



Fifth Pacific Regional Conference on Disability

OUTCOMES STATEMENT

Apia, Samoa, 20 -24 February 2017

‘BUILDING A MORE INCLUSIVE AND EQUITABLE PACIFIC FOR ALL PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES’

Preamble

The Fifth Pacific Regional Conference on Disability was held at the Tanoa Tusitala Hotel, Apia, Samoa from 20th to 24th February 2017. The Conference was jointly organised by the Pacific Disability Forum (PDF), Nuanua O Le Alofa (NOLA) as host organization and the Government of Samoa with funding from the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT), Government of Australia.

The Conference was attended by around 200 delegates representing organisations of persons with disabilities (DPOs), Governments, regional and international organisations, universities, and development partners from American Samoa, Australia, Cook Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Fiji, French Polynesia, Kiribati, New Caledonia, New Zealand, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Philippines, Republic of the Marshall Islands, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Switzerland, Thailand, Tonga, Tuvalu, United States of America and Vanuatu.

The PDF Conference is a platform for representatives from organisations of persons with disabilities (DPOs), disability service providers and development partners to discuss issues about the protection, enjoyment and promotion of all human rights of all persons with disabilities and advancement of disability inclusive development in the region.

This 5th Conference was themed “Building a more inclusive and equitable Pacific for persons with disabilities” in alignment with the recent adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

The Conference

The Conference participants discussed effective, relevant and culturally appropriate strategies for building an inclusive and equitable Pacific for ALL persons with disabilities. The Conference provided opportunities to consider a variety of international and regional frameworks and treaties that can be used to promote, guide and achieve our goals. This includes the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), SDGs, Universal Periodic Review, UNESCAP’s Incheon Strategy “To Make the Right Real for Persons with Disabilities in Asia and the Pacific Region” 2013-2022, Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction and, importantly, our own Pacific Framework for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (PFRPD) 2016-2025.

Concurrent forums focused on women and girls with disabilities as well as youth with disabilities were held on 20 and 21 February 2017. The Women’s Forum enabled women leaders with disabilities to share thoughts, insights and experiences on priority areas. The Youth Forum



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provided space for young persons to discuss how they can contribute to and benefit from an inclusive and equitable Pacific.

Creating the change we want to see

His Highness Tui Atua Tupua Tamasese Efi, Head of State, The Independent State of Samoa, opened the conference with a story about the importance of culture and inclusion, noting that including everyone is an important principle of a village and every person must celebrate and demand inclusiveness. His Highness’ message was shared by Her Excellency Sue Langford, Australian High Commissioner, in her keynote address. She said that persons with disabilities need to be the voice to discuss what affects them and what changes they want to see, and called for effective partnerships to achieve progress.

The UN Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, Ms Catalina Devandas Aguilar highlighted that the CRPD ‘is a big change and has created big change.’ She confirmed that globally there is a move beyond advocacy and awareness to the question of how to implement and monitor the CRPD. The CRPD is the tool to guide States to implement the SDGs, develop and implement inclusive national policies and advocate for a more inclusive UN system. She confirmed that persons with disabilities must be engaged in the processes of decision making. She said *‘we can make the change we want in the community. Everyone is going in the right direction. With your commitment, you are making things different and you will continue to see changes in the years to come.’*

The Conference marked the 10 year anniversary of PDF. Mr Setareki Macanawai, the CEO of PDF said *‘We have sailed ten years in our canoe but have not reached our destination yet; we have been fighting for our issues over the years, but the battle is yet to be won. The celebration is everyone’s; it is our celebration. It is also our shared responsibility to work together to reach our destination.’*

Key Issues

‘Building inclusive societies starts from within our families, communities, local and national governments. When we are building our Pacific today and in years to come, we want to build a beautiful and inclusive Pacific where persons with disabilities are not left behind. Don’t build an inclusive Pacific for us, build it with us.’ (Mr Tapusoa Sarasopa Siliato, President of NOLA).



