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**REVIEW OF PROGRESS MADE AND CHALLENGES FACED IN THE
IMPLEMENTATION OF THE BIWAKO MILLENNIUM FRAMEWORK FOR ACTION
TOWARDS AN INCLUSIVE, BARRIER-FREE AND RIGHTS-BASED SOCIETY FOR
PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES IN ASIA AND THE PACIFIC, 2003-2012**

(Item 4 of the provisional agenda)

**STRENGTHENING THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE BIWAKO MILLENNIUM
FRAMEWORK FOR ACTION IN THE PACIFIC SUBREGION***

SUMMARY

To take action towards the seven priority areas of the Biwako Millennium Framework for Action towards an Inclusive, Barrier-free and Rights-based Society for Persons with Disabilities in Asia and the Pacific (BMF) in the Pacific where it is most urgently needed, and to capitalise on the progress already made and to focus the limited resources on those pursuits most likely to succeed, the Pacific needs to target four of the seven priority areas, namely, disabled people's organisations (DPOs), education, employment and access to built environments. In addition, legislative reform will create tangible benefits for Pacific Islanders with disabilities.

To achieve the targeted key priority areas, emphasis will be placed on three critical strategies in the Pacific. The strategies of promoting a rights-based approach, coordinated policy development and raising public awareness of disability have seen some progress and are ready for further advances. Enhanced regional coordination and an increased disability focus by regional and international bodies in the Pacific since the adoption of the Biwako Millennium Framework for Action by Pacific Island Leaders in 2003 provide the much-needed drivers and support for these strategies. At the country level, DPOs, if resourced, will be vigorous champions of and essential partners for these strategies.

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I. INTRODUCTION

1. This paper reviews progress concerning the Biwako Millennium Framework for Action towards an Inclusive, Barrier-free and Rights-based Society for Persons with Disabilities in Asia and the Pacific (BMF) in the Pacific subregion, summarizing the Pacific experience of implementing the Biwako Millennium Framework for Action and outlining priorities for the next five years.

2. The expert group meeting on disability in the Pacific held at Nadi from 28 to 30 March 2007 reviewed the implementation of the Biwako Millennium Framework for Action in Pacific Island countries. Practical achievements could be logged against each of the seven priority areas of the Biwako Millennium Framework for Action. Despite the Biwako Millennium Framework for Action being acknowledged as the 'blueprint for plans and actions to address disability at the national level', the review revealed that there were many priority areas of the Biwako Millennium Framework for Action for which many countries could claim little or no progress.

II. DISABILITY IN THE PACIFIC

3. There are an estimated 832,900 Pacific Islanders with disabilities.¹ They rarely enjoy human rights comparable to their peers and are invisible to most of the community. Discrimination is exacerbated by the negative attitudes, prejudice, ignorance and apathy of policy-makers and the community.

4. The pattern of social participation, or lack of it, experienced by people with disabilities demonstrates that exclusionary barriers remain deeply embedded in the structures and processes of contemporary societies. The under-participation in paid employment has obvious material consequences, but it is further reinforced by lower levels of educational attainment, lack of accessibility to the built environment and restricted leisure opportunities. Irrespective of where the spotlight has been directed, Pacific Islanders with disabilities, compared with their non-disabled counterparts, show a pattern of massively restricted life chances, choices and opportunities.²

5. Given the disadvantages faced by Pacific Islanders with disabilities and the need for implementation of Biwako Millennium Framework for Action priorities, some specific elements of the Biwako Millennium Framework for Action are identified for targeted application in the Pacific. In identifying the key Pacific priorities for disability, this paper reviews Pacific regional and national progress made towards the priority areas of the Biwako Millennium Framework for

¹ The World Health Organization estimates 10 per cent of any community will have a moderate to severe disability. Mid-2006 population of independent Pacific Island countries: Secretariat of the Pacific Community, *Pacific Island Populations: Estimates and Projections 2005–2025*, <<http://www.spc.int/demog/en/index.html>> as at 22 September 2006.

² Barnes, C. and Mercer, G. 2003. *Disability*. Polity Press, Cambridge.

Action, outlines relevant constraints, and names key priorities central to the Pacific region's capacity to advance the goal of the Biwako Millennium Framework for Action.

