UNPRPD FUND
Partnership on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

UNITED NATIONS
FIJI

SITUATIONAL ANALYSIS
OF THE RIGHTS OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

FIJI

COUNTRY BRIEF

UNPRPD FUND
Partnership on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

UNITED NATIONS
FIJI

SITUATIONAL ANALYSIS OF THE RIGHTS OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES IN FIJI

COUNTRY BRIEF

2024

Situational Analysis of the rights of persons with disabilities Fiji

COUNTRY BRIEF

August 2024

Disclaimer:

This brief was prepared by the Technical Secretariat. It summarizes the key findings from the situational analysis report and does not necessarily reflect the position of the UNPRPD MPTF.

Acronyms and Abbreviations

CRPD	Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
DFAT	Australia- Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade
FAD	Fiji Association of the Deaf
FDPF	Fiji Disabled Peoples Federation
FEMIS	Fiji Education Management Information System
FWRM	Fiji Women's Rights Movement
FY	Financial Year
GBV	Gender Based Violence
KII	Key Informant Interview
ICT	Information, Communication, Technology
JAWS	Job Access With Speech (software for visually impaired persons)
JICA	Japan International Cooperation Agency
LGBTQI	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex
KOICA	Korea International Cooperation Agency
MFAT	Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade- New Zealand
MWCSP	Ministry of Women, Children and Social Protection
MHMS	Ministry of Health and Medical Services
NCPD	National Council for Persons with Disabilities
NGO	Non-Government organisation
NDP	National Development Plan
OHCHR	United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights- Pacific Regional Office
OPD	Organisation of Persons with Disabilities
PATIS	Patient Information System
PDF	Pacific Disability Forum
PSA	Psychiatric Survivors Association
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SIA	Spinal Injuries Association
UBP	United Blind Persons of Fiji
UNCRPD	United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
UNCT	United Nations Country Team
UNDIS	United Nations Disability Inclusion Strategy
UNPRPD	United Nations Partnership on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
VNR	Voluntary National Review
WHO	World Health Organisation

1.0 BACKGROUND

The United Nations Partnership on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Multi-Partner Trust Fund (UNPRPD MPTF) is a unique partnership that brings together United Nations (UN) entities, governments, organisations of persons with disabilities (OPDs) and broader civil society to advance the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) and disability-inclusive Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) at the country level around the world.

In 2020, with the Strategic and Operational Framework 2020-2025, UNPRPD adopted a new programme design approach. The Framework moves towards proactive, results-oriented joint programming to drive implementation of the CRPD and disability-inclusive SDGs.

In the same year, the UNPRPD launched its fourth funding call and invited UN Country Teams (UNCTs) to submit proposals for joint country-level programmes with the objectives of advancing CRPD implementation and improving the implementation of disability-inclusive SDGs. The selected teams were then allocated an initial budget to deliver an induction training, conduct a country situational analysis and complete a full joint programme proposal based on the findings of the situational analysis.

From May to August 2024, Fiji UNCT conducted the comprehensive situational analysis. The methodology included a desk review of relevant literature, key informant interviews and focus groups, stakeholder mapping exercises, and consultative workshops with key stakeholders.

This brief provides a summary of the key gaps and opportunities presented in the full report. The full situational analysis report with additional background and context can be found on the UNPRPD webpage.

2.0 WHY A COUNTRY ANALYSIS?

Many countries still struggle to transform the CRPD into concrete policies, systems, programmes and services that uphold the rights of persons with disabilities. It is urgent that governments and their implementation partners deliver on their SDG commitments through CRPD-compliant interventions. To support countries in the most catalytic way requires understanding the main bottlenecks and priorities in each country. We needed to know who the key stakeholders are, how implementation/monitoring mechanisms are functioning (or not), which capacities stakeholders may need to improve, and which ongoing development processes could be leveraged to become more disability inclusive.

The situational analysis was designed to:

1) Inform the design of future PRPD funded programmes in the country and serve as a baseline for these programmes;
2) Inform UNCTs of gaps in terms of disability inclusion in ongoing national processes and programmes and recommend further, in-depth analysis where needed;

3) Build a base of mutual understanding and working relationships among UN entities, government, OPDs and other civil society organisations, as well as the private sector and academia, as the basis for future co-design of joint programmes;
4) Strengthen the capacity of those stakeholders to more effectively include and address the rights of persons with disabilities as outlined in the CRPD; and,
5) Serve as an advocacy tool for ODPs and other civil society partners, both national and international.

3.0 INTRODUCTION TO DISABILITY CONTEXT IN FIJI

Fiji has made significant progress in advancing disability rights. It signed the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) and its Optional Protocol in 2010, ratified the CRPD in 2017, and passed the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act in 2018, replacing the Fiji National Council for Disabled Persons Act of 1994. However, Fiji has not ratified the CRPD Optional Protocol.

