

## Submission of the International Disability Alliance (IDA) to inform Australia’s new International Development Policy

The International Disability Alliance (IDA), established in 1999, is a network of eight global and six regional organisations of persons with disabilities (OPDs). IDA members and their members represent over 1,100 OPDs from across 182 countries, and the estimated one billion persons with disabilities worldwide. IDA is a standing co-chair of the [Global Action on Disability \(GLAD\) Network](#), a donor coordination mechanism tasked to promote disability inclusive development; a co-host of the [Global Disability Summit](#), which took place in London in 2018 and Oslo this year; a co-chair of the IASC Disability Reference Group, and the co-organizer of the Disability and Climate Action Caucus.

IDA’s mission is to advance the human rights of persons with disabilities as a united voice of OPDs utilizing the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) and other human rights instruments. It works to promote the rights of persons with disabilities across the UN to advance human rights and sustainable development, while supporting OPDs to hold their governments accountable and advocate for transformative change at local, national and international levels. IDA also builds the capacity of OPDs to support governments and all stakeholders in implementing the CRPD and the 2030 Agenda’s inclusion of persons with disabilities.

IDA has had a long and proud partnership with the Government of Australia as a champion for the rights of persons with disabilities at the United Nations, and in the region. Australia’s leadership on the Steering Committee for GLAD is emblematic of its work to leverage resources and pursue advances for persons with disabilities in the landscape of cooperative international development.

**The movement of disability rights organizations throughout the Indo-Pacific and around the world needs Australia’s continued commitment to building effective, accountable, resilient states in the face of external pressures and shocks. Australia should continue its leadership commitment to ambitious climate action, poverty reduction, human rights, and gender equality, disability and inclusion (GEDSI), and to grounding its work in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).**

In this submission, IDA will outline some of the key trends in the region for persons with disabilities, as well all as the risks and opportunities these present for Australia’s development assistance.

### Key trend 1: Participation of persons with disabilities as equal partners

While it is encouraging to see that persons with disabilities are being increasingly consulted on a range of issues, evidence suggests that this is still not meaningful.<sup>1</sup> Australia has been a leader in consultative processes around the globe and their continued support can shift the needle from consulting OPDs as a ‘tick box’ exercise to meaningful participation where persons with disabilities

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.internationaldisabilityalliance.org/blog/increasingly-consulted-not-yet-participating-ida-global-survey-report-participation>



are equal partners in development and humanitarian action. The principle of ‘nothing about us without us’, especially as enshrined in the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) and in particular Article 4.3 and Article 32<sup>2</sup> must underpin international cooperation. This means **prioritizing the participation of persons with disabilities and their representative organizations in efforts for international development cooperation** to ensure that there is no further marginalization and exclusion.

In addition, participation must recognize intersectionality. This is particularly true for SDG 5, because an estimated 1 in 5 women lives with a disability. The human rights and needs of under-represented groups of people with disabilities such as persons with intellectual disabilities, persons with psychosocial disabilities and persons who are deaf-blind require specific attention. The SDGs cannot be realized without the inclusion of persons with disabilities.

*Australia should continue to promote and reinforce practices of consultation and participation in its development relationships across the Indo-Pacific. Ensuring meaningful participation of persons with disabilities and their representative organizations also foster sustainability and localization of interventions. Any effort to ensure effectiveness of international cooperation must recognize the inclusion of persons with disabilities and OPDs.*

## Key Trend 2: Recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic has been a crisis of health, of economies and of social justice. It showed the fragility of global commitments to the rights of persons with disabilities. As the Terms of Reference for this consultation note, “Disadvantaged and marginalized groups – including people with disabilities, ... have been disproportionately affected by the pandemic’s health, economic and social impacts.” An IDA survey shows that 47% of persons with disabilities lost their income while 17% dropped out of education due to the pandemic.<sup>3</sup> Evidence also suggests that the pandemic adversely impacted organizations of persons with disabilities (OPDs) thereby increasing the risk of an even reduced space for disability rights advocacy.<sup>4</sup>

Despite the evidence, rebuilding and post-pandemic interventions have continued to exclude persons with disabilities or at best, included them only marginally. There is a very real risk of persons with disabilities being left behind given that the barriers that they have faced pre-pandemic were exacerbated by the impact of COVID-19.

<sup>2</sup> The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) suggests, in its Article 32 on international cooperation, that States Parties ensure that international cooperation, including international development programs, are inclusive of and accessible to persons with disabilities, recognizing the importance of international cooperation and its promotion, in support of national efforts for the realization of the purpose and objectives of the CRPD.

<sup>33</sup> [https://www.internationaldisabilityalliance.org/sites/default/files/covid-19\\_survey\\_ex\\_summary\\_final.pdf](https://www.internationaldisabilityalliance.org/sites/default/files/covid-19_survey_ex_summary_final.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.internationaldisabilityalliance.org/blog/covid-19-exacerbated-existing-inequalities-%E2%80%93-research-shows-how-systems-can-do-better>



*Recovery efforts offer an opportunity for Australia to use its leadership to course-correct for persons with disabilities' equal rights, inviting persons with disabilities and their representative organizations to meaningfully participate in such efforts.*

