A case study of culturally informed disability-inclusive education policy development in the Solomon Islands

Suzanne Carrington, Hitendra Pillay, Megan Tones, Julie Nickerson, Jennifer Duke, Benedict Esibaea, Ambrose Malefoasi & Casper Joseph Fa'asala

Published online: 18 Aug 2016.

Submit your article to this journal ⬀

Article views: 192

View related articles ⬀

View Crossmark data ⬀

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

Check for updates

A case study of culturally informed disability-inclusive education policy development in the Solomon Islands

Suzanne Carrington[a], Hitendra Pillay[a], Megan Tones[a], Julie Nickerson[a], Jennifer Duke[a], Benedict Esibaea[b], Ambrose Malefoasi[b] and Casper Joseph Fa'asala[b]

[a]Faculty of Education, Queensland University of Technology, Brisbane, Australia; [b]Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development, Honiara, Solomon Islands

ABSTRACT
Inclusive education in general, and disability-inclusive education in particular, is a high-level priority for development work in aid-supported countries. This paper presents a bottom-up process of developing disability-inclusive education policy in one country – the Solomon Islands. It is well understood that the promotion of quality in disability-inclusive education requires a clearly stated policy; however, in many developing countries, there has been a history of policy borrowing rather than culturally informed policy development. This paper will critically discuss how policy development occurs in aid-funded development work and then offers an alternative model of Australian aid-supported policy development as an in-depth case study.

Introduction

Countries all over the world advocate that every child should have the chance to go to their local school, yet the reality is that many children, in particular children with disabilities, are denied this opportunity (UNICEF 2013). This is especially the case in developing countries. For example, in 2002 it was estimated that less than 10% of children with disabilities had access to any form of education in the Pacific Island Countries (Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat 2009). When considering this statement, it is important to acknowledge that there is very limited 'verified' data and information on people with disability, especially for children in many of the Pacific Island Countries. This lack of data impacts upon the clarity of the current status of disability-inclusive education, making it difficult to determine what has been achieved to date. This state of affairs can be attributed to a variety of reasons, such as the involvement of multiple ministries and non-government stakeholders in supporting people with disabilities, limited effort made to aggregate data and cultural sensitivities regarding the level of acknowledgement of the existence of people with disability (Sharma and Ng 2014). Nevertheless, countries in the Pacific are moving forward with developing disability-inclusive education to support children with disabilities in their schools.

Australia supports disability-inclusive development to improve the quality of life of people with disabilities in developing countries. This is achieved through aid programmes to enhance participation and empowerment of people with disabilities as contributors, leaders and decision-makers in community, government and the private sector; reduce poverty among people with disabilities; and improve equality for people with disabilities in all areas of public life, including service provision, education and employment (DFAT 2015). When considering supporting disability-inclusive

development in the Solomon Islands, it was important to distinguish between a disability-inclusive model and a special education model of support in education settings:

> Inclusion requires schools to change their practices to accommodate the diverse learning needs of all students [including children with disabilities], rather than asking students to change to fit into the school system. In contrast, special schools or segregated schools provide education to children with disabilities in separate settings. They are based on the assumptions that students with disabilities are significantly different from those students who do not have special needs and that the educational and social needs of these students can only be met in special schools. (Sharma 2012, 2)

This significant report, 'Inclusive and Special Education: A Way Forward in the Solomon Islands' by Umesh Sharma, provided an important framework for further development of disability-inclusive education in the Solomon Islands.

The European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education (2009, 21) emphasises that 'the promotion of quality in inclusive education requires a clearly stated policy'. International frameworks and rights-based movements such as *Education For All* (UNESCO 2000) and the *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* (United Nations 2006) influenced policy reforms in the Pacific Island Countries by helping to shift the perspective of people with disabilities as objects of pity and recipients of charity to a group of people with equal rights to education and other services (Sharma 2012). Although this led to an awareness of the need for disability-related policies, in many developing countries there has been a history of policy borrowing (Nguyen et al. 2009) strongly influenced by frameworks such as the *Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)*,[1] *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities*,[2] and the *Biwako Millennium Framework (BMF)*[3] rather than culturally informed policy development. These frameworks provide principles, not specific directives or procedures for the implementation in different cultural contexts. A lack of differentiation between the purpose of these frameworks and what may be appropriate for a specific country often results in direct adoption of globally developed polices. This direct adoption can influence aid-funded consultants to transfer global agendas to national agendas which are then pushed down to schools and the community. This process may not encourage sufficient local stakeholder participation and ownership as described in recent research reported from a case study in Samoa (Duke et al., 2016).

Policy borrowing is not necessarily a flawed process, as policy development in similar contexts may provide valuable guidance and lessons to streamline future policy development processes in other nations. Such knowledge helps new countries to avoid the errors made by others and facilitates more effective policy formulation. However, insufficient consideration of the unique local context in the policy development phases appears to contribute to a policy-practice gap, as borrowed policies often fail to account for the unique cultural, political and geographical contexts in the Pacific, and the challenges associated with resource distribution (Sharma, Loreman, and Macanawai 2015).