Key milestones include:

Early services: Started in 1884 with mental health services at St. Giles Hospital and expanded in the 1960s with organizations like the Fiji Crippled Society and the Fiji Red Cross Society.

1992: The National Council for Persons with Disabilities (NCPD) was formalized to promote disability rights.

2006-2008: Fiji developed its first National Disability Policy, focusing on a rights-based approach.

2013 Constitution: Recognized disability rights and prohibited discrimination based on disability.

2018 Act: Passed the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act with an implementation plan (2019-2023), establishing the NCPD as the government's focal point for disability inclusion.

Social protection programs: Introduced the Bus Fare Subsidy (2011), Disability Allowance (2017), and insurance cover for social protection beneficiaries (2018).

2017 Census: For the first time, Fiji included disability data collection using the Washington Group Short Set of Questions, finding that **13.7% of the population reported at least one functional disability**. Fiji's high diabetes rates and aging population are expected to increase disability prevalence in the future.

2023 Disability Monograph: This analysis showed that persons with disabilities in Fiji face greater challenges, including higher poverty rates, lower education and employment levels, and significant gender disparities.

4.0 FINDINGS

4.1 STAKEHOLDER COORDINATION MECHANISMS

The key stakeholders responsible for implementing and monitoring the CRPD are highlighted below. A comprehensive list of stakeholders is included in the full report.

Government and its coordination mechanisms

In Fiji, the *National Council for Persons with Disabilities (NCPD)*, under the *Ministry of Women, Children, and Social Protection (MWCSP)*, serves as the focal point for disability issues. It is mandated to coordinate and oversee the implementation of the National Disability Policy, as outlined in the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act 2018 and the CRPD. NCPD is chaired by the Permanent Secretary of MWCSP, has representatives from various government ministries (e.g., health, education, employment) and five appointees from organizations advocating for disability rights.

NCPD has two types of committees—*Advisory and District Committees*. There are eight thematic Advisory Committees (Education, Health, Housing/Transport/Environment, Employment, etc.) advising on national disability policies and development initiatives. The District Committees provide local-level recommendations aligned with the CRPD and World Health Organization's Community Rehabilitation Guidelines. The NCPD operates from three offices across Fiji (Suva, Lautoka, and Labasa). At the national level, the Fiji Disabled People's Federation (FDPF) acts as a conduit for its affiliates when engaging with the NCPD. Apart from the formal NCPD committees, thematic coordination occurs through working groups in specific areas like elections and gender-based violence. Informal coordination also happens due to challenges in accessing timely information through formal mechanisms.

The MWCSP complements the NCPD by administering disability-related laws and programs, including social protection initiatives. Its Disability Unit manages disability allowances and grants to disability organizations, while its Welfare Offices provide services across Fiji's four divisions.

Stakeholders had mixed views on the effectiveness of current coordination mechanisms. Some praised the centralised role of the NCPD, while others noted gaps, including the need for better functioning mechanisms and clearer mandates, especially between the MWCSP Disability Desk and the NCPD.

Statuary bodies

Several statutory organizations in Fiji play a key role in promoting disability inclusion. *The Fiji Human Rights and Anti-Discrimination Commission (HRADC)* is responsible for raising awareness, providing advice, and investigating complaints related to human rights violations, including those affecting persons with disabilities. HRADC's current Strategic Plan (2022-2027) prioritizes empowering persons with disabilities to advocate for their rights. To support this, the Commission has developed a disability-friendly complaints management system, improved accessibility at its offices, and is decentralizing its services to regions outside the capital.

The Fiji National Sports Commission is responsible for promoting sports for people with disabilities, providing relevant equipment, and ensuring access to training and higher-level competitions, as outlined in the Fiji National Sports Commission Act 2013. Its inclusive sports programs are implemented in partnership with Organizations of Persons with Disabilities (OPDs) and various sporting bodies.

The Legal Aid Commission provides free legal services, ensuring access to justice for all Fijians, including women, children, and those with special needs. The Commission's mission, as stated in the Legal Aid Act 1996 and the Fiji Constitution (2013), emphasizes its commitment to inclusivity. It regularly consults with OPDs improve the accessibility and responsiveness of its services.

The Fiji Roads Authority responsible for ensuring that roads, footpaths, parking spaces, and public buildings are physically accessible to persons with disabilities, as mandated by the Fiji Roads Authority Act 2012. It collaborates with OPDs to address accessibility issues, particularly in public spaces and health service access points.

