

CBM AUSTRALIA'S

# DISABILITY MOVEMENT STRENGTHENING FRAMEWORK



# INTRODUCTION

**This document outlines CBM Australia's framework for working with and strengthening the disability movement.**

Our vision is an inclusive world in which all people with disabilities enjoy their human rights and achieve their full potential, and we are committed to working in partnership with people with disabilities and their representative organisations to achieve this. This includes, importantly, diverse work to strengthen the disability movement, because true transformative change for people with disabilities must be led by those with lived experience of disability and their representative bodies.

## This framework outlines:



Our **guiding principles** that must underpin efforts to strengthen the disability movement



Our **approach** to disability movement strengthening



The **tangible support and resources** that we provide to support the disability movement.

This framework is based on CBM Australia's 48 years of working with the disability movement and in consultation with our partners. We would like to **acknowledge and thank the many Organisations of Persons with Disabilities (OPDs)** who have contributed to the conceptualisation and development of our approach, particularly Pacific Disability Forum and Transforming Communities for Inclusion Global.





# OVERVIEW OF DISABILITY MOVEMENTS



- **People with disabilities have long been engaged in a range of activities and processes that aim to improve their rights**, participation and empowerment status, including individual activism, advocacy groups, self-help groups, peer-networks, collectives, NGOs, social enterprises, and social welfare services.<sup>1</sup>
- In the past, **the views of people with disabilities were mainly filtered** through the voices of disability service providers, professionals working in disability and family members, and many people were segregated on the basis of disability.
- **People with disabilities became united in claiming self-determination and self-representation** to overcome their social oppression as a group. The success of the disability movement has been built on amplifying the voice and visibility of people with disabilities.
- The **disability movement** is generally understood to include people with disabilities, their representative organisations (**Organisations of Persons with Disabilities or OPDs**), organisations including NGOs and civil society that are dedicated to furthering the rights and priorities of people with disabilities, and disability rights subject matter experts and advocates.
- **The disability movement is evolving over time.** The disability rights movement challenged the traditional perception of the white, middle-class, male “abled” body as the norm.<sup>2</sup> People with disabilities called for participation of people with disabilities in political processes and/or changing laws that discriminated against people with disabilities or promoted violence. The disability justice movement saw **increased focus on the voice and organising power of marginalised groups within disability**. It also pushed back against framing the value of people with disabilities around their capacity to contribute economically.<sup>3</sup> Today the movement is diverse and increasingly intersectional in its perspectives and priorities.
- **OPDs are essential to the disability rights movement**, helping to shape policies, advocating for the needs and priorities of people with disabilities, providing essential services and collective care, building confidence and capacity of members, protecting human rights, and strengthening public participation in government processes.
- **The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD)** expressly obligates states to consult with persons with disabilities in matters that affect them via their representative organisations and OPDs (Art 4, 32). The movement coined the phrase **“Nothing About Us Without Us”** to demand a central role for people with disabilities in decision making that concerns them.

1 Sabatello, M. (2013) *A Short History of the International Disability Rights Movement*. Columbia University.

2 Sabatello, M & Schulze, M. Eds. (2013) *Human Rights and Disability Advocacy*. University of Pennsylvania Press.

3 World Institute of Disability. *Moving from disability rights to disability justice*. Website. Accessed at: <https://wid.org/moving-from-disability-rights-to-disability-justice/>

# CURRENT CONTEXT



Despite significant advancements in legislation and increasing awareness, **people with disabilities continue to face many barriers that impede their full participation and inclusion** due to ongoing ableist attitudes, structures and systems.

- **Discriminatory legislation** that restricts mobilisation of some people with disabilities on the basis of impairment still exists in some contexts. Those most marginalised within disability still face segregation and institutionalisation in its many forms.
- **Ongoing lack of awareness and lack of provisions for reasonable accommodations** means important meetings and forums are often inaccessible. This leads to people with disabilities being excluded from decision-making processes and often needing to spend extra time, energy and money advocating for their basic accessibility and inclusion rights.<sup>4</sup>
- Public spaces, information and communications, and infrastructure are often **inaccessible to people with disabilities**.
- **Negative stereotypes, stigma, and discrimination** towards people with disabilities still persist, leading to social isolation, limited opportunities for employment and education, and much higher rates of violence, neglect and abuse.

