

Summary of key messages from the International Disability Equity and Rights Strategy consultations with and submissions from organisations of persons with disabilities

Paper prepared for DFAT's Disability Equity and Rights Section by CBM Inclusion Advisory Group

Disclaimer

This publication has been funded by the Australian Government through the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. The views expressed in this publication are the author's alone and are not necessarily the views of the Australian Government.

Acknowledgements

DFAT's disability inclusion technical and movement strengthening partners, CBM Global and Disability Rights Advocacy Fund, facilitated accessible and inclusive in-country and online consultation processes with disability movement stakeholders in selected countries and across the Pacific region. CBM's Inclusion Advisory Group compiled the perspectives of OPDs received through these consultations and written submissions into this summary paper.

Voices from the Region

Introduction

Between October 2023 and March 2024, the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) undertook broad, inclusive and accessible consultations to inform the new International Disability Equity and Rights Strategy (IDEARS).

Consultations took place through face-to-face workshops and online discussions. DFAT spoke to almost 400 people, with 249 participants identifying as persons with disabilities. Representatives from 136 organisations of persons with disabilities (OPDs) participated, predominately from the Pacific and Southeast Asia.

In the consultations there was greater representation of individuals with physical disabilities (46%) compared with individuals with other types of impairments. There were slightly more men with disabilities (53%) than women (44%) or non-binary (0.8%) participants with disabilities in the consultations.

DFAT also invited the public to send in submissions to inform the Strategy. Almost 25% of the 93 submissions received were from OPDs or OPD consortiums.

This document is a summary of key messages shared by OPDs during these consultations. DFAT also consulted bilateral partners, multilateral agencies, and development organisations in Australia and overseas, however their perspectives are not included in this report.

Australia's role

"We believe that Australia has a unique and strategic role to play in promoting and protecting the rights and interests of women and girls with disabilities in the region and globally as a major donor, partner, and advocate." *OPD in Indonesia*

- Australia has played an important role in championing disability in the region and globally and **should reinvigorate and continue to strengthen its leadership**.
- Australia's disability partners welcomed the **move towards a Strategy** with a focus on **equity and rights**.
- Australia's efforts to **provide platforms for OPDs to be heard** to date have been appreciated. Australia should continue its leadership in amplifying their voices.
- OPDs called on Australia to use its multilateral and bilateral relationships to **progress the implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD)** and facilitate partnerships between OPDs and governments.
- Australia's role in facilitating **participation of persons with disabilities in global forums** was a particular theme, and climate change and humanitarian efforts are focus areas for OPDs.
- There was strong demand across all consultations for Australia to provide **more and better support for OPDs to lead local change**.

"Resourcing the work of [OPDs] to raise multi-level awareness on [the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities], advocate for appropriate services, and support legislative reforms." *OPD in Samoa*

- Australia's support to the **Pacific Disability Forum and the Disability Rights and Advocacy Fund** in particular, as well as ensuring OPDs and persons with disabilities have access to the support provided by modalities such as Australian Volunteers Program and Australian Awards Scholarships, is highly valued and **should be continued** to reach more people.
- OPDs raised the importance of Australia's support in policy dialogue platforms to **end segregation** of persons with disabilities in health and education and to **promote deinstitutionalisation**.
- OPDs said there is a need to better **monitor indicators and outcomes** on disability inclusion and equity in DFAT's investments across mainstream and disability-specific funding streams.
- Pacific OPDs asked Australia to progress its commitment to scoping a **flexible funding facility** that includes a technical helpdesk for governments and OPDs and mobilises investments to address the small proportion of Pacific gross domestic product (GDP) currently being spent on disability.

"Australia must ensure that the purpose of the International Disability Equity and Rights Strategy is to achieve equity and give effect to the rights contained in these instruments. This means that the Strategy cannot merely promote awareness or inclusion for people with disabilities but must operate specifically from a human rights framework." *OPD in Australia*

Engagement with OPDs

- OPDs appreciated the mutual value in Australia **broadening and deepening its relationships** with OPDs.

