



DISABILITY EQUITY IN INVESTMENT DESIGN

GOOD PRACTICE NOTE¹

1. OVERVIEW

Investment design is a critical enabler of disability equity and rights across development programs. This Good Practice Note helps program managers and design teams to embed disability equity and rights in investment designs, aligned with DFAT's [International Development Programming Guide](#).

Australia's [International Disability Equity and Rights Strategy](#) (IDEARS) commits to working with people with disability throughout the program cycle, including design. It emphasises local leadership and decision-making, recognising that early engagement with people with disability and their representative organisations strengthens co-design, local ownership, and long-term impact. To be effective, investments must be informed by diverse and underrepresented people with disability, including Deaf people, people with diverse sexual orientation or gender identity, and psychosocial or intellectual disabilities.

To support this commitment, Australia has set performance targets for disability equity in international development investments – 60 per cent performing effectively by 2026, and 70 per cent by 2030. Embedding disability equity early in the design process is critical to meeting these targets and delivering sustainable, equitable outcomes.

2. KEY ELEMENTS FOR DISABILITY EQUITY IN DESIGN

Concept Preparation

- Has disability analysis informed the investment concept? This can include disability issues identified through e.g. intersectional GEDSI analysis, political economy analysis, social safeguarding assessments or other disability-related research or reviews.
- Does the concept identify disability equity challenges, including those related to intersectional disadvantage, to be explored in the design phase?
- Were diverse people with disability and/or OPDs consulted in defining the development problem?
- Did a disability specialist contribute to the concept? (DFAT staff can request a review of the draft Concept Note by disability advisors.)
- Do indicative program outcomes (End of Program or Intermediate) explicitly address disability equity?
- Is the OECD DAC marker for disability included in the narrative?

Design

- Has a disability analysis (which may be part of a GEDSI analysis) involving diverse people with disability and identifying key barriers and opportunities informed the design?
- Was disability expertise used during stakeholder engagement and design development?
- Were diverse people with disability meaningfully engaged in the design process?
- Does the design specify how people with disability will participate and benefit equally, including through barrier removal and reasonable accommodation?

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- Do program outcomes (End of Program or Intermediate) explicitly address disability equity?
- Does the design clearly outline targeted and mainstream approaches to disability equity, in line with DFAT's commitment to a twin-track approach?
- Does the design support DFAT's disability equity and rights priorities-such as partnering with the disability movement, addressing discrimination, promoting the preconditions for inclusion, supporting equity in humanitarian and climate action, or strengthening the evidence base?
- Is the meaningful involvement of diverse and underrepresented people with disability and/or OPDs integrated into the program logic, MEL and governance structures?
- Does the design commit to developing a disability or GEDSI strategy or action plan?
- Does the budget include dedicated resources for disability equity, such as reasonable accommodation, accessibility measures, technical advice, and engagement with people with disability or OPDs?

Accountability

- Does the MEL plan collect and analyse disability-disaggregated data, using both qualitative and quantitative indicators to track disability-related outcomes?
- Is disability equity embedded in governance, risk management, and safeguarding measures to prevent harm and discrimination, particularly for those facing intersectional disadvantage?
- Are safeguarding and PSEAH reporting mechanisms and information accessible to diverse people with disability on an equal basis with others?
- Do proposed roles demonstrate disability equity-related expertise, including amongst technical advisors, Team Leader positions, specified personnel, and MEL advisors?
- Does the MEL plan enable regular monitoring of the implementing partner's disability equity performance?

3. INVESTMENT DESIGN

Disability equity must be evident in design processes and documentation. Engage disability expertise early in the design process by involving an advisor in the design team, reference group, and/or during peer review and appraisal. Where a GEDSI advisor is engaged, **ensure they have specific disability expertise** or are supported by a disability advisor.

