

Disability Rights Advocacy Fund's submission to DFAT on the New International Development Policy

The Disability Rights Advocacy Fund (DRAF)¹ has been a partner of DFAT since 2009. Partnering with DRAF has enabled DFAT to both address stated development objectives and internal strategies on disability-inclusive development, as well as ensure that foreign aid commitments are in accordance with Article 32 (international cooperation) and Article 11 (situations of risk and humanitarian emergencies) of the CRPD, which Australia ratified in 2008, and in line with the leave no one behind principle in Agenda 2030.

DRAF works in partnership with the Australian Disability and Development Consortium (ADDC) and endorses the submission of ADDC and recommendations made therein. In addition, given DRAF's unique mission, methods of work and long-standing partnership with DFAT, DRAF submits the following inputs and recommendations for DFAT's consideration in the shaping of the new international development policy.

What key trends or challenges will shape Australia's engagement in our region and globally over the next five to 10 years? What risks and opportunities does this present for Australia's development assistance?

Challenges and trends:

1. Democracy and the rule of law are increasingly under threat due to multiple and interlacing factors. The growth of inequalities, political polarization and post-truth populism are undermining democratic institutions and governance, leading to a backlash on the recognition of human rights as universal, interdependent and indivisible, prompting fear of difference and diversity (racism, sexism, ableism, xenophobia, homophobia and transphobia), and shrinking civic space.² As such, multilateral cooperation and the international human rights system are in a fragile state and further exacerbated by geopolitical challenges and conflict that, in turn, trigger security crises, trade wars, displacement, food insecurity and political and social unrest with global repercussions.
 - The erosion of gender equality and gender justice is one example of how human rights are deteriorating and milestone wins are coming undone and being reversed, for example, restricting sexual and reproductive health and rights.
 - The COVID-19 pandemic further illustrates these failures and the disproportionate effect on those most marginalised (including persons with disabilities) through loss of lives, supports, livelihoods, education, increased isolation and violence, and overall entrenched inequalities. The risk for replication of crises remains due to the lack of prevention, preparation for, and response to future pandemics and absence of coordination at regional and global levels.
2. Climate change and its disproportionate impact borne by those most marginalised (women, Indigenous peoples, persons with disabilities) due to being excluded by climate action and decision-making (e.g., increased occurrence of natural disasters leading to food insecurity, disrupted livelihoods, increased displacement and migration, lack of WASH and basic infrastructure).

¹ DRAF supports organizations of persons with disabilities in the Global South, including across Indonesia and 14 Pacific Island Countries (PICs), to advance legal frameworks to realize the rights of persons with disabilities. DRAF's sister organization, the Disability Rights Fund (DRF), supports persons with disabilities around the world to build diverse movements, ensure inclusive development agendas, and achieve equal rights and opportunity for all. As participatory organisations, DRAF and DRF include persons with disabilities in decision-making at all organisational levels, from governance to staffing, and carries through to how we design our grantmaking, technical assistance and advocacy approaches.

² See CIVICUS Monitor documenting civic space restrictions in the Asia-Pacific region, <https://findings2021.monitor.civicus.org/asia-pacific.html#ratings-overview>

Opportunities:

These challenges call for strategic approaches and Australia is well placed to directly engage in seeking and applying solutions to recover democratic solidarity in the region and globally through development assistance.

As a leader in the Pacific region, Australia can serve as a model by addressing and reversing these risks and trends by:

