

**INCLUSIVE EDUCATION IN THE PACIFIC**  
**CHAPTER 2: ADVANCING INCLUSIVE EDUCATION IN THE PACIFIC**

*Priscilla Puamau*

Inclusive education (IE), as stipulated in the PRIDE<sup>1</sup> benchmarks to review national education strategic plans, is concerned with policies and strategies that address 'the teaching and learning of vulnerable and special needs students, including those from low socio-economic urban groups, those in remote and isolated areas, those with disabilities and school drop-outs and push-outs' (The PRIDE Project, 2007: 3). Providing equal access to educational opportunities, increased participation and equitable outcomes for these categories of children and youths who are vulnerable to marginalisation and exclusion is a serious challenge that many Pacific Education Ministries/Departments of Education are grappling with.

This is against the backdrop of international and regional conventions and frameworks strongly advocating that education is a human right for all children. It is the grassroots push from local and regional IE stakeholders, coupled with advocacy in the international arena, that have brought IE issues to the forefront. Implicit in the IE agenda is the ideal that all schools need to be inclusive, learner-centred and child- and youth-friendly and are able to cater for the learning needs of all children and youths at school, irrespective of ability, ethnicity, gender, religion, geographical location or economic status. This necessarily means that current education systems need to transform their philosophy of teaching and learning, management and administrative structures, policies, strategies, resource and funding priorities, curriculum content, pedagogical approaches and assessment approaches. Mindsets and attitudes also will need to be transformed, as will teacher education and training programmes. In short, a total review and overhaul is needed if the education of all children philosophy is to be fully realised so that all learners can benefit from a good quality education and live worthwhile lives.

Inclusive education for many Pacific countries, called *special education* or *special needs* education has been largely interpreted as meeting the special needs of

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1. PRIDE is the acronym for Pacific Regional Initiatives for the Delivery of basic Education. More information is available on: [www.usp.ac.fj/pride](http://www.usp.ac.fj/pride) and the Project's online resource centre: [www.paddle.usp.ac.fj/](http://www.paddle.usp.ac.fj/).

children and youths with disabilities and covers the physically handicapped, visually impaired, hearing impaired, those with speech defects, intellectual disabilities and the emotionally disturbed. Historically, the impetus, support, delivery and advocacy for IE has come, not through governments, but through non-governmental service providers, parents and community groups, disabled people's organisations and professionals working in the area.

In this chapter, I provide an overview of inclusive education as it appears in the Forum Basic Education Plan (FBEAP), PRIDE benchmarks and education strategic plans. I also discuss some IE subprojects supported by the PRIDE Project. This is followed by a description of the regional workshop where the ideas that made this book possible were generated. The final section is a summary of the book.

## **The PRIDE Project and Inclusive Education**

### **Inclusive education and the *Forum Basic Education Action Plan***

The *Forum Basic Education Action Plan (FBEAP)* developed by the Forum Ministers of Education in 2001 did not mention IE. However, 'Children and Youth with Disabilities' and 'Inclusive Education' were added to subsequent meetings of the Ministers of Education so that it has become an integral part of FBEAP.

The proposed Pacific Education Development Framework recommended by the FBEAP Review Team to replace FBEAP for consideration by Ministers of Education at their meeting of March 2009 in Tonga, included 'Students with Special Educational Needs and Inclusive Education' as one of the eight cross-cutting themes (PIFS, 2009: 20-21). The three challenges mentioned relate to poor access, poor quality of provision, and lack of policies and institutional frameworks. In relation to the first, fewer than 10% of children and youths with disabilities are estimated to have access to any form of education. Poor quality of provision is evident in a lack of trained teachers and IE strategies, poor resourcing, lack of access in school environments, and inflexible curriculum and assessment procedures. Finally, in the area of policy and institutional framework, some countries still need to develop their policy framework for children and youths with disabilities. There is also the need to have early identification and intervention services, particularly for hearing and visual impairment; greater

political commitment to legislate protection; and policy development and implementation.

Priorities and strategies suggested by the FBEAP Review to more effectively address the needs of children and youths with special needs include:

- establishment of Ministry coordinating structures at national level
- policy development for special needs and inclusive education
- capacity-building at all levels—addressing both short and long-term needs
- enhancing budgetary allocations for schools, TVET<sup>2</sup> and community development in IE strategic and approaches
- in-service education for classroom teachers and TVET trainers for working with different categories of the special needs population
- improving Ministry databases to identify and track special needs children in communities
- countries and Ministers to encourage the paradigm shift from the charity and medical models to social and rights-based models of disability
- encouragement of development partners to provide scholarships for training within the region in Special Needs Education and Inclusive Education (PIFS, 2009:20).

