

Executive Summary

Applying CRPD standards to programmatic processes: A look at inclusive programming in practice

A technical paper by the International Disability Alliance
(IDA)

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Applying CRPD standards to programmatic processes

This paper was developed by the International Disability Alliance (IDA) over the period December 2021 to May 2022 as part of the Inclusion Works program under the [Inclusive Futures consortium](#) umbrella. It looks at some of the challenges and solutions to inclusive programming in the context of IDA's experiences within Inclusion Works (IW) and draws recommendations and practical guidance from this to inform the growing discourse on CRPD-based inclusive programming.

This paper is informed by the journey of Inclusion Works and of OPDs (Organizations of Persons with Disabilities) progressively negotiating a more meaningful place at the decision-making table, and partners transforming their ways of working and the roles typically assigned to OPDs. It is complemented by learning and recommendations around meaningful OPD engagement that IDA and its allies engaged in during the past few years, in particular through the Global Action on Disability (GLAD) network and the [2nd Global Disability Summit 2022](#). It offers examples from within the IW program on meaningful engagement of persons with disabilities, including for those from underrepresented groups and what inclusive programming looks like in the context of the project cycle. The full paper can be read [here](#).

Inclusive Programming: A Process for Ensuring Meaningful OPD Engagement in Policies and Programs

This section of the paper offers an in-depth analysis on the right to participation by persons with disabilities and its evolution over time and what it means to ensure rights-based, disability-inclusive development through inclusive programming.

The adoption of the Convention on the rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) brought a paradigm shift with the understanding of disability evolving from one where disability was viewed from charity and medical models to social and human rights models. The CRPD recalls that the full and effective participation of persons with disabilities is central to the realization of their human rights and inclusion of all persons with disabilities in society. The CRPD echoes the motto "Nothing about us without us," and explicitly lays down the obligation to meaningfully include all persons with disabilities in all issues affecting their lives, through their representative organizations.

Unique role of Organizations of Persons with Disabilities (OPDs) as representative organizations

The CRPD sets a unique role for OPDs as key intermediaries to represent and channel the views and perspectives of persons with disabilities. OPD participation brings multiple benefits for the relevance, quality, impact and sustainability of development and humanitarian work. It promotes ownership of interventions, accountability and better outcomes, and also supports agency and empowerment for OPDs to be long-term and efficient partners and counterparts.

Meaningful participation of OPDs

While there is no commonly agreed definition of meaningful participation, IDA defined it as participation that:

- Respects, values and considers the unique role of OPDs as representative organizations,
- Enables their regular and effective engagement by ensuring equal opportunities for all to contribute,
- Seeks the highest levels of shared decision-making on all issues that concern persons with disabilities.

The first degree in engagement of OPDs is that they will be informed, including through accessible formats. However, information cannot be considered participation. The highest level of participation is leading, where OPDs drive interventions to advance their priorities and have access to enabling mechanisms including funding to do so.

Rights- based, disability inclusive programming

To ensure meaningful participation of OPDs into disability-inclusive development and humanitarian action, attention needs to be paid to participatory and inclusive processes. This concerns the whole cycle of designing, budgeting, implementing, monitoring and evaluating policies and programs. Inclusive programming thus covers processes aimed at ensuring

meaningful engagement of OPDs across the programming cycle, exploring roles they can play and welcoming their perspectives as a key compass to influence project orientations and ensure their relevance to the diversity of persons with disabilities. Inclusive programming contributes to the shift away from OPDs and persons with disabilities as recipients of aid to promoting meaningful roles as contributors and partners.

Inclusive Programming: Challenges and Responses through the Inclusion Works Program

This part of the paper gives an overview of challenges and opportunities, including case studies, in inclusive programming, focusing on reflections from the four participating countries of Inclusion Works (Bangladesh, Kenya, Nigeria, and Uganda) and beyond the consortium.

