

COUNTRY REPORT: TONGA

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Government

Question 1. How much support does your government give to each of the following?

- *UNESCO's Millennium Development Goals*
- *Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper – (International Monetary Fund, IMF and World Bank)*
- *UNESCO's "Education for All Children by 2015" campaign*
- *Blindness Prevention Programs, eg Vision2020*

Answer 1. Not aware of any support to these programs.

Question 2a. What (a) government legislation, (b) policies, and (c) programs are in place to ensure access and full participation in education for children with vision impairments?

Answer 2a

- (a) Government legislation – It is the law in Tonga that 'Education is for all' however in Practice, no children with disabilities are educated in mainstream schooling.
- (b) Policies – The Ministry of Education have recently employed an Inclusive Education Officer (funded through PRIDE) to start working on an Inclusive Education Policy.
- (c) Programs – The Inclusive Education Officer, together with the Tonga Red Cross Society and NATA are currently working on a pilot program within a mainstream school, to start including Children with Disabilities into Government Schools. This is to be implemented in January 2007.
Tonga Red Cross Society runs a school for children with disabilities ('Ofa Tui 'Amanaki Centre for Special Education). At this school, there is a class for children with Vision Impairments where, one day a week they are taught skills necessary for independence. This is run by a man who is blind. No teachers at this school are trained teachers. They have had basic disability training.
NATA are advocating to ensure the rights for children with disabilities.

Question 2b. What evaluation mechanisms exist for these government legislation, policies, and programs?

Answer 2b. An evaluation mechanism is being set up for the inclusive education policy and pilot school project.

We are not aware of any evaluation mechanisms for the government legislation.

Question 3. Does your country have a National Education Plan, and if so, does the Plan:

- (a) *focus on inclusive education, and*
- (b) *include provision for children with disabilities, including children with vision*

impairments?

Answer 3. The National Education Plan now has a section on inclusive education, and is being actively pursued, through the appointment of an Inclusive Education Officer.

Currently, the Government does not support, or recognize the two schools for children with disabilities run by the Red Cross (Hearing and Speech Impaired Unit, and the OTA Centre).

Country-wide data

Question 4. Are there national data on the number of children and adults with disabilities, including those with vision impairments?

Answer 4.

Yes, recent data from the 2006 Tonga National Disability Identification Survey. This survey found that 2782 people within Tonga have a disability (2.8% of the population).

24% of these people with a disability have a vision impairment.

Question 5. Are there national data on the number of pre-school and school-age children with vision impairments who:

- a. are enrolled in education settings (mainstream and special school) – full-time and part-time?
- b. are not enrolled in education settings?
- c. have “dropped-out” of schooling (retention rates)?
- d. receive community-based rehabilitation (CBR) services in their communities?

Answer 5.

No children with vision impairments are educated in a mainstream setting. Three children who are blind attend the Special School two days per week.

One child who is blind, and 24 who have a vision impairment are not enrolled in an education setting.

Not known.

There are no known community based rehabilitation services in the communities. There is a home visitation program run by the Red Cross Society who visits approximately 5 children and adults.

Organisations providing support and services

Question 6. Is there an association of blind citizens? Is it an active group?

Answer 6. There is no association of blind citizens, however there are two members of NATA (disability self advocacy group) who are blind. This is an active group.

Question 7a. What national and international government and non-government development organisations (NGDOs) provide support to your country in the area of vision impairment?

Question 7b. What types of support do they provide (please list)?

Answer 7a & b. Tonga Red Cross Society provide support to people with vision impairments through the home visitation program (therapy), the OTA Centre (education) and the Alonga Centre (residential centre where a few people with vision impairments reside).

A church organisation also provides home visitation/nursing care to some adults with a vision impairment.

NATA provide support for people who have vision impairments in terms of advocating for the rights of people with disabilities.

Question 8. What training and professional development opportunities currently exist for teachers and CBR workers in the area of disability and special education?

For example, national and international university and college courses, braille courses, O&M courses, etc. Please list organisations/agencies that provide training and other support.

