

DISABILITY POLICY

1. Introduction

1.1 Action on Poverty

Action on Poverty (AOP) is an independent, secular, not for profit, non-governmental organisation (NGO). Founded in Australia in 1968, AOP was incorporated in the state of New South Wales in 1983. AOP works with partners and communities in Africa, Asia and the Pacific.

AOP is committed to supporting work that is of the highest standard, and in doing so, holds full accreditation with the Australian Government through the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT). AOP is a signatory to the Australian Council for International Development (ACFID) Code of Conduct which requires high standards of corporate governance, public accountability and financial management to be in place.

AOP Vision: For all people to transcend the injustice, indignity, and inequality of entrenched poverty.

AOP Mission: To empower changemakers to break the cycle of poverty.

1.2 Background and rationale

AOP recognises that over a billion people, about 15% of the world's population, have some form of disability¹ and around 80 percent of them live in developing countries. This makes the global population of persons with disabilities collectively one of the poorest and most marginalized segments of society.²

AOP is aware of the interlinked cycle of poverty and disability, as people with disability not only experience disproportionately high rates of poverty, but being poor also increases the likelihood of disability. We acknowledge that the intersectionality of issues including gender, age, sexuality etc potentially create increased vulnerability as well. AOP understands that a person with disability is less likely to have access to rehabilitation, education, skills training and employment, which could otherwise reduce poverty.

AOP recognises that disability can also be the consequence of poverty when there is no access to adequate nutrition, preventative and curative health care, clean water and sanitation, and working conditions.

A holistic understanding of disability recognises that it is the outcome of complex interactions between an individual's functional limitations, and the social and physical environment. AOP recognises that disability has a human rights dimension, and that the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) states that, "persons 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".³ AOP supports a multidimensional approach, recognising the interactions between the functional limitations of an individual, alongside social and physical factors that limit their capacity to participate in community and society.

AOP seeks to ensure that people with disability and their communities experience empowerment, equality, dignity, and justice. AOP recognises that girls and women with a disability face discrimination on two fronts because of their gender and their disability. In addition, women and girls with disabilities

¹ WHO & World Bank, 2011

² ILO, 2007; DFID, 2000

³ Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
<http://www.un.org/disabilities/convention/conventionfull.shtml>

are two to three times more likely to be victims of sexual and physical abuse than women and girls without disability.

AOP believes that the community has a critical role in addressing the inclusion of persons with disability and will intentionally support programs and projects that assist the community in advancing their inclusion. However, although development practitioners can facilitate disability- inclusive programming, AOP believes that fundamental changes in mainstream services, infrastructure and cultural norms require a 'whole of government' approach.

1.3 Purpose of the Policy

The purpose of this Disability Policy is to provide direction for AOP both at the organisational level and in the delivery of its programs. In order to support management, staff and partners to strategically support the greater inclusion of people with disability within within our work programs, procedures, systems and accountabilities.

1.4 Guiding Principles

The AOP Disability Policy promotes the UN Convention of the Rights of Persons with Disability (CRPD) and is underpinned by the following principles:

People with disability have equal rights.

AOP believes that every individual should be valued as a full member of society. Disability awareness and inclusion are anchored upon respect for human equality and diversity. AOP's approach to disability inclusion will ensure the full and meaningful participation of people with disabilities in all aspects of family, community and societal life.

Supports are needed to allow people with disabilities to exercise their rights.

AOP believes that accessibility is a core element of many social and economic rights. Removing multiple barriers which prevent access in society is a key requirement for the inclusion of people with disabilities. If people with a disability are to exercise their human rights, they need a range of facilitators to help them negotiate this 'inaccessible' able-bodied world. In light of the pandemic, taking into account COVID-19 measures are key in constructing policies with regards to accessibility. Accessibility includes the following dimensions:

