

# PACIFIC DISABILITY FORUM'S PRECONDITIONS TO INCLUSION ISSUES PAPERS

## COMPLETE SERIES

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[www.pacificdisability.org](http://www.pacificdisability.org)

## Preconditions to Inclusion Issues Paper:

# Introduction to Pacific Disability Forum's Preconditions to Inclusion Framework

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## What are the Preconditions to Inclusion in the Pacific?

The Pacific Disability Forum (PDF) estimates that 1.708 million people in Pacific Island Countries and Territories (PICTs) live with disability. These people experience some of the highest forms of exclusion and discrimination across the Pacific, as seen in data showing that they are over-represented among those living in poverty and under-represented in social and public life, including in national decision-making. Women with disabilities face particular barriers: for example, experiencing higher rates of physical and sexual violence, forced treatments, and having their first child at younger ages than women without disabilities or men with disabilities. School attendance and economic participation rates are lower for persons with disabilities, and they are more likely to have bad experiences in health systems.<sup>1</sup>

This pervasive and entrenched exclusion and marginalisation of persons with disabilities must be addressed in order for persons with disabilities to access their full rights under the UN Convention of the Rights of Persons with disabilities (CRPD). Doing so is essential, not only as a matter of rights and equity but also for the sake of social and economic progress for persons with disabilities, and for their communities that will benefit from their contributions when their equal participation is facilitated.

The last decade has seen much progress in the aid sector in terms of 'mainstreaming' disability inclusion into development and humanitarian programs. This work is commendable and should be continued at pace if we are to ensure that persons with disabilities are not left behind, particularly given the many issues affecting the region, ranging from climate change to ageing populations, digital economies and more. In particular it has been excellent and commendable to see increased good practices around participation of persons

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<sup>1</sup> Data and statistics drawn from M. Sharp, Pacific Group on Disability Statistics (PGDS), Background on PGDS Presentation, SPC, 16 July 2020, <https://www.washingtongroup-disability.com/fileadmin/uploads/wg/Documents/20-8b.pdf>

with disabilities in international cooperation decision-making, in accordance with their rights under Articles 4.3 and 32 of the CRPD.

At PDF, however, we have also long recognised and advocated that mainstreaming within programs and policies is not enough. For all persons with disabilities, particularly the most marginalised, to be able to have any chance of being included within mainstream activities, there needs to be increased and intentional focus on the systemic barriers in communities that prevent them from reaching such activities in the first place. These systemic barriers include discrimination in attitudes and in practices, lack of accessibility, no access to assistive technology or support services, no community-based inclusive development to facilitate inclusion, and exclusion due to the extra costs of disabilities.

At PDF we have begun calling for policies to address these core barriers called the ‘preconditions to inclusion’ – because without policies and programs in place to address these, many persons with disabilities would be excluded from any other activities that would enable their inclusion, such as inclusive education or inclusive health activities. Our framework aligns with similar frameworks; for example, the report on disability-inclusive policies by the Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities outlines non-discrimination, accessibility and assistive technology and support services as prerequisites for the Sustainable Development Goals and the CRPD.

We have adapted our model for our Pacific context. The additional costs of disability are pervasively prohibitive for many persons with disabilities in the region: particularly where there is such a lack of health insurance, public transport or subsidised costs of items such as assistive technology or care, together with such high indirect costs of disability due to low employment rates of persons with disabilities. Together, this means that action addressing the additional costs of disability, through social protection, is seen by us as an essential precondition to facilitate entry-point inclusion for persons with disabilities in the Pacific.

Similarly, we have understood that meaningful inclusion depends also on communities being resourced and equipped to include their members with disabilities. This is particularly so in the Pacific, given the unique geographical challenges – where populations are often dispersed across vast areas and islands – and the varying amounts of resources available in different places. This all creates significant barriers to service delivery and community engagement.

We also know that across the Pacific, the people and the community are always one of our greatest potential resources, and the key is finding the way to mobilise this towards disability inclusion where needed. CBID fosters local support networks and ensures that inclusive policies reach individuals at the community level, and for this reason we have identified that CBID is also an essential precondition, particularly in our context. This precondition emphasises that programs and national policies should mobilise, be adaptable to and build upon the Pacific’s diverse and community-level context to ensure effective inclusion of persons with disabilities.

## Role of preconditions in the Pacific

The preconditions are more than a mere checklist; it reflects an interdependent policy and programming framework where each component reinforces the others. Accessibility alone is insufficient if assistive technologies are not also in place, and CBID is often required to deliver assistive technologies. Similarly, non-discrimination policies are vital, but without CBID and support services, they remain theoretical ideals rather than practical realities. PDF emphasises that the success of the framework relies on treating the six preconditions as interwoven elements, each strengthening the overall approach to disability inclusion. This holistic view underscores the need for governments, organisations, and stakeholders to adopt an inclusive policy model that addresses all of these multiple dimensions of disability rights in a coordinated manner.

The framework should be used to analyse and identify where there are core policy and programming gaps, and prioritise actions to address these. Similarly, the framework can be used to identify opportunities for coordination and collaboration between stakeholders on similar 'precondition' work.

## Preconditions under the CRPD

Non-discrimination, accessibility, assistive technology and support services are high-lighted as core CRPD General Obligations under Article 4. Social protection is also a right under Article 28, non-discrimination is further covered under Articles 3 and 5, accessibility under Articles 3 and 9, Assistive Technology under Articles 9, 20 and 26, and community support services under Article 19.

## Current status of preconditions to inclusion in the Pacific

Despite PDF's advocacy efforts over recent years, there have been challenges in achieving widespread adoption of the preconditions framework within Pacific policies. While there has been progress under some of the components themselves, PDF continues to strongly advocate for Pacific Island Country and Territory (PICT) governments, donors, multilateral organisations and other stakeholders to adopt the preconditions as an overall framework to guide their policy and programming strategies, decision-making and coordination. Doing so would pave the way for greater equity and agency for persons with disabilities in the Pacific, by removing barriers to facilitate their more equal participation in communities and mainstream programs in accordance with their rights.

## Key recommendations for preconditions in the Pacific

- **More governments, donors and other stakeholders to adopt preconditions as a framework.** This could include adopting within national policies and strategies, diplomatic agendas, coordination collaboration, undertaking situational analysis using the framework, etc. This paper notes that the UNPRPD does use the framework, and that

the UN's Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) uses a similar framework.

