



## CREATING A NEW ‘BUSINESS AS USUAL’: REFLECTIONS AND LESSONS FROM THE AUSTRALIAN AID PROGRAM ON ENGAGING WITH DISABLED PEOPLE’S ORGANISATIONS IN DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMMING AND HUMANITARIAN ACTION



Vanuatu Disability Promotion and Advocacy Association (VDPA) National Coordinator, Nelly Caleb, pictured with members and staff of VDPA © Erin Johnson for Room3/CBM Australia

### INTRODUCTION

Globally, there is increasing recognition of the need for effective development programs to be inclusive of people with disabilities in order to ‘leave no one behind’. Disability is a human rights issue and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities requires that disability be considered across all sectors, including across portfolios within international development cooperation and humanitarian action. Global frameworks reflect this requirement, for example in Agenda 2030, as do donor policies such as the Australian Government’s *Development for All 2015-2020: Strategy for strengthening disability inclusive development in Australia’s aid program*. Achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals under Agenda 2030 necessitates the effective inclusion of people with disabilities. A key mechanism for ensuring inclusion programs is meaningful engagement with representative organisations, Disabled People’s Organisations (DPOs), who are best placed to provide informed input to strengthen the quality and realisation of inclusive practice.

## About this paper

Many donors and international development agencies are familiar with funding DPOs; however engaging DPOs to help design, implement, monitor and evaluate programs and portfolios of programs, especially within mainstream development programs, is less common. This paper provides some perspectives from the Australian Aid program and Australian development sector more broadly.

The paper seeks to answer the following questions:

- What has DFAT done to encourage and enable DPO engagement in development programs, which could be replicated by other donors and funders?
- What roles are DPOs fulfilling in order to help make programs more disability inclusive?
- What issues should program managers and implementers consider and address to maximise effective and meaningful DPO engagement in programs?

The paper addresses the three questions sequentially. It is supported by case studies that illustrate the roles DPOs can undertake in programs, as well as more detailed lessons arising from these.

## Development of the paper

CBM Australia prepared the paper, with input and review from DFAT, under the ongoing DFAT-CBM partnership. It reflects CBM Australia's experiences working with DFAT since 2009 and draws on DFAT's reviews of the *Development for All* strategy and other documentation, as well as the recent evaluation of DFAT's international advocacy on disability conducted by the Office of Development Effectiveness (ODE). The paper was reviewed by the Pacific Disability Forum, SIGAB Indonesia, International Disability Alliance and Abilis Foundation. CBM Australia provides disability inclusion advice within mainstream development programs across sectors with DFAT, managing contractors, international NGOs, multilateral agencies and other implementing partners. Brokering roles and relationships between DPOs and other development partners is a significant part of this work. The paper also draws on a comprehensive CBM Australia internal inquiry on DPO engagement in programming from our portfolio of advisory work, including work co-implemented with our partner organisation, the Nossal Institute of Global Health, University of Melbourne.

### What are Disabled People's Organisations (DPOs)?<sup>1</sup>

DPOs are organisations that are representative of people with disabilities; they can be global, regional, national or local organisations. There are numerous definitions globally. Generally, the main common feature is that their membership comprises, and they are run by and for, people with disabilities. Their existence is encapsulated in the slogan of the disability movement 'nothing about us without us'.

DPOs often comprise a voting membership of people with disabilities and a board, of which a majority percentage (usually 51% or over) is people with disabilities<sup>1</sup>. In some countries, organisations must be registered with the government in order to be considered a 'DPO'; in others DPOs are registered/classified as 'NGOs' and the term may be used more loosely. In some countries requiring DPO registration, some organisations that function as a DPO may choose not to register as a DPO in order to allow for more freedom in the range of activities conducted. Some DPOs are now choosing to refer to themselves as Organisations of Persons with Disabilities (OPDs.)

<sup>1</sup> This paper uses the more well-known term – "Disabled People's Organisations"/"DPOs" – though notes there is growing use of the term "Organisations of Persons with Disabilities"/"OPDs" globally.