### Key Trend 3: The Digital Divide

The pandemic has driven unprecedented digital transformation and changed the way the world connects and works. However for persons with disabilities, the pandemic amplified existing structural inequalities and compounded the digital divide they face. Studies undertaken by the Stakeholder Group of Persons with Disabilities for Sustainable Development found that persons with disabilities in Nigeria, Bangladesh, and Bolivia had difficulties accessing digital technologies and the internet and often lacked the financial means to obtain those resources. Lack of access to technology and assistive devices impact all areas of the lives of persons with disabilities, including education and employment. The Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities has noted that lack of consideration of gender and/or disability aspects in policies relating to information and communications, including information and communications technologies and systems, and to other facilities and services open or provided to the public, both in urban and in rural areas, prevents women with disabilities from living independently and participating fully in all areas of life on an equal basis with others.<sup>5</sup>

The impact of the digital divide is likely to have particularly long-reaching consequences on access to education and better learning outcomes for children with disabilities. During the pandemic, governments introduced distance learning for school children using TV, radio, and other digital means. While this arrangement was welcomed, it was not inclusive of children with disabilities.

Remote learning options put in place during school closures highlighted the potential good of information and communications technology (ICT) and digitalization, and exposed challenges, particularly those faced by marginalized groups such as persons with disabilities. Recent developments such as the Transforming Education Summit recognized these gaps in inclusion and equity but there is much to be done to translate these commitments to reality.

*It is therefore crucial that Australia seize the opportunity to take these hard-learned lessons on the impact of digital divide and apply them across sectors in its own work, and spur other countries to do the same.*

### Key Trend 4: Climate Change

Countries of the Indo-Pacific are deeply affected by extreme weather, climate action failure, **climate change**, and climate change-driven displacement. Representative organisations of persons with disabilities should be actively sought out and engaged across different areas of climate change policy and action. Persons with disabilities are best placed to identify their needs, so they must be at

<sup>5</sup> General comment No. 3 (2016) on women and girls with disabilities, para. 48.



the forefront of designing and evaluating disaster risk reduction, climate adaptation and humanitarian responses to address displacement-related risks and impacts.

Persons with disabilities are both among the most affected by climate change, and among those actors working for climate justice. **Persons with disabilities are two to four times more likely to die or be critically injured in a climate-related disaster** due to lack of access to information, lack of transportation or accessible emergency shelters, and mobility limitations.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, 80% of persons with disabilities live in the Global South, which has been experiencing the most severe effects of climate change for a considerable time already.

At the UN Commission on the Status of Women this year, 34 feminist and disability-rights organizations led by organizations of persons with disabilities, [called for their inclusion in climate action](#). Women and girls with disabilities are at greater risk for experiencing harm because of climate change, including heightened risk of violence, and will experience more barriers to support due to their gender and disability. In the aftermath of disasters as result of climate change, they are most likely to be left out, experiencing barriers to accessing assistive devices, health care, education and more.

Climate change will continue to increase inequalities unless adequate steps are taken to ensure that adaptation and mitigation measures are fully inclusive of persons with disabilities, as a group most at risk of being left behind. At the recently-concluded COP 27, The [main decision](#) as well as the [action plan](#) for climate empowerment included references to persons with disabilities for the first time. If implemented, this means access to climate information, education, and public participation.

*Australia's own role in the region is reinforced by the natural disasters it has faced in recent years, and can show leadership for participation and accessibility. Accessibility is a precondition for the inclusion of people with disabilities, and it can walk the talk on preparedness measures that assume some forcibly displaced people will have disability-related needs and consider the accessibility of early warning systems, evacuation procedures and shelters as standard practice.*

## Key Trend 5: Data-Driven Interventions

Australia can showcase development capabilities that harness the power of community action, data, and community-driven data to make informed strategic decisions. It can champion the data infrastructures needed to have evidence on the prevalence, location, needs and resources of persons with disabilities to inform targeted, adequate and inclusive planning and responses that respect human rights.

CRPD Article 31 requires States Parties to collect data on persons with disabilities and 193 countries committed to collect data on persons with disabilities and to disaggregate data by disability by

<sup>6</sup> [https://www.aging.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/SCA\\_Timmons\\_09\\_20\\_17.pdf](https://www.aging.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/SCA_Timmons_09_20_17.pdf)





adopting the 2030 Agenda and the global indicator framework. Despite this, limited disability data are available at the global level.

Collecting disability data can also contribute to the measurement of the SDGs. Surveys and studies targeting persons with disabilities are essential to understand additional barriers faced in enjoying their human rights on an equal basis with others, and should be conducted using inclusive and accessible methods (including through accessible online survey tools).

*Australia has an important role to play in advancing the Washington Group on Disability Statistics tools, especially the Washington Group short set of questions and the UNICEF/Washington Group Child Functioning Module (that supports identification of children with disabilities). This methodology is growing in popularity. It provides an important data point to monitor the implementation of the SDGs.*

## Using Australia's National Strengths

Australia is a recognized global champion for the rights of persons with disabilities. It has been a leader in investing in strengthening representative movements of persons with disabilities thereby **fostering greater community engagement** in human rights, development and humanitarian action. A strong and vibrant movement of organizations of persons with disabilities (OPDs) also **contributes to developing capabilities that can support Australia's** larger agenda for inclusion, equity and **building meaningful participation**.

One of the **most important opportunities** that the new International Development Policy provides is the role Australia can play to support other members of the region to become champions too. Influence from one state to another in the region can build opportunities for learning and development that will be inclusive and equitable, advancing Australia's goals for stability and prosperity in the region.