These barriers manifest in vast disparities in opportunities and quality of life and have a profound impact on the disability movement itself, contributing to higher turnover of disability leaders, advocates and OPD staff. Disability movement leaders often bring these experiences when they advocate to people in power, which contributes to them being passionate and highly skilled advocates but also can come at great personal cost. The **direct and indirect costs of disability** mean that disability leaders and their organisations will often have less income available to them, even when they are paid the same as representatives of other social movements. Compared with their peers without disabilities, people without disabilities experience:

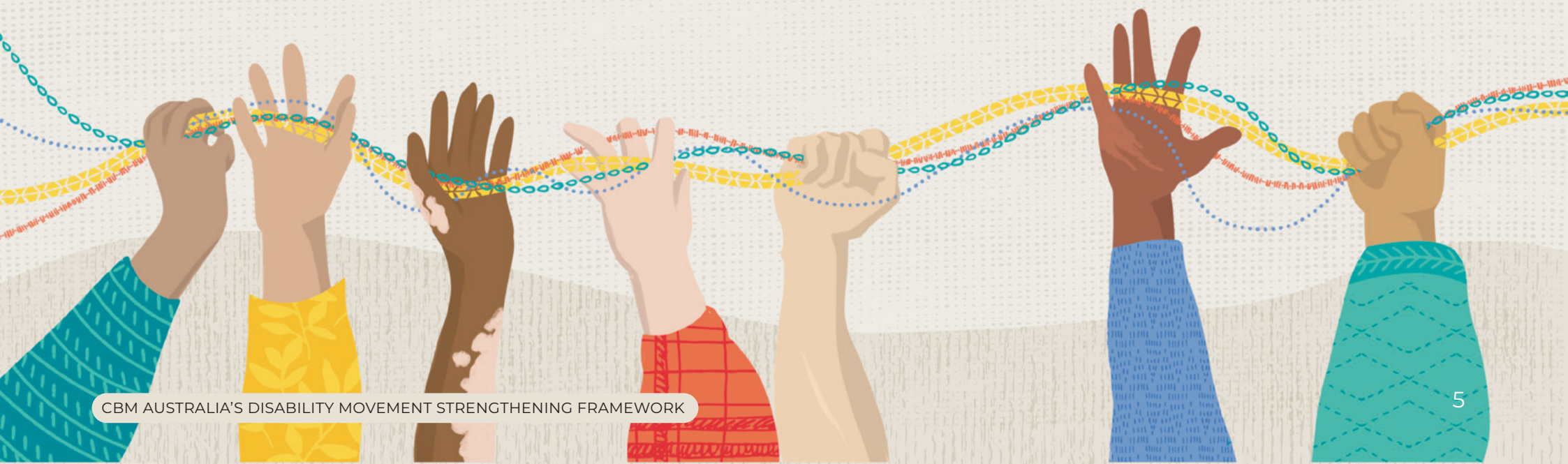
- Significant **health inequities** and lower levels of or hardship in attaining **education**.
- Higher rates of **violence, neglect, coercion, abuse** and associated trauma.
- In many cases, compounding experiences of **discriminatory attitudes** over their lifetime – from household to community to institutional levels, contributing to trauma and the cycle of poverty.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>4</sup> International Disability Alliance (2022) *Not just ticking the box? Meaningful OPD participation and the risk of tokenism*. Accessed at [https://www.internationaldisabilityalliance.org/sites/default/files/full\\_ida\\_global-survey-2022-final.pdf](https://www.internationaldisabilityalliance.org/sites/default/files/full_ida_global-survey-2022-final.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> World Health Organization (2022) *Global report on health equity for persons with disabilities*. Geneva.

