Disability Inclusion in the Media Study

Executive Summary

Introduction

This study is an initial contribution towards an evidence-informed approach to disability inclusion in Pacific media, including experiences and challenges of information accessibility for people with disability.

Disability inclusion in the media includes:

1) disability sensitive reporting and on-screen representation,

2) information accessibility through media for people with disability, and

3) ensuring employment pathways and enabling environments for persons with disabilities working in the media.

The right to access information for the purpose of gaining employment and for doing one's job effectively is key in ensuring disability inclusion in the workplace and creating a fair playing field for jobseekers and employees.

The media sector fulfils an important role in setting community standards for information accessibility to ensure the social and political inclusion of all people with disabilities, including communicating important public health, disaster preparedness and emergency information and to combat disinformation and misinformation.

The study found there are practical opportunities within workplace culture and across areas of policy and technology, to ensure the full and equal inclusion of people with disabilities in the media and achieve information accessibility for communities.

Method

This preliminary study utilised a qualitative approach to data collection, comprising key informant interviews with people with disabilities working at media organisations, individuals from organisations of persons with disabilities, and with those working in media management positions who do not live with disability. The 15 informants (9 people with disabilities) were from Fiji and Samoa (10), owing to presiding budget limitations and timeline constraints. As such, generalisations should not be drawn from the findings on the state of disability inclusion in media across the region.

The methodology for the study embedded a rights-based approach to data collection, ensuring adherence to disability inclusion in both the nature of the enquiries and the interview practices themselves. Key informant interview questions were crafted to reflect five themes which correlate to international and regional frameworks relevant to disability inclusion. These are work and employment, equal participation, right to information, assistive technologies, and women.

Key research questions were:

1) What is the current state of disability inclusion policy and practice in media organisations?

2) What are the experiences, challenges and barriers of people working in the media sector and as disability advocates regarding information accessibility?

Findings

Media's representation of people with disabilities and engagement with citizens with disability is important.

> "I was asked to make a video documentary of the challenges that I face …
> the lady that came to (record) the documentary, it started off well, but then
> when it came to the time where she had to take footage, she was always telling me,
> you need to look sad … and then I didn't even know what was happening at that time.
> But she was actually trying to play on people's emotions towards someone on a
> wheelchair. So when someone sees that documentary, they will have sympathy
> on a person on a wheelchair. Well, I was thinking about it. Three years later,
> I was like, man, we want to portray, you know, what we can do,
> the strength that we have."
>
> - Employee of an organisation of persons with disability, Fiji

- People with disabilities did not feel accurately represented in the media. Tokenistic representations reinforce limiting attitudes towards disability within communities.

- All participants expressed that there was "not enough" health and emergency information available to them via the media and wanted to be able to access important information equally with other citizens.

- Information accessibility is the key barrier for citizens with disability. Media content does not sufficiently account for the range of disabilities in the community and is not always housed within the most accessible platforms for communication. For example, internet connected smartphones are not universally accessible to all people with disabilities.

Inconsistent accessibility measures in media workplaces prevent people with disabilities from participating in work

> "The first job I had … the interview was OK but during the job as an announcer
> the part where I have to work with equipment was another story.
> The equipment was a touch panel, there was no screen-reading
> software to read out news and facilitate talkback shows.
> That is where the challenge came in …"
>
> — Former media sector employee, Samoa

- Media employers are willing to employ qualified people with disabilities and to provide on-the-job support.

- Information accessibility is an ongoing issue for people with disabilities in applying for work in the media and on the job. When websites, forms, mobile applications and work documents are not accessible, people with disabilities are prevented from participating in work.

- Media organisations do not have formal policies in place for inclusive recruitment and inclusive workplace practices.

- While on the job, employees at times felt excluded from fieldwork due to their disability. The supports and adjustments required to perform duties effectively were not fully understood by employers.

- Women with disabilities experienced discrimination at work and perceived job insecurity.

The opportunities for improved inclusion in Pacific media are significant

> "The working relationship with (vision-impaired staff member)
> helped a great deal. We involved persons with disabilities through interviews,
> being represented in stories, as subjects of the documentaries we produce.
> During the production of those documentaries, we worked closely
> in the compilation of those documentaries with OPD members
> who have worked in the media."
>
> — Editor in Samoa

- Media organisations that employed people with disabilities experienced the benefits of a diverse team both in the workplace and in producing diverse content that appeals to diverse audiences.

