

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

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

**Report on Fiji component of Research (pilot)**

*July 2011*

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## **1. Introduction**

A Pacific-wide research program entitled “Capacity Development for Effective and Efficient Disabled People’s Organisations in Pacific Island Countries<sup>1</sup>”, commenced in February 2011 with the financial assistance of AusAID. The research process will cover 11 countries and continue to June 2012.

Fiji was chosen for a trial of the research methodology. Fiji is the location for the office of the Pacific Disability Forum (PDF), which is undertaking the research in collaboration with Australia Pacific Islands Disability Support (APIDS). In addition, Fiji has a long history of DPO activity which is well known to the researchers. The research team included members from PDF and APIDS as well as three in-country researchers who are staff of the Fiji Disabled Peoples Association (FDPA)<sup>2</sup>.

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

## **2. DPOs in Fiji**

In summary, the DPO situation in Fiji has the following features:

- A history of DPO activity going back to the mid-1970s, commencing with shared interests in sports and musical activities and including strong leadership and representation at regional and international levels
- A national cross-disability DPO (FDPA) which has 4 affiliated disability-specific organizations:

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<sup>1</sup> This research is being undertaken jointly by PDF and APIDS, and is funded by AusAID.

<sup>2</sup> Allocation was made for one in-country researcher, but in Fiji there were 3 nominations and they decided to share the allocated funding between them. The research benefited from the additional expertise, and there were added benefits in terms of sharing research experiences for more people with disabilities.

- Spinal Injuries Association (SIA)
- Fiji Association of the Deaf (FAD)
- United Blind Persons of Fiji (UBP)
- Psychiatric Survivors Association (PSA)
- FDPA is a central, registered, urban-based non-profit organization with a constitution, an elected board, a mix of full-time, part-time, paid and voluntary staff and secure office facilities
  - It has one associate organisational member (Fiji Paralympic Committee (FPC), many individual members and 12 branches outside Suva – Sigatoka, Nadi, Tavua, Ra, Koravou, Goma, Rukuruku, Labasa, Bua, Dreketi, Savusavu, Rewa<sup>3</sup>

## **2.1 History of DPOs in Fiji**

This section provides summary description and analysis of the context and history in relation to capacity development processes for DPOs.

The first provision of disability services began in Fiji in the mid 1960s. It commenced with special education programs for children with physical disabilities and included services later for children with hearing, vision and intellectual impairments. Non-government and charitable organizations have been the main source of influence and providers of services to persons with disabilities in Fiji through special schools, community-based rehabilitation programs, advocacy groups and vocational training institutions.

People with disability representing Fiji internationally until quite recently considered that “for the most part, persons with disabilities or their issues are not recognized sufficiently or treated positively in the Fiji society. As a result, persons with disabilities are marginalised, neglected and isolated due to negative attitudes, false perceptions, myth and stereotypes the families and communities have towards them. Similarly, their organizations

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<sup>3</sup> These branches are at various stages of development and their level of activity currently largely depends on the extent to which FDPA can support them.

are not actively involved in decision and policy making processes relating to disability<sup>4</sup>.”

Between the 1970s and the mid-2000s, FDPA and its affiliate organizations slowly strengthened their roles and capacity, based primarily on the efforts of small numbers of dedicated voluntary office bearers. While FDPA officials participated in numerous international meetings, particularly those relating to the development of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, Fiji DPOs remained “out of the public spotlight” in Fiji. This reflected a lack of recognition in broader society, a lack of financial support, reliance on volunteers with limited availability, and other factors common to DPOs in other countries, such as the exclusion of many people with disabilities from educational and employment opportunities.

In 2003, a delegate from the Fiji Disabled People's Association (FDPA) spoke at an international conference in Bangkok and cited that “significant progress has been made in the past three years through the efforts of FDPA, the national self-help organization of persons with disabilities which is promoting the inclusion of disability issues in mainstream development initiatives at national and local levels”.

Until 2004, the major source of funding for FDPA was a small and irregular annual allocation from the Government, which contributed to office rental costs. Australian volunteers and occasional funding for events from the British Government, Japanese International Cooperation Agency (JICA), TEAR Australia and others were also provided. In 2004 the Government of Fiji agreed to construct dedicated offices for FDPA and its affiliates within the grounds of the existing training complex for people with disabilities. This was a significant contribution to the work and profile of DPOs and enabled them to become more effective and efficient.

Since its establishment, FDPA has been committed to strengthening the capacity of itself as an organisation and its members. It has conducted several leadership, empowerment and advocacy training workshops for its

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<sup>4</sup> Speech by Setareki Macanawai & Pio Rokosuka in Bangkok at the 2003 Expert Group Meeting and Seminar on an International Convention to Protect & Promote the Rights and Dignity of Persons with Disabilities

future leaders at the grassroots level through its branches and affiliates. AUSAID, JICA, NZAID and UNESCAP have contributed funds for these activities. Participants were taught current issues and valuable information in leading and managing self-help organization of persons with disabilities at national, branch and affiliate level. FDPA Board has also made several attempts to discuss and negotiate with Western Disabled Peoples Association based in Lautoka the possibility of them becoming a branch of FDPA rather than remaining a separate organization.

