
**INTERNATIONAL DISABILITY EQUITY AND RIGHTS
STRATEGY**

SUBMISSION

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DEPARTMENT OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND TRADE

IWDA INTERNATIONAL
WOMEN'S
DEVELOPMENT
AGENCY

INTRODUCTION

The International Women's Development Agency (IWDA) welcomes the opportunity to present this submission to the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade International Disability Equity and Rights Strategy consultation process.

IWDA is an Australia-based organisation, working with women's rights organisations and feminist movements in Asia and the Pacific to defend and advance the rights of diverse women and girls and advance gender equality for all. We are committed to helping make visible the nature and impact of overlapping sources of discrimination experienced by women, girls, trans, non-binary and gender diverse people with disabilities and addressing the barriers that undermine their full inclusion and active and meaningful participation in society.

Transformative action on disability equity and rights, particularly where it intersects with gender inequality and other drivers of marginalisation, is necessary to ensure that Australia's development program reaches and serves those most at risk of being left behind within our region and globally. Mandatory requirements, targets and resourcing – working in complement together - are essential to making this a reality and make measurable and substantive contributions toward equity and rights for people with disabilities in the Indo-Pacific region¹.

This submission outlines IWDA's recommendations related to the principles that should underpin DFAT's approach across:

- 1) Strategy
- 2) Resourcing
- 3) Convening and movement strengthening
- 4) Evidence and accountability; and
- 5) Sustainability

1. Strategy: integrate an intersectional approach to disability inclusion

It is widely recognised that power structures, such as patriarchy, ableism, colonialism, homophobia, ageism and racism combine to create intersecting forms of privilege and oppression that shape people's lives, identities and relationships². As a result, we know that not all people with disabilities share the same experiences of disadvantage, exclusion, opportunity and privilege³. Women, girls, trans, non-binary and gender diverse people with disabilities face multiple and compounding disadvantage driven by pervasive discriminations related to (at least) their gender and disability status. People's experiences of disability also vary according to the nature and severity of their impairment, with women with intellectual disabilities experiencing different forms of disability related discrimination than women who are Deaf, have vision impairment or mobility impairments.

The COVID-19 pandemic, climate change, and rising poverty levels all disproportionately impact diverse women and girls with disabilities who are also 2-3 times more likely to experience violence than women without disabilities, including in countries in the Asia Pacific⁴. The nature of violence experienced can also differ, for example, it is more likely to be perpetrated by family members rather than intimate partners, requiring different responses and interventions.⁵ Furthermore, Australian research has shown that women with intellectual/psychological disabilities are nearly three times more likely than women with a physical disability to experience violence⁶.

Upholding the needs and rights of people with disabilities through policies and programs cannot be achieved through a 'one size fits all' approach, but instead requires an intersectional analysis that recognises that disability equity is interlinked with the multiple forms of discrimination that people experience. This is recognised in the DFAT GEDSI Good Practice Note:

"To achieve effective development outcomes, development and humanitarian investments should be informed by Gender Equality, Disability and Social Inclusion (GEDSI) analysis. GEDSI analysis identifies how social norms, relations and power dynamics are experienced by people as a result of their identities, including gender, age, disability, income, education, faith, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and migration status. It recognises that the interaction of impairments (physical, sensory, psychosocial, cognitive) and barriers (physical, social, communication and institutional)

has a wide range of effects and explores how these elements intersect to create diverse experiences of exclusion and marginalisation⁷.

Toolkits and frameworks, including the DFAT GEDSI Good Practice Note and the UN Intersectionality Resource Guide and Toolkit can be helpful to provide scaffolding for this approach.

At its core, an intersectional GEDSI analysis involves considering;

- what the experience of disability is and how it differs for women, men, children, those living in urban compared to rural areas, those with different types of disabilities and varying SOGIESC identities and those with varying socio-economic status
- what the social (e.g. cultural and attitudinal) and institutional (e.g. legal and policy related) barriers to accessing services and programs for diverse people with disabilities are; and
- how these barriers can best be addressed through applying a twin-track approach to designing, implementing, monitoring, and evaluating all activities in the International Development program.

It will be critical to ensure that the roll-out, implementation and refinement of an intersectional approach across the International Development Program – including across the forthcoming Disability Equity and Rights Strategy, the LGBTQIA+ Rights Strategy and Gender Equality Strategy – is resourced with financial and technical resources.

Recommendation 1: DFAT should take an intersectional, rights based GEDSI approach to the Disability Rights and Equity Strategy to highlight the importance of across all aspects of the International Development program.

Recommendation 2: DFAT should require all new investments to produce an intersectional, rights based GEDSI analysis which clearly demonstrates how the investment design responds to the barriers to equity and rights for all people with a disability.

2. Resourcing: additional and core funding for disability rights

Australia was a global leader in disability inclusive development for more than a decade. This leadership has supported diverse people with disabilities to be directly included in society and development efforts and has encouraged many other countries and development actors to improve their own approach to disability inclusive development.