The study reported here describes a collaborative work with Solomon Islands Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development (MEHRD) as part of a larger project to progress disability-inclusive education in the Pacific. We acknowledge that schools exist in specific socio-cultural contexts and education must be 'responsive to the lived realities of learners and educators in those contexts' (Tikly and Barrett 2011, 6). We believe that knowledge and meaning are constructed through interaction with people in socially constructed ways (Carrington and Duke 2014). Therefore, it is reasonable to assume that people's interpretations of what disability-inclusive education means will shift over time and will be different from place to place and within a historical continuum (Carrington et al. 2012). With these ideas in mind, our work in developing countries advocates for a bottom-up approach that values the local people, culture and context, rather than imposing models of policy and practice from elsewhere. This approach is similar to the ground-up approach advocated by our colleagues, Sharma, Loreman, and Macanawai (2015). We will now discuss the bottom-up model of policy development as an in-depth case study that demonstrates how this type of approach was applied in the Solomon Islands. The case study describes policy development that is informed by culture and context where the community has been engaged in discussions about their views about

disability and sharing values and a vision for future disability-inclusive education in the Solomon Islands.

The case: Solomon Islands

The Solomon Islands is a Melanesian country northeast of Australia situated in the Pacific Ocean. There are approximately 1000 islands with a land area of 27,556 square kilometres over 1.5 million square kilometres of ocean (UNICEF 2011). With a total population of 515,870 as per the 2009 census, just 8573 Solomon Islanders reported a disability, or 1.66% of the total population (Solomon Islands Government 2009). In children and adolescents aged 5 to 19 years, rates of disability ranged from 1.21% for visual problems, 1.4% for walking difficulties, 1.9% for hearing impairments and 2.4% for memory problems (Solomon Islands Government 2009). While these disability categories and their accuracy may be limited, these figures suggest a large proportion of children with disabilities may be out of school when compared to a disability rate of 1.3% for students enrolled in schools across the nation.

The Government of Solomon Islands has signed several regional and international treaties regarding the rights of children with disabilities such as the *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities*, which was signed in 2009. The *National Disability Policy (2005–2010)* (Ministry of Health and Medical Services 2004), *Education Strategic Framework (2007–2015)* (MEHRD 2007) and *National Education Action Plan (2013–2015)* (MEHRD 2013) all recognise the rights of Solomon Islanders with disabilities to access a quality education. The Ministry of Education and Human Resource Development (MEHRD) received significant support over the last five years from the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) to support the development of an education system that includes education for children who have a disability.

The *National Disability Policy* and *Education Strategic Framework* elaborate that government can provide support and empower communities to support people with disabilities, and provide appropriate resources to schools to enable children with disabilities to access a quality education. The subsequent *National Education Action Plan (2013–2015)* reiterates the need for infrastructure and resources, including teacher training, to enable children with disabilities to attend regular schools (MEHRD 2013); however, progress has been slow. Although the Solomon Islands Government (SIG) endorsed the BMF and various other international conventions under a single and coherent framework of the Solomon Islands' *National Disability Policy (2005–2010)*, there was no disability-inclusive education policy until recently, resulting in both children and adults with a disability being left out of formal and non-formal education systems.

Educational and rehabilitative services for children with disabilities in Solomon Islands

Current services for children with disabilities are mainly provided by Community-Based Rehabilitation (CBR) programs operated by the Ministry of Health and Disabled People's Organisations (DPOs). The CBR program operates in seven provinces and is linked to the Bethesda Disability Centre, a vocational rehabilitation service for children and youth with disabilities (Walji and Palmer 2012). Key services provided by CBR of relevance to children include early detection and referral for disabilities, promoting awareness and equal rights for people with disabilities, provision of assistive equipment and facilitating coordination between government, NGOs and the church (UNICEF 2005). The current DPO, People with Disabilities Solomon Islands (PWDSI), advocates for the rights of people with disabilities. Towards this end, PWDSI has forged links with international, regional and national DPOs (Gartrell et al. 2013) and assisted in the establishment of self-help groups in seven provinces to raise awareness of disability rights (PDF and APIDS 2012). As can be seen from the above discussion, most of these support services are medical interventions and until recently, this work has not been incorporated within a disability-inclusive education policy in the Solomon Islands.

In regard to disability-inclusive education, historically, there was only one education facility for children with disabilities, which was the Red Cross Special Development Centre based in Honiara (Price 1994). Since the 1990s, several other faith-based special or vocational education facilities that support children with disabilities have been established in the Western, Isabel and Makira provinces, although their outreach is limited and there is limited information about these services (Pillay et al. 2015b). Some mainstream schools have accepted students with disabilities, although children with disabilities comprise less than 2% of enrolments. Data from the Solomon Islands Education Management System (SIEMS) indicate that enrolment rates for children with disabilities have ranged from 1.3% to 1.9% in the last 10 years (MEHRD 2014). Anecdotal reports further suggest that most children with disabilities, especially intellectual disabilities, do not attend regular schools as there is no support for them (UNICEF 2005).This is confirmed by Houma (2010) who notes that access to education for children with disabilities in Solomon Islands is very limited owing to a lack of teacher training, cost of school fees and limited infrastructure.

