



*International Council for Education of
People with Visual Impairment*



Report on the Fiji launch of the ICEVI and WBU global campaign, “Education for All Children with Visual Impairments” (EFA-VI)

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February 2008

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Abstract

The International Council for Education of People with Visual Impairment (ICEVI), in partnership with the World Blind Union (WBU), launched its “Education for All Children with Visual Impairment” (EFA-VI) at the ICEVI 12th World Conference in July 2006. The campaign’s central purpose is to improve education access of children in developing countries. The ICEVI Pacific Region Committee, in partnership with WBU Asia-Pacific, recommended Fiji as the first Pacific Island country for the campaign’s implementation. This report presents an overview of the Fiji campaign launch in February 2008, the establishment of a Fiji national EFA-VI Task Force, and the commencement of preparations for an August 2008 Task Force meeting to develop a Fijian National EFA-VI Plan.

Introduction

UNESCO and the World Health Organisation (WHO) estimate that there are in the world today approximately six million children with vision impairments, of whom 4.8 million live in developing countries. It is estimated that of these children in developing countries, more than 4.4 million (90%), are denied the basic human right of education (Campbell, 2008).

The ICEVI, in partnership with the WBU, launched its “Education for All Children with Visual Impairment” (EFA-VI) at the ICEVI 12th World Conference in Kuala Lumpur Malaysia in July 2006. The primary purpose of the EFA-VI global campaign is “to ensure that all girls and boys with blindness and low vision enjoy the right to education” (ICEVI, 2008a). The campaign is endorsed by UNESCO and UNICEF, and focuses upon improving education access of children in developing countries. The campaign’s implementation is undertaken within existing national general and special education frameworks. Campaign targets include improving current low

levels of “demand” for education of children with visual impairments through public awareness and advocacy programs in communities, and improving the quantity and quality of support provided to children and youth with vision impairments in schools and community-based education programs (ICEVI, 2008b).

Implementation of the EFA-VI campaign is currently taking place in each of the seven ICEVI regions around the world. At the international level, ICEVI and WBU have established a Global Task Force (GTF), chaired by ICEVI’s President, and consisting of the following 11 international development organisations working in the field of vision impairment:

Christoffel Blindenmission	Deafblind International
Hilton-Perkins International Program	Light for the World
International Agency for the Prevention of Blindness	ICEVI
Norwegian Association of the Blind and Partially Sighted	Royal Visio International
The National Organization of the Spanish Blind (ONCE)	Sightsavers International

The GTF’s role is to oversee implementation of the strategic framework for the campaign, globally; to mobilise technical and material resources; to undertake research into “best practice” in education of children with vision impairments; and to disseminate information about the campaign through ICEVI publications and website. At the national level, implementation of the campaign is through the establishment of National EFA-VI Task forces, with membership of key stakeholders in education, disability and vision impairment (ICEVI, 2008a; b).

The GTF’s Strategic Plan includes gradual implementation of the campaign across its seven ICEVI regions. Each ICEVI regional committee has been responsible for identifying the first country for implementation. In addition, each committee was to develop regional-level EFA-VI programs for other countries not yet targeted for implementation of the campaign. The criteria used by the Global Task Force for determining the selection of the first countries in each ICEVI region for implementation of the EFA-VI campaign were as follows:

- Presence of a functioning organisation(s) of the blind
- Programs for EFA already in place
- Availability of facilities for human resource development (such as teacher training)
- Evidence of Government’s commitment to fulfil the Millennium Development Goals
- NGOs actively working in the country in the area of education (local and International NGOs)
- Existing capacity to support the education of children with visual impairment (such as braille production centres)
- Focus on inclusive education in respect to Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper
- Implementing Blindness Prevention Programs (such as the Vision 2020 program)
- Potential to make impact on other countries within the region (ICEVI, 2008c)

Demographic data on Fiji’s population show that the total population is currently approximately 850,000. The number of children of pre-school and school-age is 216,000 or 25% (Tabalailai, 2007). Although data are unavailable on the total number of children with disabilities, the Fijian Ministry of Education school enrolment data show that 1200 children attend special schools and 5% of children with disabilities attend regular schools (Education Commission Report, 2000). The

number of children aged 0-15 years with low vision and blindness in Fiji has been estimated as approximately 300 (J. Keeffe, personal communication, 7th February 2008).

