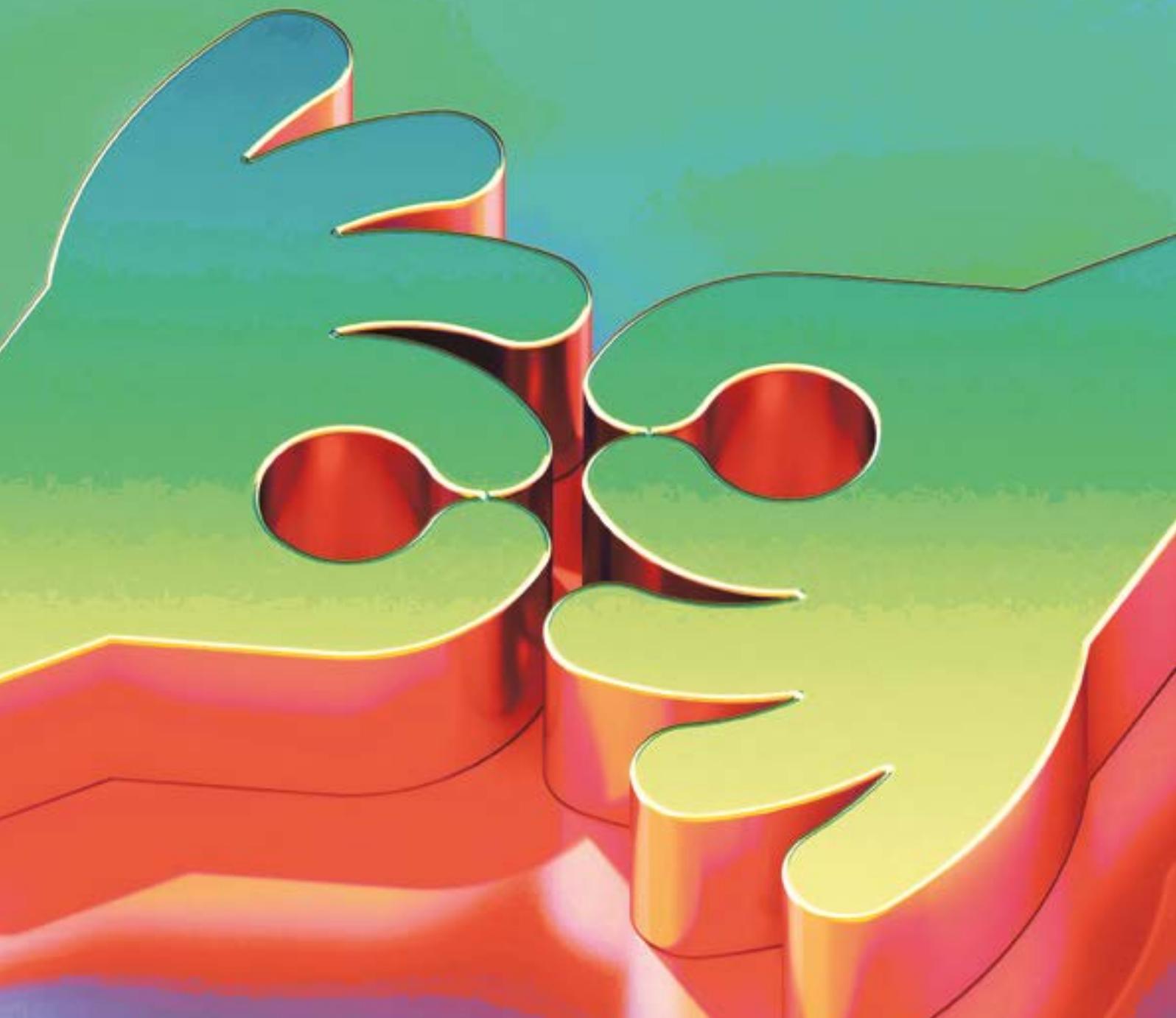


Situation Analysis
Sign Language
in Vanuatu



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Vanuatu Skills Partnership promotes economic and social change through inclusive skills development

ACRONYM LIST

ANSNIC	Asociación Nacional de Sordos de Nicaragua
Auslan	Australian Sign Language
CRPD	United Nations Convention of the Rights of People with Disabilities
DPO	Disabled People's Organisation
FAD	Fiji Association of the Deaf
IFHOH	International Federation of Hard of Hearing
ISN	Idioma de Señas de Nicaragua
MIT	Massachusetts Institute of Technology
MoET	Ministry of Education and Training
NSDP	National Sustainable Development Plan
NZSL	New Zealand Sign Language
PDF	Pacific Disability Forum
PNGSL	PNG Sign Language
PVTC	Pacific Vocational Training College
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
SFA	Sanma Frangipani Association
SISL	Solomon Islands Association of the Deaf and Solomon Island Sign Language
TSSL	Timor-Leste Sign Language
TVET	Technical and Vocational Education and Training
UN	United Nations
UNESCAP	United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific
VAC	Vanuatu Agriculture College
VCSDN	Vanuatu Civil Society Disability Network
VDPA	Vanuatu Disability Promotion and Advocacy Association
VIT	Vanuatu Institute of Technology
VSA	Volunteer Services Abroad
VSPD	Vanuatu Society of People with Disability
WASLI	World Association of Sign Language Interpreters
WFD	World Federation of the Deaf
WHO	World Health Organisation

Introduction

Sign language is critical in order to enable deaf and hard of hearing people to have equitable access to their communities. Language is a social practice that is used to create and represent meanings and enables communication with others. Language is a way of seeing, understanding and communicating about the world and each language user uses their language differently to do this.

Sign language is an important mechanism through which deaf and hard of hearing people claim their rights. However, as in several Pacific countries, knowledge and use of sign language across Vanuatu is limited, which results in the exclusion of deaf and hard of hearing people from many areas of life. Without including deaf and hard of hearing people, the Sustainable Development Goals and more specifically, Vanuatu's National Sustainable Development Plan, will not be achieved.

Across the Pacific, practices are emerging to address this gap, however these are in their early stages. In Vanuatu, policy commitments have been made to develop a national sign language, and there are good practices in the post-school education and training sector that could be learned from.

Purpose

The purpose of this situation analysis was to contribute to improved opportunities for deaf people and people with communication difficulties to realise their rights to equitable participation through greater access to nationally agreed and accepted sign language in Vanuatu.

The situation analysis sought to explore:

- Current international, national and regional commitments to the strengthening of sign language education, providing examples of good regional and global practices which could inform efforts in the Vanuatu context;
- The experiences of both mainstream skills development programs and schools that have included deaf people, including the barriers and enablers of inclusion;
- The situation of deaf people and people with communication difficulties and their families in Vanuatu, through examination of existing data / reports and discussion with key informants about lived experiences;
- Current and past services, programs and efforts which support sign language education and uptake in Vanuatu; and
- Perceived barriers to the establishment and uptake of sign language.

The analysis sought to provide short, medium and long-term recommendations for future action by Government, civil society and training providers to improve access to sign language across Vanuatu.

Approach

The situation analysis was undertaken between October 2017 and February 2018 and included a desk review of existing policies and documents, and a visit to Vanuatu. Interviews and focus groups were conducted with key stakeholders in Melbourne, Port Vila, Santo and Gaua in Vanuatu. Those involved included:

- Approximately 50 deaf and hard of hearing individuals and approximately 35 of their family members;
- Government representatives;
- Civil society representatives;
- Service providers; and
- Training providers.

An Aide Memoire containing key preliminary findings and recommendations was presented to representatives of the Ministry of Education and Training, Ministry of Justice and Community Services, Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and Vanuatu Skills Partnership.

Key findings

The situation analysis highlighted a significant lack of sign language being used, and very few sign interpreters available, which has a detrimental effect on access to education, employment and socialisation opportunities for people who are deaf or hard of hearing.

There is a stark need for the development of sign language, and opportunities to be created for deaf and hard of hearing people to unite and create their community, language and culture. Sign language will increase opportunities for currently marginalised deaf and hard of hearing people to communicate, develop social skills, gain an education, participate in cultural and social life, gain access to paid work and participate in political processes amongst many other rights. A nationally recognised sign language will also allow for the development of sign language interpreters who will be communication bridges between hearing and deaf or hard of hearing people.

According to the World Federation of the Deaf, the transplanting of another international sign language to Vanuatu is not recommended. Sign languages must be influenced by the culture, heritage and traditions of their own country. To develop a sign language that is faithful to the Vanuatu context, culture and languages, stakeholders such as Government, civil society, service providers and, importantly, deaf and hard of hearing people and their families will need to work together to address some key challenges moving forward.

The establishment of sign language will not alone lead to deaf and hard of hearing people experiencing equitable access to life opportunities and improved wellbeing; others in their lives, such as family members, need to be able to communicate with them too. Sign language interpreters are important resources, who can enable equitable access to school, training, health services, justice and social and cultural opportunities.

Findings are summarized as follows.

GAPS:

- Due to the lack of services available to diagnose deafness, language acquisition is delayed for children who are deaf or hard of hearing.
- The few services which have been made available to map home signs and teach sign language have been limited to the intermittent engagement of international volunteers. As a result, many deaf and hard of hearing people lack language and communication skills, which limits their participation in their communities, and leads to isolation.
- There is no nationally agreed sign language in Vanuatu.
- There are no qualified sign language interpreters resulting in a reliance on family members as informal interpreters to support participation which affects independence and, in some cases, affects access to justice.
- Deaf and hard of hearing people experience significant negative attitudes and stigma, which limits their access to church, communities and school.
- Families frequently experience grief about family members who cannot communicate with others, and are concerned for the deaf or hard of hearing person's future and wellbeing.
- People who are deaf and hard of hearing experience significant barriers to enrolling in and attending educational institutes with some schools either denying enrolment or expelling students, and some families are unaware of their right to education or the ability of deaf and hard of hearing children to learn.
- Where deaf and hard of hearing students are enrolled in school, a lack of sign language or other communication modalities, and a lack of educational supports such as teacher aides or sign language interpreters, severely limit their learning.
- Access to post-school education and training is sometimes challenging for deaf and hard of hearing youth, due to challenges experienced by trainers who must adapt to include deaf or hard of hearing persons in their class.
- Deaf and hard of hearing people face barriers in accessing paid work and the majority of those interviewed who were working, worked for their families. Of those who were working in paid employment, they did not socialise with their workmates.



Vanessa, a deaf Skills Centre client from Santo, produced dresses for sale following participation in sewing skills development activities

Promising practices:

- A Deaf Camp held in October 2017 enabled deaf and hard of hearing people to share a safe space where they were able to initiate development of a small, fledging community.
- The Vanuatu Civil Society Disability Network supports deaf representation, currently comprised of an individual deaf member.
- The Ministry of Education and Training has plans to establish a Sign Language Working Group.
- Matafanga School in Gaua has a Quality Assurance Officer / Principal who teaches Basic English for 45 minutes every school day and up to 5-10 signs a week to three deaf girls. The school is actively seeking deaf students to join.
- Vanuatu Skills Partnership, through the provincial Skills Centres, is responsible for working with key government and non-government stakeholders to facilitate improved access to quality, relevant training, and has made significant investments to enable deaf and hard of hearing people to access post-school education and training opportunities. Vanuatu Skills Partnership supports post-school education and training providers to use visual aids, family members as interpreters and supports teachers to teach deaf and hard of hearing students. Two deaf students have graduated from the Vanuatu Institute of Technology and are now employed. However, the lack of access to primary education means many deaf and hard of hearing youth lack the literacy and numeracy requisites needed to enrol in vocational skills training programs.
- Multiple policies including the Inclusive Education policy reference the need to establish sign language, and disability inclusion appears across the National Sustainable Development Plan.

Recommendations:

1. Creating Spaces and Supporting Self-Advocacy

Create safe spaces for deaf and hard of hearing people to meet and socialise in order to start developing a Deaf community. This will encourage the organic development of a locally relevant sign language. Increasing and strengthening deaf-specific initiatives, such as the deaf camp held in Santo in 2017, will enable deaf and hard of hearing people to engage with their peers, improve their confidence, and germinate the development of a local sign language as well as establish a self-advocacy mechanism.

2. Sign Language Development

Develop a national sign language, led by deaf and hard of hearing ni-Vanuatu. Given the current lack of language among ni-Vanuatu deaf people, further exploration will be required to ensure a rights-based and culturally and contextually appropriate approach to the development of a sign language that can be used nationally. Further, an expert in sign language linguistics and/ or the Fiji Association of the Deaf could be engaged to work with interested organisations to run national consultation workshops with deaf and hard of hearing people and their families to determine the next steps. This work should be done in line with or in cooperation with the World Federation of the Deaf.