### **The PRIDE Project**

The PRIDE Project, an initiative of the Forum Ministers for Education, was designed to implement the Pacific vision for education encapsulated in FBEAP. Implementation of this project began in 2004 and is expected to end in December 2009. The Project is funded by the European Union and NZAID<sup>3</sup> and is implemented by the University of the South Pacific.

Its overall objective is:

To expand opportunities for children and youth to acquire the values, knowledge and skills that will enable them to actively participate in the social, spiritual, economic and cultural development of their communities and to contribute positively to creating sustainable futures ([www.usp.ac.fj/pride](http://www.usp.ac.fj/pride)).

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2. Technical and vocational education and training

3. New Zealand Agency for International Development

The Project seeks to strengthen the capacity of each of the 14 Forum countries and Tokelau to deliver quality basic education through both formal and non-formal means in order to achieve its objective. The development of strategic plans for education in each country that blend the best global approaches with local values and ways of thinking is the expected key outcome. Support for the implementation of these national strategic plans is provided by the Project. Sharing of best practice and experience amongst countries is also an important project outcome, evidenced by the development of an online resource centre (see: [www.usp.ac.paddle](http://www.usp.ac.paddle)). Ministers for Education have defined basic education as all educational provision for children and youths, ranging from early childhood, through to primary, secondary and technical/vocational in both the formal and non-formal sectors. In fact, it is everything excepting higher or adult education.

### **PRIDE benchmarks for review of education strategic plans**

The PRIDE Project has listed ‘access and equity for students with special needs’ as benchmark number 4 out of a set of 11 benchmarks to review education strategic plans. The principle for this specifically states that: ‘In order to ensure access and equity, the Plan contains strategies for the teaching and learning of vulnerable and special needs students, including those from low socio-economic urban groups, those in remote and isolated areas, those with disabilities and school drop-outs and push-outs’ (The PRIDE Project, 2007: 3). The indicators identified in the benchmark document are articulated as:

- a specific objective in the Plan referring to meeting the needs of vulnerable students, including the development of appropriate policies and/or legislation
- clear statements on strategies for the development of initiatives for marginalised communities and addressing gender disparities
- specific strategies for improving retention through partnerships with other sectors and agencies
- clear statements of strategies to improve educational opportunities for vulnerable students through more effective teacher training, improvement of infrastructure, resourcing and programmes.

## **Inclusive education in educational plans**

Most of the education strategic plans of PRIDE's 15 participating countries mention their intentions on the education of children and youths with disabilities. Examples are provided below to demonstrate how three countries have articulated their strategies to advance inclusive education.

In Tuvalu, under the broader objective of increasing student participation, inclusive education and special needs education are listed under the outcomes of access and equity. The strategies identified to achieve these outcomes are:

- Develop Inclusive Education policy
- Implementation of IE policy
- Identify appropriate diagnostic tools to identify students with learning needs
- Programmes in place to assist students with learning needs
- Professional development to enable teachers to identify and support students with special needs.

(Tuvalu Department of Education, 2006: 11)

Other countries that are in the process of developing their inclusive education policies include Fiji and Vanuatu. Solomon Islands and Kiribati will be developing their IE policy in the near future. Special education programmes in the Federated States of Micronesia, Marshall Islands and Palau in the Northern Pacific are supported by the US special education grant programme. In addition, Palau has its own public law on special education. Other countries that have IE policies include Cook Islands, Samoa, Tonga and Papua New Guinea (PNG). Tokelau has an IE policy articulated within their National Curriculum Policy Framework.

Vanuatu interprets inclusive education as 'education for the disabled' and makes the point that the Government has had little to do with the education of children and youths with disabilities within the education system, mainly due to 'insufficient financial resources' (Vanuatu Ministry of Education, 1999: 138). The four actions planned for the years 2000 – 2010 are listed below.

1. The Government will appoint an officer in the Ministry of Education with specific responsibility for the development of policies and programs for the education of the disabled at all levels of the education system, and to be the

official representative of the Government to the Vanuatu Society of Disabled People.

2. The Government will officially incorporate components about the needs and education of the disabled into the curricula of all programs of Vanuatu Teachers College.
3. The Government will designate one primary school in Port Vila and one in Luganville as the national centers for education of the disabled. It will also assign resources to make it possible for these schools to provide effective education of the disabled.
4. The Government will devote capital resources and make physical provision for the disabled in all new schools constructed from 2000 on, and in all existing schools when any major project of renovation is implemented.

