

# AusAID's Disability-Inclusive Development Reference Group

Second Meeting 2-4 November 2009, Canberra

## Communiqué

1. The second meeting of the AusAID Disability-Inclusive Development Reference Group (DRG) was held in Canberra from 2-4 November 2009. The agenda for the meeting and biographies of DRG members are at [Attachment A](#). The agenda and outcomes from the DRG's first meeting in June 2009 are at [Attachment B](#).
2. The three days of proceedings were chaired by AusAID Assistant Director General, Laurie Dunn. The DRG attended a working lunch with Ms Thérèse Rein (wife of the Australian Prime Minister), and prominent members of the Australian disability community. Discussions were also held with Federal Disability Discrimination Commissioner, Mr Graeme Innes, AM, Professor Ron McCallum AO – Inaugural Rapporteur to the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and 2010 Committee Chair, representatives of AusAID's Education and Disability-Inclusive Development teams, members of AusAID's Senior Executive Service and agency staff. The Parliamentary Secretary for International Development Assistance, the Honorable Bob McMullan MP, and the Acting Director General AusAID, Mr Peter Baxter, gave their apologies.

### Purpose

3. The Reference Group was established to provide senior level guidance to the Australian aid program on implementation of the *Development for All* Strategy. Objectives for the second meeting were to:
  - Review and provide guidance on priority areas and activities identified at the first DRG meeting
  - Engage with Therese Rein, prominent Australians with disability and AusAID Executive on disability in Australia's aid program
  - Introduction and engagement with AusAID via All Staff meeting, and
  - Set out forward agenda and priority areas of focus for the DRG for 2010.
4. Priorities identified in the June meeting of the Reference Group for strategic focus in November include:
  - Formalise AusAID corporate governance structures and accountability mechanisms for disability inclusive development.
  - Building understanding (evidence base) and measuring performance: elaboration of the *Development for All* Performance Assessment Framework.
  - Communication, leadership and capacity building: finalise partnership to support work in these areas and develop a work plan.
  - Disability Resource Facility: hold discussions with other donors with the aim of securing agreement to commence work on the concept; finalise design in preparation for calling for Tenders.

### Key outcomes

5. Agreed outcomes of the meeting include:

- a) Endorsement of approach to Performance Assessment Framework and agreed that the draft Annual Report against strategy implementation will be presented at the next meeting of the DRG.
- b) Endorsement of AusAID's approaches to inclusive education and accessible infrastructure, including development of universal design guidelines for the agency.
- c) Further development of the Disability Resource Facility concept with particular regard to its scope and functions, and including working with a possible like-minded donor group and exploring links to existing global networks.
- d) Identified need for greater institutionalisation of disability into AusAID operations, accountability and reporting systems.
- e) Update on progress and coordination of DPO capacity building initiatives including the Disability Rights Fund in the Pacific at next meeting.
- f) Ms Rein expressed interest in an ongoing role to raise the profile of Australian aid program work to improve the quality of life of children with disability in developing countries. A new aspect of AusAID's partnership with UNICEF will strengthen their Child Friendly Schools program to ensure that teachers, administrators, curriculums and buildings are inclusive of and accessible to children with disability. AusAID will also support UNICEF's work with the Victor Pineda Foundation to educate and inspire young people both with and without disability about the ability and rights of people with disability. AusAID will liaise with Ms Rein's office regarding opportunities to visit these programs during official overseas visits.

### **Summary of discussions: Key Issues**

#### 6. Key points discussions over the three days include:

- Global partnerships: agreement that there is value in considering the role of AusAID's proposed Disability Resource Facility, the formation of a like-minded donor group to address key issues and challenges in disability inclusive development (eg disability and the MDGs), and potential links with existing knowledge sharing networks and communities of practice.
- Coordination in DPO capacity building initiatives: given the groundswell of activity in disability capacity building in the Pacific, attention needs to be directed to ensuring that Pacific DPOs are themselves driving program planning and priority setting, that resources and initiatives are well-targeted, have clear development rationales and avoid overburdening small organisations. Links with the new Pacific Regional Strategy on Disability 2010-2015 and its implementation plan will be important to guide these activities.
- Nature of partnerships: donors need to ensure that DPOs and people with disability are supported to be equal players in partnership arrangements. Funding mechanisms play a role in this regard and should help ensure equality between activity partners. Capacity building is also needed to ensure DPOs have the skills to be equal partners.
- Regional Frameworks in the Pacific: there continues to be a need for greater clarity on the relation between CRPD and other regional instruments, conventions and institutions – this will be important to developing an effective implementation and monitoring plan for the Pacific Regional Strategy.

