

AusAID's Disability-Inclusive Development Reference Group

First Meeting 23- 24 June, 2009, Canberra

Communiqué

1. The first meeting of the AusAID Disability-Inclusive Development Reference Group (RG) was held in Canberra on 23 and 24 June, 2009. Key outcomes of the meeting are: finalised Terms of Reference (refer [Attachment A](#)) for the RG and agreement on priority areas on which the RG will provide strategic guidance and review over the next six months.
2. The two days of proceedings was chaired by AusAID Assistant Director General, Laurie Dunn. The meeting included discussions with members of AusAID's Senior Executive (Director General Bruce Davis and Deputy Director General Murray Proctor), representatives of AusAID's Education, Infrastructure and Scholarships teams, and members of the Disability Inclusive Development team. The Hon Bob McMullan, Parliamentary Secretary for International Development Assistance, attended a working lunch with the RG. During the meeting a letter from the Australian Human Rights and Disability Discrimination Commissioner regarding the Reference Group was tabled and discussed. The Agenda for the meeting can be found at [Attachment B](#).
3. Members of the RG are: Rosemary Kayess (Acting Director, Disability Studies and Research Centre, University of New South Wales), Seta Macanawai (Chief Executive Officer, Pacific Disability Forum), Charlotte McClain-Nhlapo (Senior Operations Officer, World Bank), Megan McCoy (Pacific Regional - Social Development Programme Officer NZAID) and Christine Walton (Executive Officer, Australian Disability and Development Consortium). Biographies of Reference Group members are at [Attachment C](#).

Purpose

4. The Reference Group's purpose is to provide strategic oversight of and senior-level advice to AusAID on the implementation of the *Development for All* strategy. In line with the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) and the precept "*nothing about us without us*," the Reference group will guide Australia's aid program to ensure that its efforts are consistent with international human rights frameworks – particularly the CRPD – good practice in inclusive development, and that they are responsive to the divergent needs and priorities of people with disability. The Reference Group formalises AusAID's commitment to continue the open and inclusive approach established during consultations on the development of the *Development for All* strategy. The RG will also hold AusAID to account for delivering on the commitments made by Government in the strategy.

Summary of Key Discussions during the meeting

5. **Parliamentary Secretary for International Development Assistance – The Honorable Mr Bob McMullan**, met the RG over a working lunch. The key areas discussed were:

- i. The importance of ensuring that future Partnerships for Development negotiated between the Australian and partner governments include disability.
- ii. The potential for Australia to bring its experience in developing and implementing disability-inclusive policy to the Pacific Disability Ministers meeting (October 2009), to explore how coordination between Pacific Island governments can be strengthened, and active involvement of Disabled People's Organisations (DPOs) and People with Disability (PWD) based on the CRPD can be supported.
- iii. Opportunity for Australia to host a side event during the CRPD Conference of States Parties (2-4 September, 2009) around Article 32. This could involve a presentation on Australia's *Development for All* strategy and discussion on ways to strengthen international donor cooperation.
- iv. The interest of Ms Thérèse Rein, the wife of the Prime Minister, in disability and her offer to host a working lunch for the members of the RG and relevant AusAID staff at the next meeting in November 2009.

AusAID Senior Executive

6. **Bruce Davis, AusAID Director General**, thanked the group for their engagement with AusAID and noted that the establishment of the RG was an important next step after the strategy's consultation and development phase. He looked forward to discussing how the aid program needed to change so that disability was reflected much more strongly and, over time, how specific disability activities and priorities could be incorporated. He also noted:

- i. AusAID has made an initial modest start and now needs to look at how best to extend efforts to make disability a critical component of its work.
- ii. The RG should work jointly with AusAID in looking at where the aid program can sensibly focus and help to establish relationships with relevant players to effectively influence and maximise development outcomes.
- iii. That the RG's approach should be one of *engagement* rather than centred solely on providing advice. He hoped the RG will provide input on where AusAID needs to place emphasis and where the agency is not hitting the mark.
- iv. The importance of Australia taking an international advocacy role based on good practice and on our experience working with partner countries.
- v. There is an urgent need for a strong evidence base to assist our understanding, inform our efforts and meet our reporting obligations. Currently there are opportunities to increase the scale of Australia's engagement in capacity strengthening on statistics in partner countries to ensure appropriate data on disability is being collected. Collecting qualitative data and information about the real lived experience of PWD is vitally important.
- vi. Education as a priority sector. There is scope for AusAID to do more in this area given education's profile within the aid program: It has been identified as a flagship program by the Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade, the Honourable Mr Stephen Smith MP, and plays a key role in reducing poverty and improving the