### **Accessibility**

- The *Pacific Regional Accessibility Blueprint* regarding the built environment is under development. Once publicly endorsed, adopt these within national regulatory frameworks.
- Train national delegations of professionals, OPDs, and government representatives (particularly at the sub-national level) on how to use and monitor the *Pacific Regional Accessibility Blueprint* regarding the built environment.
- Develop a regional process for monitoring the implementation of the *Pacific Regional Accessibility Blueprint* regarding the built environment by PICTs, involving OPD representatives, government and other key stakeholders.
- Establish a regional taskforce to identify and mobilise action on strategic opportunities for accelerating accessible transport and infrastructure in the Pacific, building on the analysis and recommendations in the Pacific Regional Infrastructure Facility report *Improving Accessibility in Transport Infrastructure Projects in the Pacific Islands*<sup>2</sup>.
- Commission a report to undertake a situational analysis on accessibility of information and communications across the region, including websites.
- Outline regional information and communications accessibility standards for the Pacific, which could then be tailored by countries when developing their own national standards.

### **Assistive technology**

- Review existing tax regulations and promote exemptions or concessions for assistive products and technology across the region.
- Establish a regional procurement facility, in line with the recommendations of the WHO *Assistive Technology Procurement Study* to address the shortage of quality and affordable assistive products and technology across the region.
- Develop support from national governments and partners for training for multi-disciplinary personnel in relation to assistive products and technology, and integrated health and rehabilitation services, to ensure improved access and safe and appropriate use by persons with disabilities.

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<sup>2</sup> Pacific Region Infrastructure Facility. ND. *Improving Accessibility in Transport Infrastructure Projects in the Pacific Islands*. [https://www.theprif.org/sites/default/files/documents/prif\\_transport\\_report\\_web.pdf](https://www.theprif.org/sites/default/files/documents/prif_transport_report_web.pdf)

### **Community-based inclusive development (CBID)**

- Link CBID to disaster risk reduction through systematic mechanisms (such as national policies, international frameworks, and national and international funding allocations) to ensure that progress being achieved on a programmatic level is embedded sustainably.
- Support an initiative to identify a new action plan and budget commitment to continue strengthening CBID in the Pacific, focused on particular barriers such as resourcing, improving coordination between government ministries, accessing regional and remote areas, and workforce planning.

### **Non-discrimination**

- Ensure that disability is mainstreamed into all other sectoral laws, particularly anti-discrimination legislation and policies.
- Include non-discrimination terms and provisions in partner and donor funding arrangements and investments, including adequate provisions to address the need for reasonable accommodations.
- Ensure the right to legal capacity, including by increasing efforts towards deinstitutionalisation, in accordance with the CRPD's Guidelines on De-Institutionalisation, Including in Emergencies.<sup>3</sup>
- Ensure adequate budgetary allocations to enable full implementation of non-discrimination policies and practices, including budgets for reasonable accommodations, awareness-raising, and targeted strategies focusing on those experiencing multiple and intersecting discrimination.

### **Social protection**

- Support all countries in the region to adopt disability-specific support benefits and allowances based on good practices in the region, including protecting the right to work, and to embed these in relevant policies, legislation, and budgets.
- Develop social protection schemes that support children with disabilities and their families.
- Establish schemes that enable persons with disabilities to access social welfare assistance automatically in the event of natural disasters, without having to provide evidence of hardship.

### **Support services**

- Invest in a pilot program that can be scalable in relation to support services.

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<sup>3</sup> Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. 2022. Guidelines on deinstitutionalization, including in emergencies. <https://www.ohchr.org/en/documents/legal-standards-and-guidelines/crpd5-guidelines-deinstitutionalization-including>

- Implement recommendations of the ‘Deaf People in Pacific Island Countries’ report.

### Further resources:

Pacific Disability Forum, 2023, [\*Conference Discussion Paper\*](#), PDF.

UN Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, 2015, [\*Report of the Special Rapporteur on the rights of persons with disabilities\*](#), United Nations,

Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), n.d., [\*Policy Guidelines for Inclusive Sustainability Development Goals: Foundations\*](#), OHCHR.

United Nations Partnership on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNPRPD), n.d., [\*The preconditions necessary to ensure disability inclusion\*](#), UNPRPD.

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## Preconditions to Inclusion Issues Paper:

# Accessibility

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### What is accessibility in the Pacific?

Accessibility refers to the right of persons with disabilities to access built environments, information and communication, transport, and services open to the public, on an equal basis with others. This requires that governments and other organisations take measures to ensure accessibility: applying universal design principles, consulting with persons with disabilities about their accessibility needs, and allocating adequate budgets towards these measures. In the Pacific context, accessibility is the difference between whether or not persons with disabilities can effectively use schools, hospitals, evacuation centres, important information such as public health advice and extreme weather warnings, and accountability mechanisms such as complaints hotlines, all on an equal basis with other people.

### Role of accessibility as a pre-condition in the Pacific

Accessibility is described by the United Nations Committee on the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD Committee) as a precondition to persons with disabilities being able to live independently, participate in society, and enjoy other rights such as freedom of movement and freedom of expression.<sup>4</sup> In relation to the built environment, transport and services, full accessibility facilitates an 'unrestricted chain of movement' from one space to another with no barriers. In the Pacific, this means persons with disabilities should be able to do things such as attend education, employment, health services, and community events, go shopping, collect payments from cash machines, attend government services and appointments, visit with extended family – all with independence, dignity and ease. In many areas in the Pacific, there is no or limited accessibility, meaning persons with disabilities are often prevented from doing these activities entirely, or they incur much higher costs or inconvenience in doing so (e.g. the cost of taxis, having to travel further, or waiting for people to come to them). They may otherwise rely on family members to assist them with the activities, which in turn can involve an opportunity cost to their family

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<sup>4</sup> CRPD Committee, [General Comment No. 2 on Article 9: Accessibility](#)



member, such as lost wages. Forgoing or delaying activities or relying on family members for activities due to their inaccessibility, has many flow-on affects for persons with disabilities and their families.

Accessibility also requires an unrestricted chain in terms of connection to communication and technology. Persons with disabilities require access to many forms of information in order to be able to equally participate in everyday life, such as public information and news, or materials for their education, employment and recreation. This area strongly links to the other preconditions on support services and assistive technology, in working to ensure supply of Sign Language interpreters, screen readers, etc. The precondition on non-discrimination is also interlinked here, as it guarantees the right to reasonable accommodation for individuals where these are required for their equal access.

The vulnerability of Pacific Island Countries and Territories (PICTs) to the impacts of climate change and disasters is a pertinent area that brings together all these aspects with high urgency. Evacuation centres must be designed using universal design principles to ensure that persons with disabilities can access them, and accessibility of roads, footpaths and transport must be ensured so that persons with disabilities can get to them in the event of an emergency. Moreover, disaster alerts, warnings, evacuation plans and updates must be delivered through a variety of accessible communication methods so that all persons with disabilities receive information equally.

