

## **Hanoi Association of People with Disabilities**

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## **Submission on the new international Gender Equality Strategy**

Hanoi Association of People with Disabilities (DP Hanoi) was established in 2006 by the decision of Hanoi People's Committee as a social organization run by people with disabilities (PWDs) and for PWDs. Currently, DP Hanoi has 46 organizational members which are 30 organizations of people with disabilities (OPDs) at 30 districts in Hanoi and 16 clubs/groups/centers with more than 17,000 PWDs. DP Hanoi's mission is to operate toward an "Inclusive, barrier-free and rights-based society for PWD".

After 17 years of operations, DP Hanoi has become one of the strongest OPDs in Vietnam playing a role of representing voices of PWDs, advocating for their rights, and giving consultation for the government and relevant stakeholders on disability issues. DP Hanoi has gained achievements and success in providing and advocating for some key areas such as organizational development, disability awareness, economic empowerment, gender equality, social services, accessibility, coordinating, facilitating, and implementing activities across Vietnam, partnership with public and private sectors in improving quality of life for PWDs, and working with the relevant government agencies for policy issues.

With the mission of disability inclusion, the expertise and experience in disability as well, DP Hanoi would like to make a public submission to share our views and priorities for advancing equity and rights for PWDs in Vietnam and the region as following:

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

#### **1.1. Capacity building for PWDs and their OPDs/self-help groups**

Empower PWDs and their OPDs so that they can raise their voices, exercise their rights monitor, supervise the implementation of disability policies and other related policies. Capacity building through leadership training is crucial. DP Hanoi has been conducting some leadership training for both existing and young leaders of OPDs that is strategic development for OPDs sustainability. Also, the Chair of DP Hanoi together with some Australian Alumni started an initiative and inspiring leadership training model for women leaders with disabilities. In the future, such training needs expanding its scale and level throughout Vietnam and in the region.

#### **1.2. Economic empowerment for PWDs**

Economic empowerment is essential for PWDs' independent living. Due to their constraints in accessing education and low level of education attainment, the opportunities to access vocational training and income generation is much lower than those without disabilities leading to considerably lower employment rate in PWDs. It is urgent to provide

inclusive vocational training, market information, and emerging skills adapting labour market demand to create more job opportunities for PWDs.

PWDs belong to underrepresented groups, who are facing a wide range of barriers to participate and contribute to the society's development. PWDs themselves, authorities and community are not fully aware of the rights of PWDs and rights of PWDs are not respected and enforced. Hence, through disability awareness, the misconceptions, and stereotypes about PWDs can be brought to the forefront. Only if this is tackled, attitudes and behaviors of society become more positive and impactful.

### **1.3. Gender equality**

Women or girls with disabilities (WWD) who are bearing multiple layers of disadvantages. It witnesses lower education and employment rates compared to men with disabilities, and a much higher rate of gender-based violence compared to women without disabilities. DP Hanoi has been implementing the gender strategy in our organization's work and few recent projects/programs on promoting gender equality. Some projects have built leadership skills for women with disabilities or provided them with knowledge, skills to protect themselves, safety and live independently. Reproductive health care seems to be a topic to be 'left behind' for WWD. Although a few of our programs are implemented, it is not sufficient to support WWD. WWD needs to provide further knowledge and skills in living independently in terms of both finance and physical and mental health care and protecting them against emerging gender-based violence.

### **1.4. Set up and strengthen the organizations of PWDs (OPDs)**

OPDs are identified as organizations that are more formally structured and have majority control by people with disabilities. They usually work on a larger canvas, advocate for human rights and influence policy and resource allocation.

### **1.5. Awareness raising on PWDs and disability inclusion**

PWDs still suffer from stigma and discrimination in society, so raising awareness about PWDs and disability inclusion is very essential for fostering an inclusive society. This involves educating PWDs, their families, policymakers, and the public about PWDs' rights, capabilities, and contributions. Awareness campaigns should be engaged and consulted by OPDs or PWDs for the best effectiveness.

