



**Disability Federation of Ireland**

**Submission to the Review of the White Paper on  
Irish Aid**

**25<sup>th</sup> April 2012**

## **Introduction**

The Disability Federation of Ireland (DFI) represents the interests and the expectations of people with disabilities to be fully included in Irish society. It is an umbrella body, comprising organisations that represent and support people with disabilities and disabling conditions. There are over 126 organisations who are members of DFI, or who are associates of DFI. DFI also works with a growing number of organisations and groups around the country that have a significant disability interest, from both the statutory and voluntary sectors. DFI operates on the basis that disability is a societal issue and so works with Government, and across the social and economic strands and interests of society, to enable people with disabilities to exercise their full civil, economic, social and human rights.

One of the objectives of DFI under its Strategic Plan 2011-2016, is to develop and consolidate international links and to participate in international networks so as to transfer good practice and good policies from other countries to Ireland and vice versa. In this regard, DFI's work has included supporting efforts to progress Ireland's ratification of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD), actively working at a EU level through its membership of the European Association of Service Providers for Persons with Disabilities (EASPD), as well as contributing to the Universal Periodic Review mechanism of the UN Human Rights Council along with other organisations working in support of human rights.

DFI supports the full inclusion of people with disabilities in Ireland's overseas development assistance programme and in this regard endorses the key points identified by other groups representing the development and disability agenda including the Disability Inclusion Taskforce, an independent body convened by the Dochas Disability and International Development Working Group (DDIGWG), as well as the Centre for Disability and Law in NUIG. DFI advocates for the right of people with disabilities to be included and to participate at local, national, regional, and international levels and has particular expertise and learning drawn from its member organisations and from its local and national policy development work which can assist the policy direction of Ireland's overseas development assistance programme over the coming years.

DFI believes that disability is an evolving concept and that disability results from the interaction between persons with impairments and attitudinal and environmental barriers that hinders their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others. It supports the full inclusion and participation of people with disabilities in mainstream services and where appropriate, the development of specialist services for people with disabilities to support that participation.

In many different cultures throughout the world stigma and discrimination have contributed to people with disabilities being denied basic human rights and to

barriers in access to and participation in basic services. The World Report on Disability (2011) estimates that more than a billion people worldwide have some form of impairment, representing about 15 per cent of the global population. Mary Robinson in her launch speech for the opening of the Centre for Law and Disability, NUIG noted that people with disabilities worldwide are now recognised as the world's largest minority and the vast majority of them live in dire circumstances in developing countries (over 4 out of 5 people with disabilities lives in a developing country).

Development indicators demonstrate lower health and socio-economic outcomes for people with disabilities compared to their non-disabled counterparts, as well as much lower rates of participation in education and employment contributing to their increased likelihood to be living in poverty. Supporting people with disabilities will help to reduce poverty and contribute to the Millennium Development Goals, designed to improve the well-being and quality of life of the poorest people by 2015. It is generally understood now that unless disability is included in global poverty reduction efforts, targets for poverty reduction such as the Millennium Development Goals will not be achieved<sup>1</sup>. A number of countries have developed effective strategies for inclusion of people with disabilities in their overseas development assistance, and models of good practice exist from Australia, the United States, and Sweden. It is incumbent on the Irish government and Irish Aid during this review process of the White Paper, to give a more detailed consideration to disability and development in its development programme.

## **Progress Made**

*Has the government been successful in implementing the commitments contained in the White Paper on Irish Aid?*

DFI notes that the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade through its Development Cooperation Division has responsibility in relation to the inclusive provision of services for people with disabilities and disabling conditions in its overseas development programme. DFI recognises also that Irish Aid has made good efforts in the past to support disability projects.

The 2005 White Paper on Irish Aid (2006)<sup>2</sup> makes a commitment to:

*'examine the possibilities for increased activity in the area of disability and development, such as support for specific programmes to address the needs of disabled people'* (White Paper on Irish Aid, p31)

Progress on this commitment is referred to in the Consultation paper for the review of the White Paper on Irish Aid (2011)<sup>3</sup> highlighting that issues around disability are

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<sup>1</sup> The Time is Now, Ensuring Development for All: Disability and the Millennium Development Goals, Dochas September 2010

<sup>2</sup> Irish Aid, White Paper

<sup>3</sup> Irish Aid (2011) Consultation paper for the review of the White Paper on Irish Aid. Available at: <http://www.irishaid.ie/whitepaper>

systematically considered in the design of Irish Aid development programmes and addressed in a multidimensional way. Specifically access by disabled people in developing countries is emphasised in relation to basic education and social protection measures components of ODA. The Consultation paper also notes that people with disabilities benefit from the mainstream programmes in health and human rights provided by Irish development NGOs and supported through ODA and that more than €6.5 million has been provided since 2008 specifically to NGOs working with people with disabilities.

