



**Pacific Disability
Forum**

Mapping of the Inclusion of Women and Girls with Disabilities in Gender Programs and Policies in the Pacific: **Findings Report**

With support of:



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The views expressed in this publication are the Pacific Disability Forum’s alone and are not necessarily the views of the New Zealand or Australian Governments.

Introduction

This Report presents the findings from a desk review, research and mapping process which examines the extent to which **mainstream development actors in the Pacific** include diverse women and girls with disabilities within their **mainstream gender programs, frameworks, policies and practices**.¹ It identifies good practices and gaps in inclusion of women and girls with disabilities, and key barriers to inclusion. It presents evidence regarding the roles played by Organisations of Persons with Disabilities (OPDs) in the Pacific, in supporting the empowerment of women and girls with disabilities. Based on these findings it provides **recommendations** to strengthen inclusion of women and girls with disabilities.

The review is based on organisations who have a key focus on gender with regional coverage and influence that PDF has closely worked with:

- Pacific Island Forum Secretariat (PIFS)
- Pacific Community (SPC)
- UN Women
- United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA).

The report amalgamates information about individual organisations to give an overall picture of the performance of key Pacific partners, rather than focusing on specific examples. In addition, some information is also included related to additional partner organisations, such as where this offered examples of strong or poor practice.

This gender mapping process has been commissioned by Pacific Disability Forum (PDF), in order to inform its progress towards goals under the PDF 2021–2025 Strategic Plan, including Goal 9.1:

PDF will focus its efforts in ensuring that mainstreaming efforts with partners is truly inclusive of women and girls with disabilities, promoting their meaningful engagement and participation and recognising the diversities and specificity of needs across all women and girls with disabilities.

¹ This report uses the phrasing ‘women and girls with disabilities’, but notes that this includes diverse women and girls, including those with diverse sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression and sex characteristics (SOGIESC).

Summary of Key Findings

While formal evidence is limited and there is relatively little research into the experiences of women with disabilities in Pacific countries, it is clear that too often, women and girls with disabilities are not fully included in gender programming by key partners. Donors and implementers are increasingly aware that women and girls with disabilities are doubly marginalized and face specific barriers, and are for the most part actively seeking to engage and include OPDs and women with disabilities in activities. This includes resourcing and building internal capacity on disability inclusion, and disaggregating data for women and girls with disabilities. However, practice varies widely across programs.

Some design and guidance documents for gender programs in the Pacific are demonstrating recognition of the specific needs and marginalisation of women and girls with disabilities, and are seeking to include them. In some cases programs are also seeking to measure outcomes through disaggregation of disability. But there are also examples of designs with limited focus on disability, or programs where designs are not publicly available and the approach to disability is less clear. One example is policy guidance documents and frameworks on ending violence against women, which have little discussion of the impacts violence has on women with disabilities, nor practical guidance on targeting and supporting them.

Monitoring and evaluation of progress is also limited, with many programs not including clear indicators to measure impact and progress for women with disabilities; although disaggregation by disability is increasing.

Despite an overall movement towards strengthened inclusion in the documentation and policies of organisations, the levels of participation by OPDs and women and girls with disabilities seen in practice does not necessarily represent genuine empowerment or collaboration. Rather, it frequently sits further down the 'ladder of participation' and consists of informing or consulting women with disabilities and their representative organisations. There are examples of good practice by partners, particularly governments – including providing direct support for OPDs to implement activities, and building strong partnerships to engage with and reach women with disabilities through leveraging the reach that OPDs have in communities.

But too often, efforts at partnership involve women with disabilities and OPDs, without this offering them true decision-making power or influence over the directions or priorities of gender programming, policies and activities. OPDs and partners both recognise that this 'tick-the-box' approach to inclusion is still taking place.

Summary of Key Findings Cont.

This gender mapping has also identified the complexities and challenges involved in ensuring full and meaningful participation by women with disabilities. Doubly marginalised by both their gender and disability status, women and girls in the Pacific face significant obstacles to their participation and inclusion in gender programming. Factors including limited educational opportunities, costs of accessible transport, language barriers, isolation, and stigma mean they may find it difficult to participate in consultations, workshops, events and other activities – particularly when these are structured formally and run in English.

For women with complex or particularly stigmatized disabilities, there can be additional barriers. Pacific cultural values such as respect for elders and authority, and male-dominated societies, also mean women with disabilities may struggle to speak out and represent themselves. Yet partners implementing gender programs and activities often assume that women with disabilities can participate equally with others, once an invitation has been extended and basic accessibility is achieved. There is a clear gap between what partners perceive as inclusive practice, and what actually results in genuine, meaningful engagement by diverse women and girls with disabilities.

OPDs across the Pacific play a fundamental role in bridging this gap and building the capacity of women and girls with disabilities. Within the context of programs, OPDs push for a seat at the table; advocate for inclusion measures; provide advice on inclusion, accessibility and good practice; and ensure the voices of women and girls with disabilities are heard in events and consultations. In addition to this, OPDs engage with women and girls with disabilities directly, often within their communities, building trust and supporting them to build their capacity and confidence for self-representation. This can take place over years, and typically happens outside of the bounds of formal programs, often without direct funding or support. Yet this support is a critical, in order for diverse Pacific women and girls with disabilities to be able to effectively participate in and engage with gender programs.

But OPDs also face a delicate balance in their engagement with key partners. Power dynamics inevitably exist in any relationships between larger and smaller organisations, and OPDs may consciously or unconsciously adjust their communication, advice and interactions with key partners, in order to maintain strong relationships, funding, and ongoing invitations to collaborate.

Summary of Key Findings Cont.