III. STRATEGIC DEVELOPMENTS

6. The Commission at its fifty eighth session adopted resolution 58/4 of 22 May 2002 on promoting an inclusive, barrier-free and rights-based society for people with disabilities in the Asian and Pacific region in the twenty-first century, by which it proclaimed the extension of the Asian and Pacific Decade of Disabled Persons, 1993-2002, for another decade, 2003-2012.

7. Crucial to renewed endeavours to address disability concerns in the Pacific was the strong participation of Pacific Governments and NGOs at the 2002 ESCAP Special Body on Pacific Developing Countries which reviewed Pacific progress in implementing the Asian and Pacific Decade of Disabled Persons, 1993-2002, and at the High-level Intergovernmental Meeting to Conclude the Asian and Pacific Decade of Disabled Persons, 1993-2002, held at Otsu City, Shiga, Japan, from 25 to 28 October 2002. The outcome of this latter meeting was agreement to a regional framework for action by Governments and concerned stakeholders to achieve an inclusive, barrier-free and rights-based society for persons with disabilities in the new decade, 2003-2012. The regional framework for action known as the Biwako Millennium Framework for Action Towards a Barrier-free, Rights-based and Inclusive Society for Persons with Disabilities in Asia and the Pacific, was endorsed by Pacific Leaders at their 2003 Pacific Forum meeting in Auckland, New Zealand. The Pacific leaders recognized that the Biwako Millennium Framework for Action would provide a set of goals and targets for Pacific Island countries to work towards over the following 10 years. The leaders also acknowledged that immediate priorities for Pacific Governments should be to address policy that would assist the coordination of services and provide a focal point for people with disabilities within Government.³ A number of important disability policy initiatives can be traced back to these regional meetings.

8. ESCAP has worked with regional bodies to ensure that the mid-point review process highlights key Pacific priorities on disability while taking into account developments and barriers specific to the Pacific. To that end ESCAP has focused on (1) strengthening the level of participation of Pacific Island countries in the mid-point evaluation of the Biwako Millennium Framework for Action through convening a sub-regional Pacific expert group meeting in March 2007; (2) strengthening regional coordination and collaboration with key intergovernmental regional and sub-regional organisations and disability NGOs, and (3) assisting Pacific Governments develop 'rights-based' disability policy statements and implementation strategies.

³ Pacific Island Forum. 2002. *Forum Leaders Communiqué, Auckland*, articles 51 and 52.

9. Regional collaboration has emerged as a strategic opportunity and priority with the development of the Pacific Disability Forum (PDF) and a disability-focused position in the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat. At the national level, significant support has been provided by ESCAP to six Pacific Island countries to implement the Biwako Millennium Framework for Action priorities, particularly through the development of national policy statements and implementation plans. Further national policy and support is planned in collaboration with the Pacific Disability Forum and the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat over 2007 and 2008.

10. To capitalize on the commitment to addressing disability concerns by Pacific Island leaders and continue recent progress, some key elements of the Biwako Millennium Framework for Action have been identified that will enable tangible progress towards an inclusive, barrier-free and rights-based society for Pacific Islanders with disabilities, and thereby support progress across all seven of the Biwako Millennium Framework for Action priorities.

IV. PACIFIC EXPERIENCE IMPLEMENTING THE BIWAKO MILLENNIUM FRAMEWORK FOR ACTION

11. Across the key priority areas of the Biwako Millennium Framework for Action there have been some important achievements in the Pacific and many Pacific Island countries have also implemented Biwako Millennium Framework for Action strategies with positive results.

12. When reviewing the Biwako Millennium Framework for Action priorities and strategies, the Pacific expert group meeting identified a number of actions that were particularly required to progress priorities in the Pacific.

A. Self-help organisations of persons with disabilities and related family and parent associations

13. In the Pacific, 'self-help organisations' are referred to as 'disabled people's organisations' (DPOs). They have a focus on systemic advocacy for and by people with disabilities.⁴ This nomenclature is therefore used below in reference to self-help organisations in the Pacific.

1. Actions required

14. The Biwako Millennium Framework for Action calls for the development of DPOs and support for their involvement at all levels of decision-making. In the Pacific, this was supported but further actions were deemed necessary to work towards this objective.

