

ICAI follow-up of: DFID's approach to disability in development

A summary of ICAI's full follow-up

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Executive summary

ICAI's follow-up review is an important element in the scrutiny process for UK aid. It provides the International Development Committee and the public with an account of how well the government has responded to ICAI's recommendations to improve spending. It is also an opportunity for ICAI to identify issues and challenges facing the UK aid programme now and in the future, which in turn helps to inform subsequent reviews.

This document is a summary which focused only on the results of our follow up of DFID's approach to disability in development. The full Follow Up report of all our 2017-18 reviews, including overall conclusions from the process and details of our methodology, can be found on our website.

Findings

DFID's approach to disability in development

DFID was at the forefront of activities to ensure that disability was included as a central concern of the SDGs in 2015, but was slower in systematically including the concerns, challenges and contributions of people with disabilities in its own programming. ICAI's review looked at whether DFID had developed an appropriate approach to disability and development, and how well it identified and filled knowledge and data gaps on disability in development. As a rapid review, timed to be published ahead of the Global Disability Summit hosted by the UK government in July 2018, the review was not scored, but offered six recommendations, as summarised below.

Table 1: Summary of recommendations and the government's response

Subject of recommendation	Government response
Adopt a more visible, systematic and detailed plan for mainstreaming disability inclusion	Accepted
Increase the representation of staff with disabilities and increase the number of staff with expertise on disability inclusion	Accepted
Country offices should develop theories of change for disability inclusion and working with national governments	Partially accepted
Engage more with disabled people's organisations	Accepted
Tackle stigma and discrimination, and support people with psychosocial and intellectual disabilities	Partially accepted
Create a systematic learning programme and community of practice on the experience of mainstreaming disability into DFID programmes	Accepted

Adopt a more visible, systematic and detailed plan for mainstreaming disability inclusion

In 2017, the secretary of state for international development committed DFID to "put disability at the heart of everything that we do".¹ The ICAI report welcomed this commitment, but called for DFID to adopt a more visible and systematic plan for mainstreaming disability inclusion. DFID accepted this recommendation and has made great strides since our review. In December 2018, it published a comprehensive Disability Inclusion Strategy which sets specific and ambitious standards for all business units, with guidance provided by the disability inclusion team. The standards cover the areas included in our recommendation: programming, human resourcing, learning and organisational culture. A new Disability Inclusion Delivery Board will meet quarterly to monitor progress, and DFID will publish an annual assessment of progress against the standards.

1. Secretary of state speech at the 'Solutions to Disability Inclusion' event, DFID and the Rt Hon Penny Mordaunt MP, 2017, [link](#).

It is too early to know how well the strategy will be implemented, but early signs show that DFID departments are engaged and committed. That said, the strategy has an ambitious timeline, with all business units required to achieve the minimum standards by the end of 2019. The main risk to implementation is insufficient resources, both in terms of in-house expertise on disability (see Recommendation 2 below) and funding set aside for the mainstreaming effort.

Increase the representation of staff with disabilities and increase the number of staff with expertise on disability inclusion

The second recommendation addressed resource constraints from two perspectives. First, we recommended that DFID should increase the representation of staff with disabilities at least to the level of the UK civil service as a whole (9.9%). As of March 2019, 8.7% of DFID's UK-appointed staff and only 2% of staff appointed in country informed DFID that they had disabilities (from 6.4% and 1.4% in December 2017). Second, we recommended that DFID recruit more staff with expertise in disability issues, since working on disability inclusion is a specialist area with its own skills and legal framework.

DFID accepted both parts of this recommendation. Its new Disability Inclusion Strategy has targets for increasing the proportion of its UK-recruited staff with disabilities to match that of the UK working age population. However, the strategy does not include targets for local recruitment of people with disabilities to DFID country offices overseas.

The Disability Inclusion Strategy promises to “equip DFID staff with the skills, tools and knowledge to better integrate disability inclusion into all of our policies and programmes”. Further recruitment and training is urgently required to provide the support business units need to meet the minimum standards by the end of 2019.

Country offices should develop theories of change for disability inclusion and working with national governments

The ICAI review found that DFID country offices lacked information and analysis on the barriers to disability inclusion, and how to overcome them, in their specific country setting. We therefore recommended that country offices should develop theories of change for how to foster disability inclusion in their countries, with particular focus on how to influence and work with national governments. DFID partially accepted this recommendation. Rather than requiring country offices to prepare their own theories of change for disability inclusion, DFID developed a general theory of change which it encouraged country offices to use in preparing their disability action plans.