Given the cultural and geographic diversity of Vanuatu, there is also a need to involve deaf people and their families from different geographical areas, languages and cultures, and to accommodate cultural differences which exist locally (including home signs) in order to successfully develop a national sign language.

3. Deaf Resource Centre

Consider the establishment of a Deaf Resource Centre where deaf people can come to develop their sign language and learn from each other. This could also eventually be a place where families, teachers and other interested people could learn sign language. In addition, training to become sign language interpreters could be provided in the future by deaf ni-Vanuatu in partnership with the World Association of Sign Language Interpreters.

4. Policy and Legal Changes

Address the terminology used to describe deaf and hard of hearing people, especially in legal and policy frameworks within organisations, Disabled People's Organisations and government by updating the legislation to reflect the language recommended by the World Federation of the Deaf and the International Federation of Hard of Hearing and ensuring that policies clearly outline provisions for reasonable accommodation.

5. Advocacy and Awareness Raising in the Community

Active inclusion of deaf and hard of hearing people in daily community activities will reduce stigma and enable them to become valued and equal members of their communities. Including deaf and hard of hearing people in disability awareness-raising and advocacy efforts and celebrating specific events such as the International Day of Sign Languages on September 23, would help improve awareness of the rights of deaf and hard of hearing people, and the importance of sign language.

6. Increasing Resources and Support Services for Post-School Education

Increasing resources and support services for post-school education and training providers will improve the enrolment, retention and learning outcomes for deaf and hard of hearing students. This could include professional development for trainers, teacher's aides, sign interpreters and visual and practical resources which will enable the student to learn alongside their peers.

7. Cross Sectoral Inclusion of Deaf and Hard of Hearing People

Resourcing further studies to explore the enablers and barriers experienced by deaf and hard of hearing people and their families in accessing other essential mainstream and specialised services will be the first step towards broader inclusion. Key sectors of concern include education, early identification services, health services and justice services. These are critical to the participation and future of the deaf and hard of hearing people and their families.

Conclusions

- There is an urgent need for the development of sign language, beginning with the creation of opportunities for deaf and hard of hearing people to unite and organically create their community, language and culture.
- Sign language needs to be developed locally, and influenced by the culture, heritage and traditions of its own country.
- To develop a sign language that is faithful to the Vanuatu context, stakeholders including Government, civil society, service providers and, importantly, deaf and hard of hearing people and their families will need to work together to address some key challenges moving forward.
- With 83 islands in Vanuatu it will be important to strategise how to enable deaf people to gather together in order to develop a language which can be easily shared. It will also be necessary to allow time for the diversity of languages and cultures in Vanuatu to inform understanding and agreement on sign language development.
- A nationally recognised sign language will allow for the development of sign language interpreters who will be bridges of communication between hearing and deaf and hard of hearing people, enabling access to educational and work opportunities, and engagement in public and private spaces.
- Sign language will increase opportunities for marginalised deaf and hard of hearing people to communicate, develop social skills, gain an education, participate in cultural and social life, gain access to paid work and participate in political processes.
- Vanuatu has already demonstrated inclusive practices through the work of the Vanuatu Skills Partnership and others, and while existing good practices have been identified, further study is needed within each sector to identify the main barriers and facilitators of inclusion.
- While this study focused on access to sign language to support the inclusion of deaf and hard of hearing people in skills development, broader systemic issues play a key role in creating barriers for deaf and hard of hearing people, particularly in the early years. Access to early diagnosis and intervention programs and models of education that support deaf education, as well as access to justice, are particularly critical. These require further exploration.



Vanessa now works in the Northern Provincial Hospital kitchen after completing her Certificate in Culinary Arts at VIT

Recognising that people with disabilities comprise between 5% and 12% of Vanuatu's population and face barriers to participation in education and skills development, the Vanuatu Skills for Economic Growth Program (now known as the Vanuatu Skills Partnership) developed the Vanuatu Technical and Vocational Education and Training Sector Disability Inclusion Strategy in 2013. Implementation of this strategy led to the development of the *National Disability Inclusion Policy for the Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) Sector 2016 – 2020*.

Through implementation of this policy, it was identified that there was a need to further analyse the situation of ni-Vanuatu deaf people and people with communication difficulties (referred to as Deaf and Hard of Hearing people), to explore whether they were realising their rights to equitable participation in society through greater access to a nationally recognised sign language.

The purpose of this situation analysis was to contribute to improved opportunities for deaf people and people with communication difficulties to realise their rights to equitable participation through greater access to nationally agreed and accepted sign language in Vanuatu.

The situation analysis sought to explore:

- Current international, national and regional commitments to the strengthening of sign language education, providing examples of good regional and global practices which could inform efforts in the Vanuatu context;
- The experiences of both mainstream skills development programs and schools that have included deaf people, in particular the barriers and enablers of inclusion;
- The situation of deaf people and people with communication difficulties and their families in Vanuatu, through examination of existing data / reports and discussion with key informants about lived experiences;
- Current and past services, programs and efforts which support sign language education and uptake in Vanuatu; and
- Perceived barriers to the establishment and uptake of sign language.

The analysis sought to provide short, medium and long-term recommendations for future action by Government, civil society and training providers to improve access to sign language across Vanuatu.

Language is a social tool.¹ It is a social practice that is used to create and represent meanings, and shapes communication.² Language is a way of seeing, understanding and communicating about the world and each language user uses their language differently to do this. People use language for purposeful communication, and this understanding sees a language not simply as a body of knowledge to be learnt but as a social practice in which to participate.³

When understood in this context, it is clear that it is not enough to provide deaf and hard of hearing people with sign language. Family members, friends and others must be able to communicate with deaf and hard of hearing through sign language. It is important that sign language interpreters are available, in order to enable deaf and hard of hearing people to engage with the wider community in places where sign language is not understood and where the hearing person may have limited exposure to deaf or hard of hearing people, such as health facilities, post school educational and training institutes, banks and faith communities. These sign language interpreters must be trained and qualified in order to follow ethics which outline the importance of confidentiality, impartiality and empowerment.

Globally, best practice in educational institutes indicates that teachers must be qualified and able to sign fluently if the deaf or hard of hearing child is not attending a school taught by deaf and fluent signing teachers. This is in order to ensure that the deaf or hard of hearing child is accessing the same content as other children. Where this is not possible, access to qualified sign interpreters is essential.

This situation analysis was undertaken between October 2017 and February 2018 and included a desk review of existing policies and documents and a nine-day trip to Vanuatu visiting Port Vila, Santo and Gaua.

This report documents the key findings and recommendations relevant to sign language in Vanuatu. It begins by summarising the methodology and limitations of this situation analysis, followed by a brief on the global and regional contexts relevant to sign language which inform current and future possibilities with respect to developing a national sign language. Finally, it describes the Vanuatu context as informed by the literature review and, importantly, ni-Vanuatu and other stakeholders who were interviewed during the information gathering period, and offers recommendations for action by Government, civil society and training providers to improve access to a nationally agreed sign language across Vanuatu.

Preliminary findings from the situation analysis were documented in an Aide Memoire and presented to stakeholders in Efate on 2 November 2017.

Key informant interviews and focus groups were conducted with approximately 50 deaf and hard of hearing individuals, approximately 35 members of their families, and 16 other stakeholders (see Annex B for a list of key informants) during a nine day in-country visit to Port Vila, Santo and Gaua. These locations were chosen for the known presence of deaf people and sign language.

PROCESS

Interviews were semi-structured, focusing on gathering qualitative data. Tools used to facilitate communication included the sign language mapping book made by a previous international volunteer from Volunteer Service Abroad (VSA) working with Sanma Frangipani Association (SFA) in 2011-2012, a photo library (see Annex C) and a small, portable whiteboard and marker to assist in visual and written information, such as writing names or drawing images that were relevant to the topic at hand.

The interviews with deaf people were mostly conducted with a family member present. The lead interviewer who is Deaf would start the interview with the deaf person, using basic gestures to determine the baseline of communication, and to identify the interviewee's capacity to respond. In most cases, the interview continued with the family member in Bislama with another interviewer translating the lead interviewer's questions. In some interviews, the deaf person could understand simple Bislama, and therefore lip-read the Bislama-speaking interviewer, and respond in Bislama.

The team also observed deaf people interacting with each other at the Deaf Camp and at Vanuatu Society for People with Disability (VSPD) when participants were waiting to be interviewed. These interactions enabled the team to see how a shared space might create opportunities for development of the foundations of language, and subsequently, a Deaf community and culture.

Key informant interviews were also conducted face to face and via Skype with stakeholders in Melbourne, Port Vila, Santo and Gaua. Key informant interviews and focus groups were conducted with representatives of government, civil society, service providers and training providers (see Annex B). These consultations also took a semi-structured approach.

LIMITATIONS AND STRENGTHS

Due to the limited timeframe for the situation analysis, it was difficult to collect truly representative data from deaf and hard of hearing people across Vanuatu. The scope of the situation analysis is unprecedented in Vanuatu and indeed across the Pacific, which meant a new framework was required to guide the work.

Information and studies on deafness in the Pacific context are scarce, and the Deaf community is still emerging in Pacific Island Countries. Identifying current practices from neighbouring countries relied on internet searches for information, which was limited and often outdated.

More specifically, limitations in gathering information within Vanuatu included the following:

- Most of the deaf people interviewed were happy to be interviewed, but due to communication difficulties, there were limitations in understanding and gaining informed consent. To address this, the team ensured interviews remained within the parameters of what the interviewees were understood to have consented to.
- Communication with most deaf people was limited, as very few had any sign language. A small number of deaf people could lip-read Bislama. Many deaf people responded to body language cues from the interviewer and responded by reciprocating the body language even when they did not understand. For example, smiling and nodding in response to the interviewer smiling and nodding.



Deaf and hard of hearing people were assisted to participate in consultations through non-verbal activities such as drawing

- Vanuatu Society of People with Disability was responsible for organising all meetings in Vanuatu, and they in turn relied on local partners including Disabled Peoples Organisations to support them in identifying deaf and hard of hearing people, and people with communication difficulties. While the team was able to meet with many Deaf people, the team only met with two people with communication impairments, and two people who would be considered hard of hearing, which is a small sample.
 - The team did not meet with any deafblind people as none had been identified by stakeholders. It is recognised that the situation would be significantly more difficult for this group of people.
 - Due to conflicting schedules, the team was unable to meet with some stakeholders identified in the Terms of Reference such as the Vanuatu Disability Promotion and Advocacy Association, Lister Adventist Training Institute, Vanuatu Chamber of Commerce, Pacific Vocational Training College, Sanma Skills Centre and Torba Skills Centre while in country. However, an email summary from Torba Skills Centre was received when back in Australia.
 - Due to the Deaf Camp unexpectedly finishing a day early, the team was only able to spend one afternoon with deaf participants and their families.
 - It was difficult to find and meet with deaf and hard of hearing people who were engaged in paid work, as their numbers were limited. Stakeholders who knew of them had no way of contacting them within the short amount of time available in each location.
 - Although part of the scoping was to determine accessibility to mainstream skills development programs, access to education from kindergarten emerged as a strong theme in most interviews with deaf people and their families. Accessing training was viewed as requiring literacy and numeracy, which is learned in primary school. As a result, the key findings section focuses significantly on access to school.
 - The team did not have time to visit all provinces. The team visited three islands – Efate, Santo and Gaua. These locations were selected due to the presence of deaf people and sign language in each, however the findings are not an accurate portrayal of the situation of all deaf and hard of hearing people in Vanuatu, especially in more rural and isolated areas.
 - Gender was not considered in this situation analysis although the gender gap in outcomes for people with disabilities is recognized internationally.
- Strengths of this situation analysis include the following:
- It was clear that people were significantly more comfortable with the ni-Vanuatu interviewer than with the expatriate members of the team. The presence of a ni-Vanuatu interviewer may have allowed informants to share more than what would have been shared with just an expatriate team.
 - One of the interviewers identifies as Deaf, is fluent in Auslan (Australian Sign Language) and is able to communicate in International Sign. This interviewer was able to communicate with the deaf interviewees using visual mediums.
 - Thanks to existing networks in Vanuatu – including Vanuatu Society for People with Disability – the team was able to find and interview at least 50 deaf and hard of hearing in people in a limited amount of time.
 - Vanuatu Skills Partnership recognised that deaf and hard of hearing people experience significant barriers to inclusion and dedicated funds for five people from Vanuatu and Australia to undertake the situation analysis in three locations.