⁴ The term 'self-help' has the connotation of people with disabilities providing mutual support on personal matters (e.g. understanding one's own disability, and self-image) rather than external matters (e.g. rights-based group advocacy), which DPOs focus on.

15. To improve collaboration between Government and Pacific Islanders with disabilities, the Pacific expert group meeting called on Governments that were not already convening a national coordination committee to create one and ensure DPOs were represented. Despite a lack of government support in many countries, DPOs have developed and influenced a change in attitudes.⁵ However, the strength of their message suffers from those Governments that are unwilling to engage.

16. The Pacific expert group meeting urged DPOs to engage with people with disabilities living in rural and remote areas, but the lack of resources and the remoteness of small communities means that DPOs are often unable to work at the grass roots. Links between poverty and disability, and the unmet needs of the majority of disabled people living in rural areas, continue to be recognised by DPOs as a major barrier. National coordination mechanisms, policy and implementation agencies and DPOs need to extend to the grass-roots level. The capacities of people with disabilities must be developed so that they can contribute to community-based solutions for the particular problems they face.

17. Given that acute under-resourcing is the overriding barrier to all DPOs implementing the Biwako Millennium Framework for Action, development partners were urged to support DPOs. Almost all Pacific DPOs operate with little or no finances. A few of them employ just one person. They draw heavily on members with disabilities and their friends and families. While people with disabilities are best placed to advocate on disability issues, it is inappropriate that they bear so much of this burden while faced with the various challenges of having a disability.⁶

2. Pacific achievements

18. National DPOs received support in the Pacific during the Asia-Pacific Decade for Disabled Persons, 1993–2002. Training and capacity building led by Disabled Peoples International (DPI) Oceania were of great importance to many disabled leaders. This has been followed by further capacity-building work around the Pacific by the Asia-Pacific Development Centre on Disability. This important work was progressed with Papua New Guinea hosting in February 2007, in collaboration with the Asia-Pacific Development Centre on Disability, the Pacific Regional Seminar on Capacity Building for Self-Help Organisations of Persons with Disabilities.⁷

⁵ ESCAP High-level Intergovernmental Meeting to Conclude the Asian and Pacific Decade of Disabled Persons, 1993–2002 (25–28 October 2002, Otsu City, Shiga, Japan): Review of Achievements, p. 10.

⁶ Stubbs, D. and Nowland-Forman, G. 2005. *Free and Equal: A Review of NZAID Pacific Regional Disability Programme for New Zealand Agency for International Development*.

⁷ Pacific Expert Group Meeting (28–30 March 2007, Nadi, Fiji): Assessments on progress against Biwako Millennium Framework for Action priority areas, p. 13.

19. Today all Pacific Island countries have DPOs. This has been crucial to the promotion and implementation of the Biwako Millennium Framework for Action in those countries that have seen progress made for people with disabilities. At a regional level, DPO activity has been equally necessary to the support of Biwako Millennium Framework for Action implementation and has been demonstrated by strong advocacy at various regional forums for Government commitment.

20. Some DPOs have broadened their representative capacity and sought to support disability groups by establishing specific sub-groups, such as for autism, deafness, psychiatric survivors and intellectual disabilities. These DPOs have successfully built the capacity of these groups for rights-based advocacy. They and other DPOs have also sought to meet the challenge of developing sub-groups in rural areas and on remote islands.

B. Women with disabilities

1. Actions required

21. The Pacific expert group meeting called on various parties to undertake further specific actions in relation to involvement in decision-making and support for the most vulnerable women with disabilities. The group called on Governments to ensure that women with disabilities were included in development implementation, monitoring and evaluation of all policies and services. In the Pacific, women with disabilities experience higher levels of poverty because of both disability discrimination and gender bias. They are even less visible to policy-makers and therefore must be actively involved in decisions that relate to them.

22. Women with disabilities have found aspects of Pacific culture to be a particular barrier and have thus called for advocacy to sensitise communities to the negative impacts of culture. Also, women with profound disabilities are at greater risk of abuse and must be supported, in accordance with the Convention on the Rights of Disabled Persons, to make empowering decisions when they are unable to do so by themselves.

23. As it is critical for DPOs to actively engage and promote women, all DPOs were also called on to review their policies and structures. This may involve supporting women with disabilities to form their own self-help and advocacy groups.