Developing disability-inclusive education policy

The following section describes a methodology framework of sustained focus and support for building capacity of MEHRD staff to develop a disability-inclusive education policy: *Solomon Islands National Inclusive Education Policy 2016–2020*. The policy was to be aligned with the *National Education Action Plan (2013–2015)* (NEAP) and the policy framework in the *Education Strategic Framework 2007–2015*. This was an activity under the Primary Division in the MEHRD. These documents provide a basis for the MEHRD's objective to ensure universal basic education is available to every child of school age in the Solomon Islands including those with special needs. It will enable the MEHRD to continue its reform of the education system to make it more responsive and appropriate to the needs of Solomon Islanders. It identifies strategies for enhancing the capacity of the education system to be better able to cope with the rapidly expanding demands being placed upon it.

Key stakeholders

A range of key stakeholders were involved in the development of the vision and achievement of a community-informed inclusive education policy in the Solomon Islands. From December 2012 until July 2015, members of the Queensland University of Technology (QUT) research and development team supported senior staff from MEHRD which included members of the Technical Working Group who were charged with implementing disability-inclusive education in the Solomon Islands; staff from the Solomon Islands National University – School of Education; PWDSI; parents; staff from CBR and the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat in a range of trainings and brain storming workshops in the Solomon Islands and Australia plus benchmarking visits to countries in the Pacific.

A framework for a bottom-up process

The vision and goals for developing a disability-inclusive education policy emerged from policy documents including the *National Disability Policy (2005–2010)*, the *Education Strategic Framework (2007–2015)* and the *National Education Action Plan (2013–2015)* all of which identified that a needs analysis was a necessary first step in addressing education for children with disabilities in order to achieve *Education for All*. The above noted education documents also refer to the requirement for government support and teacher training to progress education for children with disabilities; however, these early documents used terms such as mainstreaming, special education and inclusive education, suggesting a lack of consensus on the definition of inclusive education, and/or the most appropriate model of education delivery for the region. As discussed earlier, there was a range of education models for supporting the needs of children with disability in the Solomon Islands. These varied and special models of support were influenced by NGOs and religious organisations.

Prior to the focussed work on policy development described in this paper, MEHRD mobilised a two-stage needs analysis to identify the barriers to education, including barriers for children with disabilities in the Solomon Islands. In 2007, a broad consultative process about education that included children with disabilities was conducted with parents, teachers, youth and children over five provinces in the Solomon Islands (Tavola 2010). The *Barriers to Education Study* identified 94 children with disabilities living in the participating communities, 37% of whom attended local schools (Tavola 2010). Schools accommodating children with disabilities catered for mild disabilities only, although these children did not usually complete primary school. Poor educational outcomes for children with disabilities were attributed to lack of teacher training or learning support resources for children who learned differently, as well as negative attitudes towards disability among school staff members and other students. Although this suggests that schools do not attempt to support children with disabilities, six schools had made simple accommodations including seating hearing or visually impaired children in the front row near the teacher, or contacting the Ministry of Health for advice about the students' needs. Therefore, attitudes towards the education of children with disabilities may vary across schools. While it is often stated that parents, teachers or other community-based workers possess an attitude that education is not worthwhile for students with disabilities, it is important to note that disability was identified as one of several barriers to education within the *Barriers to Education Study* (Tavola 2010). For example, a low-income family with several children is likely to educate healthy and able-bodied children rather than a child with a disability.

The findings from the second needs analysis are reported in 'Inclusive and Special Education: A Way Forward in the Solomon Islands' (Sharma 2012). This report identified several strategies to progress disability-inclusive education, which focussed on: (1) improving MEHRD infrastructure to support disability-inclusive education; (2) establishing a demonstration school project in 10 schools and (3) building teacher and school leader capacity to support children with disabilities in mainstream schools. An additional recommendation concerned parental and community involvement.

Mobilising bottom-up stakeholder engagement

Following on from these two reports, DFAT funding supported a sequence of three development and research programmes to continue the development of disability-inclusive education in the Solomon Islands: Strengthening the Capacity of the Ministry of Education and Human Resource Development in Implementing Inclusive Education in the Solomon Islands (2012–2014); Strengthening Inclusive Education Policy in the Ministry of Education (Solomon Islands) (2014–2015); Strengthening Capacity for Disability-Inclusive Education Development Policy Formulation, Implementation and Monitoring in the South Pacific (2013–2016). The following discussion describes how the overlapping and complementary DFAT-funded research and development programmes supported bottom-up stakeholder engagement that informed the development of the *Solomon Islands National Inclusive Education Policy 2016–2020*.

