

**Pacific Disability Forum (PDF) and
Australia Pacific Islands Disability Support (APIDS)**

**Capacity Development for Effective and Efficient
Disabled Persons Organisations in
Pacific Island Countries**

Report on Solomon Islands component of Research

August 2011

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1. Introduction

A Pacific-wide research program entitled “Capacity Development for Effective and Efficient Disabled People’s Organisations in Pacific Island Countries¹”, commenced in February 2011 with the financial assistance of AusAID. The research process will cover 11 countries and continue to June 2012. Pacific Disability Forum (PDF) is undertaking the research in collaboration with Australia Pacific Islands Disability Support (APIDS). The research team comprises representatives from both organisations and includes in-country researcher(s) nominated by each national member Disabled People’s Organisation.

Solomon Islands is the fifth country to be visited as part of this research (after the pilot was undertaken in Fiji, the research has been undertaken in Cook Islands, Samoa and Papua New Guinea).

The research team included one representative each from PDF and APIDS as well as two in-country researchers. The President of People with Disabilities in Solomon Islands (PWDSI), Savina Nongebatu and staff members also played an active support role to the team.

This report summarises the process, findings and lessons learned for future aspects of the research.

2. The DPO in Solomon Islands

In summary, the DPO situation in Solomon Islands has the following features:

- A history of DPO activity going back to 1980s
- There is one national cross-disability DPO – People with Disabilities Solomon Islands (PWDSI)

¹ This research is being undertaken jointly by PDF and APIDS, and is funded by AusAID.

- PWDSI is a central, registered, urban-based non-profit organisation with a constitution, an elected board, full-time, paid and voluntary staff and secure office facilities. It is an organisation founded and managed by people with disabilities in Solomon Islands, to advocate for the rights of people with disabilities and to work together to improve their situation in Solomon Islands.
- PWDSI has three paid staff and seven volunteers
- PWDSI has received funding by Pacific Disability Forum (PDF) through the Pacific DPO Fund and Capacity Development Initiative Programme , Australian Pacific Islands Disability Support (APIDS), and the Disability Rights Fund (DRF)

2.1 History of the DPO in Solomon Islands

The DPO in the Solomon Islands has evolved through many development phases since its inception in the 1980s including the changing of its name and organisational priorities. The initial disability organisation was known as the Crippled Society of the Solomon Islands (CSSI). It was founded by people without disabilities, but over a number of years, people with disabilities took over the running of the organisation. Their main focus was providing services for people with disability in sports.

In 1993, the organisation's name changed to Disabled People Rehabilitation Association (DPRA) and its focus shifted to developing the capacity of people with disability through special education programs for children with intellectual disabilities. Later, services were introduced for children with hearing, vision and intellectual impairments.

The organisation's name was again changed in 1994 to Disabled Persons Association of Solomon Islands (DPASI). In 2005, the current president was voted in to lead what she referred to as '*a loose network of people with disabilities*' and operated its services from her home. She said that "*we were fortunate to receive some funding from Australian Pacific Islands Disability Support (APIDS) to assist with our operational costs*".

The most recent name change to People with Disabilities Solomon Islands (PWDSI) occurred during organisational development changes in 2007. At

the time, PWDSI gained funding for some operational costs through the sale of baskets donated by the Republic of China.

In 2008, two Board members attended an Australian Leadership Awards Fellowship (ALAF) in Canberra, Sydney, Mount Macedon and Melbourne in Australia. In addition, seven members of PWDSI and four staff of CBR attended another ALAF program in Melbourne and Brisbane in Australia for leadership training in 2010.

In 2009, PWDSI became a full member of the Pacific Disability Forum (PDF). The first major in-country capacity development activity for PWDSI members was Human Rights Training on the Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities (CRPD) conducted by PDF, Australia Human Rights Commission (AHRC) and People with Disabilities Australia (PWD Australia).

PWDSI was registered under the Charitable Act as Disabled Peoples Association of Solomon Islands in 1993. PWDSI has a constitution that will be reviewed at its AGM in November 2011.

PWDSI's mission statement is :

To facilitate, realise, support and promote the equalisation of opportunities by strengthening PWDSI. PWDSI will strive towards an effective, cross-disability, gender-sensitive and inclusive organisation. Efficient communication will continue with Government Stakeholders, regional partners and international agencies. PWDSI upholds the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities (CRPD).