Organisations of persons with disabilities (OPDs)

Fiji's disability movement is represented by a vibrant network of Organisations of Persons with Disabilities (OPDs) that operate at both national and community levels. These organizations play a critical role in advocacy, service delivery, economic empowerment, and support for persons with disabilities. Key OPDs include:

- *Fiji Disabled Peoples Federation (FDPF)*: Established in 1984, it is the national umbrella organization representing various disabilities, with 19 branches across Fiji. Its core functions are advocacy, awareness, and promoting employment opportunities. FDPF is receiving government and donor funding for its operations and projects. It is also a founding member of the Pacific Disability Forum (PDF), a regional advocacy group for disability rights.
- *Fiji Association of the Deaf (FAD)*: Focuses on advocacy and services for the deaf community, offering sign language training and interpreter services.
- *Psychiatric Survivors Association (PSA)*: Provides advocacy, support services, peer support, and practical aid (food, medicine) for persons with psychosocial disabilities.
- *Spinal Injuries Association (SIA)*: Delivers free assistive devices and offers capacity building and peer support.
- *United Blind Persons of Fiji (UBP):* Advocates for the blind and visually impaired, providing assistive devices and support in education and employment.
- *Western Disabled People's Association*: Offers home nursing care and employment support for persons with disabilities.

OPDs in Fiji are at the forefront of promoting disability rights. They play a key role in raising awareness about human rights and the CRPD. They also offer education, health services, counselling, and income generation programs. However, challenges such as limited financial resources, gaps in coordination, and capacity constraints exist. There is a particular disconnect between national-level coordination and branch-level operations, which affects their ability to support local communities effectively.

While OPDs are visible and involved in government policy discussions, underrepresented groups—such as children with disabilities, rural communities, and individuals with diverse gender identities—still face challenges in accessing support and representation.

Civil society and non-governmental organisations

In addition to Organisations of Persons with Disabilities (OPDs), various civil society organisations (CSOs) in Fiji provide crucial services and support for persons with disabilities. These services are offered through both targeted and mainstream programs, focusing on areas such as health, education, access to justice, assistive devices, and advocacy on gender equality, sexual reproductive health, gender-based violence, and children with disabilities. Key highlights of partnerships between CSOs and OPDs include:

- *Fiji Women's Crisis Centre (FWCC*): Collaborates with OPDs to provide disability inclusion training for counsellors, focusing on supporting women with disabilities. They are also working on enabling women with disabilities to become counsellors/advocates in their own communities.
- *Fiji Women's Rights Movement (FWRM*): Through its GIRLS Programme, FWRM partners with OPDs to empower Deaf girls, ensuring their inclusion in rights education, feminism, and advocacy. Since 2019, 20 Deaf girls have participated in this program, and their priorities have been integrated into advocacy statements. This partnership includes collaboration with the Gospel School for the Deaf and Fiji Association of the Deaf (FAD).
- *Plan International:* Partners with the Fiji Disabled Peoples Federation (FDPF) to build inclusive disaster preparedness and response activities. During the COVID-19 pandemic, FDPF played a key role in ensuring an inclusive response under the Australian Humanitarian Partnership (AHP).

These partnerships demonstrate the important role that CSOs play in mainstreaming disability inclusion in Fiji, supporting OPDs, and working towards a more inclusive society.

UN agencies and international organisations

Fiji receives financial and technical support for disability inclusion from various international, regional, and bilateral sources. Donors such as *Australia (DFAT), New Zealand (MFAT), the USA (USAID), South Korea (KOICA), and Japan (JICA)* provide essential assistance in the form of funding, assistive devices, and technical expertise. DFAT has been particularly active in supporting disability inclusion through both dedicated programs and mainstreaming disability in its bilateral initiatives.

United Nations (UN) agencies also play a key role, implementing programs related to the rights of persons with disabilities, inclusive disaster risk reduction, and access to justice, among others. The United Nations Disability Inclusion Strategy (UNDIS) serves as a framework for supporting the implementation of the CRPD, the SDGs, and other international commitments. Additionally, the *Disability Rights Fund (DRF)* and its sister organization, the *Disability Rights Advocacy Fund (DRAF)*, have been providing financial and technical support to OPDs in Fiji since 2009, helping them build capacity, advocate for equal rights, and implement the CRPD.

At the regional level, organizations like the *Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat (PIFS*) and *The Pacific Community (SPC)* offer technical assistance and policy support to member countries, including Fiji, and facilitate regional collaboration on disability inclusion.

Despite significant international and regional engagement, there is no common coordination mechanism among development partners in Fiji focused on disability rights, apart from DFAT's working group through the Fiji Program Support Facility Program. Stakeholders have identified the need for better coordination among UN agencies and other external partners.

Other Stakeholders - Academia

Fiji National University (FNU) and the *University of the South Pacific (USP)* both provide support for students with disabilities through dedicated services.