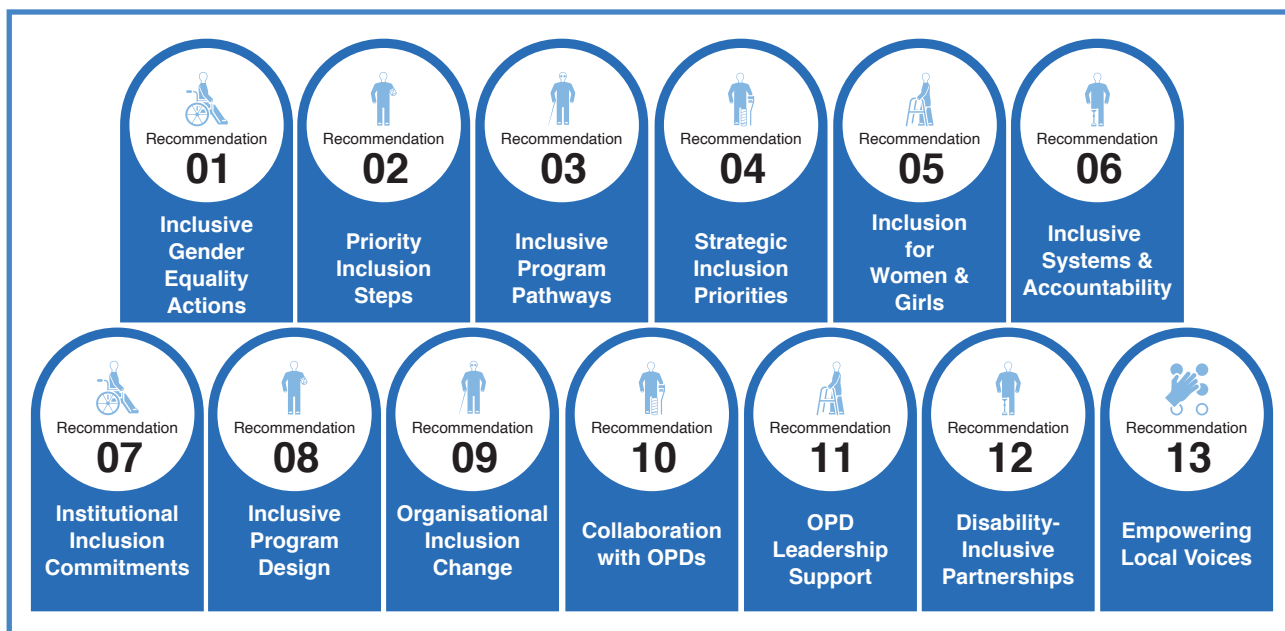
This may not be in response to any real risk or hostility from these partners, but is a feature of being a small, often under-funded organisation that is reliant on larger partners and donors for funding, support and recognition. It can also be a symptom of the fatigue that OPDs feel in constantly needing to advocate for their own rights, and sometimes even for basic preconditions for inclusion, such as accessible venues or funded sign interpreters. Yet partners sometimes explicitly stated that OPDs needed to 'claim space' within gender programs – which runs the risk of OPDs and women with disabilities being held responsible for their own rights and inclusion, rather than partners and duty-bearers actively promoting recognition and responsibility of rights and full participation.

There is a need for action to address the persistent issues that limit genuine participation and leadership by women with disabilities and their representative organisations, in gender programs and activities. Recommendations are targeted at partners, governments, donors, development actors, research agencies, OPDs themselves, as well as other actors involved in gender programming and related fields.



Fiji OPD members engaged in advocacy work.

Recommendations



Recommendation 1:

Governments, donors and research institutions should support research and analysis into the situation of diverse women and girls with disabilities within the Pacific, including examining their inclusion within gender programming. Women and girls with disabilities and their representative organisations should be supported and resourced to lead and engage in this research and analysis.

Recommendation 2:

In implementing gender programs and activities, actors need to actively ensure these are accessible to and inclusive of diverse women with disabilities. This includes addressing preconditions for inclusion, and providing resourcing and capacity-building.

Recommendation 3:

Donors and governments must adequately resource gender programs so that these can achieve full inclusion of women and girls with disabilities, and a specific focus on their rights and priorities.

Recommendation 4:

OPDs should be sufficiently resourced and supported, by donors, partners and government, through core ongoing funding as well as funding for programming, to enable meaningful participation through strengthening of organizational capacity.

Recommendation 5:

In developing and implementing gender programming, donors and implementing partners need to ensure specific focus on the rights of diverse women and girls with disabilities at all stages, from design to evaluation.

Recommendation 6:

Partners and donors need to build internal capacity to ensure an organisation-wide approach to inclusion of women and girls with disabilities, including resourcing and building understanding of preconditions for genuine participation.

Recommendations Cont.

Recommendation 7:

Gender programs should ensure that monitoring data is routinely disaggregated by disability, and that specific indicators to measure impact for women and girls with disabilities are incorporated. Partners and donors should ensure adequate resourcing and training to enable robust collection and use of this data.

Recommendation 8:

Funders and partners should build their own capacity for proactive support and inclusion of women and girls with disabilities, and recognition of their roles as duty-bearers. This should complement the central role of OPDs in promoting and advocating for rights for women and girls with disabilities.

Recommendation 9:

Donors, implementers and partner organisations should ensure that Pacific OPDs are adequately funded and supported in their work to build inclusive gender programming. This includes both funding for OPD work at program level, and core funding to support their ongoing engagement and capacity-building with women and girls with disabilities.

Recommendation 10:

Pacific OPDs should work to capture and disseminate learnings about the varied roles that OPDs play, in supporting women and girls with disabilities to access gender programming; and use these learnings to build understanding amongst partners of the importance of these roles.

Recommendation 11:

Partners and stakeholders need to carry out detailed barrier analyses, to understand and address the multiple barriers to gender programs faced by women and girls with disabilities.

Recommendation 12:

Working with OPDs, gender programs and implementing partners should develop and implement new approaches and strategies for engaging with women and girls with disabilities. These should address cultural and power-related barriers and ensure participants in programs, workshops and events have genuine opportunities to contribute.

Recommendation 13:

Funders and implementers of gender programs should engage fully with local OPDs and communities, to better understand and address barriers to inclusion faced by diverse women and girls with disabilities. This includes appropriate allocation of funding, and partnerships with OPDs which recognise the fundamental roles OPDs play in supporting and empowering women with disabilities.

Acronyms

CEDAW	UN Convention for the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women
CRPD	UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
DFAT	Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Australia)
IDA	International Disability Alliance
MEL	Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning
OPD	Organisation of Persons with Disabilities
PDF	Pacific Disability Forum
PFRPD	2016-2025 Pacific Framework for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
PICs	Pacific Island Countries
PIF	Pacific Island Forum
PIFS	Pacific Island Forum Secretariat
PGEP II	Progressing Gender Equality in the Pacific Program II
PLGED	Pacific Leaders' Gender Equality Declaration (PLGED)
PPA	Pacific Platform for Action for Gender Equality and Women's Human Rights
PWL	Pacific Women Lead
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
SOGIESC	Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity, Gender Expression and Sex Characteristics
SPC	Pacific Community
SRHR	Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights
UN	United Nations
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
WGSS	Washington Group Short Set of Questions



Organisation of persons with disability members from Fiji and Kiribati conducting outreach programs

1. Background

1.1 Gender equality in the Pacific

It is well-understood and documented that **all women and girls in the Pacific** face disadvantage and inequalities in multiple sectors and facets of life, and are not able to fully realise their rights.

This report focuses particularly on four key sectors targeted by gender programming, namely: women's leadership and participation; violence against women and girls; sexual and reproductive health; and women's economic empowerment. Evidence regarding inequality for all Pacific women and girls within these spheres include:

- **Women's leadership and participation:** only about 7 percent of elected Pacific politicians are women, compared to 27 percent globally.²
- **Violence against women and girls:** while there is a lack of recent data, rates of physical violence from intimate partners varies from 21 percent in Tonga to 61 percent in Fiji, for ever-partnered women. Prevalence of emotional and sexual violence and controlling behaviour are also very high throughout the region.³
- **Sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR):** average adolescent fertility rate across 14 Pacific Island Countries (PICs) is 48 births per 1000 women aged 15-19, against a Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) target of 13 births per 1000.⁴ There are high levels of unmet contraceptive need across the region.
- **Women's economic empowerment:** average labour force participation is 49.7 percent for women, compared to 69.9 percent for men, across 14 PICs. Rates of unemployment, youth unemployment and young people who are not in education, employment or training are both significantly higher for females than males.⁵

Many organisations, including Pacific national and regional bodies, UN agencies, and development programs funded by a variety of donors, are seeking to address issues of inequality and denial of rights for all women and girls. This includes mechanisms such as programs, legislation, declarations and activities at regional, national and local levels.