The EFA-VI campaign in the Pacific

The ICEVI Pacific Region consists of the following countries:

Australia	New Zealand	Cook Islands
Palau	Fiji	Papua New Guinea
Kiribati	Solomon Islands	Marshall Islands
Tonga	Nauru	Tuvalu
Federated States of Micronesia		Samoa

The current ICEVI Pacific Region Committee was elected at the ICEVI 12th World Congress in Kuala Lumpur, in July 2006, for a four year term (2006-2010).

Membership consists of the following people:

Chairperson: Frances Gentle

Immediate Past Chairperson: Jill Keeffe

Public Officer: David Rice

Deputy Chairpersons: James Aiwa (PNG), Doreen Roebeck (Samoa), Tricia d'Apice (Australia), Karen Stobbs (NZ), and Barbara Farouk (Fiji).

Ex-Officio Members: Sandie Mackevicius (SPEVI); Kevin Murfitt & Cheng Hock (WBU Asia-Pacific); Paul Manning (PVI NZ) & Gayle Skinner (AAPVI), Setareki Macanawai (Pacific Disability Forum)

One of the of the ICEVI Pacific Committee's early tasks was to select one Pacific Island Country for implementation of the campaign in 2008. Following due consideration of the GTF's selection criteria, the Pacific Committee recommended Fiji as the first Pacific country for implementation. Fiji is well respected in the Region and internationally for its provision of educational opportunities for children with vision impairments, including the services of the Fiji School for the Blind and the United Blind Persons of Fiji. The development of a Fiji National EFA-VI Plan will serve as a strong foundation for the development of national EFA-VI plans for other Pacific Island countries in the future.

The Pacific Committee's is recommendation was then endorsed by the ICEVI President, as well as the GTF, and preparations began for the campaign launch in Fiji in February 2008.

Launch of the EFA-VI campaign, Suva Fiji, February 2008

The EFA-VI campaign was launched in Suva Fiji through a series of meetings and a workshop during the first week of February 2008. The meetings and workshop provided the opportunity to introduce government and non-government leaders in education of children with disabilities to the work of ICEVI and the selection of Fiji as the first country in the ICEVI Pacific region selected to implement the EFA-VI campaign.

Arrangements for the launch of the Fiji campaign were facilitated by Mr Setareki Macanawai, ICEVI Pacific Committee member and CEO of the Pacific Disability Forum (PDF), with support provided by the PDF staff. A summary of the major outcomes of the Fiji campaign launch follows:

EFA-VI meetings in Suva, 4-7 February'08

Meetings were held with the following organisational leaders:

- Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Education (MoE)
- Senior Education Officer (Special Education), Ministry of Education
- Executive Director, Fiji Society for the Blind
- Head teacher, Fiji School for the Blind
- Secretary General, United Blind Persons of Fiji
- Executive Director, Fiji National Council for Disabled Persons
- Education Advisor, PRIDE Project, the University of the South Pacific (USP)
- Fiji PRIDE National Project Coordinator

A summary of the major outcomes of the meetings and workshop follows:

Major outcomes of the meetings

1. The meeting with the MoE Permanent Secretary, Mrs Rabukawaqa was positive and productive. The Permanent Secretary gave her support to the implementation of the EFA-VI campaign in Fiji. She noted that special education is a priority MoE area in 2008, and suggested that the process of developing an EFA-VI national plan could serve as a model for planning services for children with other disabilities. The Permanent Secretary advised that the MoE was currently undertaking its mid-term review of the Fiji EFA National Plan, and results would be provided to the EFA-VI Task Force upon completion.
2. The meeting with the MoE Senior Education Officer (Special Education), Mrs Tabalailai was also productive. Mrs Tabalailai gave her full support to the campaign and advised that the MoE's ten-year *Blueprint for affirmative action of special education* (Ministry of Education, n.d.) includes extensive data that would be of assistance to the National EFA-VI National Task force in its development of the Fiji National EFA-VI Plan. Mrs Tabalailai also advised that the recently released National Curriculum Framework for the Fiji Islands (2007a) included extensive consultation with stakeholders in education and is inclusive of children with disabilities.
3. The meetings with the Fiji Society for the Blind, the Fiji School for the Blind, the United Blind Persons of Fiji, and the National Council for Disabled Persons provided an opportunity to discuss in some detail current education and rehabilitation services and human resource development programs serving pre-school and school-age children with vision impairments, their parents and carers. There is no doubt that the participation of these important key organisations working in the field of vision impairment will enhance the relevance of the work of the EFA-VI Task force, and will ensure that the national plan has a distinct Fiji Islands identity and as well, addresses national goals for the education of pre-school and school-age children with disabilities.
4. Current priority areas of need in human resource development in Fiji and across the Pacific Region were identified, in particular the need for capacity-building train-the-trainer programs in (a) braille literacy, (b) computer-generated braille production, (c) orientation and mobility, and (d) education and rehabilitation services for children with vision impairments and multiple

