Achieving disability-inclusive education within Vanuatu

Through the Pacific Education Development Framework (PEDF) approved by all Pacific Island Education Ministers in 2009, special and inclusive education are seen as a priority across the region.

To achieve disability-inclusive education within Vanuatu, schools, Ministries, non-government and disability peoples organisations and communities need to work together to ensure equality of access for children with disabilities to education.

The Pacific-INDIE has been developed collaboratively as part of a research project commissioned by the Australian Government, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. The Pacific-INDIE is an important framework for supporting the development and implementation of effective Monitoring and Evaluation frameworks to measure disability-inclusive education.

Vanuatu has been one of the four key countries involved throughout the whole development process and in trialing draft versions of the indicators. Vanuatu is now in an excellent position to use the indicators to help establish disability-inclusive practices across the nation.

Vanuatu: country context

The republic of Vanuatu is part of Oceania. The archipelago, which is of volcanic origin, is some 1,750 kilometers east of northern Australia, 500 kilometers northeast of New Caledonia, east of New Guinea, southeast of the Solomon Islands, and west of Fiji. The country is comprised of a group of islands creating a Y chain covering about 1,300 km between the most northern and southern islands. Vanuatu is predominantly Melanesians (including some other Pacific islanders, Europeans, and Asians) with over 100 different languages and dialects in more than 80 islands. The Colonial legacy has left its impact to which after gaining independence in 1980, Vanuatu constitution promoted three official languages; English, French, and Bislama.

Vanuatu inherited its Christian values from the early missionaries’ influences. The first educational activities were to enable the indigenous people to read and write. From the outset, the missionaries established educational structure and systems.

Vanuatu is culturally complex due to over 100 languages and dialects spoken. This complexity compounded the establishment of schools in the local vernacular.

The colonial powers took over the education structure and system from the work of early missionaries. Vanuatu inherited the dual educational systems. Only in recent times the government through the Ministry of Education and Training (MoET) promote Inclusive Education.

Inclusive education in Vanuatu

Inclusive Education is a recent approach in Vanuatu. Prior to 2009 advocates for Inclusive Education encouraged the country to do away with special education and for the government to take initiatives towards implementing an inclusive education system. This was not an easy way-forward and it posed challenges for Vanuatu. There were cultural barriers, families’ misperceptions, and a lack of motivation and political and economic setbacks that complicated the progress to implement the new vision.

In 2011, The MoET produced an Inclusive Education Policy that set guidelines and directions (which is now set in motion) toward a holistic development in education in Vanuatu. The policy promotes an education which advocates for equity treatment to disadvantaged, vulnerable, marginalised and stigmatised sections of our society and with an inclusive education approach that enables the whole society to move towards a more inclusive community.

Vanuatu Disability Inclusive Education and Students’ Welfare are addressed and promoted through the Pacific-INDIE

The paramount intent of the inclusive education policy development and adoption is to enable schools to allow students with disabilities equal access to education services in order to perform just like non-disabled children and to be able to access life-long skills, despite their various disabilities.
Vanuatu embraces inclusive education

The indicators will help Vanuatu in many ways.

- They contribute to the continuous effort in Vanuatu, through the Government and Civil societies, in shaping the direction of developing Inclusive Education.
- They will help in identifying barriers for inclusive education.
- They will help in identifying priorities for inclusive education.
- They will indicate where Vanuatu’s current effort of achieving an inclusive education system stands.
- They will assist in involving the parents, teachers and care givers in research to identify the indicators.
Vanuatu embraces inclusive education

Positive steps taken by the Government for promoting inclusive education in Vanuatu:

■ Appointing an Inclusive Education Officer with specific responsibility for inclusive education with an office within the MoET.
■ Incorporating Inclusive Education components into Vanuatu Institute of Teacher Education (VITE) curriculum for teacher trainees.
■ Designing and piloting two pilot schools (one in Port Vila and one in Luganville, Santo) as national centers and role models for effective education for students with disabilities.

A major forecast by the MoET is that all schools infrastructures buildings must adhere to disabled accessibility giving access to all children, including children with disabilities.

Challenges for Vanuatu

■ Reducing the societal stigma and myths in the communities about the capacities of children with disabilities, and raising awareness of their right to education.
■ Developing the capacity for implementing inclusive education principles and practices.
■ Establishing legislation and policies that are conducive to developing an inclusive education system.
■ Ensuring teachers and trainers have the knowledge and skills to teach students with disabilities.
■ Resources and materials for teachers and accredited training providers in vocational and technical institutions.
■ Reliable collection of statistics regarding students with different disabilities.
■ Translating policy into practice through provision of capacity development and funding.
Future directions for Vanuatu

It is enlightening that most NGOs, stakeholders, and communities are beginning to accept and appreciate the importance of inclusive education for Vanuatu. However, more emphasis is needed to arouse the society to the magnitudes and scope of what disability is and to take ownership of inclusive education programs because unless the society becomes a player in this important direction, we will continue to face difficulties in achieving inclusive education goals.

The Vanuatu direction in the Inclusive Education programme will benefit all citizens regardless of colour, island, race, disability or religion.

The government hopes that Vanuatu will one day reach the stage where the society would see all persons including persons with disabilities as one in every aspect of humanity, at home, at school, at the work place, in sports, and in communities. Vanuatu needs to ensure that policy and legislation provide avenues that are conducive to the gradual development in practice of inclusive education for the children/youth/persons with disabilities in school, sport, employment and other livelihoods.

"The school and health sectors are the key implementers, however, tangible support must come from national, provincial, communities, stakeholders and development partners ..."

– Foreword of the Inclusive Education Policy Strategic Plan 2010-2020, Minister of Education

International Associates:
Umesh Sharma, Manjula Marella and Chris Forlin

In partnership in Vanuatu with:
The DPOs and civil societies in Vanuatu play important roles and responsibilities by continuing to advocate and provide services to the persons with disabilities. Other civil society organisations are also instrumental in providing services. Vanuatu also works with many international agencies and has partnerships with many educational groups in other countries.

The following groups in Vanuatu have worked in partnership for the development of the Pacific-INDIE: Disability Promotion and Advocacy Association; Vanuatu Society for Disabled People; Sanma Frangipani Association; Rainbow Theatre Group; and the Ministry of Education and Training.

Acknowledgments
This research has been funded by the Australian Government, through the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade’s Australian Development Research Awards Scheme (ADRAS), under an award titled ‘Developing and testing indicators for the education of children with disability in the Pacific’. The views expressed herein are those of the author(s) and not necessarily those of the Commonwealth of Australia. The Commonwealth of Australia accepts no responsibility for any loss, damage, or injury resulting from reliance on any of the information or views contained in this publication. The assistance and advice of members of the ADRAS research team who provided documents and support is gratefully acknowledged. The ‘Developing and testing indicators for the education of children with disability in the Pacific’ research project has been undertaken in partnership by Monash University, The CBM–Nossal Institute Partnership for Disability Inclusive Development, Pacific Disability Forum and Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat.

We would like to acknowledge the contributions of Disability Promotion and Advocacy Association; Vanuatu Society for Disabled People; Sanma Frangipani Association; Rainbow Theatre Group; and the Ministry of Education and Training.

More information
For more information about this program please contact the Principal Investigator:
Umesh Sharma
Associate Professor
Faculty of Education
Clayton Campus
29 Ancora Imparo Way
Monash University
Victoria Australia 3800
Phone +61 3 9905 4388
Email umesh.sharma@monash.edu

Vanuatu group working on refining the Pacific-INDIE: Glenden Ilaisa, Jim Knox Allanson, Freda Willie and Nerinda Garae