Summary of stakeholder coordination analysis

Overall, while there is progress, stakeholders feel that improving coordination between the NCPD, government agencies, and OPDs is crucial for effective disability advocacy and support. The new National Disability Policy, still awaiting approval, aims to prioritize effective coordination and mainstreaming of disability across various levels of government.

- Stakeholders especially noted gaps in the NCPD's capacity and functioning, including a lack of resources and clarity in roles, particularly in relation to the Ministry of Women, Children, and Social Protection (MWCSP).
- Stakeholders stress the need for better coordination between line ministries to improve data sharing and disability inclusion across sectors.
- There is a recognized need to strengthen government understanding and implementation of the CRPD and adopted disability policies.

4.2 PRECONDITIONS FOR DISABILITY INCLUSION

A critical new element of the UNPRPD strategy is its focus on the essential preconditions for disability inclusion to advance the CRPD. These preconditions must be met to address the requirements of persons with disabilities across all sectors. The following findings focus on the five preconditions.

EQUALITY AND NON-DISCRIMINATION

The 2013 Constitution provides strong protections against discrimination, including disability-specific provisions. The Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act (2018) upholds non-discrimination and protection of rights for individuals with disabilities. It prohibits all forms of discrimination, including the denial of reasonable accommodation, and supports affirmative action to promote equality. Fiji's National Disability Policy (2008-2018) stresses the importance of involving people with disabilities in policymaking at all levels to ensure equality. This policy is recently reviewed (2024) with an aim to improve alignment with the CRPD but faces challenges with resource allocation and implementation.

Fiji National Gender Policy, and Fiji National Climate Change Policy, have both been developed to promote disability inclusion. Sectoral Ministries (Health, Education, Trade, Youth, and Sports) also have policies that promote disability inclusion. Despite this progress on the policy level, gaps remain in the practical implementation of these commitments. The lack of disability-specific targets, consistent data, and effective consultation between the government and OPDs are cited as key issues. Also, some laws and policies still contain discriminatory language and there are still voting restrictions for some groups of persons with disabilities, in conflict with the CRPD. Additionally, the Employment Act’s quotas focus on physical disabilities, excluding those with intellectual or psychosocial disabilities.

Barriers to equity are mainly:

- *Stigma and Discrimination*: Negative societal attitudes remain a major barrier, particularly for women, children, and people with psychosocial or intellectual disabilities. Stigma leads to exclusion from education, healthcare, and employment opportunities. Women with disabilities face multiple layers of discrimination, including from traditional gender norms.

- *Lack of Empowerment and Awareness*: Many persons with disabilities are unaware of their rights or hesitate to self-identify, limiting their ability to claim necessary support and accommodations.
- *Challenges with Reasonable Accommodation*: While some services, like sign language interpreters, are available, the supply is insufficient. Personal assistant services are mostly informal and often require financial contributions from persons with disabilities. The removal of a caregiver's allowance has placed additional burdens on families.
- *Employer Resistance*: Employers often lack understanding of how to accommodate diverse disabilities. OPDs report that employers need more sensitization, especially regarding reasonable accommodations for psychosocial disabilities, like flexible work arrangements.
- *Discriminatory Practices by Service Providers*: Service providers, such as police and healthcare professionals, often assume that persons with disabilities are incapable of making decisions, leading to discriminatory treatment.

Key findings

Overall, while Fiji has made progress with legal frameworks, significant gaps in implementation, awareness, and attitudinal change continue to hinder true equity and non-discrimination for persons with disabilities. There is also a lack of political will, including having dedicated financial resources and costed implementation plans to effectively implement the law and policies.

INCLUSIVE SERVICE DELIVERY

Disability assessment and referral services

The disability assessment and referral system in Fiji vary across sectors and regions, with the support of persons with disabilities depending heavily on family awareness and involvement.

Children's impairments can be identified through *maternal health clinics*, with referrals made to national hospitals if developmental milestones aren't met. Medical assessments guide further referrals to organizations like Frank Hilton Organisation for specialized services on intellectual disabilities and St. Giles Hospital for psychosocial disabilities. There are referral services for children under the Child Welfare Act, and for women with disabilities experiencing violence, organizations like the Fiji Women Crisis Centre provide support.

Schools are also critical in identifying children with learning or psychosocial disabilities, referring them for medical assessments and support services. *Community-based OPDs and other civil society organizations (CSOs)* also play a vital role in identifying and referring individuals with disabilities to services. *Government social protection programmes* also assess eligibility for benefits/social protection measures by using medical reports and other more holistic assessment tools.

There are several challenges in the present set-up:

- Accessibility of services remains a challenge, as people with disabilities often struggle to access information due to inaccessibility of community meetings and lack of awareness.
- Coordination among service providers is weak. There is no centralized registry for tracking children from birth through school and social services and no public list of available services.
- The medical model still dominates, with a focus on impairment and medical evidence, despite some progress towards a rights-based approach.