2. Pacific achievements

24. The Pacifica Women with Disabilities network was formed in Suva in December 2003. Its goal is to build the capacity of women with disabilities and their organisations in the Pacific and to promote the equal treatment and full participation of women with disabilities in the development and implementation of national, regional and international initiatives. It is in partnership with PDF, and is a member of the wider Asian and Pacific Women with Disabilities network.

25. Some women-with-disabilities groups have partnered with their respective national councils on women, e.g. Cook Islands National Council of Women, to raise awareness of their specific concerns. The Fiji Disabled Persons Association Women's Committee is advocating for the Ministry of Women to ensure disability issues are included in their program. Because most women-with-disabilities organisations have been formed only in recent years, it is more common that mainstream councils of women have no policies relating to women with disabilities. The report by one Pacific Island Government representative that 'Women with disabilities are not barred from participating in all levels of employment [and] politics and joining organisations and clubs' belies the ongoing and deep discrimination faced by women with disabilities in the Pacific.

26. The growing capacity for women with disabilities to advocate for themselves was recently exemplified at the 2007 Women's Triennial Conference of the Secretariat of the Pacific Community. For the first time the issue of women with disabilities was discussed as a stand-alone item as well as during the main sessions. The ministerial meeting following the Triennial Conference called on Governments and development partners to support the full participation of women-with-disabilities groups in mainstream processes.⁸

C. Early detection, early intervention and education

1. Actions required

27. Inclusive education and accessible modes of communication, such as sign language and Braille, although relevant to the Pacific, must be augmented with measures emphasising early intervention and entry into schools as there are currently very few children with disabilities attending schools in the Pacific.

28. The Pacific expert group meeting called on Governments to improve referrals of very young children and to better coordinate this with ministries of education. The Pacific expert group meeting also called for trained early intervention workers, particularly in remote areas. Currently even children with minor disabilities are not being identified, and this is exacerbating their disadvantage through an inability to participate in education.⁹

29. The Pacific expert group meeting called for access to inclusive education for students with disabilities, and implementation of the Pacific Islands Forum Basic Education Action Plan. This should involve including students with learning disabilities in mainstream schools. To enable students with disabilities to access mainstream schools, Governments are required to ensure that

⁸ Secretariat of the Pacific Community, 3rd Pacific Ministers Meeting on Women, Noumea, New Caledonia, 1 June 2007.

⁹ Stubbs and Nowland-Forman, *ibid.*

relevant training is included in teaching qualifications and have advanced disability-related training available to all teachers.

2. Pacific achievements

30. Examples of early identification and intervention exist in some Pacific Island countries, particularly in the larger centres and where parents, NGOs and/or teachers have been able to mobilise resources from development partners. Project HEAVEN in Fiji and Callan Services in Papua New Guinea, test for vision and hearing impairments among primary school students and make referrals to specialists. Solomon Islands is establishing a resource centre for early detection and intervention for children who are at high risk of having a disability. Parent advocacy in the Federated States of Micronesia and Palau has been successful with mainstreaming children in education.¹⁰ Due to scarce resources, parents and communities also need to be trained to undertake early intervention to ensure that children with disabilities are school ready.

31. However, a frequent finding is the low level of coordination between health services and community-based rehabilitation and/or ministries of education. Some Pacific Island countries have extensive plans to train early identification, intervention and child development workers.

32. In general, education systems need development as there are rarely adequate provisions for inclusive education or special education. Countries that enjoy some form of early identification of children with disabilities must now meet these children's needs in schools. Meanwhile, other countries, such as Samoa and Solomon Islands, are seeking to implement measures such as accessible schools, teacher training, the Inclusive Education Toolkit, teachers' manuals and specialised education. Some teacher training has also begun incorporating special and inclusive education in courses, as well as in-service training for existing teachers, e.g. University of the South Pacific, Fiji.

D. Training and employment, including self-employment

1. Actions required

33. Employer partnerships, public employment, lists of job-ready people with disabilities, job readiness training and actions to address rural barriers will meet the needs in Pacific Island countries, but given the extreme rates of unemployment for Pacific Islanders with disabilities, further actions will be required.

¹⁰ Federated States of Micronesia Draft National Policy on Disability, 2006, Department of Health, Education and Social Affairs.