A significant element of FDPA's strengthening capacity was its involvement in international networks and cooperation, as mentioned above. FDPA was actively involved in the activities of Disabled Peoples International (DPI) at the Oceania Sub-region, Asia/Pacific Region and world level. It provided office space to the DPI Oceania Sub-region Office for many years. In its intention to build a strong leadership base, strengthen the branches and develop the Association's capacity, the management board sent members from the branches and affiliates to various international meetings held since its establishment. FDPA organized three Asia/Pacific regional disability meetings in Fiji since 1990 and became a well-known disabled persons' organization (DPO) in the Asian/Pacific Region. Exposure to such international disability forums and meetings enhanced the skills, experience and knowledge of members in disability issues as well as empowered them to be good advocates and leaders of our Association.

Cooperation among Pacific Island countries involved in the disability movement was also strengthened with FDPA as a leading member of this Oceania Disability and Advisory Support Committee (ODASC) and the 2004 establishment of the Pacific Disability Forum (PDF). FDPA was able to give useful advice to disability advocacy groups in Samoa, Papua New Guinea, Kiribati and the Solomon Islands which led to the formation of DPOs in these countries. Similar advice has been given to the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat, JICA, ILO, UNESCAP and UK DFID.

In the 1990s, alongside FDPA's gradual strengthening, national single disability consumer groups began to evolve to address specific concerns

pertinent to the disability groups they represent. These groups became affiliate members of FDPA and nominate a representative to sit on the management board of FDPA.

PDF was able to secure core funding from the Government of New Zealand in 2006 and from the Government of Australia in 2010. A previous President of FDPA was appointed CEO of the newly formed Pacific Disability Forum in 2007. A key objective of PDF is to support the capacity development of its member DPOs so funding began to flow to FDPA, among others, from 2010. In 2010, the Government of Australia began to supplement funding to PDF which supported DPO development.

There have been times of tension between DPOs and the service provider organisations in the disability sector in Fiji which have used medical or charity models to underpin their work. The tensions have arisen when people with disability have spoken up for themselves and their own priorities rather than been the “subjects” of decision-making by others. The tensions have also permeated relationships between DPOs and Government officials from time to time, where the latter have determined policies without consultation.

### **3. Research principles, approaches and methodology**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The team of researchers met together in Fiji for the first time to work out collaboratively how to implement the research in practical terms (see below).

### **3.1 Methodology in Fiji pilot study**

From 9 to 18 February, the research team worked together to:

- Develop detailed plans for in-country implementation of the research in ways that are consistent with the research objectives, principles and methods. Specific consideration was given to the Fiji context, including diversity of languages and the variety of disabled people organisations (DPOs) in Fiji, operating under the umbrella of FDPA.
- Identify the questions which would be used within each research activity
- Allocate responsibilities among team members in order to maximize the quality of the research process and achievement of objectives, including to provide opportunities for strengthening in-country research capacity in DPOs
- Trial the research process with Fiji DPOs and their stakeholders
- Collate findings at the end of the week of activities and identify lessons about how to improve the research process and methodology for subsequent country visits

In some ways, the Fiji DPO context is different from other Pacific Island countries. This meant that the generalizations assumed in the original research proposal did not necessarily apply. For example there are at least five national DPOs in Fiji, with one being an umbrella organization for another four. We understand that in most other Pacific countries, there is only one national DPO. The in-country researchers had already considered how best to ensure equitable access for the DPOs to the research process beforehand. They had suggested a timetable of meetings for board members from the five DPOs, spread over the week (14 to 18 February). Over the initial planning days, this timetable was adjusted and additional meetings were added. Meetings were planned for staff members of DPOs, the associate member (Fiji Paralympic Committee) and four external organizations (other meetings are planned for subsequent weeks).

In addition a combined workshop was organized towards the end of the in-country visit, for the following purposes:

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

Annex 2 provides the list of research activities each day. It was not yet established whether Fiji will be a source of a case study. Initial consideration suggests that a case study could be developed for FAD or UBP. Another potential case study could be considered to describe a relatively long-standing partnership between DPOs and FemLINK in Fiji, (which can be followed up at a later date).

In summary, approximately 100 people participated in meetings and workshops. Overall, approximately 50% of participants were women, and approximately 85% of all participants have disabilities. The reason we have used the word “approximately” here, is because at several large events, the numbers of people changed substantially during the day.