Efforts are ongoing to improve the system, including the creation of a National Directory of Disability Services to guide access to support. However, poor coordination and reliance on medical assessments hinder progress in development of holistic disability support services.

Disability support services

Fiji's disability services, including health, education, employment, social protection, and community support, aim to provide targeted and inclusive support for people with disabilities, but face challenges in capacity, resourcing, coordination and accessibility.

Health and Rehabilitation Services: The National Disability Inclusive Health and Rehabilitation Action Plan (2023-2027) aims to provide inclusive access to health services, supported by community-based and hospital-based referral services. Implementation is hampered by limited infrastructure and staffing, such as 51 physiotherapists for 18 locations and only one prosthetist. The National Rehabilitation Medicine Hospital (NRMH), with just 20 beds, faces capacity and infrastructure issues. Community Rehabilitation Assistants (CRAs), who are crucial for rural outreach, have reduced in numbers, affecting service reach. Barriers include urban-centric services, lack of staff, poor communication, and limited access to assistive devices.

Education Services: Fiji offers targeted education support through 17 special schools, specialised vocational training, and tertiary scholarships for students with disabilities, though uptake of scholarships is low. Schools for the Deaf, Blind, and children with multiple disabilities provide education and vocational training, with support from civil society organizations for transportation, meals, and assistive devices. Key challenges include lack of funding, coordination across stakeholders, and inconsistent support for assistive devices and specialized teachers.

Social Protection: Fiji provides disability-targeted social protection, including disability allowances, food vouchers, and transportation subsidies, but these are often inadequate to cover the extra costs faced by people with disabilities, such as health services, assistive devices and transport. Many persons with disabilities report that current assistance levels do not match their daily living costs, especially for those with high support needs. People with disabilities also face exploitation in social assistance, with family members controlling their finances.

Community-Based Support: Community programs run by OPDs and organizations like the Frank Hilton Organisation offer outreach, case management, and family-centred support, but these services are limited by lack of resources, infrastructure, and trained personnel.

Mainstream services

a) Social protection

Persons with disabilities have both targeted protection (disability allowance scheme, bus fare subsidy) as well as access to mainstream protection schemes (poverty benefit scheme). However, the schemes do provide sufficient compensation for extra costs due to the disability or for loss of income of care givers.

a) Health

The Ministry of Health and Medical Services (MHMS) developed a National Disability Inclusive Health Action Plan aimed at making health services accessible to children and adults with disabilities. Despite these efforts, access remains low, particularly in rural and remote areas. Barriers include stigma, lack of trained healthcare providers, poor physical access to facilities,

and inadequate communication tools. The plan also emphasizes the need for better rehabilitation services and assistive products.

b) Education

The Fijian government has shown commitment to inclusive education through various policies and international partnerships. This includes free education for all, teacher training, and specific funding for children with disabilities. However, challenges persist in terms of accessibility to school environments, lack of specialized teachers, and inadequate data on students with disabilities. Many children with disabilities are not enrolled or do not progress beyond secondary school. Special schools are still the main option for children with disabilities that seek education.

c) Employment

Public initiatives like the National Employment Policy and IDEA program promote the employment of people with disabilities, while private sector incentives like tax deductions encourage employers to hire those with disabilities. However, uptake in the private sector is low. Employment rates for people with disabilities are significantly lower than those without disabilities. Government policies and initiatives like the Pacific Australia Labour Mobility scheme aim to increase employment opportunities. However, challenges include employer readiness, lack of training for people with disabilities, and barriers to financial services.

Key findings

Despite a supportive legal framework, many services remain inaccessible, particularly in rural areas and for individuals with psychosocial or intellectual disabilities. These gaps leave persons with disabilities marginalized in areas like education, health, and employment. Challenges include:

- Paternalistic attitudes among healthcare workers, limiting access to appropriate health services.
- Supply-demand imbalance for specialist services (e.g., therapists, psychologists) and assistive devices.
- Inconsistent and uncoordinated referral systems, which hinder effective service delivery.

There is also a need for better coordination of services, including assistive devices, and consultation with organizations of persons with disabilities (OPDs) to ensure inclusive access, especially as services move toward digital platforms.

ACCESSIBILITY

Fiji has legal frameworks that protect the rights of persons with disabilities to access public spaces, transport, services, and information. Key provisions include:

- *Fiji Constitution (2013)*: Articles 26, 35, and 42 ensure access to public spaces, transport, housing, and communication for persons with disabilities.
- *Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act (2018)*: Expands on these rights, including the right to reasonable accommodation in public places and workplaces.
- *Other related laws (e.g., Land Transport Act, Town Planning Act)* support accessibility in areas like transport, housing, and disaster management.