- Disability and global issues: AusAID should seize leadership opportunities to integrate disability into global issues such as achievement and reporting on MDGs, G20 and the economic crisis, and climate change. To effectively engage in these areas, focus needs to be placed on building AusAID's capacity and understanding of disability inclusive development.
- Forum Disability Ministers Meeting: Pacific countries have expressed concern about the technical requirements and economic costs of signing and ratifying the CRPD. Australia is in a good position to provide leadership and regional assistance on this front. It was noted that the CRPD does not create new rights, but brings together existing rights of people with disability (and on an equal basis with others) – it need not involve high costs. In this regard, it is important to convey the cost of *not* including as well as benefits of including people with disability to government finance and treasury departments.

### **Presentations: Global and Regional**

#### *UNCRPD Conference of State Parties (COSP)*

7. Mr Graeme Innes and Ms Charlotte McClain-Nhlapo provided an overview of the UNCRPD Conference of State Parties, 2-4 September 2009, New York which they both attended. Ms McClain's presentation on the COSP is at [Attachment C](#).
8. The aim of the Conference was to exchange views and experiences among State parties to the CRPD and discuss implementation issues. Formal sessions were held on legislative measures required under the CRPD, support for CRPD implementation through the UN system, accessibility and reasonable accommodation, identification and elimination of barriers to accessibility, the development of standard guidelines on accessibility, and the development of national accessibility plans. Side events focused on strengthening links between the CRPD and the MDGs, the evolving role of human rights institutions, challenges in defining disability, and universal design.
9. Other key issues discussed at the Conference included:
  - Ratification versus preparation for implementation of the CRPD: the issue of whether States should prioritise ratification of the CPRD or whether measures to ensure compliance and monitoring should first be put in place was discussed. Concern over the cost and process of ratifying the CRPD was also raised. There was consensus that the context and situation of each nation state, including economic implications, should determine particular approaches. It was noted that change takes time, and that countries cannot make all changes required immediately upon ratifying the CRPD, but that the CRPD can be used as a framework for progress.
  - The need to improve data collection through initiatives such as the Washington Data Group to establish internationally comparable data
  - The facilitation of high level dialogue on Article 32 (dealing with international cooperation) and its implications for implementation of the CRPD was identified as a possible topic for discussion at the next Conference.
  - The need to focus on assistive devices and technologies (Articles 20 and 26), particularly issues around policy development, capacity, quality and resourcing, and how to link with the work of other treaties eg. Human rights treaties, Ottawa Convention, victim assistance.

10. The meeting noted that there are opportunities for Australian engagement and leadership on several of these issues, particularly in regard to encouraging greater representation by international donors in similar forums, and implications of Article 32 on international cooperation.
11. The permanent mission of Australia to the UN organised a successful side event hosted by Mr McMullan with the theme of meeting the needs of children and young people with disability. The event featured a panel discussion with UNICEF Deputy Executive Director, Ms. Hilde F. Johnson, Mr Victor Pineda, Director of the Victor Pineda Foundation, and Mr Innes, and attracted robust discussion.
12. Professor McCallum provided a brief update on Committee activities. Reporting guidelines have recently been completed, with the goal of establishing reporting from human rights agencies and shadow reporting through non-government organisations in addition to government reports. He also informed DRG of his election as Chair to the Committee for 2010.