34. As well as partnerships with the private sector, there is a need to review workplace policies and support change. As youth is the largest demographic in the Pacific, there is a particular need to focus on youth employment.

2. Pacific achievements

35. Many Pacific Islanders with disabilities require community-based rehabilitation to begin the process of job-readiness training. Countries such as the Federated States of Micronesia and Palau have excellent transition programs, while Fiji and Solomon Islands are making some investments in this area. In general, however, there is a lack of both much-needed community-based rehabilitation and the basic assistive devices that make the difference between independent employment and unemployment, particularly in rural areas.¹¹

36. While most Pacific countries are seeking to develop vocational education and training schemes for people with disabilities to have a chance of entering employment, Fiji has led the Pacific in necessary employment reforms. Fiji has ratified the International Labour Organization Convention 159, which promotes vocational training and decent work for people with disabilities, and has also legislated for minimum numbers of people with disabilities to be employed by firms of 50 or more employees (although monitoring and enforcement measures are unclear). Other Pacific Island countries may be able to learn from Fiji's experience as Fiji undertakes to implement these laws.

E. Access to built environments and public transport

1. Actions required

37. Technical guidelines for accessibility, promotion of accessible tourism, accessible public services and the provisions of mobility aids and devices are important.

38. Having seen many donor-funded inaccessible construction projects, the Pacific expert group meeting called on donors to ensure that their projects exhibit universal design and require Governments to monitor this. As there are also many instances of accessible building codes going unheeded, the Pacific expert group meeting found that Governments should promote universal design, enforce its implementation and provide tax incentives to encourage appropriate investment.

39. Given the Pacific's vulnerability to natural disasters, and the particular vulnerability of people with disabilities, the Pacific expert group meeting recommended that people with disabilities be involved in disaster preparedness planning.

¹¹ ESCAP, *ibid.*, pp. 8, 9.

2. Pacific achievements

40. There are examples from across the Pacific of new buildings being made accessible, such as in Palau and Fiji. Currently, however, public buildings, banks and even people's homes remain inaccessible. Although this situation can be expected to improve given that several countries have building codes requiring accessibility, building codes alone will not be enough as many of those with accessibility provisions are not enforced. Strong DPOs advocating for implementation of standards have been the most successful catalyst for such change.¹²

41. Unfortunately, accessible transport is a greater challenge than accessible buildings and streetscapes in the Pacific. This exacerbates the already significant isolation experienced by Pacific Islanders with disabilities. However, the small scale of most forms of transport means that owners require significant incentives to make the necessary adjustments.

F. Access to information and communications, including information, communications and assistive technologies

1. Actions required

42. Although it is important Governments promote accessible information and communications technology, disseminate information in accessible formats, make public facilities and services, and promote universal design and accessible standards, this is relevant to only a small proportion of Pacific Islanders with disabilities. Access to information in the Pacific is required at a much more fundamental level. Therefore, the Pacific expert group meeting required Governments to ensure that information is provided in plain language, that all Government information be made accessible, and that the needs of Braille, sign, pictorial and augmentative communications systems users be understood. Due to the long distances, it was also found important that postal concessions for alternative formats for blind people were supported by all Pacific Island countries. Making media information, such as newspapers, accessible was sought through the support of alternative media projects.

43. Digital access was addressed by a call for the Pacific Digital Strategy to advance ICT accessibility in the Pacific and for development partners to consult with PDF when implementing ICT projects.

2. Pacific achievements

44. Small and developing economies have not shared ICT benefits at the same rate as the rest of the world, and people with disabilities living in such countries have ICT access at an even lower rate than people without disabilities. This is particularly true for deaf-blind and blind people and

¹² ESCAP, *ibid.*, p. 5.

those with severe cerebral palsy. Therefore, although ICT awareness is a laudable goal for the Pacific given the large distances between communities, access to communications technology continues to be hampered by lack of infrastructure, unstable electricity supplies and very low literacy levels. Greater benefit may be gained for the Pacific from focusing on low-technology communications needs and other Biwako Millennium Framework for Action priority areas.

45. More practical communications issues have included sign-language dictionaries, which are being developed in Fiji, Samoa and the Cook Islands; however, interpreters remain scarce. In Fiji, the Reserve Bank agreed to vary the sizes of its new banknotes to enable easier differentiation by blind people.