1.2 Women and girls with disabilities in the Pacific

People with disabilities are recognised as one of the most marginalised populations within PICs, facing discrimination, stigma and denial of their rights.⁶ For women and girls with disabilities in the Pacific, the inequality faced by women and girls and by people with disabilities intersects, causing multiplied marginalisation. In many spheres of life, there is evidence that **women and girls with disabilities in the Pacific face greater disadvantage and marginalisation than other women and girls**, as well as than men and boys with disabilities. For individual women and girls with disabilities, other identities including age, sexual orientation, ethnicity and impairment type can be further sources of marginalisation.

² Baker, Dr Kerryn & Meki, Dr Theresa (2023), 'One step forward, two steps back: Women's political representation in the Pacific', <https://www.internationalaffairs.org.au/australianoutlook/one-step-forward-two-steps-back-womens-political-representation-in-the-pacific/>.

³ UN Women (2022), 'Gender Equality Brief for 14 Pacific Island Countries and Territories', https://asiapacific.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2022-12/UN_WOMEN_REGIONAL_BRIEF.pdf

⁴ See for instance, the Pacific Leaders Gender Equality Declaration.

⁵ UN Women (2022).

⁶ UN Women (2022)

⁶ PIFS, Pacific Framework for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2016 – 2025.

1. Background Cont.

While all people with disabilities in the Pacific experience marginalisation, women with disabilities **face unique risks**, including due to discriminatory gender norms. They **experience disability differently to men**, including having less access to employment and education, and face discrimination at the family level as well as the broader community.⁷

These increased and unique risks can be seen within the spheres often targeted by gender inclusion programs.

- **Women's leadership and participation:** women with disabilities **participate in their communities at a lower rate** than either women without disabilities, or men with disabilities. Factors such as fewer years of schooling, along with discrimination and marginalisation, can limit their involvement in advocacy and public life.⁸
- **Violence against women and girls:** Women and girls with disabilities face **two to three times the risk of physical and sexual abuse** than women and girls without disabilities. They also experience different forms of violence and abuse, including withholding of medication or assistance, denial of basic rights such as food and water, and forced medical treatment and sterilisation.⁹
- **Sexual and reproductive health and rights:** women and girls with disabilities often have poorer access to SRHR services. This is due to many factors including the accessibility of services, and incorrect beliefs that they are not sexually active and do not or should not have children.¹⁰
- **Women's economic empowerment:** women with disabilities are more likely to be poor and have lower rates of employment,¹¹ than either women with out disabilities or men with disabilities.

A 2023 Pacific Women Lead brief summarises the situation for women and girls with disabilities thus:

Throughout the Pacific region, in both urban and rural communities, women with disabilities are far more likely to live in poverty and face multiple attitudinal, physical and economic barriers to full participation in political, economic and social life ... Women and girls with disabilities are disproportionately affected by crises and shocks, including climate-related extreme weather events and the COVID-19 pandemic.¹²

⁷ Pacific Women Lead (2023), 'Thematic Brief: Inclusion of Pacific women with disabilities'.

⁸ PDF (2018), Pacific Disability Forum SDF-CRPD Monitoring Report 2018.

⁹ UNFPA (2013), A Deeper Silence: The Unheard Experiences of Women with Disabilities – Sexual and Reproductive Health and Violence against Women in Kiribati, Solomon Island and Tonga, Suva.

¹⁰ UNFPA (2013).

¹¹ Pacific Women Lead (2023).

¹² Pacific Women Lead (2023).

1. Background Cont.

1.3 Policy Frameworks on Gender in the Pacific

Across the Pacific, PIC governments, regional bodies, UN agencies and many other actors have worked for many years to address gender inequality, promote women's rights and progress gender empowerment. There are several key policy frameworks and conventions guiding action on gender equality in the Pacific, in addition to national level legislation. Most of these frameworks reference the importance of inclusion of women and girls with disabilities within broader gender equality efforts.

UN Convention for the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women

Almost all PICs have ratified the **Convention for the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)**, the key convention on gender equality (Palau has signed but is yet to ratify, and Tonga and Niue have neither signed nor ratified). Although CEDAW does not explicitly reference the rights of women and girls with disabilities, the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women has recognised the double discrimination that this group faces; and has noted that signatories need to take additional measures to ensure women and girls with disabilities can achieve their rights.¹³

Pacific Leaders Gender Equality Declaration

The **Pacific Leaders Gender Equality Declaration (PLGED)** was originally endorsed in 2012 by Pacific Island Forum Leaders, with a revitalized version endorsed in 2023.

¹⁴ It sets out commitments of Pacific leaders to progressing gender equality within the region and implementing existing goals including CEDAW, the Revised Pacific Platform for Action, and commitments to increase women's representation in legislatures, address violence against women, and improve economic opportunities for women as priority areas.

The original PLGED does not reference disability, nor make any commitments relating to the CRPD. However the **Revitalised PLGED**, endorsed at the 51st PIF Leaders Meeting in 2023, explicitly recognises the need to target women with disabilities, acknowledges the specific vulnerabilities they face, identifies the need for data and a conducive environment for economic empowerment, and commits to a twin-track approach.¹⁵

The **Pacific Islands Forum Women Leaders Meeting**, held in Suva in 2023, also recognised in its outcomes statement the importance of disability inclusion and the need for a twin-track approach.¹⁶

Pacific Platform for Action for Gender Equality and Women's Human Rights

The **Pacific Platform for Action for Gender Equality and Women's Human Rights 2018–2030 (PPA)** was prepared by SPC and endorsed by Pacific leaders in 2017. It provides a roadmap for achieving gender equality in the Pacific, with specific mention of women and girls with disabilities. It is designed to guide governments as well as civil society, development partners and CROP members (Council of Regional Organisations in the Pacific).¹⁷

¹³ UN Women, 'Global norms and standards: Women and girls with disabilities', accessed 20 June 2024.

¹⁴ Pacific Islands Forum, 'Gender Equality and Social Inclusion', <https://forumsec.org/gender-equality-and-social-inclusion>, accessed 29 May 2024.

¹⁵ Pacific Island Forum (2023), Revitalised Pacific Leaders Gender Equality Declaration, Suva.

¹⁶ <https://www.forumsec.org/2023/09/08/reports-2023-pacific-islands-forum-women-leaders-meeting/>.

¹⁷ Pacific Community, Pacific Platform for Action for Gender Equality and Women's Human Rights 2018-2030.

1. Background Cont.

Pacific Roadmap for Sustainable Development

The Pacific Roadmap for Sustainable Development provides guidance on achievement of the SDGs and the 2030 Agenda. Despite its importance in setting priorities for the Pacific, it makes only one reference to disability, noting the need to empower women, girls and people with disabilities.¹⁸ There are also limited other references to gender equality.

1.4 Policy Framework on Disability in the Pacific

Action on disability equity and rights is informed by international and regional frameworks. These set out clearly the responsibilities of States Parties and other actors to promote the rights of women and girls with disabilities, and to engage with OPDs as representatives of people with disabilities.

Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

Almost all Pacific nations have ratified **the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities** (CRPD), the key UN convention setting out the rights of people with disabilities (Tonga has signed but is yet to ratify, and Niue has neither signed nor ratified).

Article 6 of the CRPD recognises that ‘women and girls with disabilities are subject to multiple discrimination’ and sets out the responsibilities of States Parties to ‘take measures **to ensure the full and equal enjoyment ... of all human rights and fundamental freedoms**’ by women and girls with disabilities.

The CRPD also promotes participation of people with disabilities as both a process and an outcome, and sets out the role of OPDs as intermediary bodies in representing people with disabilities in decision-making processes.¹⁹

Pacific Framework for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

The 2016–2025 **Pacific Framework for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (PFRPD)** sets a framework for supporting Pacific governments to promote, protect and fulfill the rights of people with disabilities, as set out in the CRPD; and strengthening coordination and collaboration to support national initiatives. The Framework recognises women with disabilities as a ‘particularly vulnerable group’, and seeks to specifically address their rights, including through supporting leadership capacity-building, and economic empowerment. It also notes the need for capacity-building and leadership of OPDs, especially for women with disabilities, to support their ability to contribute to policy and program processes.²⁰

¹⁸ <https://www.forumsec.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/The-Pacific-Roadmap-for-Sustainable-Development.pdf>.

¹⁹ Asian Development Bank (2024), Gender Equality and Disability Inclusion: Guidelines to address the specific needs of women and girls with disabilities, <https://www.adb.org/sites/default/files/publication/970411/gender-equality-disability-inclusion-guidelines.pdf>.

²⁰ PFRPD, <https://forumsec.org/sites/default/files/2023-12/PFRPD.pdf>.

1. Background Cont.

1.5 Gender equality programming and women with disabilities



The policy frameworks in the Pacific guiding both action on gender equality, as well as on disability equity and rights, make explicit that gender equality programs and policies need to **fully include and benefit women and girls with disabilities**. This is required in order to fulfil the rights of women and girls with disabilities. Given the greater marginalisation and disadvantage they face, if gender equality efforts are to be successful, they must explicitly reach women and girls with disabilities.

However it is recognised that globally, **policies and programs at all levels may fail to identify or address the rights and needs of women and girls with disabilities.**²¹

This includes policies and programs specifically targeting gender inequality.

The twin-track approach

Action on disability inclusion is typically implemented using a twin-track approach.

This requires that disability inclusion must be progressed through both:

- **specific targeted actions** to promote the rights of people with disabilities; and
- **mainstreaming**, whereby all programs and policies, regardless of focus, work to ensure full inclusion of people with disabilities.

A mainstreaming approach to gender equality requires that all gender programs and policies are **fully inclusive of and accessible to women and girls with disabilities**; and that these programs and policies also address their specific needs and priorities and seek to include and strengthen their voices.

²¹ UNDESA <https://social.un.org/publications/UN-Flagship-Report-Disability-Final.pdf>.



Women with disability leaders presenting at national and regional convenings.

1. Background Cont.

1.6 Levels of Participation

In examining the inclusion and participation of women and girls with disabilities, it is useful to consider what meaningful participation looks like. Although many programs and partners will state that they promote participation or inclusion, what this looks like in practice can vary widely. Some forms of participation may be largely tokenistic or symbolic, if there are not genuine opportunities for active involvement and influence by women and girls with disabilities and their representative OPDs. Understanding these forms of participation can help to hold duty-bearers accountable, and provide a framework for identifying where ‘participation’ is falling short or is not truly inclusive, and how it can be strengthened.²²

One conception of participation here drawn from the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) identifies a spectrum of approaches, which range from merely ensuring people with disabilities are aware of programs, up to approaches which work to actively empower them to lead. This is sometimes described as a ladder, with levels of participation gradually increasing; but there can also be a variety of types of participation within a single organisation, activity or program. Levels of participation within a single program may also vary widely for different groups, for instance women with different types of impairments.

- **Informing** – letting people with disabilities know about programs and activities, often in a one-way flow of information without feedback mechanisms.
- **Consulting** – asking for input, for example on designs or approaches or in meetings or consultations. There is no certainty that this input is taken into account, however.
- **Involving** – ensuring people with disabilities and their organisations play an active role in activities, although this may not include decision-making power.
- **Collaborating** – ensuring power and decision-making processes are shared, including through structures such as steering committees or formal roles within programs.
- **Empowering** – processes work to strengthen the power of people with disabilities and their organisations, providing them with genuine control and ability to lead and pursue their own priorities.

²² CBM, ‘Inclusive Participation Toolbox: What is Participation?’, <https://participation.cbm.org/why/disability-participation/participation>

1. Background Cont.

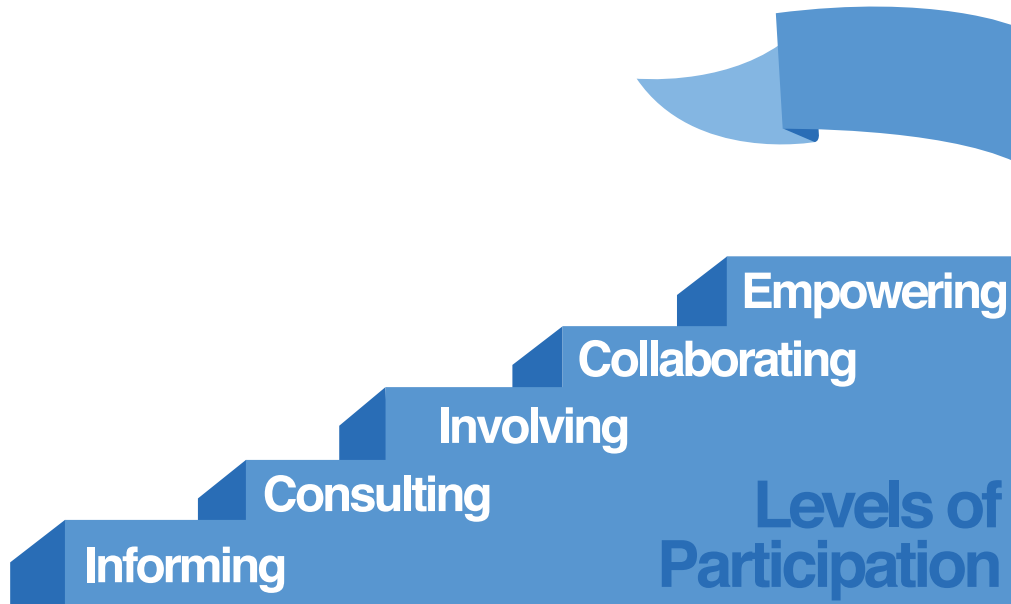


Figure 1: Levels of Participation by OPDs and women with disabilities, drawing from the IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation



OPD members from under- represented disability groups participating in outreach to the community.

2. Methodology

An initial desk review of mainstream academic publications, formal and informal research, was undertaken to identify relevant existing information or research about inclusion of women and girls with disabilities within gender programs and policies within the Pacific, with a focus on the four key organisations being examined (PIFS, SPC, UN Women, and UNFPA).