- All organisations were open and interested to increase staff capacity in skills development for incorporating accessibility standards into content publishing and platforms.

- Study participants called for more inclusive language and more representative coverage of people with disabilities in content production – specifically through updating of disability inclusive language glossaries and inclusive reporting approaches for media practitioners.

- While assistive technology solutions are available and affordable, it remains a challenge for media to acquire on shoestring budgets. Mobile smartphones and laptops with internet connectivity and accessibility software were widely used and recognised by participants to support equal participation in work activities.
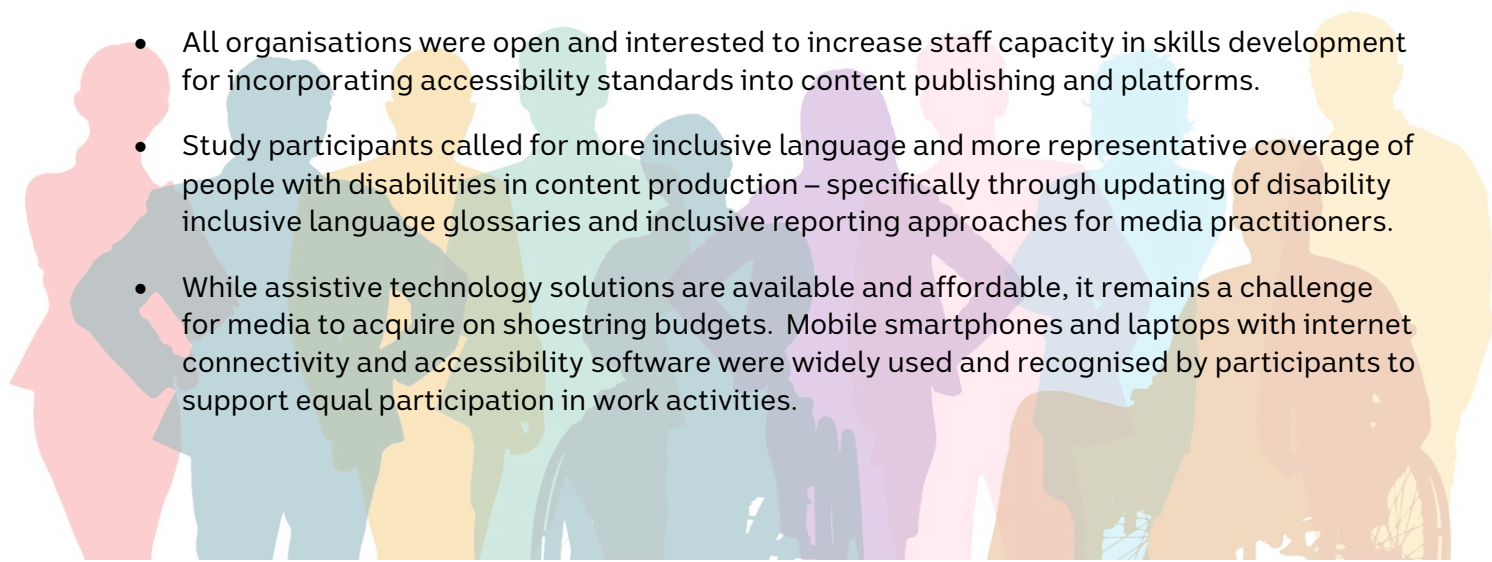
Recommendations

Recommendation 1:

Foster dialogue on inclusive recruitment and media workplace practices, and the benefits this can bring to storytelling and audience reach

Recommendation 2:

Encourage adaptive improvements to disability inclusive editorial policy and practice

Recommendation 3:

Facilitate disability inclusive technology awareness and consistent adoption

The *Disability Inclusion in the Media* study found there is still much work to do to ensure the full and equal inclusion of people with disabilities in the media sector and in achieving equality in information accessibility.

Organisations for persons with disabilities are leading with best practices for disability inclusion in recruitment and in the workplace, with robust policy and practice. There is scope for media organisations to be guided by the Pacific OPDs approach.

The ABC's expertise in this space can be leveraged to support Pacific media. It has well developed policies and practices on diversity and inclusion which extend from recruitment and retention of staff, to best practice in the field of information accessibility and standards for media publishing and editorial policies and approaches to disability inclusion across media outputs.

Acknowledgements