OPD participation as an afterthought

When OPDs do not participate in a program's design, the preconditions for their full and effective participation are not fulfilled, which not only affects their participation in the project but also leads to gaps in project implementation and relevance to persons with disabilities. From the experience of IW, it was shown that a participatory co-creation phase can be a way to compensate for limited OPD engagement in the design of a project

OPD participation is still tokenistic

Despite the push for disability-inclusive development, evidence shows that OPDs are still far from being meaningfully engaged in development policies and programs. Usually, the role of OPDs is mostly limited to being recipients of program interventions, or only as part of advocacy and outreach activities. The IW experience showed that a dedicated function to facilitate OPD engagement, such as dedicated OPD Engagement Officers, creates a mechanism to recommend and coordinate OPD engagement, and is a source of learning for both OPDs and the program.

Absence of OPDs and lack of capacity within OPD

This situation speaks to the marginalization that persons with disabilities have faced and continue to face, which has kept them from coming together as organized groups to collectively represent their issues. Sometimes funding becomes a barrier, as many OPDs do not have the

organizational capacity to meet these requirements. Programs must put in place proactive efforts to promote an empowering approach to partnerships with OPDs. For example, IW set an open call for expressions of interest that created opportunities for OPDs that had not traditionally partnered with INGOs to also apply. It also adopted a fiscal sponsorship modality to address the lack of organizational capacity to meet due diligence criteria. Organizational development was also integrated as a component of project activities.

Diversity of representation

As the [IDA Global Survey](#) shows, some groups of persons with disabilities continue to be excluded from development and humanitarian programs, more so when it comes to decision-making roles. Often the lack of organized networks representing such groups is highlighted as a barrier to including them in programs. When they are included, preconditions essential for their participation are found missing. In such cases, clear and monitored criteria for diversity are needed to incentivize progress in including underrepresented groups of persons with disabilities.

Lack of data on OPD participation

Generally, a lack of reliable and disaggregated data both on the prevalence of disability and on the extent and quality of participation of persons with disabilities exacerbates the lack of participation, particularly from underrepresented groups. To address this concern, it is critical that participation of OPDs is measured throughout. In this instance, the IDA Global Survey provides unprecedented information and has set a precedent for collecting data on who are the groups of persons with disabilities that are invited to participate, with whom they engaged, on what issues, at what level, how frequently, whether or not the preconditions needed were met and how effective was their participation.

Limited understanding of accessibility and reasonable accommodation

Accessibility and reasonable accommodation are critical enabling conditions that make meaningful participation of persons with disabilities possible. There is a general lack of understanding of what accessibility and reasonable accommodation entail, and often they are considered to be one and the same thing. Within IW, the understanding of accessibility and reasonable accommodation developed progressively. The program created a budget line for reasonable accommodation along with a reporting section in the financial reports. This was a critical measure which helped support the participation of persons with disabilities in program activities

Budgeting for meaningful engagement of OPDs

Like any other social movement, OPDs also exist on a spectrum in terms of organizational capacities. This means that not only OPDs face challenges to meet the funding conditionalities to access funds independently, they are often compelled to either prioritize issues that are critical but not financially supported over funded issues, or not participate at all. This is especially true as OPDs are increasingly solicited to participate in programs, many of which do not support the opportunity costs of participation. The experience from Inclusion Works showed that allocations need to reflect participation as a key objective. Meaningful engagement of OPDs needs systems that are in built within the proposal.

Training of all staff on inclusive programming

Inclusive programming focuses on the processes and how to ensure meaningful engagement of OPDs across all these processes within the project cycle. It requires organizations to have policies and systems in place that identify and address barriers that impede meaningful participation. Hence, core principles of inclusion and participation must be engrained from the leadership to the operational staff within the organization. It should be part of an organization's regular policies on staff on-boarding and training across all functions, and safeguarding. It is also important that these policies are developed in close collaboration with OPDs

Recommendation for inclusive programming across the project cycle

This section of the paper therefore looks at some of the steps that IW took at different stages of the project cycle and provides recommendations informed by the discussions with OPDs, INGO partners, including feedback from the Learning & Exchange Workshop on Inclusive Employment and Inclusive Programming in Kenya in May 2022. For detailed recommendations, please read the [full report](#).