The first development programme, Strengthening the Capacity of the Ministry of Education and Human Resource Development in Implementing Inclusive Education in the Solomon Islands (2012–2014), focused on developing a National Learning Support Research Centre (NLSRC) in Honiara. The types of resources, programmes and community needs that were required in this resource centre were also informed by data collected by the national CBR programme concerning the number of children with disabilities in the villages and their needs (Centre for Disability Research and Policy 2014). The CBR officers are constantly working in the villages and through their dialogue and observations are perhaps the best sources for data on children with disabilities.

The Terms of Reference (TOR) for the NLSRC was developed through consultation with key stakeholders in Honiara which included Ministry staff, school principals, parents, PWD, NGOs and health professionals. This document covers vision, objectives, training, resources, advocacy, networks, and research and development; and a timeline for establishment, review and evaluation. A discussion about Human and Physical Resources covers what is currently in place in Solomon

Islands and what needs to be sourced from outside the country. The roles and responsibilities of a Coordinator of the NLSRC were developed along with the roles and actions of an NLSRC Committee. Governance structures within MEHRD have also been developed and presented. This TOR was approved by MEHRD and a Coordinator has been funded and appointed in 2014.

The NLSRC will provide training, resources and support for children who have disabilities, their teachers, parents/caregivers and the public. The NLSRC provides professional development and resources to support vision impairment, deaf impairment, intellectual disability, physical disability, autism, speech impairment, social and behaviour disabilities and learning difficulties such as reading and attention problems. Support will be coordinated to cover all sectors: early childhood, primary, secondary, and tertiary and vocational education and training (TVET). The NLSRC is in operation with a training and professional schedule and a broad range of resources that have been donated by a number of Australian organisations and purchased with funds from the project. The resources are intended to support children, families and schools to cater for a range of disabilities at all levels of the education system ranging from early childhood to TVET. An additional purpose of the NLSRC is to build capacity and resources in inclusive education via training, learning resources, research, advocacy and networking.

At another level, a series of parallel workshops about disability-inclusive education ensured that Solomon Island communities were involved with MEHRD staff in the conceptualising of what disability-inclusion meant for people in the local provinces. For example, a two-day workshop was held at Tulagi where the Premier of the Central Province stated the following in his opening speech:

> The Provincial government that I am leading, ladies and gentlemen, went through a lot of challenges, ups and down throughout the years and up this far, but yet we prioritize Education amongst other priorities. Education is everybody's business, meaning [disability] inclusive education and it should be our sole responsibility to make sure and ensure it eventuates and not by the education workers only. There should be and we should say No to discrimination in education, despite of colour, creed, race, religion, gender, and our physical [disability] status. The fact that we all vulnerable to diseases and sickness requires that we must be responsible and care for each other. Respecting, Loving and caring is next to Godliness and Godliness is next to happiness and it is happiness that we are anticipating. All these are the virtues of [disability] Inclusive Education, the education for all in the development of ourselves, our communities, province and nation as a whole. (Premier Central Province, Opening Speech, 14–16 July 2014)

This parallel workshop involved principals and teachers from early childhood, primary and secondary schools in the Central Province, Solomon Islands. The workshop was sponsored by DFAT and with QUT staff and senior MEHRD staff leading the workshop. Two QUT staff, four MEHRD staff and approximately 30 Central Province staff and members of the local community travelled by various boats and canoes to Tulagi to participate in the two-day workshop that took place in the village hall. There were no computers, overhead projectors or any technology involved in the conduct of this workshop; just very committed people in the community who wanted to support the goal that all children in their local province should attend their local school. This would contribute to a more inclusive society for children with disabilities in the Solomon Islands. The participants at this workshop considered reasons why children of different ages were out of school. Following this collaborative discussion and recording of ideas, the workshop participants developed a community action plan for addressing these issues (Appendix).

In addition, a workshop was held in Honiara, Solomon Islands, in 2014 to support professional development in the area of autism and to support teachers to make their own resources for the NLSRC. These professional development workshops were designed to further build capacity for key policymakers, personnel and educators from MEHRD and its partners.

In summary, through the professional development and community discussions in these workshops, the theory and practice of disability-inclusive education were explored and compared to the different philosophy and practice of a special education model to support children who had a disability. A western model of inclusive education cannot be imposed on a country such as Solomon Islands; so there was considerable time for discussion, reflection and shared understanding drawing

on culture and values that informed the team of stakeholders to establish the NLSRC, the disability-inclusive education workshops and ultimately contributed to the development of the policy in 2015. Knowledge about disability, learning difficulty, assessment, adjustments to curriculum and pedagogy, use of resources, inclusive models of culture, policy and practice were all important components of learning. Autism was a particular focus due to the need for better understanding of this disability. In addition, benchmarking visits to schools and disability resource centres took place in Suva, Fiji and in Australia.

Following on from the workshops described above, an Inclusive Education Policy (IEP) Committee was established in Honiara. A team from this committee ran a series of consultation workshops in four provinces, and a three-day workshop was held for the remaining provinces in Honiara in 2015. This community consultation was led by MEHRD members and informed the final version of the draft policy. This draft was widely consulted with different sections of the society in the various workshop centres in the provinces. Comments from workshop participants included:

> This is the first time I come across this part of study towards the Policy, especially the disability identification and inclusive class room environment and ability of teachers in an inclusive school and centre.