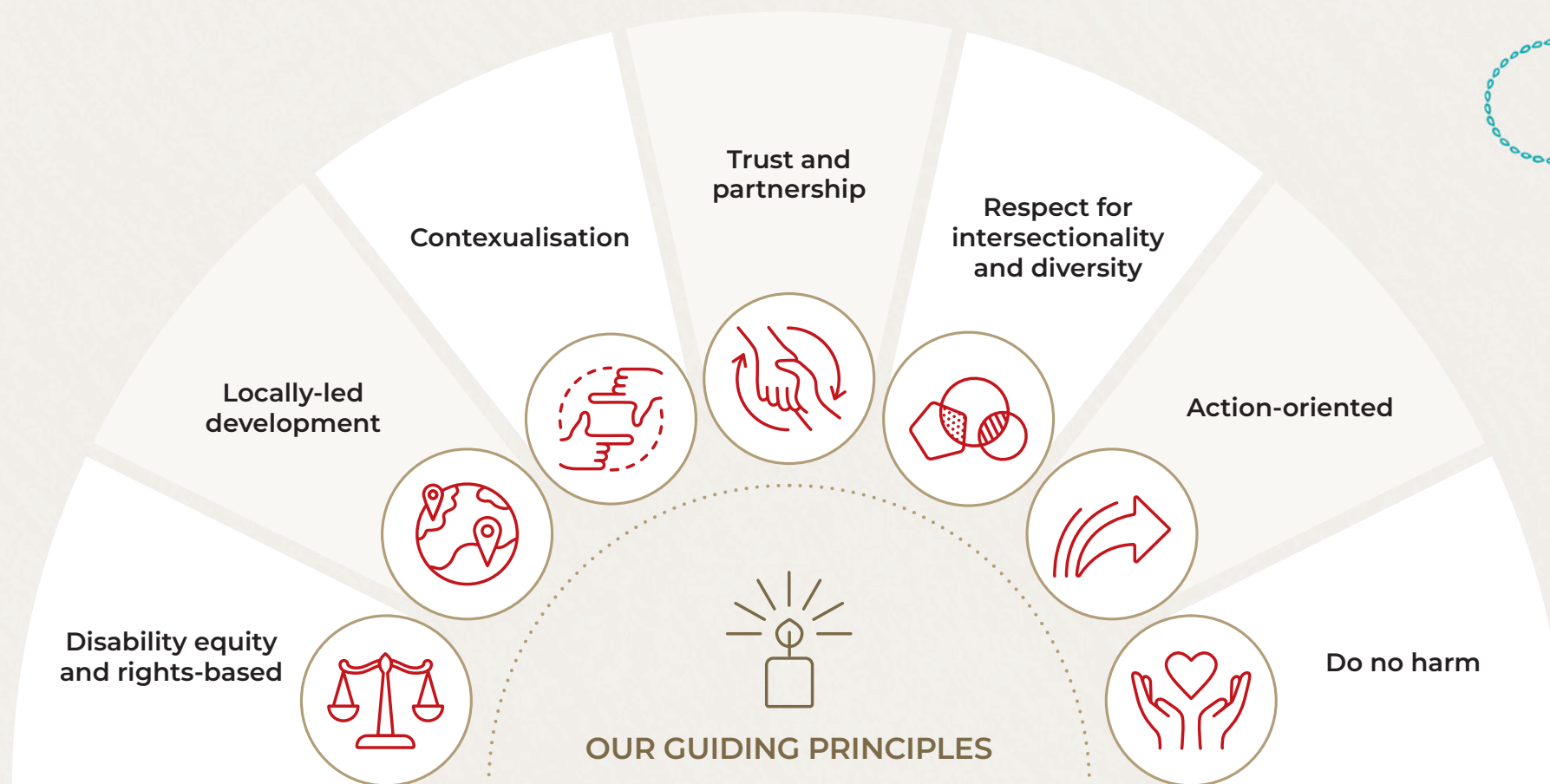


It is vital to support the disability rights movement in addressing these barriers and transforming the structures that maintain them, to create a **more inclusive society**. By amplifying the voices and experiences of people with disabilities and their representative organisations, promoting equal access and opportunities, harmful societal norms and perceptions, and supporting and strengthening OPDs, we can work together towards a more equitable and diverse community where everyone, with and without disabilities, can thrive and contribute meaningfully.