PWDSI has facilitated the establishment of provincial self help groups² (SHGs) in seven provinces: Temotu, Malaita (2 groups), Makira/Ulawa, Guadalcanal, Isabel, Central and Western. SHGs are raising awareness about the rights of people with disabilities in their respective communities and villages. PWDSI represents all people with disabilities in Solomon Islands.

² The term self help groups (SHG) is similar to the PNG referred term of Self Help Organisation (SHO).

PWDSI also is currently hosting a research project being conducted by Monash University about the social and cultural context of disability and culturally appropriate solutions to disadvantage. This research began with pilot surveys in East and West Guadalcanal and will include Temotu and Malaita Provinces. SHGs in the provinces are involved in the surveys. Research findings will be presented to the Government of Solomon Islands as well as made available to others. The research will be completed by April 2012.

The President of PWDSI is a member of the PDF Women's Committee. PWDSI office bearers have actively participated in meetings and consultations on disability issues in the region and internationally. For example, office bearers have attended various DPI and United Nations meetings on disability.

The Solomon Island Government signed the CRPD in September 2008 and its Optional Protocol in September 2009. To date, there has been no clear timeframe communicated by the Government about the process and timing of ratification.

3. Research principles, approaches and methodology

In addition to standard research principles relating to ethical considerations and the selection of a mix of accessible, culturally appropriate tools and processes, the research team approached the methodology with four particular principles in mind:

- We sought to mix the “extraction” of information with opportunities for research participants to learn about their organisations and ways of strengthening them (including opportunities to consider their own definition of capacity and their understanding of and plans for capacity development)
- We sought to focus on understanding the strengths of organisations, how they had been developed over time and how these strengths can

be used as the basis for future planning (strengths based approach) and sharing this understanding between participants

- We sought to provide opportunities for DPO-nominated people to build research skills in country through collaborative planning and implementation
- We sought to make the research process accessible for people with a variety of impairments.

In practice, the in-country research approach includes the following elements:

- Working collaboratively with the DPOs in country so they have a good sense of “ownership” of the research, rather than consider that the research is being done by outsiders
- Emphasis on respecting participants and on putting them at ease during all stages, particularly in meetings and workshops. This included the extensive use of the local pidgin language.
- Asking core set of questions for participants, adapted to suit different audiences (e.g. “what do you think are the strengths of your DPO?” or “what do you think are the strengths of the DPOs with whom you work?”)
- Respecting community protocols and customs
- Ensuring different disability groups are involved and included

The research process involves a mix of tools to maximize the chances to confirm any information collected from an individual source:

- Literature survey
- Small group discussions
- Individual meetings
- Workshops
- Case studies (of selected organisations)

3.1 Methodology in Solomon Islands

From 15 to 20 August 2011, the research team worked together to:

- Develop detailed plans for in-country implementation, giving specific consideration to the Solomon Islands context
- Identify the questions within each research activity
- Allocate responsibilities among team members
- Undertake the research activities with local organisations in the disability sector and their stakeholders, including meetings and a workshop at the end of the week
- Collate findings at the end of the week of activities and identify lessons about how to improve the research process and methodology for subsequent country visits

Once planning had been undertaken, the following meetings were held during the week:

- Separate meetings were held with the members and Board members of PWDSI
- Interviews with stakeholder groups, including non-government education providers and government departments

A workshop of members of PWDSI was organised on the last day of the in-country visit, for the following purposes:

- To share initial findings and seek discussion and confirmation of these findings
- To discuss two terms: capacity and capacity development
- To introduce the strengths based approach concept, on which the research is based and which is relevant to capacity development planning
- To provide an opportunity for collaborative planning for capacity development of PWDSI

Annex 1 provides the list of research activities each day.

In summary, the research team met 57 people during the various meetings and workshops. Of the total number of people met, 56% are female, 44% are male and just over 60% are people with disabilities.

