Case Study: Papua New Guinea  
The provision for children with hearing impairment and deafness in an 'inclusive' system

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# Introduction

This paper briefly outlines:

* the development of 'inclusive education' in Papua New Guinea (PNG);
* the philosophical background underpinning the decision to follow theprinciples of 'inclusive education'; and
* the provision for children with hearing impairment and deafness in an 'inclusive' system.

**Background**

The philosophy of Special Education adopted in PNG was that of 'inclusive education'. **Why Inclusive Education in PNG?** Each country has its unique set of reasons for adopting particular philosophies and practices. These reasons are based on a number of factors including, the country's public services, infrastructure, historical influences, cultural influences and geographical constraints. PNG is a country with approximately 4.1 million people (1994) scattered over an area which to date is mainly rural with very poor infrastructure. More than 75% of the population live in the rural areas. Rural communities in particular have a deep sense of taking care of one another within their own community. The country is divided into 20 Provinces, 7 of which had agencies registered with the National Board for Disabled Persons (NBDP, 1991). In 1993 thirteen agencies altogether were registered with the NBDP. All these agencies were based in the major towns and cities where less that 25% of the population lived.

How then were services to be provided to people with disabilities in the rural and island population of the country?

Whilst PNG has a mainly rural population where access, transport and services are in the main limited, each rural community has a community school within walking distance. Considering the difficulties of travelling between the rural areas and towns, it became clear that if education was to reach as many children with special needs as possible then the key to this important task was through regular schoolteachers because:

* they were living within the communities,
* they could be encouraged to provide community based services,
* training regular schoolteachers ensured the use of existing infrastructure, and
* schoolteachers involved in supporting children with disabilities, either formally within the school or informally within the community, could then be supported by the existing disability support services.

This approach meant that the existing services provided could be built upon. There would be no immediate need to create a new service infrastructure that would be difficult for the Government to support financially or sustain. In addition a number of key documents of legislation supported the approach. PNG was a signatory to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. It also takes note to the statement made by UNESCO on the General Principles on Special Education and international trends. Such principles are also set out in the National Constitution, declaring that '….every person (to) be dynamically involved in the process of freeing himself or herself from every form of domination or oppression…' and to have '…equal opportunity to participate in, and benefit from, the development of the country.'

Developing inclusive education that caters for a wide range of pupils in both rural and urban areas requires careful articulation of policies together with effective public information to deal with prejudice and create informed and positive attitudes. Changes would be required in the following aspects of schooling – buildings, school organisation, curriculum, pedagogy, assessment, staffing, school ethos and extra curricular activities. In addition to these practical benefits to all children, the PNG Government and other service providers in the country strongly believed that the inclusive approach was right because it would provide an opportunity to:

* reach as many children as possible;
* build upon the experience and expertise available through in-service training;
* reach out to rural communities by building up a network of
* trained teachers and provide much needed resources, training and support; and
* enable more children with disabilities to have equal access to education.

(In 1992 only 94 children with disabilities were registered as receiving schooling in the whole of PNG.)

Such changes also benefit all pupils because the approach requires flexibility of delivery, curriculum, use of materials etc.

# Services to people with hearing impairment and deafness

In PNG the pattern of service provision for children and adults with hearing impairment and deafness is, in the main, through the existing services to people with disabilities with one special day school for deaf children in Port Moresby, the capital city. School ear screening programmes carried out by Callan Services in 1991 –92 indicated that some children with severe to profound hearing losses attended regular schools, often without any specialist support and without the class teacher's knowledge of their hearing difficulty. In 1996 the Rural Ear and Eye Screening East Sepik (RESEES, based at Callan Services) co-ordinator screened over one thousand children in the lower grades in Wewak, Aitape, Mt. Hagen, Kiunga, Goroka, Lae and Rabaul. Forty four percent registered mild to moderate hearing losses (mainly conductive), with a few severe to profound cases. Recent ('98-'99) Callan Services school screening programmes confirms these findings indicating the scale of need to be addressed in the community.

In PNG there is massive attrition in school attendance by children between first and final years of schooling. Is there a correlation between those who 'drop out' of the system and those with hearing losses? If the child cannot hear what the teacher is saying then how is the child to learn, or pass the required examinations? In PNG education is not free, if children struggle to make the grades, families often find it difficult to financially support the child's continued education therefore children do not continue in formal education.

If inclusive education in the classroom is going to empower schoolteachers to identify these difficulties that can have an effect on a child's learning then it can only lead to an improved level of achievement and sustained attendance among school children. Inclusive education was also favoured as the Department for Education did not support the development of a system of Special schools education for children with disabilities. This approach would be expensive and unlikely to be financially sustainable.

Deaf adults generally had a positive role to play within rural communities and were allowed to inherit; where as people with certain other disabilities did not have this privilege. Deaf adults often married and contributed to village life in their role as craftsmen, gardeners' etc. A few examples have been cited where communities with several deaf members developed their own signed communication system. One such example was cited in Kundiawa, Simbu Province and another a clan in the Eastern Highlands Province near Goroka which had a high percentage of clan members with profound deafness as a result of consanguinous marriages favoured by the clans particular cultural traditions, customs and laws. However where only one deaf member exists within a community communication is generally limited to a few gestures and facial expressions. Against this backdrop it was decided that inclusive education was the only current way forward to reach as many children with hearing impairment and deafness as possible. In urban areas a system of unit support could be developed.