## **4. Findings**

The themes listed below emerged from an analysis of notes from all meetings. The first seven statements were identified by participants in the joint workshop as “most important” out of an initial list up to point 15. Points 16 to 19 were added during workshop discussions. Points 20 onwards were added following further reflection by the research team of additional meetings:

### **1. Developing a successful DPO takes time and continued effort**

2. **DPOs in Fiji are not all the same in their objectives and their approaches, but they share a commitment to work together**
3. **DPOs have many resources available within and outside their organisations: in particular their networks, community support and partners**
4. **All DPOs share an interest in advocacy and have different interpretations of what that means for their work**
5. **DPOs want to continue to strengthen the quality of leadership in their organizations, particularly through their young members: they seek to empower leaders, staff and members through leadership workshops**
6. **DPOs value the processes of carefully planning their work, collecting information about issues and achievements through research and monitoring, and communicating to others about what is happening. They want to improve skills in these areas so they can continue to improve their organizations and the quality of their work**
7. Many things make a DPO successful, not just one or two
8. There are many ways that DPOs can strengthen themselves and empower their members
9. The most important strength that DPOs have is their members
10. An important source of each DPOs' strength is its past and current leaders
11. Within DPOs, people already have many skills such as in advocating for change, providing services to members, fundraising, organizing branches, running workshops, being inclusive and raising awareness at community and national levels

12. Raising awareness about DPOs, about the rights of members, and about what people with disabilities can do is very important for DPO success, and inclusion of people with disabilities in these activities makes the awareness-raising activities more effective
13. DPO boards and staff know what is important to their members and their organisations and know when and where they can seek assistance: they also know that they cannot always meet all the expectations of their members
14. Plans to strengthen DPOs in the future vary, depending on their respective starting point
15. People in DPOs have talents, abilities and skills, for example, in music, sport and religious activities and their participation in these help to raise awareness in the community
16. DPOs particularly want to provide opportunities for young people with disabilities so they can develop their strengths
17. DPOs value opportunities to exchange ideas internationally through training opportunities and workshops
18. DPOs are interested in ways to develop the skills of women members especially in relation to income generation and employment
19. Office bearers, staff and members of DPOs appreciate having good role models who they can follow
20. Understanding about capacity and capacity development amongst DPOs is largely focused on collective (group) and relationship aspects (e.g. networks, shared values, collaboration, partnerships) rather than individual capacity (e.g. skills, technical ability)
21. There is some perception that the idea that DPOs should largely or only comprise people with disability could be a predominantly “imported” view. In urban Suva, there is general agreement that DPOs should comprise people with disability, and this is the case

now. But in rural areas, it may be considered possible for shared authority between people with disability and other community members during the initial development of DPOs.

22. DPOs have valued the support provided by partners to date and are aware of the implications of donor funding for their organisational capacity (e.g. to be able to write proposals and manage finances and write reports, they need different skills from those that had previously been prioritised, such as advocacy, supporting membership, etc.)
23. DPOs are increasingly realizing the need for their own plans and priorities to drive the selection and implementation of projects funded by donors/partners, rather than donor interests, where possible.

#### **4.1 Discussion**

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

In summary, DPOs have many strengths in capacity terms and there are a number of factors which have contributed to DPO capacity in Fiji. Most influencing factors have come from within the organizations themselves, and other factors reflect Fijian values or are related to the international disability rights movement.

##### **4.1.1 Elements of capacity in Fiji DPOs**

While there are many models for understanding organisational capacity, the Baser and Morgan (2009) model has been selected for framing analysis in this research. This model, based on extensive international research, suggests that capacity comprises the following five elements:

## **CAPABILITY TO COMMIT AND ENGAGE**

Includes the following:

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

## **CAPABILITY TO CARRY OUT TECHNICAL, SERVICE DELIVERY AND LOGISTICAL TASKS**

Includes the following:

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

## **CAPABILITY TO RELATE AND ATTRACT**

Includes the following:

- the ability to buffer the organisation or system from intrusions (to protect organizations from outside destructive or distracting events or people)
- the ability to earn the trust of others, such as donors and partners
- the ability to combine political neutrality and assertive advocacy (to be able to achieve goals confidently without upsetting politicians and others through too much blatant criticism)

## **CAPABILITY TO ADAPT AND SELF-RENEW**

Includes the following:

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

### **CAPABILITY TO BALANCE DIVERSITY AND COHERENCE**

Includes the following:

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

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

- the ability and willingness to persevere, particularly during times of exclusion and lack of support from others
- the ability to sustain a dream of a barrier-free, rights-based society in Fiji
- the ability to make sure office bearers and staff are committed to working hard towards the shared goals
- the ability to take ownership of the disability rights agenda
- the ability to be determined to achieve their goals and in particular to meet members’ priorities
- the ability to deliver services for members, such as provision of wheelchairs, canes, essential medical equipment, sign language classes, etc.
- the ability to earn the trust of others, including members, communities, other NGOs and donors/partners
- the ability to combine political neutrality and assertive advocacy

