

2023: A critical year for Australian leadership on disability inclusive development

Australia's leadership on disability inclusive development has been hollowing out over recent years, with a lack of new strategic direction and reduction in funding. In 2022, the Australian Government made it clear that disability inclusion is a priority and central theme of Australia's Official Development Assistance (ODA) program, including through restoration of core disability funding.

While, these steps are welcome, they do not represent an outcome. They must be a first step in Australia's journey to rebuilding its leadership and identifying its vision for contributing to a more inclusive world where people with disabilities are fully included and able to realise their rights.

The commitment comes at a critical time, with extreme poverty growing for the first time in decades, the ongoing impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, and the climate crisis increasingly affecting the lives of people in our region and beyond. People with disabilities, who were already among the most marginalised, are among those hit hardest by these global trends. With almost half of all children with disabilities living in the Asia and Pacific regions, Australia has a significant role to play in ensuring that people with disabilities are included and

engaged in its development efforts.

Global understanding of disability inclusion has advanced a lot over recent years, due in part to the early leadership of Australia through its ODA program. The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) has been widely adopted and actors across the government, corporate and NGO sectors are actively considering their obligations around inclusion and rights of people with disabilities. This progress brings new challenges including, but not limited to, what CRPD implementation looks like in particular countries, and how to meaningfully engage people with disabilities in a way that is sustainable for them and meets their priorities.

Australia's new development policy will set the foundation for Australia's international engagement and the ODA program over the next five to 10 years. Disability inclusion must be a central theme. The new Disability Equity and Rights Strategy must grapple with these new challenges – and opportunities – in ensuring development efforts are truly inclusive and respond to the needs and priorities of people with disabilities.

To deliver on this, the strategy must be **ambitious**, have built-in **accountability** and be well **resourced**.

Ambitious

The strategy should:

- be more broadly inclusive, going beyond mainstream organisations to support the inclusion of cohorts so far excluded from representation and engagement.
- require that local Organisations of People with Disabilities (OPDs) are engaged, and supported to engage, at the outset, in country, program, project strategy development, and in evaluation processes.

Accountable

The strategy should:

- include an ambitious target on disability inclusion across the development program, with initially 70 per cent of all programs to have a disability equity and rights objective in 2023-4.
- include provision and requirement for data collection and research, along with independent evaluation.

Resourced

The strategy should:

- include an increase to DFAT's central disability allocation to a minimum of \$14.4 million per annum and increase at minimum in line with GNI thereafter.
- include additional resources to extend technical capacity on disability inclusion across DFAT, including in expanding the central team and establishing technical capacity at post.



Setareki Macanawai, CEO Pacific Disability Forum, and Jane Edge, CEO CBM Australia.

About CBM Australia

CBM Australia is a Christian international development agency, committed to improving the quality of life of people with disabilities in the poorest places in the world. In 2021, CBM Australia worked across 42 countries in the Pacific, Asia and Africa. It worked with 27 OPDs and influenced 21 organisations to be more disability inclusive.

CBM Australia is proud to have a partnership with DFAT as part of the Australian NGO Cooperation Program and is a member of the Australian Council for International Development. CBM's Inclusion Advisory Group has also been DFAT's technical partner on disability inclusion since 2010 under successive partnership agreements.

2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
\$12.9m	\$12.9m	\$12.9m	\$12.9m	\$12.9m	\$12.9m	\$12.1m	\$9.6m	\$12.9m

Table 1: DFAT Central Disability Allocation - historic budget levels