Key informant interviews were conducted with staff from the four key organisations, as well as PDF. Online focus group discussion were conducted with representatives from twelve OPDs and disability-focused organisations from seven Pacific countries. Findings verification was undertaken with PDF. This draft report was developed, which PDF will share with members and provide comments to feed into a final version.



Women OPD leaders at th CEDAW convening.

3. Findings: Evidence from desk research and from OPDs

3.1 Availability of research and evidence on inclusion of women with disabilities in gender programs

There is very **limited formal research or analysis available** about the inclusion of women with disabilities in gender equality efforts within the Pacific, published in mainstream journals or publications, or produced by UN, governments, development partners or other agencies.

Searches using tools including JSTOR and Google Scholar did not find any academic resources specifically considering this issue, despite the use of a variety of search terms.²³ One of the few grey literature papers considering this directly was prepared by the author in 2023, commissioned by CBM Australia.²⁴

This lack of evidence and research reflects a wider issue **regarding a lack of research and investigation into the situation of women and girls with disabilities** in the Pacific more generally. For instance, a comprehensive 2023 brief was prepared by the Pacific Women Lead (PWL) program on inclusion of Pacific women with disabilities, summarizing available evidence across all spheres of life including access to justice, education, employment and community life. This drew on resources as far back as 2002 for country-specific information, and relied on more general global statistics in many cases.²⁵

There tends to be reliance on evidence on inclusion of women with disabilities that has been produced by a **small number of strong research projects**. These are very valuable, but many now date back 20 or more years, are focused on particular sectors, and cannot cover all countries or contexts within the Pacific nor reflect the experiences of the diversity of women and girls with disabilities.

²³ Searches included: Search of the JSTOR database using the search terms 'disability', 'women' and 'Pacific'

²⁴ James, K (2023), 'Missing Voices: The inclusion of women with disabilities within gender programming and women's movements', CBM Australia

²⁵ Pacific Women Lead (2023)

3. Findings: Evidence from desk research and from OPDs Cont.

This lack of evidence means that there is **limited understanding of the experiences of diverse women and girls with disabilities**, which in turn may impact on the design and implementation of mainstream activities, including gender policies and programs.

There is a **gradual increase in research** on the experiences of women and girls with disabilities in the Pacific, however this has not yet encompassed study of their inclusion in gender movements.

Recommendation 1: Governments, donors and research institutions should support research and analysis into the situation of diverse women and girls with disabilities within the Pacific, including examining their inclusion within gender programming. Women and girls with disabilities and their representative organisations should be supported and resourced to lead and engage in this research and analysis.

3.2 Inclusion of women and girls with disabilities in gender programs globally

Although there is a lack of research about women and girls with disabilities in the Pacific, there is anecdotal and grey literature evidence suggesting that **women with disabilities are left out of gender equity programs and policies globally**. There is increasing recognition within gender programs and gender-focused organisations of this issue. For example, UN Women notes that globally, the needs of women and girls with disabilities are often ‘overlooked during the development and implementation of policies, programs and intergovernmental processes’.²⁶ In a 2024 guidance document on gender and disability inclusion, the Asian Development Bank notes that ‘To date, many women and girls with disabilities have been marginalized and made invisible in mainstream development policies and programs’.²⁷

There is also some evidence that gender programs, including in the Pacific, **do not fully engage with OPDs** and have gaps in their approach to disability inclusion. Research by James on DFAT-funded gender programs in the Indo-Pacific interviewed representatives from OPDs in the region. This identified significant variation in the extent to which mainstream gender programs sought to involve OPDs and address disability inclusion. Issues included:

- **Insufficient engagement with OPDs representing women**, including those with a variety of impairments.
- Failure to **resource and develop proficiency on disability inclusion** in-house.
- Limited **capacity-building and core support** provided to OPDs, with funding instead centred around activities.
- Lack of **nurturing and development** for emerging smaller OPDs.
- **Inaccessible activities** within programs, and a lack of understanding or funding for the costs of inclusion measures for women with disabilities.²⁸

²⁶ <https://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/women-and-girls-with-disabilities>

²⁷ Asian Development Bank, Gender Equality and Disability Inclusion: Guidelines to address the specific needs of women and girls with disabilities, May 2024

²⁸ James, K (2023).

3. Findings: Evidence from desk research and from OPDs Cont.

Global trends on inclusion

The gaps in inclusion of OPDs within gender programs is symptomatic of broader worldwide trends. The International Disability Alliance (IDA) has highlighted that globally:

Participation of OPDs in decision making remains largely insufficient ... Despite significant progress and commitments to disability-inclusive development and humanitarian action, the experience of IDA as a global alliance of OPDs is that pledges are not yet turned into action, and do not systematically ensure participation of OPDs as right-holders. With this comes the risk of disability being merely a box to tick, and participation of OPDs being tokenistic.²⁹

Research into participation by OPDs globally, undertaken by IDA in 2021, identified that:

- **OPD influence is increasing**, and OPD satisfaction with their interaction with international partners was increasing over time. However while OPDs are being consulted on a wider range of issues, their **participation remained limited** and OPDs were not often involved in decision-making processes.
- Some groups of people are less likely to be involved in decision-making, including **people who are deafblind, or who have intellectual or psychosocial impairments**.
- **Preconditions for inclusion**, such as accessibility and reasonable accommodation measures, were also perceived to be deteriorating.
- **OPDs often lack resources including time, training and experience** to meaningfully engage with partners – which can then perpetuate this issue as OPDs miss out on opportunities to strengthen their capacity. However there is still under-investment in ensuring preconditions for meaningful OPD participation.
- While the research did not look specifically at involvement in gender programs, it did find that **OPDs felt increasingly consulted on gender equality**, compared to 2018.³⁰

Recommendation 2: In implementing gender programs and activities, actors need to actively ensure these are accessible to and inclusive of diverse women with disabilities. This includes addressing preconditions for inclusion, and providing resourcing and capacity-building.

Recommendation 3: Donors and governments must adequately resource gender programs so that these can achieve full inclusion of women and girls with disabilities, and a specific focus on their rights and priorities.

Recommendation 4: OPDs should be sufficiently resourced and supported, by donors, partners and government, through core ongoing funding as well as funding for programming, to enable meaningful participation through strengthening of organizational capacity.

²⁹ International Disability Alliance (2022), Not just ticking the disability box? Meaningful OPD participation and the risk of tokenism, https://www.internationaldisabilityalliance.org/sites/default/files/ida_global_survey_2022_final.pdf

³⁰ International Disability Alliance (2022)

3. Findings: Evidence from desk research and from OPDs Cont.

3.3 Approaches to inclusion within partner gender programs and activities

Another source of information about inclusion within gender activities examined by the review, is documents such as designs and evaluations that relate to gender programs implemented by partners, as well as policy and practice notes, frameworks and similar related documents. Partner representatives were also interviewed about practices and capacity on disability inclusion.

There is evidence of **progress over the past several years on disability inclusion within major gender programs being implemented in the Pacific**. For instance, an evaluation of the Pacific Women program (a 10-year program funded through Australian Aid and implemented across 14 PICs) found that **practice on disability inclusion had been limited but was improving**, with partners increasingly adopting inclusive practices, and evidence of engagement with OPDs.³¹ Since then, the successor program Pacific Women Lead (PWL) has also taken a strengthened approach. The MEL framework includes a focus on strengthening disaggregation of data by disability, with detailed guidance; while the outcome area of promoting women's leadership within Pacific feminist civil society includes an indicator for the number of Pacific OPDs actively engaged in the project.

