**UNPRPD Fund submission to Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) new International Disability Equity and Rights Strategy consultation**

The United Nations Partnership on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Fund (UNPRPD), funded by DFAT[[1]](#footnote-1), is a unique funding mechanism that brings together UN entities, governments, organizations of persons with disabilities (OPDs), and broader civil society. As the only UN inter-agency funding mechanism dedicated to implementing the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), UNPRPD Fund’s strategic approach provides catalytic funding for national and multi-country programmes, generates innovative knowledge management tools and systems, and provides context-relevant capacity building to support the development of genuinely inclusive national policies and systems[[2]](#footnote-2). The below submission sets out UNPRPD Fund’s feedback on the consultation questions and outlines how the new International Disability Equity and Rights Strategy can ensure Australia remains a strong, consistent and respected leader in advancing equity and rights for persons with disabilities globally.

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

Based on UNPRPD Fund’s experience of delivering 94 joint UN programmes across 87 countries[[3]](#footnote-3) the biggest priority for advancing disability equity and rights is working in partnership with OPDs, governments, UN agencies and civil society to support sustainable policy and system changes at national level. This is critical to deliver lasting change to the lives of persons with disabilities across the world.

International policy frameworks have clearly set out what is required to advance disability equity and rights internationally. The 2030 Agenda and SDGs[[4]](#footnote-4) have the imperative to leave no one behind as their core component, and many countries (185 individual member states) have ratified the CRPD[[5]](#footnote-5), which enshrines into law the importance of protecting and promoting the rights of persons with disabilities in all aspects of life. What is now required is concerted efforts to support national governments to turn their commitments into action through sustainable policy and system changes at national level.

In 2022, UNPRPD Fund released a Global Situational Analyses report[[6]](#footnote-6) synthesizing evidence on disability inclusion from across 26 countries. This highlighted gaps in systems, structures and capacities that create obstacles to delivering disability-inclusive development. The report clearly demonstrated that while policy level commitments are often in place, these are typically not implemented. There are huge gaps in coordination, implementation and monitoring mechanisms at national level. These gaps help explain why statistics from the WHO Global report on health equity for persons with disabilities[[7]](#footnote-7) continue to show huge disparities for persons with disabilities and demonstrate the lack of progress from the previous World Report on Disability[[8]](#footnote-8) published eleven years earlier.

The International Disability Equity and Rights Strategy should clearly state that it will not be possible to achieve Agenda 2030, the SDGs and effective CRPD implementation without working in partnership with multiple stakeholders to accelerate change at national level. The Strategy should commit Australia to sustaining its leadership role, and working in partnership with UN entities, governments, OPDs and wider civil society to address gaps and deliver policy and system change at national level.

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

From UNPRPD Fund’s extensive experience of working at national level, siloed approaches and undertaking sector specific initiatives are not delivering lasting change. The risks facing development, humanitarian and climate change actors are complex and require integrated, inclusive responses. Working in partnership to address these challenges is essential. Multi-stakeholder approaches, including UN entities, governments, OPDs and civil society leverage partners' comparative advantages and facilitate policy and system change. Meaningful participation of OPDs and effective multi-stakeholder partnerships also facilitate the exchange of ideas and good practices. One of the most effective routes for ensuring disability inclusion is through multi-stakeholder planning processes at national level. When disability is mainstreamed into national and local development plans, budgets and monitoring mechanisms, disability inclusive practice can be realized and lasting change achieved.

Advocacy has helped raise attention to the importance of disability rights and equity but cannot alone address complex issues. DFAT should set out how they will apply a twin track approach of mainstreaming disability into broader development, humanitarian and climate action interventions and deliver disability targeted programmes. The Strategy should make clear how DFAT will invest in, and undertake analysis of, lessons learned on what works and what does not, and the development and piloting of technical knowledge, guidance and capacity building across sectors. It should outline how Australia, as a regional and global leader, will foster collaboration and learning between countries and regions.

To deliver lasting change, the Strategy should set out how DFAT will support national governments to lay the foundations for effective SDG and CRPD implementation by addressing the core preconditions that have implications for policy and system change across sectors. Five essential preconditions must be in place and considered in all aspects of public policy making and programming[[9]](#footnote-9). These preconditions include ensuring the protection of disability rights through equality and non-discrimination policies and legislation; ensuring inclusive service delivery through mainstream and targeted support services; accessibility standards, laws and policies; CRPD-compliant budgeting and financial management; and effective accountability and governance systems, including data collection systems and independent monitoring mechanisms. Having these preconditions in place is vital for protecting the rights of persons with disabilities in laws and policies, ensuring persons with disabilities can access the services they need across all sectors, and for governments to have quality and accurate data and monitoring processes in place. Achieving these preconditions requires effective collaboration and co-ordination across sectors, and systematic engagement with persons with disabilities, OPDs and wider civil society.[[10]](#footnote-10)

Crucial for achieving the essential preconditions is ensuring three cross-cutting areas are addressed in all interventions. These include ensuring the meaningful participation of persons with disabilities in all stages of development; working to address structural gender inequality and taking specific action to promote the rights of women and girls with disabilities; and striving to identify and support marginalized and underrepresented groups of persons with disabilities.