46. Notwithstanding the general barriers to ICT access for people with disabilities, it is important that Pacific Island Governments do not further marginalise people with disabilities by creating websites and other information and communication systems that are inaccessible. Also, the Pacific disability movement (largely manifested in PDF) relies heavily on Internet communications. DPOs that do not have a reasonable level of access to the Internet may be marginalised from the many tangible benefits of Pacific-wide disability developments.

G. Poverty alleviation through capacity-building, social security and sustainable livelihood programs

1. Actions required

47. It is important that Governments integrate disability into social and economic development programs and poverty reduction strategies. Because of the greater poverty exhibited by women with disabilities in the Pacific, the Pacific expert group meeting called on Governments to promote their needs in poverty reduction strategies and identified the need for basic social services, particularly in rural and remote areas.

2. Pacific achievements

48. Some Pacific Island countries are addressing the needs of people with disabilities by ensuring that they have accessible potable water, sanitation systems and basic community care on an ad hoc basis by NGOs. These strategies, together with disaster management approaches, relieve some of the extreme impacts of poverty on Pacific Islanders with disabilities. In general, however, there are few poverty alleviation programs for Pacific Islanders to provide a path out of poverty.

V. KEY PACIFIC PRIORITIES FOR THE NEXT FIVE YEARS

49. In pursuit of a barrier-free, inclusive and rights-based society for all Pacific Islanders, the key priorities for the Pacific are centred around supporting DPOs, education, employment and accessible environments. These support actions that minimise existing barriers and leverage

change across all Biwako Millennium Framework for Action priority areas. Further, the key Pacific priorities ought to promote those Biwako Millennium Framework for Action strategies that will be most beneficial for the Pacific's particular circumstances.

A. Disabled people's organisations

50. Since the Asia-Pacific Decade on Disabled Persons, a number of DPOs have been established across the Pacific. Their mere existence, however, is not enough to create the paradigm shift required for a barrier-free and rights-based society for people with disabilities in the Pacific.

51. In general, community attitudes are against people with disabilities. In the Pacific this is due in large part to both cultural barriers and the invisibility of people with disabilities in society. As most Pacific Islanders who have disabilities are physically hidden away, policy-makers do not consider them in the development and delivery of policies, laws and programs.

52. DPOs need capacity, in terms of personnel and skills, to raise the profile of disability. Further capacity to coordinate regionally will enable Pacific Island countries to learn from other countries and draw on regional initiatives.

53. Strong DPOs are the most effective way to promote inclusion in policy development, education, employment and community. DPOs can promote grass-roots involvement and demand for rights and services.

54. The existence of strong DPOs is a precondition for Pacific Islanders with disabilities being involved in all levels of policy-making. Government support for and collaboration with DPOs will result in well-informed policy and strong partnerships for implementation of programs, with expertise provided by people with disabilities.¹³

55. Pacific Islanders with disabilities themselves are also best placed to lead the public awareness programs urgently needed in the Pacific. DPOs are most likely to be the source of more innovative policies and programs that can change community perceptions of disability.

B. Education, including early detection and intervention

56. Of the estimated 832,900 Pacific Islanders with disabilities, more than one-third (358,300) are under 24 years old.¹⁴ These Pacific Islanders tend to be denied access to education, training and employment opportunities. As a result, young Pacific Islanders with disabilities are the population group most likely to be living in poverty today and in the future.

¹³ A J Wilkinson, *Making Disability Policy in the Pacific rights-based Policy*, paper prepared for the PIFS/ILO/UN-EPOC.PDF, Pacific Regional Workshop on Disability, August, 2005, p. 4.

¹⁴ The World Health Organization estimates that 10 per cent of any community will have a moderate to severe disability. Mid-2006 population of independent Pacific Island countries: Secretariat of the Pacific Community, *Pacific Island Populations: Estimates and Projections 2005–2025*, <<http://www.spc.int/demog/en/index.html>> as at 22 September 2006.

57. The Pacific expert group meeting set out actions under this priority area at a much more fundamental level than existing Biwako Millennium Framework for Action actions, reflecting the extremely low rate of access to education for most Pacific Islanders with disabilities. Together with the important consequential benefits of accessible education, such as greater public awareness of disability, significant extra energy is required for this Biwako Millennium Framework for Action key priority area in the Pacific.