- quality of life for all, including people with disability, as reflected in MDG 2 - achieving universal education. Input from the outset by the RG is welcome.
- vii. The need for internal discussions within AusAID about how disability is being prioritised at different levels of the agency. This relates to new processes for periodic and regular engagement by Senior Executive and the Program Committee as well as broader quality assurance processes.
 - viii. The urgent need to put in place a broad suite of indicators and build a degree of discipline into the monitoring of AusAID's efforts in disability.
7. **Murray Proctor, Deputy Director General, Program Enabling Division**, acknowledged the historical significance of the inaugural meeting of the Reference Group (RG) noting that it is a new way of working for AusAID. He said that the role of the Reference Group was essential in assisting AusAID to move from not having a significant or comprehensive disability focus to extending our efforts in disability-inclusive development across the whole range of MDG target areas. He provided the RG with an overview of the broader context in which AusAID works and noted the vital community interest in Australia in this new priority area for the aid program.

Summary update on implementation of the Development For All Strategy

8. **Kristen Pratt, Director Disability Inclusive Development**, provided a summary of progress to date and challenges in supporting AusAID to implement the *Development for All* (DFA) strategy. 2009 is a planning year and the focus is to put in place foundations for comprehensive and sustainable organisational change. She reflected that the momentum experienced during the consultation period of strategy development (2008) had remained high and possibly increased. This is positive but at the same time creates challenges for the DID team in remaining focused on its core work. She noted that the mandate of the Disability Inclusive Development team (DID) is to provide agency leadership on disability and facilitate and support AusAID in implementing the strategy. The team's responsibility is to drive sustainable change in the way AusAID as a whole does its work. The DID is not primarily an implementing team and disability will not be implemented as a stand-alone program.
9. **Highlights of progress** made to date in implementing the DFA strategy include:
- i. Support for partner governments' national disability efforts in Cambodia and East Timor.
 - ii. Development of a continuum of support for capacity development for DPOs in the Pacific. This includes agreement for the Pacific Disability Forum to lead a program of organisational strengthening for Pacific DPOs and support for the new Disability Rights Fund, which complements support provided by the Australian Human Rights Commission through AusAID's Pacific Governance Support Program to raise understanding of the CRPD in Pacific DPOs.
 - iii. Ongoing implementation of the Avoidable Blindness Initiative (ABI).
 - iv. Some examples of change of practice in AusAID's program areas – Australian Development Scholarships, Australian Leadership Fellowship Awards, Disaster Risk Reduction Strategy, and inclusion of disability in the Annual Performance Reporting Guidelines.
 - v. A Companion Report (to the strategy) is soon to be published which relates to Outcome 5 of the DFA strategy.

- vi. Australian Development Research Awards: two disability-related proposals funded in the 2008 round and disability to be included as a cross cutting issue in all thematic research areas in the 2009.
- vii. Australian investment in the WHO World Disability Report to be published in 2010.

DID team priorities for the remainder of 2009 include:

- i. Establishing the RG.
- ii. Expanding further and operationalising a performance monitoring framework.
- iii. Moving forward in the design of the Pacific DPO capacity building initiative.
- iv. Working in partnership with other donors in the design of a Disability Resource Facility.
- v. Development and early implementation of a communication / leadership / capacity development (C/L/CD) program.

Challenges faced and anticipated going forward:

- i. Building a critical mass of comprehensive understanding within AusAID of the importance of disability-inclusive development for development effectiveness and poverty reduction.
- ii. Managing high stakeholder expectations – it will take time for external stakeholders to experience comprehensive change in how AusAID works.
- iii. Ensuring that we stay true to our stated principles (in the DfA), particularly being open and accessible and the key role for PWD in the process.
- iv. Building strong agency and political leadership and effective organisational accountability.
- v. Excellence in performance management – being able to effectively measure what is being done and to build the case for disability-inclusive development.