> I am happy to learn that the MEHRD is considering children with special needs/disability in its school system.

> I wonder how the curriculum of the inclusive education going to be. Is there training opportunities for interested teachers?

> … before I was scared of this subject but after this week's workshop I now realise the role that I have not played for students with disabilities in my school. With your assurance and support, I am ready to assist them more. I mean when I return from this workshop tomorrow. (Comment from a female teacher from Western Province where the first consultation workshop was held in 2013)

Other stakeholders also expressed their interest in assisting in inclusive education and disability in their work and programmes: police, nurses, NGOs, religious/church representatives, women representatives, parents, community leaders, education officers, teachers and school leaders. Common concerns raised regarded the curriculum, teacher training, building codes and resourcing, and different disabilities identified in the schools, especially in the most remote schools in the country.

Further input to the disability-inclusive education policy dialogue was provided through the DFAT-funded research (2013–2015) (Australian Development Research Award Scheme, Grant agreement no. 66446). This project was research-based and ensured a sustained focus and support for developing knowledge and building capacity to support disability-inclusive education in the Solomon Islands. As part of this project, a National Researcher from the four participating Pacific Island countries (Solomon Islands, Fiji, Vanuatu and Samoa) received training and support for using the *Index for Inclusion* (Booth and Ainscow 2002) to complete action research in two schools in each country with support from the research team from QUT and the University of the South Pacific (USP). The details of these action research projects have been reported in a monograph: *Mobilising School and Community Engagement to Implement Disability-Inclusive Education through Action Research: Fiji, Samoa, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu* (Pillay et al. 2015a). This type of grass roots level capacity development, by engaging schools and communities, demonstrated significant change in attitude towards children with disability and a shift away from expecting government to provide all support. It empowered parents and communities to get involved and influence policy development and consequently resource allocations.

Consolidating local and international disability-inclusive knowledge and practices

The final phase that consolidated learning and delivered a policy for inclusive education occurred in 2014–2015. Australian Aid funded an Australia Awards Fellowship program: Strengthening Inclusive Education Policy in the Ministry of Education (Solomon Islands) (2014–2015). The program looked at practices in inclusive education in Australia with the main goal of finalising the IEP of

the Solomon Islands. The Fellows included MEHRD staff and teachers, school principals and health professionals who worked together in Australia for five weeks with the support of QUT staff.

The programme included a leadership programme, lectures and workshops with inclusive education experts, international benchmarking activities through school/site visits, networking activities with experts, and action planning workshops which included support to write the policy and develop strategies in implementing inclusive education in the country. The project's objective was to assist consolidation of knowledge and to work as a team with resources to support the actual drafting of the policy for disability-inclusive education for the Solomon Islands. It is important to note that the five weeks of intensive work was built on a programme of visits and engagement in the provinces of Solomon Islands to ensure mutual and local understanding of what it means to be inclusive of people who have a disability as discussed in previous sections.

Internally, the members of the National Education Board (NEB) scrutinised the draft at their November 2015 meeting before approving the draft with recommendations. Externally, the draft was reviewed by Umesh Sharma and Chris Forlin from Monash University, and by Professor Suzanne Carrington from QUT. A final draft will be presented to the NEB at their April 2016 meeting. As with all Ministry of Education policies, once approved by the NEB, the relevant Cabinet/Parliament Division will lead its implementation and provide funding through its annual budget allocation. In the meantime, the Inclusive Education Committee has begun the policy socialisation process (induction workshop) at the Provincial Centres, starting with the Central Province.

The vision and goals for inclusive education were developed through community consultation and workshops in the provinces. This work was led by MEHRD and supported by DFAT-funded research and development projects.

> Our vision is that all Solomon Islanders will develop as individuals and possess knowledge, skills and attitudes needed to earn a living and to live in harmony with others and their environment. We envisage a united and progressive society in which all can live in peace and harmony with fair and equitable opportunities for a better life. We envision an education and training system responsive to its clients and efficiently managed by its stakeholders and clients. We wish to deliver quality education for everyone in Solomon Islands. (Solomon Islands Government 2015, 12)

The disability-inclusive education policy notes that the *objectives* are to improve access, quality of teaching and learning and management of resources in the Solomon Islands. Improving access refers to reliable and efficient access to better and modern learning facilities including specialised classrooms for special learners. Quality of teaching and learning refers to adopting a uniform curriculum, and providing a healthy and safe environment and quality teaching for all children and, in particular, students with diverse needs and abilities. In the context of the Solomon Islands, the responsibilities of implementation of the policy involves *stakeholders* such as the MEHRD, local education authorities, NLSRC, a newly formed National Inclusive Education Committee, school boards, parents and the schools. The Policy for Inclusive Education recognises the Solomon Islands *National Professional Standards for Teachers* as stipulated in the *Solomon Islands Teaching Services Handbook* (MEHRD 2012). In the context of the policy for disability-inclusive education, these standards are established to be a source of authority that will set an achievement level for teachers in their work with students with disability to foster positive learning. Hence, it is a way of creating uniformity in the approach to teaching. It is the responsibility of MEHRD and the NLSRC to oversee the implementation and monitoring and evaluation of the vision and objectives of the policy. The NLSRC will design a framework for implementing, monitoring and evaluating the policy each year (2016–2020).