- the ability to improve individual and organisational learning, particularly by maximizing opportunities for members to attend training, workshops, committee meetings etc.
- the ability to build connections
- the ability to manage diversity, particularly in terms of different ideas and priorities of members with different impairments

#### **4.1.2 Contextual influences on DPO capacity**

Within Fiji more broadly, the dominant perspective on the situation of people with disabilities is based on medical or welfare/charity models. Under these models, medical professionals, disability service providers or carers/parents make most decisions about the lives of adult people with disabilities. This has meant that until recently, organisations which influenced Government disability policy were not those comprising people with disabilities themselves, but service provider organizations and individual medical and other experts. The Fiji National Council for Disabled Persons, the main Government policy agency on disability has only one staff member with a disability itself. Until the last decade, there was negligible official or community recognition about the rights of people with disability, including the right to organize themselves, even though DPOs have existed in various forms in Fiji since the mid 1970s. There are some exceptions to this general situation. For example, FemLINK in Fiji has worked in partnership with the women's group of FDPA within a rights-based framework since its commencement and has supported the voice of women with disabilities in radio programs and two documentaries. Similarly, the National Council of Women (NCW) has worked with members of the FDPA Women's Committee in a range of ways in recent years, including through inviting them to participate in NCW activities.

The Government of Fiji ratified the International Labour Organisation (ILO) Convention 159 Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment Disabled Persons 1983 in 2004, adopted the National Policy on Disability in 2009 and became a signatory to the International Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) in 2010. It was also active in the activities of the UNESCAP Asian and Pacific Decade of Disabled Persons, 1993-2002 and its subsequent extension, 2003-2012 through the Biwako Millennium Framework for Action (BMF). In 2011, the extent of recognition of the rights of people with disability is still limited, particularly outside Suva. The concept of disability rights are at least included in official Government

statements, although there has been an uneven application of broad policy statements in practice. DPOs are now noticing gradually increasing community awareness about the rights of people with disability, largely as a result of their own efforts. This awareness is seen as a major factor in their continuing organisational capacity development. Combined with limited external support, the lack of broader recognition historically meant that for at least 30 years, those people with disability interested in working collaboratively were largely left to lead and develop their own organisations according to their own priorities and perspectives, but as is noted below, international perspectives on disability rights also contributed.

In this context, DPO capacity has gradually increased overall (though not necessarily consistently) since 1970. After the initial significant change for the lives of people with disability associated with the establishment of the first DPOs, the general profile of DPOs in Fiji remained relatively low for decades, although many events and processes took place. More rapid change appears to have occurred since around the mid 1990s. A number of factors have influenced these more recent changes, for example FDPA and its affiliates have: explicitly adopted the rights based approach to their work (since around 1999); implemented the Biwako Millennium Framework; secured stable and accessible office accommodation (in 2005); attracted support in the form of a small number of international volunteers and small grants from donor countries; and accessed additional funds and training through PDF.

In addition to support from a small number of Fiji-based organizations (e.g. FemLINK), several research participants noted the importance of international networks and interaction on the capacity of Fijian DPOs. For example, the participation of Fijian representatives in activities related to the Asia and Pacific Decade of Disabled Persons (1993-2002) and its extension, 2003-2012 under the Biwako Millennium Framework for Action (BMF) and to the development of Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) helped to validate the experience of people with disability in Fiji and contribute to ideas about how best to advocate for rights. A number of recent efforts to raise awareness of disability rights, including workshops funded by the New Zealand and Australian Governments, and implemented by a number of agencies such as Regional Rights Resource Team (RRRT) and Australian Human Rights Commission,

have been a source of information, confidence and skill for Fiji DPOs: *“Having CRPD really helps us with our advocacy work.”*

#### **4.1.3 Internal leadership**

For nearly three decades, DPOs were led by a number of dedicated leaders. *“Our leaders (both current and previous) are critical to our success. We value them as role models.”* As noted above, the active engagement of Fijian people with disabilities in international networks since the 1970s was a valuable source of new ideas for DPOs, particularly about rights and advocacy strategies. In particular involvement by representatives of Fijian DPOs in multiple processes leading to the development of CRPD helped them to understand that while their organizations were not widely-recognised within Fiji, their ideas were valued internationally, even though organizational or program support was not forthcoming until late in the 2000s.

The role of DPO leaders as role models is particularly highlighted by young people with disabilities. Without significant community acknowledgement of the rights of people with disabilities, the roles of senior people with disabilities in demonstrating leadership are particularly important. Their achievements provide encouragement for emerging leaders and their mentoring and coaching, as fellow people with disability, is potentially more relevant and powerful than that which could be provided by able-bodied people.

The role of women leaders in DPOs was also noted by other women’s organisations in Fiji, such as FemLINK and NCW. FemLINK said they worked with a number of women leaders who are strong committed people: *“they are very inspiring and have helped to change attitudes”*. The General Secretary of NCW noted that Fiji DPOs have very capable and strong women leaders.