"The support for [OPDs] at the national level by development partners such as Australia...has strengthened network partnerships and collaborating with the Papua New Guinea [(PNG)] Government and networking partners at the subnational level. This has led to forming the [OPDs] at the district and subnational levels." *OPD in PNG*

- OPDs would like to have more **direct relationships with DFAT**, including direct funding arrangements.
- OPDs identified the need for **sustainable, long-term, and flexible core funding mechanisms**.
- A commitment to **meaningful participation** was highlighted as critical and means moving beyond providing invitations to 'the table' towards having an 'equal voice' in decision making. OPDs said this requires providing sufficient lead time to support engagement, investing in co-design wherever possible, adequate resourcing that ensures reasonable accommodations and remuneration for OPD time, and engagement of OPDs throughout the program cycle.
- Australia was asked to **continue to support OPD capacity development to enable them to engage meaningfully**. This included supporting development of leadership skills, regional collaborations, training on governance, project/financial management, policymaking, English language and rights, and continuing to support and provide technical assistance to and alongside OPDs, including in relation to disaster risk reduction, data collection and climate change.

- Australia should engage with and invest in a more **diverse range of OPD groups, particularly those representing the most marginalised** impairment groups and those from diverse gender and sexual identities and ethnic minorities.

"...the best way and most effective approach to advance disability equity is to work together with OPDs as a partner, not solely beneficiaries even though they need support due to the shortage of resources...All OPDs have their own goals, knowledge, experience and resources that they can contribute to the benefit of [persons with disabilities], their families, the community and make the world better." *OPD in Vietnam*

"Besides financial support, we want as much as possible to see the increase of partnership and transparency growing with a new charter for partnership and localisation in order for national OPDs [to be] accredited to access and to liaise direct with the Australian Government where necessary." *OPD in Western Pacific*

Priority policy and programming areas

"Establish pre-conditions for inclusion in the [International] Disability Equity and Rights Strategy and further [promote] these pre-requisites at a bilateral level through partnership arrangements and country-level program development plans. Without pre-conditions for inclusion the Strategy will fall short in fully realising the rights of persons with disabilities." *OPD in Fiji*

- **'Preconditions to inclusion'** was a concept highlighted when referring to areas OPDs considered as foundational elements that enable access and participation.

"Critical areas for the inclusion and participation of people with disabilities such as accessibility to ICT [information and communications technology], transport and the built environment, availability and affordability of quality assistive products and technology, health, deinstitutionalisation and rethinking support services, including innovative models, are all opportunities for Australia to show thought and regional leadership." *OPD in Pacific*

Non-discrimination and CRPD-compliant law and policies

- OPDs would like to see Australia focus on supporting governments and OPDs to **harmonise laws and policies with the CRPD**, including ensuring **the right to legal capacity** and development of disability legislation.
- OPDs saw value in Australia facilitating sub-regional committees or forums on the CRPD and **building capacity of partner governments** in disability equity and rights.
- OPDs said Australia should support translation of the CRPD into local languages and **raise the awareness of persons with disabilities of their rights**. This was a particularly strong message from Pacific consultations.
- OPDs highlighted the need to **continue to address root causes** of discrimination and stigma through efforts that change attitudes at all levels.

