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1. Introduction

The Pacific Disability Forum (PDF) is a regional organization that works towards promoting the rights and inclusion of persons with disabilities in the Pacific region. It serves as a platform for collaboration, advocacy, and capacity building among organisations of persons with disabilities (OPDs) and other stakeholders in the Pacific. PDF was established in 2002 with the aim of ensuring that persons with disabilities in the Pacific have equal access to opportunities, services, and participation in all aspects of life. The organization operates under the principles of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) and works towards its implementation at both national and regional levels.

Gender is an important thematic within the programmes of PDF. Gender work in PDF has evolved over the years due to emerging priorities within the gender space and this include climate change, women in peace and security, disaster risk reduction, menstrual health, safe and clean wash and ending violence against women and girls, sexual reproductive health and rights just to name a few. In addition, the emergence of technology and the introduction of the internet and electronic communications and social media has also led to the rise of technology facilitated gender-based violence (TFGBV) which is another emerging issue that PDF is concerned about. The impacts of these issues on women and girls with disabilities is two to three times grimmer compared to those without disabilities first due to their gender and secondly, their disabilities.

PDF continues to express acknowledgment and appreciation to the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) for its funding support towards initiatives focused on women and girls with disabilities. DFAT funding on women with disabilities has played a crucial role in empowering and promoting the rights of women with disabilities in the Pacific region.

DFAT funding has made it possible for PDF to collaborate effectively with partners on numerous initiative and this has impacted the lives of women and girls with disabilities in the region positively. These include the EVAWG toolkit for Fiji, Samoa and Kiribati which was translated into the Samoa and Kiribati languages which has been used by OPDs to provide training to stakeholders on how they can provide support to women with disabilities in instances of abuse as well as providing referral pathways to provide help. In addition, UNFPA Women Enable International (WEI) with the support from DFAT under the first phase of the transformation agenda have produced a needs assessment report documenting the challenges faced by women with disabilities in Fiji, Samoa, and Vanuatu in terms of their sexual and reproductive health and rights. From the recommendations that were highlighted, work is now underway in Fiji, to increase awareness to health workers, nurses, and doctors so that they can provide support to women with disabilities when they access their services. This is one of the outcomes of the report as well as training of selected individuals with disabilities to undergo training to become SRH officers so that they can also provide support to their colleagues. To this end, women and girls with disabilities can better access the services at SRH clinics and they are able to make informed decisions about their health and family which they were not able to do before.

These are just a few impacts that the support from DFAT has achieved over the years in partnership with PDF. There has been a lot more that has been done and will continue to transpire in terms of gender work and this collaboration will go a long way in making a difference in the lives of women and girls with disabilities in the region in one way or another.

2. What are international gender equality priorities?

Priorities for achieving gender equality on a worldwide scale are referred to as international gender equality priorities. These goals are based on the understanding that gender inequality still exists in a variety of contexts and forms, and that concerted efforts are required to address and eliminate these disparities. These efforts should include eradicating discrimination, advancing women's empowerment, increasing social, economic and political participation, enhancing health and education systems,

challenging damaging norms and stereotypes, ensuring legal protection, and enhancing disaggregated data collection and analysis. These goals are essential for building an inclusive and equitable society and reflect the worldwide commitment to attaining gender equality.

3. What are the most effective approaches for achieving gender equality globally?

Gender mainstreaming and disability inclusion and equity is an essential component of the twin track approach to the inclusion of women with disabilities as it ensures that their specific needs and experiences are not overlooked or marginalized within broader gender equality or disability inclusion efforts. By addressing the gender-specific barriers they face, such as limited access to education, healthcare, employment opportunities, and sexual reproductive rights etc, gender mainstreaming disability inclusion and equity helps create a more inclusive society for all individuals with disabilities.

4. How can Australia best support efforts to achieve gender equality internationally?

Australia can best support efforts to achieve gender equality and inclusion of women and girls with disabilities through a multi-faceted approach that addresses various aspects of their lives, including education, employment, livelihood, healthcare, social services, and advocacy. By implementing policies and initiatives that promote equal opportunities, accessibility, and empowerment, Australia can create an inclusive and equitable society that values and supports the rights and well-being of women and girls with disabilities.