#### *Pacific developments*

13. Mr Setareki Macanawai (Pacific Disability Forum) and Ms Megan McCoy (NZAID) provided an update on Pacific disability issues. Initial consultations and design of the AusAID-NZAID funded DPO Capacity Building initiative have progressed well, involving stakeholders in an inclusive and participatory way. Expansion of the (US based) Disability Rights Fund (DRF) has also seen good communication between Pacific Disability Forum and DRF headquarters. The Forum Disability Ministers meeting held in the Cook Islands in October was an historic event, including for the first time civil society representatives, and reflecting the strength of partnerships in disability in the Pacific. The Pacific Regional Strategy on Disability was endorsed, a welcome step to support small island states address common challenges in disability. There was strong endorsement of the continuing importance of DPOs' participation in planning and leading program priorities, and for a transfer of skills to occur through this process.
14. There is now a strong framework for support to regional DPOs through international agreements such as the BMF and CRPD. Clarifying the links between these frameworks and the Pacific Regional Strategy remains important, as does clarifying different institutional roles in the region. The Regional Strategy's implementation plan will be a key coordination tool. Provision of appropriate support to AusAID Posts in the Pacific to engage effectively on this issue, and donor support for the Pacific Island Forum to strengthen strategic links – eg engaging with Forum Leaders meetings and economics meetings – and deliver on the Regional Strategy will also be crucial.
15. The DPO Capacity Building initiative, Australian Human Rights Commission training program, Disability Rights Fund support and the Pacific Regional Strategy provide opportunities to strengthen resourcing and coordination. Case studies of effective partnerships between DPOs and governments should be available within 12 months. At the same time, care needs to be taken to ensure Pacific DPOs are driving implementation and setting priorities, that resources are adequate, initiatives are well-targeted with clear development rationales, and that small organisations are not overburdened.
16. There would be value in reviewing the effectiveness of grant mechanisms to partner country as well as regional DPOs. As a case study, an overview of Disability Rights Fund support to the Pacific was proposed for discussion at the next meeting.

#### **AusAID Program Updates**

17. Key points presented on recent developments in the Australian aid program and progress against the *Development for All* strategy were:

- The expansion of the Australian aid program's geographic and global policy focus, including on climate change, the global economic crisis response and the G20, and the growing nexus between development, diplomacy and security. It was noted that each of these issues provide important entry points for addressing the needs of people with disability.
- Importance of building on opportunities to strengthen the integration of disability into the MDGs and other global issues
- Acknowledgement of NZAID's leadership on disability and development and good progress in Australia's emerging leadership, including: Australia's participation in the UN CRPD Conference of State Parties and its role in highlighting the importance of developed countries focusing on their responsibilities under Article 32; support for the Cairns Pacific Islands Forum Leaders meeting and the inaugural Forum Disability Ministers Meeting in Cook Islands in October 2009, and the DID team's engagement with international organisations on disability and development. The establishment of the Disability Reference Group was also noted as a leadership achievement in 2009.
- Strong emphasis on leadership in disability and development by AusAID over the course of 2009 has meant less time and resources have been available to invest in other areas of strategy implementation. However, the benefits of this investment are apparent: as a comparatively small donor AusAID has nonetheless helped raise the profile of disability and development and shape development partner commitment at the global level.
- The recent publication of the Companion Volume to the *Development for All* strategy was also noted.

#### *Inclusive Education*

18. Ms Fabia Shah (Education Thematic Group) discussed progress in inclusive education in AusAID over the previous six months. In the absence of an agency strategy to guide education policy, a number of initiatives are in planning. Guidelines on key elements and approaches to inclusive education – quality, access and systems strengthening – will be developed to assist education program and activity managers. These will be complemented by guidelines on making education infrastructure – which currently constitutes around 60% of education program resources – accessible. It is intended that these guidelines will inform inclusive education program pilots initially in selected countries, where partner government commitment and systems are in place. The pilot programs will involve a needs assessment and baseline analysis, the development of knowledge and learning strategies, and be supported by capacity building at AusAID posts.

19. Building on existing partnerships with multilateral organisations such as the *Education for All Fast Track Initiative* and UNICEF's *Child Friendly Schools* initiative will be central to this approach. Feedback was sought from the DRG on how best to move forward on policy agreement within the international community.

20. DRG members supported proposed approaches, noting importance of using existing guidelines, tools and implementation mechanisms. Issues raised included:

- Geographic focus for inclusive education pilots – value was seen in working systematically in focus countries (eg in the Pacific, possibly Tonga, Vanuatu and Samoa) which can also act as a model for the region.
- Importance of defining the scope of inclusive education which will vary in different contexts;
- Value of working towards a ‘no-gap approach’ in inclusive education through strategies such as sector-wide programs and planning; a focus on early childhood is a critical area that also needs sectoral and policy coherence.
- Importance of linking with DPOs in program approaches and drawing on innovative international practice for more robust data collection was noted.