#### **4.1.4 Link between members and DPO capacity**

The fact that DPOs were largely left isolated and unsupported for three decades, until the last decade, may have been a factor in contributing to a strong sense of self-determination and relatively strongly member-driven and member-focused organizations. *“Our greatest strength is our*

*members. For them, disability is not an idea – it is their home, their identity and their strength.”*

The research revealed an important issue about members of DPOs in Fiji, which has implications for understandings about the definition of DPOs in different cultural contexts. Internationally DPOs are defined as organizations comprising and led by people with disabilities themselves. In Fiji, one leader identified the challenge associated with a widespread perception that DPOs in effect, *separate* people with disabilities from their community context, seeing them as individuals rather than members of families, communities, villages etc. *“There is a fear that a DPO will change a person from being a community member to an individual and that doesn’t sit comfortably with the majority of people in areas outside Suva.”*

There was a perception, consistent with Fiji society’s collectivist values (where membership of a group is more important than individual identity) that in some contexts, particularly outside Suva, *“it may take time for organizations to be fully operated by people with disability, but it is very important to work towards it from the beginning.”* There is widespread agreement that *“DPOs need people with disability to be continually and actively involved, but this is difficult for many reasons.”* It may be appropriate for DPOs to be given the opportunity to consider a culturally-relevant definition of DPOs, which reflects the collectivist values which underpin Fiji society.

Recognition of the role of members in achieving DPO goals confirms widespread perceptions that contributing to the capacity of members is critical. *“We need to provide more follow-up for members after they have been to workshops and training sessions, as they are the ones who will make the difference on disability rights”.*

#### **4.1.5 Link between DPO capacity and communities**

DPOs consistently mentioned the critical links between their own capacity and broader community awareness, engagement and support. For example: *“Community support is essential for our work – our friends, families, church networks and our daily interactions with many others help us to know that our advocacy is working.”*

There is consistent recognition of the interconnectedness between DPOs and communities: *“The more we raise awareness in our communities, the more effective our work will be overall.”* And *“We value people outside our organisations to help us set up programs and advocate too, and we particularly value community participation.”*

In recognition of the importance of community engagement, the research process included a day-long visit to Tavualevu, a substantial settlement in the north of Viti Levu, located next or part of Tavua town. After attending a workshop on disability rights hosted by FDPA in 2009, interested Tavua villagers organized the establishment of a branch of FDPA in April 2010. The Branch Secretary said *“We realised that there were quite a lot of people with disabilities living in Tavua so we thought about it and had discussions with others from Tavua who were at that workshop. We noticed that not much attention was being paid to this part of the community so this inspired us to work towards establishing an association for them,”* (Fiji Times, 26 April 2010). While the Branch does not currently have any office holders with disabilities themselves, the efforts of this new Branch to formally raise awareness of disability issues at village level is being heralded by FDPA.

The FDPA Branch members in Tavua are beginning to recognise the rights of people with disability, for example through lobbying for a new special school to be built at Tavua, starting from a largely charity model base. Previously, there had been no attention paid to people with disabilities in an organized way. The new Branch has had several meetings to bring families and people with disability together, and has benefited from interest and support from the most senior chief. Branch officials have attended workshops on CRPD and human rights and helped facilitate a successful festival focused on young people with disability in late 2010. Interestingly, despite having over 70 members from several villages in the Branch, none are of Indian ethnic backgrounds.

DPOs ability to advocate through the media and in other ways is well respected in broader civil society in recent years. For example, the General Secretary of NCW said she admired the DPOS for their ability to get public attention, and others reiterated this perception.

#### **4.1.6 External factors which contribute to capacity**

DPOs place value on the contributions made to their organizations from others within Fiji and beyond. *“Of course we value people outside our organisations who have helped us to set up programs and to advocate too.”*

Sources of assistance and the nature of partnerships and networks vary significantly between DPOs in Fiji. Examples include:

- Fiji Disabled People’s Association has received external donor funds through PDF for a variety of purposes including strengthening financial management (e.g. AusAID), raising awareness of rights (e.g. Australian Human Rights Commission, Disability Rights Fund), advocacy skills (e.g. RRRT) etc. It has also received grants and support from non-government organisations such as People with Disability Australia and APIDS
- Women office bearers, staff and members of FDPA have benefited from a partnership with FemLINK in Fiji, which has provided access to a variety of workshops and training, including on media and advocacy and leadership for young women
- United Blind Persons has a relationship with Westpac Bank where staff provide voluntary assistance for particular events or activities; and also has a link with the Japanese Library for the Blind, which has provided courses on relevant communications technology
- Fiji Association of the Deaf had an Australian volunteer who assisted with the production of the first Fijian sign language dictionary; and other voluntary assistance to strengthen its financial management capacity
- Spinal Injuries Association has attracted funds from a range of sources for organizational capacity development activities as well as for equipment, such as wheelchairs and medical supplies that are otherwise inaccessible for members

- Psychiatric Survivors Association of Fiji had four Australian volunteers (AVIs) work with them since 2004 including assistance with their formation, learning about their rights and developing office procedures
- Fiji Paralympic Committee has a long-standing funded partnership with the Australian Sports Commission which covers staff costs, workshops, meetings and many other activities and it also works with business houses for sponsorship of sports events.