1. Continuing to strengthen democratic institutions and rule of law in the region with a focus on human rights. While many other governments focus their assistance on development, **Australia's investment and focus on human rights will be key to countering populist and polarising movements and bringing stability and security. Through investment and partnerships with governments and civil society**, Australia can bolster local governance and institutions for, among others, more robust social protection and health systems, economic empowerment and growth, and resilience and preparedness in the face of climate change, natural disaster and security threats. In doing so, **Australia can infuse democratic values and apply rights-based, intersectional and participatory approaches** to ensure that the institutions, infrastructure, policies and programmes challenge power dynamics and serve all populations. For example,
 - Australia can assist in enhancing and expanding access to support and services in the community, including in remote areas, for children and adults with disabilities, that in turn builds up human capital and leads to greater social and economic returns within the community.
 - Australia can invest in human rights organisations working on mainstreaming gender equality, disability rights, rights of Indigenous peoples and persons with diverse SOGIESC etc. and call on their partners to also directly engage with these organisations and communities.
2. Leveraging Pacific expertise to strengthen capacities and investing in participatory research and evidence-based solutions that live up to Australia's own values- gender equality, disability and social inclusion (GEDSI). This means engaging in comprehensive GEDSI and recognising that it is not a 'one size fits all approach'. For each population to benefit from transformative GEDSI, this requires recognition of their own lived experiences, technical expertise and practice, and **committing to upholding transformative GEDSI in all its actions across all policies and all areas of engagement**; not only promoting inclusion through programmes and investments supported or operated by Australia, but also ensuring that no barriers are sustained or created that put at risk the participation and inclusion of marginalised groups. Additionally, it means **making disability inclusion and accessibility requirements across all Australia's priorities and not funding or supporting anything that is not disability inclusive**.
 - For example, *whether disability-specific or not*, no investments or support should be allocated to, among others:
 - Responses, programmes or policies (e.g., related to humanitarian and climate action, economic recovery) that are not inclusive of, and do not engage persons with disabilities in their decision-making, design, evaluation, follow up to evaluations (e.g., recommendation uptake, integration of lessons learned and adaptations based on learnings)
 - inaccessible infrastructure (e.g., schools- including school curricula and materials, community centres, hospitals, websites, court procedures)
 - building segregated facilities such as residential institutions or special schools
3. As a leader in global development and diplomacy, Australia wields significant soft power and can help to mobilise and shape bilateral and multilateral approaches that uphold human rights and democracy, multiculturalism and diversity, as a means to confront and regain ground lost due to the current threats in the global environment. By sharing its own whole-of-government approaches and values, Australia can serve as a model for others to follow. For example, the

comprehensive GEDSI commitment and approach in development assistance and beyond; appointment of Australia's inaugural First Nations Ambassador; Australia's leading investment and support for the elaboration of the UN Disability Inclusion Strategy (UNDIS)- these initiatives demonstrate how Australia puts into practice its values and seeks to elevate and mobilise them globally. **Australia should continue to make GEDSI, Indigenous peoples and UNDIS a priority and seize further spaces where diversity and disability inclusion can be showcased and institutionalised as best practices.** For example, globally promoting the use of, and capacity building for, the OECD DAC marker on disability consistently across all forms of development aid; and advocating for a rights-based Pandemic Treaty that reflects the lived experiences of persons with disabilities and upholds their direct participation in its development.

What development capabilities will Australia need to respond to these challenges?

Participatory and intersectional approaches: In order to develop programmes and interventions that uphold human rights, shift power and respond to the concrete demands of all groups, Australia needs to enhance its capabilities to ensure that the most marginalised groups are equally and equitably engaging and benefitting from Australia's development assistance. This recognises the lived experiences of marginalised populations, including the unique experiences of those at the intersections of groups who are subjected to multiple and compounding forms of oppression (e.g. Indigenous women and girls with disabilities, persons with disabilities with diverse SOGIESC, etc.). These approaches should entail and extend to:

1. Participatory research that involves concerned communities in the identification, definition, design and implementation of research that advances their empowerment and evidence-based solutions.
2. Proactive outreach and engagement with all groups- this requires inclusive and accessible communications, consultations, and interactions, provision of reasonable accommodation, fostering safe spaces for exchange and refraining from tokenistic engagement, and ensuring that knowledge, learning and outcomes generated by consultations should be shared as a means of empowerment.³
3. Meaningful and direct partnerships with civil society organisations, favouring those that are led and governed by persons with lived experience including those most marginalised, and requiring partners to apply participatory and intersectional approaches in their own engagements.
4. This also requires support for, and the establishment of emerging organisations, even those considered high risk that can be strengthened through capacity building (DRAF specialises in providing core support and technical assistance to emergent and grassroots organisations of persons with disabilities representing those most marginalised, e.g. organisations of women and girls with disabilities, organisations of persons with disabilities with diverse SOGIESC, organisations of Indigenous peoples with disabilities).
5. Tracking and analysis of how Australia is supporting the participation of the most marginalised (the measurement of which should be defined by the most marginalized themselves) and may include analysing outreach, their participation in setting advocacy agendas and project objectives, strengthening their capacity to achieve advocacy priorities, enjoyment of rights, access to services and opportunities by persons with disabilities, as well as the barriers that continue to exist to better address and remove barriers to inclusion.