Global Context

CURRENT SITUATION

The World Health Organisation (WHO) states that there are 360 million people worldwide who have disabling hearing conditions, which is approximately 5.3% of the global population, and 32 million of those are children.⁴ Most people with disabling hearing loss live in low- and middle-income countries.⁵

Of the 70 million Deaf people around the world, 56 million – or 80 per cent – receive no education. This rate is higher for Deaf people living in developing countries, and for Deaf women and girls.⁶ Only 2% of Deaf children in developing countries receive a quality education that includes sign language. This figure is likely to be lower in the Pacific. Deaf people are often un- or under-employed, with this lost productivity costing the global economy \$105 billion annually.⁷

Hearing loss adversely affects social and economic development in communities and countries.⁸ These negative impacts arise from the interaction of hearing loss with the wider social environment and can be significantly mitigated through early identification and appropriate management of hearing problems⁹ or through the widespread use of sign language. Improving access to education and vocational rehabilitation services and raising awareness especially among employers about the needs of workers with hearing loss, will decrease unemployment rates for people with hearing loss.¹⁰

Deaf women and girls are at heightened risk of sexual abuse and violence, but they are rarely able to access shelters or represented in court due to an absence of sign language or interpreters.¹¹ Deaf people without shared sign language experience isolation, often leading to mental health issues. Around one quarter of all Deaf people experience additional, psychosocial disability.¹²

There is a worldwide shortage in trained, qualified and ethical sign interpreters¹³ and highly trained Teachers of the Deaf.¹⁴ This means that deaf and hard of hearing people are unable to engage fully with hearing people in everyday situations.

INTERNATIONAL FRAMEWORKS AND COMMITMENTS

The Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities (CRPD), which Vanuatu ratified in 2008, recognises that sign languages are equal in status to spoken languages and should be respected and promoted (Articles 2, 9 and 21). It recognises that people should have the freedom to express, state their opinion and have access to information in their chosen form of communication (Article 21) and states that deaf children have a right to fully develop their cultural and linguistic identity (Article 30).¹⁵

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) have an overarching theme of Leave No One Behind and outline the importance of people with disabilities accessing education and vocational training; full and productive employment with equal pay; equal social, economic and political inclusion; and universal access to safe, inclusive and accessible public spaces.

The Special Rapporteur on Disability for the CRPD recognises through reports that deaf and deafblind people are more likely to be forgotten in policy making, especially when disability is considered otherwise.¹⁶ Reporting also highlights the priority for sign language and sign language interpretation as a critical mechanism for greater access to all rights for Deaf and Hard of Hearing people.

The Special Rapporteur on Education for the CRPD also recognises that sign language is vital to the education and training of deaf and hard of hearing children and that deaf learners will need to learn sign language at the beginning of their education.¹⁷

* Themes include: access to rights-based support; disability-inclusive policies; the rights of persons with disabilities to social protection; and sexual and reproductive health and rights of girls and young women with disabilities.



Peter has been supported by the Vanuatu Skills Partnership to become an award-winning handicraft producer

FINDINGS

KEY INTERNATIONAL PLAYERS

The World Federation of the Deaf (WFD) is an international non-governmental organisation that acts as a peak body for national associations of Deaf people and advocates at the United Nations (UN) level for human rights and equal opportunities for Deaf people globally.¹⁸ WFD is also a member and the current chair of the International Disability Alliance, the international peak body of Disabled Persons Organisations.

The International Federation of Hard of Hearing (IFHOH) is an international non-governmental organisation that acts as a peak body for national associations of and for hard of hearing and late deafened people, and works to promote greater understanding of hearing loss issues and to improve access for hard of hearing people worldwide.¹⁹

The World Association of Sign Language Interpreters (WASLI) is committed to advancing the profession of sign language interpreting worldwide and supports the establishment of national associations of sign language interpreters; provides support networks, and aims to work in partnership with Deaf and Deafblind associations on sign language interpreting issues.²⁰

RECOMMENDED MODELS OF PRACTICE

Sign Language

The WFD outlines that sign language has an equal status to spoken languages and governments must implement programs to support the teaching of sign language to family members and carers of deaf children, in co-operation with Deaf communities and deaf sign language teachers. It identifies that early exposure to sign language and multilingualism, combined with strong family support for sign languages, best prepares deaf children for their future effective participation in society.²¹

The WFD also identifies that the ability to communicate effectively in sign language, and to read and write the language(s) of the country they live in, is crucial for the ability of Deaf people to participate effectively in society. It outlines that Deaf people, teachers of the Deaf, sign language interpreters, hearing parents of Deaf children and other people with a need to communicate with Deaf people will benefit from a sign language dictionary. A dictionary makes many of the signs of a particular sign language more accessible to people beyond the signing community and also serves as documentation of a sign language. Legal recognition is not necessary for sign language dictionaries to be developed, but a dictionary can be used as a tool to show the existence of a language that needs legal recognition and protection.²²

Approximately 95% of deaf and hard of hearing people are born to hearing parents who usually do not know sign language or anything about Deaf culture.²³ In a resource-rich environment early intervention enables parents to decide on amplification strategies (i.e. hearing aids, cochlear implants), language choices (i.e. sign language, oral methods*) and educational strategies. The WFD recommends that the best model for language and social skill development is a bilingual-bicultural model where the deaf or hard of hearing child learns sign language with their family, and learns the local language concurrently.²⁴ This involves interacting with older Deaf peers who act as role models and simultaneously expose the family to Deaf culture.

It is essential that families learn sign language with their deaf child so that families have an active role in communicating with their child in sign language. Deaf children need dependable access to high quality communication partners to engage in meaningful sign language activities. Research shows parents learning a sign language at the same time as their deaf child can develop communicative competence in sign language²⁵ and that consistent exposure to sign language at a young age is beneficial.²⁶

Deaf education

The CRPD clearly stipulates that ‘...the education of persons, and in particular children, who are blind, deaf or deafblind, is delivered in the most appropriate languages and modes and means of communication for the individual, and in environments which maximise academic and social development. (...) In order to help ensure the realisation of this right, State Parties shall take appropriate measures to employ teachers, including teachers with disabilities, who are qualified in sign language...’ (Article 24).²⁷

It also outlines that accommodations include subjects taught in sign language, and that States parties must remove barriers and promote accessibility and availability of inclusive opportunities for persons with disabilities to participate on an equal basis with others in play, recreation and sports in the school system and in extracurricular activities, including in other educational environments. This includes access to cultural life and to develop and utilize their creative, artistic and intellectual potential, for their own benefit and for the enrichment of society, both within and outside formal school settings.

The CRPD goes on to state that persons with disabilities are entitled to recognition of their specific cultural and linguistic identity, including sign languages and deaf culture. In addition, hard-of-hearing students should have access to quality speech therapy services, induction loop technology and captioning.

The WFD states that best practice for Deaf children is full access to an education in their native sign language, regardless of any technological devices they may use. Even when deaf children have access to education there may be barriers in place – including lack of trained teachers, lack of teachers who are fluent in sign language and the lack of a learning environment and pedagogy that is conducive to effective learning by deaf students. Literacy and language does not equal speech and spoken communication. Language development must precede everything else, speech development can occur later.²⁸ The WFD²⁹ also articulates that it is not possible to use sign language interpreters without knowing sign language.

* Oral method means to use only speech and lipreading strategies.

INCLUSIVE EDUCATION FOR DEAF AND HARD OF HEARING CHILDREN

Many countries are shifting their focus from special/segregated education to inclusive education, by encouragement of the Disabled People’s Organisation (DPO) in their countries who are prompted by the CRPD. However, the relationship between special education and inclusive education remains extraordinarily complex. For example, it is necessary for deaf learners to learn sign language at the beginning of their education if they do not have access to the language at an earlier age. Such learning might take place by way of separation from hearing children, even in a school committed to inclusion which means the goal of inclusion might be thwarted.³⁰

Another challenge arises when “integration” is confused with “inclusion”: where learners with disabilities are merely placed in mainstream schools without the additional support required to accommodate their individual needs. The “integration” of learners with disabilities without full inclusion can lead to isolation of the learner and ultimately, presents obstacles to meeting the education needs of all learners.³¹

The inclusion model may work for hard of hearing students, if they have access to hearing aids or cochlear implants, if the classroom is quiet, and if teacher’s aides are available.³² However, as deaf people are a culturally and linguistically diverse group, the WFD recommends that deaf children attend a school with their deaf peers, where they are taught in their native sign language by Deaf teachers in order to best facilitate academic and social development.³³ Studies suggest that deaf children attending bilingual schools achieve better outcomes compared to deaf children attending school with a teaching aide.³⁴ This is because hearing peers also learn sign in the bilingual school. Sign language in bilingual schools is not just a device to support the learning of spoken language, but one of the school’s languages actively used by children and teachers inside and outside the classroom.³⁵

Deaf and hard of hearing children who are mainstreamed in inclusive schools, especially where they may be the only deaf person in the classroom, or even in the school report having increased social isolation, loneliness, and decreased identity and wellbeing.³⁶ They also tend to suffer more academically and interact less with their hearing peers in the classroom. Studies have also found that even having a fluent interpreter in the room does not provide the deaf student with full and equitable access to the classroom or lesson content³⁷. Having a teacher aide in the classroom has been demonstrated to be ineffective in promoting social ability or educational achievements in deaf students³⁸.

Challenges to effectively placing a deaf or hard of hearing child in a classroom with their hearing peers and a sign language interpreter present are³⁹:

- **Lag time between the spoken message and the interpreted message.** This prevents the deaf student from equally participating, and may leave the student unable to respond, or in danger of responding inappropriately, embarrassing themselves and others.
- **Rapid rate of discussion or presentation which occurs when many speakers are involved in a lively discussion.** As speakers jump in and out of a discussion very quickly, the message that comes through the interpreter is one long, undifferentiated string of words, without the visual breaking of looking from speaker to speaker.
- **Space.** Deaf students need to sit in areas of the classroom that maximize the range of their visual field; they must be able to see the instructor, the blackboard, and the interpreter all at once. This arrangement is highly dependent on the cooperation of the teacher, interpreter, and seating arrangement. As the teacher moves around the room, an extra challenge is created as the deaf student attempts to watch the teacher for expression and body language cues and the interpreter for content.

- **Social skills and relationship development.**

Though the obvious result of not sharing a language is confusion, the barrier of language also prevents deaf students from participating in class relationship building. The light-hearted joking or teasing that may create a warm and comfortable learning environment for hearing students may be confusing to deaf students. In a speaking classroom, people may laugh at jokes that are funny in spoken language but are not funny in sign language. The jokes either are heavily dependent on spoken language, or they rely on a particular tone of voice to be conveyed.

Studies have found that hearing students often describe their deaf peers in the classroom as antisocial or unlikeable⁴⁰, which may be due to not having a shared language. One of the major issues for deaf and hard of hearing students in mainstream settings is that there is no exposure to deaf peers and no access to deaf culture, which impacts on their social identity⁴¹. In contrast, deaf and hard of hearing students who attend schools with their deaf and hard of hearing peers in the same classroom have a stronger identity and do better academically. They also have increased language.⁴²

The following outlines a properly inclusive classroom for deaf students in a wholly inclusive school⁴³ in a high-income country with an established education system based on years of experience. This could provide a useful vision for Vanuatu in understanding what would be necessary to ensure deaf and hard of hearing students are succeeding academically alongside their hearing peers, but would need to be tested to ascertain whether it fits the Vanuatu system:

- **A whole school approach**, where all staff in a school share responsibility for all students and where the school promotes positive attitudes to deafness and deaf people, ensuring that deaf students feel valued members of the community.

- **Regular opportunities for successful interaction** between deaf and hearing students, whether in mainstream schools and classes or in other contexts; and regular opportunities for deaf students to interact with other deaf students and make deaf friends.

- **An effective communication environment** according to the competencies and needs of the deaf student.

- Access for deaf students to the formal curriculum through a **flexible response to individual need**, including effective strategies to meet the needs of all students, led by teachers in mainstream contexts.

- Teachers (mainstream and specialist) and learning assistants who have the necessary **knowledge, skills and attitudes** to effectively teach and support deaf students.

- **The involvement of deaf students in extracurricular activities**, providing them with opportunities to develop leisure interests and social skills and to make friends with hearing and deaf students.

