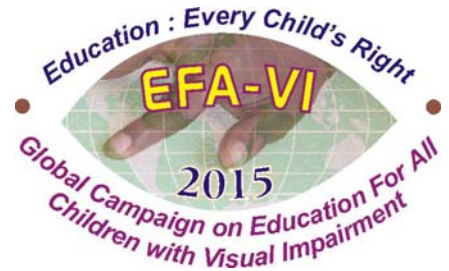




*International Council for Education of
People with Visual Impairment*



ICEVI Pacific Report 2008

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The International Council for Education of People with Visual Impairment (ICEVI), in partnership with the World Blind Union (WBU), launched the “*Education for All Children with Visual Impairment*” (EFA-VI) global campaign at the ICEVI 12th World Conference in Kuala Lumpur Malaysia in July 2006. The campaign’s goal is “to ensure that all girls and boys with blindness and low vision enjoy the right to education” (ICEVI, 2008). The campaign is endorsed by UNESCO and UNICEF, and is closely aligned with the United Nations “Education for All” (EFA) global campaign, which addresses the rights of children to education.

This report presents an overview of the EFA-VI initiatives of the ICEVI Pacific Committee during 2008. These initiatives are based upon regional priorities identified at the ICEVI Pacific Forum in Perth, Western Australia in January 2007. The Perth Forum was attended by leaders in education and disability services from Australia, New Zealand and Pacific Island countries (PICs), and resulted in the development of an EFA-VI Pacific Plan for ICEVI’s 2006-2010 quadrennial period. This report documents ICEVI’s contribution to the development of a National EFA-VI Plan for Fiji; the delivery of professional training programs in orientation and mobility, braille, and teaching pedagogy for children with vision impairments and multiple disabilities (MDVI); and the provision of assistive technology. The report concludes with ICEVI’s contribution to the development of a national plan for inclusive education in Timor-Leste.

Fiji National EFA-VI Plan

One of the major responsibilities of the ICEVI Pacific Committee was the selection of one Pacific Island country for focussed support in the development of an EFA-VI Plan and Implementation Program. Following consideration, Fiji was selected as the focus country in the region. Fiji is well respected regionally and internationally for its provision of educational opportunities for children with vision impairments. During February 2008, consultation meetings were held in Fiji with key government and non-government stakeholders to inform them of the principles and goals of the EFA-VI global campaign, and to establish a National EFA-VI Task Force to spear-head the development of the Fiji EFA-VI Plan. The EFA-VI campaign received endorsement by the Fiji Ministry of Education, and membership of the National EFA-VI Task

Force included key government and non-government stakeholders in education and disability services for children with vision impairments.

The Fiji EFA-VI Plan was developed at a Forum in Suva Fiji, 6-8 October, hosted by the Royal Institute for Deaf and Blind Children (RIDBC) and Vision Australia. The Plan included a situational analysis of current services, long and short-term goals, service delivery approaches, resource mobilisation and professional training requirements, and budgetary considerations. The Fiji National EFA-VI Plan was developed through a process of participatory consultation.

Forum delegates included representatives from the Ministries of Education and Health, the Fiji Society for the Blind, the Fiji School for the Blind, the United Blind Persons of Fiji (UBP), the Fiji National Council for Disabled Persons, the Suva Parents Association, the Pacific Disability Forum (PDF), the University of the South Pacific (USP), Corpus Christi College, Project Heaven, UNICEF Fiji and Vision2020 Fiji. International and regional participants included representatives from ICEVI, WBU, the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat (PIFS), United Nations Economic and Social Commission Asia and Pacific (UNESCAP), South Pacific Educators in Vision Impairment (SPEVI), the Australian Association for Parents of the Vision Impaired (AAPVI), Vision Australia, RIDBC, and the Centre for Eye Research Australia (CERA). It is anticipated that the Fiji EFA-VI Plan, in addition to strengthening capacity in education of all children with disabilities in Fiji, will serve as a model for education service provision for children with vision impairments in other Pacific Island countries.

