

Submission to the Australian Government's new international development policy: Australian Disability and Development Consortium

The Australian Disability and Development Consortium (ADDC) is a network of over 600 members including [Australian development agencies, managing contractors, academic institutions and disabled people's organisations](#) acting as a collective voice calling for the inclusion of people with disabilities across the Australian international development sector. We welcome the opportunity to provide input, drawn from the experience and expertise of our membership, to the formation of the Australian Government's new international development policy.

This submission will provide both principled and practical guidance to aid the Australian Government in maintaining their globally-recognised leadership in disability-inclusive development; ensure the integration of inclusive approaches across development assistance, humanitarian and human rights policy; suggest action and accountability measures; and outline necessary resourcing for the effective and impactful delivery of the new international development policy.

A principled development policy

The 2017 Foreign Policy White Paper laid out a number of high-level principles for Australia's ongoing engagement in our region and the broader world. Within the detail, it also laid out critical approaches that would characterise Australia's global presence. This included an overarching commitment to inclusion, with explicit reference made to people with disabilities in relation to 'promoting disability inclusive development',ⁱ '[focusing] strongly on protection efforts for... people with disabilities',ⁱⁱ and '[promoting] the rights of people with disabilities',ⁱⁱⁱ particularly through the UN Human Rights Council and other multilateral advocacy mechanisms. This focus reflects an emergent truth about our world: while economic growth has shifted many states from low- to middle-income status, inequality has increased and at an individual level, many people—particularly women and girls, indigenous people, the LGBTI community and people with disabilities—have been left behind.

Without transformative policy change that leads to change in practice, people with disabilities are unlikely to reap the full benefits of action aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and will remain insufficiently engaged in the Goals' implementation, monitoring and evaluation.^{iv} Historically, Australia has not waited to be led in this area: in 2009, the Australian Government introduced the world's first dedicated strategy for disability-inclusive development. This step drove years of innovative work in partnership with and informed by representative bodies of people with disabilities. It also cemented Australia's position as a global leader and go-to partner for thought, strategy, engagement and funding related to disability-inclusive development.^v The Australian Government's new international development policy presents an opportunity to build upon this demonstrated leadership, under the auspices of an overarching policy framework guided by a clear objective of human development and inclusive poverty reduction.

ADDC recommends that the new international development policy include eradicating poverty and leaving no one behind as the clearly-stated, primary objective of Australia's international development program in order to drive greater targeted investment in disability-inclusive development.

Impact for disability inclusion

A policy framework guided by an overarching objective of inclusive poverty reduction is a critical step towards translating the Foreign Policy White Paper's commitments into action for all. However, this is

only a foundation, with evidence and lived experience suggesting that a too-broad approach to social inclusion (including ‘gender equality and social inclusion’ approaches) can exacerbate the exclusion of particular groups.^{vi} To ensure this objective drives meaningful change in the lives of people with disabilities in particular, specific references must be interwoven throughout the policy’s varied pillars of development assistance, humanitarian response and human rights advocacy.

While this would build upon Australia’s principled leadership, intentional and clearly-stated references to the [cycle of poverty and disability](#)^{vii} would also reflect real and often understated challenges in our region and beyond. Despite substantial development gains, 80 per cent of the world’s people with disabilities continue to live in poverty.^{viii} Fewer than ten per cent of children with disabilities in the Asia-Pacific region attend school, compared to 70 per cent of children without disabilities,^{ix} and census data from across the Pacific consistently shows people with disabilities overrepresented in unemployment or subsistence employment.^x Despite this, overall domestic resource allocation for the inclusion of people with disabilities averages below 0.15 per cent of most Pacific countries’ GDP.^{xi}