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

PWDs are believed to be their own best spokespersons and their OPDs are the most fundamental base for disability inclusion. Therefore, DP Hanoi has been promoting the role of OPDs in representing the voice of PWDs, identifying barriers and needs, expressing views on priorities, evaluating services, and advocating change and public awareness. It is vital to support, inspire and motivate PWDs throughout Vietnam to set up their own organizations at different levels with mutual support and solidarity.

Based on our expertise and experience, 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 their shortage of resources and limitations. All OPDs have their own goals, knowledge, experience, and resources that they can contribute to the benefits of PWDs, their families, the community and make the world better.

### **3. How can DFAT support the role of, and partner with, OPDs?**

#### **3.1. Disability legislation**

Vietnam is on the progress to amend its Law on PWDs to be issued in 2026. Australia should prioritise supporting the Vietnamese government to amend this law to harmonize with the UNCRPD and other international legislation that Vietnam joined.

At the same time, the Australian government should support OPDs and PWDs to enjoy meaningful participation in contributing opinions to amend this important Law.

It is realized that Vietnam has a system of legislation to promote disability equity and rights, but its enforcement is still limited due to limited resources. The Australian government can support Vietnam to strengthen enforcement of law and legislation relating to disability.

Discrimination act and feedback mechanism: It is important that OPDs are involved in/consulted by coordination and feedback mechanisms. National mechanisms can provide an effective space for OPDs to engage with the diversity of ministries and build an overview of government actions across sectors.

#### **3.2. Support the formation of OPDs and build their capacity**

In Vietnam, OPDs are usually based in cities and sometimes do not have adequate representation at grass-roots level. To reach further grass-roots level, DFAT should provide support to establish and develop OPDs located in the rural and mountainous areas. And to sustain OPD development, DFAT may give minimum quota seats for trainees with disabilities at relevant training courses and scholarship.

One of the most important areas is organizational development, which is grounded from the needs of creating an available space for PWD to meet their peers, sharing, seeking for support which PWDs cannot find from the existing system. One example is that, since its inception, DP Hanoi has grown from an organization with 19 organization members and 750 individual members to become a home for 46 organization members (30 OPDs at districts) and 16 clubs/centers/groups with more than 17,000 individual members with disabilities. DP Hanoi also supported the establishment of many OPDs/self-help groups in Vietnam. A good practice is peer counseling experience from an existing OPD to the group of PWDs and thus the group learns by doing together with support from that OPD.

#### **3.3. Promote disability inclusion at workplace and employment for PWDs by engaging OPDs**

There is still a misconception about the capability and competence of PWDs at the workplace and a hesitance to recruit PWDs, since employers seem unknown how to work and support employees with disabilities. Building the connection between OPDs and employers is the very first step to support PWDs to enter the workforce and make disability inclusive workplaces. OPDs actively engage in educating and training employers and staff in disability inclusive work and employment practices. Also, OPDs provide and train basic and necessary skills for PWDs to make them confident and include better in the company. Take the OPDs and enterprise model as an example. DP Hanoi collaborated with Intellife company to start to recruit PWDs for the company by screening, interviewing. Then DP Hanoi provided communication skills, labor disciplines, related regulation about employees with disabilities training for PWDs to be able to work in a company and other training for Intellife staff to help them communicate with PWDs effectively, recognise potential skills of

PWDs and support them at work. DP Hanoi also commented on company policy to make it inclusive, for instance, employees with disabilities have 2 additional paid-day annual leave and accessibility and inclusion are in the consideration in any activity organization within the company. After 3 years of collaboration, there are about 145 PWDs working in this company.

If DFAT connects OPDs with business enterprises/employers and introduces this kind of model, more and more PWDs will have jobs and become economically independent. Although Vietnam has been trying to create and provide services to people with disabilities, there lacks services and service providers in some key areas which are widely used in Australia such as job coach, transition model.

