



**Submission to the Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade - Foreign Affairs and Aid Sub-Committee:**

***Inquiry into strengthening Australia's relationships with countries in the Pacific region***

**April 2020**

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***Please note that the recommendations have been drafted in such a way that they apply to all aspects of the Australian government's engagement in the Pacific – and can equally be applied to COVID-19 response and recovery programming.***

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## Summary of Recommendations

### Building on Australia's leadership in the Pacific and beyond

1. Building on Australia's Pacific and global leadership in disability-inclusive development by:
  - a) establishing disability inclusion as a crosscutting stream throughout *Pacific Step-up* investments and programs;
  - b) ensuring disability inclusion technical expertise lies with staff who have sufficient responsibility and authority to meaningfully influence and direct program and policy work; and
  - c) applying disability inclusion standards to procurement, loans and contracts related to *Pacific Step-up*.
2. Embedding disability-inclusive mechanisms across the performance frameworks applied for all Pacific Step-up investments including:
  - a) an ambitious and time-bound target for a percentage of investments to be rated 'satisfactory' against disability inclusion across the Step-up program, and specific disability inclusion targets for each of the Step-up objectives; and
  - b) supporting planning, monitoring and evaluation of the proposed disability inclusion crosscutting stream by applying CRPD-compliant criteria related to disability, including requirements for all data to be disaggregated by disability.
3. Utilising the Australian government's leadership in the Pacific by mobilising resources and influencing other donors to contribute resources in support of people with disabilities, in cooperation with the Pacific Islands Forum (PIFS) and with regional civil society representative bodies.

### Strengthening civil society engagement in the *Pacific Step-up*

4. Increasing Australian government investment in Australian civil society organisations that work alongside Pacific civil society organisations.
5. Ensuring robust mechanisms for civil society representation within its governance and accountability structures, including women and men with disabilities and their representative bodies.

### Ensuring Step-up initiatives reflect the priority needs of particularly marginalised Pacific Islanders and their governments

6. Ensuring the Australian Government's Office of the Pacific coordinates effectively with the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat (PIFS), aligning the *Pacific Step-up* with PIFS' Social Inclusion Policy and the Pacific Framework on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.
7. Progressing implementation of the *Pacific Framework on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities*, by strengthening partner government commitment and investment in disability inclusion policy and practice in throughout development and humanitarian sectors in line with the Convention on the Rights of Persons' with Disabilities.
8. Aligning infrastructure and workforce development investments through *Pacific Step-up* to address the need for investments that will provide Pacific Islander people with disabilities the specific supports and services they need to participate equally in their local communities and economies.

9. Increase investment in the core funding and strategic initiatives of organisations that represent people with disabilities.

## Introduction

The *Pacific Step-up*<sup>1</sup> recognises that Australia's future is deeply entwined with that of its Pacific neighbours. This can and should be understood as an intention by Australia to step up with our Pacific neighbours, respecting the capacities, strengths and priorities of Pacific Island nations. The *Pacific Step-up* should drive stability, prosperity and resilience in a way that aligns with and promotes:

- a) our national values and character;
- b) Australia's obligations under international human rights treaties to which we are party, including the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD)*; and
- c) the ambitious *2017 Foreign Policy White Paper*,<sup>2</sup> which notes:
  - i. 'Australia is committed to promoting the rights of people with disabilities';
  - ii. a 'focus on poverty reduction and promoting the participation in the economy and society of the most disadvantaged, including women and girls and people living with disabilities'; and
  - iii. the need to reduce inequality and contribute to sustainable change even in the midst of this era of rapid change and diverse priorities including global health risks, food security, climate change and extreme weather conditions.

Accordingly, as the largest donor in the Pacific<sup>3</sup> and as a recognised world leader in disability-inclusive development, Australia has an opportunity through the *Pacific Step-up* to work in partnership with Pacific Island Countries (PICs), particularly in support of Pacific Islanders who have been largely bypassed by development gains in the past. This should involve mobilising investment and cooperation from Australia's and PIC's own mainstream programs, other donor governments and multi-lateral agencies in support of people with disabilities throughout the Pacific.

## Strengthening whole-of-government efforts to deepen and coordinate Australia's Pacific initiatives

While Australian development assistance has been on the decline in recent years, Australia remains the single largest investor in the Pacific.<sup>4</sup> The *Pacific Step-up* provides an important opportunity to amplify Australia's influence and reputation as a Pacific neighbour and development investor. In undertaking this investment, it is important for the Australian government to capitalise on initiatives that have resulted in equitable outcomes for Pacific Islanders, contributed to more effective governance and amplified Australia's reputation globally.

