

The challenges and a new direction for including persons with disabilities in the Pacific region's education system will be discussed at a meeting of Pacific Islands Forum Directors of Education in Nadi, Fiji, 19 – 21 October.

“Inclusive education seeks to address the learning needs of all children, with a specific focus on those who are vulnerable to marginalisation and exclusion. The goal is to promote opportunities for all children to participate and be treated equally,” said Ms Andie Fong Toy, Acting Secretary General of the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat.

Ms Fong Toy said: “Our schools in the region can only be inclusive when they are working towards full participation and equality through; respect for differences, respect for different learning styles, variation in methods, open and flexible curricula and welcoming each and every child.”

During the 41st Pacific Islands Forum held in Vanuatu last year, Leaders agreed to “promote an inclusive, barrier-free, and rights-based society for people with disabilities.”

The Leaders also agreed to support the improvement of the lives and status of persons with disabilities in the Pacific region and “affirmed the need for disability inclusive development in all government programmes in Forum Island countries to address the needs of persons with disabilities – accepting such people are among the poorest and most vulnerable and face many barriers to full participation in society.”

With the theme: “Inclusive Education for all in the Pacific Forum Island Countries”, the meeting will discuss:

- The vision, experiences, practices and challenges of Inclusive Education globally and in Pacific countries;
- Identify key strategies needed for wider implementation of inclusive practices, and its implication for children with disabilities in Forum Island Countries;
- Discuss, explore and investigate future national and regional strategies and actions aimed at strengthening Inclusive Education within the framework of the Education for All initiative; and
- Recommend the way forward in regards to charting a new direction for Special Needs Education in the region.

The three-day meeting coordinated by the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat is funded by Australia's international development assistance agency, AusAID and supported by UNICEF.