disabilities (MDVI). Discussions took place between ICEVI Pacific's Chairperson, and staff of UNICEF and the PRIDE Project regarding ways of working collaboratively to address these identified priority areas of need.

EFA-VI workshop, Wednesday 6th February, Southern Cross Hotel, Suva

ICEVI hosted an EFA-VI workshop at the Southern Cross Hotel in Suva on Wednesday 6th February 2008. The workshop was attended by 28 people from a broad range of government and non-government national and regional organisations. Representation included government Ministries of Education and Health; organisations of persons with disabilities and vision impairment; the newly-established organisation of parents of children with vision impairments; national and international NGOs working in areas associated with education and disability, teachers and rehabilitation professionals, eye-health care professionals; teacher preparation institutions; the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat, and ESCAP (see Appendix 1 for a list of EFA-VI workshop participants).

Workshop participants were provided with information on the EFA-VI campaign, including copies of the "Plan for ICEVI Pacific Region, 2006-2010". This Plan was developed at the ICEVI Pacific Forum in Perth, in January 2007, a meeting attended by delegates from Australia, New Zealand, and Pacific Island Countries. Background information on the EFA-VI campaign was also provided. This included information available on the ICEVI website, www.icevi.org. The workshop commenced with prayer, followed by an introduction by Frances Gentle to the ICEVI and World Blind Union's EFA-VI campaign in the Pacific Region. Workshop members were then invited to discuss the implications of the EFA-VI campaign in the Fiji, commencing with presentations by (i) Ministry of Education personnel on the National EFA Plan and the Blueprint on Special Education, (ii) the Fiji Society for the Blind on the perspective of Fiji service providers, and (iii) the United Blind Persons of Fiji on the consumers perspective. An open invitation was then extended to all workshop members to share information and personal perspectives on the implications of the EFA-VI campaign in the Fiji context. The workshop discussion was informative and reflected the diverse perspectives of those present. A summary of the major outcomes of the EFA-VI workshop follows:

Major outcomes and points of discussion of the EFA-VI workshop

- Suva EFA-VI workshop participants supported the implementation of the EFA-VI campaign in Fiji. 13 of the 28 members volunteered to become foundation members of the Fiji EFA National task force, and recommendations were made for invitations to others not present to join.
- The central role of parents as the primary educators of children with disabilities and the importance of parent-professional partnerships in education and rehabilitation services was acknowledged. Rev. Aporosa Rageci of the Suva Parents Association emphasised the challenges faced by parents in coming to terms with their child's disability, and the social stigma they experience in their communities.
- A number of research projects are currently being undertaken by the Fijian government, including (a) compilation and synthesis of the 2007 national census data; (b) review of the National Eye Care Strategic Plan 2004-2008; and (c) the mid-term review of the Fiji National EFA Plan.