The Disability Inclusion Taskforce submission recognises the strengths of Ireland's ODA and its interest in disability issues, which they note are well founded but which are based largely on a piecemeal approach which does not achieve the maximum for the ODA inputs in this area. This fact lends credence to the argument for adopting disability as one of Irish Aid's cross-cutting issues, along with Gender, Environment, HIV and AIDS, and Governance. Doing this would more effectively work towards full inclusion and participation of people with disabilities in mainstream programmes and where appropriate, the development of specialist programmes and services for people with disabilities (such as rehabilitation, support services, or training) to support that participation.

DFI endorses the Disability Inclusion Taskforce's submission in relation to the following points:

- 'systematic consideration' may be given in the design of Irish Aid's programmes, but this is not supported by clear policy or guidance
- Work aimed at mainstreaming disability inclusion across Irish Aid's development programmes remains under-developed
- There is no systematic evaluation of the impact of outcomes of Irish Aid funded initiatives as they affect people with disabilities
- There is no requirement for governmental or non-governmental organisations funded by Irish Aid, whether based in Ireland or abroad, to demonstrate practical commitment to accessibility of information, infrastructure, systems, participation, or the inclusion of disabled people in projects or programmes
- Small resource allocation is targeted to inclusion of people with disabilities, only an estimated 0.25% of ODA, appears to be targeted to the needs of a group which makes up at least 15%<sup>4</sup> of the population of the Irish Aid programme
- There appears to be little dissemination of good practice in disability inclusion in development assistance or humanitarian aid, or of building disability-related capacity in mainstream development agencies

In terms of progress on the White Paper commitment to disability and development, the Consultation paper notes that there has been an emphasis on access by

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<sup>4</sup> World Report on Disability, Chapter 2; Disability, the global picture

disabled people and other marginalised groups within support to basic education and social protection measures. Given the history of exclusion and disadvantage people with disabilities have experienced in developing countries, there is a strong rationale for strengthening the policy commitment to supporting people with disabilities and the development of a formalised strategy for their inclusion in Irish Aid's development programme.

The Consultation paper also notes that people with disabilities benefit from mainstream programmes in health and human rights delivered by Irish development NGOs. Again DFI considers that there needs to be more coherent policy direction coming from Irish Aid guiding Irish development NGOs on mainstreaming principles and practice.

In addition, DFI would like to see in Irish Aid's reporting on progress stronger information on outcomes and what has been achieved in relation to the inclusion of people with disabilities in its programmes.

## **Changing Contexts**

*What are the implications of the changes in the global and domestic context for the Government's aid programme in the future and how will these affect current priorities?*

## **International Context**

Broad and significant changes have been made since the publication of the 2005 White Paper on Irish Aid at an international level on disability rights and inclusive development. This progress included:

*The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD)*

The CRPD is widely recognised as the international framework for full inclusion and participation of people with disability in all aspects of life, and is considered to be the best standard for international work and cooperation in relation to disability. The CRPD has been ratified by over 105 countries with Ireland's forthcoming ratification as soon as the necessary legislative measures are in place and expected to be within the lifetime of Ireland's revised White Paper on Development Aid<sup>5</sup>. Once this occurs, Ireland will be bound to implement Article 32 which sets down a range of measures to be undertaken by States Parties. In essence, it requires that international development programmes should be inclusive of, and accessible to persons with disabilities. This has practical resource implications particularly in terms of making programmes accessible to all people with disabilities, including consideration of resources for assistive technologies. In practical terms, following Ireland's ratification, Irish Aid, will need to demonstrate the following (as identified by the Disability Inclusion Taskforce):

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<sup>5</sup> Disability Inclusion Taskforce (2012) Submission to review of White Paper on ODA

- The steps taken to ensure inclusion and accessibility
- Measures taken to ensure that all donor funds are used to reach people with disabilities
- Provision of evidence of disability mainstreaming
- Provision of details of projects and programmes specifically targeting people with disabilities
- Evidence of the mechanisms Irish Aid use to ensure that people with disabilities and their representative organisations are involved in the design, development and evaluation of programmes and projects

Other provisions of Article 32 refer to facilitating and supporting capacity building, including through the exchange and sharing of information, cooperation in research and access to scientific and technical knowledge, and providing technical and economic assistance.