Professional Diploma in Orientation and Mobility, Pacific Region

One of the priority areas identified at the 2007 ICEVI Pacific Forum in Perth, WA, was the need to strengthen current regional capacity in the field of orientation and mobility (O&M). At present in the Pacific, many children and youth with vision impairments are marginalised from the school system due to their inability to journey independently and safely between home and school each day. In order to address this priority need, ICEVI Pacific partnered with several regional organisations to establish a professionally focussed regional train-the-trainer program in O&M. The principle program sponsor was the PRIDE Project (Pacific Regional Initiatives for the Delivery of basic Education), The program was open to education and rehabilitation professions from the 15 PRIDE member countries. The program, titled “*Professional Diploma in Orientation and Mobility, Pacific Region*”, consisted of an intensive four-week residential training program, delivered at the Centre for Appropriate Training and Development (CATD Nadave), in Nausori, Fiji during November 2008. This was followed by a two-week practicum project in each participant’s home country. The program content was developed and delivered by a team of Australian O&M professionals from Guide Dogs NSW/ACT and RIDBC Renwick Centre in Sydney.

The *Professional Diploma in Orientation and Mobility, Pacific Region*, was made possible through the collective efforts and contributions of the PRIDE Project, PDF, ICEVI, RIDBC, Guide Dogs NSW/ACT, and Australian Volunteers International (AVI). The program is endorsed by the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat (PIFS) and the United Nations Economic & Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP). It is anticipated that program graduates will become future Pacific leaders in O&M. Course graduates will be qualified to establish professional O&M

training programs in their home countries, as well as provide direct services to children with vision impairments and their families. The ultimate beneficiaries of the Diploma program will be children with vision impairments and their families. Training in O&M will enable greater independence and access to home, school and community environments as well as learning opportunities

Braille Promotion

In addition to improving school access for children with vision impairments through the provision of O&M training programs, the ICEVI Pacific Committee provided public awareness workshops in the region to promote the importance of braille as the primary literacy medium for children who are blind. At present, approximately one third of Pacific Island countries actively teach braille. These countries use a variety of the braille codes in accordance with the historical context of colonialism and special education provision. In addition, ongoing regional collaboration in the field of braille required constituent nations to consider adoption of Unified English Braille (UEB) in Australia and New Zealand in 2005. These issues were raised in a concept paper presented by ICEVI, WBU and SPEVI delegates at the Pacific Disability Forum Council meeting in Samoa, April 2008. The Pacific Disability Forum is the peak non-government organisation in the Pacific representing people with disabilities.

Concept paper on braille in the Pacific region

The ICEVI concept paper, titled “Unified English Braille: A concept paper for Pacific Island Nations”, was written on behalf of ICEVI Pacific by the National Executive of the Australian Braille Authority. The concept paper included recommendations to the PDF Council for the adoption of policy positions on the following:

- (a) the importance of braille to blind children in the region;
- (b) the need for standardisation of braille codes in the region;
- (c) the adoption of Unified English Braille (UEB) in English-speaking countries in the region; and
- (d) promotion of braille literacy for blind children at national government level and within organisations of persons with disabilities.

Following consideration by PDF Council members, the recommendations were adopted. It is anticipated that their adoption will enable future regional collaboration in the area of braille, including the delivery of capacity-building programs in the areas of braille code knowledge, braille production methods, and the sharing of braille books and technology within the region.

Braille code workshops

The first braille-related public awareness workshops took place in Fiji during October 2008. The workshop, delivered in collaboration with the Australian Braille Authority and the State Braille and Large Print Service of the Department of Education and Training NSW (DET NSW), introduced the basic concepts of the Unified English Braille (UEB) code. The workshops took place in Suva, at the Fiji EFA-VI Forum and the Fiji Society for the Blind. Negotiations are currently underway to provide similar workshops in Papua New Guinea in 2009.

Braille training program

The RIDBC Renwick Centre, in partnership with ICEVI and Callan Studies Institute of Papua New Guinea, has developed a distance education training program in

Unified English Braille for Pacific Island professionals. This course has been designed for local conditions, where braille writing equipment is often limited to the slate and stylus. Students from Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Fiji and the Solomon Islands form the first cohort of course participants. This cohort includes 35 students currently completing the Bachelor of Special Education degree program at Callan Studies Institute in Wewak, Papua New Guinea.

The RIDBC Renwick braille program provides educators and CBR staff with a cost-effective means of learning braille. It is anticipated that increased knowledge and skills in braille among educators will result to increased enrolments and achievement levels of children who are blind in schools across the Pacific.

Pacific training program in Perkins Braille repairs

Another braille-related priority need in the Pacific, identified at the ICEVI Pacific Forum in 2007 is the need for qualified Perkins Braille repairers in Australia and Pacific Island countries. Negotiations are currently underway with Perkins School for the Blind to establish an advanced level professional training program in Perkins Braille repairs for the Pacific region. An essential feature of the program will be the establishment of a Perkins Service Centre within the region. This Centre will provide spare parts to organisations and individual across the Pacific region.