More internal capacity and expertise: Given the challenges to democracy, human rights and rule of law in the region and globally, Australia requires stronger internal capacity to develop appropriate responses and ensure accountability in line with its values. This extends to developing expertise on participatory and intersectional approaches, transformative GEDSI and particularly accessibility and disability inclusion:

³ See UNDIS Guidelines on Consulting Persons with Disabilities, https://www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/un_disability-inclusive_consultation_guidelines.pdf

1. Build and invest in internal expertise across the department. Achieving transformative GEDSI requires expertise beyond 'gender in development'. While DFAT has a strong team on disability inclusion, other teams have limited experience and technical expertise on disability inclusion. A team approach to GEDSI capacity is critical for results to ensure application of all its components across all portfolios and to ensure engaging in networks in the region to foster strong partnerships with local CSOs and OPDs.
2. Strengthen capacity to collect disability-disaggregated data including through the OECD DAC marker on disability to enable measuring impact of interventions.
3. Building on DFAT's evaluation on disability inclusion in Australian aid, carry out an independent evaluation to analyse the internal needs required to better embed disability inclusion across all systems and processes.
4. As outlined in the ADDC submission, appoint disability advisors or units based in the Office of the Pacific and the new Office of Southeast Asia to help boost, disseminate and consolidate knowledge and understanding of disability inclusive development across regional and country initiatives.
5. Learn directly from civil society leaders by hosting secondments of OPD/CSO representatives with lived experience into teams- a practice that FCDO has implemented. Set aside budget to invest in representative organisations, such as OPDs, to deliver learning and strengthen DFAT's expertise.

How can Australia best utilise its national strengths to enhance the impact of our development program and address multidimensional vulnerabilities?

As a strong democracy based on the rule of law and human rights, Australia can promote good governance and participatory interventions.

1. Australia is well equipped and positioned to **support governments to strengthen their institutions and practices in line with international commitments, including human rights obligations**. Australia can take the opportunity to **embed rights-based approaches into governance and institutions and foster transformative GEDSI approaches** across the board for inclusion of the most underrepresented groups. In particular, Australia can demonstrate through its own practices nationally, that the inclusion of diverse perspectives and communities enriches outcomes and better adapts governance and institutions to address multidimensional and intersectional triggers of vulnerability.
 - Australia became one of the leading countries to provide individualised support for persons with disabilities in the community through the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS), building on the lessons learned from this experience, Australia can work with governments and OPDs to strengthen person-centred community-based support systems.
2. Australia has led globally in drawing attention to, and investment into the Pacific region, including through offering grants, advocacy and technical assistance, such as through DRAF and other organisations. Australia can continue to **attract focus on the region as well as to promote outreach and support to the most marginalised groups through direct interventions or through strengthening government capacities to do so**. This is a direct investment into the people and contributes to building human capital and talent that can serve their communities, country and region.
3. Australia can **leverage its influence and convening power to support more democratic and participatory ways of working by civil society organisations that result in concrete shifts in power dynamics**. While working in partnership with an intermediary is an efficient mechanism for reaching communities, it is also important to institutionalise mechanisms to have direct access to the diverse voices, perspectives and priorities of civil society. This could be achieved, for example, by ensuring OPD participation in project design, monitoring and evaluation.⁴ Moreover, by requiring partners to apply democratic,

⁴ See main findings of the GLAD Network [Report on Localisation and Disability](#), 2022.

participatory and intersectional approaches in their own operations and engagements will serve to transform power dynamics on the ground, particularly relating to how concerned communities are involved in and leading design and implementation of interventions. Australia can continue to draw on the rich array of civil society partners, particularly those working directly with the most marginalised communities, for example DRAF will continue to enable direct contact and exchange for Australia with grassroots OPDs.

How should the new policy reflect the Government's commitments to build stronger and more meaningful partnerships in our region, founded on mutual trust and respect and shared values of fairness and equality?

