



DPO ENGAGEMENT WITHIN DFAT DISABILITY INCLUSIVE DEVELOPMENT CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT

Summary: A range of disabled people's organisations (DPOs) have been involved in short-term disability inclusive development capacity development visits to Australian Government Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) Posts, as co-facilitators, speakers and advisors. Involving DPOs in disability inclusion trainings and meetings: supports the 'nothing about us without us' principle; upholds DFAT's own strategy principles; ensures that training and advice is contextually relevant; and contributes to establishing and strengthening relationships between DPOs, DFAT, governments and implementing partners. DPO involvement in visits also helps to build DPO capacity and create momentum for DFAT and partners to identify opportunities to support DPOs or involve them in their programs.

Background

The DFAT-CBM Partnership (the 'Partnership') works to strengthen the capacity of DFAT and its partners in Disability Inclusive Development (DID). One element of this involves "Post visits" in which staff from DFAT Disability Section (DIS) and CBM Australia¹ visit Australian High Commissions/Embassies "Posts" to support the implementation of the Australian Government's *Development for All Strategy* at a country level. The purpose of a Post visit is for the Partnership to support the Post in progressing its DID work as needed. DPOs from the local context also play an active role in these visits.

¹ CBM implements the DFAT partnership activities in partnership with the Nossal Institute of Global Health. Some post visits involved Nossal staff.

The program is tailored to the priorities of the Post, with a key objective of the visit being facilitation of stronger or new links with DPOs. Other examples of objectives include:

- Capacity strengthening on disability inclusive development for DFAT staff and DFAT partner staff (government, managing contractors, NGOs, CSOs, development banks, other bilateral and multilaterals).
- Facilitation of cross learning across Post and with partners regarding disability inclusive development.
- Raising awareness and generating commitment to disability inclusive development and the *Development for All Strategy*.
- Supporting Post with disability related public diplomacy and advocacy.

A range of activities are conducted to achieve these objectives, such as:

- A briefing on the aid program and diplomatic objectives of the *Development for All Strategy*
- Training for program staff and/or partners
- Receptions hosted by the Ambassadors/ High Commissioners with a disability inclusion focus, such as a media exhibition or a panel discussion featuring DPO representatives
- Sector-specific meetings and roundtable discussions with program teams to identify opportunities to enhance DID practice, and plan for any future technical support
- Exposure visits





Young boy with Autism talking about his experience of schooling during the DPO panel at the Australian embassy in Mongolia. © Briana Wilson / CBM Australia

DPO engagement within Post Visits

A large objective of all Post visits is to broker and/or support relationships between DFAT, its partners, including governments, and DPOs. This is achieved through DPOs being engaged to:

- co-facilitate trainings
- give presentations and share case studies
- contribute to meetings and roundtable discussions
- participate in panel discussions usually involving a range of DPO leaders speaking on different topics of relevance as part of a training or as a separate event

CBM Australia uses its and Posts' networks, including CBM's affiliated offices, to identify potential DPOs to be involved in all Post visits, affirming the central principle of the disability rights movement of 'nothing about us without us'. CBM Australia typically spends 1-3 days working with DPOs in-country to better understand the operating contexts of DPOs, the situation of people with disabilities in that context, as well as to explain the operating context of DFAT and the DFAT-CBM Partnership and to work with DPOs to prepare for their engagement in the Post visit.

The impact of DPO engagement in Post visits

The Partnership's monitoring and evaluation processes allow for stakeholders to regularly provide feedback on Post visits (and other Partnership activities and technical advice). Feedback has indicated the following:

Benefits reported by DPOs:

- In all cases but one, DPOs have indicated they have seen the benefits and flow-on effects of being involved in the Post visits for their organisation and for their development.
- DPOs have reported that they have a greater capacity to network with DFAT and other stakeholders, including government partners.
- All DPOs, ranging from young DPO members with no prior experience, to those with significant existing training experience, reported increased knowledge, skills and confidence. E.g. increased skills in speaking to and delivering training to development actors and an increased understanding of (a DPO's role in) disability inclusive development.
- In cases where the DPO movement is fragmented, the visit provided an opportunity for greater coordination and aligned key messaging among DPOs, easing engagement between DFAT, partners and DPOs.
- In some countries, where DPOs were already engaging with DFAT and/or implementing partners, they observed subsequent changes in the way they are seen and approached by development partners.

"We thought we knew [the DPOs] because we have provided them funding but we have never truly listened to them, their positions and their stories." (DFAT staff member)



“Because you know in our country, if we raise our voice alone, the development partners do not hear us. But if another partner introduces us, like CBM, they listen to us.”
(DPO representative)

Benefits reported by DFAT and their partners:

- DFAT staff report having a greater capacity to engage with DPOs in their work as a result of the Post Visits.²
- In some cases, DFAT or partners subsequently decided to support DPOs: financially; with their organisational development (e.g. by placing volunteers in DPOs); in their advocacy; or through brokering strategic relationships.
- Stakeholder interviews report new relationships with DPOs that would not have occurred without CBM Australia brokering these relationships.³
- Stakeholders often noted DPO involvement in Post visits as a highlight.⁴
- Many DFAT staff members and partners who listened to the lived experience, situations and needs of DPO members stated that it has profoundly changed the way they perceive people with disabilities, their capacity and rights:

“Listening to the woman who had a disability sharing about her experience as a female researcher brought tears into my eyes and helped me to better understand the challenges of women with disabilities” (DFAT staff member).

- DFAT and partners report a better understanding of the role of DPOs and how they could be engaged in programming and other activities at Post, such as public diplomacy.
- There is evidence that in a number of countries there is now more contact between DPOs, DFAT and partners, and a number of the potential collaboration opportunities identified during the visits have materialised.
- Increasingly, DFAT and partners are consulting with DPOs when designing new programs, proposals or workplans, involving them in program implementation and as co-facilitators and speakers for workshops and events.

“I now understand why you (CBM Australia) thought it was important to have the DPOs involved... we were just cautious ... but now we know them and their role and they know us. Now we can engage with them more.” (Senior DFAT staff member).

High level lessons and recommendations

Lessons

- Donor agencies provide a positive and powerful example to implementing partners and governments when DPOs are meaningfully engaged in their activities.
- The engagement of people with disabilities and DPOs in awareness raising and capacity strengthening activities has significant impacts on participant’s understanding of and commitment to disability inclusive development.
- There is often a lack of understanding among development agencies regarding the role of DPOs and how they could be engaged to assist with inclusive programming. Similarly, many DPOs don’t fully understand how development

² DFAT-CBM Australia Partnership Annual Report – Year 1

³ Stakeholder interviews

⁴ Stakeholder interviews and Post visit reports



partners work, and particularly how development partners work with and influence one another. For example many DPOs have little understanding of how donor agencies can interact with and influence their national government.

- Brokering relationships between DPOs and development partners can enable greater understanding and trust to develop between parties and result in fruitful collaborations, including DPO engagement in programs.



Ms Gerel Dondovdorj, President of the Mongolian National Federation of the Blind chairing the DPO panel at the Australian embassy in Mongolia. © Briana Wilson / CBM Australia

Recommendations

- Development agencies should invest time and resources into developing/strengthening trust and understanding between DPOs and program staff. Trust and understanding leads to better DPO engagement in programs, and this engagement is likely to be mutually beneficial for both parties.