"I think the important thing here is the translation of the CRPD with the different government stakeholders to understand the CRPD and how best it is interpreted into the strategies to be more inclusive...so developing clear strategies is something that we would like the increase of Australia to support government ministries." *OPD in Western Pacific*

"DFAT should support government/OPD through resourcing development of disability legislation." *OPD in Samoa*

"[Australia] can support [government] to support the law on people with disabilities...the law has not been effectively enforced and so people with disabilities have been left behind." *OPD in Laos*

Assistive technology and disability support services

- **Investment in assistive technology (AT)** was raised as critical for enabling participation of persons with disabilities in communities. Assistive services, procurement and local industry development and subsidies and social protection to cover the costs of AT were highlighted as key areas that need attention.
- OPDs reflected that disability-specific support services are still not well understood by National Governments and pointed to the need to **invest in the full range of support services**, as well as the workforce around them.
- OPDs raised the importance of **investment in community-based disability services** and the role of family, friends, and the wider social ecosystem, and pointed to the need for investments in these community support systems.
- **Early childhood development** and intervention, **sign language development**, legal recognition and the development of training and qualifications for care givers and service providers were all highlighted.

"Invest in developing a specialised workforce through its education, Australia Awards and Labour Development Programs to scale up disability support services at regional and national levels in the areas of sign language interpretation, braille instruction, psychosocial rehabilitation, inclusive counselling, physiotherapy, occupational therapy, speech pathology, orientation and mobility instruction, assistive device maintenance, caring, prosthetics, orthotics...autism, education psychology, for dyslexia and intellectual disability." *OPD in Fiji*

Accessibility

- Accessibility was identified as **one of the biggest challenges globally**, and OPDs suggested Australia could showcase leadership by mandating universal design in its programs.
- OPDs said Australia should pay **more attention to accessibility in its own work** by ensuring that accessibility requirements are met when inviting OPDs for consultations and by providing information in plain language, easy to read versions, local languages and in multiple formats.

"We have encountered instances of discrimination in transport, particularly in public transportation. It is imperative to incorporate this into the [strategy] to enhance [accessibility] of all services to disability peoples." *OPD in Kiribati*

Social protection

- OPDs said there was an unmet need for adequate disability allowances to cover the extra costs of disability.
- **Removing barriers to accessing social protection** schemes and empowerment of OPDs to engage on the issue was seen as critical.

"...develop social protection program that cover the cost of disability-related needs linked to the social registry." *OPD in Philippines*

Community inclusion and mobilisation

- Australian-funded programs need to **mobilise communities**, raise awareness of rights, remove barriers, and promote inclusive communities.
- The **support for OPDs to do advocacy for disability** has been working well, and Australia should continue and expand this support to more OPDs, particularly for those who are most marginalised.
- More attention needs to be paid to addressing **violence against persons with disabilities**, particularly women and children.
- Australia's **willingness to support OPDs to pilot programs** is appreciated and should be continued.
- Promoting and establishing **community based inclusive development (CBID) models in the Pacific and scaling up models in the Philippines** were recommended as priorities for Australia's support.

"...a separate stream of funding focussed on community inclusion, independent living, bolstering the existing support systems and establishing inclusive and accessible community supports services and mainstream services is the need of the hour." *OPD from Asia Pacific*

Other priorities

- OPDs said Australia's funding has seen important gains in some areas of rights but there is a need for **continued investment in and strengthening of**:
 - **inclusive education** across the lifespan, including teacher training and supports;
 - **inclusive health** and improved access to rehabilitation services; and
 - **employment opportunities** including better access to international employment pathways, livelihoods projects, and training.
- There were consistent recommendations for Australia to enhance its attention to disability inclusion in **disaster risk reduction, climate change mitigation and humanitarian response**, with a particular focus on women and children with disabilities.

"Health workers still have the assumption that people with disabilities are something that can be medically corrected. Assistive devices are still considered an effort to "heal and normalise" disability, not yet considered part of a person's personal need to be able to participate fully and meaningfully." *OPD in Indonesia*

"The community is increasingly recognised and there is additional attention about intellectual disability. However, it is not yet in the form of schools becoming inclusive because even 'inclusive schools' still reject children with intellectual disabilities." *OPD in Indonesia*