Project design

- Include OPD representatives in the development of project proposals, clearly articulating their roles across all stages of the project, including resources to be made available for them.
- Include a co-creation process to develop the project together with a diversity of groups of OPDs, with sufficient time and preconditions for meaningful engagement.

- Communicate clearly about the project at the grassroots for more OPDs to have the chance to engage.

Project governance

- Clearly define the role of OPD representatives within the decision-making processes of the project, with a feedback mechanism to reflect how their inputs are being taken into account.
- Define a mechanism for OPD engagement that cuts across the program components. This should be well coordinated so that it contributes to strengthen rather than challenge leadership of the disability rights movements at the country level.
- Establish a bottom-up approach to governance with clear communication pathways.

Partnerships

- Partnerships with OPDs, including underrepresented groups, should not be an afterthought. Establish open, accessible processes to enable OPDs to express interest to engage as partners.
- Define the level of partnerships (e.g. implementing partners, technical partners, knowledge partners, advocacy partners) so that OPDs can indicate interest based on the level of engagement they decide for themselves within the project.
- Adopt flexible processes to keep funding conditionality from becoming a barrier to partnerships.
- Categorize project activities into smaller parts so that OPDs can choose where they fit best as per their capacity. Smaller OPDs may not engage if the only room for them is to take on huge project responsibilities beyond their capacity.
- Establish partnerships that respect the OPD structures and leadership, rather than creating competition.

Budgeting

- Allocate adequate resources for meaningful engagement of OPDs, in consultation with them, including supporting staff time and enhancing operational capacities of OPDs.
- Include budgets for the cost of inclusive procurement to support accessibility of activities, products, information, etc.
- Support OPDs to develop capacities on budgeting and compliance requirements.
- Develop accessible tender processes and include OPDs as vendors or service providers.

Project activities

- Have clearly defined roles for OPDs in project activities, not limited to outreach and advocacy or to mobilize their membership.
- Strengthen project activities by aligning them with OPD priorities on those issues.
- Develop, along with OPD partners, clear guidelines for meetings and events that foster inclusion of a diversity of disability groups.
- Establish feedback mechanisms to continuously enhance inclusion in project activities.

Monitoring and evaluation

- Include disability-related indicators and disaggregate data by disability, gender, age and other relevant parameters, using globally accepted tools.
- Include collection of data on the extent and quality of OPD engagement in monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL) practices.
- Include CRPD-based MEL practices in training modules and train staff working on monitoring and evaluation.
- Consult OPDs on any accessibility considerations for reporting or options for alternative formats that could be provided.
- Work with OPDs to collect disability data and also strengthen capacity of OPDs on data collection practices.

Communication

- Follow a rights-based approach in reporting on project activities or on disability in general.
- Develop clear guidelines, in close collaboration with OPDs, for communicating on project activities, including on social media (see UNDIS guidelines on communication).
- Include minimum accessibility standards for the project (e.g. an accessibility checklist) in communication guidelines, including for internal communication.

Safeguarding and organizational policies

- Establish policies, including safeguarding policies, and action plans that are disability inclusive. These should be available in accessible formats.
- Conduct regular trainings on disability-inclusive safeguarding, especially keeping in mind lived experiences of persons with disabilities themselves (e.g. include trainers with disabilities).
- Make sure to get the buy-in of top leadership for organizational policies, including on recruitment.
- Ensure multiple channels for feedback and reporting. Make sure a safe space that is accessible for all is created.
- Support OPDs, particularly those that are program partners, to develop safeguarding plans and allot a reasonable time.