## Accessibility under the CRPD

Under the United Nations' CRPD, accessibility is both a right (Art 9) and also a principle (Art 3) and a general obligation (Art 4). As a right, persons with disability are to be afforded the same opportunity to participate, on an equal basis with others, in the physical environment, transportation, information and communications, including information and communications technologies (ICT), and other facilities and services open to the public.<sup>5</sup> As a principle, accessibility underpins each article in CRPD, so that accessibility needs to be embedded within other rights, whether those be education, employment, political participation and so forth.

## Current status of accessibility in the Pacific

The *Pacific Regional Accessibility Blueprint* regarding the built environment are under development and awaiting final approval. There has been some good progress in recent years in terms of adoption of built environment policies and legislation by some PICTs, including the Fiji Building Code; the development of building codes in Kiribati and Tuvalu, supported by the World Bank; and revision of the Solomon Islands National Building Code, supported by the Australian Government. Despite these achievements, there remain many challenges, including the many countries with no built environment policies, and whose

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<sup>5</sup> Further reading on the UNCRPD can be accessed using the link provided [enable convention cover \(un.org\)](https://www.un.org/enableconvention/)

codes lack legal components to effectively require contractors to build with accessibility for persons with disabilities in mind.

In terms of implementation, particularly in urban areas, work has been done in a number of PICTs to improve accessibility of the built environment through the installation of tactile pathing, reviewing of national building codes and retrofitting of infrastructure. However, government bodies that carry out these works continue to neglect a consultative process with Organisations of Persons with Disabilities (OPDs) that could provide sound advice on accessibility relating to various disability groups and issues.

In relation to accessible information and communications, for some PICTs such as Fiji there has been improved practice since the COVID-19 pandemic, with public announcements provided with Sign Language interpreters and in Easy Read infographics – however, there is much more progress needed, including ensuring public websites, materials and announcement comply with accessibility standards, and improving practices across all PICTs.

Transport is still largely inaccessible in the Pacific, with both areas requiring much more focus and improvement in coming years. The 2020 report<sup>6</sup> by the Pacific Regional Infrastructure Facility (PRIF) on improving accessibility in transport in the Pacific is a strong starting point on this area.

### Key issues for accessibility in the Pacific

- Understanding accessibility still remains a challenge in many parts of the Pacific. One critical issue is that many countries only focus on physical access or built accessibility without taking into consideration access to public transportation, road infrastructure like footpaths, and to information and communication technology (ICT).
- Lack of awareness of the actual requirements for accessibility, or lack of resources to properly comply with these, leads to only partially meeting accessibility standards. This means that environments, transport or communications may still remain inaccessible, even though they may appear to be. For instance, service providers assume their services are accessible by the provision of ramps, however, if the ramp is incorrectly placed or has a steep gradient, this means the person with physical impairment cannot fully access services independently.
- The release of the *Pacific Regional Accessibility Blueprint* regarding the built environment is highly anticipated, as these will assist PICTs in development of national frameworks. Similar standards for ICT, as well as resources to facilitate PICTs, OPDs and other stakeholders to implement these, would overcome significant barriers preventing progress in these domains.

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<sup>6</sup> Pacific Region Infrastructure Facility (PRIF) 2024, [Improving accessibility of transport infrastructure projects in the Pacific](#)

- Increased resourcing needs to be allocated across budgets for all infrastructure projects – transport, facilities, ICT and built environment – to ensure these address accessibility, and consult adequately with OPDs. Addressing accessibility from the outset is much more cost-effective than retrofitting. Opportunities should be taken to build capacity of staff and OPDs in relation to accessibility where required in keeping with a localisation approach.
- There is a need for technical advice setting out clear, practical steps regarding what PICT governments, donors and other stakeholders should do to progress meaningful action in relation to transport and information and communications in particular.
- The Pacific lacks technical expertise and resources to promote and implement accessibility across all the domains covered within Article 9 of the CRPD. Capacity building for PICT staff, workforce planning for relevant professionals, as well as delivery of investment, are all required to help deliver accessibility at the pace needed to ensure this precondition is in place and can sustainably continue to be implemented as an ongoing element of all the governments’ undertakings. The PRIF is a strong stakeholder and resource to support this area of work.

#### Further resources:

Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), 2014, [General Comment No. 2 on Article 9: Accessibility](#)

World Health Organization (WHO) & World Bank, 2011, [World report on disability](#), WHO, Geneva – refer to Chapter 6: Enabling environments

OHCHR (undated), [Human Rights Indicators on the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities: Facilitating a Disability-Inclusive 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#)– refer to Article 9 – Illustrative indicators on accessibility

World Blind Union and CBM Global Disability Inclusion, 2020, [Accessibility GO! A Guide to Action](#)

International Organization for Standardization (ISO), n.d., [ISO Standards](#)

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## Preconditions to Inclusion Issues Paper:

# Assistive Technology

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### What is assistive technology in the Pacific?

Assistive technology (AT) is an umbrella term for assistive products and devices, together with their related systems and services, that increase, maintain, or improve the functional capabilities of individuals with disabilities. It can comprise physical products or information and communication technology (ICT) such as digital devices. Assistive products and devices encompass any item, piece of equipment, or product system, whether commercially available, modified, or customised, that is used for the purposes mentioned above. These can include wheelchairs, white canes, prosthetics, walkers, glasses, screen readers, Braille and more. Assistive services are essential for access to and delivery of these products and devices, and include referral, fitting, training, maintenance and repair of assistive products or devices. AT assists impairments across all functional domains, including cognition, communication, hearing, mobility, self-care, and vision. Access to AT is a human right and a precondition for equal participation and opportunities.

### Role of assistive technology as a precondition in the Pacific

The Pacific Disability Forum (PDF) identifies AT as a precondition to inclusion for persons with disabilities in the Pacific. It plays a crucial role in promoting independent living for individuals with disabilities, allowing them to perform daily tasks, engage in education and employment, and participate actively in their communities. AT facilitates and promotes the inclusion, participation, and engagement of any person with functional limitations. Increasing people's access to AT is a critical enabler necessary to meet the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and to realize the rights of persons with disabilities enshrined in the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD). Some groups of persons with disabilities are more likely to need AT than others. These groups include children and adults with disabilities, older people and people who have been injured or who have acute or chronic health conditions and those with high support needs.

AT empowers persons with disabilities in any setting, including the workforce, education, health services, and community engagement, allowing them to be more independent. It facilitates communication, enhances inclusivity in training and learning environments,

supports mobility and promotes independent living. For example, a comprehensive review across ten countries found that assistive technologies and devices used by students with disabilities in higher education had substantial positive effects on their academic engagement, psychological well-being, and social participation (McNicholl, Casey, Desmond, & Gallagher, 2021). The provision of AT is often organised under the health sector and is a component of universal health coverage. However, it also is essential for enabling multisector participation, including education, economic development, health services and disaster risk reduction and responses. As the preconditions are all interlinked, AT also cuts across these: for example, AT is often more effective when environments, services and communications are more accessible, and support services have a role to play when persons with disabilities still face barriers to inclusion that are not met through AT and accessibility.