Conclusion

The writing of the *Solomon Islands National Inclusive Education Policy* was informed through various consultations and awareness-raising workshops in a number of provinces in the Solomon

Islands and by a range of training and research programmes. The workshops and consultative meeting were supported by DFAT and the MEHRD. The policy statement captures education development and explicitly documents how disability-inclusive education approaches can be realised through research-based policy development. For Solomon Islands, the government's commitment to disability-inclusive education is demonstrated by the serious and rigorous approach adopted for this policy development. This is documented in the policy with the NLSRC and the stakeholders taking responsibility for their schools and institutions to implement the policy directives in the new *National Education Action Plan (2016–2020)*. The Solomon Islands has come a long way compared to other sister countries of the region as far as disability-inclusive education is concerned. Previously, churches and non-government organisations like the Red Cross were responsible for the schooling of children with special needs. However, through support from DFAT programs, the NLSRC has been established and the *Solomon Islands National Inclusive Education Policy* has been developed and is in the process of being formally adopted by the Government. On the whole, there is good support for the policy and its impact and the role it will play in the education system when implemented. In particular, the section of the policy dealing with professional development is well received with teachers looking forward to the implementation of teacher professional development. However, there are concerns around the resourcing and confidence of teachers, when training opportunities may not be available at the implementing stage. However, it is felt that the Government will take on the responsibility towards children with special needs in this policy.

It is clear that the collaborative bottom-up framework to progress disability-inclusion in the Pacific has been conducted with an understanding of socio-cultural contexts and the lived realities of the people. The *Solomon Islands National Inclusive Education Policy* reflects local vision and ideas about including children and people who have disabilities in the community. This case study demonstrates how a bottom-up approach of policy building values the local people, culture and context, rather than uncritically imposing models of policy and practice from elsewhere. In addition, researchers in institutions such as QUT grow in their own learning and understanding about disability-inclusion in different cultural contexts. Our experience of working alongside the staff in MEHRD over the last three years has been rich and satisfying. We have long-lasting friendships and professional associations with many of our partners.

Notes

1. MDGs are a United Nations initiative designed to meet the needs of the world's poorest people. There are eight international development goals, agreed upon by all countries and leading development institutions (United Nations 2015).
2. 'The purpose of the present Convention is to promote, protect and ensure the full and equal enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms by all persons with disabilities, and to promote respect for their inherent dignity' (United Nations 2006).
3. The BMF 'incorporates disability concerns into national policies and programmes to achieve the targets of the United Nations millennium development goals' to promote inclusion in Asia and the Pacific (United Nations 2004).

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

Funding

Notes on contributors

Professor Suzanne Carrington is currently the Head of the School of Cultural and Professional Learning at the Queensland University of Technology. She has conducted research and published in international journals in the areas of education for students who have disabilities, inclusive culture, policy and practice, learning support, autistic spectrum disorder, service learning and teaching/professional development for inclusive education. Suzanne leads a number of research and consultancy programmes in schools to develop a more inclusive approach to education for children who have disabilities and has led a number of Australian Aid Development and Research projects to progress inclusive education in developing countries such as Bhutan, Maldives, Solomon Islands, Fiji, Vanuatu, Samoa, and Indonesia.

Professor Hitendra Pillay works in the School of Cultural and Professional Learning at the Queensland University of Technology. He has a multi-disciplinary background resulting in a diverse academic research portfolio. Professor Pillay has won many national and international research grants, published over 120 academic papers and over 80 technical reports for the World Bank, Asian Development Bank and Australian Aid. Drawing on his multi-disciplinary academic research and education sector development work, his current research interest is in synthesising the fragmented research agendas into more holistic and cross disciplinary models of knowledge creation, innovation and global development.

Dr Megan Tones is a researcher in the Centre for Learning Innovation at the Queensland University of Technology. Her research interests include lifespan developmental psychology, adult learning, work engagement, industry-based training, disability inclusion, and learning and cognition. Her PhD project involved the construction of a survey to measure engagement and disengagement in learning and development goals within an organisational setting. She has presented at conferences both nationally and internationally.

Julie Nickerson is a research assistant for the Faculty of Education at the Queensland University of Technology. She has worked on the research, writing and editing of a variety of articles for publication with topics including high-stakes testing, teacher professionalism, disability-inclusive education and curriculum design.

Dr Jennifer Duke worked in an Education Ministry for over 25 years as a teacher and school leader in early childhood, primary, secondary, general and special education contexts before becoming an academic. She is a lecturer in inclusive education in the Faculty of Education at the Queensland University of Technology. Her research and teaching interests are in the area of Inclusive Education - Disability.