(Vanuatu Ministry of Education, 1999: 139)

One of the 17 policy areas identified for further policy development and action by the Government of Tonga is Special Education. The Tonga Education Policy Framework 2004 – 2019 (Tonga Ministry of Education, 2004: 35-36) clearly stipulates that government policy response would be reflected in the following strategies:

- Undertaking a review of special education provision in Tonga
- Conducting a baseline survey to ascertain the nature, number and extent of children with special needs both in and out of school
- Establishing a central database with detailed information about those people (children and adults) who have special learning needs
- Providing assistance for special needs children in existing schools through:
  - a special needs component in all pre-service teacher training
  - providing teachers of children with special needs with professional development opportunities and targeted in-service training
  - training of teacher aides
  - reviewing the school curriculum to ensure it caters adequately for children with special learning needs, and making available appropriate learning materials and equipment for special education
  - provision of incentives to improve the qualifications of teachers in the special education field
  - supporting classes for adults with special needs in the community.

Examples of what countries are doing in the area of IE are provided in the next section. All these subprojects are aligned to the education strategic plans of the four countries which have elected to use PRIDE funds on IE.

### **Inclusive education and PRIDE subprojects**

As part of support to its 15 participating countries, the PRIDE Project provides subproject funding for countries to implement their education strategic plans. Of the 140 subprojects, 7% are in the area of inclusive education in the following countries: Cook Islands, Vanuatu, Tonga and Samoa. There is also a regional subproject on IE which is aimed at providing a Pacific regional non-award *Certificate of Orientation and Mobility in the Pacific*.

Following on from the detailed strategies articulated in the Tongan Education Policy Framework in the section above, Tonga has focused its assistance from PRIDE exclusively on early childhood education and inclusive education for children and youths. Its integrated approach to IE begins with the development of an IE policy, capacity-building and training of IE teachers/trainers, the resourcing of an IE centre, and a pilot IE project at one school where 23 children with disabilities are mainstreamed into a primary school. PRIDE funding has enabled the IE following activities to be met:

- appointment of an Inclusive Education Supervisor to oversee subproject implementation
- a baseline disability identification survey for children and adults with disabilities
- training of community members in each island group on disability issues and inclusive practices, and on how to conduct the survey
- turning the findings of the survey into a report with recommendations on how to improve access to education for people with disabilities in Tongan society
- development of a centralised database for children, youths and adults with special needs
- carrying out a pilot of an IE classroom
- provision of resources for the IE centre
- capacity-building of teachers and teacher aides.

Cook Islands' two IE subprojects, the first complete, the second ongoing, are concerned with improving the quality of trainers for a special education centre and involves the non-formal sector. The main aim of these subprojects is to provide support to the community-run Creative Centre for people with disabilities through the capacity-building of Centre staff to better meet the learning needs of students. The first subproject engaged with both ICT<sup>4</sup> and youths and adults with disabilities and included recruiting a consultant who worked with the two trainers at the Centre over a three-week period, modeling new ideas across a range of areas with an emphasis on the use of ICT in supporting the learning of the students. This *train-the-trainer* model included the development of a training programme, training of the two Centre trainers and the development of individual education plans (IEPs) for each of the Centre students.

The second subproject continues from the previous *train-the-trainers* project with the Creative Centre. The initial project allowed for the capacity-building of trainers at the Creative Centre to develop and implement IEPs for the Creative Centre users. The purpose of the second subproject is to extend that capability both through observation of and participation in best practice and through more formal learning towards a recognised qualification. The completion of this project will allow the Creative Centre to register as a private learning centre with the Ministry of Education and therefore receive financial support towards staffing and operations in order to give the Centre a level of financial certainty as it plans for its future.

Vanuatu's IE subproject is concerned with the development of an IE policy. Part of the strategy to accomplish this is a planned study tour to tertiary and other institutions engaged in IE programmes in PNG by two Ministry of Education staff and a third person from the non-government organisation (NGO) sector. The development of the inclusive education policy will require a short-term local consultant and will involve nation-wide consultation and awareness-raising, which will include meetings and consultations with donors and stakeholders.

Following the study tour, analysis will be conducted on the most appropriate method to:

1. develop the Inclusive Education Policy, including scoping for special education

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4. information and communication technology

2. introduce sign language training in the Vanuatu Institute of Teacher Education and disability organisations
3. outline any training and capacity-building opportunities.