- *National Building Code*: Adopts Australia/New Zealand standards for accessibility in public and private construction. The Advisory Committee under the NCPD oversees compliance with accessibility guidelines.

Despite these provisions there are many challenges in the implementation, as described below:

*Transport and public spaces***:** While there are accessible features in some buildings, footpaths, and transport (e.g., automatic doors, ramps, elevators), many public transport options like buses remain inaccessible to wheelchair users, leaving taxis as the main transport option for them. While some accessible features exist in public spaces, many government and public buildings are still inaccessible due to lack of proper ramps, steep ramps, or inaccessible entrances. Accessibility audits are becoming more common, but many new infrastructures still lack proper accessibility features. An audit was made by the government in 2020, identifying a number of gaps in policy and practice.

Access to Services: Many schools are not physically accessible, requiring upgrades such as ramps and accessible bathrooms. While some private hospitals offer accessible features, public hospitals remain largely inaccessible, especially for persons with mobility impairments. On a positive note, programs by NGOs like Habitat for Humanity help provide accessible housing, and government grants are available to retrofit homes for persons with disabilities.

Access to Justice and Information: Legal Aid and judiciary services offer support to persons with disabilities, including interpretation services. However, stigma, lack of sensitization, and physical inaccessibility still prevent some groups, especially women with intellectual or psychosocial disabilities, from accessing justice. Parliamentary proceedings include sign language interpretation, but captions are often unavailable. Many government websites also lack accessibility features, limiting information access.

Key findings

While Fiji has established a solid legal framework for accessibility, challenges in enforcement and proper implementation remain weak. Some key challenges are:

- The current focus of accessibility is largely concentrated on physical accessibility. There is a need to also enforce provisions for the visually impaired, for persons with intellectual and/psychosocial disabilities, and those with hearing or speech impairments.
- There is a lack of relevant data to inform policy and programming about the barriers faced by persons with disabilities across the various disability groups.
- The cost of adaptations, assistive devises and provision of reasonable accommodation is cited as a big obstacle.

CRPD-COMPLIANT BUDGETING AND FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT

There has been an increased focus on disability in the budgets of the Fiji government. Six ministries have dedicated disability budget lines. The biggest three programs are the Disability Allowance (F$68.5 million), the Bus Fare Subsidy (F$41.7 million) and the grants to special schools (F$14.8 million). Spending largely supports special schools rather than inclusive mainstream education. In total the government spent approximately F$152 million from FY 2016/17 to FY 2023/24, but disability-related expenditure is less than 1% of both GDP and national spending.

International agencies also contributed to disability specific initiatives in Fiji:

- *Australian government (DFAT)* spent A$420,000 on disability specific initiatives (2019-2022) according to public reporting
- *Disability Rights Advocacy Fund (pooled donor funding)* has provided approximately US$1.17 million in grants to OPDs in Fiji since 2009
- *UN in Fiji* invested approximately US$46,000 in 2023

Key findings

While the government has made financial investments towards disability over the years, there are inconsistencies in allocations and a lack of disaggregated data. Many government ministries and agencies do not have specific budget lines for disability, making it difficult to track spending effectively. Key concerns include:

- *Lack of transparency*: OPDs highlighted limited awareness of how budget decisions for disability are made, pointing to gaps in accountability and governance.
- *Inadequate funding*: Stakeholders feel current budget allocations fall short of addressing the diverse and high-cost needs of persons with disabilities, including those with higher support needs.
- There is a *lack of guidance and support for developing CRPD-compliant budgets* and empowering OPDs to advocate for equity, rather than just inclusion.

ACCOUNTABILITY AND GOVERNANCE

Inclusive evidence and data gathering systems

Fiji has made progress in gathering disability-disaggregated data, especially with the inclusion of the Washington Group Short Set of Questions in the 2017 national census. A Disability Monograph, published in 2023, further analysed this data to provide insights into the prevalence and status of persons with disabilities across key life areas. Despite this progress, significant challenges remain:

- *Data inconsistencies*: Different government ministries and organizations collect disability data for various purposes, using different approaches and without a centralized system. This limits the ability to track and analyse progress comprehensively.
- *Data gaps*: OPDs and stakeholders have pointed out limitations in existing data tools like the Washington Short Set, which doesn't disaggregate by impairment type or capture data for children under 5 years. Additionally, there is a lack of in-depth, up-to-date research on disability in Fiji.
- *Lack of centralized data hub*: Although individual organizations collect disability data, the absence of a centralized repository hinders access to comprehensive data. A scoping study has begun to establish a national data repository at the NCPD.
- *Training and implementation issues*: During the census, enumerators sometimes failed to ask the right disability-related questions, indicating a need for better training.

Overall, while Fiji has made strides in collecting disability-disaggregated data, there are still gaps in coverage, methodology, and accessibility, which need to be addressed to fully understand and respond to the needs of persons with disabilities.