The Markets for Change program, which addresses women's safety in urban markets in Pacific countries has also engaged closely with women with disabilities over its implementation. PDF has been a member of the program steering committee for several years, and issues such as physical accessibility of markets, accommodation centres, and WASH facilities addressed. Monitoring data is disaggregated by disability for the most recent phase. Nevertheless, program staff noted that the focus had been largely on physical barriers, and the reach beyond this was more limited. **Women with more complex or stigmatized impairments, in particular, still face exclusion.**

There are other programs for which designs and evaluation reports are not publicly available, making it difficult to assess whether and how these programs are seeking to include women with disabilities.

³¹ DFAT, 'Pacific Women shaping Pacific development: Six year evaluation report', 2020, <https://www.dfat.gov.au/publications/development/pacific-women-shaping-pacific-development-six-year-evaluation-report-and-management-response>

3. Findings: Evidence from desk research and from OPDs Cont.

Monitoring and evaluation of progress is also limited, with many programs not including clear indicators to measure impact and progress for women with disabilities; although disaggregation by disability is increasing.

Guidance documents and learning papers

Regarding policy guidance documents, frameworks, learning papers and similar documents developed by partners on key gender issues, performance is mixed. There are concerning examples of documents which have relatively little mention of the needs of women and girls with disabilities, such as guidance documents on ending violence against women and girls. (EVAWG). This is particularly the case for documents dating from five or more years ago, although these are still available as resources on partner websites.

Conversely, there are also good practice examples, such as needs assessments of women and young people with disabilities in selected PICs; briefs on the experiences of women and girls with disabilities during COVID; and papers on other human rights issues such as access to justice for women with disabilities in Fiji. These tend to be more recent documents, suggesting that there is **gradual change over time and an increase in good practice guidance** on promoting the rights of women and girls with disabilities, within partner organisations.

Internal organizational capacity

In order to adequately include women and girls with disabilities in their activities, partner organisations need to have **internal capacity and resources to support this**. Partners are well aware of this, and take a variety of approaches. Some organisations have disability advisors at organizational or program level. There are examples of strong practice, with the recognition of disability rights as a fundamental component of women's rights embedded throughout an organisation. Others reported a more ad hoc approach, acknowledging gaps between aspirations and actual practice, and a limited understanding of participation as a force for empowerment. There were also ongoing challenges noted in terms of supporting inclusion of women with psychosocial and intellectual impairments.

Recommendation 5: In developing and implementing gender programming, donors and implementing partners need to ensure specific focus on the rights of diverse women and girls with disabilities at all stages, from design to evaluation.

Recommendation 6: Partners and donors need to build internal capacity to ensure an organisation-wide approach to inclusion of women and girls with disabilities, including resourcing and building understanding of preconditions for genuine participation.

Recommendation 7: Gender programs should ensure that monitoring data is routinely disaggregated by disability, and that specific indicators to measure impact for women and girls with disabilities are incorporated. Partners and donors should ensure adequate resourcing and training to enable robust collection and use of this data.

3. Findings: Evidence from desk research and from OPDs Cont.

3.4 OPD perceptions of good practice on inclusion by partners within gender programming

With the CRPD setting out the role of OPDs as representatives of people with disabilities in decision-making processes, Pacific OPDs have strong experience in engaging with government, UN, regional and development partners. OPDs are often called upon to **participate in consultations, workshops, planning sessions or various stages of program design, implementation and monitoring and evaluation**. This is despite the fact that national-level OPDs within the Pacific are often small and reliant on volunteers, with limited sources of core funding. Some countries may have a single OPD which represents all people with disabilities, including women and girls; others have impairment-specific OPDs and groups or sub-groups with a focus on women and girls with disabilities.

In focus group discussions, OPDs across the Pacific identified a range of issues regarding the inclusion of women with disabilities by key partners in gender programming, based upon their experiences. Not all points were raised by all OPDs; however the following findings represent the key themes that emerged from the discussions.

OPDs reported a number of practices which they felt represented good practice by partners. They perceived that partners largely recognised the need for inclusion and were seeking to engage and develop technical approaches.

Establishment of focal points and direct delivery of services through OPDs

Most examples cited referenced government partners, rather than the four key organisations. OPDs reported that some Ministries (e.g. Ministries of Health) showed good practice in engaging with them, including **establishment of focal points** at Ministry level; provision of services at OPD offices to support accessibility; and working with OPDs to directly target and reach women with disabilities in providing specific services. There were also cases of capacity-building and support provided for OPDs, including for core functions.

One OPD gave an example strong practice in collaboration by a women's health service. The service **engaged with the OPD to identify the best way to reach women with disabilities and help them to access services**. Health screening was then offered through the OPD office, as this was a location that was comfortable and accessible for women with disabilities.

3.5 OPD perceptions of poor practices by partners on inclusion of women with disabilities in gender programs

There is **strong recognition by identified partners**, and by development stakeholders more broadly, of the need for disability inclusion and specific engagement with women and girls. Typically, more recent frameworks, program designs, guidance notes etc from partners will **note the marginalisation of women and girls with disabilities**, and the need for specific action to address this and ensure inclusion. However, **significant limitations and challenges in current inclusion practices persist**.

3. Findings: Evidence from desk research and from OPDs Cont.

Pacific OPDs identified specific issues regarding poor or limited practice on inclusion within gender programs, by key partners including the four focused on in this review.

Tick-the-box approaches

A common concern raised was of **inclusion being treated as a ‘tick-the-box exercise’**. Multiple OPD representatives mentioned that while consultation with their organisation and with women with disabilities took place, it often felt like this was conducted in order to meet donor or organizational requirements on disability inclusion. There was sometimes a **failure to look beyond the basics and meaningfully engage with, or include, women with disabilities** – OPDs reported that they did not feel listened to. One participant noted that ‘It feels like [partners] know they are meant to engage [with OPDs], but it does not feel like they ... have a big impact in their engagement.’

One OPD cited the issue of support being provided only while funding was available, which in the case of short-term programs, raised expectations but then caused issues once these finished. Engagement with women and girls with disabilities, as well as capacity-building of OPDs, can require significant time and effort which may not fit within the timeframes of shorter gender programs.

Partner organisations themselves also raised this issue in interviews, with one noting that OPDs might be engaged as a way to ‘tick the box’ on inclusion, rather than being proactive. Some respondents noted that the current engagement with OPDs was somewhat ad hoc, and did not necessarily reflect a commitment to empowerment of women with disabilities.

Poor accessibility or inclusiveness of activities and events

OPDs identified that some events or training were run in ways that meant they were **not truly accessible to women with disabilities, despite OPDs being invited**. This included issues of accessibility of venues, geographical location, cost of events and associated costs such as transport, the language used (events are usually held in English), and the structure or complexity of events. This is linked to a lack of understanding of the **specific needs and issues** facing women with disabilities.