Samoa's IE subproject is concerned with the development of a sustainable IE system, and its linkage to the national education strategic plan is discussed in more detail in Chapter 11. The five components of Samoa's IE subproject are:

1. *universal accessibility guidelines for all schools and public buildings*  
The final draft is now ready and will go to the planning and urban management authority board for endorsement.
2. *professional development at the national level*  
At least five workshops have been completed to support children with special needs: hearing, sight, physical disability and intellectual disability. There has also been a national workshop on writing individual education plans.
3. *a media campaign for access to information by the public about disability via TV advertisements*  
The IE subproject coordinator, Donna Lene, described these ads as 'good value for money' since the TV stations still ran ads even though the funding had stopped. There were three ads, two funded by PRIDE and one by another donor. There is also radio talk back, even in Savaii, the other main island, through the government radio station.
4. *a pilot IE programme in three primary schools (two grade 1; one grade 4)*  
In this component, the teacher aides are selected carefully for training and are family members. This rolled out in January 2008, with two (family member and member of youth group) people from each of the three sites selected to work with deaf children. A boy in one of the three schools has already received a hearing aid with plans in place for the other two children to get hearing aids soon (health and education connections). The IE subproject coordinator is working to get teacher aides established into the organisational structure of the MoE.
5. *recording stories with significant change where documentation and evidence gathering is an important component*

In our discussion about the impact of the IE subproject in Samoa, Donna had the following to say: 'It explores ways the MoE can work creatively with NGOs. The PRIDE Project has added value by helping the Ministry of Education engage

with other NGOs, such as the Early Intervention Service. There is now close collaboration and support for families and communities’.

Another benefit that Donna mentioned was that the subproject ‘provided opportunities at a high policy level such as through the universal accessibility guidelines with greater harmonising and institutional strengthening’. Institutional strengthening through the Institutional Strengthening Project funded by ADB<sup>5</sup>, AusAID<sup>6</sup> and NZAID assisted with school buildings, which is a component of the PRIDE IE subproject. Another benefit Donna saw lay in IE becoming a ‘hot topic’ and the creation of specific disability networks.

Donna added that IE in Samoa has grown because teachers and parents have been the catalysts for change. The teachers have started a process with their specific knowledge and confidence, building on what the MoE has already done. The six UNESCO<sup>7</sup> toolkit booklets have been translated into Samoan and these were used as resources at the IE workshops and the training of teacher aides.

Another benefit that Donna identified is that parents have been empowered to be advocates for their own children. As teacher aides, the three relatives (two mothers and sister) have advocated for rights in IE and this is something new. The support by parents has seen a growth of the network.

Another impact that Donna identified is that schools have broadened their values and are valuing difference. There is a change in teaching styles with the focus shifting to the visual—and this is not just for deaf children. Another advantage has been that children with disabilities can be educated in their own village, in their own community.

An indirect impact has been the concept of sign classes ‘under the mango tree’ where a teacher aide, also a member of the women’s village community, has been training the women in sign language. There is a snowballing effect evident; for example, where there is training in DVD/computer training, a sign language DVD is piggybacked to this.

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5. Asian Development Bank

6. Australian Agency for International Development

7. United Nations Scientific and Cultural Organisation

Another indirect effect is the transformation in the teacher aides. The sister of one of the three children with a hearing impairment who is part of the pilot programme dropped out of school but when she was drawn into the IE teacher aide programme and trained, the transformation was remarkable. She, a school drop-out, is now actually training qualified teachers!

A regional subproject entitled the Pacific Regional Train-the-trainer Certificate Programme in Vision Impairment was submitted by the Pacific Disability Forum. The main aim of this subproject is the provision of a Pacific regional non-award *Certificate of Orientation and Mobility in the Pacific* (O&M), delivered in partnership with the International Council for Education of People with Visual Impairment and in collaboration with the Royal Institute of Deaf and Blind Children, the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat and the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific.

The proposed course aims to train 16 mobility instructors from 12 Pacific countries to directly support the development of mobility skills of children and youth with vision impairments. The focus areas of the training course will be instruction in the long cane and 'sighted guide techniques'. Trained mobility instructors will then be able to work in their home countries with teachers, parents and children with vision impairments. As a result of this training, blind and severely vision impaired children and youth will develop the mobility skills needed to travel to school with a level of independence, to physically access school classrooms and playgrounds and to independently move around their local community.

### **Regional Workshop on Advancing Inclusive Education**

This book is an outcome of a regional workshop on 'Advancing Inclusive Education in the Pacific' which was held in Nadi from 1 – 5 October in Nadi, Fiji. It is the second in a series of workshops where the University of the South Pacific, through the PRIDE Project, has collaborated in partnership with six other organisations: Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat, Pacific Resources for Education and Learning, UNESCO, UNICEF, the South Pacific Board for Educational Assessment and the host government, in this case the Fiji Government/Ministry of Education. The workshop, with PRIDE taking the lead coordination role, is also the PRIDE Project's eighth regional workshop.