### Assistive technology under the CRPD

The CRPD recognises the importance of AT and in article 4(1)(f) points to the role of state parties in enabling persons with disabilities to live independently and participate fully in all aspects of life in their respective communities. State parties do this through ensuring the availability and affordability of assistive devices, including in Article 9 regarding accessibility to ICT and systems, which often involve the use of AT. In Article 20, CRPD guides state parties to take effective measures towards the independence of persons with disabilities by facilitating the provision of assistive devices and technologies. In Article 26, CRPD promotes the rights of persons with disabilities to habilitation and rehabilitation services, which may include access to AT to achieve meaningful inclusion and participation in society. Finally, on international cooperation in Article 32, state parties promote access to AT for persons with disabilities, which is particularly important in the Pacific, where such resources are limited.

### Current status of assistive technology in the Pacific

The PDF estimates that there are 1.708 million persons with disabilities in Pacific Island Countries and Territories (PICTs), many of whom have AT needs. Additionally, population health in PICTs is characterised by a high and growing prevalence of non-communicable diseases (NCDs). The older population is expected to increase to over 2.2 million by 2050, with 88 percent of the increase in Melanesian countries. Between 2006 and 2016, PICTs saw a greater than 50 percent rise in strokes, 35 percent increase in cardiovascular disease, 16 percent increase in respiratory disease and more than 13 percent rise in diabetes. This health and demographic profile of the Pacific indicates a significant and growing need for AT with a high rate of diabetes, but currently this demand is far from being met. The WHO and UNICEF Global Report on Assistive Technology (2022)<sup>7</sup> estimates that 2.5 billion people need at least one assistive product and that this number will grow to over 3.5 billion by 2050. In addition, the report reveals a significant disparity in access to assistive products across the

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<sup>7</sup> World Health Organization (WHO) 2022, [Global report on assistive technology](#), WHO, Geneva.

globe, with less than 3 percent of people in some low-income nations having access to them, compared with 90 percent in some high-income countries.

At the Pacific regional level, PDF, in collaboration with the Fiji Disabled Persons Federation (FDPF), the Fiji National Disability Council for Persons with Disabilities (FNCPD), and the Spinal Injury Association (SIA), and other partners are contextualising the WHO Assistive Product List. The contextualisation is intended to guide the procurement of assistive products and gain support from PICTs to regionalise the list.

In Fiji, at a smaller scale, several churches and charitable organisations, services and the Ministry of Health, provide AT to targeted individuals. Fiji's SIA is the only known Organisation of Persons with Disabilities (OPD) that distributes AT to individuals and communities on a larger scale. Private donors, including Physio Net UK, are donating these technologies with funding from the Vodafone Foundation.

The WHO *Pacific Assistive Technology Procurement Study*<sup>8</sup> explored options for improving procurement and service delivery of AT in the Pacific context. The study findings provided three overarching recommendations: establishing a Pacific AT resource facility, setting up an AT supply chain hub, and strengthening national AT services and workforces within health systems. The implementation of these recommendations is in progress under the New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (MFAT) funding to WHO in 2023.

In 2018, the Western Pacific Ministers of Health Meeting endorsed the Western Pacific Regional Framework on Rehabilitation, which emphasises rehabilitation and AT to address unmet needs through greater investments, regional collaboration, and improved data and information.

## Key issues for assistive technology in the Pacific

- Overall, the availability, choice, affordability and quality of AT in the Pacific is very limited.
- Information about AT needs to be available and easier to access, and public awareness about AT needs to improve.
- Users of AT need to be more included in decision-making about it, as well as being provided with greater choice and the means to exercise choice.
- To ensure persons with disabilities can access AT, schemes should be established to subsidise these or otherwise address barriers to affordability.
- There is a strong need for PICTs, in collaboration with other relevant stakeholders, to set and regulate standards to maintain quality of products and services.

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<sup>8</sup> World Health Organization (WHO), 2022. [Assistive Technology Procurement Study](#): Technical Report. WHO Regional Office for the Western Pacific.

- Historically, there has been a lack of effective regional collaboration in this area. Addressing this could enhance progress across the region.
- Supply of assistive products and devices is a critical issue. There need to be concerted efforts to apply principles of commercial procurement and logistics to this at regional scales, as well as addressing supply chains at national levels.
- As well as addressing procurement and supply chains, it is also critically important that PICTs strengthen assistive services, to ensure that assistive products and devices can be appropriately accessed by persons with disabilities. Without addressing this, increased procurement and supply will not be met with systems for delivery, fitting, maintenance and repair of AT, which could mean that some persons with disabilities are left behind, or that persons with disabilities even encounter harm, through being provided with inappropriate AT without the follow-up services required. Workforce planning is a critical aspect of this.

### Further resources:

Brentnall, L., Kuambu, A., & Mines, R. (2023). [Scaling up access to assistive technology in the Pacific.](#) *Development Policy Centre.*

McNicholl, A., Casey, H., Desmond, D., & Gallagher, P. (2021). [The impact of assistive technology use for students with disabilities in higher education: A systematic review.](#) *Disability and Rehabilitation: Assistive Technology, 16(2)*, 130–143.

## Preconditions to Inclusion Issues Paper:

# Community-Based Inclusive Development

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## What is Community-Based Inclusive Development in the Pacific?

Community-Based Inclusive Development (CBID) involves addressing cultural, social and economic challenges experienced by persons with disabilities, their families, and communities in practical ways through their inclusion in development activities. CBID does so through specific activities such as community awareness-raising, mobilising community resources, advocacy, referrals, and investment. This helps achieve disability inclusion, by working with and through local groups and institutions to remove barriers to participation.

Persons with disabilities in the Pacific face unique challenges in accessing services, resources and community participation – such as climate impacts and the distance between countries and the population spread within countries across islands. This should not, however, deter the equal opportunities for persons with disabilities in all aspects of life, including education, livelihoods and accessing support services when needed to participate in the community life. Taking advantage of the strong community values and systems which the Pacific is known for, CBID is a key strategy within general community development for equalising opportunities and social inclusion of all persons with disabilities that is particularly suited to overcome the challenges of the Pacific context.

## Role of CBID as a precondition in the Pacific

Despite the geographical location of persons with disabilities, whether they live in main population centres, isolated communities or outlying islands, the CBID approach complements national sectoral policies and pays attention to the diversity of disabilities in ways that reduce inequalities for persons with disabilities. CBID is a multi-sectorial, cross-disability and rights-based approach involving health, education, livelihood, social and empowerment components. It mobilises community networks and systems towards advocacy, outreach, referrals, supports and service delivery. Together, these community resources are mobilised to facilitate the participation of persons with disabilities across all aspects of programming and everyday life. In fact, in the Pacific, CBID approaches are a key and essential pathway to ensuring that persons with disabilities can access multisectoral programs and services.