Braille literacy training programs in Timor-Leste

ICEVI Pacific, in collaboration with St Edmund's School for Students with Vision Impairments, and RIDBC, provided training programs in braille code, braille literacy and braille book production to key stakeholders in education and rehabilitation in Timor-Leste during April and August 2008. The training programs included instruction in the Portuguese braille code and braille book production techniques. Local materials were used for the production of tactile graphics, and books were created using the Perkins Braille and slate and stylus. The training programs have been offered periodically since 2003 to educators and rehabilitation professionals in Timor-Leste. Participants in the 2008 training programs included staff of the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Social Solidarity, ASSERT, Plan International, and Fuan Nabilan Ba Matan Aat.

Children with vision impairments and multiple disabilities

The unique needs of children with vision impairments and multiple disabilities (MDVI) have been a focus of the Pacific EFA-VI campaign during 2008. In many countries in the Region, educators and rehabilitation staff seek access to professional training in teaching pedagogy for children with complex communication and learning needs. RIDBC, in partnership with ICEVI and UNICEF Pacific, provided a professional training program for selected staff of the Fiji School for the Blind and the Fiji Society for the Blind. The program, delivered at RIDBC in Sydney, included a one-week academic program in communication strategies for children with MDVI, and one-week placement in RIDBC's Alice Betteridge School for children with sensory impairments and additional/multiple disabilities. The Fiji School for the Blind and the Fiji Society for the Blind are two leading organisations in service provision for children with vision impairments and multiple disabilities in the Pacific. The professional training program will assist both organisations in delivering high quality services to children with MDVI and their families in school and community settings.

Assistive technology provision

ICEVI Pacific has continued to support the provision of assistive technology to regional organisations working in the field of vision impairment during 2008. ICEVI Pacific has partnered with Australian organisations, including WBU Pacific-Oceania, the Royal Society for the Blind in South Australia (RSB, SA), RIDBC, Vision Australia, Guide Dogs NSW/ACT, and Guide Dogs Victoria to meet requests for technology support from the region.

Education for all children with disabilities in Timor-Leste

One of the most significant developments during 2008 has been ICEVI's support for the establishment of inclusive education in Timor-Leste. Timor-Leste is the world's newest nation and the poorest in Asia. Approximately 50% of Timor-Leste's population of 1.1 million are aged 0-15 years. The Timor-Leste Ministry of Education (2005) estimated that one third of school-aged children from the poorest families and one quarter from the richest families in Timor-Leste are not receiving an education. The challenges facing the Timor-Leste Ministry of Education are far-reaching, and include the development of human, physical and financial resources and infrastructure. The development of the *Strategic Plan for Inclusive Education* is a significant step in achieving "Education for All" children in Timor-Leste. Phase 1 of the Plan (2009-2010) addresses the enrolment of children with disabilities into formal (school-based) and non-formal (community-based) education programs. Subsequent years will address the education of other marginalised children, including those marginalised due to poverty, linguistic and cultural background, and displacement during the periods of political unrest in Timor-Leste.

Endorsement of the *National Plan for Inclusive Education* by the government of Timor-Leste will result in the coordinated development of human capital and infrastructure in inclusive education over a number of years. The implementation of education services and programs for marginalised children and families at the community and village levels will result in long-term improvements in the quality of life of children and families who live on the margins of education, employment and community life of Timor-Leste society.

Conclusion

The ICEVI Pacific Regional Committee, in partnership with World Blind Union Asia-Pacific and regional development partners, has provided a range of programs in the Pacific region during 2008. These programs addressed the priorities of the EFA-VI Pacific Plan for the current ICEVI quadrennial period (2006-2010). Regular updates on the EFA-VI campaign are available on the ICEVI websites, www.icevi.org, and, www.icevipacific.org.au. Regular updates are also included in ICEVI's biannual magazine, "The Educator", which is available in "hard-copy" or electronic formats (see ICEVI's website for details). Pacific regional EFA-VI updates and related information are available through subscription to ICEVI Pacific electronic list, via the website, <http://www.icevipacific.org.au/index1.php>. ICEVI invites organisations and individuals to become ICEVI members. Subscription forms are available on the ICEVI and ICEVI Pacific websites.

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