3.1 Disability analysis

DFAT's [GEDSI Analysis Good Practice Note](#) guides DFAT investment managers and implementing partners in developing quality GEDSI analysis. The analysis should identify barriers and opportunities for diverse people with disability, including physical, communication, attitudinal and institutional barriers. Where local data is limited, use international or regional data. Ideally the analysis should be informed by consultation with diverse people with disability and their representative organisations.

Ensure the analysis reflects the experiences and interests of those most marginalised. This may include considerations of gender, age, ethnicity, First Nations status, socio-economic background, and disability types (e.g. physical, sensory, psychosocial, cognitive).

3.2 Design Terms of Reference

Include disability equity considerations in the design team's Terms of Reference:

- **Technical advice:** Engage a disability equity advisor to guide consultations with people with disability and/or OPDs, identify key considerations and shape design recommendations.

- **Diversity of disability:** Ensure stakeholder engagement includes a range of people with disability, including women and girls, LGBTIQ+ people, people who are Deaf, Blind, Deafblind and people with psychosocial and cognitive disability. Partnering with OPDs and other representative organisations can facilitate engagement with diverse people with disability.
- **Enabling participation:** Plan for accessibility and reasonable accommodation in the design process (including venues, communication formats, and budget) to support meaningful participation.

3.3 Design Document or Design Summary

Disability equity should be incorporated throughout the design, which should actively consider how to:

- **Remove barriers and uphold the rights of diverse people with disability** to enable equal participation and benefit from the investment.
- **Amplify the perspectives of people with disability** and increase their role in decision-making.
- **Support capacity development of OPDs**, focusing on shared priorities.
- **Support partners and strengthen local capacity** to progress disability equity objectives.

3.3.1 Development context and situational analysis (What problem are we addressing?)

This section should reflect the findings of the disability analysis and:

- **Identify barriers and opportunities** for diverse people with disability relevant to the investment context.
- **Include disability-disaggregated data** most relevant to the situational analysis.
- **Draw on evidence and lessons learned** from previous disability equity efforts.

3.3.2 Strategic intent and rationale (Why?)

This section should:

- **Reference Australia's and partner government/organisation policy priorities** on disability equity and rights, particularly those aligned with the investment's focus areas.
- **Identify where and how disability equity will be integrated** across the investment.

3.3.3 Proposed outcomes and investment options (What?)

The program logic should reflect opportunities identified in the disability analysis and embed disability equity objectives. This will ideally:

- **Include disability equity in program outcomes**, such as End of Program or Intermediate Outcomes.
- **Commit to developing a disability equity (or GEDSI) strategy or action plan.**
- **Incorporate opportunities for meaningful engagement with people with disability and/or OPDs**, and supported shared priorities and capacity development.

Where gender equality or GEDSI is referenced, **explicitly mentioning people with disability or disability equity** will strengthen the investment's equity and inclusion approach.

Table 1: Examples of effective disability equity outcomes

Disability equity outcome example	Rationale
Community members recognise people with disability as active contributors and leaders within the community.	Contributes to addressing harmful disability stereotypes and reinforces positive narratives of capability, agency and diversity.
Partners implement equitable systems that enable people with disability – especially women with	Emphasises disability equity as part of systemic change rather than purely about access.

disability – to lead, influence decision-making, and access economic opportunities.	
Increased access to services for women and children, including those with disability, in targeted health care facilities.	Recognises that women and children with disability require specific interventions to ensure equitable access to health care and services.
Improved learning outcomes for all boys and girls, including those with disability, at targeted year levels.	Promotes inclusive education by ensuring that children with disability are supported to achieve equitable learning outcomes alongside peers.
Infrastructure policies, design and delivery embed accessibility and universal design principles, resulting in equitable access and use of public spaces for diverse people with disability.	Removes physical and systemic barriers to enable social and economic inclusion for people with disability.
Women, youth, children, people with disability and other at-risk groups actively shape and access inclusive disaster risk reduction systems that remove barriers and build their resilience and preparedness.	Recognises the leadership and agency of people with disability in building community resilience.

