

Disability Inclusion Helpdesk Report No: 85

Query title	Disability inclusive social protection programming: meaningful engagement with organisations of persons with disabilities (OPDs)
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Enquirer	FCDO Social Protection Team

This note provides guidance on good principles and practice for meaningful engagement of organisations of persons with disabilities (OPDs) within social protection programming and within policy influencing. This note should be read alongside FCDO's Engagement and Consultation with organisations of persons with disabilities PROF guide and 'How to' Guide for Disability Inclusion.

What are Organisations of Persons with Disabilities?

OPD's are organisations governed, led, and directed by persons with disabilities. They are membership organisations, with a clear majority of their membership drawn from persons with disabilities. Some OPDs may also include caregivers of children with disabilities as part of their leadership structure. While all OPDs advocate for disability rights, provide peer support and act as a watchdog for the rights of persons with disabilities, many also provide service delivery to their membership and technical guidance to organisations, including FCDO. A full definition can be found in FCDO's PROF guide signposted above.

The importance of OPD engagement

Meaningful engagement of OPDs is key to meet international commitments, including the UN CRPD which clearly establishes OPDs as intermediary bodies between policy makers and persons with disabilities.

It is also an important part of implementing the FCDO's Disability Inclusion and Rights Strategy which reflects the commitment to drawing on expertise provided by OPDs, whilst strengthening the capacity of OPDs to engage and advise on policy and programme design and monitoring. OPD capacity building, consultation and participation are identified as key 'enablers' for social inclusion. Consulting and working with civil society is also a key part of the FCDO's Programme Operating Framework and drive for localisation, referenced in the latest UK government's strategy for international development.

Involving OPDs in the design of policies and programmes contributes to better policy and programme outcomes by ensuring they reflect the rights and needs of people with disabilities and are effective (IDA and NORAD, 2022).

There are several key roles that OPDs can play (this list is not exhaustive):

- > Inclusive targeting and reviewing the accessibility of application procedures (including identifying barriers)

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- > Contribute to filling data gaps (FCDO, 2023)
- > Contribute towards making the process of cash transfers more accessible, for example carrying out audits of social protection delivery mechanisms, helping identify the most appropriate, safe and accessible payment mechanism to use.¹
- > Improving awareness and outreach. Often, persons with disabilities are not aware of existing programmes or how to access them, or they may believe that social protection programmes are not accessible to them.
- > Helping to monitor beneficiary experiences, and advising on how to establish accessible grievance and feedback mechanisms ([ILO, 2021](#); [Wapling and Meaney-Davis, 2020](#)).
- > OPDs can be involved in and lead research, such as on quantifying disability-related cost.
- > Persons with disabilities are a diverse population, including women, older people, LGBTIQ+ people, with knowledge and lived experience that enrich programming by contributing to creativity, new approaches and innovative solutions to challenges ([UNDESA, 2020](#)).

Not involving OPDs can lead to programme failure. For example a review of a cash grant programme established by the Ghanaian government for persons with disabilities in 2005 found that the lack of consultation with OPDs over the allocation of grants likely contributed to why the programme did not achieve its aims ([Peprah Opoku and Nketsia, 2021](#)).

How to meaningfully engage OPDs

“Meaningful consultation is about recognizing that engaging with persons with disabilities and their organizations is a two-way exchange, not just telling them what is being done. It means there is genuine interest in listening to OPDs, discussing their inputs and concerns, and being willing to act upon them. It is about building a dynamic relationship based on partnership and not considering consultation as a one-off event.” ([UN, 2021](#))

The CPRD sets a number of obligations to States to guarantee effective and meaningful participation of persons with disabilities through OPDs. These include transparency, accessibility, allocation of funds, and reflection of OPDs recommendations in final documents and communication of outcome of the process to OPDs.

Historically, many OPDs may have been reluctant to engage with social protection programmes as they perceived them as targeting persons categorised as ‘unable to work’ or ‘to take care of themselves’. OPDs have been concerned that these reinforce ableist attitudes that persons with disabilities cannot be active contributors to society and diverts attention away from considering how to make work more inclusive and accessible. The leadership of OPDs has until recently, often been unwilling to engage with systems that essentially seemed to reinforce dependency. It is important that staff are aware of this background (more information can be found in note one). The principle of Do No Harm and taking a rights-based approach is critical. At a minimum, ableist norms that presume persons with disabilities cannot work and cannot take care of themselves, and therefore need benefits, should not be reinforced. Design and messaging around disability responsive social protection programmes need to break stereotypes and be developed in ways that promote social and

¹ OPDs can be involved in improving safeguarding for those persons with disabilities, in particularly those with intellectual impairments, who can name someone else to collect their disability benefits, as this can lead to exploitation risks.

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economic participation not dependency.

For a full list of steps, checklists for in-person and online consultations, and guidance on engaging OPDs, please consult the FCDO's Engagement and Consultation with OPDs PrOF Guide. note. The note identifies four steps for meaningful consultation and provides guidance for each step.



