

# Submission of the International Disability Alliance<sup>1</sup> to UK Parliament Inquiry on disability-inclusive development

## Role of the UK in disability inclusion within the global humanitarian and development community

The government of UK and its Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO) have historically been an international leader and champion in advancing the rights of persons with disabilities internationally. It has been one of the few donors that have properly invested in strengthening the movement of persons with disabilities through their representative organizations, and promoting inclusive programming in development that reflects the highest standards set by the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Together with the International Disability Alliance (IDA) the UK was co-founder of the Global Action on Disability (GLAD) Network<sup>2</sup>, a coordination body of bilateral and multilateral donors and agencies, public and private foundations as well as key coalitions of the disability movement with a common interest in achieving inclusive international development and humanitarian action. Over the years, GLAD has played a key role in bringing together these stakeholders to find more synergies in their approaches to critical issues such as education, investment in strengthening the representative movement of persons with disabilities, and provided a platform for knowledge sharing to strengthen each other's leadership on disability inclusion. The UK together with IDA established the Global Disability Summit, with the UK co-hosting the first Global Disability Summit in London in 2018,<sup>3</sup> which has raised the profile of disability at the highest levels of government around the world. Of the 17 commitments the UK made at GDS18 all but four have been completed and the remainder are underway.

The UK has been investing in strengthening the movement of persons with disabilities through its support to organizations *of* persons with disabilities (OPDs)<sup>4</sup>, including the

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<sup>1</sup> IDA is a global alliance of eight global and six regional member organizations representing over 1,100 organizations *of* persons with disabilities (OPDs) and their families from 182 countries. IDA's membership (members and members' members) includes 227 OPDs in Africa; 230 in the Americas; 88 in Asia; 390 in Europe; 63 in MENA; and 163 in the Pacific. IDA's work is primarily focused on promoting the effective and full implementation of CRPD and compliance by governments and the UN System through the active and coordinated involvement of representative OPDs at the national, regional, and international levels. IDA's work is structured around the pillars of Human Rights, Advocacy, and Capacity Building, which mutually reinforce each other in thematic areas. As a representative organization of persons with disabilities, IDA brings unique strengths and expertise, including the diversity of constituencies within the disability movement, and the ability to bring together multiple stakeholders to generate political will and raise the profile of disability rights from the global to the local level.

<sup>2</sup> <https://gladnetwork.net/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.globaldisabilitysummit.org/>

<sup>4</sup> The CRPD makes a distinction between organizations *of* and organizations *for* persons with disabilities. This was further elaborated by the General Comment 7 of the CRPD Committee. Organizations of persons with

International Disability Alliance (IDA). The IDA is a global alliance of organizations of persons with disabilities (OPDs) that has outreach at all levels – global to regional to national. Through FCDO support IDA has been able to work on capacity building of persons with disabilities and OPDs, including through its world-leading Bridge CRPD-SDGs<sup>5</sup> training program. The UK government’s funding has supported our work on strengthening the capacity of OPDs at the grassroots including those from marginalized groups, as well as raise the profile of disability at the highest level of decision making within multilateral and bilateral mechanism. It has also enabled us to bring together OPDs to develop positions on critical issues such the implementation of SDG 4 on education in line with the CRPD<sup>6</sup>, inclusive employment<sup>7</sup>, among others. These are examples of ways in which FCDO funding has supported positioning OPDs and persons with disabilities as technical resources who can be equal partners in development rather than being passive beneficiaries. The UK support through the Inclusive Futures work has also led to creation of models on operationalising meaningful engagement of OPDs<sup>9</sup> and persons with disabilities and inclusive programming<sup>10</sup> that have been recognized as good practices.

### **The new FCDO disability inclusion and rights strategy (2022-2030) and its impact on FCDO’s larger work on inclusive development & humanitarian work**

The new FCDO disability & inclusion strategy comes at a time when multiple challenges are facing the world, all of which have very disproportionate impact on the lives of persons with disabilities. The COVID19 pandemic, the economic downturn and the cost-of-living crises have put persons with disabilities at an even greater risk of being left behind and having their rights violated. During the pandemic, the FCDO actively supported evidence gathering not only on the impact of the pandemic on the lives of persons with disabilities but also how it adversely impacted the functioning of OPDs – that are often the only link between persons with disabilities and policymakers. The new FCDO disability inclusion and rights strategy is cognisant of these recent challenges as well as other emerging issues impacting disability inclusive development and humanitarian action. It was developed in close consultation with OPDs and other experts to put diversity, intersectionality, and inclusion at the heart of FCDO’s programming. This strategy along with the FCDO guidance note on OPD consultation stands to have far reaching impact on how inclusive development and humanitarian funding and programming evolves in a post-pandemic world. It is significant to note that the strategy reinforces efforts to look at disability as a cross-cutting issue across all development and humanitarian work of FCDO rather than in a silo. The new FCDO women

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disabilities (OPDs) are organizations or associations led, directed and governed by persons with disabilities where a majority of their membership constitutes persons with disabilities. See CRPD General Comment No.7 on participation, para 14, for the specific role that OPDs have under the CRPD

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.internationaldisabilityalliance.org/content/bridge-crpdsdgs-training-initiative>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.internationaldisabilityalliance.org/ida-inclusive-education-2020>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.internationaldisabilityalliance.org/blog/equalising-access-labor-market-persons-disabilities>

<sup>8</sup> <https://inclusion-international.org/resource/inclusive-workplaces-toolkit/>

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.internationaldisabilityalliance.org/content/inclusion-works-program-spotlight-organizations-persons-disabilities-engagement-mechanism>

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.internationaldisabilityalliance.org/blog/applying-crpds-standards-programmatic-processes-look-inclusive-programming-practice>

and girls' strategy 2023-2030, for example, also includes the rights of women and girls with disabilities. It is hoped that similar intersection between disability and emerging areas of work such as climate action would also be triggered by the new disability strategy.