- Access for deaf students to **Deaf culture and d/Deaf adult role models**;

- **The involvement of deaf students in decisions that affect them**, for example, over educational placement and curriculum; and the involvement of parents in decisions that affect their children, for example, over educational placement and curriculum.

- **The involvement of deaf adults, including members of the Deaf community, in policy making** for deaf children.

- High academic and non-academic **achievement** for deaf children.

In terms of education, Vanuatu shares similar complexities with Nicaragua, Central America. Teachers receive low wages, schools have limited resources and deaf and hard of hearing people are isolated from each other and their peers in the classroom.

Nicaragua established centres for special education in the 1970s. One school had a large number of deaf children attending. Prior to these schools, deaf people were largely isolated from each other and used basic home signs, but the presence of many deaf people in one school provided the conditions necessary for a language to be developed. A vocational school for deaf adolescents opened in the area in 1980 and by 1983, there was over 400 deaf students enrolled in the two schools. However, classes were only taught in Spanish, relying on lip-reading and very basic fingerspelling, and were unsuccessful.

The deaf children remained linguistically disconnected from their teachers, but the schoolyard, the street, and the school bus provided fertile ground for them to communicate with each other. By combining gestures and elements of their home-sign systems, a pidgin-like form and a creole-like language rapidly emerged. These children were creating their own language.

Staff at the school, unaware of the development of this new language, saw the children's gesturing as mime and as a failure to acquire Spanish. Unable to understand what the children were saying to each other, they asked for outside help. The Nicaraguan Ministry of Education contracted an American Sign Language linguist to assist. While analysing the language, the linguist noticed that the younger children had taken the pidgin-like form used by the older children to a higher level of complexity, with verb agreement and other conventions of grammar. This more complex sign language is now known as Idioma de Señas de Nicaragua (ISN).

There is now a Deaf Association - Asociación Nacional de Sordos de Nicaragua (ANSNIC), and six Deaf faith ministries in the capital city. Nicaraguan Sign Language has been recognised and documented, and is used in deaf classrooms.

Acceptance of deaf people has grown in the country, although it is estimated that only 3,000 of the 600,000 deaf people in Nicaragua have access to Nicaraguan Sign Language. The limited numbers of people using ISN is potentially due to deaf children being born to hearing parents and therefore not accessing the language until they are aged five to seven years old, and have the opportunity to learn sign language in school from their deaf peers. Efforts are underway to continue to identify Deaf people and support sign language development in Nicaragua.

Regional Context

CURRENT SITUATION

Data on the situation of Deaf and hard of hearing people in the Pacific is not available. The WHO and UNESCAP estimate that out of 650 million people with disabilities⁴⁴ in the Asia Pacific Region, roughly 65,000 people in the Pacific region are Deaf or hard of hearing⁴⁵. This higher prevalence of hearing loss in the Pacific is primarily due to poverty and tropical diseases. The Asia Pacific is the second highest region impacted by deafness for both children and adults⁴⁶, yet the impact of deafness in these areas has not been studied.

The 2011 Deaf People and Human Rights around the World Survey of 93 countries⁴⁷ conducted by WFD did not include the Pacific region simply because no data was available and the only Pacific Island Deaf Association, the Fiji Association of the Deaf (FAD), did not complete the survey. If global data trends can be applied to the Pacific, lack of access to language and interpreters will mean most deaf women, men, girls and boys are not able to access education, employment, justice or adequate healthcare.

Deaf adults and children are also underrepresented by DPOs at the Pacific regional, national, and local levels, resulting in disability advocacy efforts that are not necessarily inclusive of, or relevant to Deaf children and adults. FAD is the only formally recognised Deaf DPO in the Pacific outside of Australia and New Zealand. There are very few sign interpreters in any Pacific country⁴⁸.

Very little reliable data exists to accurately capture the issues faced by deaf and hard of hearing people in the Pacific and inform strategies and actions that facilitate their inclusion. It is difficult and challenging for the DPOs to advocate for deaf and hard of hearing constituency when deaf and hard of hearing children and adults remain excluded from the disability community. Lack of monitoring mechanisms further hampers the visibility and voice of deaf and hard of hearing people.

Many of the local sign languages in the Pacific are only a few years old, and are strongly influenced by Australian Sign Language (Auslan), New Zealand Sign Language (NZSL) or, more predominantly, Signed English and are usually taught by hearing people who are not fluent in Auslan or NZSL⁴⁹. Fijian Sign Language is around 20 years old⁵⁰ and has developed from Signed English to have a strong Fijian 'accent'.

REGIONAL FRAMEWORKS AND COMMITMENTS

The CRPD has been ratified by 13 out of 15 Pacific Island Countries.

The Incheon Strategy on Making the Right Real for Persons with Disabilities recognises the diverse needs of deaf and hard of hearing people and addresses the need to include deaf and hard of hearing people in early intervention and education. It also addresses the need to ensure information and communication is inclusive through the use of sign language interpreters or captioning⁵¹.

The Pacific Framework on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities is silent on the topic of Deaf and hard of hearing people⁵².

KEY REGIONAL PLAYERS

There are Oceania branches of the WFD and WASLI. There are WFD Oceania members from Fiji, Kiribati, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Australia and New Zealand. Members of WASLI Oceania are from Fiji, Solomon Islands, Australia and New Zealand.

FAD was established in 2000 by the head teacher of the Gospel School for the Deaf and is now run entirely by Deaf Fijians. It has a strong presence in Fiji and is an active contributor to Pacific Deaf issues. FAD currently works with Deaf communities in PNG, Solomon Islands and Kiribati in an effort to increase the voice and visibility of deaf people across the Pacific.

The Pacific Disability Forum (PDF), established in 2002, works towards the achievement of inclusive, barrier-free, socially just and gender equitable societies that recognise the human rights, citizenship, contribution and potential of people with disabilities in Pacific countries and territories. The PDF is instrumental to building the capacity of DPOs in the Pacific. FAD is a member of PDF and efforts are being made by PDF to support the creation of Deaf associations through their DPO networks.

CURRENT PRACTICES ACROSS THE PACIFIC

Please note: while the following stakeholders and practices have been identified across the Pacific, some information gained through the desk review and interviews may be outdated and, due to scope of this analysis, the quality of practices was not assessed.

Fiji

There are two schools for deaf people. The Hilton Special Needs School includes early intervention services and goes to Grade 8. This school serves both deaf children and children with additional disabilities. Between 20-30 deaf children are enrolled here at any given time⁵³. The Fiji Gospel School for the Deaf is operated by missionaries. This school serves only deaf children and begins from pre-school and ends in Grade 8. The school accepts deaf children from all over the Pacific. There are also two high schools that are equipped to educate deaf students. When deaf students are ready to enter high school, they attend either Fiji Gospel High School, which is a hearing school with six full-time sign language interpreters and is funded by the Fijian Government,⁵⁴ or Marist Brothers High School, which has two full-time sign language interpreters⁵⁵. It is reported that one Deaf student is now attending university in Fiji.⁵⁶ FAD published and launched the Fiji Sign Language Dictionary in 2005 (which is strongly influenced by Signed English), and succeeded in getting the Fiji Ministry of Education to be responsible for paying interpreters at two schools in Fiji which admit deaf students⁵⁷. There are interpreters in Fiji and they have participated in workshops and training facilitated by the WASLI Oceania arm.

Kiribati

There is a Deaf Association and an i-Kiribati Sign Dictionary (2016), which is strongly influenced by Signed English⁵⁸. Deaf and hard of hearing students attend the Kiribati School and Centre for Children with Special Needs. Anecdotally, there is one known interpreter.



Victoria, a deaf Skills Centre client in Torba, carries the baskets she has made to sell at the market

FINDINGS

Samoa

There is a Deaf Association and a Samoan Sign Dictionary, which is strongly influenced by Auslan in Upolu and American Sign Language in Savaii.⁵⁹ There is an organisation called SENESE which supports children with disabilities in mainstream schools with the use of teacher's aides and sign interpreters. Assigned classrooms at some schools offer venues for the provision of additional support. SENESE also provides sign interpreter training, and there are a few known interpreters in Samoa.

Solomon Islands

There is a Solomon Islands Association of the Deaf and Solomon Island Sign Language (SISL), which is strongly influenced by Signed English⁶⁰. The San Isidro Care Centre is run by Catholic Missionaries and serves deaf youth from 14 years of age. They provide training in agriculture, carpentry, cooking, sewing and life-skills with an emphasis on income-generating activities⁶¹. There are no known interpreters, except for those who are teachers at the school.

Papua New Guinea

The Government of Papua New Guinea has legally recognised PNG Sign Language (PNGSL), again strongly influenced by Signed English, as its country's fourth official language and the Deaf community are now making a PNGSL Dictionary.⁶² Callan Services has recently established Deaf Units within some schools. One unit in Madang is also responsible for training in sign language throughout the country⁶³. FAD has been working with people in PNG in developing their interpreters.

Timor-Leste

There is a Deaf School – Agape School for the Deaf and a Timor-Leste Sign Language (TSSL) Dictionary, which is strongly influenced by Filipino Sign Language.⁶⁴ The school has approximately 100 deaf students from 5 to 58 years of age⁶⁵. This school is operated out of the teacher's garage and receives minimal funding. Agape was established in 2004, and younger generations of Deaf students are now fluent in this sign language and adding more signs, which indicates ownership of sign language by Deaf people⁶⁶. The principal of the school acts as an interpreter and is training three more people as interpreters, one of whom is a mother of a deaf student at the school.

Vanuatu Context

PREVALENCE OF DEAF AND HARD OF HEARING NI-VANUATU

It is difficult to source data on how many people are deaf or hard of hearing in Vanuatu and how many went to or are currently enrolled in school. However, WHO global statistics suggest that 5.3% of the population or 14,779 people are likely to have disabling hearing conditions. As in many Pacific countries, Vanuatu's deaf population is spread out over the archipelago.

POLICY FRAMEWORKS AND COMMITMENTS

The Vanuatu People's Plan does not make any specific commitments to deaf or hard of hearing people, but commits to the social inclusion of people with disabilities in order to empower and support them and enable access to government services, buildings and public spaces. There is also a commitment to increasing access to employment.

The National Disability Policy and Plan of Action 2008-2015 recognised children with disabilities face significant barriers in education, and documented the lack of sign language, sign language teachers and accessible textbooks. The plan of action stipulated that a standardised sign language was to be understood as a right, developed or adopted by 2008 and taught nationwide by 2009 at Vanuatu Institute for Teacher Education and the Vanuatu Nursing School. The policy recognised sign language as a language, and a key action in the subset of 'legislative and policy framework' sought to officially recognise sign language as a special language.

Vanuatu's National Disability Inclusive Development Policy 2018 – 2025 recognises the particular barriers faced by deaf and hard of hearing people to school, training and work. In particular the absence of a national sign language and the exclusionary impact of this is noted. The policy implementation plan stipulates the need for targeted support towards the establishment of sign language, to be led by the MoET.⁶⁷

The MoET's Inclusive Education Policy 2010-2020⁶⁸ proposes adoption and legislation of a Melanesian, English or French sign language. It also stipulates that teachers should be qualified in sign language and parents should receive training in sign language. The MoET's National Disability Inclusion Policy for the TVET Sector 2016 – 2020 outlines that paid sign language interpreters should be provided for students who need them.⁶⁹

There is only one law that covers disability protection, the Education Act 2001, which prohibits discrimination on the basis of disability.⁷⁰

SERVICES

The national DPO, Vanuatu Disability Promotion and Advocacy Association (VDPA) reported there are no deaf DPOs. One was established some years ago, but disbanded when the deaf people involved returned to their homes in their provinces.⁷¹

Disability service providers who are involving deaf and hard of hearing people include the VSPD, based in Efate; and SFA, based in Santo. It was reported that students with learning and physical impairments are more accepted than blind or deaf students. In response to this, VSPD plans to establish a deaf group so deaf people can be consulted, work on deaf issues and develop a language.

The Vanuatu Civil Society Disability Network includes around 12 organisations including key actors such as VDPA and VSPD, who meet on a regular schedule to collaborate and advocate for change for ni-Vanuatu with disabilities. Currently this network also includes one deaf individual.

The MoET and Vanuatu Skills Partnership, through the provincial Skills Centres seek to include deaf and hard of hearing people in their education and training programs.