10. **Representatives from some of AusAID's key sectoral areas, Education, Infrastructure and Scholarships**, provided briefings on early implementation of *Development for All* and some of the realities, issues and challenges they have identified in going forward.

11. **The Education team (Steve Passingham and Fabia Shah)** expressed the view that practical gains are better achieved and longer lasting if part of a broader effort that is inclusive of all children. Noted that while inclusive education for children with disability had always been on AusAID's agenda that efforts to date had been ad hoc and fragmented and there had been no synthesis of evidence. Advised that over the next 6 months they will map out how to make schools more inclusive, including consideration of social infrastructure. A key challenge will be how to bring about a shift in thinking to counter the assumption that disability-inclusive approaches are something to add on and/or a luxury that many can't afford. Building the evidence base and understanding why children with disability don't get into school or don't succeed or finish will also be critical.

12. **Principal Infrastructure Advisor, Marcus Howard**, clarified that the team focus is on 'economic infrastructure' – roads, water and sanitation and that 'social

infrastructure' is managed through country and regional programs. He noted past and current work supporting the reduction of preventable impairments through the design of safe roads and helmet wearing campaigns. Discussed the new \$300 million, three-year WATSAN initiative (MDG 7) and work towards better alignment of cross cutting issues including disability, environment and gender. Noted a key challenge was the cost implications of capital works and the impact of scaling up in large countries and the need for sound justification and quality information to ensure good decision making. A key focus for moving forward in this area was getting targets into performance assessment frameworks and building understanding of the issue. The Pacific Regional Infrastructure Facility provided an opportunity to get in early and increase the quality of programs, as does the ADB Port Vila WATSAN activity.

13. **Michael Hassett, Director Scholarships section and Petra Kavunenکو**, noted that Scholarships are a significant and growing element of Australia's aid program, currently making up approximately 5 percent of all assistance, with 1800 new scholarships annually. Discussed revised guidelines for both Australian Development Scholarships (ADS) and Australian Leadership Awards Fellowships (ALAFs) and the increasing numbers of people with disability beginning to access these opportunities. Key challenges include: ensuring students appropriate visas, building in flexibility around carer support, ensuring that host universities are able to provide appropriate support, building an increasing base of eligible applicants. The ADS team was particularly seeking advice regarding how best to strength advocacy work to increase the number of people with disability applying for long term awards.

Key Issues and Themes Discussed by the Reference Group

14. General Comments made by the RG:

- i. Australia's initiative and leadership in disability and development was strongly welcomed, particularly in relation to the approach taken during consultation for the strategy – open, transparent, accessible, and inclusive.
- ii. Establishment of the AusAID Disability Inclusive Development Reference Group is considered a milestone for AusAID both in respect to other donors' position on this issue and in regard to AusAID's commitment to the inclusion of PWD.
- iii. The uniqueness of this type of external RG (for AusAID and probably for other similar donors) which will guide and be part of the accountability mechanism of the implementation of a major strategy was noted, as was its importance to Australia's leadership efforts.
- iv. Recognition that AusAID is facing a big task in bringing about significant organisational change, but has made a good start.
- v. Encouragement that Australia is committed to provide ongoing leadership regionally and internationally to build awareness of our approach amongst other donors. Articles 32 and 33 provide a framework to do this.

15. Strategic issues raised in discussions by the RG:

- i. Time frame and stages for implementing and effecting organisational change. There is value in considering different stages of implementation – advocacy, awareness raising, and integration into "business as usual". It is important to think long term (10 to even 20 years) and to anticipate and plan in 3-4 year stages the types of issues and contexts in which AusAID will be operating.

- ii. The CRPD as a practical tool to guide programming and financing mechanisms with partner countries. Potential for partner governments to have ownership of efforts by organising the donors' support around the ratification, implementation, monitoring and reporting of the CRPD. An example was given of AusAID's approach in supporting Vietnam's accession to the World Trade Organisation.
- iii. The value of the CRPD in influencing high level policy dialogue respecting disability will be a new issue to introduce at this level. The importance and value of ensuring people with disability are part of and influence the policy dialogue – this requires increasing and ongoing support to civil society.
- iv. How Australia can align its efforts to best effect with other international facilities, structures and processes in disability – eg Global Partnership in Disability and Development and International Disability Alliance.