# OUR GUIDING PRINCIPLES TO DISABILITY MOVEMENT STRENGTHENING

CBM Australia takes a **principle-based approach to disability movement strengthening**. Our principles are crucial in guiding ethical practice and decision making and are drawn from evidence and learning from the sector. They do not tell us how to do our work but are an anchor for everything that we do and help guide us through complexity. They are **a lens to facilitate a shared understanding**, clarity and cohesiveness across our organisation and help our partners hold us to account.







## Disability equity and rights-based

- **All human rights and fundamental freedoms of people with disabilities are to be respected**, protected and actively promoted without discrimination. This includes promoting all rights of marginalised and underrepresented people with disabilities and considering human rights principles.
- **Disability is to be framed as part of human diversity** and is both accommodated and celebrated. A rights-based approach to disability is promoted and applied.
- **A key cornerstone of the disability movement is self-determination.** This calls for not only inclusion and participation but also an active decision-making role for people with disabilities, to ensure disability equity is achieved. Likewise, it ensures a move away from institution-type services to community-based supports and services that respect the inherent dignity and autonomy of people with disabilities. This requires a shift away from a 'care' model to a support paradigm.



## Locally-led Development

- **Local actors are experts** in their context and must be empowered to meaningfully lead.
- **High income countries have dominated** the space, and international development has in some ways reinforced harmful dependency and disempowerment. An intentional shift of power to local actors is critical.
- **Historical factors** such as conflict, economic hardship, uneven development, and unequal access to resources has often resulted in the creation and perpetuation of disabilities amongst marginalised communities.<sup>6</sup> **Shifting power is crucial** to building trusting relationships and working towards a more just and inclusive society. We will be reflexive in our practice to ensure we do not perpetuate such practices.



## Contextualisation

- **Disability takes different forms**, and there are different understandings within these forms, and across different contexts.
- **Within disability movements, various efforts may co-exist** in a single context with specific structures and agendas developed in response to local situations. Some of these may be less visible than others but are nevertheless examples of the priorities and resistance of people with disabilities. Some of these initiatives focus on including people with disabilities within traditional or culturally prescribed roles, while others may directly seek to transform power relations and structures in their pursuit of disability equity.
- **Support should be tailored** to the unique context, culture, and needs of the OPD or community, rather than applying pre-defined models or solutions.

<sup>6</sup> Puar, J. K. (2017). *The Right to Maim: Debility, Capacity, Disability*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.



## Trust and partnership

- **Building trust with disability movements requires investment of time and resources.** Movements shaped by trauma need to be able to trust their partners. We have made mistakes and will continue to do so, and in these circumstances, trust requires time, listening, mutual respect, reflective practices and the means for accountability. The collective power that emerges through partnerships and collaboration with others is based on mutual support, solidarity, and is underpinned by trust.



## Respect for intersectionality and diversity

- **The disability movement is diverse, with many members experiencing multiple and unique forms of disadvantage.** These challenges may be driven by the intersection of disability-related discrimination with factors such as gender identity, age, ethnicity, geographical location, sexual orientation or characteristics, or impairment type.
- **Ensuring we are truly including all people with disabilities** and especially the most marginalised requires that we bring an analytical and reflexive lens to ourselves and the work we do, and an awareness of how disadvantage is associated with different characteristics and how this is experienced.



## Action-oriented

- **It is not enough to commit to working differently.** Tangible, movement-useful resources and skills must be deployed to meaningfully strengthen the disability movement.