Engaging with OPDs around social protection programming meaningfully requires ambition and awareness about the inherent complexities of the engagement. Key considerations and steps you can take when engaging with OPDS include:

Considerations prior to engagement

- > Ensure that staff engaging with OPDs are trained in disability rights and are confident at identifying ableist norms and challenging stigma.
- > Ensure that the approach is accessible, planning for reasonable accommodations and ensuring budget for consultations and workshops. Ensure a robust approach to ethics and safeguarding.²
- > Consider how OPDs will be appropriately compensated for their work. Be aware that the resources, capacities and time of OPDs might be limited.³ It is important not to be extractive.
- > Conduct a mapping of OPDs. While big and umbrella organisations have a central role to play, FCDO has the duty to consult with everyone, including women-led OPDs, persons with intellectual disabilities and persons with psychosocial disabilities as they are often not included (FCDO, 2023),⁴LGBTIQ+ and marginalised groups of persons with disabilities, in particular those in rural or remote areas (GIZ, 2022). It is also important to consult with people with disabilities who are not members of OPDs or where an OPD does not exist.
- > Be aware of the barriers OPDs may have to engaging in discussions on social protection, including policy consultation process. Persons with disabilities and OPDs are often primary target groups for social protection, but information on social protection is often not accessible, which is a barrier to taking part in policy discussions. The understanding of social protection also varies within and between OPDs and contexts. A thorough understanding of social protection systems should not be a prerequisite for participation; capacities can be built over time.
- > Plan for ongoing relationship building rather than a one-off consultation. Meaningful consultation is not to be used a 'tick box' exercise.

² The Resource and Support Hub produced guidance on safeguarding people with disabilities and mental health conditions in [programming](#) and the [workplace](#).

³ It is important to consider the request of time and input from OPDs as it will divert time from their advocacy work. However, while it builds relationships and engages with OPDs, FCDO can be a broker between OPDs and authorities, which will in lead improve bilateral relationships.

⁴ Results from a IDA Global Survey show that persons with psychosocial disabilities, persons with intellectual disabilities, persons with deafblindness, deaf persons, women with disabilities, and indigenous persons with disabilities are still largely left out of consultation and decision-making processes (IDA and NORAD, 2022).

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Considerations during consultation

- > Shift the conversation: FCDO should ask OPDs how social protection programmes can promote the inclusion of persons with disabilities in their diversity and across the life cycle, rather than what it can be done to not exclude them. OPDs (especially their leadership) might initially criticise what they might see as a charity-based activity. One highly successful way to start moving on from this view is to talk about disability-related costs. Questions such as “how much does a person living with a disability spend on their disability-related costs, compared to their neighbour who does not have a disability?” or “how much more difficult is it for a person with disability to find a job and earn a stable income?” generally help shift the conversation towards the role social protection has in equalising opportunities. For example, cash transfers can be viewed as an appropriate compensation for disability-related costs.⁵
- > Work with OPDs to gather data on social protection from a disability perspective. This should be used to improve programming and policy and contribute to the evidence base, including through presenting it at conferences on social protection.
- > Do not engage with OPDs only on disability targeted social protection. It is also important to engage with OPDs on mainstream social protection schemes, particularly in the formulation of national social protection strategies which set out the main policy directions for the social protection system and define the strategies and priorities that guide the development of schemes and programmes.
- > Influence bilateral and implementing partners, especially the World Bank,⁶ to consult OPDs as part of programme design and delivery, and include at least one key design feature stemming from consultations with OPDs. FCDO can broker dialogue between OPDs and partners, and authorities: if FCDO is consulting OPDs on a programme, partners can be brought to the table as well, for example the World Bank or NGOs, so it does not need to be repeated later. It is important to include persons with disabilities in research and policy teams and ensure that downstream partners have disability expertise.
- > Provide timely feedback on the discussion to OPDs and request their feedback.

Key questions for partners

It is essential that FCDO encourage downstream partners to engage with OPDs and persons with disabilities. These questions can support that process ([ILO and IDA, 2019](#); [GIZ, 2022](#)):

Programme level:

- > Are OPDs included in the design and implementation of the programme, including to identify strategies on those persons with disabilities that are particularly marginalised or hard to reach are reached?
- > Have you identified an OPD to support the implementation of specific activities such as disability awareness and monitoring and evaluation, including representatives from diverse

⁵ When designing a social protection programme, it is key to take into consideration those extra disability-related costs for the poverty threshold, but also that even if persons with disabilities may be able to work and earn an income, and participate in society, they incur in extra costs. Social protection programmes should aim to cover income security, extra disability costs, and healthcare (including assistive devices), and dialogue can also facilitate the inclusion of disability consideration in other sectors, for example education.

⁶ The World Bank committed in 2018 to make three quarters (75%) of their social protection projects disability inclusive by 2025 at the [London Global Disability Summit in 2018](#).

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gender identities?

- > Have you planned strategies to strengthen the capacities of persons with disabilities and OPDs?

System level:

- > Do national dialogue processes for formulating or revising national social protection strategies foresee consultations with OPDs, including those of women with disabilities?
- > Do national monitoring processes of social protection systems include OPDs?

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