While offering country offices the choice of a general theory of change to draw on is an improvement, this approach entails a risk that country office action plans become based on general assumptions rather than on local consultation, including with national disabled people's organisations. However, DFID's new Country Development Diagnostics (CDD) process, which has an 'inclusion module', may help to improve the quality of country-level analysis by asking country offices to consider: “What is the situation for people with disabilities in social, political and economic spheres?”²

Engage more with disabled people's organisations

DFID recognised that effective disabled people's organisations are critical to countries achieving disability inclusion, but country office engagement with disabled people's organisations was mostly at the level of conversations and they have generally not been consulted in the business planning process. DFID's main means of support for them, the Disability Rights Fund, operated in only eight of DFID's more than 32 priority countries. We recommended that DFID should engage with disabled people's organisations on country-level strategies, advocacy towards partner governments, capacity building and the design of programmes, including research programmes.

There has been a strong and positive response to this recommendation. The Disability Inclusion Strategy reaffirmed a fundamental principle that people with disabilities are “engaged, consulted, represented and listened to at all levels of decision-making ... and empowered as powerful and active agents of change to

2. See more on the CDD in the sub-sections of this review on DFID's approach to value for money and inclusive growth.

challenge discrimination and harmful norms and to hold governments and implementers to account”.³ The Strategy committed to sufficient investments in disabled people’s organisations to promote their meaningful engagement.

In addition, the Strategy’s minimum standard states that business units must consult (at least) annually with disabled people’s organisations on the design, implementation and evaluation of programmes and office policy and strategy, and should do so in a way that builds capacity and involves groups that are sometimes excluded, such as women and people with psychosocial or intellectual disabilities.

While it is too early to see how this policy development is implemented, we were pleased to see how DFID ensured substantial involvement by people with disabilities in the July 2018 Global Disability Summit. We also note that two new research programmes have very thorough involvement of disabled people’s organisations in their governance. Practical issues remain to be tackled, such as the accessibility of DFID offices. A significant obstacle is DFID’s onerous contracting requirements, which disabled people’s organisations are often unable to meet due to their limited finances and capacity.

Tackle stigma and discrimination

The ICAI review found that few DFID programmes had major elements tackling stigma and discrimination. People with psychosocial disabilities (mental health challenges) and with intellectual disabilities (learning disabilities) are particularly vulnerable. We recommended that DFID should increase its programming on (i) tackling stigma and discrimination, including within the private sector, and (ii) inclusion of people with psychosocial disabilities and people with intellectual disabilities, noting that these are two different groups facing different sets of challenges.

Although DFID only partially accepted this recommendation, the new Disability Inclusion Strategy includes stigma and discrimination as one of three cross-cutting areas “which will be consistently and systematically addressed in all of our work”. It requires all business units by 2023 to be “supporting full participation and leadership of people with disabilities; transforming harmful stereotypes and behaviours; and ensuring policies, structures and resources [are] in place to counter discrimination”.⁴

DFID’s rationale for only partially accepting the recommendation was that it needed to understand the issues better before designing interventions. Apart from two innovative new programmes that pilot methods of tackling stigma and discrimination, DFID’s efforts at the moment remain at the level of aspirations. We think this is unduly cautious because evidence of what works already exists, as pointed out in the ICAI report, on how to influence behavioural change.

On psychosocial disabilities, DFID has made important improvements. Beyond including these in the new Strategy, there has been a considerable amount of activity, pushed along by the appointment of a staff member dedicated to this issue. In contrast, little has changed on the issue of intellectual disabilities – highlighting the importance of dedicated, expert staff to promote DFID’s ambitious Disability Inclusion Strategy.

Create a systematic learning programme and community of practice on the experience of mainstreaming disability into DFID programmes

There is a lack of experience among DFID staff on disability inclusion, but a strong demand for knowledge about what works to achieve it. Building on the proposals for the new Disability Inclusive Development programme, with its helpdesk, we recommended that DFID should create a systematic learning programme, and a community of practice, on the experience of mainstreaming disability into its programmes. DFID accepted this recommendation and has embarked on a range of innovations. It is creating a community of internal champions on disability inclusion and designing a *learning journey* on the topic with five monthly sessions planned for about 30 participants. The helpdesk is now generally available for all business units.

These are welcome moves but are unlikely to be sufficient to ensure that all business units meet the minimum standards by the end of 2019.

3. DFID’s Strategy for Disability Inclusive Development 2018-23, December 2018, p. 8, [link](#).

4. DFID’s Strategy for Disability Inclusive Development 2018-23, December 2018, p. 11 and 18, [link](#).

Conclusion

The Disability Inclusion Strategy is a major step forward and incorporates policies that address most of the issues raised in the ICAI review. The minimum standards for all business units are specific and ambitious. Achieving them within the required deadline is likely to require more resources than currently available to departments – in particular, staff with relevant experience and skills. The new community of practice will need to ensure that information on challenges and successes is actively shared. The ambitious deadline for meeting the minimum standards approaches fast. However, it is more important to maintain the current sense of strong forward progress than it is to hit the exact deadline for all departments.

