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Disability Equity and Rights Policy

Managed on behalf of the ED and Board by: Head of Programs

Approved by the Board on: March 2 2024

1. Background

Disability is part of being human. Almost everyone will temporarily or permanently experience disability at some point in their life. An estimated 1.3 billion people – about 16% of the global population – currently experience significant disability. This number is increasing due in part to population ageing and an increase in the prevalence of noncommunicable diseases. ¹

Following the adoption of the United Nations *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* (CRPD), disability is increasingly understood as a human rights issue. Disability is also an important development issue with a growing body of evidence showing that people with disabilities experience worse socio-economic outcomes and poverty than people without disabilities. ²

People with disabilities (PWD) experience inequalities – for example, when they are denied equitable access to health care, employment, education, or political participation because of their disability. People with disabilities are subject to violations of dignity – for example, when they are subjected to violence, abuse, prejudice, discrimination or stigma because of their disability. ³

Globally, an estimated 19% of women have a disability, compared to 12% of men. ⁴Women with disabilities (WWD) experience the combined discrimination associated with gender as well as disability. ⁵ It is widely recognised that women and girls with disabilities are often amongst the most marginalised people in any community. They face human rights abuses including violence, institutionalisation and discrimination at higher rates than women without disabilities or men with disabilities, are less likely to be employed, and are often excluded from leadership roles. ⁶

¹ World Health Organization: https://www.who.int/health-topics/disability#tab=tab_1

² World Health Organization and World Bank, 2011. World Report on Disability. p. xxi
<https://www.who.int/teams/noncommunicable-diseases/sensory-functions-disability-and-rehabilitation/world-report-on-disability>

³ Ibid. p. 9

⁴ Ibid. p. 28

⁵ Ibid. p. 8.

⁶ CBM Australia, 2023, Missing voices: The inclusion of women with disabilities within gender programming and women's movements <https://www.cbm.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/CBM-Australia-briefing-Missing-Voices-The-inclusion-of-women-with-disabilities-in-gender-programming-and-womens-movements-final-11-23.pdf>

2. Purpose

This policy outlines the organisation's commitment and approach to disability equity and rights as an integral part of ActionAid's Human Rights-Based Approach (HRBA). In addition to gender equality and women's rights, ActionAid Australia is deeply committed to disability equity and upholding the rights of people with disabilities.

ActionAid Australia strives to be an organisation truly inclusive of PWD, working in a way that promote inclusivity and valuing people with disabilities and their contributions and actively dismantling barriers to equitable participation. It seeks to be an organisation where people with disabilities can access opportunities for collaboration, contribution, recognition and growth on an equal basis with others.

3. Scope

This policy applies to the following people:

- ActionAid Australia staff members, contractors and consultants;
- ActionAid Australia office-based volunteers and interns;
- ActionAid Australia Board of Directors;
- Visitors to ActionAid Australia programmes and
- partner organisations.

4. Definitions

Disability: The outcome of an interaction of physical, sensory, mental and intellectual impairments with barriers (including attitudes and behaviours of others) which prevent people with disabilities from obtaining their full rights, effectively participating in society and thus achieving their full potential. A disability may be visible or invisible and it can be permanent, temporary or episodic. ⁷

People with disabilities (PWD): People with disabilities include those who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others. ⁸

The rights of PWD: Article 3 of the CRPD outlines the following general principles:

1. Respect for inherent dignity, individual autonomy including the freedom to make one's own choices, and independence of individuals;
2. Non-discrimination;
3. Full and effective participation and inclusion in society;
4. Respect for difference and acceptance of people with disabilities as part of human diversity and humanity;
5. Equality of opportunity;
6. Accessibility;
7. Equality between men, women and non-binary people;
8. Respect for the evolving capacities of children with disabilities and respect for the right of children with disabilities to preserve their identities.

⁷ ActionAid Australia Social Justice for All Policy, 2023.

⁸ UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) 2006 – Article 1

The rights of WWD: Women and girls with disabilities are subject to multiple forms of discrimination to their full and equal enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms. The CRPD outlines that States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to ensure the full development, advancement and empowerment of women, for the purpose of guaranteeing them the exercise and enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms.⁹

Barriers: Any factor, whether it is physical, social, policy, economic, or attitudinal that hinders the full and effective participation of PWD in society on an equitable basis with others.¹⁰

The World Health Organisation (WHO) outlines that there are several factors contributing to health inequalities faced by people with disabilities. Factors include **structural factors** such as ableism, stigma and discrimination, **social determinants of health** such as poverty, exclusion from education and employment. PWD are also more likely to have high **risk factors** for non-communicable diseases and **health system barriers**, including a lack of knowledge, negative community attitudes and lack of information or data collection and analysis on disability.¹¹

WHO outlines that a person's environment has a significant effect on the experience and extent of disability. Inaccessible environments create barriers that often hinder the full and effective participation of PWD in society on an equal basis with others. Progress on improving social participation can be made by addressing these barriers and facilitating PWD in their day to day lives.¹²

Discrimination: Disability discrimination means any distinction, exclusion or restriction based on disability which has the purpose or effect of impairing or nullifying the recognition, enjoyment or exercise, on an equitable basis with others, of all human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural, civil or any other field. It includes all forms of discrimination.¹³

Reasonable Accommodation: Reasonable accommodation has necessary and appropriate modifications and adjustments so as not to impose a disproportionate or undue burden on PWD, where needed in a particular case, to ensure the enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms on an equitable basis.¹⁴

⁹ UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCPRD) 2006 – Article 6

¹⁰ UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCPRD) 2006 – references to barriers and what they constitute can be found in the Preamble, Article 1, Article 9, Article 30 and Article 31.