## Advancing Human Rights

Australia's rights based approach to disability is consistent with Australia's commitment to advancing human rights globally. Men, women and children have the right to fundamental freedoms and the right to live their lives with dignity.

Australia's Foreign Policy White Paper affirms that disability is a crosscutting priority for Australia's international engagement in human rights, development assistance and humanitarian action and commits Australia to promoting the rights of persons with disabilities as one of six key focus areas for Australia's 2018-2020 term on the United Nations Human Rights Council. This is alongside a commitment to protecting and strengthening civil society internationally.

Australia's development efforts take a human rights based approach and include a strong focus on supporting DPOs to advocate for disability rights, in accordance with the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD).

## THE VARIETY OF FUNCTIONS AND ROLES DPOs FULFIL

Globally, DPOs perform a range of roles, including:

- raising awareness of the rights of people with disabilities, both amongst people with disabilities themselves, and in the general community;
- representing people with disabilities to service providers, the government and UN bodies;
- engaging in advocacy, to promote the development and implementation of policies which are reflective of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD);
- providing peer support and networking opportunities for people with disabilities;
- in developing countries and/or in contexts where there is a lack of services, providing services to people with disabilities – such as, for example, running training programs focusing on skills, mobility or income generation, and providing accessible transport and assistive technology services – in addition to, or in place of, more traditional DPO advocacy and representational roles; and
- Working with donors, governments and others to plan and implement projects.

In many cases, these focus areas have led to DPOs collaborating first with their members (people with disabilities), disability services providers and the relevant government department (often the Ministry of Social Welfare or similar).

Working to influence *international development programs* to be more disability inclusive is strategic in that it allows DPOs to:

- raise awareness of the CRPD and the human rights of people with disabilities with a broad range of stakeholders who may also influence the government to ratify/implement the CRPD and other relevant human rights instruments;
- ensure members (people with disabilities) benefit from and contribute to development programs, from planning, implementation, to monitoring of programs, in collaboration with governments, donors, other stakeholders, or through their representative organisations; and
- work with program partners to test and demonstrate CRPD compliant program and service delivery models that can generate evidence to inform policy and to be used in advocacy.



# DONOR STRATEGIES FOR FACILITATING DPO ENGAGEMENT IN PROGRAMS

To achieve the SDGs and to implement the CRPD, disability inclusion and DPO engagement need to become standard practice. In the international development and humanitarian action sphere, donors/funders can greatly contribute to this practice change by creating policy imperatives and systemic changes within their own agency, which in turn influences the practice of their partners.

Engagement between mainstream development agencies, programs and DPOs is relatively new, and there are varying capacities on all sides with regard to doing this well. Concerted effort and time are required. DFAT has made significant progress on DPO engagement throughout the implementation of its disability strategies, however there is still a need to continue to learn, improve, refine and broaden the practice through the department and with all partners. The following outlines high-level recommendations drawn from DFAT's experience for other donors and funding agencies looking to improve and refine their practice of DPO engagement throughout program work. Program level recommendations are provided in another section.

- *Model* an inclusive approach by engaging with DPOs at a strategic level, not just within program activities.
- *Learn* to work together, and know that learning should occur on both sides. Take a concerted and strategic approach to strengthening disability inclusion capacity of both internal and program partner staff.
- *Promote* DPO leadership and engagement as a vehicle for strengthening disability inclusion within programs in relevant strategies, policies and guidance and promote the role and capacity of DPOs more broadly throughout your agency and to partners.
- *Invest* in funding DPOs and their capacity, and encourage implementing partners to do so within programs also. This includes providing core funding. At a high level, this could include forming DPO partnerships with regional and global bodies who also support and fund smaller DPOs and other bodies such as the Disability Rights Fund. Support DPO capacity development initiatives.
- *Encourage* DPO collaboration in program requirements by making it a consideration for funding. Take care: making DPO engagement a firm requirement that is applied broadly, without flexibility, may encourage tokenistic engagement of DPOs, and/or DPO engagement that is not appropriate for the context.
- *Collaborate* recognising that all parties can learn something from one another, and design approaches that capitalise on this and address power dynamics
- *Report* by including qualitative reporting requirements on DPO engagement within program reporting. Qualitative reporting allows programs to explain the type of DPO engagement within the program, and the context around that, and to provide rationale if DPOs are not engaged. There may be good reasons for non-engagement and other appropriate steps taken to improve disability inclusion. Purely quantitative reporting may inadvertently penalise programs with context appropriate low DPO engagement.
- *Nuance your approach* recognising that the end goal is for people with disabilities to participate in, lead and benefit from programs, and that DPO engagement is a means to this end. Requirements for DPO engagement should promote flexibility so that engagement is meaningful and appropriate, and international development actors do not end up unintentionally diverting DPOs away from their own priorities and objectives by attempting to co-opt DPOs into every program in every situation.