# How the inclusive education was delivered

In order to achieve 'inclusive education' the Government decided to introduce the initial changes at the Teacher Training Level, focusing on pre-service training. This approach would ensure that new graduates would take the principles of 'inclusive education' out to the schools with them. In PNG there are 10 Teacher Training Colleges, all within reach of a Special Education Resource Centre (SERC). A post for a Lecturer at each of the teacher training institution to develop an oversee the Special Education training component at that level as well as liase with the staff at the Resource Centres in to provide practical and experiential input to the college courses. The SERC staff would provide the essential hands-on, community based experience essential to the student teachers to put into practice the theory taught at the TTL.

In developing this work, the Government was able to build upon the groundwork provided and developed by PNG nationals through local NGO service providers. Hitherto major International Non-Government Organisations (INGOs) funding agencies such as Christoffel-Blindenmission (CBM), Save the Children Fund (SCF), the British Red Cross etc. Had supported the local request for the provision of support services for children with disabilities by providing funding for personnel (expatriate and national), buildings, vehicles etc. In view of the needs identified the PNG Department of Education developed services that utilised the experience and expertise of staff working in the areas of disability within PNG. Further details about the development can be seen in the publication of the National Special Education Plan and Policy and Guidelines for Special Education (1993, Department of Education, Waigani, Port Moresby, PNG).

# The development of inclusive education and teacher training in PNG

The initial programme was set up at St. Benedict's Teachers' College in collaboration with Callan Services for Disabled Persons, Wewak, East Sepik Province, PNG in 1991. At the same time planners were involved in writing documents in liaison with key government departments toward the development of legislation. Callan Services in collaboration with other NGOs called upon the National Department of Education to take responsibility for children with disabilities by making the regular school system inclusive. CBM assisted Callan Services to develop a three-year special education curriculum, which could be incorporated in the existing teacher education programme. This meant that all graduating teachers would have the opportunity of studying Special Education as part of their regular teacher education programme. Part of this programme included Units on Hearing Impairment and Deafness. In parallel to this development Callan Services established in 1991 the following programmes:

* A community based programme called 'home contact'.
* An inclusive kindergarten and pre-school. (As the majority of children with disabilities had severe to profound hearing problems the teacher, her assistants and all pupils used Total Communication as their primary mode of communication.)
* An ear screening programme.

# In-service training for Callan Service staff in Hearing Impairment

In subsequent years the service was expanded to include a number of other related services such as a disability screening programme, an early intervention and rehabilitation centre, Ear and Eye clinic, audiological services, further day and residential training programmes for community workers, parents, people with disabilities, both in-service and distance education.

Delivering an inclusive approach for children with hearing impairment and deafness:

In order for an inclusive approach to be successful the following pre-requisites were required:

* Full audiometirc assessment and the provision of medical audiological and rehabilitation support services as required.
* An understanding of the different communication approaches according to each child's individual communication needs.
* The provision of an early intervention programme (medical and educational) that includes, amongst others services, early identification, medical intervention (when required), audiological services, auditory training, language development, communication approaches not only to the child with hearing impairment or deafness, but also to parents, siblings and community members.
* Teachers and classroom assistants who are able to identify children with hearing difficulties and are fluent in Oral, Total and Bilingual Communication.
* The provision of a pre-school which catered for the communication needs of deaf and hearing children alike.
* Additional staff to provide individual support including additional speech and language programmes.
* In-service training for classroom teachers and assistants.
* In-service training for community schoolteachers in preparation for integration / inclusion.
* Provision for deaf adults to become involved in the provision of services.

The development took over two years to be realised. Positive aspects of the development:

* The family and community are exposed and educated as to the needs of the child;
* Hearing and deaf children learn to communicate with each other in a free and open environment without preconceived prejudices or fears;
* Teachers communicate fluently through sign language where such an approach is necessary;
* Hearing children grow up signing freely and naturally with the deaf children. As the children grow together through to the primary level, the hearing children act as interpreters for teacher who have not yet learnt sign language or do not sign fluently;
* Deaf children and their need for signed communication are accepted within the community.
* The deaf community has a role to play in providing support both at the community level and within the education.

# Conclusion

Following the successful delivery of inclusive education in reaching as many children with hearing impairment as possible, the PNG Government, supported by existing services, moved to develop the inclusive approach in the urban areas through special classes based within regular schools. This provision provides children with hearing impairment and deafness to be integrated or included in the mainstream curriculum each according to language and communication needs. This approach requires specialist teachers of the deaf to be responsible for the delivery and development of such a facility. The specialist teacher's role in this instance would be to deliver a special curriculum for children within the special class which would lead to 'inclusion' whilst at the same time support mainstream teachers in providing the 'inclusive curriculum'. The development of services to people with hearing impairment and deafness within PNG has been criticised by some experts as not considering the complex communication needs of deaf children, and failing to implement an 'exclusive' educational approach of schools for the deaf, special classes in regular schools etc. Inclusive education considers the needs of all children with hearing impairment, regardless of level of hearing loss and respects communication needs. However, the approach in PNG has been a pragmatic one, by leading with an 'inclusive' approach to address the priority needs of the majority of children with hearing impairment, followed by a more specialised approach later. To meet this provision a specialised training need was recognised. The Department of Education in 1999 is sponsoring the training of teachers of the deaf in Rabaul and in the year 2000 is moving the programme to its main in-service training college, the Education Studies Institute in Port Moresby.

However in PNG, with its mainly scattered, rural and island communities the immediate need is the development and expansion of 'inclusive' approaches. The approach respects and takes into consideration the individual deaf child's communication, social, linguistic and general developmental needs in their home areas with their families, as well as promote community understanding. Thus allowing the deaf child's needs to be meet within his /her community wherever possible. At the same time every opportunity can be given for deaf people to meet on a regular basis in order to promote deaf culture, communication, and provide mutual support.

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[Inclusion and Deafness Seminar Report](http://www.eenet.org.uk/resources/docs/repindex.docx)

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