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Disability and Pacific life

Disability is part of human diversity so the interests of people with disabilities relate to all aspects of life. ALL people with disabilities want to participate in communities and development processes, and contribute to government policies and programs, as equal decision-makers.

In the Pacific, persons with disabilities are making progress on building an inclusive and equitable society, for women, men, young people and children with disabilities and want to achieve much more.

Pacific cultural practices, many of which support inclusion, are highly valued. When persons with disabilities are included, communities are richer and everyone’s lives are improved.

Change, such as a shift to inclusive and equitable societies, happens in many different ways in different places. Many of the issues are inter-connected, such as governance, leadership, partnership, human rights, education and employment. Sometimes progress move forwards and backwards before goals are achieved. Sometimes an approach that works well in one country or in one organisation, does not work in another. Ways of working in one sector, like education, may be the same or different in another sector, like disaster risk reduction or health. Achieving inclusive and equitable societies for women, men and young people takes a great deal of cooperation, leadership, learning and advocacy. Sometimes change is quick but mostly it takes a long time. Regular celebrations of achievements along the way will help keep persons with disabilities and their development partners motivated!

The Pacific region is very special. There are many strengths as well as many new challenges such as more natural disasters and climate change. Persons with disabilities are already experiencing the negative impact of climate change and are increasingly involved in disaster risk reduction, response and recovery. Persons with disabilities have an important role to play in government and community planning and adaptation, but they often do not have enough access to information about these issues.

Pacific persons with disabilities and their development partners are trying hard to work inclusively, recognizing that there is still much to learn about the complexities, diversity, identities and challenges involved. For example:



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- Women’s issues are different from men’s issues, and sometimes women’s issues are sensitive and invisible in the mainstream women’s movement. Many women seek increased capacity to advocate for their priorities to be met.
- Youth with disabilities are the future of the movement towards disability inclusive development in the Pacific. Young people with disabilities have diverse and unique interests and seek greater participation and opportunities to develop leadership skills and gain employment.
- The Deaf community (which includes deaf, hard of hearing and deafblind people) seek greater means to actively engage with each other, develop national sign languages led by them, participate in the broader disability movement, enable access to quality sign interpretation services and have their priorities heard within broader development processes.
- Pacific children are valued yet those with disabilities have limited access to services and opportunities to help them thrive. It is critical to make efforts to ensure girls and boys with disabilities are able to access quality services, including early identification, health, education, assistive technologies and other support services.
- Many people are being left behind within the disability community, particularly those with psycho-social and intellectual disabilities, autism, people who are deaf-blind and those who have multiple impairments. The region wants to find ways to be more inclusive of all its people.

Persons with disabilities have many identities beyond disability for which they want to be recognised – they are members of a culture, a community, a gender, a church, a family for example. Human diversity must be respected, embraced and celebrated.

CRPD and regional frameworks

Pacific persons with disabilities highly value the CRPD and the opportunity it provides Pacific governments, DPOs and communities to promote, guide and organise actions.

There is an increasing need to be involved in the multiple parts of the human rights system. Opportunities exist for persons with disabilities to influence more than just CRPD processes. UN processes like the UPR, CEDAW, CRC, SDGs, Incheon Strategy, Sendai Framework and the UN



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Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities are available and are a critical means to achieving a more inclusive and equitable Pacific.

Pacific Framework for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2016-2025 (PFRPD) shows disability inclusion as a key priority of the Pacific regional leaders who support efforts to achieve the rights of persons with disabilities. This framework is an important tool to support inclusive and equitable national development.

Our Pacific Governments

Most Pacific governments have now signed or ratified CRPD, thanks in part to DPO advocacy efforts. DPOs want to continue to hold Governments to account to deliver on their obligations under CRPD. Collective advocacy by a diverse disability community will be most effective.

Pacific Governments have sometimes treated disability as a separate issue even though it cuts across all aspects of government. Disability inclusion should be both coordinated in a central Ministry and mainstreamed so that persons with disabilities are included in relevant aspects of government. In practice, this means persons with disabilities must be involved in decision-making, planning, implementation and monitoring of progress in most areas of government.