Furthermore, DPO engagement is only one element of inclusion. A continued focus on necessary disability specific and support services is also vital for the promotion and protection of the rights of persons with disabilities, and indeed the good functioning of DPOs, their members and leaders.

## ROLES AND FUNCTIONS OF DPOS WITHIN INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Disability inclusive development guidance often references DPO engagement, however the specifics of *how* DPOs could be engaged to strengthen a program, can be less clear. DFAT is not prescriptive in what roles they expect of DPOs, rather encourages DPOs to engage actively with the department, and to hold it to account. DFAT encourages DPOs to clarify their own priorities, and be clear about what, if any, support is required for effective engagement, both in terms of reasonable accommodation for individuals, as well as organisational support. Clarity and good communication regarding this eases the negotiation of roles and is more likely to result in a mutually beneficial collaboration. Through this approach, a range of roles and functions for DPOs to help strengthen disability inclusive programming in the Australian Aid program, have emerged. They may serve as useful examples for others.



Orsula from Timor-Leste with Field Officer, Veronica, from the national Disabled People's Organisation, Ra'es Hadomi Timor Oan (RHTO). © Erin Johnson for Room3/CBM Australia

### DPO engagement with a donor

#### Strategic guidance

DPOs are being engaged to provide general advice and guidance at an organisational or portfolio level. This higher level, more strategic engagement 'sets the tone' for DPO engagement within programs and activities underneath, modelling an inclusive approach. It allows both parties to rise above the detail of development activities to build trust, understand the context of both parties and determine joint priorities. High-level engagement provides opportunities to mitigate power dynamics, enabling the DPO to provide broad feedback and advice outside the role of funding recipient or program partner.



For example, Australia's *Development for All 2009-2014: Towards a disability inclusive aid program* strategy was guided by a Disability Reference Group made up of leaders and active participants in disability inclusive development, including DPO leaders from the Pacific. The small honorary advisory group provided high-level guidance and ensured a transparent, consultative approach to the development and implementation of *Development for All 2009-2014*, as well as the design of the second strategy. The group formed an informal accountability mechanism for the strategy, and advised donor staff on the monitoring and evaluation of the strategy.

Similarly, DFAT has a partnership with CBM Australia to provide technical assistance to DFAT to design, implement, monitor and evaluate disability inclusive policies and programs. Within this partnership, DPOs provide strategic guidance in several ways:

- The partnership specifically engages with selected regional DPO networks with a view to contributing to their strategic objectives. This creates opportunities for the partnership to draw on DPOs to strengthen DFAT's work, whilst also strengthening the disability movement more broadly by providing technical assistance and capacity development to DPOs as requested by DPOs.
- The Pacific Disability Forum (PDF) is a member of the DFAT-CBM partnership steering committee to provide the partnership with relevant contextual information and to provide feedback on the focus, direction and means of delivering technical advice. With the focus of the DFAT-CBM partnership extending beyond the Pacific, the steering committee membership and function is being reviewed in 2018.
- When capacity development and/or technical advice is being delivered by CBM outside Australia, local DPOs representing people with disabilities from that context are engaged as speakers, co-facilitators and/or advisors. This ensures advice is contextually relevant, and complements the disability movement in that context. See case study *DPO Engagement in DFAT Disability inclusive development capacity development* for a detailed example.