Overall, DPOs recognize the valuable contribution that partners, donors and friends make to their own capacity: *“Funding from partners has helped us to reach more people and to advocate.”* They increasingly recognise that other organisations have diverse perspectives and agendas, and that DPOs need to ensure that their own values and agendas are understood and prioritised as they work together to achieve shared objectives.

#### **4.1.7 Interaction between influences on capacity**

Fiji DPOs recognize that there are many factors that influence their current capacity strengths, not just a short list of a few influences. These factors are prioritised in different ways and may interact with each other in unpredictable and diverse ways, with some being more important than others depending on the lens one looks through. Factors such as history, time, personalities, changing priorities, different types of impairment and many others affect the ways in which organisations strengthen their capacity over time. For example:

- *“from the FDPA Board perspective, we have found that many internal and external contributions have been made to our current capacity. Internally, our members have done a lot of advocacy work, and our founders have provided ongoing support and advice. We have tried hard to involve young people as advocacy trainees over many years. We have also provided space for people with acquired disabilities to work out how to manage. Externally, volunteers have come to help us and they have also linked us up with other organisations.”*

- *“At FDPA we need to have many elements working well to be a successful organization, for example, we have to have a good communications strategy based on our ability to represent our diverse members; effective planning; an enabling environment which gives us the opportunity to participate; a strong voice and a well-informed message; and the skills that help us to be really heard (not just token contributors).”*
- *“as staff of DPOs, we have focused on good governance, including a clear demarcation between the roles of board members and staff. This has helped strengthen us as organisations – we know it is a requirement of some of our funding partners. We have used training workshops to improve our skills, but when they are not accredited, this limits the options for us to continue formal studies. We work on improving our skills for fundraising, office management and project management, which includes proposal writing, managing finances, IT etc., and we also need the support of our Boards, and strong networks with our members and other partners. Over the years, we have strengthened our capacity through sheer willpower and personal commitment and passion, through support from our members, and through ensuring that young people are involved in learning opportunities as they will be our organisations’ future leaders.”*
- *“In SIA, many things have enabled us to strengthen our organization, particularly leadership skills from our President and Executive members, our networking, our access to reasonably priced medical supplies for our members and our ability to access education and training. We have also had volunteers to help us and we spend time listening to our members so we learn about their priorities and how best to respond. Also, we have a good reporting system, access to transport and accounting skills.”*
- *“In FAD, our organization started in 2003 and has grown in strength because of a good faithful board – a good team – who have collaborated well with staff to deal with issues, develop plans and*

*support members. We have been persistent and patient with our advocacy work.”*

- *“At PSA, we have strengthened our organization through the fellowship of our members, through accessing training and workshops on advocacy and other skills and topics, from working with volunteers from Australia, from networking with other DPOs and by feeling committed to our organization and speaking up more about our experiences and perspectives.”*
- *At UBP, the most important factors that have contributed to our capacity are the commitment by our Board and their skills, knowledge and information; the strong IT and communications skills among our members; our strong networks in Asia and Pacific countries; and support from the business sector.*

Organisations that work with DPOs also recognized the interconnection between different elements of capacity and the many factors which influence changes in capacity over time. For example:

- RRRT noted that DPOs in Fiji have demonstrated good leadership and a commitment to advocacy in recent years. They noted that FDPA has some very skilled, devoted and passionate advocates. They suggested DPOs could potentially be more even more effective if they had more research evidence and statistics (especially economic data) as a basis for advocacy and if they were more prolific in preparing written materials for advocacy purposes. In RRRT’s experience, without powerful evidence, organisations such as DPOs will not be able to convince Governments to change policies related to the rights of people with disabilities. They noted that while DPOs are often not sufficiently and consistently “vocal” in their advocacy about rights, they are “effective culturally.”
- FemLINK noted that Fiji DPOs have “the most dedicated group of people to [address] the key issues.” They said they have “worked with a number of women leaders who are strong committed people. They are very inspiring and have helped to change attitudes.” By providing skills in radio programming and support for women to run a radio program on disability issues since 2003, FemLINK have helped

build advocacy and media skills within DPOs as well as contribute to community awareness, which as noted above, is critical to DPO capacity.

#### **4.1.8 Perceptions about lack of DPO capacity**

The literature survey for this research found most perceptions about capacity in DPOs start with the judgment that capacity of DPOs is lacking, in various degrees. No other reports have identified the strengths of DPO capacity and the factors that contribute towards increasing capacity over time, so this research is innovative in that respect.