## Do no harm

- **An intentional focus on 'do no harm' is critical to supporting an ethical approach to inclusion.** This means supporting the empowerment of people with disabilities in ways that are respectful and culturally appropriate and centring OPDs to be best placed to advise on strategies to do no harm.
- In taking a do no harm approach, international intermediaries and development actors must recognise and **look to reduce any unintended harm** they may cause to OPDs, disability leaders and other people with disabilities. This must be done in parallel to pro-actively address backlash and potential harms arising from challenging ableist social norms through supporting representation and decision making of people with disabilities.



# OUR APPROACH TO DISABILITY MOVEMENT STRENGTHENING

The following seven 'A's' outline CBM Australia's approach to disability movement strengthening, which link our principles to our behaviours. These approaches have been developed based on feedback from our disability partners and informed by evidence of our effectiveness and impact.

## **ACTION** the agenda of the disability movement and human-rights treaties

We advance the rights of people with disabilities in all their diversity, in line with their own agenda – through taking a rights-based approach to disability in all our work and addressing the barriers that prevent the most marginalised people with disabilities from mobilising and expressing their demands using all our vehicles of change. We listen to the agenda of people with disabilities in the contexts we are working in and ensure our work aligns with and progresses these priorities.

## **ANTI-ABLEIST** and locally-led development assistance

We interrogate and transform the beliefs, structures, and practices that underpin development and humanitarian action and oppress people with disabilities in the Global South. By embracing inclusive, community-driven approaches and maintaining a long-term commitment to reflexive learning and improvement, we aim to contribute to more equitable systems and relations.

## **ACCOMPANIMENT** to the disability movement

We understand that supporting the disability movement requires long-term commitment, deep listening, and a willingness to be part of the struggle without having to be at its centre, whilst being accountable to those at the forefront of the struggle. We provide accompaniment to the disability movement and their advocacy through means most useful to them, providing technical, emotional and physical solidarity and resourcing to those individuals and organisations navigating ableist and patriarchal systems, signalling to others that disability allies are watching.



## **ATTENTION** to the support needs of the movement

In the context of scarce resources and overwhelming needs of constituents, enabling support within and for the movement is **integral to being an effective ally**. People with disabilities engaged in movements may neglect their own time, energy and space for reflection and self-care, putting key activist leaders at risk of burnout. We will seek to prevent this through departing from the typical NGO engagement approach and establish safe spaces by acting as a sounding board, enabling attention to wellness, and informal spaces for healing and rebuilding. Trauma-informed approaches are important.<sup>7</sup>

## **ALLOCATE** resources to long term investment in partnerships with the movement

We recognise that long term investment in **partnerships** is the key to creating deep transformational change together.

## **AVAILABLE** to assist or act

We are available to assist or act on behalf of the disability movement when requested, **especially when our privilege needs to be leveraged**. We use our privilege in solidarity with people with disabilities to challenge the status quo. We nurture long-term, mutual relationships with people with disabilities in all their diversity and emphasise mutual learning and transformation. This requires us to be adaptive and flexible where context requires, even when this leads to discomfort.

## **ACCOUNTABLE** to the movement

We have and continue to strengthen mechanisms for mutual learning and for feedback from the disability movement, and to follow commitments through with **action**. This means leaving behind the tendency to focus on competition for funds and instead seek out coalitions for action and ensure tangible movement-useful skills are shared.



