**World Food Programme’s Submission to DFAT:**

**Advancing Disability Equity and Rights Internationally**

# **Prepared by the World Food Programme’s Global Disability Inclusion Team, Asia-Pacific Bureau Disability Inclusion Team, and Evidence Partner Trinity College Dublin**

The World Food Programme’s Global Disability Inclusion Team welcomes the opportunity to provide input and feedback on DFAT’s strategy to advance disability equity and rights internationally.

**Australia's partnership with the World Food Programme**

Australia's support for multilateral organisations including the World Food Programme (WFP) is reflected in the Government of Australia’s [International Development Policy](https://www.dfat.gov.au/sites/default/files/international-development-policy.pdf): for a peaceful, stable and prosperous Indo-Pacific (August 2023). WFP is a valued partner in delivering food assistance and supporting food security under Australia's aid programme. Australia supports WFP's overarching approach, goals and objectives as outlined in its Strategic Plan 2022-2025. Australia supports predictable core funding to implement WFP's Strategic Plan including the important normative and operational functions of WFP, and the efficiencies which are realised through multi-year planning.

Feedback and evidence shared below is based on WFP's implementation of the UN Disability Inclusion Strategy; and organized via the four questions posed by DFAT to contributors. Inputs and evidence are particularly drawn from our DI pilot region in the Asia-Pacific – historically supported via partnership with DFAT; as well as the WFP – Trinity College Dublin partnership which aims to generate an evidence base on WFP’s disability inclusion and food security programming. WFP's work on disability inclusion is also well supported by CBM Global Advisory Group in their role providing technical assistance and support to the World Food Programme.

These inputs complement the World Food Programme’s inputs into DFAT policies such as Australia’s International Development Policy (August 2023) and new Humanitarian Strategy (comments shared in December 2023); which both seek to mainstream disability inclusion throughout.

In this regard, WFP would like to recommend following elements are captured in Australia’s new stratey to advance disability equity and rights internationally.

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

* The World Food Programme applauds The Government of Australia’s leadership in advancing disability inclusive development and humanitarian action, and encourages continued prioritizing and investment in both targeted and mainstreamed interventions at the intersection of disability, food security and nutrition. WFP welcomes an equitable strategy that strives to accelerate action and deepen investment towards equality for persons with disabilities around the globe, taking an intersectional approach to programming.
* Focus on intersectionality and a localized approach is key in the upcoming strategy. For example, women with disabilities experience higher rates of food insecurity than women without disabilities; as well as men with and without disabilities. Findings in the upcoming UN Disability and Development Report chapter on SDG 2, drafted by WFP partner Trinity College Dublin, reinforce that persons with disabilities are more likely to be food insecure than persons without disabilities – controlling for a variety of factors such as country, context, population groups and geo-spatial boundaries. This is further compounded by intersectional identities such as gender and sex, with comparative findings across 33 low, middle and high income countries showing that women with disabilities experience higher levels of food insecurity vs. men with disabilities. While the report is still under finalization – WFP is sharing a high-level summary of these findings to emphasize the importance of prioritizing an intersectional and rights-based approach to disability inclusion.
* Placing an emphasis on displaced persons with disabilities will also be an important area that was historically overlooked in DFAT policy. At the end of 2023, 110 million persons will be displaced across the globe. Compared to 59.1 million persons displaced in 2021, this number has almost doubled in less than two years. Data shows that disability prevalence increases in situations of conflict and disaster. Climate related disasters are already disproportionately affecting countries across the Asia Pacific. Continuing to invest in and scale investments in inclusive humanitarian assistance, emergency preparedness and response, and social protection – which were a key component in the “Development for All” strategy - should be central in the new strategy. This can be done both through disability – targeted financing, as well as intentional and specific mainstreaming of disability inclusion across humanitarian funding mechanisms.
* Geographically, WFP appreciates the Indo-Pacific remain a strong priority within of Australia’s development programmes. Climate change adaptation and resilience is of priority for DFAT and for WFP in the Asia, Pacific region. As evidence increases on the impact on persons with disabilities, WFP recommends that DFAT investments prioritize inclusive climate action. This should begin by investing in partnerships that ensure persons with disabilities are participating in climate governance. DFAT can leverage relationships with governments in the region to ensure disability inclusive climate action becomes a priority agenda item, and to influence investment by all relevant actors.
* Meaningful participation is at the core of advancing disability equity and rights internationally, and evidence from WFP’s work in the Asia-Pacific points to various ways that organizations of persons with disabilities can partner with different agencies to advance disability inclusion. In the past 2-3 years, our Asia-Pacific bureau engaged OPDs across both our programming, but also to support WFP within internal operations. For example, WFP engages OPDs in looking at physical accessibility through their active participation in accessibility audits, partnering with OPDs in national level policy advocacy influence, and ensuring meaningful participation across advisory groups, e.g. the APEX level advisory group. OPDs have led action research with WFP to inform strategy and implementation of WFP’s “Country Strategic Plans.” Building strategic partnerships that enable meaningful participation is a good practice that should be promoted and replicated.
* Complementarily, DFAT can engage partner governments to influence the design of programming e.g. social protection, emergency preparedness and response, and other relevant areas to ensure that these programmes take disability inclusion into account.