DFI would like to reiterate the principles set down in the preamble to the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities recognising:

- that disability is an evolving concept and that disability results from the interaction between persons with impairments and attitudinal and environmental barriers that hinders their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others,
- the importance of mainstreaming disability issues as an integral part of relevant strategies for sustainable development
- the importance of international cooperation for improving the living conditions of persons with disabilities in every country, particularly in developing countries,
- the fact that the majority of persons with disabilities live in conditions of poverty, and in this regard recognises the critical need to address the negative impact of poverty on persons with disabilities,
- that discrimination against any person on the basis of disability is a violation of the inherent dignity and worth of the human person
- the valued existing and potential contributions made by persons with disabilities to the overall well-being and diversity of their communities, and that the promotion of the full enjoyment by persons with disabilities of their human rights and fundamental freedoms and of full participation by persons with disabilities will result in their enhanced sense of belonging and in significant advances in the human, social and economic development of society and the eradication of poverty

The values and principles that underpin the UN Convention including non-discrimination, individual autonomy, dignity, full and active participation and inclusion, respect for difference, equality of opportunity, accessibility, social solidarity, equality between men and women and respect for the evolving capacities of children with disabilities represent the move away from a welfare approach to one that promotes equal rights.

### *Improved Information*

New and more accurate information about the prevalence and disabling effects of impairment has become available, and in particular, as identified by the Disability Inclusion Taskforce, the World Report on Disability, published by the WHO and the World Bank, providing information on the prevalence of impairment and disability throughout the world, and the ways in which people with disabilities are affected by disabling barriers.

### **National Context**

The Consultation paper notes the changing context in Ireland in terms of available financial and human resources, and that a greater focus is needed on key priorities, and accountability and measurable results.

### **The National Disability Strategy**

The National Disability Strategy (NDS) has developed since the White Paper, in terms of its person-centred focus, and its planned and coordinated approach across all government departments in support of the inclusion of persons with disabilities in Irish society. Key components of the Strategy include Equality legislation, which outlaws discrimination against people with disabilities, among others, and the Disability Act 2005, which gives legal effect to the principle that mainstream public services should serve people with disabilities alongside other citizens ('mainstreaming'). The NDS approach and the principles underpinning the Strategy represent significant policy progress in this country, which will support Ireland's ratification of the UNCRPD, and which can guide Irish Aid in support of its disability and development agenda, for example, the recent adoption of disability proofing of substantive memoranda for submission to the Government underlines the NDS focus on inclusion across public programmes<sup>6</sup>.

### **Key Issues/Challenges**

*How should the government respond to the key issues of hunger, climate change, fragility, basic needs, governance and human rights, and gender equality? Are there other issues?*

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<sup>6</sup> Department of Justice and Equality (2012) How to Conduct a Disability Impact Assessment. Guidelines for Government Departments. Available at <http://www.justice.ie>

*Given the limited resources, and the need to focus these, which issues should the government prioritise in its future aid programming?*

DFI consider that a disability perspective needs to be built in to all elements of Irish Aid's development programme so that the poverty and exclusion experienced by people with disabilities can be tackled in a systematic way.

People with disabilities are more likely to be living in poverty and face additional challenges in accessing education and employment supports. Key challenges identified by Irish Aid in their aid programme of hunger, climate change, fragility, basic needs, governance and human rights, and gender equality impact to a greater extent on people with disabilities than their non-disabled counterparts, in countries where the attitudinal, environmental and structural barriers to inclusion have not been adequately addressed.

There is a two way relationship between disability and poverty, disability may increase the risk of poverty, and poverty may increase the risk of disability. The onset of disability leads to deterioration in a person's quality of life and in their social and economic situation in many ways, including the impact on education, employment, earnings, and increased expenditures relating to disability. There is a growing body of empirical evidence across the world demonstrating that across all of the development indicators, people with disabilities and their families are more likely to experience social and economic disadvantage than their non-disabled counterparts.

Disability and impairment are expected to increase over the coming decades as a result of population growth, ageing, lifestyle diseases (such as diabetes), conflict, malnutrition, traffic accidents, injuries, HIV, and medical advances that preserve and prolong life. Disability is now recognised as part of the natural life course, and that it is part of the human condition<sup>7</sup>.