The main responsibility for changing accountability for disability inclusion and gender equity rests with institutions and governments, rather than individuals. It is the State’s obligation to prohibit discrimination on the basis of disability at every level. Stories and life experiences showing the diversity of persons with disability as well as disaggregated data can help governments and institutions to better understand priorities and how best to address them in legislation, policies, plans, services, programs and, importantly, budgets.

It is important for DPOs to value their role in understanding the service priorities of persons with disabilities (understanding demand). Service providers, for example in education, health and rehabilitation, social protection, providers of assistive technologies, have an important role in meeting the priorities (supply). The Government has a mandate to regulate and resource the operations and quality of those services.

In the Pacific, Community Based Rehabilitation (CBR) is a mechanism used by governments to implement the CRPD and the SDGs at community level. It provides opportunities for partnership between government, service providers and DPOs. It seeks to include people who are traditionally excluded to make sure they are not left behind.



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Our Leadership

Leadership and ability of persons with disabilities to participate in policy-making and decision-making processes are critical to achieving the goal for an inclusive and equitable society.

Disability inclusion is important at many levels – global, regional, national, community and in the family. To be able to advocate for, lead and participate in decision-making and planning, understanding of the diversity within the disability community, the intersectionality of identities, how governments work and the large range of international and regional systems and structures, will enable the changes persons with disabilities want to see.

For persons with disabilities to have their voices heard in the many areas of policy that affect their lives such as education, employment and decent work, ICT, climate change and accessibility, opportunities to learn more about these issues are needed so that they can make practical and effective contributions.

Our partnerships

Persons with disabilities deeply value partnerships and alliances with many other organisations and decision-makers in and beyond the disability movement.

The Pacific already has many resources to support national development, leadership and human rights that DPOs should and can use.

Churches play an important role in the Pacific. Church leaders can help change attitudes, facilitate inclusion, and stop violence against children and people with disabilities and other harmful practices.

When women and men, young people and children with disabilities are involved in leadership and decision-making, they learn from each other, work better in partnership and achieve more. This will help to improve lives and communities in the Pacific more broadly.

Recommendations

Participants attending the 5th Pacific Regional Conference on Disability make the following recommendations:

1. We all strengthen our engagement at the **global level** on human rights treaty systems relating to the rights of persons with disabilities, which includes:



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- a. Asking our governments to report on national progress on realising and advancing the rights of persons with disabilities
 - b. Writing our own and contributing to alternative reports, telling our stories
 - c. Raising questions to our governments through our DPOs
 - d. Ensuring that everyone, including children and young people, women and men and ALL people with disabilities are included and have their voices heard in all representation and engagement efforts
 - e. Using concluding observations from UN committees in our advocacy to keep our governments to account so they fulfil their role as duty bearers.
2. We all build on our shared **Pacific** strengths, which includes:
- a. strengthening regional collaboration, particularly through PDF
 - b. drawing on resources available in the region that are tailored to our context
 - c. maintaining our shared values of respect, taking into account the views of others, maintaining harmonious relationships and celebrating our communities, diversity and special events
 - d. maximising our use of opportunities to participate in Pacific regional systems and events where our voices are important such as the meeting of the Pacific Platform for Action on the Advancement of Women and Gender Equality in October 2017, the Commonwealth Head of Government and Youth Ministers Meetings, and the civil society mechanism for the SDGs.
3. We strengthen leadership, advocacy and participation in decision-making, including for women, youth and children with disabilities at **national** levels. This includes:
- a. Advocating for and contributing to inclusive, equitable and non-discriminatory legislation, policies, plans and budgets
 - b. Working with government, civil society and the private sector to increase access by persons with disabilities to mainstream services, social protection systems and accessible information, communication and technology