DFAT also receives context information and guidance from DPOs through its partnerships with the International Disability Alliance (IDA), Pacific Disability Forum, the Disability Rights Fund, and the Disability Rights Advocacy Fund.

## Joint advocacy

Donor and other development agencies collaborate with DPOs on joint advocacy. The recent evaluation of DFAT's *Advocacy for Disability Inclusive Development*<sup>2</sup> found donor-DPO collaboration to be highly effective. Australia's diplomatic missions advocate for disability inclusion and rights through public diplomacy, and engage with DPOs and people with disabilities for both disability specific and general public diplomacy events, particularly around International Day of Persons with Disabilities on December 3<sup>rd</sup> each year. Embassies/High Commissions also engage in targeted joint advocacy. For example, in Timor-Leste the Australian Embassy has been actively involved in advocacy for the ratification of the CRPD, alongside the national DPO. In Indonesia, the Australian Embassy supported DPOs to contribute to the drafting of the Indonesian Disability Law and bylaws.

DFAT works with DPOs to advocate for disability inclusion and disability rights at the global level. For example, DFAT, the Finnish Foreign Ministry, (in collaboration with the Abilis Foundation), the International Disability Alliance, the Women's Refugee Commission, CBM International and Handicap International worked in partnership to influence negotiations at the World Humanitarian Summit in 2015, resulting in the development of the *'Charter on Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities in Humanitarian Action'*. DFAT, and other members of the group, funded and supported DPO engagement within the Summit, enabling the voices of

<sup>2</sup> <http://dfat.gov.au/aid/how-we-measure-performance/ode/strategic-evaluations/Pages/unfinished-business.aspx>



people with disabilities to be prominent and influential throughout proceedings. This significantly influenced negotiations.

## DPO engagement within program implementation

Within the Australian Aid program, DPOs are strengthening the inclusivity and quality of individual programs in a range of ways. The model of engagement varies according to the context and program. Some factors that commonly shape engagement include:

- the existence of DPOs in the program area;
- the DPOs' organisational capacity, sector and program expertise and resources;
- the priorities of specific DPOs;
- how representative a particular DPO is; and
- how politicised the DPO movement is in that location.

DPOs may take on different roles as contexts, priorities, capacity and trust between the DPO and the partner organisation change over time. A summary of emerging roles for DPOs is provided below.

### 1. DPO ENGAGEMENT IN PROGRAM DESIGN

DPOs can be engaged as part of a design team or as key informants within a design process. This engagement provides crucial information to support program design, including for example:

- the disability policy context within the country/region;
- the needs and priorities of people with disabilities within the DPO constituency;
- particular barriers that may prevent full inclusion of people with disabilities across different impairment groups, ages and genders (depending on the representativeness of the DPOs engaged); and/or
- potential links with other DPO activities, including policy advocacy.

Consulting with DPOs does not replace conducting a social inclusion/disability analysis; rather it is an element of these processes, and/or provides context for further preparatory analysis.

An example of DPO engagement in program design was the engagement of Samoa's national DPO Nuanua O Le Alofa (NOLA) in the design of the Samoa Disability Program. The DFAT-CBM partnership supported NOLA to articulate its own strategic priorities and contribute these priorities into the DFAT funded Samoa Disability Program. NOLA went on to receive funding to implement key activities under the program. A multi-stage approach, whereby DFAT invested in supporting NOLA to build its own organisational and absorptive capacity, allowed NOLA to play an important and active role at each stage in the program cycle. Supporting NOLA to articulate its priorities within the design process ensured the program reflected the needs and priorities of people with disabilities in Samoa.

DFAT aims to replicate this kind of engagement increasingly within mainstream development programs. For example in Indonesia, in the design of phase 2 of the Australia Indonesia Partnership for Justice, DPOs were effectively engaged in design consultations with government and program stakeholders, which resulted in a strong disability inclusive design as well as better relations between DPOs and government.



DFAT programs valued at \$3 million dollars or greater are required to engage with people with disabilities/DPOs within the design of the program. The *Aid Quality Check* reporting process requires programs to report on the participation of people with disabilities/DPOs in planning, as well as report on program measures that reduce barriers and enable people with disabilities to benefit from the investment<sup>3</sup>. This helps to create systemic change to make DPO engagement standard practice for DFAT programs.