Answer 8. In Tonga, there are currently no training or professional development opportunities for teachers. Teachers would have to travel to neighboring countries such as Samoa/Fiji for specialised training. The Teacher's Training College is currently organizing an inclusive education subject for all student teachers to undertake.

Question 9. What are some examples of “best practice” in education of children with disabilities, including children with vision impairments, in your country? Please describe how these “best practices” came about.

Answer 9. The inclusive education pilot program about to commence is the most promising event to take place for children with disabilities so far. There have been very limited services here in Tonga for people with a vision impairment.

Question 10. Can you identify any deficiencies in the current provision of education services for children and youth with vision impairments?

For example, curriculum and class activities.

Answer 10. The Tongan Government currently do not identify the Red Cross Schools as Educational Facilities, and do not provide any support to these schools. The Government do not provide any services at all for people with disabilities. There are no opportunities within Tonga for staff to be trained in teaching children with a vision impairment. There are very limited educational resources for the children with vision impairments attending the OTA (Red Cross School) to be educated appropriately. There is no appropriate curriculum for teaching students with a disability, or a vision impairment. There are no opportunities for youth with a vision impairment to gain vocational skills.

Question 11. What are your country's priorities for improving access to schools, curriculum, and programs for children with vision impairments?

Answer 11. To improve the class provided through the OTA Centre by improving the skills of the teachers, creating an appropriate curriculum, and improving the educational

resources to provide the children attending the class with an appropriate education. We then aim to use this class as a transitional class, and to then include children with vision impairments into the mainstream schooling system.

Resources

Question 12. What types of resources are needed to support (a) teachers, (b) children and adults with vision impairments, (c) their parents and carers, (d) volunteers, and (e) others working in the field of vision impairment?

Please identify specific human, financial, and physical resources.

Answer 12.

- (a) Appropriate teaching resources, appropriate training in teaching children who are blind/VI and in curriculum. To be trained as Teachers.
- (b) Appropriate learning materials, Government support (through acknowledgment of OTA as educational facility, & financial support of VI class)
- (c) Parent/Carer support groups.
- (d) Training.

Question 13. Is there a resource centre or facility for the provision of resources for (a) pre-school and (b) school-age children with vision impairments?

For example, centre for braille production, provision of low-tech and high-tech adaptive technology, including low vision aids.

Answer 13. No

Education services

Question 14. What educational options currently exist for (a) pre-school and (b) school-age children with vision impairments?

Please include regular school and special school options.

Answer 14.

- (a) Early intervention program run by the OTA Centre. This is a group run once a week for 2-3 hours.
- (b) OTA Centre for Special Education. There is a basic class here run for children with vision impairments.

Question 15a. How many teachers and CBR workers provide services to children with vision impairments, including children with additional disabilities?

Answer 15a. One Teacher at the OTA who runs the class (who is blind himself). The home visitation officer (at the OTA Centre as well) also visits adults in the community who have a vision impairment.

Question 15b. Where are these teachers and CBR workers located? (eg regular school, special centre, special school)

Answer 15b. Special School.

Question 16. What is the background and level of training (qualifications) of these teachers working in the field of vision impairment?

Answer 16. The Teacher who is blind has had training in how to use Braille, use a white cane etc through the Fiji School for the Blind. He has no teacher training and no disability training.

The Home Visitation Officer has had basic disability training, and no training in working in the field of Vision Impairment.

Question 17. What are the training/professional development needs of teachers, CBR workers, parents, and education volunteers?

Please include needs in the areas of vision impairment and additional disabilities.

Answer 17. The Teachers need to have teacher training, and also training in the different impairments, eg. Vision impairment.

Question 18. Can you recommend ways of promoting the Education for All Children with Vision Impairment (EFA-VI) campaign in your country?

Answer 18. The campaign could be promoted through NATA, the disability self advocacy group, and also through the inclusive education program.

Question 19. Can you suggest ways of increasing demand for education of children with vision impairments, including children with additional disabilities?

Answer 19. Public Awareness campaigns.

Pressuring the Government through groups such as NATA.