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<sup>1</sup> DFAT (2019) *Pacific Step-up: Stepping Up Australia's Engagement with our Pacific Family* <https://www.dfat.gov.au/geo/pacific/Pages/the-pacific>

<sup>2</sup> DFAT (2017) *2017 Foreign Policy White Paper*, <https://www.dfat.gov.au/about-us/publications/Pages/2017-foreign-policy-white-paper> pp. 89 – 94.

<sup>3</sup> Lowly Institute, *Pacific Aid Map* <https://pacificaidmap.lowlyinstitute.org/>

<sup>4</sup> As above.

## Australia's leadership on disability-inclusive development

On the global and regional stage, Australia has been at the forefront of developing disability policy frameworks. This includes championing disability inclusion in humanitarian contexts, and supporting countries in the Pacific to strengthen their own systems in response to the needs and capacities of people with disabilities.

The introduction of *Development for All*, Australia's—and the world's—first strategy for disability-inclusive international development, has driven real achievements. These achievements were built upon in the subsequent *Development for All 2015 – 2020: Strategy for strengthening disability-inclusive development in Australia's aid program*, including:

- a) embedding disability inclusion as a crosscutting theme of Australia's aid program;<sup>5</sup>
- b) establishing disability-inclusive approaches to humanitarian response and disaster preparedness;<sup>6</sup> and
- c) facilitating high-level policy discussions through co-chairing the Global Action on Disability Network.<sup>7</sup>

The Australian Government's work championing disability-inclusive development in the past decade has been supported by key Australian government investments, which have returned significant results for minimal expense.<sup>8</sup> As Australia looks to strengthen its position within the Pacific through *Pacific Step-up*, it makes sense to leverage upon the strength and leadership of our disability-inclusive development work. Doing so will in turn cement Australia's leadership and deepen Australia's regional influence.

Despite these concerted efforts there is still much to be achieved. The *UN Flagship Report on Disability and Development*<sup>9</sup> released late in 2018, found that people with disabilities are still disadvantaged compared with those without disabilities. In the same year, the Pacific Disability Forum (PDF) released its *SDG-CRPD Monitoring Report*.<sup>10</sup> The report notes that progress has been made with the majority of Pacific Island countries ratifying the CRPD, greater awareness, data collection, and greater cooperation between Pacific Island government and the disability movement. However, the report also notes that there are:

- a) significant gaps exist within countries and between Pacific Island countries; and
- b) PICs do not have adequate disability support services.

Significant barriers persist to equal participation of people with disabilities, with women and men with disabilities being over-represented among the poor and have fewer

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<sup>5</sup> Office of Development Effectiveness (2018) *Development for All: Evaluation of progress made in strengthening disability inclusion in Australian aid* <https://www.dfat.gov.au/sites/default/files/development-for-all-evaluation.pdf> p. 2.

<sup>6</sup> Australian Government (2017) *Fact sheet: Australian Humanitarian Partnership* <https://www.dfat.gov.au/sites/default/files/ahp-factsheet.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> GLAD Network, *The Network*, see <https://gladnetwork.net/network>

<sup>8</sup> Office of Development Effectiveness (2017) *Unfinished business: Evaluation of Australian advocacy for disability-inclusive development*. <https://dfat.gov.au/aid/how-we-measure-performance/ode/strategievaluations/Pages/unfinished-business.aspx>

economic opportunities than non-disabled people, and children with disabilities are far less likely to be in school.<sup>11</sup>

Australia's achievements through the *Development for All* strategies provide a wealth of lessons and experiences to draw from to deepen and coordinate disability-inclusion initiatives across investments under *Pacific Step-up*. We recommend that **Australia builds upon its leadership in both the Pacific and disability inclusive development by establishing disability inclusion as a crosscutting stream throughout *Pacific Step-up* investments and programs.** In order for this to translate into significant change in practice, **disability inclusion technical expertise must lie with staff who have sufficient responsibility and authority to meaningfully influence and direct program and policy work.**

Mechanisms to ensure disability is addressed throughout investments in the Pacific would include **applying disability inclusion standards to procurement, loans and contracts related to *Pacific Step-up*.** There is also a need to **utilise the Australian government's leadership in the Pacific by mobilising resources and other donors to contribute resources in support of people with disabilities,** in cooperation with Pacific Islands Forum (PIFs) and with regional civil society representative bodies.