## 2. DPOS PROVIDING DISABILITY INCLUSION TRAINING/AWARENESS RAISING

Disability inclusive development requires changing attitudes and up-skilling program staff and stakeholders. DPOs can facilitate/co-facilitate training to donor, program and partner staff on disability inclusion. Depending on the context, co-facilitators with a sound understanding of inclusive programming - including design, monitoring and evaluation - and who can help to broker and translate between the disability movement and program staff, can complement the DPO. Hearing directly from people with disabilities and their representative organisations provides a powerful opportunity for workshop participants to understand disability issues and the barriers that might exist for women, men, girls and boys with disabilities in their program. This often sparks enthusiasm and motivation to engage further with DPOs and to ensure programs are accessible and inclusive. For example, see case study: *DPO engagement in DFAT's disability inclusive development capacity development*.

Awareness raising of disability inclusion and disability rights may also be required at the community level, for which DPOs can play a vital role. For example, the Access to Education Program in Fiji had a disability awareness team made up of DPOs who visited communities and schools to raise awareness of the importance of enrolling and supporting the attendance of children with disabilities in school. The program evaluation found this to be effective at improving participation of children in education.

## 3. DPOS CONTRIBUTING TO IMPLEMENTATION OF PROGRAM ACTIVITIES AND MONITORING AND EVALUATION

DPOs can be engaged to assist with the implementation of program activities. Emerging trends from the Australian Aid program include:

- Data collection: DPO involvement in the training of data enumerators and/or in engagement of people with disabilities as data enumerators, can improve the quality of disability data in research/analytical activities within programs<sup>4</sup>. Involving DPOs in enumerator training increases the confidence of enumerators in communicating with people with disabilities, understanding the importance of data, and asking appropriate questions. When DPO representatives or other people with disabilities are used as enumerators, particularly for qualitative inquiries, the richness and quality of information sourced from people with disabilities may be enhanced<sup>5</sup>.
- Identifying and locating people with disabilities to be included in the program: Many program managers report difficulty in identifying people with disabilities in program areas due to systemic barriers to participation in community life, and due to stigma. People with disabilities may not be visible in the community, remaining within the family home. Individuals or families may be reluctant to identify someone as a person with a disability, or may not understand disability. DPOs can help to locate and

<sup>3</sup> The following indicators are used within the Aid Quality Check reporting process. 'The investment actively involves people with disabilities and/or disabled peoples' organisations in planning, implementation and monitoring and evaluation' & 'The investment identifies and addresses barriers to inclusion and opportunities for participation for people with disabilities to enable them to benefit equally from the aid investment.'

<sup>4</sup> Disability data collection methodology should also be informed by disability data expertise such as the Washington Group on Disability Statistics

<sup>5</sup> <https://iwda.org.au/resource/report-triple-jeopardy/>



communicate with potential program stakeholders, change agents and beneficiaries with disabilities by helping to facilitate community consultations, linking programs to grassroots DPO networks, such as self-help groups or CBID networks, and by conveying program information through their networks. For example, see case study: Partnering with Disabled People's Organisations to improve disability inclusive skills development and economic empowerment in Vanuatu.

- Implementation program activities: DPOs are often engaged as implementers. For example, see case studies: DPO engagement in the DFAT Civil Society WASH Fund Projects and DPO engagement within the Australia Indonesia Partnership for Justice. These describe how DPOs were engaged in a range of program implementation activities such as providing advice on the accessibility of program-funded infrastructure, disseminating legal information among networks, and contributing to community mobilisation and planning. When DPOs and other civil society and/or government organisations work together, new partnerships and alliances are formed, mutual learning can occur and new ways of working are established.
- Monitoring and evaluation (M&E) of accessibility and inclusion: DPOs provide valuable input to M&E, such as contributing to inclusion steering committees, participating in monitoring of accessibility and inclusion and on evaluation teams. For example, see case study: Engaging with DPOs to implement disability inclusive WASH programming - learning from the Australian Aid-funded Civil Society WASH Fund.