Summary of findings

Subject of recommendation	Recent developments	ICAI's assessment of progress
<p>Adopt a more visible, systematic and detailed plan for mainstreaming disability inclusion.</p> <p>Government response: Accepted</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> DFID has published a comprehensive Disability Inclusion Strategy, with specific and ambitious standards for all business units. Guidance has been provided by the disability team. The standards cover programming, human resourcing, learning, and organisational culture. All business units are required to achieve the standards by the end of 2019. A new Disability Inclusion Delivery Board will meet quarterly to monitor progress and DFID will publish an annual assessment of progress against the standards. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Disability Inclusion Strategy is a step change compared to the 2015 non-directive Disability Framework and the one-page 2017 disability action plan. It is too early to know how well the strategy will be implemented, but early signs show strong engagement and commitment. The strategy's timeline is very ambitious. The lack of sufficient human and financial resources will make it extremely difficult to meet.
<p>Increase the representation of staff with disabilities and increase the number of staff with expertise on disability inclusion.</p> <p>Government response: Accepted</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Disability Inclusion Strategy includes targets for increasing the proportion of UK-recruited staff with disabilities (currently at 8.7%) to match that of the UK average for the working age population (18%). The strategy states that DFID "will equip DFID staff with the skills, tools and knowledge to better integrate disability inclusion into all of our policies and programmes". 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The target for UK-recruited staff is appropriate, but stronger efforts should also be made to increase the number of locally recruited staff with disabilities in DFID country offices overseas (currently only at 2%). Additional expertise is urgently required to help all business units meet the minimum standards by the end of 2019.
<p>Country offices should develop theories of change for disability inclusion and working with national governments.</p> <p>Government response: Partially accepted</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> DFID argued against making country-level theories of change mandatory. Instead it has developed a general theory of change for disability inclusion which it encourages country offices to use to develop their mandatory disability action plans. The 'inclusion module' of the Country Development Diagnostics (CDD) asks country offices to consider the situation for people with disabilities in social, political and economic spheres. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Country-level action plans without country-specific theories of change can lead to plans being based on general assumptions instead of local knowledge on context-specific needs and opportunities. The CDD's inclusion module is likely to help improve the quality of country-level analysis by ensuring that the situation for people with disabilities is comprehensively considered.
<p>Engage more with disabled people's organisations.</p> <p>Government response: Accepted</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Disability Inclusion Strategy reaffirmed a fundamental principle that people with disabilities are "engaged, consulted, represented and listened to at all levels of decision-making ... and empowered as powerful and active agents of change to challenge discrimination and harmful norms and to hold governments and implementers to account". The Strategy commits to sufficient investments in disabled people's organisations to promote their meaningful engagement and stipulates that business units must consult (at least) annually with disabled people's organisations on programmes, policy and strategy in a way that builds capacity and involves groups that are sometimes excluded, such as people with psychosocial or intellectual disabilities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There has been a strongly positive response to this recommendation. It is too early to assess implementation, but we note that DFID ensured substantial involvement by people with disabilities in the July 2018 Global Disability Summit and that disabled people's organisations have been brought into the governance structures of two new research programmes on disability inclusion. Practical issues remain to be tackled, such as the accessibility of DFID offices and onerous contracting requirements, which disabled people's organisations are often unable to meet due to their limited finances and capacity. While country offices have improved their engagement with disabled people's organisations, they have generally not been consulted in the business planning process.

<p>Tackle stigma and discrimination.</p> <p>Government response: Partially accepted</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Disability Inclusion Strategy includes stigma and discrimination as a cross-cutting area to be consistently and systematically addressed. • The Strategy requires all business units by 2023 to be “supporting full participation and leadership of people with disabilities; transforming harmful stereotypes and behaviours; and ensuring policies, structures and resources are in place to counter discrimination”. • There has been considerable activity - particularly on learning and influencing - on psychosocial disabilities, with a staff member dedicated to this issue. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DFID’s rationale for only partially accepting the recommendation was that it needed to understand the issues better before designing interventions. We think this is unduly cautious, as evidence of what works already exists on how to influence behavioural change. • The improvements in the area of psychosocial disabilities highlight the importance of having dedicated, expert staff to promote DFID’s ambitious Disability Inclusion Strategy. In contrast, little has changed on the issue of intellectual disabilities, which has not benefited from similar human resources.
<p>Create a systematic learning programme and community of practice on the experience of mainstreaming disability into DFID programmes.</p> <p>Government response: Accepted</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DFID is creating a community of internal champions on disability inclusion and designing a <i>learning journey</i> on the topic with five monthly sessions planned for about 30 participants. • The Disability Inclusive Development helpdesk is now generally available to assist all business units. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • These are welcome moves, but probably not sufficient to ensure that all business units meet the minimum standards by the end of 2019.



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