In recent years, Australia's leadership in this space has been waning, with gaps in implementation across all levels (including strategy and program levels) and stagnant funding. Core funding for disability equity and rights within DFAT has not benefited from indexation applied across the international development program, and in 2023, spending on disability inclusion mainstreamed across the program falls short of DFAT's guidance to allocate 3-5% per program budget (at 2.17%)⁸.

New and additional funding for disability inclusion across the International Development Program would help to maintain and expand the gains already achieved for diverse women and girls with disabilities in our region. The International Development Program must be properly resourced to address all forms of social inclusion through institutionalising and implementing a GEDSI approach, as well as going beyond inclusion by prioritising programs which aim to transform the structures of power which drive marginalisation and inequality. This should be achieved through targets for mainstreaming disability inclusion across all programs, as well as increased funding to the central disability fund to support targeted investments in disability equity and rights programs.

Furthermore, global evidence shows that the most transformative outcomes are achieved when organisations are provided with core, flexible, long-term funding. The Office of Development Effectiveness found that providing long-term core funding to civil society organisations – when they are funded to be, not merely to do - allows them to strengthen their organisational capacity and be “long-term agents of change”.⁹ Increased core, flexible, operational funding for Organisations for Persons with Disabilities (OPDs) in the Asia Pacific region will further strengthen their capacity to contribute to long-term meaningful change for people with disabilities in their networks and communities. This additional spending on disability inclusion should come as part of an overall increase in Australia's Official Development Assistance budget.

Recommendation 3: Increase the central disability fund to \$20m per annum with annual increases thereafter in line with CPI.

Recommendation 4: The Australian Government should increase the provision of core, flexible and multi-year funding to Organisations of Persons with Disabilities (OPDs) and implement the priorities of local women with disabilities in determining development investments.

Recommendation 5: Set a 2030 target of 10 per cent of ODA being allocated to initiatives with disability equity as a principal objective, according to the OECD Development Assistance Committee Disability policy marker.

3. Convening and movement strengthening: support intra- and cross-movement solidarity

People with disabilities can be marginalised within disability rights movements as well as other social and human rights movements, due to the intersections of disability related discrimination with other identity-related discrimination (e.g. such as racism, sexism, ageism, or homophobia). Despite experiencing disadvantage related to gender inequality and disability discrimination, women and girls with disabilities are often excluded from active participation in gender and disability-focused programs and movements¹⁰. Strengthening the intersectional inclusion of diverse people with disabilities across social and rights-based movements will enhance the agency, representation and voice of people with disabilities in the social movements and public forums that seek to uphold their needs and rights. Dedicating resources to support knowledge exchange and engagement between OPDs, women's rights organisations (WROs) and other social and rights-based movements and networks will help ensure that policies and programs address the needs of constituents with intersecting characteristics. As part of a broader intersectional approach, DFAT should provide funding and incentives for cross-movement solidarity, including between OPDs and Women's Rights Organisations, as well as LGBTIQ+ led, youth-led, and other constituency-based movements.

Recommendation 6: Increase resourcing to support the inclusion of diverse people with disabilities within disability rights, women's rights, LGBTIQ+ rights and other human rights-based networks and movements.

Recommendation 7: Support holistic, intersectional and collaborative approaches by supporting cross-movement solidarity between disability rights and women's rights, LGBTIQ+ rights and other human rights-based movements.

4. Evidence and accountability: strengthening data and improving effectiveness

More evidence is needed to better understand the intersectional nature of the disadvantage and discrimination often experienced by people with disabilities in our region, and the contribution of Australia's International Development Program towards addressing related systemic and social barriers.

DFAT's performance reporting indicates that only 54% of programs assessed were deemed to be effectively addressing disability inclusion¹¹. With nearly half of programs not meeting the effectiveness standard, greater investments in technical expertise are required to ensure appropriate action on disability inclusion mainstreaming. However, DFAT's current Performance and Delivery Framework merely commits to tracking the percentage of programs assessed as effective on disability inclusion, without setting a target¹². Establishing a target of 80%, in line with the gender equality effectiveness target, and with supporting technical expertise to ensure robust implementation, would driver greater accountability towards improvement. Similarly, reporting the percentage of DFAT's programs assessed as not targeted, significant and principal against the OECD DAC Disability Marker would also strengthen transparency and support greater investment. As DFAT's capacity for intersectional, power-based GEDSI analysis deepens over time, the strategy should work towards establishing a complementary commitment that – as for gender – investments over \$3m should include a disability equity and rights objective to ensure this analysis takes place at the design phase, in addition to the effectiveness assessment that takes place during and after implementation.

Tracking progress and incorporating lessons learned is pivotal to the success of achieving the Disability Equity and Rights Strategy. Understanding how investments are translating into outcomes for the most

marginalised is important for effectiveness and accountability. Australia has invested in developing *Equality Insights*, a survey tool that captures individual-level, gender-sensitive and multidimensional data and makes analysis by social group possible.¹³ Equality Insights can provide key evidence to provide a baseline assessment of the circumstances of people with a disability as well as to enable regular monitoring and evaluation of the extent to which programs and interventions are leading to positive change for all people, including those with a disability. Scaling up availability of this data and the capacity for development actors to use it, should be ongoing priorities of this strategy.