This research did not seek to ascertain perspectives about “absent” capacity, but rather to identify perspectives on existing DPO capacity and ways to build upon it in future. Interestingly, organisations which partner with DPOs or have dealings with DPOs, such as the Government of Fiji, commented on DPOs’ lack of capacity, even when asked to identify their strengths. This reflects the common experience and perspective of critiquing other organisations as a means of describing capacity.

The Government of Fiji’s National Council for Disabled Persons (FNCDP) suggested that DPO strengths came from their affiliation with the Council, their donor funding and their flexibility. It did not identify other internal strengths of DPOs but described ways that DPOs should develop themselves.

#### **4.1.9 How DPOs want partners to assist in future**

Several opportunities were taken in the research to identify **what** and **how** development partners could contribute to the capacity development pathways of DPOs. When asked **what** additional resources would be helpful for DPOs, beyond their own existing resources, requests appeared to be modest and feasible. There were few responses which were common across several DPOs, reflecting the fact that each DPO had different priorities. The common additional resources sought included:

- Funding for some core costs of running offices and employing staff (not tied to specific short-term projects)

- Placements of volunteers to support existing staff to achieve organizational objectives
- Funding for a variety of training in topics such as leadership (culturally relevant to Fiji), proposal writing, M&E, community awareness raising and advocacy
- Funding to enable DPOs to access resources (e.g. mentors, coaches, consultants on tap, including on human resource development) to follow-up and support learning provided in one-off training courses
- Access for people with disability to participate in a wide range of policy development processes, community events and educational opportunities
- Assistance with establishment of employment services for members, linking to job-skills development programs and potential employers
- Funding for accessible transport (e.g. costs of office bearers, staff and members attending meetings, visiting communities for awareness raising activities or workshops etc.)
- Reliable funding for equipment (e.g. wheelchairs, white canes, specialist medical supplies etc.)

Unique requests were diverse in nature and complexity. For example:

- UBP sought to establish links with Blind Citizens Australia and NZ and other blindness organisations; to obtain a building of their own with potential to establish an IT training centre; to be able to purchase low cost laptops for children and adults who have visual impairments and who want to use them
- FAD sought particular access to training for sign language interpreters and funds to increase the numbers of interpreters in Fiji
- FDPA sought assistance to:
  - strengthen affiliate organisations and branches in rural areas and help them to be self-sufficient
  - enable them to follow-up learning in communities and with branches/affiliates after training courses and workshops to

maximise the effectiveness of these opportunities, especially in rural areas

- pay salaries for staff who can continue their community awareness work in rural areas and use the media more effectively
- strengthen FDPA's research, monitoring systems and skills related to collection of evidence for preparation of high quality reports on monitoring implementation of CRPD (including working in partnership with experienced researchers and funding for access to specialist advice when required, as well as ongoing training on research skills for people with disabilities)
- assist with accessing legal advice relating to legislative and policy changes required for implementation of CRPD

In terms of **how** best development partners/donors can contribute effectively to DPOs capacity, the following suggestions were made:

- Development partners need to recognize that each DPO is different, operates in a different context and has different priorities so any assistance should be based on the existing strengths and capacity of each organization
- A valuable role that development partners can play is to facilitate linkages to be made between DPOs and like-minded and specialist organisations, for example organisations that can assist with coaching in M&E, or organisations that have strong advocacy skills. We have found that the opportunity to share experiences between Fiji and other countries, supports our DPOs to grow
- Donors should also prioritise inclusive engagement with DPOs, which means including people with all types of impairment, both women and men, from urban and rural settings etc.
- For effective partnerships, DPOs want to work closely with donor agencies so we can explain our priorities and we are not entirely driven by their priorities and simply “recipients” of donor-decided grants. We want to make sure they are flexible in their contributions,

because our experience tells us that there are many factors that can change after funding has been granted, and sometimes it is not sensible to complete a plan because of things that have changed in the environment or things that we have learned don't work well.

- Donors should not assume that all people in the disability sector are volunteers – we need paid staff to undertake professional organizational and management roles
- We want to have a gender balance in our organisations, so support from donors should help us to ensure that both men and women and young people can participate in activities – sometimes this will involve different costs, for example to reach women in rural areas
- Donors should acknowledge that people in Fiji do not necessarily understand, read and write in English, and sign language interpreters are also required, increasing some activity costs.