National accountability mechanisms

Accountability mechanisms include the National Council for Persons with Disabilities (NCPD), the Fiji Human Rights and Anti-Discrimination Commission, and Organisations of Persons with Disabilities (OPDs). They all play roles in monitoring the implementation of the CRPD in accordance with its article 33. However, there are notable gaps in these accountability mechanisms, particularly concerning stakeholder engagement, transparency, and governance. Key points include:

- *The NCPD* coordinates national disability policy implementation and CRPD reporting, with OPDs being part of advisory committees. However, OPDs face capacity challenges in effectively monitoring and advocating for disability rights.
- *The Fiji Human Rights and Anti-Discrimination Commission* monitors disability rights but reports low levels of complaints from persons with disabilities, signalling a need for more outreach and awareness.
- *OPDs* participate in various government working groups, task forces, and regional mechanisms. However, they need more support in capacity building to contribute effectively, especially in CRPD reporting. OPDs expressed concerns about their limited involvement in state accountability processes, including unclear participation in Fiji's first CRPD report. They also advocate for the ratification of the CRPD Optional Protocol to strengthen enforcement mechanisms.
- *Development partners* like DFAT integrate disability inclusion into their programming and monitor progress, but OPDs are not consistently involved in monitoring national disability policies.

Overall, while there are existing structures for disability policy governance and monitoring, stronger engagement, transparency, and technical assistance for OPDs are needed.

Key findings

Fiji has made progress in developing accountability mechanisms and is working towards inclusive data systems, though challenges remain, such as:

- *Coordination* between key actors needs improvement, and stakeholder capacity must be strengthened to apply accountability effectively for CRPD and SDG implementation.
- The planned *centralized data hub* will enhance efforts to mainstream disability across the government but will require significant technical investment. This includes building OPD and NCPD capacity to collect data on marginalized groups (e.g., those with intellectual or psychosocial disabilities and those in rural areas) while ensuring data remains reflective of persons with disabilities' experiences.
- *Standardizing datasets and integrating them with national systems* like FEMIS and PATIS is another challenge. Sensitizing and training government and stakeholders on consistent data collection practices will be essential.

International and UN development partners can support Fiji in this effort, particularly in building OPD capacity for human rights monitoring and treaty reporting.

4.3 CROSS-CUTTING APPROACHES: GENDER, PARTICIPATION, INEQUALITIES

The UNPRPD has adopted three cross-cutting approaches to be intrinsically applied across all of its work, including its structures, programmes, and processes to ensure full and meaningful participation of all persons with disabilities.

PARTICIPATION

OPDs in Fiji play a vital role in decision-making and planning across various sectors. They contribute to national development processes and reform initiatives, ensuring the rights and priorities of persons with disabilities are represented. OPDs collaborate with civil society organizations (CSOs) and government agencies, particularly in the reporting processes for the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) and Fiji's Voluntary National Review (VNR). They also engage with UN agencies and donors, demonstrating increased recognition of their expertise. While there has been progress in facilitating access to elections for persons with disabilities through partnerships and a memorandum with the Fijian Elections Office, significant gaps remain in their political representation, with persons with disabilities under-represented in Parliament and local government.

Gaps to progressing participation include attitudinal barriers with prejudice that persons with disabilities do not have the capacity to make informed decisions, make meaningful contributions and participate in various areas of society. Capacity support and reasonable accommodation for OPDs to enable their meaningful participation is often lacking. There are also gaps in laws and policies that prevent certain groups of persons with disabilities from participating.

GENDER

Gender inequality in Fiji is entrenched, with women and girls facing widespread discrimination and limited access to opportunities. Although women with disabilities are increasingly visible in leadership roles within the disability movement, they still encounter structural and cultural barriers. Despite positive national programs acknowledging their vulnerabilities, there is a significant lack of data on the experiences of women and girls with disabilities, particularly regarding violence, education, and employment. They are disproportionately at risk of violence but often face barriers in accessing support services. Employment rates for women with disabilities are notably lower compared to their male counterparts and women without disabilities.

Recent initiatives, such as a pilot program on sexual and reproductive health rights (SRHR) for women with disabilities, have demonstrated the importance of inclusive approaches in addressing their needs. These programs highlight the critical role of OPDs in advocating for and delivering effective services, though more comprehensive data and support mechanisms are needed to enhance the empowerment and protection of women with disabilities in Fiji.

INEQUALITIES

Certain groups face heightened marginalization within the disability movement. Persons with intellectual or psychosocial disabilities experience significant stigma, exclusion, and derogatory language, which affects their visibility and rights. LGBTQI persons with disabilities encounter discrimination based on both their sexual orientation and disability, leading to safety concerns and reduced visibility in the community. Persons with albinism remain largely invisible in policy

discussions, lacking targeted initiatives to address their unique needs. Overall, these marginalized groups experience compounded barriers to participation.