<sup>7</sup> Kenya Network of Women and Girls with Disabilities. *Processing our pains, our traumas...collectively*. Accessed at: <https://advocacynetwork.blogspot.com/2024/12/processing-our-pains-our-traumas.html?m=1>



# TANGIBLE WORK WE WILL DO TO SUPPORT THE MOVEMENT:



## Funding

- **Increase the levels of funding flowing to OPD partners**, including budget provisions for organisational strengthening plans that best suits their priorities and requirements and with a recognition of core running costs as a necessary component of project management.
- **Resource OPDs' core development**, including recognising and supporting the important place of OPDs in building the capacity of other OPDs due to their contextual knowledge and unique relationships.
- **Invest in movement-building** and long-term development of future leaders.
- **Pay attention to funding the full ecosystem** of the disability movement, responding to the needs in the context e.g., umbrella organisations; national cross-disability OPDs; disability-specific OPDs; OPDs representing women and people of diverse and marginalised social identities; emerging OPDs; informal networks; as well as attention to groups of parents and carers of people with disabilities.
- **Evolve models that enable long-term investment** and flexible funding, as well as flexible program management models.
- **Allocate budget for reasonable accommodations** in all our engagement with the disability movement and advocate for our partners to do likewise.



## Transformative programming

- **Prioritise delivering programs that reach the most marginalised** and strengthen culturally responsive community systems for inclusion.
- **Support other organisations** to ensure that their programs are inclusive and support the movement's agenda.
- **Prioritise programs that address the preconditions for inclusion** (i.e., efforts in empowerment and participation of people with disabilities, progressing policy and programming for accessibility, support services, assistive technology, and non-discrimination).
- With our OPD partners, **promote diversity and pursue practical strategies** in the countries where we work to strengthen the involvement of people from diverse backgrounds and impairments, including under-represented groups facing intersectional discrimination.
- Continue to support the mobilisation of **peer-support networks and self-help groups**.



## Peer support and mentoring

- **Support organisational capacity building of OPDs** in alignment with their priorities that's tailored and contextualised to promote resilience and self-sustainment.
- **Provide mentoring, coaching and peer support** including being a sounding board and a trusted friend to the movement.



## Promoting and undertaking research

- **Co-create, design and conduct research in partnership** with local organisations, supplying the findings to the movement to use in their activism.
- **Promote awareness** about the advances in disability-related thinking from disability theorists and activists.
- **Reflect and challenge ourselves** on the assumptions we hold, translating what we learn into our practice to avoid repeating harmful patterns from the past.
- In collaboration with our partners, **produce high-quality data** on the impact and value of disability inclusion.



## Advocacy on the rights of people with disabilities

- **Use our privilege and resources to amplify** the voices and visibility of people with disabilities in institutional structures where they can influence policy, practice and research.
- **Work hard to ensure the right people are at the table** when decisions are made that impact people with disabilities.
- Act to complement the agenda and **amplify the many voices of the disability movement**, particularly in the Global South.
- **Challenge negative perceptions of people with disabilities** and model and promote the strategic role of OPDs in achieving locally led inclusive development and inclusive humanitarian action.



## Technical assistance – 'on tap, not on top' support

- **Following a strong localisation approach**, assist the movement to deliver upon their strategic interests, while developing capacities to do so through mentoring, peer support and strategic inputs.
- **Bring complementary skills** (e.g., advocacy and advisory) to the work of the movement.
- Where aligned with disability movement priorities, **invest in strengthening the capacity of the disability movement** to influence mainstream agencies through technical advisory roles, including through building OPD roles, resources, and associated budget into advisory contracts.
- **Provide surge-capacity**, meaning we play a back-up role when the movement needs us.



## Facilitation and brokering

- **Work closely with local and regional disability organisations** to amplify their voices, including providing resources, training, and practical assistance.
- **Act as a broker by connecting OPDs with governments** and policy makers and other relevant stakeholders to create partnerships and collaborations that lead to sustainable change.





# RESOURCES WE BRING TO THIS WORK

**CBM Australia contributes a variety of resources to support efforts that strengthen disability equity and rights.** This includes funding opportunities, projects focused on disability related issues, and technical support for development and humanitarian initiatives. CBM Australia also facilitates connections with the disability movement and between intersecting movements, encouraging collaboration and exchange of effective practices.

By using its available resources and networks, CBM Australia aims to support the visibility and participation of people with disabilities and promote inclusive practices.