DIAGNOSIS OF DEAFNESS

Deafness in Vanuatu is usually diagnosed at a later age^{*72} and therefore deaf and hard of hearing people in Vanuatu are using home signs and learning what little Bislama/English/French they know at a later age than hearing people. Delays in onset of first-language acquisition affect language acquisition and processing⁷³ verbal memory organisation⁷⁴, mastery of numeracy and literacy⁷⁵, and higher-order cognitive processing such as executive function^{**} and theory of mind.^{***76} This is demonstrated even when deaf and hard of hearing people have home signs. The earlier the deaf or hard of hearing child is exposed to language, the better their language learning and social skills are.⁷⁷ Families shared that they did not know about sign language or receive specialist early intervention support, especially around communicating with their deaf or hard of hearing child.

The Starkey Foundation visited Vanuatu for the first time in October 2017⁷⁸ with the promise of providing free hearing aids to approximately 2000 people. Vanuatu Institute of Technology informed the team about one hard of hearing person who was sent to New Zealand to receive either a hearing aid or cochlear implant. In the absence of a locally embedded service system to provide hearing aids, hard of hearing individuals are functionally deaf and face the same barriers as deaf people, and sign language may be an appropriate means of communication.

* No indications were given for age of diagnosis.

** Executive function is a set of cognitive processes that are necessary for the cognitive control of behaviour such as planning, decision making and troubleshooting.

*** Theory of Mind is how a person can empathise and understand others' emotions and actions and to understand that mental states can be the cause of and used to explain and predict the behaviour of others.

LANGUAGE, COMMUNICATION AND SOCIALIZATION

The majority of deaf and hard of hearing informants in Vanuatu were reported or observed to communicate with their families with the use of simplistic gestures, basic home signs and lip-reading. For example, family members would point to their feet to indicate 'put shoes on' or mime splashing water on their face to indicate 'go and wash'. Two families had more developed home signs, which may be because these families had more than one deaf child.

The majority of deaf and hard of hearing informants were unable to articulate additional information when asked, and could not converse beyond their names and 'yes' and 'no' answers when they understood the question. Several deaf people had their names tattooed on their arms.

Deaf and hard of hearing informants were generally not able to communicate outside of their immediate families – for example, when they started school, they did not have any language to communicate with teachers or other students. Often, the home signs used were developed by the deaf child, and only their immediate family had learned the gestures.

The majority of deaf and hard of hearing informants reported that they often did not leave their house or their village. As a result, many have not had the chance to develop their sign language with other deaf people in their area. Many families and deaf people reported that there is significant stigma regarding disability in Vanuatu. This was reported to be a major concern resulting in an unwillingness to permit deaf children to participate in community life outside the home. When deaf people do not leave their villages, they do not have the opportunity to meet and socialize with other deaf people from nearby villages, and therefore develop social or language skills.



Victoria produces highly sought after baskets

KEY FINDINGS

All these factors suggest that deaf and hard of hearing ni-Vanuatu continue to be excluded from political, cultural, economic and social opportunities on an equitable basis with others, and are at risk of being left behind.

HISTORY OF SIGN LANGUAGE IN VANUATU

There have been efforts in the past by international volunteers from New Zealand and Australia to teach deaf people Australian and New Zealand sign languages. These volunteers ranged from hearing to Deafblind people. It was reported that volunteers generally did not have teaching qualifications, which resulted in deaf adults learning to mimic the signs without meaningful conversation. One deaf informant had a good grasp of Auslan, which was taught to her by Australian volunteers with the Jehovah's Witness church in Freshwota.

Some family members were found not to have learned any home signs, and therefore had limited ability to communicate with deaf family members. For example, some family members had not learnt any sign language, even when provided a copy of the local sign language book. These family members shared that the reasons for not learning sign language were that it was too hard to learn, too difficult to understand the book (which maps a variety of signs used by people including, for example, 5 different signs for "coconut"), or that they were too busy.

SIGN INTERPRETATION IN VANUATU

Considering the lack of a national sign language, there is no effective way for people to become sign language interpreters in order to facilitate communication for deaf people in essential contexts such as education, meetings, consultations or medical appointments. On at least two occasions deaf and hard of hearing people were involved in meetings (i.e. Vanuatu Civil Society Disability Network and local community meetings), but they could not be actively involved because they could not understand what was happening.

Reasons included the lack of interpreters (due to having no sign language), hearing aids, and inability to read or write.

In interviews with Vanuatu Skills Partnership staff, it was revealed that when a deaf person was attending training, family members who communicated the most with the deaf person using home signs were often brought in and paid to work as an interpreter. This is a reasonable stopgap measure, but as familial interpreters, they do not have the necessary training, ethics or impartiality to allow the deaf person to speak for themselves and practice self-determination. However, these people who support the deaf person as an interpreter could be identified as potential future interpreters and therefore be targeted for interpreter training.

It is important to note that bringing in people who can sign a little or who know another sign language to assist as a sign interpreter in communication for deaf and hard of hearing people is generally limited in its effectiveness, as the ni-Vanuatu deaf person often does not know sign language beyond home signs that are unique to their home. In addition, the interpreter is not a trained or qualified professional, and so may only sign one in every 20 spoken words, or only know a few signs. These broader systemic issues limit the ability of deaf and hard of hearing people to exercise their rights to equality before the law, education, health, work, gaining access to justice and other services.

Understanding of the role of sign interpreters is also limited. For example, interviewees reported on at least one occasion that police did not accept witness statements or speak to deaf people using their family interpreters, because they wanted to hear directly from the deaf person themselves. Awareness and understanding about the role of a sign language interpreter was limited, and the police were sometimes unwilling to collaborate with VSDP when they tried to explain the interpreter's role.

NEGATIVE ATTITUDES AND STIGMA

It was reported that due to beliefs and taboos, in many cases families and community members do not involve the deaf or hard of hearing person in family and community life. Some families felt that they had broken taboo and been punished with a deaf child. The lack of inclusion of their deaf or hard of hearing family member caused significant grief for the family member in nearly every interview. Families were often the source of unintentional exclusion, but were also equally as likely to be aggrieved by the exclusion of the deaf person. They were worried about what would happen to the deaf person without them present – or when they (the guardian) died. In some cases, the siblings have taken on the responsibility of support.

Families felt that their deaf or hard of hearing child was unable to do things like other children who were not deaf or hard of hearing and therefore would not allow them to ride bikes, or in at least one case, sterilised their daughter after she had a child. Families perceived their deaf family member as ‘short tempered’, possibly due to frustration at not being understood or able to understand what is happening.

It was reported by a large number of families of deaf or hard of hearing people that deaf family members do not leave their houses or villages, because no-one wants to ‘storian’ with them. It was reported that often, the community does not think highly of the deaf or hard of hearing person and therefore ignores their needs, bullies them and does not care for them. It was reported that hearing children in the village usually communicated better with the deaf and hard of hearing adults because they were open to using more visual communication tactics and had more time. Family members shared it was hard to watch their deaf family member trying to communicate with others, because then they would need to stop what they were doing and intervene, and to keep the peace. Other families shared that it is distressing when their deaf child cried, because they did not know why they were crying.

Churches play a central role in the spiritual, cultural, family and community life of ni-Vanuatu. However, it was reported that many churches do not actively engage with deaf or hard of hearing persons and are not aware of how to ensure their services and activities are inclusive of deaf and hard of hearing people. The exceptions identified included Jehovah’s Witness and Presbyterian Church in Freshwota who provided sign interpreters and actively worked with deaf people to increase their language.

ACCESS TO EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Educational challenges identified included barriers to enrolling in schools, communication challenges with teachers and classmates, limited participation in classes, being progressed to next grades without learning anything, school policy and resource limitations – all of which have led to high dropout rates for deaf and hard of hearing students.

The majority of deaf people and families interviewed indicated that they would attend or send their deaf or hard of hearing child to a deaf school, or a place where students are taught** in sign language if such a place was available.

* Storian means to get together and talk without an intended motive.

** Education in this context includes all subject matters being taught in sign language, not just learning sign language

ENROLMENT

In many cases deaf people and their families shared that educational institutes refused to enroll a deaf student, while educational institutes reported they were unsure of how to educate the deaf or hard of hearing child, so declined the enrolment. Additionally, as teachers did not know sign language, it made it difficult for them to assist with enrolments.

Some families shared they were hesitant to enroll their child because their child could not communicate and they thought it would be too much work for the teachers. In other cases, families thought that deaf and hard of hearing children couldn’t learn and therefore thought it wasn’t worthwhile sending them to school. There was a wide assumption that deaf people could not learn or were too hard to teach. This attitude was also found amongst school principals, who thought that deaf people could not learn academically, and were therefore better off in a vocational training program. While these attitudes and assumptions were not explored further, access to a language with which to communicate can often change people’s negative perceptions of the capacities of deaf and hard of hearing people.

Some interviewees noted that it can be challenging for adult deaf and hard of hearing people to enroll in post-school education and training due to language barriers. One example given included a deaf person who expressed interest in attending a post-school education and training institute. The institute, however, had no means of communication with the person and was unable to advise on enrolment requirements. Therefore, the deaf person never enrolled.

COMMUNICATION

With the exception of one principal in Matafanga School, there were no teachers identified who knew any sign language. Teachers who do not know sign language are unable to effectively communicate with deaf or hard of hearing people. There were also no teachers learning sign language beyond basic home signs. This means that deaf and hard of hearing people are not able to actively participate in their education and progress alongside their peers.

The principal from Matafanga School had been asked to teach three deaf students basic sign language and Basic English skills for 45 minutes a day using a mixture of Auslan from an Auslan dictionary and NZSL from an unaccredited and poorly drawn sign language book. As this teacher had no prior knowledge or understanding of the grammar of Auslan or NZSL, she unintentionally taught a form of Signed English to the students teaching around 5 signs once or twice a week with a stronger focus on written English acquisition. However, it is important to note that Matafanga School was the only school identified as actively striving for inclusion and provision of sign language classes in a bilingual model.

NEGATIVE ATTITUDES

Teachers were regularly found to have sent deaf and hard of hearing children home within a week or month of commencing the first grade, and in most cases families did not ask why or fight the action. When families did ask why their child was sent home, teachers stated that the child was 'unteachable'. Some education stakeholders expressed that teachers tend to give up easily when their strategies did not work, did not want to go the extra mile to be inclusive and that students with disabilities are viewed as being "extra work". Some teachers were said to lack confidence in working with deaf students.

Many deaf and hard of hearing people reported that they grow up with friends but were also frequently bullied in school. They reported experiencing negative attitudes from teachers and classmates and significant communication barriers.

CLASSROOM PRESENCE
VERSUS CLASS PARTICIPATION

At one school, a teacher's aide was paid for by an ex-patriate couple to support a deaf student. When the couple left Vanuatu there was no one to pay the aide's salary so she left, negatively impacting the student's education. This was especially devastating for the mother, who had seen a significant positive impact on her child while the teacher's aide was in place.

There are limits on how much deaf and hard of hearing people can learn in a large classroom environment where they are unable to understand the content of lessons. Deaf and hard of hearing children who attend school are at risk of being present in lessons, but not participating or understanding what is being taught. In many cases, the child or their parents subsequently decided it was not worth attending school.

Another barrier to accessing school is the cost of transport, which may limit the ability of a deaf or hard of hearing child to attend an inclusive school that may be outside of their village. For example, it costs a significant amount of money to travel around Santo.

One post-school education and training institute, the Vanuatu Institute of Technology (VIT) had included deaf students. Initially the teachers at VIT did not know how to work with deaf students, and found this very difficult to navigate, but VIT has since successfully graduated two deaf students who are now in employment. The methods used were ensuring the deaf students were in the front of the classroom, and with one student, the use of a friend as a peer-tutor and interpreter. The hearing student received a scholarship for undertaking this role.

PROGRESSING ONTO
THE NEXT GRADES

One family is paying for two deaf sons to attend school. The father reported that his sons do not understand the school work and despite not making any educational progress are being promoted through the grades. The father of these deaf boys has approached the school to ask why his sons are not learning anything, but has not received answers.

POLICIES AND RESOURCES

Even though there is an Inclusive Education Policy, many schools are not aware of it, and have not begun to implement the approaches outlined in the policy. It was reported that another challenge with this policy is that there is 'no bite' – there are no consequences for not implementing the policy.

Resources are very limited with only 460,000 VUV* (approximately \$5,400 AUD) for the National Inclusive Education Budget, which is also shared with education in emergencies and is available for discretionary use by the director.

Some educational institutes (including VSPD's Early Intervention program, MoET's three pilot inclusive primary schools and VIT) accept referrals of deaf people, but these referrals are rare. In many countries where participation by deaf people has been limited, stakeholders must invest in and take active steps to seek out and support the inclusion and participation of deaf people in educational institutes. With support from Vanuatu Skills Partnership, VIT and Vanuatu Agriculture College (VAC) are currently drafting disability policies to ensure accessibility and are willing to accept more deaf students.