The success of this strategy, however, depends on the availability of adequate resources for its effective roll out. In the aftermath of the pandemic particularly, in many countries around the world there have been drastic cuts in ODA across the board. Disability rights issues were already chronically underfunded in development funding<sup>11</sup> before the pandemic and the recent cuts have only contributed to further under-prioritization of the rights of persons with disabilities. Cuts in FCDO funding have in the recent past, forced IDA for instance, to reduce the scope of our work. Pulling back on work advancing the rights of persons with disabilities who were marginalised even before the pandemic and who now find themselves at alarming risks of being further left behind, is an issue that demands careful consideration from decision makers. Ultimately the human impact of reductions in funding is that it devastatingly and disproportionately affects the lives of persons with disabilities. Funding cuts have a dramatically negative impacts the education, employment, health, and inclusion in society of persons with disabilities.

The UK has been one of the rare champions when it came to funding disability issues. We need you to continue to be the world leader on disability inclusion in development for the long term. We have come so far together, but there is still much to be done, and we cannot lose the hard-won gains that we have made thanks to FCDO funding in the past. The global community of persons with disabilities and their families, through their representative organisations (OPDs) look to the UK government to continue strongly supporting inclusive development and humanitarian action in partnership with the International Disability Alliance

### **'Nothing About Us, Without Us'**

As examples above have highlighted, FCDO's support has focused on strengthening the movement of persons with disabilities, prioritizing their agency and leadership. Even the development of the new FCDO disability inclusion and rights strategy was done with active participation of persons with disabilities. During the pandemic FCDO supported evidence generation activities that included a survey designed for OPDs by OPDs. The questionnaire of the IDA Survey on the Experiences of Persons with Disabilities Adapting to the COVID-19 Global Pandemic<sup>12</sup> was developed through active consultations with persons with disabilities and their representative organizations, the survey adopted plain language, to maximize participation among people who are rarely consulted in research on disability rights, during the pandemic. As an example, 17% of respondents self-identified as having an intellectual disability. Another area of research that the FCDO supported which was quite unique as it was essential, was the impact of the pandemic on OPDs. This was significant because the disability movement is still a very nascent movement compared to many other social

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<sup>11</sup> <https://devinit.org/resources/disability-inclusive-oda-aid-data-donors-channels-recipient/#:~:text=International%20aid%2C%20known%20as%20official,disabilities%20are%20not%20left%20behind.>

<sup>12</sup> [https://www.internationaldisabilityalliance.org/sites/default/files/covid-19\\_survey\\_ex\\_summary\\_final.pdf](https://www.internationaldisabilityalliance.org/sites/default/files/covid-19_survey_ex_summary_final.pdf)

movements. The FCDO study<sup>13</sup> on the impact of COVID19 was perhaps the only evidence of this nature that showed the adverse impact the pandemic had on the operations of OPDs where they had to either pivot from their core function at times, operation on reduced staff and volunteer time and some even facing the risk of shutting down. OPDs are representative organizations advancing the interests of persons with disabilities and an impact on their ability to operate puts the risk of persons with disabilities being left out of decision making including pandemic response. FCDO also supported the IDA Global Survey on OPD Participation<sup>14</sup>, perhaps the only survey of this nature. The findings of the survey also put focus on 'Nothing about us without us' in the context of development and humanitarian work. Other examples of FCDO advancing meaningful participation of persons with disabilities can be found in the Inclusive Futures<sup>15</sup> program where innovative ways of operationalizing meaningful engagement of OPDs were piloted through the OPD engagement mechanism<sup>16</sup> which was profiled as one of the 12 case studies in the 2022 GDS Discussion Paper<sup>17</sup> on OPD participation.

## **Progress on commitments made at the Global Disability Summit**

The Global Disability Summit+2 Years Progress Report (2021) includes the progress made by UK on its 2018 commitments as a good practice. Of the 17 commitments the UK made at GDS18 all but four have been completed and the remainder are underway. Following the 2018 GDS, the UK government launched an ambitious five-year strategy to embed disability inclusion across the organization. The strategy had minimum standards for all business units to strive for and included a delivery plan to ensure accountability. Despite the fact that circumstances changed in 2020 with the COVID19 pandemic, the UK made significant progress against the strategy. The UK has also launched and funded both disability-specific and mainstream development programs to support persons with disabilities which have generated good practices and models of inclusive development that continue to inform other practitioners. With this new FCDO disability rights and inclusion strategy further demonstrates the UK's resolve to fulfill commitments made at the GDS. However, this commitment must continue to be matched by adequate resource allocation necessary to translate the UK and IDA's shared vision of a truly disability inclusive development and humanitarian agenda into tangible actions on the ground. With the FCDO strategy matched by adequate resources, in partnership with the International Disability Alliance we can together sustainably strengthen the disability movement through OPDs, end marginalization and fully include persons with disabilities in society on an equal basis with others around the world.

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<sup>13</sup> <https://www.internationaldisabilityalliance.org/blog/covid-19-exacerbated-existing-inequalities-%E2%80%93-research-shows-how-systems-can-do-better>

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.internationaldisabilityalliance.org/blog/%E2%80%9Cnot-just-ticking-disability-box-meaningful-opd-participation-and-risk-tokenism%E2%80%9D>

<sup>15</sup> <https://inclusivefutures.org/>

<sup>16</sup> <https://www.internationaldisabilityalliance.org/world-creativity-innovation-day-2021>

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.internationaldisabilityalliance.org/content/discussion-paper-opd-engagement-launching-gds>