## Transparency and evidence

A *Pacific Step-up* performance framework should also be credible, transparent and highlight Australian impact and progress in line with international standards and norms. International statutes like overseas development assistance (ODA) and UN indicators are among the gold standard for creating sustainable, long-term change for the poorest and should be used as a benchmark for the *Pacific Step-up* and as key measures of transparency for development partnerships.

It is important to ensure that the *Pacific Step-up* performance framework is inclusive and designed to capture progress towards ensuring the underlying SDG aim to ensure 'No One Is Left Behind'. Evidence-based data on people with disabilities is instrumental in supporting policymakers to address gaps and amend existing policies and regulations to address their needs. **This framework should include an ambitious and time-bound target for a percentage of investments to be rated 'satisfactory' against disability inclusion across the *Pacific Step-up* program, and included specific disability inclusion targets for each of the *Step-up* objectives.**

People with disabilities are among those furthest behind and, accordingly, the SDGs and their indicators clearly state that disaggregated data is needed to monitor advancement in the implementation of the goals. The *SDGs Report 2017* states: 'a lack of rigorous evidence and comprehensive data has long compromised the ability of governments and the international community to accurately document the discrimination faced by various groups. As a result, planning and budgeting for necessary services along with effective policymaking have suffered. Persons with disabilities, for example, have largely fallen off the statistical "map".'<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Pacific Disability Forum (2018) *SDG CRPD Monitoring Report*

[http://www.pacificdisability.org/getattachment/Resources/Research/PACIFIC-DISABILITY-FORUM\\_SDG\\_REPORT-2019.pdf.aspx](http://www.pacificdisability.org/getattachment/Resources/Research/PACIFIC-DISABILITY-FORUM_SDG_REPORT-2019.pdf.aspx)

<sup>12</sup> United Nations (2017) *The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2017*

<https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/files/report/2017/thesustainabledevelopmentgoalsreport2017.pdf>

The *Pacific Step-up* can play a key role by ensuring disability inclusion is cross cutting across investments and that the technical and authoritative support is in place within the Pacific Office to build capacity and monitor progress in *Pacific Step-up* for disability inclusion and gender equity. Several key areas within the international development program currently lag on disability inclusion. These include agriculture, fisheries and water, infrastructure and aid for trade. In 2017-18 the percentage of investment rates of disability-inclusive in Australia's aid program Aid Quality Checks was 40 percent.<sup>13</sup> In the aforementioned key areas, the percentage was well below average at less than 30 per cent, and less than 20 per cent for infrastructure. A target to drive improved performance in disability inclusion in the *Pacific Step-up* is an important way to address economic prosperity and security in the Pacific. We therefore recommend **embedding disability-inclusive mechanisms across the performance frameworks applied for all *Pacific Step-up* investments including:**

- a. **an ambitious and time-bound target for a percentage of investments to be rated 'satisfactory' against disability inclusion across the Step-up program and specific disability inclusion targets for each of the Step-up objectives; and**
- b. **Supporting planning, monitoring and evaluation of the disability investments – including the proposed disability inclusion crosscutting stream - by applying CRPD-compliant criteria related to disability, including requirements for all data to be disaggregated by disability.**

## **Strengthening Australian civil society engagement in the *Pacific Step-up***

### **The unique advantages of civil society organisations in the Pacific**

The *Pacific Step-up* provides an opportunity to harness Australian solidarity, talent and development experience. Through partnership with Australian civil society organisations, *Pacific Step-up* has the opportunity to tap into the deep connections in communities amongst both Australia and in Pacific Island countries. The access and reach amongst communities is a unique advantage of civil society organisations as compared to government or multi-lateral organisations.

The advantages of CSO engagement are evidenced particularly in the effectiveness of Australian NGO development cooperation. The *2017 Foreign Policy White Paper*<sup>14</sup> recognises NGOs as vital partners in efforts to encourage greater stability in our region. Yet despite NGOs out performing multilateral organisations<sup>15</sup> and a commitment to NGOs and civil society within the *Foreign Policy White Paper*, Australian Government funding to and through civil society organisation has decreased. This goes against the general trend of an increase in OECD countries.<sup>16</sup>

The Australian NGO Cooperation Program (ANCP) has proven itself to be among the Australian aid program's most effective investments. It extends the reach of Australian

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<sup>13</sup> DFAT (2019) *Performance of Australian Aid 2017/18* <https://dfat.gov.au/about-us/publications/Pages/aid-program-performance-reports.aspx>

<sup>14</sup> DFAT (2017) as above.

<sup>15</sup> DFAT (2017) as above.