Benedict Esibaea is a former Director for Primary Education, now Policy Analyst in the Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development (MEHRD) in the Solomon Islands. He chaired the Inclusive Education Policy committee and led the awareness taskforce and ran workshops in the main Provinces on developing the policy. He was part of the ADRAS Research Team as National Researcher for Solomon Islands. Benedict is the parent of a deaf child and a strong advocator for inclusive education and a teacher by profession.

Ambrose Malefoasi is an Under Secretary in the Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development in the Solomon Islands. He is also responsible for the formulation of the Inclusive Education Policy for the Solomon Islands schools. His interests also include decentralisation in education.

Casper Joseph Fa'asala is a Youth and Community Development Worker by profession having graduated with a Diploma with the Commonwealth Youth Programme/South Pacific Programme. He is a former General Secretary of the Solomon Islands National Youth Congress, and Youth Affairs Officer with the Directorate of Youth Affairs, in the Department of Education and Youth, Republic of Nauru. He is a former Permanent Secretary in the Solomon Islands Government, and is the President for People with Disabilities Solomon Islands. Casper supported the Review of the National Disability Policy 2005-2010, and is the co-author in the formulation of the Solomon Islands National Disability Inclusive Education Policy 2016-2020. Casper is a Fellow with the Sydney University, having completed studies in Community Based Rehabilitation and Strengthening and as well as a Fellow in Technical Vocational Studies and Disaster Risk Management Studies with the Queensland University of Technology. Casper currently works as the Advocator in Gender and Women in Leadership with the Solomon Islands National Council of Women.

References

Booth, T., and M. Ainscow. 2002. *Index for Inclusion*. Bristol: Centre for Studies on Inclusive Education.

Carrington, S., and J. Duke. 2014. "Learning About Inclusion from Developing Countries: Using the Index for Inclusion." In *Measuring Inclusive Education*, edited by C. Forlin and T. Loreman, 189–203. Bingley: Emerald Group.

Carrington, S., J. MacArthur, A. Kearney, M. Kimber, L. Mercer, M. Morton, and G. Rutherford. 2012. "Towards an Inclusive Education for All." In *Teaching in Inclusive School Communities*, edited by S. Carrington and J. MacArthur, 3–38. Milton: John Wiley & Sons.

Centre for Disability Research and Policy. 2014. *Monitoring Manual and Menu for CBR and Other Community-Based Disability Inclusive Development Programs.* Sydney: The University of Sydney. http://sydney.edu.au/health-sciences/cdrp/projects/cbr-monitoring.shtml.

DFAT (Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade). 2015. *Development for All 2015–2020: Strategy for Strengthening Disability-Inclusive Development in Australia's Aid Program.* Barton: Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade.

Duke, J., H. Pillay, M. Tones, J. Nickerson, S. Carrington, and A. Ioelu. 2016. "A Case for Rethinking Inclusive Education Policy Creation in Developing Countries." *Compare: A Journal of Comparative and International Education.* doi:10.1080/03057925.2016.1204226.

European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education. 2009. *Key Principles for Promoting Quality in Inclusive Education: Recommendations for Policy Makers.* Odense: European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education.

Gartrell, A., L. Manderson, M. Jennaway, J. Fangalasuu, and S. Dolaiano. 2013. *Realising Rights, Protecting Freedoms: Disability, Social Inclusion and Culturally Appropriate Solutions to Disadvantage in Solomon Islands. Final Report.* http://www.disabilityrightsfund.org/resource/realising-rights-protecting-freedom-disability-social-inclusion-and-culturally-appropriate-.

Houma, S. 2010. "Key Areas of Disparity in the Provision of Education in Solomon Islands." *Commonwealth Education Partnerships* 2010. http://www.cedol.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/02/73-76-2010.pdf.

MEHRD (Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development). 2007. *Education Strategic Framework 2007–2015.* Honiara: Solomon Islands Government. http://www.paddle.usp.ac.fj/collect/paddle/index/assoc/sol031.dir/doc.pdf.

MEHRD (Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development). 2012. *Solomon Islands Teaching Services Handbook 2012.* Honiara: Solomon Islands Government.

MEHRD (Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development). 2013. *National Education Action Plan 2013–2015.* Honiara: Solomon Islands Government.

MEHRD (Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development). 2014. *2006–2013 Enrolment Data from SIEMS Database.* Honiara: IEMS division, MEHRD.

Ministry of Health and Medical Services. 2004. *Solomon Islands National Policy on Disability (2005–2010).* Honiara: Community Based Rehabilitation Programme of the Ministry of Health and Medical Services.

Nguyen, P. M., J. G. Elliot, C. Terlouw, and A. Pilot. 2009. "Neocolonialism in Education: Cooperative Learning in an Asian Context." *Comparative Education* 45 (1): 109–130.

Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat. 2009. Forum Disability Ministers' Meeting, Rarotonga, Cook Islands, October 21–23. http://www.forumsec.org/resources/uploads/attachments/documents/Pacific%20Regional%20Strategy%20on%20Disability.pdf.

