

Title

Nothing about us, without us: Perspectives of people from the Pacific about inclusive education.

Type of presentation

Roundtable Symposium

Abstract

Less than 10% of children with disabilities have access to any form of education in the Pacific countries. A large number of children with disabilities either never enrol in schools or they drop out in a very short time. Most Pacific countries are aware of the need to improve the situation. The Pacific Island Countries recognise that implementing inclusive education across the region is the best possible way to provide quality education to children with disabilities who have been excluded for a long time. These countries have signed a range of international declarations and have drafted policy documents to support inclusive education. However, implementing inclusive education is not easy. The countries need support in identifying strategies that can be used to implement inclusive education across the region. They are highly skeptical of importing approaches from other countries as the Pacific context is unique and any imported approaches are unlikely to be successful in the Pacific.

In this round table symposium, we will present findings of a three year project funded by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT), Commonwealth of Australia. The project was implemented in four countries of the Pacific (Fiji, Samoa, Vanuatu and Solomon Islands). A primary purpose of the project was to develop a tool- the Pacific Indicators for Disability Inclusive Education (Pacific- INDIE). It allows countries to identify key areas that they need to address to implement inclusive education, monitor their progress and set targets for future. The tool provides mechanisms to prioritise key goals relevant to the country context and to identify resources that can be used to achieve the goals. A significant innovation in the project was the methodology used in developing the the Pacific-INDIE. Unlike other similar tools, the Pacific INDIE was developed using a bottom up approach. People from the Pacific (including people with disabilities) identified what they valued the most about inclusive education and how best the countries could achieve the goals incorporated in the Pacific-INDIE. The use of this approach, alongwith three systematic literature reviews, surveys of key stakeholders from 14 Ministries of education from the Pacific, and ongoing consultations with regional partners provided new perspective about how inclusive education can be implemented and measured in the Pacific. In this presentation, we will share voices of three groups who were involved in the project. The presenters will include local researchers from four countries Fiji, Samoa, Vanuatu and Solomon Islands; members of the regional bodies from Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat and international researchers. We will discuss about the perspectives of the people from the Pacific about what they valued most about inclusive education in the Pacific. We will also share how perspectives of various members were incorporated in the development of Pacific INDIE. Implications of the findings for policy makers and school leaders will also be discussed.