Examples of what this will involve include facilitating grassroots advocacy to ensure mainstream programs in the community are more accessible, and by offering referral and outreach components to deliver services to persons with disabilities in the community, particularly those marginalised by barriers such as distance or stigma. CBID is therefore a key precondition to inclusion as, without it, many persons with disabilities would be excluded from accessing everyday life, opportunities or mainstream inclusive services. It brings change in the lives of persons with disabilities at community level by working with and through local groups and institutions to remove barriers to participation.

## CBID under the CRPD

Under the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CPRD) all persons with disabilities have an equal right to live in the community where they are treated equally, participate on the same grounds as others, and decisions and choices are of their own making. Article 19 specifically requires governments to provide community support services and personal assistance necessary to support inclusion in the community and prevent segregation, as well as to ensure mainstream community services are fully accessible. CBID also strongly relates to other CRPD articles including those regarding education (Article 24), health (Article 25), (re)habilitation (Article 26), work and employment (Article 27), social protection (Article 28) and the right to representation through Organizations of Persons with Disabilities (OPDs) (Articles 4.3 and 32). Where there are CBID programs, their work may also relate to other CRPD articles depending on the focus areas of the programs, and the priorities that arise.

## Current status of CBID in the Pacific

One important aspect of CBID in the Pacific is understanding the availability of services for persons with disabilities. In 2019, Pacific Disability Forum undertook a mapping exercise involving 17 countries to provide vital information for persons with disabilities accessing health, education, employment, and social sectors. While this information is a helpful start, much further work is required in terms of resourcing and developing CBID programs and approaches to ensure access to existing services and community resources, and to address the many gaps identified by the mapping. The mapping is also by now quite outdated, and an update is required.

## Key issues for CBID in the Pacific

- **The need to raise awareness and train Pacific Island Countries and Territories governments, donors and stakeholders** regarding CBID approaches. While many community and inter-national development programs align with or would be strengthened by CBID approaches in practice, there is often low knowledge and capacity about what CBID involves or how it can be utilized for shared outcomes.

- **Insufficient resourcing** for CBID programs, including for CBID workers in communities.
- **Policy and governmental structures** are needed to support and coordinate CBID approaches. Within governments, CBID is often allocated only under one ministry, such as the Ministry of Health for example in Fiji and Solomon Islands. However, since CBID is by nature a multisectoral approach and program, it is vital that it can be coordinated and set up to have strong cross-ministry linkages. Failure to do so is often a key reason for lack of momentum and progress of CBID in countries.
- The need to ensure that **CBID approaches are informed by persons with disabilities** as active contributors and leaders and take a **rights-based approach aligned with the CRPD**. This includes ensuring that CBID approaches have empowerment and community mobilisation as foundational strategies, alongside service-delivery components.
- **Each country is in critical need of more sophisticated systems for mapping** disability services and other community resources, and updating such records, so that donors, governments, OPDs and community members can **identify key gaps and formulate strategies for addressing these** through CBID approaches. The majority of services are provided in urban areas, whilst the availability of disability services is rare in rural areas and outer islands. Mapping clearly demonstrates this, as well as identifying community resources and networks that can be mobilised through CBID approaches to increase the rights of and support to persons with disabilities.

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## Preconditions to Inclusion Issues Paper:

# Non-Discrimination

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*The development of these issues papers has been funded by the Australian Government through the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, with technical support from CBM Australia Inclusion Advisory Group. The views expressed in this publication are the Pacific Disability Forum's alone and are not necessarily the views of the Australian Government.*

### What is non-discrimination in the Pacific?

Non-discrimination is a precondition because it overcomes the huge barriers created by discrimination, which exclude persons with disabilities from participating in day-to-day life on an equal basis with others. Discrimination can be directly based on a person's disability, such as laws or practices that take away people's right to make decisions about their own lives<sup>9</sup> or live independently in the community due to their disability (particularly if they have an intellectual or psychosocial disability). Discrimination can also be indirect – that is, where a practice, policy or law disadvantages persons with disabilities disproportionately more than people without disability. For example, where public education or health services do not comply with accessibility standards, they indirectly discriminate against the persons with disabilities who cannot access them. Another form of indirect discrimination is denying or failing to provide reasonable accommodation.<sup>10</sup> Inter-sectional discrimination may occur where people who belong to more than one marginal identity may encounter unique forms of discriminations. For example, across the Pacific indigenous women with disabilities may not be able to take up leadership roles in their village as these are normally held by men, or by people of a specific cultural group, and also due to their disability.

Discrimination is driven by systemic norms in society such as prejudicial and negative stereotypes of persons with disabilities, and the medical model of disabilities that regards disability as an individual deficit or problem (as opposed to a rights-based model which frames disability as a natural part of human diversity, with persons with disabilities entitled to equal rights, and efforts to ensure this being the responsibility of society in general). Non-discrimination is realised when all persons with disabilities meaningfully enjoy the same

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<sup>9</sup> This is the right to equality before the law, or legal capacity (Art 12 of the CRPD), and includes the right to make medical decisions and refuse medical treatment, which is often denied to people with psychosocial disabilities by discriminatory mental health laws. It also includes the right to vote, testify in court and manage money and other affairs, which are also often denied due to direct discrimination on the basis of disability.

<sup>10</sup> 'Reasonable accommodation' refers to necessary and appropriate modifications and adjustments not imposing an undue burden, where needed in a particular case, to ensure persons with disabilities can enjoy or exercise their rights on an equal basis with others.

rights and opportunities as others, including having all laws treat, benefit and protect them equally without discrimination.

## Role of non-discrimination as a precondition in the Pacific

To ensure that non-discrimination applies in society, there are two main strategies that can be implemented. Firstly, law and policy reforms are essential to ensure that the laws and policies of a country are aligned and compliant with the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with disabilities (CRPD) and that they prevent discrimination from occurring. In the Pacific this is often referred to as the process of ‘legal harmonisation’, and involves both ensuring that existing laws comply with the CRPD and, where necessary, that disability-specific laws and policies are enacted to ensure disability rights are protected and discrimination is addressed. This includes justice systems that allow for avenues of redress for persons with disabilities when situations of discrimination occur. Where such laws and policies do not exist, this work involves advocacy by Organisations of Persons with Disabilities (OPDs) to the state to ensure that persons with disabilities are protected through the provision of reasonable accommodation and budget allocations; the abolition of laws that preclude the legal capacity of persons with disabilities; and ensuring that laws exist which provide legal pathways for those experiencing discrimination, and accessible justice and support systems.

