Thoughts on

Australia’s New International Disability Equity and Rights Strategy

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1. **What should DFAT prioritise to advance disability equity and rights internationally?**

* DFAT should prioritise the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) and disability-inclusive SDGs. As recommended by [ODE’s 2018 evaluation of DFAT’s Development for All 2015-2020 strategy](https://www.dfat.gov.au/sites/default/files/development-for-all-evaluation.pdf), DFAT needs to continue to support the work needed for ratification or implementation of the CRPD. To do so, DFAT can support advocacy by OPDs to replace and update CRPD non-compliant policy and legislation. This is especially important for nations where there is stigma, limited capacity to mainstream disability across government departments and services, limited support for people with disabilities (reasonable accommodation), and weak legal protections against discrimination. The implementation of CRPD also includes the rolling out of the national acts and policies enacted in light of the CRPD.
* Another priority area can be improving data related to persons with disabilities. As the [United Nations](https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/resources/monitoring-and-evaluation-of-inclusive-development.html) puts it, the lack of data and information on disability and the situation of persons with disabilities at the national level contributes to the invisibility of persons with disabilities in official statistics, presenting an obstacle to achieving development planning and implementation that is inclusive of persons with disabilities.
* Considering persons with disabilities as a heterogeneous group, DFAT can prioritise the focus on the underrepresented groups like women with disabilities, children with disabilities and persons with neurodevelopmental disabilities.

1. **What are the most effective approaches to progress these priorities?**

* Ensure that all DFAT staff have a basic orientation on disability inclusion and have exposure to interact with persons with disabilities.
* Ensure the visibility and leadership of persons with disabilities and their representatives' organisation for any interventions related to disability inclusion.
* Follow the twin-track approach with disability-specific interventions to support the meaningful mainstreaming of disability in programmes. This will involve partnering with organisation for persons with disabilities (OPDs), considering them an expert organisation on disability inclusion.
* Promote the leadership of persons with disabilities, especially focusing on women with disabilities.
* Promote the employment of persons with disabilities in all programmes and ensure mandatory budget provision for reasonable accommodation.
* Promote joint initiatives on the rights of persons with disabilities. OPDs, disability expert NGOs, disability-inclusive mainstream development organisations and state actors can jointly take initiatives.
* Extend partnership with government mainstream ministries and mainstream development organisations to promote disability-inclusive development.

1. **How can DFAT support the role of, and partner with, organisations of persons with disabilities?**

* Prioritise underrepresented persons with disabilities (i.e. women with disabilities, persons with hearing disabilities, persons with neurodevelopmental disabilities) in leadership and academic development progression. If required, take affirmative actions for women with disabilities and other underrepresented groups of persons with disabilities in the selection criteria.
* Invest in capacity strengthening and sustainability of OPDs. Provide small-scale funding to grassroots OPDs.
* Flexibility in the criteria of partnership with OPDs considering that OPDs may not be able to meet all the compliances at the beginning.
* Make disability inclusion a mandatory agenda for all partners and recognise OPDs as experts in disability inclusion. Set provision for partnering with OPDs for the mainstream organisation that promotes disability inclusion.

1. **What are the biggest challenges to and opportunities for advancing disability equity and rights?**

Challenges:

* Addressing intersectionality to ensure that persons with disabilities are equally benefited from the interventions for people with disabilities irrespective of their type, sex, age, socio-economic condition and geographic location.
* Ensuring a level playing field for OPDs to secure funding opportunities competing with strong disability expert organisations.
* Barriers for persons with disabilities, especially women with disabilities in securing employment and also professional growth while in employment.
* “Persons with disabilities as subjects of rights, not objects of charity”- in many cases the paradigm shift marked by the CRPD has not been translated properly in the works for people with disabilities.

Opportunities:

* Mainstream organisations (i.e. BRAC) are stepping forward to become disability-inclusive organisations.
* Accountability mechanism exists within the government (CRPD reporting, compliance management of the domestic acts enacted in light of the CRPD) to promote the rights of persons with disabilities.
* Assistive technologies exist and more are being developed that help people with disabilities to live independently.

**Reference:**

* Situational analysis of the rights of persons with disabilities in Bangladesh; ILO, Bangladesh, 2022
* Functional Analysis of the Committees formed under the Rights and Protection of Persons with Disabilities Act 2013, UNICEF, Bangladesh, 2023
* Organizational Capacity Assessment of OPDs in Bangladesh, UN Women 2023