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

* DFAT should emphasize collaboration across key stakeholders within countries, leveraging regional bodies to implement effective strategies for advancing disability inclusion/equity, and developing or implementing existing policies and frameworks. Often fragmentation is a hindrance to tangible impact/change. Further, DFAT can support knowledge sharing and exchange of best practices and successful models across countries/governments. For example, sharing programs supported by DFAT that have demonstrated effectiveness in promoting disability rights and ensuring sustainable outcomes.
* In that spirit, WFP is happy to share evidence developed over the past year or two on “what works.” The research collaboration between Trinity College Dublin (TCD) and WFP seeks to develop an evidence base for what works to ensure persons with disabilities are included in food security programming. The partnership provides an opportunity to pilot new approaches and capture learning in real time as WFP works to adapt its programming to better include and meet the needs and preferences of food insecure people with disabilities.
* Through this partnership, WFP is investing in the evidence base on “what works” to include persons with disabilities in food security programming. Evidence notes are now available on [disability data](https://www.mdpi.com/1660-4601/18/19/10334), as well as [disability inclusion within accountability to affected populations.](https://docs.wfp.org/api/documents/WFP-0000138872/download/) The partnership thus generates WFP-specific evidence which can be scaled across the organization, while also providing robust and [peer-reviewed evidence](https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/17549507.2022.2140829) which is freely available to the wider humanitarian and development sector. Thematic and topic areas covered to date have included the collection and utilization of data disaggregated by disability, inclusive accountability to affected populations, and accessible communication methods in emergencies.
* Evidence shows that prioritizing persons with disabilities is more important than ever in advancing the leave no one behind agenda. WFP partnered with Trinity College Dublin to conduct upcoming research for the UN Disability Development Report Chapter on SDG 2: Ending hunger, achieving food security and improved nutrition for all persons with disabilities. Findings support evidence that persons with disabilities are more likely to be food insecure than persons with disabilities – controlling for a variety of factors such as country, context, population groups and geo-spatial boundaries. This is further compounded by intersectional identities such as gender and sex, with findings showing that women with disabilities experience higher level of food insecurity vs. men with disabilities. While the report is still under finalization – WFP is sharing a high-level summary of these findings to emphasize the importance of DFAT’s continued leadership and investment in this topic.
* Throughout partnerships and investments, WFP would like to highlight the importance of taking a people centered, participatory approach that enables meaningful participation of persons with disabilities and their representative organizations throughout. This includes prioritizing funding mechanisms that allow for localized response. Simply put, zero hunger will not be achieved without the meaningful participation of persons with disabilities throughout – because they know best, what they need.
* As the TCD-WFP research partnership has progressed, an increasing focus is the effective adaptation and application of generated evidence to field level interventions in the diverse contexts in which WFP works, as well as building capacity for evidence generation. This capacity is vital to support scale up of evidence-based practice across the breadth of WFP interventions and to support sustainable progress. The most effective approaches to achieve these objectives have been a participatory, action research approach, whereby local communities and where possible, organizations of persons with disabilities are brought into the process and work collaboratively to generate real world learning with immediate application.