Furthermore, awareness-raising is also crucial in progressing non-discrimination. It is crucial that persons with disabilities and their representative organisations are aware of their rights under the CRPD. This empowers them to be better equipped to identify existing policy gaps that are discriminating against persons with disabilities and to advocate for equality and non-discrimination to relevant ministries and authorities. At the same time, advocacy and awareness-raising should also be done at mainstream level to duty-bearers, members of the community and their leaders, and faith leaders, to address the prejudicial attitudes and negative social norms that drive discrimination against persons with disabilities. Doing so will increase non-discrimination practices and approaches throughout communities, policies and programs, meaning that these all become more inclusive and accessible.

## Non-discrimination under the CRPD

Under the CRPD, non-discrimination is a cross-cutting principle under Article 3 and addressed in the general obligations under Article 4. Article 5 further provides the right to equality and non-discrimination, which outlines that all people are equal before and under the law, and entitled without discrimination to the equal protection and equal benefit of the law. States must prohibit all discrimination and guarantee persons with disabilities equal and effective legal protection against discrimination.

## Current status of non-discrimination in the Pacific

### Legal harmonisation work

As of 2024, in terms of legal harmonisation efforts to progress non-discrimination, 13 countries in the region have made the initial step of ratifying the CRPD: Cook Islands, Fiji, Federated States of Micronesia, Kiribati, Nauru, Niue, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Republic of Marshall Islands, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tuvalu, and Vanuatu.<sup>11</sup> There are a total of 11 countries that have made some progress in reviewing and bench-marking their national legislations and or national disability policies against the CRPD: Marshall Islands, Nauru, Samoa, Vanuatu, Fiji, Kiribati, Papua New Guinea, Palau, Solomon Islands, Tonga, and Tuvalu.

Countries are obligated to develop national disability policies after ratifying the CRPD. These policies aim to address barriers faced by persons with disabilities and promote inclusive development across various sectors such as education, health, and employment. Countries which have developed national disability policies this far include Cook Islands, Fiji, FSM, Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Nauru, Niue, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu, and Vanuatu, while only Fiji, Cook Islands, Marshall Islands, Nauru, and the states of Chuck, Pohnpei and Kosrae of the Federated States of Micronesia (FSM) have adopted disability-specific legislation.

These laws and policies are designed to ensure that persons with disabilities have equal access to opportunities, services, and protections. They also provide frameworks for governments to implement disability-inclusive policies and services, promoting non-discrimination, accessibility, and participation in all aspects of society.<sup>12</sup>

### Discriminatory attitudes and need for disability rights awareness-raising

Discriminatory attitudes and the need for ongoing disability rights awareness-raising are a persistent and pervasive issue across the Pacific. Years of experience have shown that effective strategies to reduce discriminatory attitudes towards persons with disabilities involve engaging partners to work with OPDs to target communities, programs and governments, so that these groups and stakeholders begin to see persons with disabilities as active and capable members of society. Other effective strategies involve portraying persons with disabilities in social and mainstream media, such as the radio, on relevant international days. These portrayals must adopt rights-based approaches that ensure that persons with disabilities get to speak about themselves, their work, and their rights in their own words. Again, this changes discriminatory attitudes because it addresses misconceptions amongst the community that persons with disabilities are inactive and incapable recipients of help, and presents them as empowered and active members of communities who hold rights on an equal basis with others. Through such efforts, progress is occurring in this area, but very

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<sup>11</sup> Information can be accessed on the [UN Treaty Body Database](#).

<sup>12</sup> Information on national legislation and policy benchmarking and review accurate as of 2022.

slowly, and mainly in urban and semi-rural areas where most of the efforts to raise awareness of rights occur. This leads to unique and intersectional disadvantage of persons with disabilities in remote and isolated areas.

### Key issues for non-discrimination in the Pacific

Progress has been made in the area of non-discrimination in the region, but there is also a vast amount of work still to be done. Key issues that need to be highlighted include the following:

- **CRPD alignment:** There are countries which have ratified the CRPD, but their policies and legislations are not aligned with the CRPD. Thus, the rights and inclusion of persons with disabilities are not fully realised and protected. There is much ongoing work that needs to be done to ensure meaningful legal harmonisation of the CRPD across Pacific Island Countries and Territories (PICTs).
- **Coordination and enforcement:** Another challenge is the lack of enforcement mechanisms available in countries to ensure that pieces of legislation that are already in place are enforced appropriately. This is due to a lack of clear demarcation of roles and responsibilities regarding enforcement. For example, in many countries, the government disability focal points do not work closely with OPDs and may not work through a rights-based approach, leading to a disconnect between the disability-focused work implemented by their ministry and that progressed by the OPDs in the country. There may also be a lack of coordination between different government ministries' various work on disability.
- **Realisation of rights:** In most countries, persons with disabilities are not aware of their rights under the CRPD. As a result, they are not able to be aware of when they are experiencing discrimination, and are not empowered to advocate for themselves when they do become aware. It is a key role of OPDs to build the awareness and capacity of persons with disabilities in this regard, but they face substantial challenges in doing so – for example, competing demands on their time: much of OPDs' time is spent engaging in advocacy as well as participating in consultations with mainstream development partners, which puts time pressures on their ability to also undertake this level of capacity-building with their members.
- **Localisation:** The lack of materials in local languages regarding the CRPD, rights to non-discrimination and equality, and national laws regarding disabilities is a real barrier to raising awareness amongst persons with disabilities, their communities, and stakeholders such as governments and programs regarding the right to non-discrimination and the need to comply with this.
- **Education:** Another barrier is the lack of access to education amongst persons with disabilities. Lower levels of literacy and education amongst persons with disabilities

due to systemic discrimination mean that they themselves will encounter more barriers in participating in rights-awareness activities even where these do exist and remain less equipped to identify and push back against discriminatory practices or claim their rights to non-discrimination in a vast range of contexts. This has nothing to do with their capability but is due to the barriers they have encountered because of discrimination in their lives.

- In addition, women and girls with disabilities, those with intellectual and psychosocial disabilities, Deaf persons and persons with deafblindness face a lot of additional and unique discrimination in society. This includes increased risk of physical and sexual assault, denial of opportunities for education or livelihood, a presumption that they are unfit to parent on account of their disability, involuntary treatment, institutionalisation, and barriers to accessing justice services. These cause severe marginalisation in society.

### Further resources:

Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), n.d., [Article 5: Indicators](#), OHCHR

ESCAP, 2022. [Harmonisation of national laws with the convention on the rights of persons with disabilities: Overview of trends in Asia and the Pacific](#). United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, Thailand.

Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), 2018, [General Comment No. 6: Equality and Non-Discrimination \(Article 5\)](#), United Nations

Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), 2014, [General Comment No. 1: Equal Recognition before the Law \(Article 12\)](#), United Nations

Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), 2017, [General Comment No. 5: Right to Independent Living \(Article 19\)](#), United Nations

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## Preconditions to Inclusion Issues Paper:

# Social Protection

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### What is social protection in the Pacific?

Persons with disabilities and their families face higher costs in all facets of life and are also at higher risk of poverty. In the Pacific, social protection generally involves transfers of cash, benefits, allowances such as travel allowances, or other in-kind assistance that aims to support equality and community inclusion by assisting people to overcome higher risks and inequalities, to respond to shocks and crises, and to promote opportunities. Social protection is particularly important to Pacific Island Countries and Territories (PICTs) due to their high vulnerability to sudden economic changes caused by their remoteness, risk of disasters, geographical spread, small internal markets, and limited natural resources.

### Role of social protection as a precondition in the Pacific

**Social protection is needed because of the additional costs faced by persons with disabilities and their families.** These include disability-specific expenses, such as assistive technology and support services, as well as higher general expenses such as medical care and transport. There are also indirect costs associated with disability because persons with disabilities experience lower levels of income than the general population, including lower levels of employment, lower salaries, and being more likely to be engaged in the informal sector. Factors contributing to this include exclusion from education, discriminatory attitudes, and lack of other essential preconditions that would enable economic engagement. The most marginalised groups experience higher rates of poverty, for example women with disabilities and those with psychosocial and intellectual disabilities. Other indirect costs might be family members forgoing school or work opportunities to provide support (Mont et al., 2022).

The Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Persons with disabilities stated that social protection for persons with disabilities needs to have a clear aim related to facilitating social inclusion. This is a shift from previous 'welfare' models of social protection for persons with disabilities, rooted in a medical model that saw disability as a deficit, and often came with a presumption that persons with disabilities could not work or contribute to their communities (Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Persons with disabilities, 2016). It is



therefore essential that disability-inclusive social protection schemes **aim to enable the right of persons with disabilities to live independently and be included in their communities on an equal basis with others.**

This purpose is already a strong feature of PICT culture, traditions, and laws, reflected in concepts of togetherness, inclusion, and ensuring individuals are provided for within the community setting. It is essential that government schemes, programs, and legislation consider, draw from, and build upon cultural and local laws and traditions when devising social protection mechanisms. Doing so will lead to stronger schemes, as they will not be imposing a new model but rather building upon existing cultural strengths that communities already understand and accept.

### Social protection under the CRPD

Under Article 28 of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), states are required to take appropriate measures to ensure that persons with disabilities receive equal access to mainstream social protection programs and services (such as poverty reduction, housing and retirement schemes) as well as access to specific programs and services for disability-related needs and expenses. Social protection also strongly relates to other provisions of the CRPD, including the right to live independently and be included in the community (Article 19), respect for home and the family (Article 23), education (Article 24), health (Article 25), rehabilitation (Article 26) and work and employment (Article 27).

### Current status of social protection in the Pacific

There is evidence of disability benefits already in existence in the Pacific region, with seven countries introducing schemes since 2005 and many more doing so recently. This is partly due to a broader trend towards social protection efforts but is also tied to PICTs' efforts to ratify the CRPD in recent years (Knox-Vydmanov & Cote, 2023). While this progress is positive, there is still much work to be done, as anecdotal evidence shows that the disability-specific schemes are not meeting the additional costs needed to adequately overcome the barriers to inclusion. There have been pockets of success, but there is much work still to do to ensure that persons with disabilities access mainstream social protection programs, related to issues including those described below.

### Key issues for social protection in the Pacific

- **Investment levels:** A recent study found that Kiribati was the only PICT that spent more on social protection than the average of all other countries in their income bracket (Knox-Vydmanov, Soni, Satriana, & Attenborough, 2023).
- **Amount of social protection available to persons with disabilities:** Whilst it is positive that PICTs are increasingly enacting schemes such as disability benefits, the amount of allowances provided is significantly less than adequate to cover the many additional

costs that persons with disabilities face. Moreover, schemes often do not incorporate measures to increase adequately as costs of living increase.

- **Types of social protections:** The type and amount of support required by different persons with disabilities varies. CRPD-aligned social protection schemes must be designed to include a comprehensive understanding of the diversity of disabilities and be able to consider functional limitations and support needs.
- **Disability-specific schemes that are incompatible with work or other social protection payments:** The purpose of disability support benefits as a pre-condition to inclusion is to address the burden of the additional costs of disability, which often exclude persons with disabilities from participating equally in everyday life. Disqualifying persons with disabilities who work, or who receive other social protection payments, from disability-specific benefits defeats this purpose.
- **Lack of legislation:** Many countries have not enacted disability benefits into law, which undermines confidence in their longevity and sustainability.
- **Barriers to assessments for disability-specific social protections:** In many PICTs, eligibility assessment has been based on a medical model of disability. For example, to be eligible, a person may have to show evidence that a medical professional has assessed them as having a particular impairment. This is problematic, as (i) it does not consider the actual support needs of the person based on their circumstances; and (ii) there are barriers to accessing medical professionals. Fiji's assessment scheme was developed in consultation with Organisations of Persons with Disabilities (OPDs) and focuses on the support required, which, in most cases, can be provided by a community worker.
- **Access to schemes and payments:** For both mainstream and disability-specific schemes, there are many barriers for persons with disabilities to access and receive payments. This can include inaccessible information and venues, especially for payments and vouchers that have to be collected in person. For people living in rural and remote areas with limited access to public transportation and public services, travel to collect their social welfare assistance can be impossible. Some persons with disabilities may rely on family members to collect their funds, which can lead to them not receiving the allowance.
- **Inclusive and accessible awareness-raising and communication** regarding the availability of schemes is also crucial for the success of social protection for persons with disabilities. Strong engagement by OPDs is a critical enabler here.

### Further resources:

CBM Global. (2021). [\*Disability inclusive cash assistance: Learnings from practice in humanitarian response.\*](#)

International Labour Organization (ILO). (2019). [\*Joint statement towards inclusive social protection systems supporting the full and effective participation of persons with disabilities.\*](#)

International Labour Organization (ILO), International Disability Alliance (IDA), & United Nations Partnership on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNPRPD). (2022). [\*Social protection for the inclusion of persons with disabilities\*](#) (pp. 6-9).

Knox-Vydmanov, C., & Cote, A. (2023). [\*The path towards inclusive social protection for persons with disabilities in the Pacific.\*](#)

Mont, D., Cote, A., Hanass-Hancock, J., Banks, L. M., Grigorus, V., Carraro, L., Morris, Z., & Pinilla-Roncancio, M. (2022). [\*Estimating the extra costs for disability for social protection programs.\*](#)

Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Persons with disabilities. (2016). [\*The rights of persons with disabilities to social protection.\*](#)

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## Preconditions to Inclusion Issues Paper:

# Support Services

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### What are support services in the Pacific?