<sup>16</sup> OECD (2019) *Aid for Civil Society Organisations- Statistics based on DAC Members' reporting to the Creditor Reporting System database (CRS), 2016-2017* <http://www.oecd.org/dac/financing-sustainable-development/development-finance-topics/Aid-for-CSOs-2019.pdf>

aid to beneficiaries beyond the footprint of DFAT's bilateral aid and government investment programs and enables NGOs to deliver effective development activities from the grass roots through to the institutional and policy levels.<sup>17</sup> The on-going presence of Australian NGOs in the Pacific provides strong people-to-people linkages with high degrees of community level knowledge and response.

*Pacific Step-up* engagement with Australian civil society organisations involved in development in the Pacific can both amplify the engagement of the Australian public in the *Pacific Step-up* and contribute to the effectiveness of the investments.

As such, if the Australian Government is to strengthen civil society engagement through *Pacific Step-up*, we recommend that it **increases investment in inclusive Australian civil society organisations, such as ANCP partners, that work alongside Pacific civil society organisations**. The role for civil society organisations is not only as implementing partners, but also as representatives to provide voice of their communities into the planning, practice and monitoring of programs and policies that affect them. Disabled Peoples' Organisations have a powerful role to play in this regard. As such, **we recommend that the *Pacific Step-up* include robust mechanisms for civil society representation within its governance and accountability structures, including women and men with disabilities and their representative bodies**.

## **Ensuring *Step-up* initiatives reflect the priority needs of marginalised Pacific Islanders and their governments**

Australia's membership in the Pacific Island Forum, its partnership and investment in representative civil society groups such as the Pacific Disability Forum and the frameworks and priorities outlined by these government and representative organisations, provide fertile ground for ensuring the *Step-up* reflects Pacific Islander priorities. These priorities can be found in key documents such as the *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD)*<sup>18</sup>, *Agenda 2030* and this agenda's *Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)* and the *Pacific Framework for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2016-2025 (PFRPD)*.<sup>19</sup>

### **Civil Society**

The Australian Government's commitment to the Pacific provides significant opportunities to support much-needed disability inclusion outcomes and showcase civil society engagement while asserting continued leadership in the region. An estimated average of 17 per cent of people in the Pacific have a disability.<sup>20</sup> However, many live without access to necessary services that can provide linkages to existing Australian aid investments as to enable them to actually benefit from these and more broadly support full and equal inclusion in community life.

Pacific Islanders with disabilities are a diverse population; they are women and girls, LGBTI individuals, users of health and education services, farmers, small business

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<sup>17</sup> Office of Development Effectiveness, *Evaluation of the Australian NGO Cooperation Program*, <https://dfat.gov.au/aid/how-we-measure-performance/ode/other-work/Pages/evaluation-of-the-australian-ngo-cooperation-program.aspx>

<sup>18</sup> UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006) <https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/convention-on-the-rights-of-persons-with-disabilities.html>

<sup>19</sup> Pacific Islands Forums Secretariat (2016) *Framework for Rights of Persons with Disabilities*, <https://www.forumsec.org/framework-for-rights-of-persons-with-disability/>

<sup>20</sup> UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (2012) *Disability at a Glance 2012: Strengthening the Evidence Base in Asia and the Pacific* <https://www.unescap.org/publications/disability-glance-2012-strengthening-evidence-base-asia-and-pacific> p. 3.



owners, office workers and students. Yet people with disabilities are sorely under-represented in the labour workforce and in educational institutions. Barriers to participation and lack of specific supports and services such as assistive products, rehabilitation and community based inclusive development mean people with disabilities are not able to participate equally and robs Pacific Island countries of their contributions to social, economic and political life.

Australia and its Pacific Island neighbours are committed to achieving the SDGs. The SDGs are wide-reaching and inclusive; calling for outcomes to be achieved for 'all people, everywhere', with disability specifically referenced 11 times across five goals.<sup>21</sup>

Australia and the strong majority of its Pacific Island neighbours are also party to the CRPD<sup>22</sup> and as such the Australian and Pacific Island member governments have a duty to uphold the rights of people with disabilities. *Pacific Step-up* should be CRPD compliant ensuring the principles of the Convention and obligations regarding international cooperation (Article 32).

The Pacific Disability Forum (PDF) is the regional disabled people's organisation, with members across the Pacific including Australia and New Zealand and itself a member of the International Disability Alliance. Its landmark *SDG-CRPD monitoring report*<sup>23</sup> included a recognition of sustained Australian government support to disability inclusion in the Pacific as a contributing factor to the gains achieved. However, the report also identifies significant gaps and recommends, among other things, that collective efforts be made to ensure comprehensive accessibility standards, access to assistive devices, provision of support services, social protection measures and community based inclusive development. These investment areas are described in the report as preconditions to inclusion of people with disabilities. By investing in areas already identified as essential to people with disabilities in the Pacific, *Pacific Step-up* can make a profound difference in the lives of marginalized Pacific Islanders.