PDF and APIDS (Pacific Disability Forum and Australia Pacific Islands Disability Support). 2012. *Capacity Development for Effective and Efficient Disabled Persons Organisations in Pacific Island Countries: Report on Vanuatu Component of Research.* http://www.pacificdisability.org/getattachment/Resources/Research/Vanuatu-summary-report-April-2012.pdf.aspx.

Pillay, H., S. Carrington, J. Duke, S. Chandra, J. Heeraman, M. Tones, and R. M. Joseph. 2015a. *Mobilising School and Community Engagement to Implement Disability-Inclusive Education Through Action Research: Fiji, Samoa, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu.* Brisbane: Queensland University of Technology.

Pillay, H., S. Carrington, J. Duke, S. Chandra, J. Heeraman, M. Tones, and R. M. Joseph. 2015b. *National Profiles of In-Country Capacity to Support Disability-Inclusive Education: Fiji, Samoa, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu.* Brisbane: Queensland University of Technology.

Price, P. 1994. "Developing Services for Young Children with Disabilities in South Pacific Countries." In *Beyond Basic Care: Special Education and Community Rehabilitation in Low Income Countries*, edited by R. Brown, D. Baine, and A. Neufeldt, 63–99. Toronto: Captus Press.

Sharma, U. 2012. "Inclusive and Special Education: A Way Forward in the Solomon Islands." PhD thesis, Monash University, Melbourne.

Sharma, U., T. Loreman, and S. Macanawai. 2015. "Factors Contributing to the Implementation of Inclusive Education in Pacific Island Countries." *International Journal of Inclusive Education.* doi:10.1080/13603116.2015.1081636.

Sharma, U., and O. Ng. 2014. "What has Worked for Bringing Out-of-School Children with Disabilities into Regular Schools? A Literature Review." *Disability, CBR & Inclusive Development* 25 (2): 57–74.

Solomon Islands Government. 2009. *Report on 2009 Population and Housing Census. Basic Tables and Census Description.* Volume 1. Honiara: Solomon Islands National Statistical Office, Ministry of Finance and Treasury. http://www.spc.int/prism/solomons/index.php/sinso-documents?view=download&fileId=60.

Solomon Islands Government. 2015. *Solomon Islands National Inclusive Education Policy 2016–2020.* Honiara: Solomon Islands Government.

Tavola, H. 2010. *Barriers to Education in Solomon Islands.* Honiara: Ministry of Education and Human Resource Development.

Tikly, L., and A. M. Barrett. 2011. "Social Justice, Capabilities and the Quality of Education in Low Income Countries." *International Journal of Educational Development* 31 (1): 3–14.

UNESCO. 2000. "The Dakar Framework for Action. Education for All: Meeting our Collective Commitments." World Education Forum, Dakar, April 26–28.

UNICEF. 2005. *Solomon Islands: A Situation Analysis of Children, Women and Youth.* Suva: UNICEF Pacific. http://www.unicef.org/pacificislands/Solomon_Island_Sitan_Latest_pdf.pdf.

UNICEF. 2011. *Children in Solomon Islands: 2011. An Atlas of Social Indicators.* Suva: United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF).

UNICEF. 2013. *The State of the World's Children 2013: Children with Disabilities.* New York: United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF).

United Nations. 2004. *Proposal for a Comprehensive and Integral International Convention on Promotion and Protection of the Rights and Dignity of Persons with Disabilities.* http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/enable/rights/uncontrib-escap.htm.

United Nations. 2006. *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.* Paris: United Nations.

United Nations. 2015. *Millennium Development Goals and Beyond 2015.* http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/.

Walji, F., and M. Palmer. 2012. *Improving Access to and Provision of Disability Services and Facilities for People with Disabilities in the Pacific: Disability Service and Human Resource Mapping.* Melbourne: Nossal Institute Partnership for Disability Inclusive Development.

Appendix. Examples of findings from the Tulagi two-day workshop.

Issue identified	Action plan	Responsibility
Social/family/culture (e.g. lack of education legislative material)	Develop inclusive education policy	MEHRD
	Implement and support policy	PEA
	Set up constitution for community about disability	Village/community
	Reinforce/welcome children with a disability	Church leaders
Geographical (e.g. distance of any ECE centre)	Establish and register inclusive education centres	MEHRD
	Provide materials for children with special needs	CBR
Finance	Assist in providing financial support for special needs schools	CBR
School factors	Patterns of non-attendance to be documented	School principal, teachers, students
	School records and PEA records of attendance of age-appropriate children	Village leaders, church leaders, NGOs, CBR, family
	Village leaders collaborate with schools	Village leaders, church leaders, school principals, teachers, NGOs, CBR
Teacher factors (e.g. lack of training, professionalism, ignorance)	Provide training and funds for scholarships for further study	MEHRD
	Provide avenues for training	MEHRD
	Formulate plans and endorse skill training	PEA
	Value and recognise good teaching	MEHRD, PEA
	Provide workshops to strengthen the capability of teachers	EA

Notes: PEA: Province Education Authority;
EA: Education Advisor; ECE: Early Childhood Education.