- A range of data on the number of children with disabilities in education and health programs was presented by workshop members from the Ministries of Education and Health, and also by members of the Fiji Society for the Blind. It was agreed that there is a need for coordination in the compilation of data held by a variety of government ministries and NGOs. It was also agreed that effective mechanisms should be established for the dissemination of relevant data to key stakeholders working with children and youth with disabilities, and their families. This includes effective mechanisms for disseminating MoE data on school enrolments, retention rates, and achievement levels; and Ministry of Health data on “out-of-school” children with disabilities receiving health and rehabilitation services in their home communities.
- Workshop participants representing teacher training institutions discussed the need to re-establish special education courses in pre-service teacher preparation programs in all teacher colleges. In addition, there is a need for human resource development programs in the area of vision impairment, including disability-specific training programs for regular and special school teachers, community-based rehabilitation workers, school administrators, parents and community-members.
- Participants from the United Blind Persons of Fiji highlighted the need for education programs for children with vision impairments to include: (a) curriculum modification and adaptation to accommodate the learning needs of students with vision impairments; (b) the provision of information in alternative formats such as Braille and large print; (c) independent living; (d) assistive technology; (e) mobility; (f) advocacy; and (g) vocational skills. It was recommended that the Principles and Standards for education of children with vision impairments, including those with disabilities, developed by the South Pacific Educators in Vision Impairment (SPEVI, 2004) be disseminated in Fiji and be used as a resource in the development of the Fiji national EFA-VI plan.
- Information was shared on current trends that have led to increasing enrolments of children with disabilities in pre-schools and schools. Although this is a positive trend, concern was expressed that current staffing levels and professional training programs in disabilities were insufficient to ensure the successful inclusion of these children. In addition, there is a need to review current salary and remuneration levels for early childhood educators.
- The support of regional organisations including PDF, PIFS, and ESCAP will be invaluable in implementing regional level EFA-VI programs in the Pacific, as well as providing advice on national-level capacity building in the area of vision impairment to the national EFA-VI Task Force and government and non-government stakeholders.

The meeting concluded with the establishment of the Fiji EFA-VI National Task Force. The task force includes representatives from the major stakeholders in education and disability services in Fiji. Their combined knowledge, skills and perspectives should result in a strong foundation for the work of the task force in

developing and implementing a national EFA-VI plan for Fiji. Listed below are the founding members of the Fiji task force:

Membership of the Fiji National EFA-VI Task Force: Founding members

Organisation	Task Force Members
Ministry of Education Fiji Islands	Mrs Maresilina Tabalailai Senior Education Officer, Special Education
	Mr Laisenia Seru Senior Executive Officer, Early Childhood Education
	Nemani Drova Principal Education Officer, Curriculum Advisory Services
Ministry of Health, Fiji Islands	Ms Maraia Matakibau CRA Coordinator Tamavua Hospital
United Blind Persons of Fiji (UBP)	Mrs Angeline Chand Secretary General
	Mr Akuila Rewatabua
Fiji National Council for Disabled Persons	Dr Sitiveni Yanuyanutawa Executive Director
Suva Parents Association (Vision Impairment)	Reverend Aporosa Rageci
Fiji School for the Blind	Ms Rukh Mani Head Teacher
	Ms Makereta Musukasau Teacher
Fiji Society for the Blind	Mrs Barbara Farouk Executive Director
	Ms Vilisi Salavabisi Coordinator, Community-Based Rehabilitation
	Ms Sisi Coalala Integration Teacher
The University of the South Pacific (USP)	Ms Liku Mataluvu Coordinator, Certificate in Disability Studies, Continuing & Community Education

Corpus Christi College	Ms Taina Hazelman Lecturer/Dean of Academic Studies
Project Heaven	Ms Vani Volatabu
Pacific Disability Forum (PDF)	Mr Setareki Macanawai Chief Executive Officer
Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat (PIFS)	Mr Frederick Miller Disability Coordination Officer

It was agreed that the Fiji EFA-VI National Task Force would meet around August 2008 to develop the EFA-VI National Plan for Fiji. The terms of reference of the Task Force are as follows:

Fiji EFA National Task Force Terms of Reference

- To work within the overall framework of the Fiji national education plan, so as to ensure that the educational issues of girls and boys with vision impairments, including those who are deafblind and multiply disabled are adequately addressed.
- To undertake a situation analysis of education and rehabilitation services for pre-school and school-age children with disabilities, including those with vision impairments. This includes compiling data that will assist the national EFA-VI task force to develop a comprehensive national EFA-VI plan for Fiji.
- To develop a national plan for implementing educational services for all children with vision impairments, including those with additional/multiple disabilities.
- To review current legislation and regulations relating to children and youth with disabilities, to ensure it is equitable, inclusive and non-discriminatory.
- To establish national, regional and international linkages for the purpose of networking and advocacy in the area of education of children with vision impairments.
- To support the development of appropriate curricula for children with vision impairments.
- To mobilise and share resources in order to promote the achievement of “Education for All” through the convergence of services (ICEVI, 2008b).