4. Findings

The themes listed below emerged from an analysis of notes from all meetings and were discussed and endorsed at the members' workshop

1. People with Disabilities Solomon Islands (PWDSI) is managed by people with disabilities who have knowledge and awareness of disability issues and know the language and culture
2. PWDSI is an established organisation run by a committed and strong Board with good leadership and organisational skills
3. PWDSI has an office, some office equipment and both paid and volunteer staff
4. PWDSI has strong networks internationally, regionally and within Solomon Islands and they have assisted in building the capacity of people with disabilities and attracting funding from outside
5. PWDSI has established self help groups in the provinces, with the potential for ongoing strengthening through working closely with Bethesda and San Isidro³
6. PWDSI has a strong advocacy and awareness program which has attracted media attention
7. PWDSI has excellent training on the rights of people with disabilities as expressed in the CRPD
8. PWDSI has a strong vision of encouraging and supporting young people with disabilities to become leaders
9. PWDSI has a strong working relationship with education NGOs
10. PWDSI has contributed to the development of disability policy in the Solomon Islands

³ These are service providers for people with disabilities which operate from premises near to Honiara

11. PWDSI is an active member of the regional forum (PDF) that advocates for the rights of people with disabilities
12. PWDSI has established relationships with Government ministries. In order to build a barrier free community in the Solomon Islands PWDSI will develop strategies to rebuild and strengthen the relationship with Government through the Ministry of Health focal point
13. PWDSI would like more training to build capacity of its members in advocacy, Human Rights, and management and organizational skills
14. PWDSI would like to secure multi-year funding to develop, strengthen and sustain the organisation
15. PWDSI has a vision for an accessible building dedicated for people with disabilities. This building will set a standard for all in the community
16. PWDSI would like to develop and strengthen linkages between people with disabilities in the provinces.

4.1 Discussion

This research attempted to understand perceptions of DPO capacity by DPOs themselves and their stakeholders, as well as perceptions of changes in capacity over time and factors which contribute to effective change. Importantly, this research did not attempt to “measure” DPO capacity. This section discusses the findings listed above, within an understanding of the history of PWDSI and broader capacity development thinking.

In summary, PWDSI has many strengths in capacity terms and there are a number of factors which have contributed to DPO capacity in Solomon Islands. Most influencing factors have come from within the organisation itself, and other factors reflect Solomon Islands values or are related to the international disability rights movement.

4.1.1 Model for understanding elements of capacity

While there are many models for understanding organisational capacity, the Baser and Morgan (2009) model has been selected for framing analysis

in this research. This model, based on extensive international research, suggests that capacity comprises the following five elements:

CAPABILITY TO COMMIT AND ENGAGE

Includes the following:

- the ability to encourage mindfulness (being thoughtful about the impact of words and actions)
- the ability and willingness to persevere (to keep to goals and actions even when facing difficulties)
- the ability to aspire (to be ambitious; to dream)
- the ability to embed conviction (to make sure everyone is committed to working hard towards the shared goals)
- the ability to take ownership (to make sure that any plans to change the organisation and its work are completely “owned” by the organisation itself)
- the ability to be determined (to make strong efforts to achieve goals despite any challenges or setbacks)

CAPABILITY TO CARRY OUT TECHNICAL, SERVICE DELIVERY AND LOGISTICAL TASKS

Includes the following:

- the ability to deliver services
- the ability to plan strategically (to reach longer-term objectives, not just short-term day-to-day work)
- the ability to manage the implementation of all the plans effectively and efficiently (with consideration given to different definitions of effectiveness and efficiency)
- the ability to manage the finances (in ways which comply with local laws, practices and values)

CAPABILITY TO RELATE AND ATTRACT

Includes the following:

- the ability to buffer the organisation or system from intrusions (to protect organisations from outside destructive or distracting events or people)
- the ability to earn the trust of others, such as donors and partners

- the ability to combine political neutrality and assertive advocacy (to be able to achieve goals confidently without upsetting politicians and others through too much blatant criticism)

CAPABILITY TO ADAPT AND SELF-RENEW

Includes the following:

- the ability to improve individual and organisational learning
- the ability to foster internal dialogue (to provide chances for people to talk with each other openly about things that are happening and what is planned)
- the ability to reposition and reconfigure the organisation
- the ability to incorporate new ideas
- the ability to map out a growth path