3.3.4 Implementation arrangements (How will DFAT engage?)

This section should include:

- **Plans for the inclusion of diverse people with disability/OPDs in governance structures** to ensure their experiences and expertise continue to shape the investment.
- **Description of disability equity expertise in the implementing team.** Where GEDSI advisors are engaged, confirm whether dedicated disability technical expertise is available.
- **Assessment of whether gaps in disability equity** could weaken the investment's sustainability and impact.
- **Identify policy dialogue and diplomacy opportunities to promote disability equity.**

3.3.5 Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) (How will DFAT measure performance?)

This section should outline what role people with disability will play in the investment's MEL, and articulate how progress on disability equity will be measured and reported. This should include:

- **Disability-related indicators** and evaluative questions in the MEL framework, including DFAT's Tier 2 indicator on OPD capacity support (where relevant).
- **Plans to collect and use disability disaggregated data**, using both quantitative and qualitative methods to assess meaningful engagement and benefit.

3.3.6 Gender equality, disability equity, climate change and other cross cutting issues

Disability equity should be integrated throughout the design, not only addressed in the specific narrative on disability. The narrative should articulate:

- **The level of consultation** with diverse people with disability and OPDs during the design process.
- **The main barriers and opportunities** for people with disability relevant to the investment context. This should be informed by lived experience, especially from underrepresented groups.
- **The overall strategy or approach** to disability equity – how the investment will address key barriers, promote meaningful engagement of diverse people with disability, and apply the twin-track approach. It should also outline plans to develop or refine a disability equity strategy or action plan (which may be part of a GEDSI strategy/action plan).

- A **rationale** for the [OECD DAC Disability Equity Policy Marker](#) that has been selected and outline of how the investment aligns with priority pillars of IDEARS.

3.3.7 Budget and resources (What will it cost?)

The budget should include adequate, dedicated resources to implement the investment's commitments on disability equity. This should include allocated budget for:

- **Reasonable accommodation and accessibility** measures.
- **Technical advice** to support the program implement a sound approach to disability equity.
- **Appropriate resourcing** for the engagement of OPDs/people with disability (e.g. remuneration, capacity development activities).

3.3.8 Procurement and partnering

Consider the following accountability mechanisms that can be used in procurement arrangements:

- Specify **adequate financial and human resources** for disability in all downstream procurement arrangements.
- **Link milestone payments** to disability equity deliverables, such as the GEDSI strategy.
- Include **disability equity expertise** in the selection criteria for specified and advisor positions.
- Assign **specific responsibilities** for disability equity in job descriptions of the Team Leader and other key roles.
- Provide quality **disability training for the implementing team**, followed by ongoing mentoring and support.
- Require implementing partners to **uphold standards, codes of conduct and protocols** that prevent harm – ensuring non-discrimination, provision of reasonable accommodations, accessibility, and safeguarding the rights and dignity of people with disability.
- Encourage contractors to **appoint people with disability to program teams** wherever feasible.

3.3.9 Risk management and safeguards (what might go wrong?)

The design should identify and explain how disability related risks will be mitigated throughout the investment. The risk management section and matrix should:

- Identify **risks in relation to PSEAH**, acknowledging that people with disability experience increased risk.
- Outline how **safeguards processes and mechanisms will be made accessible** for people with disability.
- Consider whether the investment could **inadvertently exacerbate the exclusion** of people with disability, and whether inadequately addressing disability equity could constrain progress on the investment's objectives.
- Recognise **other disability-specific risks**, such as:
 - a. **Limited disability expertise** amongst implementing partners.
 - b. **Insufficient consultation** with diverse people with disability and their representative organisations, leading to ineffective or exclusionary outcomes.
 - c. **OPDs may not have time or interest** to engage if not aligned with priorities or capacity.
 - d. **Inadequate resource allocation** for disability equity and rights.
 - e. **Inaccessible communication, facilities or processes** that hinder participation of people with disability.

4. FURTHER INFORMATION AND ADVICE

For further assistance or advice on disability equity, please contact GEDSI.GEB@dfat.gov.au