ACCESS TO PAID WORK

Due to limited access to education, deaf and hard of hearing people experience limited literacy and numeracy, which is a barrier to vocational training and paid work. When employed, the lack of language limits engagement with coworkers in both work-related and social interactions. The majority of deaf people work with their families in their gardens or cook for the household.

Despite a predominately inaccessible education system, 12 of the 50 deaf people the team interviewed (24%) were engaged in paid work. Though they reported little interactions with workmates they expressed enjoyment of their work. The individuals interviewed were employed in a range of vocations including:

- Bricklayer
- Chef
- Business services at Vanuatu Air (two people)
- Shop cleaner
- Gardener
- Copra
- Construction
- Maintenance work
- Handicrafts vendor at market
- Screen-printing shirts and sarongs to sell at market
- Tailor

* 1/11/2017, Communication with Inclusive Education Officer, MoET.

GOOD PRACTICES

Good practices, which can be built on and learned from, were identified. These are described below.

DEAF CAMP

For the first time, a Deaf Camp, organised by SFA and supported by Vanuatu Skills Partnership, was held in Santo in October 2017, which hosted approximately 25 deaf people and their family members to allow them to develop their language together and to develop a network of peers. This camp was considered to be very successful for deaf people by families and SFA. For example, one young man started the camp not interacting with anyone, only joining the group for meals. By the end of the camp he had learned some signs and made some friends. While the families who attended did not want to learn sign as it was 'for them' (the deaf people), there is opportunity for building better family awareness and sign language use.

MATAFANGA SCHOOL

Matafanga School in Gaua, Torba Province, started enrolling deaf students after being approached by a parent of two deaf children. The school now has one 45 minute class every school day for their three deaf students where they are able to learn some basic signs concurrently with their teacher. The class also covers Basic English. Deaf students are reported to have a 99 -100% attendance rate and are progressing with their peers through grades. The school is also actively seeking deaf children to enroll. Their educational outcomes were not assessed during this situation analysis, but exploration of how educational outcomes can improve for Deaf and Hard of hearing students in the school system could be explored in a study in future.

VANUATU CIVIL SOCIETY DISABILITY NETWORK

The Vanuatu Civil Society Disability Network (VCSDN) is advocating with stakeholders to change negative attitudes towards people with disabilities, including deaf and hard of hearing people. VCSDN aims to establish a deaf group to ensure representation of the deaf community as well as be responsible for sign language development.

SIGN LANGUAGE COMMITTEE

There is a Sign Language Committee at MoET, which plans to meet regularly to make decisions on establishing a national sign language. This group includes the Disability Inclusion Coordinator from Vanuatu Skills Partnership, the Inclusive Education Officer from MoET, the Disability Inclusion Officer for Curriculum Design from MoET, an interpreter from Epi and a yet to be designated deaf person. The committee has yet to meet.

VANUATU SKILLS PARTNERSHIP

The Vanuatu Skills Partnership has made significant investment to strengthen their approach to disability inclusion to ensure people with disabilities including deaf people can access their program. This is done through provision of reasonable accommodations for people with disabilities who are involved in Skills Centre activities, including paying for interpreters (often a family member). It has provided training opportunities to several^{*} deaf and hard of hearing people who now work with their family businesses. It has proven to be an effective referral mechanism for deaf people to enroll in courses at VIT. Two deaf people who successfully completed their studies at VIT through the support of the Partnership are now in formal paid employment, one of whom was interviewed for this situation analysis. Vanuatu Skills Partnership has a strong commitment to ensuring that deaf and hard of hearing people and those with other forms of disabilities can access skills training through the provincial Skills Centres under the MoET.

The Vanuatu Skills Partnership has done much to support training providers to include deaf people in training activities despite the significant communication barriers. The strategies used include speaking slowly – relying on lip-reading if the deaf person was able to lip-read, using facial expressions, using pictures and using family members to interpret if possible. A formalized sign language and qualified sign interpreters would amplify the numbers, opportunities and learning outcomes for students in future.

Vanuatu Skills Partnership has also done significant work with trainers to ensure they are able to support deaf students in training sessions. Out of all the deaf and hard of hearing people^{*} who participated in training facilitated by the program, only two were unable to finish courses due to their interpreters (relatives) falling ill, and all of those who finished are either employed, self-employed or working for the family.

VANUATU INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY

Initially the teachers at VIT did not know how to work with deaf students, but with support from the Vanuatu Skills Partnership, VIT has successfully enrolled, graduated and placed two deaf female students, both of whom are now employed. The methods used to include deaf students were ensuring the deaf students were in the front of the classroom, and with one student, the engagement of a close friend of the deaf person as a peer-tutor and interpreter. The hearing student received a scholarship for undertaking this role.

SANTO EAST PRIMARY SCHOOL

The principal at Santo East Primary School is collaborating^{**} with a VSA volunteer with SFA to have a single classroom set aside for deaf students who would be taught in sign language by a Deaf New Zealand qualified Teacher of the Deaf^{***}. However, the principal is of the opinion that deaf and hard of hearing people are better suited for TVET programs as opposed to formal education.

* Exact numbers have not been provided.

** Efforts at Santo East remain in the development phase, with relevant approvals, funding, visas and contracting not yet in place.

*** It is not known in what language the classes will be taught or how the classes will be run.

It is clear that there is a **stark need for the development of sign language**, and for opportunities to be created for deaf and hard of hearing people to unite and create their community, language, culture and social skills. Having sign language will increase opportunities for currently marginalised deaf and hard of hearing people to communicate, develop social skills, gain an education, participate in cultural and social life, gain access to paid work and participate in political process amongst many other rights. Having a nationally recognised sign language will also allow for the development of sign language interpreters who will be bridges of communication for hearing and deaf and hard of hearing people enabling access to broader educational and employment opportunities and engage in public and private spaces.

While some policies and stakeholders have suggested adopting another sign language, this is not recommended practice according to the WFD because **sign languages are and need to be influenced by the culture, heritage and traditions of its own country**. To adopt a sign language that is faithful to the Vanuatu context, culture or Bislama language and to create spaces for deaf people to come together, stakeholders such as Government, civil society, service providers and, importantly, deaf and hard of hearing people and their families will need to work together to address some key challenges moving forward. With 83 islands in Vanuatu it will be important to strategise how to enable deaf people to gather together in order to develop a language which can be easily shared. It will also be necessary to respect and allow time for the diversity of languages and cultures in Vanuatu, to be considered and inform mutual understanding and agreement in signs.

Vanuatu has already demonstrated the beginnings of inclusive practices through the work of the Vanuatu Skills Partnership, and while current practices have been identified, further study is needed within each sector to identify the main barriers and facilitators of inclusion. While this study focused on access to sign language and informal and formal training, broader systemic issues play a key role in creating barriers for deaf and hard of hearing people, particularly in the early years – especially around access to early diagnosis and intervention programs as well as models of education that support deaf education. These need further exploration in their own right.

Many families mentioned that it was the first time that anyone had ever spoken to them about their deaf or hard of hearing family member and were grateful for the opportunity to talk about this. They also asked what the team were going to do for them, their deaf or hard of hearing family member, or the situation.

RECOMMENDATION ONE:

Creating Spaces and Supporting Self-Advocacy

Create safe spaces for deaf and hard of hearing people to meet, socialise and develop their language in order to build a Deaf community which will in turn empower deaf people.

- Create spaces for deaf and hard of hearing people to meet, socialise and develop their language, Deaf community and identity. Ideally this gathering would be on a daily or weekly basis, but until there are more funds available, province-wide deaf camps would be ideal.

Short Term Action:

- Create a variety of ways for ni-Vanuatu deaf and hard of hearing to meet in their local communities. This could include establishing a location which allows the deaf and hard of hearing people to get together in a safe space to socialise and develop a language that builds on the existing home signs, which would be recorded by deaf people themselves. A local DPO or linguist could potentially support documentation. This action could also be a part of the strategy of the sign language committee.

Medium Term Action:

- Resource the continuation and expansion of deaf camps strengthening the approach used by the deaf camp held in October 2017. Part of this approach could include campers and families mentoring other deaf people and families in their own communities in between camps.

Long Term Actions:

- Fund deaf camps to be held every six months in each province. Train a local deaf or hard of hearing counterpart to organise and lead these camps.
- Provide funding for deaf and hard of hearing people to meet nationally and establish capacity building opportunities for deaf and hard of hearing people.
- Hold a national Deaf camp, which is organised and led by deaf and hard of hearing people.
- Implement parallel camps: one for children of deaf parents, where children can learn about challenges and strategies; and the second for parents of deaf children who would also discuss educational and communication strategies with their deaf and hard of hearing children.
- Build and strengthen deaf-specific advocacy groups.

Short Term Action:

- Support and build on VSPD's plans to create and support a deaf group in Port Vila. Ideally this group will become an affiliate to the national Disabled Peoples Organisation – VPDA and link with provincial/local groups developing above.

Medium Term Action:

- Build capacity of the deaf group so that they become a stand-alone DPO and are represented in the DPO Network.

Long Term Actions:

- Support affiliation of the deaf DPO with the WFD. Membership in the WFD would enable participation in and technical support on advocacy issues. This membership will enable the Deaf people of Vanuatu to have access to information and global camps such as the WFD's Junior Camp and Youth Camps, where young deaf and hard of hearing people can develop as leaders in their countries.
- Support the expansion of the Deaf DPO to other provinces.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

RECOMMENDATION TWO: Sign Language Development

Develop a sign language that is used nationally and led by deaf and hard of hearing ni-Vanuatu people.

- Using a rights-based, locally-led, culturally and contextually appropriate approach, develop a sign language that can be used nationally. The Sign Language Manual created by the WFD⁷⁹ recommends that a Deaf linguist* works with the deaf community in-country and a local deaf counterpart who they teach to take on the role of documenting the sign language. This strategy would be a long-term process and require investment over time as there is currently no deaf community, or existing language. The national sign language should take into account the natural variation of language.

Short Term Action:

- Government of Vanuatu and other interested stakeholders to partner with WFD⁸⁰ and PDF** to explore the situation further to determine the next steps. Caution should be taken to ensure that the decision on sign language is made with strong, active engagement by deaf and hard of hearing ni-Vanuatu people.

Medium Term Action:

- Continue to support the safe space already established for deaf and hard of hearing people to meet, enable language development and growth.

- Involve deaf and hard of hearing people in the MoET Sign Language Working Group in leadership and other roles.

Short Term Action:

- Identify a deaf person to sit on the working group.

Medium Term Action:

- Quarantine a budget for the group in order to provide reasonable accommodations such as interpreting, to enable deaf members to actively participate.

Long Term Action:

- A counterpart from the MOET sign language group could work with the nominated deaf person in order to develop his/her capacity to lead the group.

* The Deaf linguist would not provide any sign, but share the space with the deaf and hard of hearing ni-Vanuatu until she or he has picked up enough of the language to be able to interact and then begin trainings. Deaf Development Programme. *Cambodian Sign Language*.

** The PDF has the expertise of working within the Pacific.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

RECOMMENDATION THREE: Deaf Resource Centre

Consider establishing a Deaf Resource Centre where deaf people can develop their sign language and learn from each other. This would also be a place where families, teachers and other interested people could learn sign language. In the future sign language interpreters could be trained at the resource centre by deaf ni-Vanuatu and the WASLI.

- Pilot a Disability Resource Centre Model, for example within the context of the work of Santo East Primary School.

Short Term Action:

- The planning process currently being undertaken by the principal at Santo East Primary School could be strengthened and supported by MoET.

Medium Term Action:

- Establish a Deaf Resource Centre teaching the MoET school curriculum in sign language. This will allow deaf and hard of hearing people to learn alongside their deaf and hard of hearing peers, learn sign language and develop their cultural and linguistic identity. This resource centre could also be a place where families, teachers and other interested people could learn sign language.

Long Term Action:

- Establish a Deaf Resource Centre in other key locations.

- Establish family support programs and sign language interpreter training in the Deaf Resource Centre.

Short Term Action:

- Provide classes in sign language to families, teachers and interested people.

Medium Term Actions:

- Actively identify people who are informally working as interpreters for deaf family members and target them for formal interpreter training.
- Recruit interpreters for Vanuatu Skills Partnership activities from among people who are informally serving as interpreters for their deaf family members.