¹¹ World Health Organization: <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/disability-and-health>

¹² World Health Organization: https://www.who.int/health-topics/disability#tab=tab_1

¹³ UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCPRD) 2006 – Article 2

¹⁴ Ibid.

Equity: Equity recognises that advantages and barriers exist for different groups of people. Equity is a process that begins by acknowledging individuals have unequal starting places and seeks to correct and address the resulting imbalances.¹⁵

The process is ongoing, requiring identifying and overcoming intentional and unintentional barriers arising from bias or systemic structures.¹⁶

Empowerment: The process through which people experiencing poverty or injustice become rights activists through a critical awareness of power relations and a strengthening of their own individual and collective power.¹⁷

Intersectionality: Intersectionality is a concept used to describe the ways in which different forms of structural oppression (racism, sexism, homophobia, transphobia, ableism, xenophobia, classism, etc.) are interconnected and cannot be examined separately from one another. For ActionAid intersectionality is a frame which provokes understanding how multiple forms of disadvantage compound a problem and are linked to, and dependent on, history and institutions of power.¹⁸ Using an intersectional feminist lens, ActionAid specifically explores how gender inequality intersects with other forms of discrimination to drive marginalisation and exclusion of specific groups of women.

Organisations of People with Disabilities (OPDs): Organisations of people with disabilities are civil society organisations where the majority of staff, volunteers and members are people with disabilities, and the organisation is governed, led and directed by PWD. OPDs may be individual organisations and/or members of wider OPD coalitions and networks which often exist at national, regional, and global levels. OPDs may represent people with different types of disabilities (sometimes termed cross-disability) or a specific community within the wider population of people with disabilities, for example women with disabilities, children with disabilities or those with specific impairments. OPDs also include self-advocacy organisations, which often represent people with intellectual disabilities, through locally formed networks and platforms, and may also involve family members or carers. Organisations including family members and carers of people with disabilities play an important role in facilitating, promoting, and securing the interests, autonomy and active participation of relatives with intellectual disabilities, dementia and/or children with disabilities. All such organisations should be committed to the principles and rights recognised in the CRPD.¹⁹

¹⁵ Meg Bolger, 2019. <https://generalassemb.ly/blog/diversity-inclusion-equity-differences-in-meaning/>

¹⁶ NACE <https://www.nacweb.org/about-us/equity-definition#:~:text=The%20term%20%E2%80%9Cequity%E2%80%9D%20refers%20to,and%20make%20adjustments%20to%20imbalances.>

¹⁷ Action for Global Justice in Practice: ActionAid's Human Rights Based Approach: <https://actionaid.org/sites/default/files/publications/Action%20for%20Global%20Justice%20in%20Practice%20-%20AA%20HRBA%202020.pdf>

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, General comment No. 7 on the participation of persons with disabilities, including children with disabilities, through their representative organizations, in the implementation and monitoring of the Convention, 9 November 2018, CRPD/G/GC/7.

5. Guiding Principles

ActionAid Australia is guided by the following principles in its work to advance disability equity and rights:

- recognition that communities are not homogenous;
- using feminist analysis to guide our work and an **intersectional feminist approach**, which recognises that poverty intersects with gender inequality, disability and other forms of discrimination including race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, age and other factors;
- promoting and establishing partnerships with organisations that are recognised and respected by people with disabilities and that represent and advocate for their interests;
- actively encouraging partner organisations to identify and work with organisations of people with disabilities (OPDs) and challenging the notion that this work is too difficult, sensitive or not relevant to ending poverty and injustice;
- strengthening the leadership, agency and voice of women with disability in our programming and campaigning, where appropriate, and embodying the principle of ‘nothing about us, without us’;
- ensuring awareness and respect for collective and individual rights, including women’s rights, when working with people with disabilities;
- promoting transformative social protection¹ to enable everyone to obtain their full human rights and integrate equitably into society;
- continually examining our own behaviours and attitudes closely and recognising how these can lead to a denial of rights and social exclusion;
- ensuring respect for the rights of people with disabilities and the principle of free, prior and informed consent in our programming and campaigns;
- striving to ‘do no harm’ and ensure protection of human rights defenders defending the rights of PWD;
- Ensuring all communications materials portray people with disability with dignity and respect.

6. Policy Objectives

This policy aims to ensure that disability equity and rights underpin ActionAid Australia’s:

- organisational culture and behaviours; and
- functional areas, including campaigning, communications, finance, human resources, fundraising and programming.