#### *Performance Assessment*

21. Consultant Michael Pilbrow and Angela Clare (DIDT) presented on the *Development for All's* draft performance assessment framework (PAF). The aim of the PAF is to provide a practical tool for the agency to monitor and assess progress under the strategy and feed back performance information to program management. The DRG provided input on 1) key measures of success under the strategy, 2) ways to involve people with disability and capture their lived experience, and 3) ways the DRG can help hold AusAID to account for its performance against strategy objectives.

1. Key measures of success demonstrated through: level of understanding of disability as a development issue in AusAID; the institutionalisation of disability in AusAID leadership structures, consistent policy engagement; replication of *Development for All* strategy in development partner agencies; ability to demonstrate best practice in target countries and programs; and leadership on disability in partner countries.
2. Ways to involve people with disability and capture their lived experience: develop baseline data drawing on same partner country DPOs over time, combined with random sampling; include people with disability in planning and design process to enable them to provide feedback on implementation results; recognise that it is DPOs' responsibility to hold their governments to account, and that donors should support local DPOs to do this; understand local situation of people with disability, recognising that disability is a diverse issue, and the need to find way around ‘gatekeepers,’ eg through community-driven responses; use qualitative methods to gather information in the short term and build on this over time.
3. Holding AusAID to account: support use of existing AusAID processes eg traffic light system of reporting; publicise progress; integrate disability in key operations/business processes eg annual program reporting; conduct policy reviews to monitor progress on government commitment; consider use of impact (“spotlight”) evaluations to track effectiveness of selected initiatives from design through implementation; use DRG communiqués to track progress.

22. AusAID's DID team undertook to finalise the Performance Assessment Framework, including through consultations with stakeholders and AusAID Posts, and present a first draft Annual Report on the *Development for All* strategy to the DRG meeting by April 2010.

#### *Disability Resource Facility*

23. A concept for a Disability Resource Facility to support capacity building and provide access to a broad range of expertise and technical assistance on

disability issues has been developed. Initial planning considered extending access to the Facility to development partners and DPOs. Discussions were held with DFID and GTZ on a possible partnership arrangement for the Facility. These discussions identified the need to consider objectives and functions of such a facility in more depth, including its potential relationship to existing global mechanisms for technical support

24. The value of a 'like-minded' donor group as a coordination mechanism was also discussed. In some cases donors' limited experience and lack of policy framework in disability means that their technical and information needs remain undefined; however with further policy development and implementation experience donor needs should become clearer. The DRG saw merit in a like-minded donor group to consider disability-specific issues and challenges, and coordinated approaches to key issues such as revisions of the MDGs. It would be important to define a clear mandate and objectives for such a group.
25. The DID team undertook to develop a revised concept note on the Facility model for DRG response and explore linkages with a possible donor group as well as existing global governance and information networks.

#### *Focus countries*

26. Good progress has been made in AusAID's partnerships with Cambodia and East Timor to promote national efforts in disability and development. Formal discussions will commence with Samoa in the coming months to determine the nature of the partnership. Key points include:
  - Partnerships between government, key civil society organizations and DPOs is essential to progress
  - Disability is often not a first ranking priority for governments, therefore funding and capacity development needs to be focused on sustainable activities in line with government policies and strategic long term results
  - AusAID posts need to be supported to effectively manage and monitor disability inclusive activities.
27. PNG has also requested support from AusAID to move towards signing, ratifying and implementing the CRPD.
28. DRG noted that it would be valuable to establish a mechanism to bring together advisers working in these countries, to share information and lessons. This support provides a good opportunity to pilot sector wide approaches, work with ministries to coordinate the response across government, and engage community level organizations to build a multi-sectoral approach. The CRPD could be at the centre of this approach, with a focus on building reporting capacity of DPOs. A challenge for AusAID is to meet demand from partner governments over next 12 months, avoid overstretching, and achieve clearly articulated results.

#### *Accessible infrastructure*

29. Although progress in this sector has been slower than hoped, good work is occurring in AusAID's water and sanitation programs and policies, and in expanding Australian NGO awareness in this sector. Discussions have also commenced on the development of universal design policy guidance and practical guidelines for AusAID. This guidance will strengthen the agency's multi-sectoral response and policy coherence needed for effective disability-inclusive development in, for instance, inclusive education.