As the Foreign Policy White Paper notes, people with disabilities are ‘particularly vulnerable during conflicts and natural disasters’.^{xii} Around the world, people with disabilities experience unique and disproportionate impact in humanitarian contexts: they are less likely to participate in disaster preparedness and planning; are more likely to be injured, left behind, subjected to violence, or otherwise exploited in disasters; and face heightened barriers to accessing post-disaster services. This is an urgent concern in the disaster-prone Indo-Pacific region. Following Tropical Cyclone Pam in Vanuatu, people with disabilities were found to be 2.45 times more likely to have been injured than those without disabilities, and in the aftermath of Tropical Cyclone Winston in Fiji, disaster-related information, services, and relief distribution points were found to be insufficiently accessible.^{xiii} Australia’s role in supporting inclusive humanitarian action has been commended by civil society observers,^{xiv} but in the context of more frequent, complex and climate-exacerbated disasters, further commitments must be made tangible in forward-looking policy to ensure that people with disabilities are not left behind.

In human rights and legislative settings, the rights laid out in the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) are clear, yet often insufficiently integrated into global policy. Owing in part of the advocacy efforts of the Australian Government, the SDGs framework contains a prominent focus on inclusion, drawing on clear linkages to the CRPD. In a recent evaluation, 90 per cent of respondents assessed Australian advocacy for disability rights during the SDGs formulation process as influential or very influential;^{xv} however, this is only the first step. In order to ensure that the rights of people with disabilities are not only integrated into policies, but also transformed into practice, there is a significant role to play for disabled people’s organisations (DPOs) to hold duty bearers to account for implementation. The Australian aid program has supported DPOs from regions around the world—including the [Pacific](#), [Asia](#), Africa, the Caribbean and [Middle East](#)—to participate in human rights and SDGs review processes,^{xvi} in an example of placing people with disabilities at the centre of rights-based advocacy. Sustained effort and a formalised commitment to inclusion from the Australian Government is required to ensure that people with disabilities and their representative organisations play an active leadership role in determining, advocating for and overseeing accountability for their rights on the global stage. Embedding a disability inclusive focus at this high level would reinforce, model and extend visibility of Australia’s strategic leadership on disability inclusion.

Australia’s new disability-inclusive international development policy should reflect not only our own leadership and ambition, but that of the many disability rights leaders in our region and beyond. Supported in some instances by Australia’s example and practical support, other global and regional approaches to disability inclusion have emerged. In our region, the Pacific Framework for the Rights of

Persons with Disabilities articulates a number of priorities identified and agreed by Pacific disabled people's organisations (DPOs) and governments. DPO-led monitoring, such as the [Pacific Disability Forum's SDG-CRPD monitoring report](#), further facilitates the leadership of people with disabilities in identifying priority areas for action and holding governments and development actors to account for their commitments to disability inclusion. Australia's new international development policy, under its principled focus on inclusive development and leaving no one behind, should complement and support Indo-Pacific-led strategies on the rights of people with disabilities and act on DPO-led monitoring to inform priorities.

ADDC recommends that disability-inclusive approaches be integrated across the new international development policy's thematic pillars of development assistance, humanitarian response and human rights advocacy, through the active and central voice of people with disabilities and particularly by:

- Embedding a ['twin track' approach](#) to disability-inclusive development, which sees disability-specific development programming and actions prioritised as a necessary enabler of inclusion, as well as inclusion principles and practice integrated across all 'mainstream' aid investments;
- Ensuring that approaches to humanitarian response incorporate best practice in disability inclusion, through incorporating reference to the principles of the Charter on Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities in Humanitarian Action and the newly-developed Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) Guidelines on Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities in Humanitarian Action; and
- Actioning the recommendations made in the Office of Development Effectiveness' 2017 evaluation of Australian advocacy for disability-inclusive development, particularly the recommendations relating to continuing advocacy relating to global human rights frameworks and processes, and investing in the capacity of Indo-Pacific governments and DPOs to increase country-level implementation of the CRPD.

ADDC recommends that the Australian Government ensures that people with disabilities, through their representative organisations, play an active and central role in consultations and decision-making processes, including future Performance Framework and other accountability mechanisms, relating to the new international development policy.