58. Inclusive education, early identification and early intervention are some of the best ways to try to ensure equal enjoyment of rights for children and young people with disabilities. If these are actively practised in the Pacific, there will be long-term changes to the current Pacific culture of ignoring and hiding people with disabilities because of shame, lack of understanding and fear.

59. The Convention on the Rights of the Child has been ratified by all countries in the Pacific region. It mandates that states make primary education compulsory and available free to all children on the basis of equal opportunity, with protection from all kinds of discrimination, including discrimination on the basis of disability. Moreover, children with disabilities must receive education in a manner conducive to the child's achieving the fullest possible social integration and development.

60. Some children and young people with disabilities in the Pacific would also benefit from programs and policies that follow a 'twin-track' approach. That is, programs must support integration so as to ensure that children and young people with disabilities are actively included in all mainstream education policies and programs. Meanwhile, there needs to be a dedicated program of work that is focused purely on children and young people with disabilities.¹⁵

61. Where limited resources are available, a prioritised focus on children may provide the best outcome that will in time impact on all other areas of development.

62. Regional policies that support inclusive education, early identification and intervention exist. Given that the Forum Basic Education Action Plan contains recommendations concerning the inclusion of children with disabilities, inclusive education should be a requirement of every Pacific Island ministry of education.

¹⁵ PIFS, ILO, UN-EPOC, DPI, PDF Pacific Regional Workshop on Disability, Nadi, 1–4 August 2005.

C. Training and employment, including self-employment

63. Growing employment for Pacific Islanders with disabilities requires job-ready training. Many Pacific Islanders are far from this level of readiness – hence the concentration by the Pacific expert group meeting on community-based rehabilitation and vocational training.

64. The growing Pacific focus on economic sustainability, promoted in the Pacific Plan, suggests a policy environment receptive to policies and programs promoting the economic independence of Pacific Islanders with disabilities. The success of such employment policies for Pacific Islanders with disabilities will be intrinsically linked to the development of inclusive education systems. That is, the labour market must be made disability ready.

D. Access to built environments and public transport

65. The inability to have access to buildings and to move about by public and/or private transport represents one of the major barriers preventing people with disabilities from actively participating in social and economic activities. It is another area where collaborative solutions need to be sought, but the primary responsibility is that of Government and enforceable legislation and standards are necessary.¹⁶ Governments need to gradually introduce a series of initiatives leading towards legislation or regulations requiring access for all. This would give the private sector reasonable adjustment time. It is unlikely to occur without strong and sustained advocacy; nevertheless, Governments can expect considerable public credit and even international recognition by implementing accessibility legislation.

66. During the first Asia-Pacific Decade for Persons with Disabilities, pilot sites in Bangkok, Beijing and New Delhi were developed with technical and financial support to promote the benefits of physical access. The projects were very successful and enabled those involved in infrastructure development to understand the low costs and considerable benefits of an accessible city.¹⁷ This could be achieved in the Pacific at a lower cost given the lower level of physical infrastructure and smaller city size.

VI. PACIFIC STRATEGIES

67. The Pacific expert group meeting emphasised three strategies: (1) promoting a rights-based approach for all; (2) promoting an enabling environment and strengthening an effective mechanism for policy formulation and implementation; (3) improving understanding of the concept of disability.

¹⁶ McKinstry et al., 2004. *Review of Policy and Legislation on Disability in Pacific Island Countries for the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat*, p. 42.

¹⁷ ESCAP, *ibid.*, p. 6.

68. Data collection, as another strategy, has been approached with limited success in the Pacific due to various cultural, attitudinal and methodological factors.¹⁸ The risk in focusing on data collection is that policy-makers may require data before doing anything, while people with disabilities and their families see no benefit in self-identifying. Disability-inclusive development should be implemented as an intrinsic part of the strategies and key priorities identified above.

69. Promoting a rights-based approach, advocating collaborative policy development and raising public awareness of disability are all strategies fundamental to Biwako Millennium Framework for Action progress in the Pacific. They are mutually reinforcing and have seen some early progress, and Pacific Island countries will be receptive to further progress. Each of the three strategies should have DPOs as essential actors in their implementation. DPOs may take a leadership role in the implementation of these strategies.