Recommendation 8: Require that all in-country programs over \$3m have a disability objective, and that 80 per cent of programs effectively address disability equity.

Recommendation 9: Report annually the percentage of programs assessed against the OECD DAC disability maker as not targeted, significant and principal focus.

Recommendation 10: Through consultation, up to three countries should be identified for trialling *Equality Insights* as a monitoring and accountability tool. This would involve the collection of longitudinal data in these countries to inform targeted investments, track their performance, adapt and learn, and ensure robust accountability for the outcomes of Australian investments in disability rights.

5. Sustainability: building technical expertise with DFAT and OPDs

The most recent evaluation of Australia's investment in disability inclusive development, conducted by the Office of Development Effectiveness in 2018, found that while good progress was made in strengthening disability inclusion under the Development for All strategies, 'the Australian aid program is still far from being fully disability inclusive' and sustained efforts are central to Australia maintaining and advancing on the achievements made¹⁴.

Development expertise has been moving out of DFAT since the AusAid-DFAT merger in 2013, driving an increasing focus on external managing contractors to execute development programs¹⁵. Increasingly, disability and GEDSI technical skills are being outsourced into advisory roles instead of being embedded within DFAT in Canberra and at Posts. While there is clear benefit to mandating the provision of disability inclusive and intersectional analysis and advice, there is a risk that without internal expertise and sufficient resourcing, the analysis and advice is neither sufficiently understood, nor able to be acted on credibly. Rebuilding this capability inside DFAT is a high priority. IWDA continues to call for an increase in DFAT's core staffing budget to enable investment in long term roles with technical expertise in disability inclusion across the international development program, and for DFAT to track and publicly report the allocation of FTE to these technical roles. This should include the reestablishment of principle sector specialist roles, including for disability inclusion.

Organisations for Persons with Disabilities (OPDs) in our region would similarly benefit from long-term core funding for operational costs, organisational capacity development, staff capacity development and succession planning for leadership of OPDs, including investment in leadership opportunities for women and girls with disabilities. DFAT should also track provision of funding to OPDs as they do for Women's Rights Organisations, not merely the number of OPDs receiving capacity development.

Recommendation 11: Increase the staffing portfolio of DFAT in Canberra and at Posts with a focus on disability inclusion, GEDSI and intersectional analysis expertise, including people with disabilities.

Recommendation 12: Increase long-term core funding for OPDs and invest in succession planning, organisational capacity development and leadership development opportunities for diverse women and girls with disabilities to ensure long-term sustainability and effectiveness of OPDs and the broader disability rights movement.

REFERENCES:

¹ ADDC open submission to the consultation process

² UNPRPD, UNWOMEN (2021) Intersectionality Resource Guide and Toolkit. Accessed via: [INTERSECTIONALITY RESOURCE GUIDE AND TOOLKIT \(unwomen.org\)](https://unwomen.org/intersectionality-resource-guide-and-toolkit/)

³ CBM 2019. Leave Noone Behind. Gender Equality Disability Inclusion and Leadership for Sustainable Development. Accessed via: [CBM-Leave-No-One-Behind-Gender-Equility.pdf](#)

⁴ UNWOMEN. Factors and Figures: Women and Girls with Disabilities. Accessed via: [Facts and figures: Women and girls with disabilities | What we do | UN Women – Headquarters](#)

⁵ Banteay Srei et al., “Research Policy Brief: Triple Jeopardy: Violence against Women with Disabilities in Cambodia” (AusAID, 2013).

⁶ [Women with disability at increased risk of violence | Australian Bureau of Statistics \(abs.gov.au\)](#)

⁷ Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) October 2023. Gender Equality, Disability and Social Inclusion Analysis. Good Practice Note. Accessed Via: [Gender equality, disability and social inclusion analysis – Good practice note \(dfat.gov.au\)](#)

⁸ Disability Inclusion in the DFAT Development Program. Good Practice Note. April 2021. Accessed via: <https://www.dfat.gov.au/sites/default/files/disability-inclusive-development-guidance-note.pdf>

⁹ Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) Office for Development Effectiveness. 2014. *Learning from Australian aid operational evaluations*. <https://www.dfat.gov.au/sites/default/files/learning-from-aust-aid-op-evaluations.pdf>

¹⁰ (Edwards 2015, Grech and Soldatic 2016, CBM 2019).

¹¹ IWDA 2022 Federal Budget Submission. Accessed via: [IWDA-budget-analysis-FY2022-23_Final.pdf](#)

¹² Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. August 2023. Australia’s International Development Performance and Delivery Framework. Accessed via: <https://www.dfat.gov.au/sites/default/files/performance-delivery-framework.pdf>

¹³ From 2016-2020 the Individual Deprivation Measure was a partnership between IWDA and ANU with strategic support by the Australian Government through DFAT. www.individualdeprivationmeasure.org From 1 August 2020, IWDA has taken forward this work under a new banner, Equality Insights equalityinsights.org

¹⁴ ACFID AGM statement

¹⁵ IWDA 2023-2024 Federal Budget Analysis. Accessed via: [Analysis of the Australian Federal Budget 2023-24 | IWDA](#)

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