ADDC recommends that the new international development policy clearly identify linkages with existing regional strategies, particularly the Pacific Framework for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. This should drive increased investment and mobilisation of other donors towards a regional collaborative mechanism, in order to best strengthen coordination.

Action and accountability

The new international development policy, and associated Performance Framework, budget and communications strategies, will play an important role in setting priorities and driving more targeted action in line with the high-level goals set out in the Foreign Policy White Paper. In order to best ensure the effective implementation of the new policy, additional guiding documents will be required, including a renewed, standalone strategy for disability-inclusive development with clearly defined targets.

The current *Development for All* strategy, introduced in 2015, expires in 2020. This strategy, and its 2009 predecessor, have been widely regarded as effective and influential by observers in Australia and beyond. Following Australia's lead similar strategies have been introduced by the governments of the [United Kingdom](#) and Germany, and the United Nations introduced its ambitious [Disability Inclusion Strategy](#). A new *Development for All* strategy, which adapts to emerging challenges and further embeds disability inclusion in Australia's international development assistance, humanitarian and human rights promotion

efforts, should be introduced as a priority per recommendations made by the Office of Development Effectiveness.^{xvii}

Following the existing *Development for All* strategy, a new iteration should continue the Australian aid program's commitment to a [twin-track approach](#) that prioritises investment in disability-specific initiatives while simultaneously mainstreaming disability inclusion across all other investments. Critically, this should flow down into the country and regional plans and thematic strategies developed under the direction of the new international development policy. In keeping with the current strategy's support for 'an active and central role for people with disabilities',^{xviii} all new plans should adopt a twin-track approach and centre people with disabilities in their development through utilising disability disaggregated data and engaging DPOs in the consultation and drafting processes.

The Performance Framework to sit under the new international development policy should include measurable and clear targets for disability inclusion. Data published in recent *Performance of Australian Aid* reports indicates that while there is an increasing awareness of disability inclusion across elements of the international development program, some thematic areas—namely infrastructure, agriculture, water and livelihoods programs—have fallen behind.^{xix xx} The accompanying Performance Framework should include an ambitious target to drive equitable performance in disability inclusion across the whole international development program in line with recommendations made by both civil society^{xxi} and the Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade's inquiry into Australia's aid program in the Indo-Pacific.^{xxii}

ADDC recommends that, as a key measure in ensuring the effective implementation of the new international development policy's commitments to disability-inclusive development, a new *Development for All* strategy be introduced to replace the current iteration. The new strategy should include a targeted focus on inclusive humanitarian action and disaster risk reduction and an ongoing commitment to disability rights advocacy in addition to development assistance.

ADDC recommends that the accompanying Performance Framework to the new international development policy includes clearly defined and measurable targets. This framework should include an ambitious and time-bound target for a percentage of investments to be rated 'satisfactory' against disability inclusion across the whole international development program, and specific disability inclusion targets for each of the international development program's thematic areas.

ADDC recommends that the aid program's country and regional plans and thematic strategies reflect the twin-track approach to disability-inclusive development. All plans should utilise disability-disaggregated data and engage DPOs in their development in order to ensure that the priorities of people with disabilities are reflected in both disability-specific and mainstream development investments across the whole of Australia's international development policy.

Resourcing rights-based development

In order to act upon an ambitious new strategy truly commit to the principle of leaving no one behind, and drive improvements in inclusion across varied areas of Australia's international development program, increased financial resources are required. This includes greater investment in disability-inclusive development within the context of a growing overall aid budget.

Since the introduction of the 2015 *Development for All* strategy, resourcing for disability-inclusive development has remained stagnant at \$12.9 million per annum. Against a backdrop of not only inflation, but increased demand for disability inclusion technical advice and DPO expertise, this sum has become

stretched to its limits. Current funding levels cannot accommodate the focus on inclusive development, humanitarian response and human rights advocacy that the new international development strategy should contain.