A. Rights-based approach

70. The rights-based approach for people with disabilities is exemplified in the Convention for Persons with Disabilities. The benefit of its ratification is that the Convention gives internationally agreed detail to the rights-based approach, which the Biwako Millennium Framework for Action requires.

71. There are arguably more opportunities for positive change relating to the rights of people with disabilities than for any other group of Pacific Islanders. A practical starting point is legislative reform. The legislative review undertaken for Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat described the changes required at a legislative level¹⁹ and gave a range of examples of denigrating language currently found in statutes in Forum countries: 'idiot or imbecile', 'persons of unsound mind', 'mentally defective', 'incompetent', 'severely subnormal', 'imbecility', 'retarded class' and 'feeble minded'. This language is likely to be contributing to the shame and negative attitudes towards many people with disabilities. Countries should examine their criminal law, immigration law, and health and education provisions to ensure that people with disabilities are not discriminated against and that the language employed is appropriate.

72. To promote a rights-based approach for people with disabilities in laws, policies and programs, the Regional Rights Resource Team has developed a training program to give DPO-based disability advocates the skills to promote rights-based social and policy change in their countries.

¹⁸ Stubbs and Nowland-Forman, *ibid.*

¹⁹ McKinstry et al., *ibid.*, p. 55.

B. Policy formulation, coordination and implementation

73. A number of Pacific Island countries have, with ESCAP support, completed national disability policies; however, several of the policies are yet to be formally endorsed by Governments.

74. As part of the policy development process, many countries have established national coordinating mechanisms to enhance closer coordination among Government ministries and departments at different levels, as well as between Governments and civil society organisations, to improve effectiveness of programs.

75. Collaborative policy development is necessary but not sufficient for Biwako Millennium Framework for Action realisation in the Pacific. A plan of action that national governments commit to in terms of legislative change, policy alignment and budgetary allocations is necessary. This real local commitment will be the basis of the paradigm shift sought by the Biwako Millennium Framework for Action.

76. Despite the increasing number of countries with well-developed disability policies, the legislative basis that would support the implementation of many of the Biwako Millennium Framework for Action priority areas simply does not exist. For example, in most cases where basic human rights are set out, people with disabilities are ignored. Laws and standards for access to public places are rare and for public transport they are non-existent. There are a few Pacific Island countries with laws against employment discrimination, but fewer have laws prohibiting discrimination against people with disabilities entering education.

C. Improved understanding of the concept of disability

77. As discussed above, DPOs have a key leadership role to play in promoting public awareness and understanding of disability. There are some excellent examples of DPOs using the media to promote awareness in Fiji, Cook Islands, Vanuatu and Tonga. They should also lead the way in the more complex task of promoting understanding of the concept of disability by policy-makers.

VII. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

78. The Biwako Millennium Framework for Action has been an important and useful instrument in the Pacific, but the paradigm shift from a charity to a rights-based approach for people with disabilities has not occurred as it has in many other parts of the world over the past 25 years. To make progress on this front, it will be necessary to focus energy on just a few of the Biwako Millennium Framework for Action priority areas.

79. Employing certain key strategies that have already been found to be effective for the Pacific is expected to provide for significant achievements. Concerted strategic effort by

Governments, development partners and DPOs will see outcomes against not just the four key Pacific priorities but all Biwako Millennium Framework for Action priority areas.

A. Recommendations

1. Disabled people's organisations (DPOs)

80. To promote implementation of key Biwako Millennium Framework for Action strategies, DPOs should receive training and resourcing to advocate for a rights-based approach in all aspects of the lives of Pacific Islanders with disabilities.

2. Education

81. Health and education policies to ensure early intervention and inclusive education of all children with disabilities should be developed and implemented.

3. Employment

82. Training programs, aids and equipment to promote smooth transition to employment should be provided in collaboration with employers, with a focus on young Pacific Islanders with disabilities.

4. Access to built environments

83. All new transport and infrastructure projects, regardless of funding source, should incorporate universal access as a key requirement in their design.

5. Legislative reform

84. All countries should review existing laws in accordance with the 2003 review of legislation to remove negative language and provide for a rights-based approach.

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