4.4 DISABILITY INCLUSION IN BROADER DEVELOPMENT, HUMANITARIAN AND EMERGENCY CONTEXTS

National Development Plans

Fiji's 5-Year and 20-Year National Development Plans (NDP), launched in 2017, aim to realize the potential of all Fijians. The NDP integrates disability as a critical cross-cutting issue, focusing on inclusive socio-economic development. Key commitments include affordable housing, inclusive education, and social protection programs for persons with disabilities, acknowledging Fiji's commitment to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD). Strategies also emphasize data collection for assessing the needs of persons with disabilities and establishing inclusive health services by 2022. However, the integration of disability inclusion into government policies and frameworks is inconsistent. The language used in some official documents often frames individuals with disabilities solely in terms of vulnerability rather than recognizing them as active contributors to development.

Fiji has submitted two Voluntary National Review (VNR) reports (2019 and 2023) assessing progress on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 10. Both reports highlight improvements in targeted programs for persons with disabilities but identify ongoing challenges in education, data collection, and social protection. Education outcomes are particularly concerning, with low post-secondary attainment rates for persons with disabilities compared to their peers. The 2023 report stresses better coordination among government and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) for SDG implementation.

The UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF) for the Pacific (2023-27) prioritizes inclusivity, especially for persons with disabilities. The Fiji Country Implementation Plan (CIP) includes commitments to disability inclusion across various sectors. Although consultations with civil society organizations (CSOs) included feedback from organizations of persons with disabilities (OPDs), there is a call for stronger coordination among UN agencies to promote disability rights.

Climate change, disaster risk reduction and humanitarian action

The Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act (2018) mandates reasonable accommodation for individuals with disabilities in emergencies. There is a strong commitment to disability inclusion in disaster risk reduction and humanitarian action among government entities, UN agencies, and non-governmental organizations, as well as among Organizations of Persons with Disabilities (OPDs) and there are positive examples of integrating disability considerations into disaster preparedness and emergency response frameworks. However, resourcing for disability-focused initiatives remains a challenge. The National Council for Persons with Disabilities has established an Emergency Operations Center (EOC) run by volunteers, but it lacks core funding and technical training. There are also community-level gaps in understanding what adaptations are required to ensure that information and evacuation centers are accessible to all.

Fiji's National Climate Change Policy (2018-2030) emphasizes inclusivity, committing to address inequalities faced by marginalized groups, including persons with disabilities. However, specific involvement of OPDs in policy development is unclear.

COVID-19 recovery

During the COVID-19 pandemic, persons with disabilities faced heightened risks due to existing barriers and discrimination. OPDs played a crucial role in ensuring that government responses were inclusive, delivering essential goods and services and advocating for accessibility in communication. Initiatives included food distribution, the creation of a national directory of disability services, and training for organizations on disability inclusion.

5.0 CONCLUSIONS

The Situational Analysis of Fiji's progress in disability inclusion highlights several key findings:

Legal and Policy Framework: Fiji has a strong legal framework for disability inclusion, but implementation and enforcement are lacking. There is a need for awareness-raising about the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) and the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act to ensure effective implementation.

Equality and Non-discrimination: While the Constitution enshrines the rights of persons with disabilities, stigma and discrimination remain barriers. Certain groups, such as those with intellectual or psychosocial disabilities and LGBTQI individuals, are at risk of being overlooked. Continued training and sensitization are essential to address these issues.

Inclusive Data and Evidence: There is a significant lack of up-to-date, disaggregated data on the status of persons with disabilities. Data collection occurs in silos across agencies, and efforts to centralize this data, such as a planned hub at the National Council for Persons with Disabilities (NCPD), are crucial. Involving OPDs in this process is recommended.

CRPD Compliant Budgeting: Although government funding is increasing, there is a call for more financial investment and a rights-based budgeting approach that considers the varying support needs of different disabilities. Guidance for developing CRPD-compliant budgets is needed.

Stakeholder Coordination: Effective coordination among stakeholders remains a challenge. While some existing structures facilitate information flow, others do not meet required standards and meaningful OPD engagement. Clarity in roles and improved coordination, especially between the NCPD, MWCSP and line ministries as well as within UN agencies, is necessary.

Investment in OPDs: OPDs are vital for implementing and monitoring the CRPD and ensuring inclusive SDG implementation. However, they lack adequate resources and technical capacity. Strengthening relationships and support between key organizations is needed to empower OPDs to reach community levels effectively.

More detailed recommendations are found in the full Situational Analysis.

UNPRPD FUND

Partnership on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

www.UNPRPD.org

Follow us on Twitter @unprpd