‘Participation’ being limited to consultation, rather than empowerment

OPDs reported sometimes being **excluded from the planning stages** of programs or activities, and being invited to participate only once planning is already underway, or even after programs have started. This represents practice that is lower down the ‘ladder of inclusion’ – consulting or involving, rather than genuinely collaborating with OPDs in ways that allowed them to influence the direction of programs and activities.

Failure to proactively progress inclusion and reliance on OPD advocacy

OPDs reported that they were sometimes expected to advocate for their own inclusion, with partner organisations **not necessarily being proactive in including women and girls with disabilities within their programs**. This was also expressed by some partners – one in particular emphasized that they felt that PDF needed to advocate strongly and “claim space” within gender movements.

3. Findings: Evidence from desk research and from OPDs Cont.

While OPDs do play an important role in advocating for inclusion and holding duty-bearers to account, this assumption that they need to claim their own space de-emphasises the responsibility of partners to progress inclusion themselves. If women and girls with disabilities are required to claim their own rights, this means that when they cannot do so due to barriers, those rights can be at risk. It also means that OPDs must spend limited resources and time on advocating for their own inclusion, which can impact their ability to carry out other activities to support women and girls with disabilities. In addition, while there are many women's rights programs across the Pacific, PDF is the only regional OPD in the Pacific and cannot engage across all of these spaces.

Women's rights organisations can play a complementary role to that of OPDs, in recognising that the rights of women and girls with disabilities are a gender issue, and advocating for their full inclusion.

Recommendation 8: Funders and partners should build their own capacity for proactive support and inclusion of women and girls with disabilities, and recognition of their roles as duty-bearers. This should complement the central role of OPDs in promoting and advocating for rights for women and girls with disabilities.

Lack of funding and support

OPDs highlighted that there was **limited direct funding provided by partners**, particularly for core costs. The ongoing work which OPDs carry out in supporting women and girls with disabilities is not necessarily easy to classify, and may not fall under a particular program or activity. A lack of core funding means that one half of the twin-track approach is not being adequately fulfilled.

Where funding is tied to specific programs and activities, this can limit the ability of OPDs to **implement based on the priorities of their members**, and to undertake activities where outcomes are less obvious or may accrue over a long period (**such as capacity-building and support** for rural women and girls with disabilities). Funding which is provided without capacity support can also cause problems for smaller and emerging organisations in particular: see Practice Example 1.

Practice example: Support to an emerging organisation of women with disabilities

A disability organisation in Melanesia described a situation in which a large partner provided funding directly to a small emerging group of women with disabilities. The funds were provided to support implementation of activities including rights education and economic activities.

By directly supporting women with disabilities to form a representative organisation and address their own priorities, this had the potential for good practice. However the partner did not provide the group with any core support for organisational strengthening and operations, including policies and financial systems; nor connect them with agencies such as larger OPDs that could have provided technical support.

3. Findings: Evidence from desk research and from OPDs Cont.

The focus on programming and lack of resources for organisational strengthening meant that the group struggled to meet the partner's requirements for reporting and financial management. They were then considered to have mismanaged the funding. This may jeopardise their ability to access funds in future, in turn limiting the ability of the group to grow and develop further.

3.6 Roles played by OPDs in supporting inclusion of women with disabilities in gender programs

Despite their small size and limited funding, Pacific OPDs play multiple roles in **supporting and promoting the inclusion of women with disabilities** in gender programming and activities.

Engagement with gender partners and stakeholders

OPDs **engage directly with partners and stakeholders** in a variety of ways to support them in inclusion of women and girls with disabilities. This includes:

- Providing **advice and support to partner organisations** on ways to provide accessible and inclusive services, and how to effectively reach diverse women with disabilities. This was often within formal settings such as consultations, or in contexts where OPDs played a recognised advisory role within a program.
- **Advocating to partners, government and other stakeholders**, to promote awareness of their obligations under the CRPD to fully include women and girls with disabilities.
- **Engaging with partners** to 'push for a seat at the table' for OPDs themselves and women with disabilities more broadly, including raising awareness of the needs of diverse women with disabilities and the barriers they face, and sharing lived experience.
- Identifying and advocating on **specific accessibility issues impacting the participation of women with disabilities**: for instance, the need for sign interpreters to be funded by partners in order to facilitate involvement of Deaf women in activities.

Despite (or perhaps because of) this variety of engagement between OPDs and partner organisations, it is important to recognise that this comes with particular **power dynamics**. While OPDs did not necessarily express this directly in FGDs, it was implicit within the issues that they raised.

OPDs are often reliant in some way on partner organisations – such as for funding, recognition, or opportunities to be involved or consulted in current and future programs. Or OPDs may receive funding or support from donors which also support the programs they are involved in. While the impact of this can be subtle, **it may mean that OPD members do not want to do anything that could jeopardise relationships with partners or donors**. They may consciously or unconsciously adjust their communication, messaging or ways of interacting. There is an understandable interest for OPDs to keep relationships with partners open and cordial, and perhaps to be perceived as constructive and easy to engage with. There may be reluctance to raise difficult questions, point out barriers or instances of discrimination, or push back in order to request their rights be respected. OPDs mentioned a level of fatigue at

3. Findings: Evidence from desk research and from OPDs Cont.

repeatedly having to negotiate with donors for basics such as funding for sign interpreters. Or there may be wariness about providing feedback that criticizes current practices, and by implication the staff who are implementing these, which OPDs may also deal with in other capacities.

Engagement with women and girls with disabilities

Arguably less well-recognised is the long-term work that OPDs carry out in **engaging with women and girls with disabilities to build their capacity and confidence to represent themselves, tell their stories**, and engage in more formal spaces. This may take place outside of the context of a particular program or partner.

For a variety of reasons, including lack of access to education, language skills, shyness, isolation, stigma, or family attitudes, women and girls with disabilities may not feel confident speaking out or engaging in formal spaces, such as workshops or consultations. OPDs shared that they often **work with women and girls, including those in remote and rural areas over months or years** to gradually build confidence and encourage them to participate. Although it is often not visible to or supported directly by gender partners, this work is often a **precondition for women and girls with disabilities to be able to effectively engage** in gender programs.

Other activities that OPDs conduct directly with women and girls with disabilities include:

- Engaging with women and girls with disabilities who are invited to specific events or consultations, **to map out ways to advocate and strategically share messages**. This may include supporting specific communities of women, such as Deaf women or women with intellectual impairments.
- Conducting **outreach activities**, to make women and girls with disabilities aware of programs or services and to raise awareness of their rights – including women with intellectual disabilities and others who are isolated or face particular barriers.
- Supporting **women's leadership and involvement within the OPD**, for example within a specific Women's Committee or in supporting increased engagement from women and young people with disabilities.

Recommendation 9: Donors, implementers and partner organisations should ensure that Pacific OPDs are adequately funded and supported in their work to build inclusive gender programming. This includes both funding for OPD work at program level, and core funding to support their ongoing engagement and capacity-building with women and girls with disabilities.