Fatima from Timor-Leste now has access to safe water and sanitation thanks to WaterAid, supported with disability-inclusive training from CBM Australia © Erin Johnson for Room3/CBM Australia



# DPO ENGAGEMENT ISSUES AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PROGRAM DESIGNERS AND IMPLEMENTERS

As DPOs become more engaged in international development, a range of issues is emerging. Issues noted by CBM and DFAT in discussion with DPO partners are highlighted below along with recommendations for international development partners.

Issue	Explanation	Recommendations
Under- resourcing of DPOs globally	Globally DPOs are under-resourced with only 3 percent of human rights funding globally granted to disability initiatives <sup>6</sup> , despite people with disabilities representing 15 percent of the population. Many DPOs receive little or no core funding. Limited human and other resources (such as accessible transport, access to phone and email communication) may limit a DPO's ability to respond to all requests for consultation and engagement without being provided with some funding and logistical support to facilitate this.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consider providing core funding to DPOs, or funding a dedicated DPO staff position if they are strongly engaged in a program. Core/staff funding provides important flexibility in resources and capacity, allowing DPOs to pursue program activities and policy and legislative reform. Flexible funding is also recommended as it allows organisations to be responsive to new and emerging issues and opportunities. Funding is important to create and support emerging networks.</li> <li>• If core funding is not possible or appropriate, adequately reimburse DPOs for their time and expertise. Cover the cost of reasonable accommodations where required (for example if an accessible taxi is required to attend a meeting, consider providing transport).</li> <li>• Build accessibility and reasonable accommodation budget lines into all program activities and events to ensure people with disabilities, including from DPOs, can effectively participate.</li> </ul>
Increasing demand for DPO engagement	Increased awareness of the need for disability inclusion within sustainable development programs presents good opportunities for DPOs to strategically partner with international development agencies. There are also risks, however, that DPOs could be overwhelmed with requests and demands from development partners,	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Aim to engage DPOs in ways that also contribute to their own strategic objectives. This leads to longer term, and more effective, engagement and will mitigate risks of international development partners co-opting rather than complementing the DPO movement. For example, discuss ways in which the program could leverage networks and resources to assist with policy advocacy objectives of the DPO, or with reaching and supporting new members, or growing leadership capacity of staff, as well as</li> </ul>

<sup>6</sup> <http://humanrightsfunding.org/report-2017/>



	without being well equipped to respond; and that DPOs could be diverted from their own policy and advocacy objectives by engaging in diverse programs which may not necessarily contribute to sustainable policy change.	ensuring the program effectively includes people with disabilities. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Advocacy and programming networks and coordination mechanisms (such as the cluster system within humanitarian responses) can provide an efficient way for DPOs to provide insights and advice to a number of development partners<sup>7</sup>. Ensure DPOs are represented within these mechanisms and that they are able to effectively contribute.</li> </ul>
Varying organisational capacity and resources	Like many civil society organisations, and compounded by educational and other barriers faced by people with disabilities, capacity – including internal organisational capacity - varies across DPOs.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Adopt a capacity strengthening approach, which may include supporting DPOs with organisational capacity. This contributes not only to the quality of your program but to a strong civil society and disability movement.</li> <li>• Recognise that capacity is best strengthened when both parties acknowledge there is something each can learn from the other.</li> <li>• DPOs may request a variety of forms of capacity strengthening. This could include governance, human resourcing and organisational development, financial and office management, through to more technical training and support in policy advocacy, legislative reform and program design.</li> </ul>
Lack of experience in disability mainstreaming	Many DPOs have historically focused on disability specific programs, and/or disability related policy advocacy, and may have less experience in mainstream programs or programs in particular sectors. This means there may be a need for clear briefing and support to translate DPO recommendations into program features.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide DPOs with clear briefings on the program and sectoral area and clearly discuss mutual expectations for the process.</li> <li>• Where appropriate, work in partnership to translate DPO input into appropriate programmatic outputs, or engage a trusted disability inclusion advisor to assist with this process.</li> </ul>
Representation of/by all people with disabilities	Disability inclusion applies to all women, men, girls and boys of all genders, ages, ethnicities, locations and impairment types. DPOs may	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Engage widely, aiming for diversity of representation across impairment types and genders in particular. This may lead to also collaborating with less “official” representative networks, which will also help</li> </ul>