## 4.2 Summary

This research concludes that:

- Fiji DPOs have made considerable achievements in terms of developing sound organisations over the last four decades
- They now have a solid foundation of capacity on which they can continue to build to achieve their objectives
- A long history of exclusion, self-determination and internal leadership appears to have influenced current perceptions within DPOs about their capacity, which may not necessarily be shared with those from outside DPOs
- DPOs have some common and some different perspectives on capacity and capacity development strengths and priorities
- In 2011, using strengths based approaches and cross-referencing, this research process identified both *perceptions* within DPOs that they have considerable capacity strengths and the *reality* of these strengths, particularly their strong commitment to disability rights and a shared belief in a better future for people with disability
  - *DPOs recognise that “our future development starts with ourselves and depends on our own people. It is clear we have*

*lots of skills, resources, networks and potential. DPOs need to put these strengths together so we can achieve our objectives”*

- *“We need the desire to develop ourselves and then we are best able to get others to support us. Our partners are willing to help but they want us to be the drivers. Gone are the days when they will tell us what to do.”*
- Recognition of DPO capacity strengths contributed to a heightened sense of shared motivation among DPOs, a healthy confidence and a realistic understanding about the pathways ahead.

## **5. Lessons learned about the research methodology**

In testing the research methodology, we found a number of strengths as follows:

- The methodology was flexible enough to cater for different country contexts (e.g. where there was more than one DPO at national level)
- It was very important to include researchers from the country and DPO itself – the inclusion of 3 from Fiji (not all full-time) worked very well
- The participation of people with a variety of impairments worked well, with interpreters and participation levels in meetings and workshops generally working smoothly
- The research questions were a pleasant surprise to some participants who expected the research to concentrate on their lack of capacity or their weaknesses and problems
- The research questions were generally transferable between people in DPOs and those in partner organisations

We found a number of areas where we could strengthen the approach in future:

- We need to ask a better introductory question to set the scene (e.g. ask the DPO to describe their organization and its recent history)
- Some questions tended to generate repetitive answers, so need to be revised

- We need to talk with the in-country researchers before the external research team members arrive in-country so they have adequate time to organize meetings, events, logistics etc.
- Group work in two large workshops could have been better prepared and facilitated, with more careful consideration made about language issues (e.g. in Tavua, the group was so large, we split into 4 groups, but we didn't have 4 people who could speak the local language or Fijian, so some answers were "lost in translation"; in the final workshop, the groups comprised people with different impairments, and some were more "competitive" in terms of their communications which may have intimidated others)
- We could put more effort into translation of research questions into local languages beforehand and ensuring
- We should have made the handout (list of topics identified to date, for confirmation at the final workshop) in larger font

In subsequent countries, we will make efforts to continue the strengths listed above and improve on the points listed above to maximise the quality of the research process.

## **Annex 1: Details of DPO history in Fiji**

FDPA has undertaken a wide range of projects and activities since its establishment in 1988, including:

- Organisation of independent living programs for women with disabilities – Domain Half-Way Home – from early 1980s until 2002
- Provision of medical supplies for persons with spinal injury to enable them to live independent, successful and health lives (prior to the establishment of Spinal Injury Association in 1992)
- Assisting members to adapt their home environment to make it more accessible, safe and friendly so that they are able to live independent normal lives. Such adaptations include building of ramps, driveways, handrails, grab bars and railings. This service was discontinued in the late 1990s due to lack of funding.
- Organisation of Community Based Rehabilitation Program for Women With Disabilities (1995-1997)
- Establishment of Youth Group in 2002 starting with a grant from the New Zealand government for a successful leathercraft Income Generating Project for unemployed youth members. Subsequent funding to develop business and marketing skills from the British High Commission extended this income generating activity and small co-operative business system for up to 10 unemployed youth with disabilities selected from members of the organization.
- Establishment of Branches at village, settlement and rural levels and conduct of community awareness-raising activities.
- Initiation of the idea in 2001 for a National Disability Survey which was partially implemented in 2010 by FNCDP.
- Joining the Fiji Forum of non-state actors (FFONSA) which enabled members' issues to be integrated with and considered alongside other mainstream development issues.

## **Annex 2: List of research activities**

### **12 February 2011**

Fiji Disabled Peoples Association – Interview with Board members

- Sarita Devi - Treasurer
- Elenoa Kaisai – Secretary

### **14<sup>th</sup> February**

Tavualevu Disabled Peoples Association workshop

- Approximately 40 participants (approximately 20 women, 10 young people and 10 men)

### **15<sup>th</sup> February**

Spinal Injuries Association – Interview with Board members

FNCDP – Interview with Director

United Blind Persons of Fiji – Interview with Board members

### **16<sup>th</sup> February**

Staff workshop

- 8 participants

Psychiatric Survivors Association of Fiji – Interview with Board members

Fiji Association of the Deaf - Interview with Board members

Interview with Melenia Nawadra, AusAID

### **17<sup>th</sup> February**

Workshop with members

- Approximately 30 participants

Fiji Paralympic Committee - Interview with Board members

### **18<sup>th</sup> February**

Interview with Sharon Baghwan Rolls, FemLink

### **18<sup>th</sup> March**

Interview with Fei Volatabu, General Secretary of the Fiji National Council of Women