

UK Aid Direct's work to drive forward disability inclusion and rights

Overview

An estimated one billion people are living with disabilities globally. This is approximately 15% of the world's population.

And an estimated 80% of people with disabilities live in developing countries, which equates to one in five of the world's poorest therefore, having a disability.

The barriers and challenges that persons with disabilities face on a daily basis cut across all aspects of their lives – education, healthcare, employment and livelihoods, justice, and social support – and are systemically embedded and found in community norms and attitudes.

UK Aid Direct, funded by the UK Government's Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO), is a multi-sectoral fund that supports the direct delivery of poverty reduction interventions by small and medium civil society organisations (CSOs). It sees the inclusion of persons with disabilities (alongside other vulnerable and marginalized groups) as essential, whatever the focus of their interventions.

Small and medium sized CSOs play a critical role in providing responsive, locally rooted, and locally led, interventions, and connecting them into wider policy and institutional issues. By tackling and transforming the realities of persons with disabilities through sustainable, long-term change it ensures we leave no one behind.

As a fund, UK Aid Direct's investment in work that supports persons with disabilities has been steadily growing over the last five years.

Within the current portfolio for example:

- **11%** of projects are focused on disability
- Persons with disabilities are a primary target group for a further **24% of projects**
- These represent **over £20 million of investment** through UK Aid Direct
- **Across 23 countries** in Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia
- There is a strong focus around supporting persons with disabilities in **education, livelihoods** and **health** sectors.

Strategies taken to support persons with disabilities

The CSOs funded through UK Aid Direct are responding to the needs of persons living with disabilities through a range of context- and sector-specific strategies; from the local delivery of services through to national-level advocacy.

Below is a summary detailing these, broken down by response type:

Improving services and support

- Supporting with the physical infrastructure and assistive devices for people with physical disabilities to improve their mobility and access to services
- Strengthening the skills, capacities and supporting structures for key staff like teachers and health workers, to improve the inclusivity of their services for persons with disabilities
- Building stronger screening processes for earlier and more detailed identification of disabilities, including coordination between different government, civil society, and community actors for a holistic process. This early identification can in turn lead to more rapid and appropriate support and helps to improve inconsistent official data on disability.
- Establishing local coordination mechanisms involving government and civil society across sectors like education, health and protection. This enables better referrals and data sharing between services, ensuring persons with disabilities get the most appropriate support and maximises the different expertise of local actors.
- Working closely with families and community networks to build local, community-led capacities for care and support of persons with disabilities.

Challenging discrimination

- Using the local and contextual knowledge and trust that many smaller civil society organisations (CSOs) have within communities, to identify and influence key local power-holders on disability rights, and partnering with local organisations of persons with disabilities to strengthen civil society capacities, networks and coordination around advocacy and service delivery for persons with disabilities
- Empowering persons with disabilities and their families, to act as role models and become their own advocates within communities, challenging discriminatory attitudes and stigmatisation of persons with disabilities and their families. This includes, for example, supporting persons with disabilities to deliver training to community members and parents of children with disabilities, on the importance of those children accessing education, or building the capacities of families to advocate on behalf of their children with disabilities for improved local services.

Empowering persons with disabilities to make their own decisions and hold others to account

- Partnering with organisations of persons with disabilities to ensure there is direct representation and engagement of persons with disabilities in the design, delivery, and evaluation of services, as well as in local community consultative processes
- Supporting persons with disabilities to engage with local and national government to advocate directly for their rights and hold them accountable for developing and implementing disability-related strategies, policies, budgets, and legislation
- Building solidarity and skills amongst persons with disabilities through strengthened networks, peer mentoring and buddying systems in different sectors (education, livelihoods, and health, for example)
- Supporting the economic empowerment of persons with disabilities and their families, through livelihoods programmes and income generating activities.

Case studies

Humanity & Inclusion, Bangladesh

[Humanity and Inclusion](#) (opens in a new window) is an independent charity that works alongside persons with disabilities and vulnerable people, in situations of poverty and exclusion, conflict and disaster, to help meet their basic needs, improve their living conditions, and promote respect for their dignity and fundamental rights.

With a UK Aid Direct [Impact grant](#) (opens in a new tab), Humanity & Inclusion is working alongside government, organisations of persons with disabilities, and communities in the Rangpur and Chittagong divisions of Bangladesh, to identify persons with disabilities who are most in need. They then work with these persons with disabilities, and their households, to fully understand their context, so they can develop tailored solutions to their needs.

Two years into the project, over 1,600 persons with disabilities have received regular physical and psychosocial rehabilitation services, enabling improved independence and social participation.

The economic empowerment and resilience of over 880 households has also improved, through livelihood's training, peer support groups, facilitating better links to markets and referrals into public and private services like social welfare and micro-finance programmes.

The project has further supported over 1,150 households to improve their disaster preparedness with coping mechanisms in areas prone to frequent and devastating flooding. Alongside this, the charity is working to raise awareness and tackle discrimination in local communities, including in disaster risk reduction planning. This has resulted in the adaptation of a rescue boat to make it the district's first fully accessible, inclusive, community-owned rescue boat.

Able Child Africa, Rwanda

Able Child Africa ([opens in a new window](#)) works with local partners in Kenya, Rwanda, Tanzania, and Uganda, to protect, educate and empower children with disabilities to fulfil their potential.

Through a UK Aid Direct Community Partnership grant, Able Child Africa and its local partner Uwezo Youth Empowerment (UWEZO), are delivering the Raising Aspirations project in Rwanda. This project seeks to empower children and youth with disabilities to demand their inclusion in Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) related development processes in the country. It uses a youth-led approach with a network of 80 young persons with disabilities, driving forward advocacy and gathering evidence of good practices to inform inclusive programming.

Two and a half years into the work and the project's youth disability advocates are changing community and official attitudes around disability through community awareness raising events, home and school visits and engagement in official consultations. They now have a place in several government forums, including working with the National Youth Council and National Commission for Children to ensure the government's SDG programmes incorporate disability-related information.

The project also uses an innovative mentoring approach where youth with disabilities work with children with disabilities to build confidence, skills, and knowledge of disability rights – an approach that has proved to be effective in empowering both the children and the youth to drive forward local solutions to the issues they face. For example, working with schools to overcome the access barriers that children with disabilities face. Further information on this project can be found on YouTube ([opens in a new window](#)).