<sup>7</sup> when they are aligned to DPO priorities



	only represent one impairment type or group of people, or may be a cross disability DPO. Often some impairment types are more marginalised or excluded than others (particularly people with psychosocial and intellectual impairments, Deaf people and people who are deaf-blind or have multiple impairments). These groups may have fewer representative groups, and/or be less represented within cross disability organisations.	to support emerging coalitions and civil society. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Umbrella DPOs may be a useful mechanism to disburse funds to members if smaller, less formal DPOs are unable to receive funds. Umbrella organisations can also be helpful with coordinating other members but, like all movements, there is often politics between organisations.</li> </ul>
Coalitions for inclusive development and human rights	DPOs benefit from working in broader disability and civil society coalitions for combined impact. These collaborations can lead to mutual learning, new ideas and innovative practice.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Broker links and partnerships between DPOs and other program partners. When a broader range of actors work together on disability inclusive programs, strong, multidisciplinary social movements can emerge to champion inclusion in and outside of the program.</li> </ul>
Leadership	There are a range of experienced, charismatic and capable DPO leaders globally who have contributed to enormous change in terms of disability inclusive development. To maintain momentum in the long term, DPOs often identify the need to nurture and develop new leaders.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Where possible, identify opportunities to support the capacity of a diverse range of young and emerging leaders, to ensure sustainability of the movement.</li> <li>• Providing emerging leaders with opportunities to work alongside others in program work, gaining skills and networks can significantly contribute.</li> </ul>
Tokenism	In the guise of inclusion, people with disabilities or their representative organisations are often consulted/engaged quite superficially, merely to “tick the box” or to satisfy donor requirements.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Verify with DPOs whether the consultation or engagement was genuine and whether they feel their contributions were valued.</li> </ul>



## CONCLUSION

There is no one better qualified to understand how people with disabilities can be included in international development programming, than people with disabilities themselves - and their representative organisations, DPOs. These represent an incredibly valuable source of information and expertise for international development partners who are committed to disability inclusive development. Done well, DPO engagement can provide mutual benefit, with development programs improving their reach and effectiveness, and DPOs expanding their voice, gaining influence and receiving resources. Done poorly, DPO engagement risks diverting DPOs from their own priorities, overwhelming their capacity and available resources, and perpetuating the marginalisation already experienced by many people with disabilities.

There is also no one better placed to influence how DPOs are engaged in international development programs than donor organisations. This paper has reflected on the lessons learned through DPO engagement in the Australian Aid program and provided a range of recommendations for effective engagement with DPOs based on the experience of one donor. By engaging strategically as well as operationally, by being willing to support capacity development and to provide resources to DPOs to enable them to participate in development processes, by embedding DPO engagement in internal systems and processes as well as in program requirements for implementing partners, DFAT is starting to see the benefits in some of its programs. Other donor organisations are encouraged to take note of these lessons, and to use their influence with implementing partners carefully, to ensure that good practice DPO engagement becomes business as usual in international development programming.

---

This paper was prepared by Briana Wilson, Disability Inclusion Advisor- Manager at CBM Australia.

The author would like to thank the following for reviewing the paper and providing useful comments and additions: *Mika Kontiainen, Felicity O'Brien, (DFAT), Joni Yulianto (SIGAB Indonesia), Seta Macanawai (PDF), Vladamir Cuk and Talin Avades (IDA), Marjo Heinonen (Abilis Foundation), Sally Baker (independent consultant), Kirsty Thompson, Tamara Jolly, Raine Dixon, Clare Hanley (CBM Australia).*

For more information contact: [disabilityinclusivedevelopment@dfat.gov.au](mailto:disabilityinclusivedevelopment@dfat.gov.au) or [bwilson@cbm.org.au](mailto:bwilson@cbm.org.au)