## **Workshop Objectives**

The four workshop objectives were:

1. to understand the visions, experiences, practices and challenges of inclusive education globally and in Pacific countries;
2. to identify key strategies needed for wider implementation of inclusive practices and their implications for children with disabilities in Pacific Island countries;
3. to discuss, explore and investigate future national and regional strategies and actions aimed at strengthening inclusive education within the framework of the Education for All initiative;
4. to recommend the way forward with regard to charting a new direction for inclusive education at the national level in Pacific Island countries.

## **Workshop Outputs and Outcomes**

A significant outcome of this workshop was the presentation of an outcomes document<sup>8</sup> prepared by the workshop partners to the Forum Ministers of Education at their meeting in Auckland in November 2007. The document (Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat, 2007:3-4) noted that key areas that needed to be addressed at the national level included policy, collaboration, research, budget/finances, implementation of policy and training as well as school level initiatives. The Ministers of Education were invited to:

1. note the progress for inclusive education at the regional and national level and support the current paradigm shift from the charity and medical models to social and rights-based models of disability
2. note the actions required in the Biwako Millennium Framework and the BMF Plus Five as a basis of advancing inclusive education at the policy level of Forum Island countries
3. endorse an integrated approach to inclusive education that recognises all children's right to education
4. endorse the use of the UNESCO toolkit on inclusive education as the basis for promoting the philosophies of inclusive education in Forum Island countries.

These recommendations and endorsed were noted by the Ministers.

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8. See page 56.

Another significant outcome of the regional workshop is this book which is written by the resource people and participants.

An important output of the workshop was the development of an outcomes document which was prepared by a subcommittee at the workshop. This document is included as the final chapter of this book.

### **Participants**

A total of 24 regional participants from 14 Forum countries, including Tokelau, attended the workshop. The Federated States of Micronesia, despite our best efforts, was not represented. The participants, up to two per country, were high level decision-makers or experts from the Ministry of Education working in the area of inclusive education and key NGO stakeholders involved in supporting IE. In addition, 12 Fiji participants attended at different times throughout the week.

The resource people included representatives of the seven partner organisations, three observers, a critical friend, three international keynote and three regional speakers (See Attachments A and B for the full list of participants at the workshop and the group photograph).

### **Programme**

Participants at the workshop had a full programme. Keynote addresses (presenting global and local perspectives to IE) provided the conceptual, theoretical and philosophical underpinnings of inclusive education. Panel discussions were organised so that the voices of consumers, providers and professionals could be heard, and case study presentations enabled individuals and professionals involved in inclusive education delivery and practice to share their experiences with workshop participants. Time was also set aside for a lot of group work and a visit was also organised to a centre for children with disabilities and a regular secondary school, which had mainstreamed children with disabilities. The principal of a mainstream secondary school, two deaf children and their teacher were able to share their experiences with the participants.

## **Conclusion**

Three things are clear: first, the definition of inclusive education is highly variable in the Pacific. Second, the debate around inclusive education and special education will continue for some time in the Pacific as it has done internationally. And third, the education of children and youths with disabilities is only the tip of the iceberg in the IE discourse as the broader definition of the *all* in the generic definition of inclusive education encompasses more than children with disabilities.

What of the specific learning needs of other categories of children and youths who are disadvantaged and marginalised and whose needs are not adequately met by education systems in the Pacific? What of the students who fail national examinations and have to leave school as a result? What remedial measures are taken at school level and what national policies exist to address the special needs of the 'below average' students? What of the drop-outs and push-outs? How will their needs be met? What about the gifted child? How are his/her special needs met? What about access, equitable provision and participation in a good quality education for children who are disadvantaged because of poverty and physical isolation? Unfortunately, it was not possible to discuss these issues at the inclusive education workshop because the emphasis was on inclusive education for children with disabilities.

The aim of advancing inclusive education in the Pacific so that the diversity of needs of all learners through their equitable access and participation in quality learning are met by education systems has enormous policy and budgetary implications. If countries are to embrace this inclusive, all-embracing philosophy as a key tenet of their education delivery, what is called for is an education revolution—everything and everyone must be transformed. And this must begin with a transformation in minds, hearts and attitudes about inclusive education ideology, process and practice. At the highest policy level, political will must mandate that a quality education for all is mandatory and this needs to be backed by policy directions and financial resources. At the centre of inclusive education is teacher education and training. There needs to be a change in pedagogical practices to make teaching and learning more inclusive. Increased advocacy and public awareness campaigns must be added to the equation. The content and processes of learning and its assessment will also need to be closely scrutinised so that, at the end of the day, national education systems do not fail students.

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