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- c. Nurturing and strengthening the leadership capacity of existing and emerging leaders, including women and youth, through training and mentoring
 - d. Connecting and partnering with other persons with and without disabilities to raise our collective voice about issues that affect our lives, including through the effective use of social media and engaging directly with Ministers
 - e. Role modelling inclusion by working together with persons with different disabilities in advocacy and monitoring activities, making sure reasonable accommodations are made for participation
 - f. Monitoring our increasing capacity in decision-making so that we can continue to effectively participate in complex aspects of government and community life
 - g. Advocating for improved research and data collection to inform decision making and policies in all sectors, including the use of Washington Group Questions on Disabilities (adult and children's set of questions)
 - h. Using CBR as a strategy to achieve inclusive development at the local level, making sure DPOs are engaged in CBR development, governance, implementation and monitoring processes
 - i. Developing, respecting and promoting national sign languages in line with the CRPD.
4. We seek to strengthen and create new **partnerships**, across DPOs and other civil society organisations, governments, faith based organisations, regional and international organisations, private sector and educational institutions, to maximise resources and achieve shared goals. This includes:
- a. Engaging with partners and opportunities more broadly such as leaders' programs, women's groups, youth groups and councils, and sports organisations
 - b. Seeking funding from various sources (beyond funding sources for disability specific organisations) to strengthen our organisations and implement programs
 - c. Partnering with academic institutions (regional universities, development agencies) to engage in research and data collection about how to contribute to inclusion of women, young people and children with disabilities
 - d. Developing partnerships with other DPOs to share good practices and learning.



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5. We pay particular attention to **women's priorities**, including:
 - a. Building capacity in understanding various gender frameworks
 - b. Building capacity of women with disabilities in lobbying skills for better advocacy to influence mainstream gender frameworks and national development agendas
 - c. Building capacity of women and girls with disabilities through economic empowerment and livelihoods
 - d. Eliminating violence against women and girls with disabilities and creating safe spaces and taking into account the role of families and caregivers
6. We pay particular attention to **priorities of youth and children**, including:
 - a. Investing in the leadership capacity of the PDF Regional Youth Committee to engage in and advocate on youth and children's issues at the regional level and to support national youth committees to carry out national level advocacy
 - b. Ensuring youth and children with disabilities are invited to conversations and conferences so that their voices are heard
 - c. Having a youth with disabilities representative on the PDF Board
 - d. Supporting the establishment of regional impairment specific networks of youth with disabilities.
7. We advocate for greater and coordinated efforts by governments, development partners and other organisations to improve access to **mainstream and specific services**, including:

Access to services, education and training, information, employment, decent work and livelihood opportunities

- a. Supporting and providing training opportunities and programs for young people and women with disabilities to gain skills, employment and decent work, including through entrepreneurship.
- b. Supporting the branding and marketing of products as 'created by persons with disabilities' for the broader market



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- c. Increasing services for children with disabilities, including early identification and intervention, education and health
- d. Increasing DPO advocacy for the services priorities of persons with disabilities, making sure that practical suggestions consider the specific requirements of the diverse disability community
- e. Taking into account the role of families and caregivers in enabling access to services by including them in conversations and creating support networks
- f. Developing skilled and qualified sign languages interpreters, as well as professional codes of ethics to improve accessibility for deaf people to information, education, employment and services across all sectors (aligned with the Oceania regional networks within the World Association of Sign Language Interpreters and World Federation of the Deaf)
- g. Working together to ensure all conferences and training opportunities for persons with disabilities and DPOs are accessible (including ensuring budget lines for professional sign languages interpreters), and that deaf members are able to gain governance experience and skills
- h. In relation to assistive technology and ICT (e.g. internet, mobile services) - share information, resource appropriate products and train our personnel in its provision and use.

Disaster Risk Reduction Preparedness, Response and Recovery

- i. Strengthening DPO capacity to support implementation of regional and international frameworks such as the Sendai Framework for DRR, the PFRPD and the Framework for Resilient Development in the Pacific.
- j. PDF with assistance of stakeholders develop a DPO disaster management plan that considers early warning systems and communication plans, household DRR and preparedness plans, evacuation management plans as well as medical/first aid plans.

Sport

- k. Advocating for inclusion and recognition of persons with disabilities in physical education, physical activity and sport
- l. Using sport to raise awareness about the rights of persons with disabilities in various development priorities like health and education.



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Acknowledgements

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