

## AusAID's Disability Inclusive Development Reference Group Seventh Meeting 28-30 May 2013

### Communiqué

The seventh formal meeting of AusAID's Disability-Inclusive Development Reference Group (DRG) was held in Canberra, 28-30 May 2013. Current members of the DRG are: Senator Monthian Buntan from Thailand, Charlotte McClain-Nhlapo, Coordinator of the Office for Disability and Inclusive Development at USAID; Setareki Macanawai, Chief Executive Officer of the Pacific Disability Forum; Ingar Duering, Head of Sector Initiative "Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities", at Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ); Rosemary Kayess, Director of Human Rights and Disability Projects at the Australian Human Rights Centre, University of New South Wales; and Deborah Rhodes on behalf of the Australian Disability and Development Consortium (ADDC). Frederick Miller, Disability Coordinator at the University of the South Pacific, and Carrie Netting, from the UK's Department of International Development, and future secondee to AusAID, also attended as observers.

#### Purpose

1. The DRG was established to provide high level insights and advice on the implementation of AusAID's *Development for All* strategy. Objectives for the seventh meeting for AusAID were:
  - To review AusAID's progress against *Development for All*
  - To provide guidance to AusAID on key policy issues such as including people with disability within the post-2015 development agenda
  - To raise awareness of disability-inclusive development with key stakeholders within and external to AusAID including AusAID's Senior Executive, parliamentarians and the academic community.

#### Summary

2. The meeting provided an opportunity to discuss issues such as the implementation of the mid-term review of *Development for All*, including people with disability in the post-2015 development agenda and AusAID's approach to developing a new strategy. The Disability Reference Group met with the Action Director General and a wide range of people from AusAID's sectoral, regional and program areas including focal points for disability-inclusive development, Principal and Senior Sector Specialists.
3. The meeting included a Q&A Seminar on disability-inclusive development, held at the Development Policy Centre, Australian National University (ANU). The session was jointly organised with ADDC and AusAID and attended by over 60 people from a range of backgrounds and interest groups including students and staff from the University, representatives of NGOs and consultants. The DRG reinforced and reiterated key messages such as:
  - the need to engage Disabled People's Organisations (DPOs) whose voice and agency is critical;
  - disability-inclusive development benefits the whole population as well as the 15% with a disability;
  - people with disability are rights-holders and stakeholders in development and should not just be considered under labels such as "vulnerable" or "marginalised";
  - disability-inclusive development is here to stay and is not a fad;
  - impairments are part of human diversity;
  - disability-inclusive development is an investment in functioning economies and societies;
  - changing attitudes and including people with disability in the design and implementation of aid programs is essential and should not be "costed" separately from any other participatory effort; and
  - disability-inclusive development means more efficient aid programs overall.

4. The meeting also included an event at Parliament House, hosted by the Hon Amanda Rishworth MP, Parliamentary Secretary for Disabilities and Carers, and chaired by Christine Walton from ADDC. The event included addresses by Seta Macanawai and Australia Awards recipient Dr Maureen Udodeme from Nigeria. The event generated significant interest in AusAID's *Development for All* Strategy amongst the parliamentarians present.

## Key Findings

The DRG:

- Thanks AusAID for hosting the meeting and highly commends AusAID on its achievements since the DRG last met. The award to Australia from the Women's Refugee Commission, recognition from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Development Assistance Committee (DAC) and the involvement of AusAID's Director General, Peter Baxter, in the launch of UNICEF's State of the World's Children Report on 30 May 2013 in Vietnam, were all noted as examples of AusAID's leadership and commitment in this area.
- Commends AusAID's Executive for its strong positive response to the mid-term review of the *Development for All* Strategy as well as for retaining an increased budget for disability-inclusive development for the financial year 2013-14.
- Recognises the complexities of working in multiple and diverse national contexts in the Asia and Pacific regions, and commends steps taken within the Asia and Pacific Divisions to embed inclusive principles as part of their work.
  - In particular the DRG notes that the Pacific Division's effort to develop a delivery strategy is an important step and looks forward to this Strategy being finalised and implemented within its programs.
- Recognises the progress made by the Australian Awards and Volunteer Program in finalising and implementing policies on including people with disability and notes in particular the significant resources (including staff time) allocated to the Awards Program.
- Notes the critical role of AusAID's Principal and Senior Sectoral Specialists and focal points on disability-inclusive development in promoting a more inclusive aid program and the opportunity for them to continually deepen understanding and play greater roles.
  - Recommends that AusAID's Disability Policy Section works with the different sectoral areas to develop AusAID specific guidance and tools on how to ensure that people with disability both contribute to programs as well as benefit from them, reinforcing and reiterating the key issues noted above (paragraph 3) as well as the principles included in *Development for All*.
  - Congratulates AusAID for increasing the number of focal points on disability inclusive development across Posts and Canberra and encourages further efforts to define their roles and responsibilities.
  - Recognises that the depth of knowledge among staff varies and stresses the need for deepening understanding at all levels about what it really means to take the *Development for All* strategy from principle to practice, including through systematic professional development offered to AusAID staff.
- Acknowledges the high expectations that Australia will take a leadership role in striving for the maximum possible focus on disability inclusion in the post-2015 development agenda.
  - The DRG supports consideration by the international community being given to a stand-alone goal for disability inclusion, and stresses the importance of explicit mention of disability-inclusion across all targets and indicators as well as in the framework principles.
  - The DRG encourages research and analysis on the progress of the MDGs so far and opportunities to accelerate their achievement up to 2015 through inclusion of people with disabilities.

- The DRG encourages Australia to work closely with developing countries as well as bilateral donors including new donor countries in the development of an inclusive post-2015 development agenda. It encourages Australia to also continue working with other stakeholders, especially multilateral partners to strengthen systematic disability inclusive efforts, given the significant contributions Australia makes to their work. In particular, AusAID should promote empowering language and focus on contribution and participation, rather than deficiency-centred vocabulary such as “vulnerable groups”.
- Applauds AusAID’s commitment, articulated in its management response to the mid-term review, to develop a new disability-inclusive development Strategy following on from *Development for All* for the period 2015-2020.
  - Suggests that while consultation remains important, the next Strategy should be targeted and build on the objectives and principles of the current strategy.
  - Agrees with the recommendation of the mid-term review that the Strategy should not include an objective relating to the prevention of disabilities except where it relates to prevention of secondary disabilities.
  - Recommends that the Strategy concentrate on focal areas in which Australia can play a significant advocacy role internationally.
  - Suggests that clear criteria be established for the addition of any focus country in which AusAID will support the partner government in disability-inclusive development. Criteria should include partner country commitment as well as interest from AusAID’s Posts.
  - Suggests that consideration be given to new focus sectors, such as livelihoods and employment and that different areas of work within these sectors may be relevant in different countries, for example disaster risk reduction programs.
  - Affirms the need for ongoing monitoring by the Disability Policy Section of the work of other sections across AusAID to contribute expertise and ensure policy compliance and quality.
  - Considers there may be merit in supporting south-south cooperation as well as other context-specific efforts to increase capacity in disability-inclusive development beyond technical assistance.