16. Building understanding and measuring performance

- i. Urgent need to build the evidence base but need to be careful about how baseline data collection is framed. Collaborative research with DPOs in Asia and the Pacific is important.
- ii. Start in focused way: eg in the area of Inclusive education in the Pacific where there is potential for Australia to take the lead in providing quality, relevant information to inform program directions and support smaller island states in regard to possible first steps.
- iii. Elaboration and operationalisation of the Performance Assessment Framework (PAF) for the DFA strategy. This needs to be guided by the CRPD and also aligned with apply other international frameworks including: MDGs, Paris Declaration and ACCRA action plan.
- iv. The importance of baseline information as a reference point for the PAF. It will be critical to focus on situational analysis done for country programs and development partnerships and the potential for CRPD to guide this.

17. Communication / Leadership / Capacity Building

- i. Critical importance to maintain momentum in effectively translating policy into practice and action both in Canberra and at country program level.
- ii. The proposed Disability Resource Facility (DRF) will be essential in meeting the demand from AusAID officers for support to implement the strategy, in particular in answering the “how” questions related to DID.
- iii. The importance of putting strong governance structures in place within AusAID's senior management to ensure DID remains a priority area. The critical importance of disability being “mainstreamed” horizontally *and* vertically by the agency.
- iv. Necessary to develop strategies that will sustain strong leadership – political, executive and program management levels.
- v. At this early stage important to take a multifaceted approach to communication that targets internal and external players and in particular the thematic areas of AusAID so that disability is raised as an issue and included in design and review processes.
- vi. Ongoing and wide reaching advocacy about disability and development. Advocacy is a continual process: even as the organisation changes and understanding of DID increases, there will remain a need to bring new people on board. Ongoing dialogue and engagement with the domestic disability community is encouraged.

18. Thematic areas

- i. Caution about a “generalist approach” to inclusion in relation to education. Concern that a broader approach that assumes inclusion of children with disability as part of targeting the “most vulnerable” in reality often is not successful. Specific targeting of disability is necessary at this early stage.
- ii. Endorse accessible and inclusive education as a starting point for Australia’s aid program. Particularly important to get early baseline data in this area to build evidence base.
- iii. AusAID should also move to develop clear protocols on accessible design. Given USAID’s experience and policy directive, this is an area that could easily and quickly be moved on – “low hanging fruit”.

19. Other issues

- i. There is an important role for ongoing engagement with the Australian Human Rights Commission.
- ii. Noted that Australian Government’s focus in Africa is on WATSAN and food security. There is significant potential and need to consider disability as part of these priority areas.

Priorities for Reference Group strategic focus and review for the next six months

20. The following areas of AusAID activity will be the focus of the RG for the next six months;

- i. Formalise AusAID corporate governance structures and accountability mechanisms for disability inclusive development, including building DID into formal quality processes.
- ii. Building understanding (evidence base) and measuring performance: internal discussions to inform the elaboration of the Performance Assessment Framework based on key results areas in *Development for All* and the CRPD and articulation of indicators that programs can use.
- iii. Communication / leadership / capacity building: finalise partnership to support work in these areas and develop a work plan.
- iv. Disability Resource Facility (DRF): hold discussions with other donors with the purpose to secure agreement and to commence work on DRF concept; finalise design in preparation for calling for Requests for Tender.

21. Other issues that the Reference Group expressed interest in following progress when next meet include:

- i. Education thematic group plans to more strategically address disability-inclusive education, particularly around strengthening the evidence base.
- ii. Infrastructure: review progress made, particularly in relation to accessible design protocols.
- iii. The Focus country efforts: how well aligned they are with the CRPD.
- iv. Progress being made by country programs and how they are changing their work in practice to include people with disability.

Next Meeting It is proposed that the meeting will be held in Canberra in early November, 2009. Final date to be confirmed.