Long Term Action:

- Establish training of sign language interpreters by deaf ni-Vanuatu with the support of the WASLI at the Deaf Resource Centre.

RECOMMENDATION FOUR:**Policy and Legal Changes**

Address the terminology used to describe deaf and hard of hearing people, especially in legal and policy frameworks.

- Legislation, policies and documents should be updated to reflect the international language recommendation by WFD and IFHOH to describe deaf and hard of hearing people as Deaf or Hard of Hearing instead of 'hearing impaired'.
- Ensure that provisions are included for reasonable accommodations to be made and for use of sign language in all legislation and policies.
- Ensure that the new national disability policy includes reference to and actions relevant to deaf and hard of hearing people including the development of sign language.
- Raise awareness amongst DPO members regarding terminology, issues and preferences of deaf people internationally (for example deaf people reject 'person-first' language and therefore when speaking about deaf people, they refer to them accordingly, instead of 'people with hearing impairment').

RECOMMENDATION FIVE:**Raise awareness and advocate in the Community.**

Actively including deaf and hard of hearing people in daily family and community activities enables deaf and hard of hearing people to participate as valued and equal members of their communities, reduces stigma and increases awareness in the wider community.

- Support VDPA together with deaf and hard of hearing people to raise awareness in their local community including:

Short Term Actions:

- Support the deaf community to celebrate the International Day of Sign Languages on 23 September (the inaugural day will be celebrated in 2018).
- Support the deaf community to celebrate the WFD's initiative: International Day of Deaf People held on the last Sunday of September.
- Other activities such as International Day of People with Disabilities could include activities which are inclusive and recognise deaf people and their contribution to Vanuatu society.

- Support faith communities to include deaf and hard of hearing people by:

Short Term Action:

- Churches and church leaders could actively recognise their deaf and hard of hearing parishioners by taking the time to meet with them to ensure they are able to learn from sermons.

Medium Term Action:

- Church networks could be utilised to enable other churches to learn from the existing churches who use interpreters to engage with their deaf congregations, in order to learn how to support their deaf and hard of hearing parishioners.

Long Term Action:

- Churches could use sign interpreters in their services.

- VCSDN has taken an important step by including a deaf person as representative of the deaf and hard of hearing community in the network. This representation should be strengthened by addressing communication barriers to active participation through increased membership, training and reasonable accommodations.

Short Term Action:

- The network should invite two or more deaf people who can read and write English or Bislama to join the network. VCSDN should provide clarity of their role in the network and should articulate the proactive steps it will take to enable deaf representatives to fully participate. This may include meeting with deaf representatives before the meeting, providing written agenda materials in advance of the meeting, providing a note taker to facilitate participation of deaf representatives in discussion and assigning a 'communication captain' whose role is to ensure that communication runs smoothly.

Medium Term Action:

- The Network should utilise deaf and hard of hearing members who can read and write English, French or Bislama to work as a team with the other deaf people to facilitate contribution to the discussions.

Long Term Action:

- Once a national sign language is established, it would be ideal to have an interpreter in the room for all meetings.

* This could be a co-teaching endeavour where the teacher and the deaf graduate co-teach – the deaf person will have had the experience of the classroom and the work itself, and the teacher can provide additional information. This means that both teachers will support each other and the deaf and hard of hearing students will benefit from having a class in a visual language.

RECOMMENDATION SIX:**Increasing Resources and Support Services for Post-School Education and Training**

Increase resources and support services for post-school education and training providers to enable enrolment, retention and learning outcomes for deaf and hard of hearing students.

- Mobilise training and resources such as teacher's aides, sign interpreters and visual and practical resources to enable deaf students to learn alongside their peers in mainstream post-school education and training settings.

Short Term Actions:

- Train trainers to enable them to adapt to having a deaf or hard of hearing student in the classroom – VIT could be used as an information resource on how they addressed their challenges.
- Increase the intake of deaf and hard of hearing students in training.
- Actively seek and receive referrals from deaf and hard of hearing students.

Medium Term Actions:

- Pay for interpreters to be present in the classroom. In this context, the interpreters will most likely be family members. Ensure that all resources have visual accompaniments.
- Pay for teacher's aides who are fluent in sign language, or pay available family members as teacher's aides to support deaf or hard of hearing persons in the classroom.

Long Term Action:

- Have sign interpreters available and consider teaching some classes only in sign language.
- Employ willing and qualified deaf and hard of hearing graduated students to teach* other deaf and hard of hearing students.

RECOMMENDATION SEVEN:

Cross-Sectoral Inclusion of Deaf and Hard of Hearing People

- **Government, development partners and relevant sector stakeholders could resource further studies to explore the enablers and barriers experienced by deaf and hard of hearing people and their families to other essential mainstream and specialised services.**

These services, which include a focus on strengthening access to quality education for deaf and hard of hearing children, are critical to the participation and future of the deaf and hard of hearing communities.

- **Access to education: explore an appropriate model for education of deaf and hard of hearing learners in Vanuatu's education system.**

Feasibility studies should consider the whole education system and include consideration of, but not be limited to: enablers and barriers to enrolments, retention and learning outcomes for deaf and hard of hearing students; modification requirements for the existing Government of Vanuatu curriculum, assessment and transition starting from kindergarten through to secondary school; support services and resources required such as teacher's aides, sign interpreters and having classes conducted only in sign language to enable learning; teacher capacity and support for families. The scope of studying feasible educational options in Vanuatu could include studying the experience of Matafanga school and evaluating strengthening approaches such as:

- Use of 'video' sign language resources like apps and websites rather than the book dictionary they are currently using. This would improve the use of correct signs, as sign language is a visual language which book dictionaries cannot demonstrate fully. (Deaf students at Matafanga, for example, were found to misunderstand some images in book dictionaries).

- Consider teaching classroom subjects in sign language to facilitate learning by deaf students beyond life skills in line with the national curriculum.
- Ensure sign language classes are a part of the curriculum for hearing students.
- Recruit a foreign Deaf teacher who is fluent in sign language as this person would be able to adapt to the local language.
- Consider moving towards bilingual education: a bilingual model of education is an important model to explore as the means through which deaf and hard of hearing children can gain better education outcomes. Full inclusion in an inclusive hearing school means that everyone in the school, from principal to teacher, to students to the cleaner, would be fluent in sign and every single subject was taught in sign⁸¹. In a bilingual model, deaf students would learn together with their deaf peers within a mainstream school setting and join hearing peers in activities where language is less needed, for example, sports. Students and teachers in the school who are not deaf or hard of hearing who learn sign language develop positive attitudes toward deafness⁸². A bilingual setting develops social and academic proficiency in both sign and spoken language⁸³.

- **Strengthen early identification and early intervention services to support families from the moment their child is identified as deaf or hard of hearing to learn sign language and to communicate with their child.** Priority attention should be given to the following, noting the need for further feasibility studies in the following areas:
 - Early Identification and referral: Ministry of Health to consider strategies for and resource capacity to appropriately assess newborns and young children for deafness and establish systems to refer the child and family to an early intervention program equipped to work with deaf and hard of hearing children and their families.
 - Access to early intervention and education: Establish an early intervention program specialised in working with families with a deaf or hard of hearing child that incorporates sign language training, strategies on how to communicate with a deaf or hard of hearing child and educational planning. As a short-term strategy, consideration could be given to supporting VSPD to strengthen their early intervention programs to cater for deaf and hard of hearing children and their families.
 - Access to hearing aids: Establishing a locally sustainable system for the provision of assistive technology such as hearing aids, building on the work currently undertaken by the Starkey Foundation.

DISABILITY

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, the guiding international framework in understanding and approaching disability, states that people with disabilities include ‘those who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others’⁸⁴. This understanding of disability is consistent with that outlined in Vanuatu’s national disability policy.

Of key importance to the conceptualisation of disability set out in the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities is the understanding that the experience of disability arises not from impairments (i.e. problems in body functions or structures) alone, but from the interaction between a person’s impairment and the barriers to full participation in their community experience, on an equal basis of others⁸⁵. The experience of disability is diverse. A broad array of types and degrees of impairment interact with a range of factors including environmental, gender and age. This means that no two people with disabilities are likely to have the same experience.

DEAF AND HARD OF HEARING

Many Deaf and Hard of Hearing people are significantly left behind in all aspects of life⁸⁶. The major barriers for deaf people are lack of recognition, acceptance and usage of sign language in all areas of life, and lack of respect for Deaf people’s cultural and linguistic identity⁸⁷. When hearing people cannot communicate with deaf people, deaf people can be viewed as also having intellectual disabilities, and therefore be stigmatised, and assigned social roles and even traits consistent with this belief⁸⁸.

In the English language, the lowercase ‘deaf’ often refers to a property of the body (i.e. the physical inability to hear), while the uppercase ‘Deaf’ is often used to refer to the cultural and linguistic aspects of being deaf⁸⁹. It is important to clarify that Deaf people who identify themselves as Deaf do not consider themselves people with a disability⁹⁰. In fact, Deaf people have a proud history of culture and language and therefore consider themselves an ethnic, cultural and linguistic minority⁹¹. Many people who have a Deaf identity do not want to be cured and see nothing wrong with their deafness⁹². However, there are still many deaf people in communities and countries who do identify as being a person with disability and are joining disability movements, including through representative organisations of people with disabilities, to gain greater visibility, voice and opportunities in life. As their opportunities to develop their own ethnicities, cultures and languages increases, their identity may sit more strongly with the Deaf community.

The term Hard of Hearing can denote a person with a mild-to-moderate hearing loss, or a deaf person who does not want or have any cultural affiliation with the Deaf community, or both⁹³. Hard of hearing people usually can communicate through spoken language and often can benefit from hearing aids and cochlear implants⁹⁴.

Individuals can choose an audiological or cultural perspective. This choice is up to the individual and relies on personal comfort level with the labelling, mode of communication, and acceptance of their deafness.

The World Federation of the Deaf and the International Federation of Hard of Hearing have signed a memorandum of understanding which agrees that the term ‘hearing impaired’ is both offensive and an inaccurate term to describe people who are deaf or hard of hearing⁹⁵. It is important that the words ‘D/deaf’ or ‘Hard of Hearing’ are used, and not the words ‘hearing impaired’ in order to reflect what deaf and hard of hearing people prefer. It is also recognised that many countries, including Vanuatu, still use ‘hearing impaired’ as terminology in their official documents. For the purpose of this report, the term deaf and hard of hearing is used.

HEARING

From a biomedical perspective hearing people have been defined as those with ‘normal’ range of hearing. In the context of Deaf culture, ‘hearing’ means the opposite of ‘Deaf’.

SIGN LANGUAGE

Sign language is an actual language with its own syntax, grammar and language rules⁹⁶. The language is usually developed by deaf people and strongly influenced by the local culture.⁹⁷ For example, Auslan has its roots in British Sign Language (BSL) because this was the language that was brought from England when Britain colonised Australia but has grown into its own language influenced by multiculturalism, local cultures and history.⁹⁸

HOME SIGNS

Home sign is a basic communication system created within a family with one or few deaf members. Home signs are gestural communication systems which convey concrete ideas, such as ‘wash’, ‘clothes’, ‘drive’. The biggest difference between ‘home signs’ and ‘sign language’ is the number of people who use this system of communication as their primary language. In home sign, it is often just one person, while in either a village or a deaf community sign language is used by many people.⁹⁹ Literature suggests that home signs never develop into a full language, even after 20 years of use¹⁰⁰ as they are usually formed by the deaf person themselves as a child, and are only used within the signer’s family^{101,102}. Therefore, while home signs may inform the development of a national sign language, they are not a substitute¹⁰³.

SIGNED ENGLISH

Signed English is a manually coded communication form which was created in an attempt to teach deaf and hard of hearing children English¹⁰⁴. While there are minimal as-yet defined useful capabilities in the classroom around learning written English, it takes twice as long to articulate as words, which means the rate of articulation must be decreased to an unnaturally slow pace¹⁰⁵. It is not a natural language and combines unwieldy whole signed English words to make a whole sentence (i.e. ‘care’ + ‘full’ + ‘y’ to say ‘carefully’). Signed English is not regarded by WFD as a language in itself due to the fact that it has been intentionally invented by particular individuals to represent spoken language to be used in the classroom and therefore is known as an artificial sign system¹⁰⁶; and is not used spontaneously in a wider community or used as everyday communication.