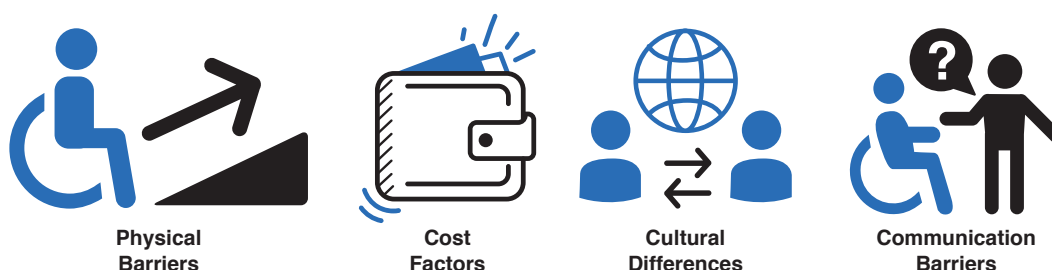
Recommendation 10: Pacific OPDs should work to capture and disseminate learnings about the varied roles that OPDs play, in supporting women and girls with disabilities to access gender programming; and use these learnings to build understanding amongst partners of the importance of these roles.

3. Findings: Evidence from desk research and from OPDs Cont.

3.7 Barriers faced by women with disabilities in accessing gender programs

In focus groups, OPDs highlighted the many specific barriers faced by their members, specifically women with disabilities, in accessing gender programs. This includes barriers both to the activities and services themselves, as well as to engagement in consultations, planning, evaluations etc related to the design and implementation of programs.

Conversely, some partner organisations mentioned situations where OPDs had been invited to events or activities but had not attended. There seemed to be relatively little recognition by these partners that this could be due to barriers, or that simply extending an invitation to an event is often not sufficient to allow OPDs to attend.



Barriers related to location or format of gender programs and activities

Physical barriers:

- **Inaccessible venues:** on occasion, events and services were held in inaccessible venues. More generally, activities and programs are often run from urban centres, making them inaccessible to women and girls in remote or rural areas.
- **Inaccessible transport:** can be a significant barrier, particularly for those in rural areas.

Availability and provision of support services

- Deaf women are impacted by the limited availability of sign language interpreters, especially outside of capital cities and urban areas. In order to participate in activities, women with vision impairments may require a guide, women with physical impairments may require a personal assistant, and women with psychosocial and intellectual disabilities may require support persons.

Information and communication barriers

- **Language can act as a barrier:** involvement in planning or consulting on programs and activities often requires **English language skills, as well as ability to understand complex language and documents.** This restricts the number of women that felt able to be involved, which in turn puts pressure on these women to constantly represent OPDs at consultations.
- **Inaccessible information and communication:** such as for women with vision impairments (e.g. when workshops involve powerpoints and posters), Deaf women, and for women with psychosocial and intellectual disabilities (who were reported to be amongst the most excluded).

3. Findings: Evidence from desk research and from OPDs Cont.

- **Format and expectations:** activities and consultations often follow a particular format, which assumes that participants are able to follow presentations and speak. Women who have missed out on education, or who may lack confidence due to stigma and isolation, may be reluctant to speak out in these settings.

Direct and indirect costs

- **Additional costs of transport and support services** can be very expensive. This expense is a barrier that can prevent participation in itself. Even where reimbursement is provided, this assumes that participants are able to afford costs up-front, which is not always the case.
- Participation in events can also mean **missing out on income:** while OPDs and women with disabilities bring lived experience and expertise, there is often no payment for their involvement in events or consultations.
- **OPDs have limited resources and funding,** which can limit both their ability to engage in programs and activities, as well as their capacity to support women and girls with disabilities, as discussed in section 5.3.

Attitudinal barriers

- **Community and family attitudes** may make it more difficult for women with disabilities to participate in activities and events or to access services, e.g. if family members do not support their involvement, for reasons including stigma, shame, or wanting to protect a family member. This can particularly impact Deaf women, women with psychosocial and intellectual impairments. Women with psychosocial impairments can face **particular stigma and isolation**, which means they do not engage in gender programs and activities.

Power relationships and cultural factors

- In male-dominated societies, **cultural and gender norms** can make it difficult for women to speak out in mixed settings in particular. This can be magnified for women with disabilities, who face additional stigma or may have perceived low status. Even in spaces where women's voices are prioritised, women with disabilities may not have had opportunities to build the confidence to contribute.
- **Pacific customs and etiquette**, such as respect for elders and seniority, can mean Women with disabilities representing OPDs may find it difficult to speak up in workshops or events. They may perceive other participants as having seniority over them, for example because they are from a donor or organisation with a contractual relationship with the OPD, or are in a role such as facilitator. Women with disabilities may stay silent out of respect or humility, which may then be perceived as having no inputs or being unwilling to engage.
- Women with disabilities may feel intimidated or reluctant to speak out, in contexts where there is **perceived cultural or education difference between themselves and other participants** – for example, if they are the only person with disability present,

3. Findings: Evidence from desk research and from OPDs Cont.

or others have higher education levels, are from government or large organisations, or are not from a Pacific background. This can be particularly difficult for women from remote areas, or who have stigmatised disabilities such as psychosocial or intellectual or being Deaf or hard of hearing. The impact can be that OPDs or women with disabilities are considered to have ‘participated’ at a level of consultation or involvement, but in practice they were not able to contribute; their views and inputs were not heard.

Recommendation 11: Partners and stakeholders need to carry out detailed barrier analyses, to understand and address the multiple barriers to gender programs faced by women and girls with disabilities.

Recommendation 12: Working with OPDs, gender programs and implementing partners should develop and implement new approaches and strategies for engaging with women and girls with disabilities. These should address cultural and power-related barriers and ensure participants in programs, workshops and events have genuine opportunities to contribute.

3.8 Recommendations from OPDs to strengthen inclusions

OPDs gave multiple recommendations as to measures that would help to strengthen inclusion of women and girls with disabilities in gender programming, and enable OPDs to support and engage with women with disabilities.

These included:

- **Full and effective inclusion** of women and girls with disabilities and the organisations that represent them, at all stages of programs, including scoping and design.
- **Training, resourcing and capacity-building** for OPDs.
- **Direct engagement** from partners with OPDs.
- Different **modes of communication** with women with disabilities, recognising their different education levels and the needs of those with differing impairments
- **Budgeting for inclusion** within programs and activities, including costs such as sign language interpreters.
- **Empowerment of women with disabilities**, including through support of OPDs who are experts in this area.
- Development of **evidence and data** for OPDs.
- **Support for provision of assistive devices.**
- **Support for locally appropriate approaches** to inclusion which are relevant to local contexts, rather than taking a one-size-fits-all approach.

While the responses from OPDs were wide-ranging, none of them are new – they are common issues faced by OPDs in many contexts. And addressing all of these measures, while complex, should be within the reach of partner organisations who engage with OPDs.

3. Findings: Evidence from desk research and from OPDs Cont.

Specific barriers and needs will vary across countries, impairment groups and geographic areas, but need to be identified and addressed, including through adequate resourcing, wherever gender programming is being implemented.

Recommendation 13: Funders and implementers of gender programs should engage fully with local OPDs and communities, to better understand and address barriers to inclusion faced by diverse women and girls with disabilities. This includes appropriate allocation of funding, and partnerships with OPDs which recognise the fundamental roles OPDs play in supporting and empowering women with disabilities.



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