7. Legislative Framework & Standards

ActionAid Australia abides by the following legislation and international standards across all aspects of its work:

<https://docstore.ohchr.org/SelfServices/FilesHandler.ashx?enc=6QkG1d%2FPPRiCAqhKb7yhsnbHatvuFkZ%2Bt93Y3D%2Baa2pjFYzWLBu0vA%2BBR7QovZhbuyqzjDN0plweYI46WxrJJ6aB3Mx4y%2Fs pT%2BQrY5K2mKse5zjo%2BfvBDVu%2B42R9IK1p>

International

- Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948)
- International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1966) and its two Optional Protocols
- International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1966)
- UN Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (1979)
- World Programme of Action Concerning Disabled Persons (1982)
- ILO Convention No. 159 on Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment (Disabled Persons) (1983)
- United Nations Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities for People with Disabilities (1993)
- UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006);
- Sustainable Development Goals (2015)

Australian

ActionAid Australia abides by the following Australian anti-discrimination legislation and frameworks across all aspects of its work:

- [ACFID Code of Conduct 2023](#) ;
- [DFAT International Development Policy \(2023\)](#)
- DFAT Development for All Policy: 2015-2020;
- [DFAT Gender Equality, Disability and Social Inclusion analysis - Good practice note](#)
- Disability Discrimination Act (1992), Australia

ActionAid Australia will work alongside partners to recognise the various regional policies and frameworks that support the rights of people with disability, particularly women.

8. Policy in Practice

In order to implement this policy, ActionAid Australia will:

International Programming

1. Support staff and partner organisations with training and capacity development, as required, so they can implement the HRBA, understand the barriers facing people with disabilities, and specifically women, to strengthen their participation in programming, removing barriers to their participation.
2. Encourage partners to pro-actively engage with diverse community groups and their representatives (e.g. with people with disabilities, carers and their local organisations where they exist) to improve understanding of the rights violations experienced by these groups and to ensure inclusive programming.
3. Strive to ensure that all programming is as inclusive as possible and recognises the dynamics within diverse groups, and the intersecting and compounding nature of exclusion. ActionAid Australia will role model this inclusive approach in work with partners and communities, including using the Washington Group questions in data collection and allocating budgets to disability inclusion.

4. Encourage partners to actively involve people with disabilities, and particularly women, in the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of programs.
5. Encourage partners to promote disability rights awareness among community members and government officials and commit to change attitudes, behaviours and/or policies so that all PWD, including women, can have their human rights recognised, protected and fulfilled.

Organisational Culture and Behaviours

6. Strengthen staff capacity and knowledge to embed a culture within the organisation that promotes disability equity and rights; and work to eradicate any form of discrimination or bias;
7. Ensure all staff are familiar with the Disability Equity and Rights Policy through induction for new staff and volunteers and training;
8. Ensure ways of working, policies and processes are disability inclusive and promote an intersectional feminist approach to eradicate discrimination or bias.
9. Provide a safe space for staff and volunteers with disabilities to raise their challenges and concerns and discuss specific workplace needs or reasonable accommodation if travelling;
10. Review and monitor our HR systems and policies to ensure that they reflect our commitment to disability equity and rights;
11. Support the leadership of PWD at all levels of the organisation;
12. Engage with ActionAid International Federation's Global HR standards to ensure the federation adheres to good practice.

Functional Areas

All of ActionAid Australia's functional areas will promote disability inclusion as part of our efforts to advance women's rights and gender equality. We will do this by:

13. Ensuring gender and disability rights analysis is incorporated into activities wherever possible.
14. Ensuring accessible communications guidelines are understood by all, particularly those producing communications content on behalf of ActionAid Australia and that all communications (printed and/or electronic) present people in a respectful and dignified manner including people with disability. When applicable, the emphasis and priority will be on the individual above and before the disability, through naming individuals (where appropriate) and using empowering language (speaking of a person who is blind, rather than a blind person).
15. Inform partners, donors and supporters about our disability equity and rights policy and promoting positive examples of ActionAid's work on disability equity and rights;
16. Periodically review the effectiveness of our efforts to advance the rights of PWD, particularly women;
17. Advocate with the Australian Government's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade to promote implementation of its commitment for PWD in DFAT International Development Policy (2023) and encourage gender analysis in this work.

9. Monitoring and Review of Policy

The Head of Programs is accountable to the Executive Director and Board for managing and maintaining this policy. All members of the Leadership Team are accountable for ensuring that their functional teams understand and adhere to this policy in their day-to-day work. Where compliance issues are surfaced, Leadership Team members will work with staff to address these issues promptly.

All staff members are responsible for reflecting on own behaviour, actions, and ways of interacting with others in line with this policy and associated policies.

Any updates/revisions to the policy must be endorsed by the Executive Director and Leadership Team before being submitted to the ActionAid Australia Board for their approval.

Changes to Policy

Nature of changes	Date approved by Board
Policy first developed and separated out from Social Justice for All Policy	March 2, 2024.