The need for increased investment in these areas is starkly evident in the fact that overall domestic resource allocation for the inclusion of persons with disabilities is still below 0.15% of the GDP for most Pacific Island countries.<sup>24</sup> This highlights a clear role for Australia's investments in the Pacific to build partner countries' capacities to address the above gaps in services and technologies for people with disabilities. We therefore recommend that **the Australian Government aligns its infrastructure and workforce development investments through *Pacific Step-up* to address the need for investments this will provide Pacific Islander people with disabilities the specific supports and services they need to participate equally in their local communities and economies.**

Civil society organisations like PDF play a vital role in the Pacific both regionally and through their national memberships. The network of churches, represented by the Pacific Conference of Churches (PCC), the Pacific Island Association of NGOs (PIANGO) and Pacific Women among others play a significant role in Pacific regionalism and their members are often key providers of services and information in their respective countries.

The Australian Government is well placed to work alongside and invest in indigenous

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<sup>21</sup> United Nations Enable, *Disability Inclusive Sustainable Development Goals*  
[http://www.un.org/disabilities/documents/sdgs/disability\\_inclusive\\_sdgs.pdf](http://www.un.org/disabilities/documents/sdgs/disability_inclusive_sdgs.pdf)

<sup>22</sup> UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006) <https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/convention-on-the-rights-of-persons-with-disabilities.html>

<sup>23</sup> Pacific Disability Forum (2018) as above.

<sup>24</sup> Pacific Disability Forum (2018) as above, p. 1.

Pacific organisations to build diverse and successful partnerships. The *Pacific Step-up* would do well to develop partnerships characterised by local leadership, trusted relationships and co-designed objectives that are inclusive and open to local adaptation, and **increase investment in core funding and strategic initiatives of organisations that represent Pacific Islander people with disabilities.** This should include civil society representation in *Pacific Step-up* governance structures.

## Government

Australia is a member of the Pacific Islands Forum. The regional cooperation between Pacific Island neighbours is an example for other regions and the *Pacific Step-up* can both benefit from and contribute to this cooperation. The Pacific Islands Forum envisions "...a region of peace, harmony, security, social inclusion and economic prosperity, so that all Pacific people can lead free, healthy and productive lives."<sup>25</sup>

Strengthening support to people with disabilities and disability inclusive development is a specific area of focus in the Pacific. This work is outlined in the PFRPD.<sup>26</sup> Pacific governments have committed to action tied to priority themes of the SDGs, including livelihoods, social policy, leadership, enabling environments, disaster risk management, and strengthening available evidence. However, there is a substantial role for the Australian Government to support implementation and show case innovative partnerships by developing a regional modality to better support national initiatives. As such it is important that the **Australian Government's Office of the Pacific coordinates effectively with the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat to align the *Pacific Step-up* with PIFS' Social Inclusion Policy and the PFRPD.** The Australian Government should also **progress implementation of the PFRPD by strengthening partner government commitment and investment in disability inclusion policy and practice throughout development and humanitarian sectors, in line with the Convention on the Rights of Persons' with Disabilities.**

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<sup>25</sup> Pacific Island Forum Secretariat (2017) *Strategic Framework 2017-2021* <https://www.forumsec.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/Forum-Secretariats-Strategic-Framework-2017-2021.pdf> pg. 2

<sup>26</sup>Pacific Islands Forums Secretariat (2016) *Framework for Rights of Persons with Disabilities*, <https://www.forumsec.org/framework-for-rights-of-persons-with-disability/>

## About CBM Australia

CBM Australia is a Christian international development agency, committed to improving the quality of life of people with disabilities in the poorest places in the world. In 2019, CBM Australia supported field projects in 11 countries and supported partners including governments, multilateral organisations, non-government organisations and DPOs in 18 countries.

CBM Australia is proud to have a partnership with the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) as part of the Australian NGO Cooperation Program (ANCP), and is a member of the Australian Council for International Development.

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## About Australian Disability and Development Consortium

The Australian Disability and Development Consortium (ADDC) is a network of over 600 members including [Australian development agencies, managing contractors, academic institutions and disabled people's organisations](#) acting as a collective voice calling for the inclusion of people with disabilities across the Australian international development sector.

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