Support services enable persons with disabilities to fully participate in everyday life and preserve their dignity, autonomy and independence. In the Pacific, these services are needed to support persons with disabilities to live independently in the community, perform daily activities, engage in all aspects of life on an equal basis with others, exercise legal capacity, and access general services, such as education, justice, and health.

Specific support services required to meet these needs in the Pacific context can include human supports (e.g. carers, personal assistants), communication support (e.g. sign language interpreters, Braille, readers, guide interpreters for persons with deafblindness), support in decision-making, mobility support (e.g. guides), independent living, support systems (e.g. circles of support, buddy systems, self-advocacy supports, peer-led supports), as well as respite care services, peer-to-peer and other supports for carers.

Support services are responsive to the needs of the person requiring support (and their family unit as appropriate) and vary according to the diversity of their disability.

### Role of support services as a precondition in the Pacific

Support services are an essential precondition to inclusion because, without them, persons with disabilities will be excluded from participating in community and daily life, accessing programs and services, living independently in accordance with their choices, and contributing to their communities. Depending on the needs of persons with disabilities, support services may be required even where environments are fully accessible and assistive technologies (AT) are available. Support services can also 'bridge the gap' where AT and accessibility needs are not sufficiently met in the individual's context. The overall aim of support services is to facilitate inclusion in the community, programs and everyday life on an equal basis with others.

As with social protection, the role of support services aligns with Pacific culture and tradition's strong concepts of togetherness and ensuring care, respect and inclusion of all family members. Further cultural values regarding caring for individuals with disabilities

within the family unit are also relevant to support services, as is the existence at times amongst family members, and others providing support, of prejudicial attitudes towards disabilities (particularly psychosocial and intellectual disability) or even just lack of awareness of how to give the best rights-based support for their family members. It is therefore critical that support services policies and programs: (a) build upon existing cultural systems and values to build upon existing strengths, be culturally appropriate, and do no harm; and (b) include awareness-raising and training for communities and families, especially those providing and receiving care, regarding the inherent rights, dignity and value of persons with disabilities, and how to give rights-based care.

There is a very high risk that, without the support services they require, persons with disabilities will have significantly reduced agency and autonomy over their lives and may even be institutionalised. This is particularly so for people with psychosocial or intellectual disabilities or those with high support needs. Developing strong and appropriate community-based support services is therefore a key aspect of de-institutionalisation.

## Support services under the CRPD

Persons with disabilities have a right to support services under the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD). Article 4 specifically calls on governments to provide support services to persons with disabilities, whilst Article 19 specifically reinforces access to community support services that will encourage the inclusion and engagement of persons with disabilities in their communities.

## Current status of support services in the Pacific

Support services are a hugely under-resourced precondition throughout the Pacific. Whilst almost no formal research or analysis has been done in this sector, anecdotal evidence suggests that the majority of support services in the Pacific are provided informally, such as through family members. Female family members often undertake this responsibility, contributing significantly to the unpaid work of these women and girl caregivers in the Pacific and reducing their own ability to engage in education, livelihood, and other opportunities.

Anecdotal evidence also suggests that where formal support service providers do exist in the Pacific, they are mainly non-governmental services or Organisations of Persons with Disabilities (OPDs). These provide examples of the type of formal support services that need to be systemically developed, funded, and embedded on national scales to fulfil the preconditions and rights under the CRPD.

## Key issues for support services in the Pacific

- An initial barrier to persons with disabilities accessing support services in the Pacific is the lack of awareness by them, their families and representative groups about the nature of support services and their right to be provided with these.

- Another significant barrier is the lack of quality, CRPD-compliant and community-based support services across the Pacific. Sign-language interpreters, trained personal assistants and support in decision-making are particularly needed. Planning and provision of services need to be accompanied by workforce planning and development and should also take a life-cycle approach – that is, considering the various support needs of children, youth, adults, and older persons with disabilities.
- An important issue to consider in planning for support services is the culturally important role of the family in the Pacific, as well as expectations and wishes that may exist from the person with disabilities and their family members for support to be provided within the family unit. Support services and systems need to be developed to respond to this context and provide complementary support where appropriate, including support to the whole family where support continues to be provided informally by family members. Examples here include social protection carer payments, respite and peer support for carers, and innovative programs and campaigns to ensure support and opportunities for women and girls in families with members with disabilities.
- Another aspect of this linkage between social protection and support services is recognising the indirect cost of disability that is placed on a family unit when a person with disabilities is unable to work and the impact of this. Anecdotally, this often leads to a particular family member of the individual with disabilities – who had been acting as the individual’s preferred and trusted carer – needing to leave the family home to seek more profitable employment opportunities elsewhere (such as in a bigger city or even overseas) so that they can send larger pay checks home to cover the family expenses. This then leaves the person with disabilities without their carer. Appropriate social protection payments such as disability benefits and carer allowances would address this situation.
- Being in a position to receive support services often places persons with disabilities in highly vulnerable positions. It is important to establish safeguarding systems and policies to protect persons with disabilities in this regard, including raising their awareness about their rights and about linkages with the OPDs who can support them, particularly if they need to access support services outside the family unit.
- A critical aspect of developing support systems in the Pacific is building individual and formal support services and strengthening informal support systems throughout the community. This includes more direct peer-to-peer support systems and broader community building (such as sports, religion, drama, youth and community clubs) to strengthen support networks available to persons with disabilities and their families. These should build upon local context, cultures and strengths.
- There are critical gaps in the workforce regarding support services, particularly for personal assistants, sign language interpreters, and support in decision-making. Again,

workforce development needs to consider local culture and context, and it is particularly important not to exacerbate a ‘brain drain’ issue that means local needs would still not be met.

- More broadly, there is significant policy and framework gaps regarding support services across the region. To date there is no overarching legal, policy direction, significant budgetary allocation, on regional or national levels. Strong leadership is required to drive this critical issue forward.

### Further resources:

Centre for Inclusive Policy. (2023). [\*The Disability Support Gap: Community support systems for persons with disabilities in low- and middle-income countries.\*](#)

International Disability Alliance (IDA), Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), UNICEF, International Disability and Development Consortium (IDDC), & CBM Global. (n.d.). [\*Towards sustainable support systems for community inclusion of persons with disabilities.\*](#)

Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR). (2022). [\*Guidelines on deinstitutionalization, including in emergencies.\*](#)

Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR). (2023). [\*Support systems to ensure community inclusion of persons with disabilities.\*](#)

Pacific Disability Forum (PDF). (2019). [\*Deaf people in the Pacific Island Countries.\*](#)

Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Persons with disabilities. (2023). [\*Transformation of services for persons with disabilities.\*](#) A/HRC/52/32.