

**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): March 2011**

## **1. Introduction**

In February 2011, Fiji was the first country to be studied in a Pacific-wide research program “Capacity Development for Effective and Efficient Disabled People’s Organisations (DPOs) in Pacific Island Countries”. Eleven countries are part of the program and will be visited before June 2012. This research is run by Pacific Disability Forum (PDF) and Australia Pacific Islands Disability Support (APIDS) and is funded by AusAID.

The research team in Fiji included members from PDF and APIDS as well as three in-country researchers who are staff of the Fiji Disabled Peoples Association (FDPA).

FDPA works with all people with disabilities. It has the following affiliated organizations and branches:

- Spinal Injuries Association (SIA)
- Fiji Association for the Deaf (FAD)
- United Blind Persons (UBP)
- Psychiatric Survivors Association (PSA)
- Branches outside Suva in Sigatoka, Nadi, Tavua, Ra, Koravou, Goma, Rukuruku, Labasa, Bua, Dreketi, Savusavu, Rewa

## 2. What did the research team do?

Before the research started, we all agreed that the research would:

- Look at what DPOs are good at (strengths based approach) and how these strengths can help the organisation grow
- Make sure that people with any disability could take part
- Make sure that all people are respected in meetings and workshops
- Respect community protocols and customs

The research team had the following events in Fiji in the week of 14 to 18 February:

- Meetings with each of the DPO Boards (FDPA, SIA, UBP, PSA, FAD)
- Meeting with the staff from FDPA, SIA, UBP, FAD and Fiji Paralympic Committee (FPC)
- Meeting with the FPC Board
- Workshop with members from DPOs to: talk about what we found out; the meaning of strengths based approach, capacity and capacity development; and to work on a plan for making DPOs in Fiji stronger
- Meetings with people from organisations who work with FDPA, including FemLink, National Council of Women, AusAID and RRRT

## 3. What we found out

People who took part in the research told the research team that:

- a. Developing a successful DPO takes time and effort
- b. Many things make a DPO successful, not just one or two
- c. The most important strength that DPOs have is their members. *“Our greatest strength is our members. For them, disability is not an idea – it is their home, their identity and their strength”.*
- d. DPOs in Fiji work well together
- e. DPOs have many resources inside and outside their organisations, especially their community support and partners. *“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”.*

- f. All DPOs have an interest in advocacy
- g. DPOs help their young members to be strong leaders and to develop what they are good at
- h. Past and current leaders help to make DPOs strong. Senior leaders can become good role models for young people wanting to become leaders
- i. DPOs understand that they must plan their work and let people know about what they are doing and what is successful
- j. DPO boards and staff know what is important to their members but they know that they cannot always make all members happy
- k. There are many ways that DPOs can make themselves and their members stronger
- l. DPO leaders have many skills such as in advocacy, providing services to members, fundraising, organizing branches, running workshops, including all members and raising awareness in the community and government
- m. People in DPOs have talents, abilities and skills, for example, in music, sport and religious activities which they share with community members
- n. DPOs think that it is important to take part in training and workshops with people from other countries
- o. DPOs are interested in ways to develop the skills of women in making money from crafts and finding jobs
- p. DPOs think the support from partners is important. *“Funding from partners has helped us to reach more people and to advocate”.*

The research team found that Fiji DPOs have some outstanding strengths, including being able to:

- keep going even when others are not supporting them
- have a dream of a barrier-free, rights-based society in Fiji
- make sure office bearers and staff work hard for that dream

- deliver services for members, such as providing wheelchairs, white canes, medical equipment and sign language classes
- be trusted by members, communities, other NGOs and donors/partners
- advocate with respect to all in the community
- assist all to learn new skills
- participate actively in Pacific regional and international activities

DPOs thought the following extra resources would help them to be stronger:

- Funding for office expenses, employing staff, transport, training and equipment (e.g. wheelchairs, white canes)
- Volunteers to help with teaching skills
- Funding to start employment services for members to help them find jobs
- Funding to help DPOs find ways to share experiences between Fiji and other countries

DPOs want to work with donor agencies to explain what is important to them and help to explain to them:

- that paid staff are needed to run DPOs
- that we believe men, women and young people from all provinces should take part in activities
- that not all people in Fiji understand, read and write in English so Fijian and Hindi language and sign language interpreters are often needed.

#### **4. Next steps**

A full research report of Fiji will be given to all the people involved in the research.

The research team will visit another 10 countries in the next 15 months, and then a report will be written about the whole project in mid-2012.

The researchers hope that this project will help DPOs to become stronger organizations, both through their own efforts and through appropriate support provided by other organizations.

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