- **Physical accessibility:** removing barriers in the infrastructural environment. Ensuring access to buildings, water supply and sanitation facilities, roads and transport services means designing them in a way that they are usable by all people, including all persons with disabilities. Use of facilities that take into account social distancing measures should consider any circumstances where persons of disabilities are unable to socially distance from their caregiver and adjust location capacity numbers accordingly.
- **Information and communication accessibility:** ensuring information provided can be read or understood by persons with disabilities. Accepting and facilitating the use of sign language, Braille, plain language, barrier-free documents and other alternative modes of communication. Include COVID-19 safe measures for persons with disabilities who navigate and obtain information through touch, such as including other methods of distributing information. An example can be information provided in audio format for persons who have a sight disability as another form of receiving information compared to braille.
- **Institutional accessibility:** ensuring equal access to justice, property and financial services, social services (e.g. in the health or education sector), as well as social protection and poverty reduction programs.
- **Economic accessibility:** ensuring affordability of services and information and communication technologies.
- This section should be reviewed in the instance of a new global health crisis where accessibility of persons with disability is compromised.

Address non-discrimination, equality of opportunity and gender equality.

AOP believes that participation is both a means and an aim to empower rights holders, including people with disability, to articulate their expectations towards the State and other duty bearers, and to claim their rights. The slogan of the disability rights movement “Nothing about us without us” summarises this principle. Participation and empowerment are also key principles of the twin-track approach, i.e.:

- Development of the conditions under which people with disability can fully participate in social and political processes, i.e. support from government and other stakeholders in society to strengthen civic and political participation mechanisms
- Development of the capacity of people with disability to use these mechanisms, participate in political processes, communicate on an equal basis with governments and other stakeholders in society, and network with other groups.

AOP believes that cultural, systemic and environmental obstacles to access and participation for people with disability should be removed. Persons with mental health conditions or intellectual impairments, for example, appear to be more disadvantaged in many settings than those with physical impairments.⁴

AOP believes that children have the right to freedom from discrimination, respect for the dignity of the child and the cultivation of her or his potential to assume a responsible and independent life in society. A child with mental or physical disabilities is entitled to enjoy a full and decent life, in conditions that ensure dignity, promotes self-reliance and facilitation of the child’s active participation in the community. All necessary measures shall be taken to ensure the full enjoyment by children with disability of fundamental freedoms on equal basis with other children.

As women with disabilities are often subjected to discrimination, on the grounds of gender and disability, the need to incorporate a gender perspective in all efforts to promote the rights of persons with disabilities should be emphasised.

1.5 Our Commitment

- a) AOP is committed to ensuring inclusion in all areas of the organisation and ensures that both women and men are provided with equal opportunity to be involved in the organisation and its work. Discrimination in any form, including on account of disability, will not be tolerated.
- b) AOP will continue to ensure all recruitment processes are based on individual qualifications and work experiences. AOP commits to refraining from any discriminatory recruitment and employment practices, and AOP’s management practices will aim to minimize access barriers for people with disabilities.
- c) AOP is committed to ensuring that its staff would receive training to enable them to work in alignment with AOP’s Disability Policy. AOP staff will also be encouraged to work with partners to assess or develop their capacity to work in alignment with AOP’s Disability Policy.
- d) AOP is committed to implementing programs that contribute to social inclusion including consultation with and the participation of people with disability, and to the development and implementation of national policies and programs that support the inclusion of people with disability.
- e) AOP commits to monitoring of our progress through the collection disability related data, reporting on progress related to inclusion and by documenting the participation and inclusion of people with disability in our programs.
- f) AOP is committed to promoting the consultation, participation and leadership of people with disability in decision making at all levels, including towards strengthening the structure and functionality of DPOs (Disabled People’s Organisations).

⁴ WHO/World Bank World Report on Disability, 2011 in http://www.cbm.org/article/downloads/54741/A_human_rights-based_approach_to_disability_in_development.pdf

- g) The use of outdated language and words to describe people with disabilities contributes greatly to perpetuating old stereotypes. AOP will ensure that any communication and/or promotional material (printed and/or electronic) which include people with disability, they are portrayed in an honest and dignified manner. 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).

2. Scope of Policy

This policy applies to all AOP staff and associated personnel.

'Staff' refers to: full time, part time, international and national, and those engaged on short term contracts such as consultants, contractors, researchers, photographers, journalists and media personnel.

'Associated Personnel' refers to: volunteers, board members, visitors and personnel in partner agencies that have a formal/contractual relationship with AOP.