It is vital that the International Disability Equity and Rights Strategy makes clear the inherent connection between achieving the SDGs and ensuring effective implementation of the CRPD. It should outline concrete steps DFAT programmes will take to help national governments achieve the essential preconditions and address cross-cutting areas. Australia, as a regional and global leader, has a vital role in helping its partners to enhance understanding and delivery of inclusive development. The Strategy should outline how Australia will equip their partners with the knowledge and tools that are required for developing systematically inclusive policies and services at national level and ensure disability is mainstreamed into national development planning. This can be achieved by focusing support on reforming policies, plans, budgets, programmes and services to comply with the CRPD and the SDGs.

In order for DFAT’s programmes to achieve disability inclusion, the strategy should set out how gaps will be addressed through explicit targets, indicators and budgets to ensure that persons with disabilities are included both in influencing the design and monitoring of programmes and as an explicit target group.

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

Based on UNPRPD Fund’s experience the most effective programmes ensure the meaningful participation of OPDs across all stages of the programme cycle. UNPRPD Fund programmes also include specific objectives around ensuring government partners design and embed strategies for ensuring the systematic and meaningful participation of OPDs in national reform and policy processes.

Understanding how to engage persons with disabilities and their representative organisations in the design, implementation and monitoring of policies and programmes is essential. Persons with disabilities are uniquely qualified to share knowledge on how best to include, reach, and respond to their requirements because of their own lived experience. In addition to being fundamental to the vibrancy of civil society, persons with disabilities and their representative organizations play an essential role in holding governments to account. They are essential partners to governments, donors, human rights institutions, and all actors working on development, emergency response and climate action.

DFAT’s International Disability Equity and Rights Strategy should set out how DFAT will ensure persons with disabilities, through their representative organisations, will be equal partners in all DFAT-funded programmes and have decision-making roles in policy and systems changes that affect them. To ensure this, the Strategy should set out what action DFAT will take. This should include targeted context-relevant capacity building to address gaps in the knowledge and skills of key stakeholders. Including addressing capacity gaps in OPDs where required, for example on complex and emerging issues such as disability-inclusive climate action, and crucially, building the technical capacity of government and national stakeholders on how to identify and partner with OPDs. Capacity building can be undertaken through in-person or remote training, or technical assistance from subject matter experts and should be tailored to the programme and context.

Capacity building should be delivered through a multi-stakeholder approach. DFAT’s new International Disability Equity and Rights Strategy should set out how DFAT will work to build stronger working relationships between OPDs, UN entities and governments on legislative and policy change and service delivery reform processes at the regional, national and local levels. This should also include facilitating the participation of OPDs in legislative, policy and system-level changes to advance implementation of the CRPD and SDGs, and building the capacities of representatives from governments, UN entities, OPDs, and wider civil society.

In addition to capacity building, DFAT should consider how to support and partner with under-represented groups of persons with disabilities. The disability community is diverse and there are many different disability groups with diverse needs and priorities. Some groups are less represented within the disability movement. Those who face multiple and overlapping forms of discrimination on the basis of their disability and other factors are often more marginalized. This varies in different contexts, but underrepresented groups of persons with disabilities such as persons with intellectual disabilities, persons with psychosocial disabilities, persons with albinism, deafblind persons, little people and persons with multiple disabilities are often less represented in the disability movement.

In many contexts, women with disabilities are less represented in leadership positions within the disability movement. Women with disabilities often face additional barriers accessing leadership positions within the disability movement, but in many countries, women with disabilities are forming membership-based organizations as well as cross-disability collectives.

The Strategy should make clear that development progress will only be possible by ensuring the systematic engagement, participation and empowerment of persons with disabilities, and how DFAT will ensure a systematically inclusive approach to gender equality and disability inclusion is embedded into all DFAT programmes. The Strategy should also recognize the need to address structural barriers and rising inequalities and apply an intersectional approach[[11]](#footnote-11) – that connects human rights to the multiple forms of discrimination people experience – in order to reach the most marginalized and under-represented groups.

The Strategy should therefore set out DFAT’s definition of an OPD, the importance of understanding the diversity of the disability movement, recommendations for identifying and engaging with OPDs, women-led organizations and under-represented groups, and what meaningful participation looks like in DFAT programmes, giving examples of the expected entry points to ensure meaningful participation in different stages of the DFAT programme cycle.