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

* WFP welcomes a policy that puts persons with disabilities and their meaningful participation at the center of DFAT’s policy and programming. WFP is starting to gather good practices and lessons learned on this and is sharing through an internal guidance note: [WFP Guidance Note on Consulting with Persons with Disabilities and their Representative Organisations at WFP (March 2022)](https://docs.wfp.org/api/documents/WFP-0000139032/download/). WFP recognizes that one of the reasons why DFAT [works with multilateral aid organizations like WFP](https://www.dfat.gov.au/development/who-we-work-with/multilateral-aid-effectiveness), is for the organization’s ability to reach communities at scale. Through policy that ensures that where possible, multilaterals partner with persons with disabilities and their representative organizations under DFAT funding, DFAT can encourage multilateral operations to more meaningfully include OPDs across humanitarian response and development-related programming. Accountability to persons with disabilities and their representative organizations could be reinforced through policies that encourage local organization led evaluations of partner work, including commitments on disability inclusion.
* Further, DFAT should continue to invest in building the capacity of organizations of persons with disabilities – an area that continues to be under resourced globally.
* Alongside the promotion of direct investment for OPDs plus meaningful participation throughout partnerships; DFAT can use their positionality to influence partner governments in relation to disability inclusion. For example, DFAT can advocate for partner governments to ensure meaningful participation of persons with disabilities and their representative organizations throughout policy making processes.

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

* Disability rights is becoming a “mainstream” topic within international development and humanitarian action. Due to the leadership of bilateral organizations like DFAT, FCDO, Finland and other donors; non-specialized organizations are now investing in DI. This is both an opportunity, and a potential challenge. There is increased resourcing of disability inclusion work in general. However, the risk is that funds are diverted from organizations of persons with disabilities towards nonrepresentative organizations. Ensuring that “nothing about us, without us,” or “nothing without us” remains a core tenant of advancing disability equality and rights across the globe should remain core to DFAT’s strategy.
* Sustainability of resourcing and development investments is a critical issue to advancing disability equity and rights. In large multilateral organizations like WFP (operational in over 120 countries with about 23,000 employees), which have extensive reach and the capacity – attitudinal change and awareness raising takes time. Sustained partnerships for disability inclusion are needed to maintain, and build on the progress already made.
* In addition, while donors increasingly mandate international organizations to deliver on inclusion, the existing structure of funding mechanisms is limited in enabling inclusive approaches, particularly due to their prioritization and demand of: quantity, scale and time-efficiency; short (softly or tightly) ear-marked funding over unearmarked funding; strict reporting mechanisms; and cost-effectiveness.
* Geographically, WFP appreciates the Indo-Pacific – especially the Pacific, Southeast Asia and South Asia – remain a focus of Australia’s development programs. WFP notes that the Asia and the Pacific is home to 690 million persons with disabilities, which is a great majority of the population of persons with disabilities globally. The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates prevalence rates for Southeast Asia at 15.6% and the Pacific at 15.3% with higher rates among older adults. Despite this, disability rights and meaningful participation of persons with disabilities and their representative organizations in the Asia-Pacific is often deprioritized in planning and response. This is due to various challenges including resource constraints, competing priorities, stigma and discrimination, and policy misalignment of national vs. regional and international policies. Despite this, the region has a lot of opportunity for technology and innovation – to invest in accessible technology solutions to advance disability equity and rights.