3. AOP Programs: Disability Considerations

AOP regards disability as a cross cutting issue in its programming and disability considerations are mainstreamed where appropriate into AOP programs. The "twin track" principle of participation and empowerment inform our programs. AOP's disability inclusion work is aimed at the full, equal and meaningful participation of people with disability in various spheres of community and societal life.

AOP will continue to work with its partners to address issues that are critical to people with disability, particularly in breaking down the barriers that prevent people with disability from realising their equal rights and opportunities. To do this, AOP will:

- Ensure that all women, men boys and girls benefit from and participate in all AOP's programs and projects, irrespective of their mental or physical abilities.
- Continue to utilise approaches that address issues faced by persons with disabilities where they are central to our programmatic areas.

4. Review

This Policy will be monitored on an ongoing basis and will be reviewed at every 3 years to ensure that it remains relevant to the needs of AOP and its partners.

AOP Policy Adopted by AOP Board 6 April 2009

AOP Disability Policy revised in 2014 and readopted by the AOP Board on 26 June 2015 AOP Disability Policy reviewed by Senior Leadership Team in June 2018

AOP Disability Policy reviewed and amended in February 2021

5. Glossary⁵

Access in its fullest sense refers to physical access, communication access, and social access to facilities, services, training, and jobs. Physical access means that people with disabilities can, without assistance, approach, enter, pass to and from, and make use of an area and its facilities without undue difficulties.

⁵ This Glossary has been extracted from CBM's Disability and Development Policy: http://www.cbm.org/article/downloads/54741/Disability_and_Development_Policy.pdf

Disability and Impairment

Disability: The interaction between a person with impairment or health condition and the negative barriers of the environment (including attitudes and beliefs, etc.).

Impairment: A characteristic or condition of an individual's body or mind which unsupported has limited, does limit or will limit that individual's personal or social functioning in comparison with someone who has not got that characteristic or condition. Impairment relates to a physical, intellectual, mental or sensory condition; as such it is largely an individual issue. Accordingly, disability is the way(s) in which people with impairments are excluded or discriminated against; as such, it is largely a social and development issue.

Disability Models⁶

- The medical model that sees disability as a health issue⁷
- The social model that understands disability as a social issue characterised by unequal opportunities for participation⁸
- The multi-dimensional model conceptualises disability through four dimensions: impairments, activity limitations and participation restrictions and environmental barriers and facilitators. It can be called the bio-psychosocial model of disability⁹
- A political perspective understands the issue of disability as a human rights issue. The work towards an International (UN) Convention on the rights of persons with disabilities may be seen to emphasise this perspective.¹⁰

Discrimination on the Basis of Disability¹¹

Any distinction, exclusion or restriction on the basis of disability which has the purpose or effect of impairing or nullifying the recognition, enjoyment or exercise, on an equal 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, including denial of reasonable accommodation.

Disabled Persons Organisation (DPO)

The main characteristic of a DPO is that its members consist of people with disability. The main roles and functions of DPOs are to represent the interests of people with disability, to advocate and lobby for their rights, and to ensure that government and service providers are responsive to the needs and rights of persons with disabilities.

Inclusive Development

Refers to the planning and implementation of policies, programs, projects and actions for the human and socioeconomic development. It makes feasible the ideal of equal opportunities and the exercise of rights – civil, political, economic, social and cultural for every person, regardless of his / her social status, gender, physical or mental condition and ethnic affiliation.

⁶ Working Group on Disability and Poverty Reduction www.stakes.fi/sfa/disabilityandpoverty/index.htm in CBM's Disability and Development Policy

⁷ The International Classification of Impairments, Disabilities and Handicaps (ICIDH, WHO 1980) in CBM's Disability and Development Policy

⁸ The United Nations Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities reflects this stream of thinking.

⁹ Such as the WHO International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (ICF, WHO 2002)

¹⁰ UN Enable - Promoting the rights of Persons with Disabilities - Ad Hoc Committee in CBM's Disability and Development Policy

¹¹ United Nations (2006 b), chapter 2 in in CBM's Disability and Development Policy

Mainstreaming Disability

Implies that all development interventions are planned and implemented in such a way that people with disabilities, their needs, rights and potentials, are taken into account on equal terms with those of other population groups.