

Safeguarding – Lauren Watters, co-chair, Bond DDG and director of delivery and impact, AbleChildAfrica, supplementary evidence

The first thing to say on this question is that disability inclusive safeguarding is of the utmost importance for any aid agency and should be a central consideration in all ODA spending.

It's an area that in the past has been overlooked despite the risk levels. We know that people, and in particular children and girls with disabilities are at an increased risk of harm:

- Up to 70% of women with disabilities experience sexual abuse before 18 years of age.
- And children with disabilities are four times more likely to experience physical violence than their peers without disabilities.
- We also know that people with disabilities, and in particular children with disabilities experience unique and specific barriers to accessing reporting and safeguarding systems.

In recent years the UK government has demonstrated real leadership in this area especially in terms of understanding best practice or what works for inclusive safeguarding. For example:

- The UK Government has funded the development of extensive guidance for practitioners on inclusive safeguarding – namely [Able Child Africa and Save the Children's Disability-inclusive Child Safeguarding Guidelines](#);
- Disability-inclusive safeguarding has also been addressed by the FCDO-funded Safeguarding Resource and Support Hub (RSH) through the funding and development of a few key disability-inclusive safeguarding resources (*such as the Pocket Guide: Safeguarding persons with disabilities in programmes*).
- Commendably, there is also an explicit commitment to 'pay specific attention to safeguarding people with disabilities' in the Disability Inclusion and Rights Strategy although its still unclear how this will be implemented and what the indicators of success are in this area.
- Only last week in the recent Global Action on Disability (GLAD) Network meeting the FCDO alongside the International Disability and Development Consortium ran a learning session on inclusive safeguarding for a number of high-level donor agencies and other stakeholders.

There is no question that the FCDO have invested into thinking hard about inclusive safeguarding and to developing tools in this area.

But despite this, it can be said there is an inconsistency between the guidance FCDO has funded and its own internal practice.

- It worth noting that there are zero references of disability or disability inclusion in the UK Strategy for Safeguarding Against Sexual Exploitation, Abuse and Sexual Harassment within the Aid Sector.
- There is also only one reference to disability in the FCDO's Safeguarding Due Diligence Guidance for external partners and no specific assessment in the safeguarding due diligence on inclusive safeguarding.
- UK Aid grant holder reporting requirements do not require grantees to talk about or think about inclusive safeguarding.

In Able Child Africa's DFID funded project working with youth with disabilities – we were not asked once about the extent to persons with disabilities were kept safe in delivery.

- Finally, it worth mentioning again how the cost per beneficiary analysis which formed a crucial part of DFID's 2019 Approach to Value for Money can actually discourage grantees from including budget to fully safeguard persons with disabilities, as the costs associated with disability-inclusive safeguarding can be seen as expensive and therefore affecting the overall 'efficiently' of the intervention.

Furthermore the cuts have also significantly impacted FCDOs ability to keeping people with disabilities safe in their work.

- **92% of DDG members surveyed reported that the approach the FCDO took to cutting programmes was unsafe for persons with disabilities**
- And to make matters worse **over 75% reflected that persons with disabilities were more at risk following the cuts** than they had been prior to the intervention taking place.

We must remember that effective safeguarding for persons with disabilities relies to some degree on the social protection available in the context where we are working. Abrupt cuts to programmes that were investing in these protection systems actually threatens our ability to safeguard them overall.

It can also be said that the cuts did actual harm to these populations, wasting the time and resources of the OPD which protect these populations, on projects that were unfinished and rebudgets and therefore damaging existing social protection systems and leaving persons with disabilities more exposed than before.

If we fail to invest in disability inclusive social protection systems or worse, cut our investment and further weaken these systems. FCDO will be less able to effectively safeguard persons with disabilities in the long run.

I'd like to add a final thought based on our own finding with children and youth with disabilities. Whilst the focus on Sexual Exploitation, Abuse and Sexual Harassment in FCDO's safeguarding work is crucial, it can at times mean that other more nuanced ways we can do harm to persons with disabilities is overlooked.

- For example, neglect or emotional abuse are not talked about as often as key safeguarding concerns in the FCDO's approach to safeguarding, yet these are the types of abuse children and people with disabilities experience most often during programme implementation.
- Children with disabilities we surveyed about their safeguarding experiences talked about being called the "Deaf one" or the 'Blind one' by project staff and talked about being overlooked or bullied during project delivery.
- These may seem minor in comparison to SEAH concerns, but they are the real experiences of children and youth with disabilities in programme implementation that contribute to a loss of confidence, self-worth and ultimately do harm to this group.

- In order for the FCDO to fully safeguard everyone, its approach to safeguarding needs to be broadened to include the types of abuse persons with disabilities more commonly experience in ODA spending and delivery.

Recommendations:

1. FCDO should continue to leverage its global leadership in disability-inclusive safeguarding to influence networks such as the GLAD Network, in order to encourage adherence to inclusive safeguarding standards in global aid spending.
2. FCDO should lead by example and routinely embed disability-inclusive safeguarding principles in due diligence, reporting requirements, and quality standards for all FCDO funded work, including disability-inclusive safeguarding audits in British International Investment spending, and promoting inclusive safeguarding in other ODA spend departments.
3. FCDO should invest in formal and informal social protection systems for persons with disabilities – particularly women and children – recognising that strengthening these local protection systems is vital in tackling sexual exploitation and abuse in the aid sector.
4. FCDO should lead on efforts towards deinstitutionalisation, as globally it is estimated that [one in three children](#) in institutions is a child with disabilities.