



Foreign, Commonwealth
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Sarah Champion MP
Chair of the International Development
Committee
House of Commons
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S H
February 2024

My Dear Sarah,

I am writing to you with responses to the International Development Committee's outstanding questions on the inquiry into the FCDO's approach to disability inclusive development on 23rd January 2024.

Nutrition for Growth Summit

France has announced Brieuc Pont (former French Ambassador to Nicaragua) as their Special Envoy for the Nutrition for Growth Summit but has not yet set a date for it. However, we understand it is likely to be at the end of 2024 or early 2025.

FCDO definition of disability

The FCDO's Disability Inclusion and Rights strategy takes a human rights approach to disability inclusion. It uses the United Nations (UN) definition of disability, as per the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD): '*Persons with disabilities include those who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others*'.

FCDO staff dedicated to mainstreaming disability inclusion

We do not collect explicit data on the number of staff working on mainstreaming disability across the FCDO. Ensuring that FCDO's work is inclusive of people with disabilities is mainstreamed through the organisation. Many staff will incorporate disability inclusion and broader equalities into their work on diplomacy, policy development and programme management. This is supported by the central Disability Inclusion Team, comprised of seven full time staff. A package of internal resources and training is provided to raise awareness and equip colleagues, including Heads of Mission, to engage with inclusion issues in their policy, programming, and diplomatic activities.

Embedding disability within FCDO programmes

As noted by the Committee, around 34% of FCDO bilateral ODA programmes undertake some activities that address disability inclusion (marked as 'significant' in the OECD-DAC marker system) and almost 1% focus specifically on disability inclusion (marked as 'principal'). As part of the Disability Inclusion and Rights strategy's twin track approach, the FCDO is working toward further mainstreaming disability inclusion across its programmes.

The FCDO's Programme Operating Framework (PrOF) guides staff in designing and delivering high quality programmes. Its mandatory rules include one on equality (Rule 10) which requires programme teams and implementing partners to consider and provide evidence on interventions that will affect disability inclusion, gender equality and other equality considerations. This is supported with specific guidance, including a PrOF guide on disability inclusion. PrOF rule 10 also requires programme teams and implementing partners to collect disaggregated data where relevant and possible. To further support this, our disability helpdesk provides technical assistance to programme teams and partners. This includes practical recommendations on how programme activities can be made inclusive.

A series of disability technical advisers have also been embedded in policy departments to support mainstreaming across the organisation. The work of the technical secondees has shown that it is easier to embed disability inclusion in mainstream programmes as part of the design process than it is to add it to programmes that are already running. The *UK Partnering for Accelerated Climate Transition* (UK PACT) and the *Shule Bora* (a national education programme in Tanzania) programmes are good examples. In both cases, evidence on successful disability inclusive practices influenced the design of the programme and the approaches that are being implemented.

We also recognise that delivery partners' disability inclusive technical knowledge is currently variable. Mainstreaming will become more effective and successful as non-specialist delivery partners build expertise and apply it to a wider range of programmes. The Inclusive Futures consortium, which leads our *Disability Inclusive Development* programme, has some demonstrated success in this by including mainstream partners such as BRAC, BBC Media Action and SDDirect in the projects. All three organisations are now more committed to embedding disability inclusive practices in their wider portfolios of work.

More broadly, in the last 18 months, FCDO has scaled up its work to strengthen internal systems to better embed equality into all that we do, in compliance with the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) but also to increase impact and reach for the most vulnerable and excluded. We established an Equalities Impact Unit to support teams across the department to comply with equalities obligations. It focusses on strengthening organisational awareness, guidance and capability on PSED, the International Development (Gender Equality) Act and carrying out Equality Impact Assessments (EIAs). The FCDO provides an enhanced capability 'offer' to staff to build their understanding of equalities issues and develop inclusive programmes and policies. This includes a new internal resources hub known as the 'Equalities Gateway' which contains information, guidance and advice on all equalities issues.

We have so far made good progress in mainstreaming disability inclusion. Only 18% of DFID bilateral ODA programmes were marked 'significant' or 'principal' against the OECD-DAC disability policy marker prior to the 2018 Global Disability Summit. This has now increased to 35% of the FCDO bilateral portfolio.

Disability is being integrated into programmes within the core pillars of the FCDO Disability Inclusion and Rights strategy, from health and education to economic empowerment, and this is already achieving results. For example, the Women's Integrated Sexual Health (WISH) programme, a £273m sexual and reproductive health programme works across 27 countries in Africa and Asia. WISH partners have worked with disability communities to tailor services to meet the specific needs of people with disabilities and to carry out accessibility audits of healthcare clinics. On average, around 7% of participants in WISH projects have a disability.

In addition, the Leave No One Behind programme (LNOB) in Ghana is providing £39.2 million over five years (2019-2024) to support the Government of Ghana to deliver services to the poorest and most excluded. The programme has directly reached almost 65,000 people with disabilities through cash grants and/or activities addressing stigma and providing mental health support.

Furthermore, the Youth Skills for Economic Growth in the Eastern Caribbean (SkYE) programme has responded to the socioeconomic problems of the lack of skills and high unemployment, particularly among the disadvantaged youth (15-30). A quarter of trainees enrolled in the programme self-identified as having a disability and 19% of trainees graduating from the programme were people with disabilities. Follow-up studies showed that 55% of traced people with disabilities were in employment following SkYE training.

However, we are still at the start, rather than end, of the journey. Our ambition is to continue to increase this proportion over the coming years. We must, however, be realistic about the practicalities of getting disability inclusive practices into all bilateral ODA programmes. Some of the barriers – such as delivery partners having the expertise to design and implement UNCRPD-compliant activities – are significant and will take time to address.

De-institutionalisation of people with disabilities

The FCDO recognises the harm of institutionalisation to the wellbeing and development of people with disabilities. In particular, we recognise that children with disabilities are at a high risk of institutionalisation, including children with psychosocial disabilities. This is why we made the commitment at the Global Disability Summit in 2018 to continue to work towards the long-term process of de-institutionalisation and reaffirmed this commitment in FCDO's Disability Inclusion and Rights strategy.

As part of our commitment to de-institutionalisation, our £10 million Ukraine Civil Society Fund (2022-24), has provided eight grants to organisations of persons with disabilities, or organisations focused on disability rights, which includes those working on deinstitutionalisation and the rights of children with disabilities. Furthermore, at the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting 2022, the UK worked with others to maintain strong language on deinstitutionalisation in the Kigali Declaration on Child Care and Protection Reform which also recognises the impact this has on many children with disabilities.

Finally, as Minister for International Development, I would like to reaffirm my own commitment to the disability inclusion agenda and my determination to ensure we deliver against the commitments set out in our strategy. I recognise how critical the leadership of Ministers is to achieving progress.

With warmest regards to
you and your committee,
Yours ever
Andrew

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