

# Tuvalu's disability study from the perspective of a field worker

Tuvalu [Ending Violence Against Women](#)

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Project Name: National Disability Study

Project partner: Fusi Alofa Association

Total funding: \$103,680

Funding timeframe: 2016-2017



Mr Taupaka Uatea, Acting Office Manager of Fusi Alofa Association Tuvalu.  
Photo: Natalie Makhoul

The first comprehensive disability study for Tuvalu was conducted in February 2017 by field workers and research assistants including persons living with disabilities. One fieldworker was Mr Taupaka Uatea, the acting Office Manager of Fusi Alofa Association Tuvalu (a non-government organisation for people with disabilities). Mr Uatea not only gained skills in field research and data collection, but he also saw opportunities for Fusi Alofa to work more with disability and gender.

Funded under the Australian aid program's [Pacific Women Shaping Pacific Development](#) initiative, the survey collected information about the experiences of persons with disabilities and their carers. It examined physical, communication, attitudinal and institutional barriers they face in their everyday lives.

My own disability was a barrier in the sense that I needed another fieldworker to support me moving around', reflects Mr Uatea.

'My disability was not a barrier in doing the actual work! I could ask questions and communicate with persons with disabilities (PWDs) like any other fieldworker without a disability. I guess that my personal disability helped me a lot to win the trust of other PWDs... I talked to the other fieldworkers who did not have a disability and they had a harder time in breaking the ice with PWDs during the fieldwork.'

Previously, there were just 72 people registered on Fusi Alofa's database. The study, conducted in Funafuti and several outer islands, counted 466. The survey also collected specific data on the situation of women and girls living with disabilities.

'I know that women and children with disabilities are more disadvantaged, but it was good to get actual numbers and gender analysis from the study. The abuse cases against women with disabilities were shocking to me. There are no activities in the past that I know of which targeted women with disabilities. I think the study will guide Fusi Alofa to do more for women with disabilities. Gender and disability should be a focus in the future and we could do more activities. In our advocacy, we always talk about gender because this is an article in the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.'

For Mr Uatea and the Fusi Alofa Association, this study is of the highest importance.

‘Now, we have a better understanding of numbers of PWDs in Tuvalu. We also know more about persons living with multiple forms of disabilities. This helps Fusi Alofa to, for example, develop toolkits or information pamphlets ... The study provided us with more evidence which will help us to access more aid support.’

*\* This Story of Change was originally published in the [Pacific Women Annual Progress Report 2016 – 2017](#). All values are consistent with that reporting period. For the most up-to-date value of activities, visit our [interactive map](#).*