ADDC recommends that in order to effectively implement the new international development policy, Australian official development assistance be increased to at least 0.5 per cent of GNI within 5 years. Over the longer term, the Australian Government should commit to increasing it to 0.7 per cent of GNI within the next decade.

ADDC recommends that within the context of a growing aid budget, specific funding for disability-inclusive development increase by \$1 million per year over the coming five years, in order to accommodate the increased attention to disability-inclusive development outlined in the Foreign Policy White Paper. The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade should also receive increased core departmental budget for staff and associated activity costs to ensure whole of department capacity is strengthened to facilitate effective mainstreaming of disability inclusion and disability-specific actions across the department's development assistance, humanitarian and human rights work.

References

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- ⁱ Australian Government, 2017. *2017 Foreign Policy White Paper*. DFAT, Canberra. p. 89.
- ⁱⁱ Australian Government, 2017. p. 93-94.
- ⁱⁱⁱ Australian Government, 2017. p. 89.
- ^{iv} United Nations, 2018. *Disability and Development Report: Realizing the Sustainable Development Goals by, for and with persons with disabilities*. Department of Economic and Social Affairs, New York. p. 1.
- ^v Office of Development Effectiveness, 2017. *Unfinished Business: Evaluation of Australian advocacy for disability-inclusive development*. DFAT, Canberra. p. 3.
- ^{vi} "In other programs, technical support was provided by gender and/or social- inclusion advisors... many thought disability could be overlooked in the effort required to work for gender equity, especially where resources are limited." Office of Development Effectiveness, 2019. *Development for All: Evaluation of Progress made in strengthening disability inclusion in Australian aid*. DFAT, Canberra. p. 59.
- ^{vii} Disability can be a cause of poverty as well as a consequence of poverty. Not only do people with disabilities experience a disproportionately high level of poverty, being poor increases their chances of having a disability and reduced their access to vital services. For more information, see www.endthecycle.info.
- ^{viii} UN General Assembly, 2015. *Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*. United Nations, New York. p. 7.
- ^{ix} Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat, 2009. *Pacific Education Development Framework 2009-2015 (PEDF)*. PIFS, Suva.
- ^x Pacific Disability Forum, 2018. *Pacific Disability Forum SDG-CRPD Monitoring Report 2018—From Recognition to Realisation of Rights: Furthering Effective Partnership for an Inclusive Pacific 2030*. PDF, Suva. p. 20.
- ^{xi} Pacific Disability Forum, 2018. p. 1.
- ^{xii} Australian Government, 2017. p. 94.
- ^{xiii} Pacific Disability Forum, 2018. p. 32.
- ^{xiv} ACFID Humanitarian Reference Group, 2019. *Fit for the Future: Priorities for Australia's Humanitarian Action*. ACFID, Canberra. p. 16.
- ^{xv} Office of Development Effectiveness, 2017. p. 22.
- ^{xvi} Note that funding delivered by Disability Rights Fund (DRF) and the Disability Rights Advocacy Fund (DRAF) is supported by a longstanding partnership with the Australian aid program.
- ^{xvii} Office of Development Effectiveness, 2017. p. 9.
- ^{xviii} Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 2015. *Development for All: Strategy for strengthening disability-inclusive development in Australia's aid program*. DFAT, Canberra. p. 8.
- ^{xix} Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 2017. *Performance of Australian Aid 2015-16*. DFAT, Canberra. p. 94.
- ^{xx} Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 2019. *Performance of Australian Aid 2017-18*. DFAT, Canberra. p. 66.
- ^{xxi} Australian Disability and Development Consortium, 2018. *Submission to the inquiry into the strategic effectiveness and outcomes of Australia's aid program in the Indo-Pacific and its role in supporting Australia's regional interests*. [Download from here](#).
- ^{xxii} Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade, 2019. *First report: Inquiry into Australia's aid program in the Indo-Pacific*. Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra. p. xxiv-xxv.