CAPABILITY TO BALANCE DIVERSITY AND COHERENCE

Includes the following:

- the ability to communicate
- the ability to build connections (to work collaboratively with other organisations)
- the ability to manage diversity (to make the most of different ideas from people and strengths within the organisation)
- the ability to manage paradox and tension (to work out how to deal with information which is opposite from other information, and how to deal with people who have different ideas)

Using this framework, and based on the findings discussed below, PWDSI has a number of “stand-out” capacity strengths, including:

- the ability and willingness to persevere, particularly during times of exclusion and lack of support from others
- the ability to make sure office bearers and staff are committed to working hard towards the shared goals
- the ability to take ownership of the disability rights agenda
- the ability to be determined to achieve their goals and in particular to meet members’ priorities
- the ability to earn the trust of others, including members, communities, other NGOs and some donors/partners
- the ability to combine constructive awareness and assertive advocacy

- the ability to improve individual and organisational learning, particularly by maximizing opportunities for members to attend training, workshops, committee meetings etc.
- the ability to build connections.

4.1.2 Contextual influences on DPO capacity

The dominant perspective on the situation of people with disabilities within Solomon Islands is based on medical or welfare/charity models. Under these models, medical professionals, disability service providers or carers/parents make most decisions about the lives of adult people with disabilities.

This has meant that until recently, organisations which influenced Government disability policy were not those comprising people with disabilities themselves, but service provider organisations and individual medical, educational and other experts. Until the last decade, there was negligible official or community recognition about the rights of people with disability, including the right to organise themselves.

In this context, PWDSI capacity has gradually increased overall since 2009. Support from outside Solomon Islands has enabled the organization to grow its own capacity and to increase the use of a rights based approach within the country by people with disability themselves.

4.1.3 Advocacy skills

It was evident from the discussions with PWDSI and its stakeholders that advocacy plays a significant role in elevating the profile of PWDSI in the Solomon Islands. For example, PWDSI has attracted media attention through its advocacy and awareness-raising in relation to the rights of children with disabilities in the Solomon Islands to attend school.

The staff and members of PWDSI have developed their understanding, knowledge and skills through the ALAF training programs in Australia and through the Human Rights Training conducted in-country by the Pacific Disability Forum. Understanding about the rights expressed in the CRPD has been significant in increasing the confidence of staff and members to speak with government officials as well as community and family members.

4.1.4 Internal leadership

PWDSI's internal leadership features prominently in the list of strengths: the research team was told that the organisation's leadership has continued to inspire and motivate people with disabilities in the Solomon Islands to advocate and promote their rights. One stakeholder identified the core strength of PWDSI as its internal leadership in the following way:

“The current leader of PWDSI Savina Nongebatu is the strength behind their success in advocacy and motivating people with disabilities in the Solomon Islands.” (Comment by Service Provider representative)

An example that best illustrates this leadership is Savina's commitment to develop young people with disabilities in the Solomon Islands to become leaders. The research team was ably assisted by two talented young persons with disabilities who are acknowledged in this report. Mr. Davis Ladofoa and Ms Naomi Tai displayed outstanding research planning and implementation skills that earned them admiration and praise from research participants. They both showed great diligence and potential to become excellent leaders for PWDSI in future.

4.1.5 Link between members' and DPO capacity

Both members and PWDSI office bearers agreed that they *'would like more training to build capacity of its members in advocacy, human rights, management and organisational skills'*.

The majority of Solomon Islands' population lives in rural areas outside Honiara, and communications are limited, so links between PWDSI and its members across the country are challenging. Connections with members in the provinces are channeled through the seven SHGs noted above. The high cost of conducting training activities and awareness workshops, particularly travel, is a particular challenge for PWDSI.

The aim to decentralize the services of PWDSI to the rural and outer islands has been identified as a development priority. This will enable PWDSI to develop and strength linkages between its members in the provinces.

The challenges faced by PWDSI in accessing its members in the provinces are the high costs and diverse geographical locations. A point of entry for PWDSI identified by the research is exploring the opportunity of working closely with two service providers Bethesda Disability Training and Support Centre and San Isidro Training Centre both located on the outskirts of Honiara. Both institutes attract people with disabilities from the provinces of the Solomon Islands and PWDSI currently conducts human rights training at Bethesda. Staff from Bethesda and San Isidro believe that PWDSI can strengthen people with disability in the provinces by strategically conducting training in both institutes, including for and through the existing SHGs.