It is important also to highlight that people with disabilities like all people are diverse, and therefore, their needs are diverse, and individual. People have different experiences based on gender, class, type of disability, onset of disability, ethnicity, and their geographical location. Equally, some types of disability are more visible than others, with stigma and shame attaching more to some than to others. These issues have implications in terms of people's access to and participation in services.

As noted by the Disability Inclusion Taskforce, these issues amongst others, point to the importance of seeing disability as a cross-cutting issue, and not as an example of a particular vulnerability. A key message conveyed by DFI is that disability is a societal issue, and not a narrow minority issue.

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<sup>7</sup> The World Report on Disability highlights the intersectionality of ageing and disability situating disability as part of the human condition



It is also crucial to reiterate the importance of removing barriers to inclusion and participation by people with disabilities. There are many good practice initiatives in the development context, e.g. Community Based Rehabilitation (CBR) as a strategy for community based development involving people with disabilities. However, until there is systematic removal of barriers combined with social development and the movement away from the medical/charity model, exclusion will continue.

It is interesting to note that there is little mention of disability in the Consultation Paper in this section on key issues/challenges, apart from reference to the challenges involved in the full implementation of the UN CRPD. Elsewhere in the document, disability is referred to in Annex A, as discussed under the Progress heading.

The challenges therefore are great, but examples globally have shown that the situation for people in low-income countries can be improved. However to do this, disability needs to be a priority, successful initiatives need to be developed further, and a more coherent response is required.

### **Ways of Working**

*How can the government further strengthen its ways of working in delivering an effective aid programme, with a view to delivering real results in poverty reduction?*

It has been stated elsewhere that it is inconceivable to achieve the Millennium Development Goals of halving poverty, dealing with education for all, halving the rates of child and birth mortality by 2015 without providing for the full inclusion of people with disabilities.

Firstly, DFI supports the key points made by the Disability Inclusion Taskforce namely:

- The adoption of disability as a cross-cutting issue
- The implementation of the 'twin-track approach' (mainstreaming of disability issues in ODA, as well as continuing support for disability specific action)
- Ensuring that mainstream development activity and humanitarian assistance do not create intentional or unintentional barriers to equality of participation by people with disabilities

Secondly, DFI recognises that national governments need to lead efforts to ensure the inclusion of persons with disabilities. NGOs and Disabled People's Organisations play an important role, but what is needed is an all government approach that addresses the needs of all people with disabilities. Systems need to be developed that support the implementation of the CRPD obligations, including relating to education, employment, and social protection. The overall goal therefore, should be

to support national governments in their development of disability inclusive policy and systems.

Thirdly, Irish Aid should direct its attention towards its nine programme countries (building on established work already in these countries), for the purposes of increasing disability specific supports, as well as measures to ensure improved ways of mainstreaming disability issues into wider international development programmes funded by Irish Aid. In this regard, all of Irish Aid's programme countries have already ratified the CRPD.

DFI has identified key principles to guide Irish Aid's work. These principles are based on the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, as well as drawn from the guiding principles outlined in DFI's Strategic Plan 2011-2016, which are based on the outcomes of a national consultation process with our members and on our experiences of working on inclusion for people with disabilities in Irish society over the past 20 years.

- The central principle is to respect and value the contribution and perspectives of people with disability. People with disability should be consulted as well as play an active role in Irish Aid's development programme, including in the design and delivery stages of programmes, as well as in monitoring and evaluation of performance. Disabled People's Organisations are a vehicle for people with disabilities to contribute to policy and practice development, and therefore are a mechanism for including the voice of people with disabilities.
- Secondly, DFI supports the full inclusion and participation of people with disabilities in mainstream services, and where appropriate, the development of specialist services for people with disabilities to support that participation. The policy of mainstreaming requires that services and supports for people with disabilities are provided in the same way that services and supports for other members of society are provided, that is, in the mainstream. Mainstreaming needs to occur at programme, and organisational levels, ensuring that policies and practices are disability proofed and that procedures and ways of working are non-discriminatory, inclusive and equitable.
- Other guiding principles underpinning our work include promoting the rights and respecting the diversity of people with disability, taking gender into account, adopting a life cycle approach (promotes a coordinated response to the needs of people with disability), and promoting integrated and partnership ways of working.
- While DIF consider that the majority of Irish Aid's disability focus should be on improving the quality of lives of people with disabilities, resources should also be targeted to working on the factors that cause disability and disabling conditions in order to reduce and lessen the effects of such conditions, i.e.,

reducing preventable conditions, e.g. vitamins and minerals to reduce and prevent vision impairment

- Building the capacity of people with disability and their organisations (as set down in Article 32 of the UNCRPD) is a key principle of DFI's approach, so as to build and strengthen leadership in disability and development

The overall goals of Irish Aid's programme should be to support people with disability to improve the quality of their lives by better access to the same opportunities for participation, contribution, decision-making, and social and economic well-being as others.