CBM Australia's contribution to this work:

- **A partnership approach**
- **Deep, longstanding relationships**
- **Networks and connections**
- **Technical skills**
- **Evidence and learning**
- **Funding**

# GLOSSARY OF TERMS

**A social movement:** is a sustained, collective action by a group of people seeking to bring about social or political change. Social movements are characterised by a **shared purpose**, often involving informal networks and organised constituents pursuing a **common agenda** that focusses on addressing social issues and injustices.<sup>8</sup>

**Movement strengthening:** processes that **build the collective power** of an organised constituency of excluded, marginalised, oppressed or invisible people around a change agenda that enables them to access rights and resources, challenge dominant ideologies and transform social power relations.

**Organisations of Persons with Disabilities:** are **non-governmental, representative organisations or groups of people with disabilities** where people with disabilities constitute a majority of the overall members, staff, board, and volunteers, at all levels of the organisation. OPDs are diverse and characterised by representative groups from the community level through to national and international levels, responding to different contextual issues. OPDs may be constituent-specific (e.g. people with psychosocial disabilities, Deaf persons, women with disabilities, etc) or representative of a range of disabilities and intersectional identities. OPDs may have formal member-based structures, informal peer-support groups, collectives or self-advocacy groups, or more informal groups. **OPDs may work at the local, national, regional and international levels.** Parents, family members and relatives can also form OPDs when people with disabilities want to be supported by these groups.<sup>9</sup>

**Capacity building:** a broad concept that **encompasses the development of skills, knowledge and resources, and capabilities of individuals, organisations and communities.** It focusses on building the capacity of people to perform their roles effectively. It involves complementing existing capabilities with further knowledge, expertise, infrastructure, leadership, and other resources to empower individuals and groups to address challenges, make informed decisions, and drive positive change. Capacity building works best when it is a mutual endeavour. In a development context, a localisation approach to capacity building often involves acknowledging that an actor from a high-income country may be charged to develop the capacity of an individual or organisation from a lower-income country, because there is a bias towards valuing the profile or skill set of the actor from the higher-income actor in the operational context. However, the actor from the lower-income country will bring a strong and complementary skill set to the interaction that should be drawn upon so that the process is **strength-based, effective and sustainable, culturally appropriate, and one of contextual learning and mutual benefit.** This may involve more time, flexibility and reflexive practice, however in our experience will lead to improved outcomes for both parties.

**Organisational strengthening:** a specific strategic process that focuses on **improving the internal capacity, effectiveness and resilience of an organisation to achieve its mission and goals.** It involves enhancing structures, systems, processes and resources within the organisation to enable it to respond to challenges and adapt to change. It often includes enhancing skills and processes such as those related to leadership, human resources, communications and accounting, strengthening the operational and compliance aspects of running an organisation, and improving overall management practices to enhance organisational performance.

**Ableism:** discrimination in favour of non-disabled people.

**Patriarchy:** a system of society or government in which men hold the power and women are largely excluded from it.

**Intersectionality:** the **interconnected nature of social identities** such as race, class, and gender as they apply to a given individual or group, regarded as creating overlapping and interdependent systems of discrimination or disadvantage.

**Reflexive practice:** a way of thinking that involves reflecting on how your actions and learning impact the broader context.

**Transformative:** causing an important and lasting change to a person, organisation or institution, particularly regarding harmful social norms and practices.

<sup>8</sup> UNICEF. *Social movements: supporting and nurturing social change processes*. Website. Access at: <https://www.sbcguidance.org/understand/social-movements>

<sup>9</sup> UNPRPD (2024) *Guidance note on effective and meaningful participation of persons with disabilities through their representative organisations in UNPRPD joint programming*. Accessed at: <https://unprpd.org/new/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/OPD-participation-guidance-note.pdf>




CBM Australia acknowledges the Traditional Owners of the lands on which we live, learn and work and we pay our respects to their Elders past, present, and future. Throughout our work, we acknowledge First Nations people's resilience, contributions and connection to Country and culture, and stand with First Nations' people and their movements.


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