Education: One crucial aspect of supporting inclusion is ensuring equal access to quality education for women and girls with disabilities. Australia can work towards this goal by implementing inclusive education policies that provide reasonable accommodations, such as assistive technologies and specialized support services, to enable their full participation in mainstream educational settings. Additionally, training programs for teachers and educational staff can be developed to enhance their understanding of disability issues and inclusive teaching practices.

Employment and Livelihood: Another important area where Australia can support inclusion is in the workforce. Efforts should be made to eliminate barriers that prevent women and girls with disabilities from accessing decent employment opportunities. This can be achieved through the implementation of anti-discrimination laws, workplace accommodations, vocational training programs, and targeted employment initiatives. Providing support for entrepreneurship and self-employment can also empower women with disabilities to create their own businesses and contribute to the economy.

Healthcare: Accessible healthcare services are essential for the well-being of women and girls with disabilities. Australia can support inclusion by ensuring that healthcare facilities are physically accessible and equipped with appropriate medical equipment. Healthcare providers should receive training on disability awareness and communication techniques to ensure effective care delivery. Additionally, mental health services should be readily available to address the unique challenges faced by women with disabilities.

Social Services: Australia should prioritize the provision of comprehensive social services that cater to the specific needs of women and girls with disabilities. This includes accessible transportation options, affordable housing solutions, personal assistance services, and community-based support networks. Collaborating with disability organizations and advocacy groups can help identify gaps in services and develop targeted interventions to address them.

Advocacy: Australia can play a crucial role in advocating for the rights and inclusion of women and girls with disabilities at both national and international levels. This can be achieved through active participation

in global forums, such as those relating to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), United Nations Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) , and by supporting disability rights organizations. Promoting awareness campaigns and media representation that challenge stereotypes and promote positive narratives about women and girls with disabilities can also contribute to their inclusion.

In addition, Australia can play a significant role in supporting efforts to achieve gender equality, disability equity internationally through the following:

1. Advocacy and Diplomacy: Australia can promote gender equality, inclusion, and equity of women and girls with disabilities on the international stage through its diplomatic channels and platforms. To do this, women's rights and empowerment of women with disabilities must be aggressively promoted in international settings including the United Nations, the G20, and Commonwealth gatherings. Australia can also hold bilateral talks with other nations to persuade them to enact laws and practices that support gender equality, policies that include people with disabilities, and targeted programs that focus on women and girls with disabilities.

2. Development Assistance: Australia to continue allocate a significant portion of its development assistance budget towards gender equality and women's human rights and moreover programs that specifically target women with disabilities.

3. Capacity Building: Australia may assist nations working toward gender equality, disability inclusion, and equity by offering technical assistance and support for building capacities. This can involve exchanging best practices, offering training courses, and fostering knowledge exchange on subjects like gender-disability mainstreaming, developing budgets that are inclusive of people with disabilities, and eliminating violence against women and discrimination against people with disabilities. Australia can help other countries adopt successful policies and initiatives to enhance gender equality and promote disability inclusive development by sharing its experiences and expertise.

4. Research and Data Collection. By generating evidence-based knowledge, Australia can prioritize the collection of disaggregated data on women without and women and girls with disabilities. This involves gathering information that specifically identifies gender and disability status to understand the unique challenges faced by both women with and without disabilities. Data collection methods should be inclusive, accessible, and respectful of privacy concerns. Once collected, the data should be analyzed to identify trends, patterns, and gaps in services or support systems.

5. Corporate Responsibility: Australia can invest in initiatives that enhance the skills and knowledge of women with disabilities, enabling them to participate fully in the workforce. Additionally, training programs for corporate service providers can help them understand the specific needs of women with disabilities and develop inclusive practices.

5. What should the government/ DFAT consider when developing the new international gender equality strategy?

When developing gender equality strategy, to pay attention to challenges face by women and girls with disabilities, Key factors to consider:

1. Intersectionality: It is essential to recognize that women and girls with disabilities face multiple forms of discrimination and marginalization due to their gender, disability, and often other intersecting identities such as race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status or geographic location. Intersectionality acknowledges that these different aspects of identity interact and compound each other, resulting in unique experiences and barriers. Therefore, gender equality strategies should adopt an intersectional approach that considers the diverse needs and experiences of women and girls with disabilities.