30. DRG noted that donor agencies are increasingly developing and implementing accessibility guidelines, and that this should be a straightforward exercise for AusAID to identify where it can engage and adapt its work. The option of making the guidelines mandatory was discussed. The importance of including DPOs in developing accessibility guidelines to ensure quality was noted, as was ensuring people with disability are included in planning and implementation. The World Bank is a significant player in this area but does not currently have a policy on accessibility; there is therefore an opportunity for Australia to show leadership on this point through its partnership arrangements. Also need to consider use of partner government policies and procurement systems for infrastructure initiatives: standards between donors and developing countries will be different. Donor harmonisation should be promoted where possible.

#### *Communication, Leadership and Capacity Development*

31. Strong political leadership and Australia's support for a number of key events – UN Conference of State Parties, the Cairns Pacific Forum Leaders Meeting and Pacific Islands Forum Disability Ministers Meeting – were important in maintaining momentum and raising the profile of disability within the agency throughout 2009. AusAID also supported the leadership of people with disability through initiatives such as attending conferences, scholarships and leadership awards, and representation on AusAID Committees and panels. The DID team is looking to be more strategic in this area and has commenced work with CBM to develop a program of capacity development and training over the next 18 months to enhance agency knowledge, capacity and leadership.
32. DRG noted that engaging with mid and senior management and building their capacity in disability-inclusive development is challenging, given demands at these levels. It is crucial to ensure the right advice, tools, and accountability mechanisms are in place to support staff. The DRG offered to continue to play a role in engaging with AusAID's senior executive.

#### ***Meeting AusAID: DRG presentation***

At an AusAID all staff meeting on Wednesday 4 November DRG members discussed key issues in disability and development from their respective institutional and professional experience. This was followed by morning tea and an opportunity for informal discussions. The DRG then met with a number of AusAID's senior executive.

#### ***Engagement with AusAID Senior Executive***

The DRG met with Branch Heads from the Development Partners Branch, PNG and the Pacific, and Governance and Service Delivery. The discussion provided an opportunity for the DRG to hear from Branch Heads how disability is being addressed in their programs and issues and challenges faced. It was noted that while good progress had been made in elevating disability and development politically, it is early days in terms of how AusAID translates that into practical change at the program level and there remains some way to go. The importance of sustainable change being driven by national communities and government was highlighted and that this should inform AusAID's approach and is likely to differ between countries. SES thanked DRG for the discussion and looked forward to future opportunities to engage with them on how AusAID is tracking with implementation.

#### **Other issues**

33. Prevention of impairments: The DRG discussed the issue of the inclusion of prevention (Outcome 2) in the *Development for All* strategy. Some concern was expressed that whilst prevention is a valid and important public health and safety objective, its inclusion in a strategy that aims to extend the benefits of



development to people with disability risked confusing people's understanding of disability inclusive development. DRG members noted that disability initiatives should be directed to people with disability to support their inclusion and participation in society; prevention measures were directed to the general community and risk deflecting attention and resources away from people with disability. The DRG also noted philosophical tensions: prevention of disability is not mentioned in the CRPD, other than in the context of preventing worsening or secondary disability. AusAID acknowledged this was a sensitive area but that the issue is being addressed appropriately. While respect for the diversity and rights of people with disability remains the strategy's primary focus, prevention measures were widely identified as a priority in consultations for the strategy. *Development for All* supports reducing preventable impairments in those areas where significant humanitarian, social and economic benefits can be made with modest investment.

34. Both DRG and AusAID noted that attendance of all team members of DIDT at the meetings was a valuable opportunity for both sides - for the DRG to hear directly from officers engaged in particular work, and for DIDT to learn from and tap into the perspectives and expertise of DRG, to address implementation issues and inform work priorities going forward.
35. 2010 DRG Meetings: the DRG agreed to the recommendation to conduct a 'virtual meeting' in March/April to specifically consider the first report card on implementation of *Development for All*. Consideration was also given to the idea of holding the main DRG meeting for 2010 in a focus country to provide an opportunity for the DRG to engage directly with AusAID staff at posts who are at the forefront of translating the strategy into action. An in-country meeting would also enable the DRG to engage with key stakeholders. The main DRG meeting for 2010 is likely to be held mid year.