“It is always good to start small and ensure that we develop the capacities of our members to ensure that all provinces have self help groups” (PWDSI Board member)

4.1.6 External factors which contribute to capacity

It was evident from the research that there was a strong value placed on partnerships between PWDSI and external partners. PWDSI has worked collaboratively with organizations such as PDF, APIDS, Disabled Peoples International (DPI) and Disability Rights Fund (DRF). These organisations have contributed in various ways including providing access to training and funding, as well as policy support and advice.

PWDSI Board and its members agreed that two main events have particularly contributed to the development of PWDSI capacity:

1. Participation by two PWDSI Board members and seven youth members for 4 weeks training in Australia under the Australia Leadership Awards Fellowship program.
2. Organisation of Human Rights Training in Honiara, which included people with disabilities from the provinces and has been the impetus for the start of self help groups.

4.1.7 PWDSI's future capacity development objectives

With Pacific Leaders endorsing the Pacific Regional Disability Strategy, Pacific Forum Island countries are required to allocate a focal point within Government to coordinate national efforts. For PWDSI to take full advantage of the Solomon Islands Government assistance, it needs to develop strategies to rebuild and strengthen the relationship with the Community Based Rehabilitation section of the Ministry of Health, which is the focal point for disability within the Government.

This has been a challenge for PWDSI as both organisations have different perspectives on issues regarding people with disabilities. PWDSI has agreed that more effort should be made to strengthen their partnership with Government. This will both strengthen the advocacy process and increase access to Government resources that will benefit people with disabilities.

The development of the capacity of the members of PWDSI in areas of advocacy, human rights, and management and organisational skills is identified as a priority. This will assist PWDSI to achieve its goals. In catering for the increasing PWDSI membership, members have identified the need to have a dedicated building for people with disabilities. It is envisaged that a building will be able to provide a venue for capacity building training and also potentially, life-skills and income-generating workshops.

4.1.9 How PWDSI wants partners to assist in future

PWDSI's plans of developing a new strategic plan in November 2011 that will align membership priorities through its program, is expected to attract support from Solomon Islands Government and other potential partners.

To maximize and extend ongoing benefits for its members, PWDSI would also like to secure multi-year funding from donors. However, the requirements for organisations to obtain multi-year funding are difficult for

PWDSI to meet. They noted that donors' "*criteria are difficult to meet*" and they were not comfortable that donor requirements appear to be "*dictating what we do.*" PWDSI would like to request that donors and development partners are more flexible with their criteria so they can support and fund DPO priorities.

PWDSI Board and members sought more leadership training to be held in-country and in local language so that more people with disabilities will be able to attend and gain relevant skills.

Finally, PWDSI would like technical assistance from development partners and volunteers to assist in strengthening the organisation, especially in the areas of advocacy and strategic planning. This will assist in developing the young people with disabilities who are currently volunteering with PWDSI.

4.2 Summary

In summary, this research concludes that:

- PWDSI has significant strengths within its membership, particularly young people with disabilities
- There is potential to strengthen the organisational capacity of PWDSI in a variety of ways
- There is great potential for PWDSI to work closely with service providers Bethesda and San Isidro to strengthen and develop self-help groups in all the provinces of Solomon Islands
- PWDSI needs to rebuild its relationship with the Government focal point, the Ministry of Health, to maximize benefits from Government for people with disability across the country.

Annex 1: List of research activities

August 16th 2011

Meeting with country researchers

Meeting with Under Secretary for Ministry of Health

Meeting with Elise Taloafiri – Community Based Rehabilitation (CBR)

Workshop with members

August 17th 2011

Interviews with Catherine Anilafa - Red Cross Special Disability School

Meeting with Susan Larsen - Bethesda Disability Training Centre

Meeting with PWDSI Board

August 18th 2011

Meeting with staff of San Isidro

Meeting with Mary Alalo Haridi & Paul Kakai– Coalition for Education Solomon Islands

August 19th 2011

Workshop with PWDSI members

Reflection meeting – research team