2. Participation, Representation and Empowerment: The government/DFAT should prioritize the recognition of women with disabilities and their meaningful participation, representation and empowerment throughout the development, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of gender equality strategies. This means involving women with disabilities in decision-making processes, ensuring their voices are heard, and recognizing their expertise as experts on their own lives and to represent their issues. Their active involvement will help shape policies that are responsive to their needs and aspirations.

3. Accessibility: Accessibility is a fundamental aspect of disability inclusion and equity. The government/DFAT should ensure that all services, programs, facilities, information, and communication channels are accessible to women and girls with disabilities. This includes physical accessibility of buildings and infrastructure, as well as providing accessible formats for information (such as Braille or audio), sign language interpretation services, captioning for videos, and accessible websites or digital platforms. By removing physical and communication barriers, women and girls with disabilities can fully participate in society on an equal basis with others.

4. Healthcare Services: Gender inclusive strategy should address the specific healthcare needs of women and girls with disabilities. This includes ensuring access to quality healthcare services, including sexual and reproductive health and rights services, mental health support, rehabilitation services, and assistive devices. It is important to address the barriers that prevent women and girls with disabilities from accessing healthcare, such as stigma, discrimination, lack of trained healthcare providers, and inaccessible facilities.

5. Education: Accessible and inclusive education is a fundamental right for all children, including girls with disabilities. The strategy should focus on removing barriers to education and promoting inclusive as well as safe practices in schools. This includes providing reasonable accommodations, such as accessible classrooms and WASH facilities, assistive technologies, trained teachers, and support services. Additionally, efforts should be made to address gender-based violence and discrimination in educational settings that disproportionately affect girls with disabilities.

6. Employment and Economic Empowerment: Gender inclusive strategies should aim to promote the economic empowerment of women and girls with disabilities by addressing barriers to employment. This can be achieved through initiatives such as vocational training programs, job placement services, awareness campaigns targeting employers to reduce discrimination, and ensuring workplace accessibility. Additionally, strategies should address the gender pay gap and promote equal opportunities for career advancement.

7. Violence Prevention and Response: Women and girls with disabilities are at a higher risk of experiencing violence due to intersecting forms of discrimination. Gender Equality Strategy should prioritize preventing violence against women with disabilities through awareness campaigns, training for service providers on disability-specific issues, accessible reporting mechanisms, and ensuring access to justice for survivors. Support services such as personal assistance, hearing interpreters, counseling, shelters, legal aid, and rehabilitation should also be made available.

8. Social Protection: Gender equality strategies should ensure that women and girls with disabilities have access to social protection programs that provide financial support, healthcare coverage, and other essential services. These programs should be designed in a way that considers the specific needs of women and girls with disabilities and addresses the additional costs they may incur due to their disability.

9. Data Collection and Research: Adequate data collection and research are crucial for understanding the specific needs, challenges, and experiences of women and girls with disabilities. It is important to prioritize the collection and analysis of disaggregated data that captures the intersectional experiences of

women with disabilities This data can inform evidence-based policies and programs, monitor progress, and identify gaps in services.

10. Collaboration and Partnerships: The government/DFAT should collaborate with organizations of persons with disabilities, women's rights organizations, civil society organizations, and other relevant stakeholders to ensure that the gender equality strategies are developed in consultation with the affected communities. Collaboration and partnerships can help leverage expertise, resources, and ensure a more inclusive and comprehensive approach to disability inclusion.

6. Conclusions.

In conclusion, the Pacific Disability Forum acknowledges and appreciates the funding support provided by the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade towards initiatives focused on women and girls with disabilities. This funding has been instrumental in empowering women with disabilities in the Pacific region as well as towards the promotion and realisation of their human rights. Through various programs, projects, and research activities, the PDF aims to create an inclusive and safe society where women and girls with disabilities can fully participate and thrive.

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