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

The COVID-19 pandemic, climate change and conflict are threatening gains made on eradicating poverty, ending hunger, strengthening health systems and access to education across the world. All countries have an obligation to ensure that their humanitarian and climate actions respect, protect and fulfil the human rights of all, including by integrating the rights of persons with disabilities into laws, policies, plans and programmes. Development progress is being reversed and urgent action is required in order to achieve the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.[[12]](#footnote-12)

Despite the urgent need for disability-inclusive action, disability inclusive development remains a chronically under-funded issue. Since 2014, across 136 countries eligible for official development assistance (ODA), the average share of aid projects that are disability-inclusive is just 0.5%[[13]](#footnote-13). Awareness of disability rights has grown since the CRPD was ratified in 2006, but this has not been backed up by finance or action. Sustained investment is required to achieve lasting change. Governments must urgently translate their commitments – both to domestic implementation and to prioritizing disability inclusion in international cooperation – into action. The new Strategy should ensure Australia continues to target financial resources to disability-inclusion through a clear allocation of ODA.

It is vital to ensure the rights of persons with disabilities are respected across all aspects of the humanitarian-development-peace nexus. Too often the rights of persons with disabilities are ignored in conflicts, humanitarian and emergency response, and climate action. Climate change has a disproportionate impact on persons with disabilities[[14]](#footnote-14), yet new mitigation and adaptation policies and programmes that do not adequately consider the rights of persons with disabilities risk creating new barriers.[[15]](#footnote-15) DFAT’s International Disability Equity and Rights Strategy should recognize that the development progress required to achieve the SDGs – and Agenda 2030 as a whole – can only be achieved by addressing inequities, ensuring the meaningful participation of persons with disabilities as key partners, and promoting the rights of persons with disabilities across the world.[[16]](#footnote-16)

The lack of knowledge and data on disability remains a key challenge. DFAT should ensure the Strategy sets out how DFAT programmes will continue to strengthen the knowledge base on inclusive data collection, systems and management. This should include specific objectives for strengthening national partners’ data collection systems and capacity across sectors to collect, share and report on disability, commitments to delivering evidence-based programming, and monitoring disability inclusion at all stages by having disaggregated data in DFAT programme targets and indicators.

1. UNPRPD Fund (2023) [Annual Narrative and Financial Report 2022](https://www.unprpd.org/sites/default/files/library/2023-06/UNPRPD%20Annual%20Report%202022%20Final_compressed.pdf) p4 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. UNPRPD Fund (2020) [Strategic Operational Framework 2020-2025](https://www.unprpd.org/strategic-approaches) [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. UNPRPD Fund (2023) [Annual Narrative and Financial Report 2022](https://www.unprpd.org/sites/default/files/library/2023-06/UNPRPD%20Annual%20Report%202022%20Final_compressed.pdf) p9 [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. United Nations (2015) [Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](https://sdgs.un.org/2030agenda) [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Status of Ratification Interactive Dashboard [Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities](https://indicators.ohchr.org/)  [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. UNPRPD Fund (2022) [Situational Analysis of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities – Lessons & Conclusions from twenty-six countries](https://www.unprpd.org/sites/default/files/library/2023-09/Global%20Situational%20Analysis%20Report.pdf) [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. WHO (2022) [Global report on health equity for persons with disabilities](https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789240063600) [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. WHO and World Bank (2011) [World Report on Disability](https://www.who.int/teams/noncommunicable-diseases/sensory-functions-disability-and-rehabilitation/world-report-on-disability#:~:text=World%20Report%20on%20Disability%202011,a%20figure%20of%20around%2010%25.) [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. UNPRPD (2020) [The preconditions necessary to ensure disability inclusion across policies, services, and other interventions](https://www.unprpd.org/sites/default/files/library/2023-10/UNPRPD%20Preconditions%20to%20disability%20inclusion_1.pdf) [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. UNPRPD Fund (2020) [Strategic Operational Framework 2020-2025](https://www.unprpd.org/strategic-approaches) [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. UNPRPD & UN Women (2021) [Intersectionality Resource Guide and Toolkit](https://www.unprpd.org/sites/default/files/library/2022-03/Intersectionality-resource-guide-and-toolkit-en_0.pdf) [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. United Nations (2023) [The Sustainable Development Goals Report](https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/report/2023/The-Sustainable-Development-Goals-Report-2023.pdf) [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Development Initiatives (2020) [Disability-inclusive ODA: Aid data on donors, channels, recipients](https://devinit.org/resources/disability-inclusive-oda-aid-data-donors-channels-recipients/#:~:text=Across%20the%20136%20ODA%2Deligible,total%20received%20aid%20is%200.5%25.) [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. OHCHR (2020) ‘[Analytical study on the promotion and protection of the rights of persons with disabilities in the context of climate change](https://www.ohchr.org/en/documents/thematic-reports/analytical-study-promotion-and-protection-rights-persons-disabilities)’, Report of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, A/HRC/44/30 [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. OHCHR (2020) ‘[Analytical study on the promotion and protection of the rights of persons with disabilities in the context of climate change](https://www.ohchr.org/en/documents/thematic-reports/analytical-study-promotion-and-protection-rights-persons-disabilities)’, Report of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, A/HRC/44/30 [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Department of Economic and Social Affairs [Leaving no one behind](https://www.un.org/en/desa/key-topics/leaving-no-one-behind)  [↑](#footnote-ref-16)