It is agreed that the Fiji national EFA-VI Task Force would meet around August 2008 to develop the national EFA-VI plan. The PRIDE Project Fiji National Project Coordinator, and Deputy Secretary of Education, Mr Filipe Jotoko has given in-principle approval to PRIDE Project sponsorship of a three-day meeting at the Southern Cross Hotel in Suva (costs of venue and refreshments). Details relating to the dates, venue and program are yet to be determined by the Task Force.

Concluding remarks

Implementation of the ICEVI and WBU EFA-VI global campaign commenced in Fiji with enthusiasm and commitment from leaders in education and disability services. The composition of the Fiji National EFA-VI Task Force includes representation of key stakeholders, and plans for the task force meeting later in the year have already

started. The Task Force has the full support of the ICEVI and the World Blind Union international and regional executive committees. The ICEVI Pacific Committee welcomes this opportunity to establish strong collegial partnerships with their counterparts in education and rehabilitation in Fiji.

The Mission of The Ministry of Education is to “provide a challenging teaching and learning environment, in partnership with stakeholders, that will nurture and empower the child to become a competent member of society” (Ministry of Education, 2007b, p.2). The EFA-VI task force’s terms of reference address this mission, as well as do the Ministry of Education’s Vision Educational Values. The ultimate “winners” in this EFA-VI campaign will be the children with disabilities, their families and their communities.

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APPENDIX 1

**Attendance List
EFA-VI Workshop
Southern Cross Hotel, Suva Fiji, February 2008**

Organisation	Participants
Ministry of Education, Fiji Islands	Mrs Maresilina Tabalilai Senior Education Officer, Special Education
	Mr Govind Sami Director, Primary Education
	Mr Laisenia Seru, Senior Education Officer, Early Childhood Education
	Nemani Drova Principal Education Officer, Curriculum Advisory Services
	Mr Mikaele Leawere Divisional Education Officer Central
	Ms Torika Taoi EO Statistics
Ministry of Health, Fiji Islands	Ms Maraia Matakibau CRA Coordinator Tamavua Hospital
United Blind Persons of Fiji (UBP)	Mrs Angeline Chand Secretary General
	Mr Akuila Rewatabua
	Ms Ruci Senikula
Fiji National Council for Disabled Persons	Dr Sitiveni Yanuyanutawa Executive Director
Suva Parents Association (Vision Impairment)	Reverend Aporosa Rageci
Fiji School for the Blind	Ms Rukh Mani Head Teacher
	Ms Makereta Musukasau
Fiji Society for the Blind	Ms Vilisi Salavabisi Coordinator, Community-Based Rehabilitation

Organisation	Participants
The University of the South Pacific (USP)	Ms Liku Mataluvu Coordinator, Certificate in Disability Studies, Continuing & Community Education
Corpus Christi College	Ms Taina Hazelman Lecturer/Dean of Academic Studies
	Ms Marisia Vosanilawa
Project Heaven	Ms Vani Volatabu
ESCAP Pacific Operations Centre	Mr Alistair Wilkinson Regional Adviser, Social Development and Planning
Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat (PIFS)	Mr Frederick Miller Disability Coordinator Officer
Pacific Disability Forum (PDF)	Mr Setareki Macanawai Chief Executive Officer
	Ms Keleni Naikatini Administrative Assistant
	Losalini Tukai
	Mr Soloveni Vitoso Programme Officer
Vision 2020	Ms Akeneta Rekitilako
ICEVI	Mrs Frances Gentle Chairperson, ICEVI Pacific
APOLOGIES	
Ministry of Education	Mrs Emi Rabukawaqa The Permanent Secretary
Fiji Society for the Blind	Mrs Barbara Farouk Executive Director
The PRIDE Project	Dr Priscilla Puamau, Team Leader, The PRIDE Project Institute of Education, The University of the South Pacific
UNICEF Pacific	Dr Nikhat Shameem Project Officer Education/ECD
Pacific Eye Institute	Dr John Zetu
The Fiji PRIDE Coordinator	Mr Filipe Jitoko