LIP-READING

Lip-reading or speechreading is where deaf and hard of hearing people focus on the lips of the other person speaking. This works with some hearing to fill in the consonants and vowels as many of the lip patterns are very similar (i.e. 'shoes' and 'shoot')¹⁰⁷. It is not an effective way to communicate as it requires the speaker to always look at the deaf or hard of hearing person, for the conditions to be ideal (i.e. lighting, background noise, no interruptions) and it must be contextual (i.e. do not start a new topic in the middle of talking, the deaf or hard of hearing person won't be primed for this). Even in perfect conditions, the deaf or hard of hearing person will only pick up around 60% of what is being said¹⁰⁸. In less resourced settings like Vanuatu, without access to hearing aids to help pick up cues, learning to lip-read may be difficult. Deaf and hard of hearing people need to be taught how to lip-read if they choose because it is not always an innate skill¹⁰⁹.

AMPLIFICATION: HEARING AIDS AND COCHLEAR IMPLANTS

Amplification options include things such as hearing aids and cochlear implants. A hearing aid is a device that makes sounds louder so that a person can hear more easily. There are many types of hearing aids and therefore a person must be assessed and fitted by trained personnel so that the hearing aid can match their hearing levels. Hearing aids need frequent battery changes; the frequency of battery changes will depend on many factors such as use, climate, how well the hearing aid is looked after. Hearing aids need ongoing maintenance and adjustment as the person's hearing changes over time. Users of hearing aids also benefit from training on its use, maintenance and protection (i.e. it is not waterproof and needs to be stored well). Access to hearing aids through a local service system by locally trained personnel as well as access to maintenance and repair materials close to home are essential for ensuring a hearing aid user is able to participate fully in society¹¹⁰.

In addition to receiving an appropriate hearing aid, speech training or sign language is still required to ensure equitable or full access and participation.

A cochlear implant is a device which is implanted into the skull. This requires surgery where all residual hearing is eliminated, and a metal coil is inserted into the cochlear inside the ear. A magnet is worn over the ear which is connected to the internal device and amplifies hearing. This also requires batteries which are changed regularly. But it is important to note that when this is turned off, the person is still deaf. Use of cochlear implants without appropriate, medical, educational, psychological and hearing professional resources and services are not recommended by the World Health Organisation. The World Health Organisation also suggests that "affordable" hearing amplifications should be no more than 3% of the per capita of the user's country, which is not possible in less resourced settings¹¹¹. In such settings, the resources required for cochlear implants could be more effectively used for less costly interventions that reach a greater number of people, such as hearing aids.

COMMUNICATION DIFFICULTIES

For the purposes of this analysis, communication difficulties meant people who had difficulties or could not communicate through the audiological, spoken word or understand spoken words due to reasons such as cerebral palsy, difficulty speaking or another undefined reason¹¹². People who experience communication difficulties would benefit from sign language assuming that the reason for their communication difficulties were not to do with language processing disorders¹¹³.

DEAF CULTURE

It could be said that there are three views of Deaf people – the medical, social and cultural-linguistic. The medical view is commonly associated with doctors and focuses on the "cure". The social view is where Deaf people are "welcomed" into the hearing world, and provided accommodations such as interpreters. People with this view feel as though it is the duty of the Deaf individual to find their own way into a predominantly hearing society. The cultural-linguistic view recognises Deaf people as a minority culture with their own language, social norms and culture, and promotes Deaf people's right to a collective space within society to pass on their language and culture to future generations¹¹⁴. Being involved in the Deaf community and culturally identifying as Deaf has been shown to significantly contribute to positive self-esteem in Deaf individuals¹¹⁵. This community provides support, easy social interaction, and a "refuge from the grinding frustrations of the hearing world."¹¹⁶ Conversely, Deaf individuals who are not a part of the Deaf community are forced to conform to the hearing world, resulting in lower self-esteem¹¹⁷.

In Deaf culture, person-first language (i.e., "Person who is deaf", "person who is hard of hearing") has long been rejected since being culturally Deaf is seen as a source of positive identity and pride.¹¹⁸ Instead, Deaf culture uses Deaf-first language: "Deaf person" or "hard-of-hearing person"¹¹⁹. Deaf culture intersects with nationality, education, race, ethnicity, gender, class, sexual orientation, and other identity markers, leading to a culture that is at once quite small and also tremendously diverse.¹²⁰ Unlike some other cultures, a deaf person may join the community later in life, rather than being born into it¹²¹. Deaf culture has historically evolved from places where deaf communities have gathered, such as deaf schools or deaf sports associations.

SIGN INTERPRETER

The role of the interpreter is to interpret between people who use a signed language and a spoken language and provide complete and accurate information both to Deaf and hearing people. In order to work effectively as an interpreter, it is important that the interpreter focus on impartially performing their interpreting work.

It is also important that the interpreter be aware of how to make ethical decisions, and this includes: ensuring their skills are suitable for the assignment, engaging in on-going professional development to better their skills and understanding of interpreting, doing the preparation work required to do a good job of interpreting, turning down work for which they are not qualified and turning down work when they know that they cannot take an impartial stance to the interaction¹²².

Deaf and hard of hearing people have the right to represent themselves and direct their own lives. They expect interpreters to understand and be engaged in proactive activities aimed at achieving equality. For example, deaf and hard of hearing people need to represent themselves in all aspects of life, including in decision making on Boards and Committees. Deaf people must take on these leadership roles, while the interpreter remains the vehicle through which the communication occurs. It would not be appropriate for an interpreter who is hearing to be the President or a leading board member of a Deaf club or association or for them to speak for a deaf or hard of hearing person without their consent¹²³.

Key informant interviews and focus groups were conducted with approximately 50 deaf and hard of hearing individuals and approximately 35 members of their families in the following locations:

- Port Vila: Interviews were held at VSPD's building and at several people's villages and homes around Erakor.
- Hog Harbour: at the Deaf Camp run by Sanma Frangipani Association for deaf people and their families from around Santo.
- Luganville: with individuals who did not attend the Deaf Camp.
- Gaua: at Matafanga School and at individuals' homes.

Key informant interviews were also conducted with stakeholders face to face in Melbourne, Port Vila, Santo and Gaua and by Skype. Key informant interviews were conducted with representatives from:

- Fiji Association of the Deaf
- Volunteer Service Abroad (VSA) volunteer previously based with Sanma Frangipani Association
- Vanuatu Society for People with Disability (VSPD)
- Ministry of Justice and Community Services
- Vanuatu Skills Partnership
- Ministry of Education and Training (MoET)
- Vanuatu Institute of Technology (VIT)
- Sanma Provincial Government
- Sanma Frangipani Association
- Vanuatu Agricultural College
- Santo East Primary School
- Matafanga school
- Tasvare Primary School, Mere Lava.

Focus groups were conducted with representatives of the following stakeholders:

- Vanuatu Disability Promotion and Advocacy Association affiliate members
- Vanuatu Civil Society Disability Network
- Teachers aides, teachers and principals from Matafanga school
- Provincial Skills Centres

A photo library was used for interviews with deaf and hard of hearing people and people with communication difficulties. Photos were sourced from Google and Voices of Children with Disability*. The library consisted of the following images:

- Dog
- Chickens
- Pigs
- School
- Bunk bed room
- Boys fishing with nets and a canoe
- Male traditional dancers x2
- An older man holding a young boy
- A man holding a laptop
- Nakamal x2
- Classroom setting – children sitting on ground
- Classroom setting – children at desks
- Classroom setting – children in a circle
- Classroom setting – teachers teaching in front of a blackboard
- Classroom setting – empty classroom
- A woman in traditional clothes with food
- A woman holding a young boy
- An older man weaving
- A child in traditional dress in front of a fire
- Men and a woman hauling in a net on the beach
- Marketplace setting x2
- People getting food from a table – festive setting
- Workmen with shovels and a wheelbarrow
- A small church
- A large church
- Garden
- A child painting
- Bags of chips on a shelf
- Woven bags
- A family on a mat
- People sitting outside with a dog in front of them
- A road with buses driving alongside
- An ambulance (4x4)
- Children holding volleyballs
- A woman weaving x2
- A wedding – pink bridesmaid clothes, bride wearing white and lots of leis
- Vanuatu flag
- Children walking in a circle
- Children playing on tractor tyres
- Children and a man in a canoe
- A child sleeping
- Children lined up in front of several large fish
- Wedding scene – with an arch of flowers held above their head
- A chief
- Garden with a man
- Flowers
- A child spearing a fish underwater
- A teenager in a canoe
- People in traditional clothes in front of a fireplace where several pigs are being cooked
- People at a festival holding flags
- A beach setting
- A policeman in front of his car
- Women in traditional dress
- A Banyan tree
- Children on swings
- A man in scrubs
- A parade consisting of men in police and army uniform

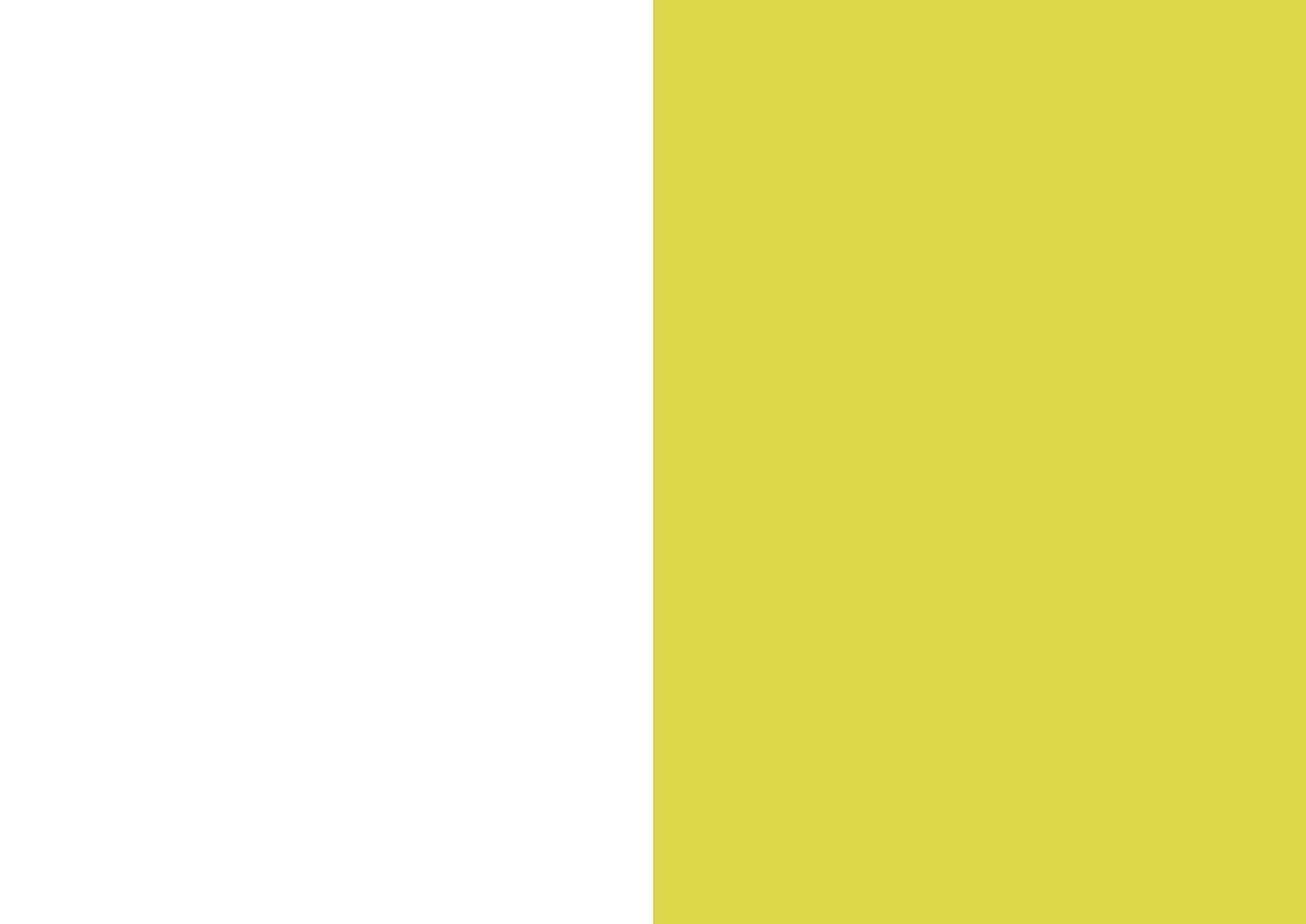
* <http://www.voicesofchildrenwithdisability.com/photo-libraries/>

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