This can be achieved by supporting national governments' efforts towards disability-inclusive development, assisting Disabled People's Organisations to strengthen their capacity to become effective advocates in inclusive development, building on existing work in the basic education and social protection sectors of Irish Aid's programme as well as development of a mainstreaming model. Consideration should be given to developing a strategy document to articulate Irish Aid's disability and development approach.

Dochas has recommended that Government strengthen its commitment to an all-government approach to development policy, which can provide coherence across overlapping policy areas in relevant government departments<sup>8</sup>. DFI concurs with this view and considers that Irish Aid's development programme in relation to the inclusion of people with disabilities should be aligned with the government's national agenda on social inclusion and inclusion of people with disabilities.

A number of key policy action measures have been initiated as well as built upon in Ireland since 2006. These contain elements of good practice, components of which can be used to inform policy improvement in development activity and humanitarian assistance, in furtherance of the goal of inclusion of people with disabilities. Through the National Disability Strategy, disability has been prioritised in government policy with commitments to ensuring that people can participate to the fullest extent possible in all aspects of life in Ireland.

The life cycle framework as discussed in *Towards 2016*<sup>9</sup>, identifies key life cycle stages {Children, People of Working Age, Older People, and People with Disabilities (who in accordance with the policy of mainstreaming will benefit from measures at all stages of the life cycle)} within which to address social challenges by assessing the risks an individual faces at each stage of the life cycle. The lifecycle approach offers the potential of a more streamlined, outcomes-focused approach to monitoring and reporting on progress.

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<sup>8</sup> Dochas (2011) Submission to the Review of the White Paper on Irish Aid. Mobilising for Transformation: Ireland's role in ending extreme poverty

<sup>9</sup> Department of the Taoiseach (2006) *Towards 2016. Ten-Year Framework Social Partnership Agreement 2006 – 2015*. Dublin: Stationery Office

In conclusion, DFI recommends that Irish Aid:

- establishes a Disability Advisory Group within its Development Cooperation Division
- reviews its policies and practices and in particular, its mainstream programmes for compatibility with CRPD obligations, and in particular, Article 32
- develops a disability-inclusive Irish Aid programme strategy document which is focused on rights and which is based on a consultation process with relevant stakeholders
- ensures that progress in terms of outcomes for people with disabilities is systematically monitored and evaluated
- targets and strengthens its funding to Disabled People's Organisations (DPOs) in developing countries
- supports increased collaboration between the Irish Disability community and DPOs in developing countries
- ensures infrastructure programmes supported through Irish Aid reduce barriers (e.g. transportation systems, the building of schools, and other public buildings)
- undertakes quantitative and qualitative research on disability, poverty, and development with a particular focus on the lived experiences of people with disabilities
- develops scholarship programmes for people with disabilities in developing countries
- incorporates a disability focus within its volunteering programmes
- draws on the learning from other countries' good practice in this area e.g. Australia and the United States
- explicitly monitors the 'disability impact' of its interventions



**Representing the interests and expectations of people with disabilities to be fully included  
Comprising organisations that represent and support people with disabilities**

The Disability Federation of Ireland (DFI) represents the interests and the expectations of people with disabilities to be fully included in Irish society. It comprises organisations that represent and support people with disabilities and disabling conditions.

The vision of DFI is that Irish society is fully inclusive of people with disabilities and disabling conditions so that they can exercise their full civil, economic, social and human rights and that they are enabled to reach their full potential in life. DFI's mission is to act as an advocate for the full and equal inclusion of people with disabilities and disabling conditions in all aspects of their lives.

There are over 130 organisations within membership, or as associates, of DFI. DFI also works with a growing number of organisations and groups around the country that have a significant disability interest, mainly from the statutory and voluntary sectors. DFI provides:

- Information
- Training and Support
- Networking
- Advocacy and Representation
- Research and Policy Development / Implementation
- Organisation and Management Development

DFI works on the basis that disability is a societal issue and so works with Government, and across the social and economic strands and interests of society.

For further information go to [www.disability-federation.ie](http://www.disability-federation.ie)

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