Approaches to implementation

Intersectionality and inclusion of underrepresented groups

"We would like to propose that Australia pays more attention to the issues of persons with psychosocial disabilities because until now people with psychosocial disabilities are one of the most marginalised groups, even within the disability community itself. Fundamental rights, such as legal capacity... [de]institutionalisation (the right to freedom), and the right to work, are still not enjoyed by persons with psychosocial disabilities." *OPD in Indonesia*

- A strong theme across consultations was the need to **acknowledge persons with disabilities as a diverse group**. The recognition of gender, age, ethnicity, LGBTQIA+ identity and impairment type as significantly influencing experiences was emphasised.
- The needs and interests of **persons with psychosocial disabilities and intellectual disabilities** are poorly understood, and OPDs saw a role for Australia in supporting self-advocacy and leadership of people in these impairment groups.
- OPDs raised concerns about the **limitations and risks of losing attention to disability within a gender equality, disability and social inclusion (GEDSI) approach**.
OPDs outlined the need to ensure sufficient disability technical expertise and protection of budgets for disability-specific aspects.

"Disability inclusion processes may be seen to succeed where it includes many people with disabilities, yet those most at risk of exclusion may continue to fall through cracks due to the higher systemic disadvantages they face." *OPD in the Pacific*

"We are concerned, though, that the development sectors' increasing shift towards broader 'GEDSI' [gender equality, disability and social inclusion] will blunt the cutting edge of DFAT's dedicated focus to disability. If the unique barriers and disadvantages faced by people with disabilities are only considered superficially, amongst a myriad of competing interests, then the deeper, substantive change required to achieve equity and rights for such persons will not progress." *OPD in the Pacific*

Data and evidence to support disability equity and rights

- The role Australia has had in **supporting capacity building** of OPDs and national statistics offices in **disability data** as well as its advocacy for use of the Washington Group questions was acknowledged and appreciated but OPDs said more work needs to be done.
- There is a need for **better monitoring and evaluation of disability outcomes** in all of Australia's programs.
- **Investment in research** that identifies evidence-based practice and impactful programs and attention to pre-implementation analysis and building on strengths of **local community and culture** to promote disability equity and rights were highlighted.

"The IDEARS should show DFAT's commitment to robust data collection that captures evidence on the experiences, situations, barriers, and support

requirements of diverse people with disabilities, both within Australia's aid program and within our partner governments." *OPD in the Pacific*

CRPD-compliant budgeting

- OPDs raised Australia's potential role to **advocate to partner governments to establish core budget for disability** equity and rights, enable implementation of the CRPD and support OPD advocacy.

"...with resourcing we look to DFAT not only to fund disability-inclusive investments, but to help our national governments improve their financial management systems, allocation processes and transparency to facilitate disability rights in national government budgets. These are crucial, systemic changes that will increase national level independence and sustainability for both government and the disability movement." *OPD in the Pacific*

Invest in DFAT's capability

- OPDs said **DFAT's disability technical capability** needs to be improved to support implementation of disability equity and rights, including for disability focal points.
- OPDs said Australia should **elevate the importance of disability inclusion across DFAT**.
- OPDs said a Disability Ambassador position, like the Gender Equality Ambassador, could be established and local disability advisors could be employed at Posts.
- OPDs said that, while there have been some gains in mainstreaming disability in programs, **there is a need for further support** to programs to fully understand the twin track approach and apply it well.
- There was strong demand for Australia to support **better representation of persons with disabilities at all levels** and in different forums and approaches – with a strong emphasis on co-design, establishment of adequately resourced and remunerated advisory roles for OPDs, and employment of persons with disabilities within DFAT.

"It is important for Australian DFAT initiatives aimed at disability development to focus on sustainability and localisation. This must be a key requirement for the projects to ensure that the implementing agencies work with [OPD] organisations to build their capacity." *OPD in PNG*

"Build the capacity and awareness of DFAT staff and their implementing partners on disability issues and ensure that they follow relevant standards and guidelines to promote disability inclusion in their work." *OPD in Indonesia*