### **3.4. Opportunities for OPDs to access funding from DFAT**

Due to various types of barriers such as languages, information access, networking, and disability, most OPDs have no chance to approach funding from DFAT. So, DFAT should categorize different types of local organizations for funding. Many local NGOs, CSOs, and even INGOs work with and for PWDs but consider them as beneficiaries rather than a partner without sustainability. DFAT should be side by side with them or engage OPDs who have capacity to provide peer support for other OPDs. And funding criteria and procedures should be simple and flexible if possible.

In addition, most OPDs work voluntarily and depend on funding from locals and a few from donors. However, this funding often does not pay salary for staff or board of OPDs, but only for activity implementation. Hence, DFAT should consider increasing opportunities for OPDs to improve their human resources in terms of management skills, leadership, diversity of impairment types, gender equality.

### **3.5. Partner with OPDs in disability awareness**

Partner with OPDs in events such as communication campaigns to raise awareness of public about disability, social movements on social media.

Engage PWDs/OPDs as trainers, guest speakers for training/dialogues/events organized by DFAT.

Engage OPDs as a partner in all collaboration/funding programs from DFAT.

Sometimes, the voice of an outsider/donor would be more effective. For example, DP Hanoi had been introduced to work with a Ministry on providing GESDI for a Draft of a Water resource management Law. However, at first, a representative for the Ministry did not really want to involve disability and argued that the Law did not directly relate, mention, or talk about PWDs. But, with the insistence from the donor (Australian Water Partnership), she gradually accepted and collaborated with DP Hanoi in this consulting job. They even suggested further collaboration with DP Hanoi in the future. So, advocacy for disability rights can be done from both bottoms up (PWDs voices) and top down (donor/higher positions/diplomatic relations).

### **3.6. Prioritize women and girls with disabilities**

Due to the more serious stereotypes and discrimination occurred with women with disabilities compared to men with disabilities. Thus, DFAT should pay specific attention to this group. Economic empowerment, reproductive health care, GBV prevention and protection, leadership skills are all essential to make them included in society.

There is a very newly network of WWDs in the Asia Pacific taken place in Bangkok, Thailand on 8-10 December 2023 and DP Hanoi joined. Currently, DP Hanoi is leading the

network of WWDs in the North of Vietnam and really need support to promote, train for the network members.

### **3.7. Disability and climate change**

Issues of disability, poverty, and climate resilience are deeply intertwined. PWDs are often disproportionately affected by the consequences of climate change, such as extreme weather events, disasters and natural hazards, food, and water security issues. The existing barriers and discrimination PWDs are facing in all areas of life also make them more vulnerable to climate impacts. Climate change is likely to increase existing inequalities.

PWDs should not be considered only as victims of climate change impacts – they should have an active role in planning and implementation of adaptation, mitigation, and conservation efforts to assure that these efforts **do not leave anyone behind**. Hence, Including PWDs/their OPDs in the design and implementation of climate action is likely to benefit societal well-being and equity overall.

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

The challenge for the disability sector in Vietnam is to establish well-functioning collaboration and coordination, so unified actions carried out are for the human rights of PWDs and for the enforcement of laws and policies protecting PWDs in Vietnam.

- The wide-ranging needs of people with different disabilities, and the difficulties gathering them for common activities are the major challenge for the OPDs' operations.
- There are still pervert perceptions of PWDs in the society (e.g. disabilities are the curse of fates, or they are the burdens of the families and the society). PWDs often have lower levels of education (literacy and vocational skills). All these are pressure on the awareness, the confidence, and the striving ambitions of PWDs.
- Ratification CRPD is very new and does not yet have a clear guidance on implementation in Vietnam. In addition, the Law on PWDs, and other regulations regarding the support for the PWDs are comprehensive on paper, but its enforcement in practice involves different agencies and requires good coordination among these government agencies. As a matter of fact, the involvement and coordination of these agencies have always been a challenge creating difficulties for OPDs to gain the proposed support.
- The capacity of these OPDs is limited and their activity operation is now depending much on little support from the local authorities.