1. **Adopt a whole-of-agency focus on making the most marginalised central to Australia's development work.** This requires ensuring that partners are effectively resourced to keep communities and individuals at the core of their work; enabled to break with traditional models of aid; mobilised to engender empowering approaches that reconfigure power dynamic; and held accountable to communities and individuals. In addition, it requires recognising and valuing the expertise of partners that apply these approaches and promoting collaborations to replicate these practices.
 - **Draw on DRAF's participatory approaches and expertise** with grassroots and emergent OPDs, including high-risk organisations, and promote collaborations to share models of good practice on outreach and capacity strengthening in support of organisations representing the most marginalised groups.
2. **Support and resource CSOs and promote cross movement collaboration** to ensure priorities and concerns of those most marginalised can have access to broader platforms, gain allies and strengthen and coordinate work towards common objectives. For example, Australia could resource collaborations that foster cross movement solidarity, particularly organisations working transversally across multiple spaces such as feminist, disability, LGBTQI+, environmental movements and Indigenous communities.
3. **Make shifts on who holds expertise and redefine the Australian government's relationship with concerned communities** to move beyond "consultation and participation" to achieve truly empowered local leadership and decision making. This will require more opportunities for investment by creating more pooled funding arrangements to share and mitigate risk for their support, strengthening the capacity of representative organisations, including OPDs, fostering more direct dialogue and collaboration to learn and act on their priorities, and turning to them for capacity building of government staff.

What lessons from Australia's past development efforts should inform the policy? What is Australia seen to be doing comparatively well?

1. Australia is a leading donor in disability-inclusive development; and in many ways, the **Australian government has paved the way for other development actors to address disability inclusion within development.** Their key investments into pooled funds like the DRAF will ensure that funds are reaching the most grassroots and marginalised groups in the Indo-Pacific region. Australia should also continue their partnerships with other disability rights organisations like IDA and PDF and support to the UN Partnership on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities to ensure the disability rights movement is strengthened at the regional and international levels.
2. Australia holds considerable political influence: the letter Australia sent to the UN Secretary-General, together with the governments of UK and Finland, was decisive in triggering the development of the UNDIS that transformed the way that UN entities and country teams work and are held accountable on disability inclusion in their programming and within their internal operations.
3. Australia became the lead donor for the baseline review and development of the UNDIS and directed this support through the UN human rights system to the Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, with the funds channelled through DRAF. **Australia**

should continue to exercise its influence in shaping the global disability agenda by interfacing its political and financial capital with its commitment to human rights.

How should the performance and delivery systems be designed to promote transparency and accountability, as well as effectiveness and learning in Australia's development assistance?

1. Set ambitious targets for inclusion, including on gender and disability, in accordance with Australia's commitment to GEDSI. For example, Australia could show its leadership by setting a target for disability inclusion that is as ambitious as its gender target (that at least 80% of DFAT's development cooperation investments should effectively address gender issues) and backing it up with a stand-alone disability rights and inclusion strategy.
2. Capture and share good practices about Australia's inclusive approach, for example how disability inclusion is integrated across all development sectors. Draw on existing partners like DRAF that are already providing this expertise to organisations.
3. Include representatives of marginalised communities in accountability mechanisms- not only in the context of consultations but engaging them as agents and experts to undertake research, analyses and develop recommendations and strategies.
4. Establish criteria for Australia's partners to infuse and multiply inclusive approaches. For example, set requirements calling for accessibility and the provision of reasonable accommodation in processes and products (e.g. consultations, procurement), and engagement with OPDs.
5. Promote evidence-based and transparent approaches by collecting and disseminating data focused on human diversity, for example, disaggregated data on gender and disability and intersectional identities by consistently applying the OECD DAC marker on gender and disability for better informed funding distribution, programming, and policymaking.
6. Resource inclusion and accessibility of the most marginalised and systematically budget for reasonable accommodation.
7. Make it a mandatory budget requirement for disability inclusion in design guidance, design documents, quality checks, reporting processes.

How should the new policy address the role of ODA and non-ODA in supporting the development of our regional partners?

1. ODA spending should increase and funding to local actors should be prioritised, either directly or through intermediaries like DRAF that are committed to working with grassroots civil society in a participatory manner.
2. Core support to advance organisational mission should be prioritised.
3. GEDSI should be a pre-condition in all ODA and non-ODA spending to ensure that power dynamics are not reinforced to the detriment of the most marginalised groups. No Australian funds should be used to create barriers nor result in exclusion.