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Access to funding:

Good Practice Guidance from & for Organisations of Persons with Disabilities (OPDS) in Low-Middle Income Countries (LMICs)

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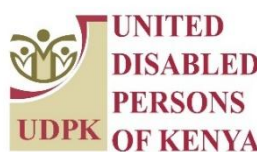


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- ASEAN Disability Forum (ADF)
- Blind and Visually Impaired People of Solomon Islands (BVIPSI)
- Ethiopian Women with Disabilities National Association (EWDNA)
- Federation of Ethiopian Associations of Persons with Disabilities (FEAPD)
- Northern Nomadic Disabled Persons Organization (NONDO), Kenya
- Tanzania Users and Survivors of Psychiatry Organization (TUSPO)
- United Disabled Persons of Kenya (UDPK)
- Welfare Society for the Disabled Sierra Leone (WESOFOD-SL)





This guidance is one output of a wider project delivered by GDI Hub under the UK International Development funded AT2030 programme answering: **What opportunities are there to improve access to funding for OPDs, in pursuit of a fairer world for persons with disabilities?**

Alongside this guidance on Access to funding, good practice from and for Organisations of Persons with Disabilities (OPDs) in low- middle-income countries (LMICs), we recommend reviewing: [Pathways to Funding for Organisations of Persons with Disabilities: Landscape Review of Sources, Barriers and Opportunities](#) which outlines current funding mechanisms and highlights the key trends, challenges, and emerging opportunities affecting OPD access to both core operational support and project specific funding.



Introduction

This section provides an overview of the role of OPDs, the funding challenges they face, and the wider systemic changes needed to strengthen their participation in development processes.

Organisations of persons with disabilities

A Disabled People's Organisation (DPO) or Organisation of Persons with Disabilities (OPD) is a civil society/third sector, representative organisation that exists for the explicit purpose of advancing justice, collectively acting, expressing, promoting, pursuing and defending the rights of persons with disabilities¹. OPDs are either:

- Majority-run and -controlled by persons with disabilities, including at leadership/board levels; or
- Run by supporters of persons with disabilities, if the persons with disabilities in question have access or legal needs that make such support necessary. In this case, self-advocacy and self-determination must be a primary part of the organisation¹.

There are many types of OPDs, including umbrella, national and subnational organisations, as well as those representing women with disabilities, persons who are visually impaired, persons who are hearing impaired, persons who are physically

¹ Anna Landre and Global Disability Innovation Hub. 2025. The Global DPO Map: An Open-Source Data Collection of Disabled People's Organisations Worldwide. AT2030 Programme, University College London. Retrieved March 2026 from <https://dpomap.com/>



impaired, persons affected by leprosy, persons with deaf blindness, persons with intellectual disabilities, etc.²

OPDs play a vital role in advancing the rights of persons with disabilities by delivering community-based services, contributing lived experience expertise to projects, and holding governments and institutions to account .

Funding barriers

Many OPDs operate with limited, insecure funding; this limits their capacity to sustain operations, retain staff, be partners and suppliers for public and private institutions, and engage strategically in development processes³. This challenge is further intensified by funding cuts across the development finance ecosystem⁴.

The quote from and OPD below outlines a vision for what sustainable funding for OPDs should look like:

“What works well is early and meaningful engagement when OPDs are involved from the concept and design stage, share decision-making power, and receive direct or flexible funding with fair remuneration and accessibility budgets. Multi-year partnerships, simplified reporting, trust-based partnership and collaboration tend to strengthen ownership, accountability, and sustainability.”

² International Disability Alliance (IDA) and Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (NORAD). 2022. "Discussion Paper on OPD Engagement." Global Disability Summit, August 19, 2022. Retrieved March 6, 2026, from <https://www.globaldisabilitysummit.org/resource/discussion-paper-on-opd-engagement/>

³ Wardrop, Polly; Landre, Anna; Joskow, Rebecca. 2026. "Pathways to Funding for OPDs in Low- and Middle-Income Countries." AT2030 Programme, Global Disability Innovation Hub. Retrieved March 2026 from <https://at2030.org/pathways-to-funding-opds/>.

⁴ Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). 2025. "Cuts in Official Development Assistance: OECD Projections for 2025 and the Near Term." OECD Policy Brief, 26 June 2025. Retrieved March 2026, from https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/2025/06/cuts-in-official-development-assistance_e161f0c5/full-report.html



But there are still significant challenges that make it hard for OPDs to access funding around the world. Fixing these problems is important for disability-inclusive development. This guidance explains how OPDs can try to access funding in the difficult situation they face today.

Navigating the funding ecosystem

By compiling and sharing experiences, practices, tips, advice, and tools, we hope to support other OPDs globally who face similar challenges funding their operations and accessing the resources required to continue their activities, grow their capacity, and carry out their integral role in realising the rights of persons with disabilities.

Systemic action

Ensuring access to funding for OPDs is not the responsibility of OPDs alone. In the pursuit of the realisation of the rights of persons with disabilities, the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and economic and social inclusion globally, action must be systemic, individual and purposeful across the whole ecosystem.



Guidance from and for OPDs

Institutional capacity

One of the key recommendations from our collaborating national umbrella OPDs is for local OPDs to gradually develop their systems, processes, structures, human resources and fund management capacity to meet the requirements of funders.

This advice echoes findings from the Funding Landscape Report:

Responding to our survey, all (eight) funders use ‘governance and management capacity’ as criteria when selecting OPDs to work with, and six of eight looks for ‘compliance with due diligence requirements.’

OPDs expressed a desire for relaxation and simplification of these requirements, alongside targeted capacity-building support in these areas.

Governance advice for effective organisations, from and for OPDs includes:

- Ensuring Boards and Leadership Teams within your organisation are composed of committed individuals with diverse expertise;
- Planning regular meetings, clear roles and accountability mechanisms with documentation; and
- Conducting and writing regular internal reviews.

Umbrella OPDs are well positioned to support building local OPD capacity.

“From the perspective of ASEAN Disability Forum (ADF) and its members, the most useful resources for OPDs in Southeast Asia right now are practical, ready-to-use tools that reduce administrative burden, strengthen compliance capacity, and improve direct access to funders”

ASEAN Disability Forum (ADF)



ASEAN Disability Forum (ADF) recommends setting capacity building milestones to meet donor due diligence compliance. Some umbrella OPDs, such as Welfare Society for the Disabled (WESOFOD) and United Disabled Persons of Kenya (UDPK), support their members to plan these milestones.

For umbrella OPDs looking to build capacity of member OPDs, some of the most useful resources they can provide are practical, ready-to-use tools that reduce administrative burden, strengthen compliance capacity, and improve direct access to funders.

Practices that go a long way to establish credibility and strong working relationships with funders include:

- Submitting high quality reports on time;
- Consulting funders before making changes to budgets or project activities; and
- Always using funds for their intended purpose -- request approval if you want to do otherwise.

Have confidence in your capacity.

"They say we don't have capacity - we want to shatter that narrative. Funders need to listen to us to see what capacities we actually have. There is an assumption that we don't have structures, that we are just informal groups, but even local OPDs often have structures, even without an office. There is also an assumption that we don't use evidence. In reality, OPDs care about institutional strengthening."

United Disabled Persons of Kenya (UDPK)



As follows are three different examples, from Sierra Leone, Ethiopia, and Kenya of capacity self-assessment tools that OPDs can use:

Welfare Society for the Disabled (WESOFOD) in Sierra Leone has developed, in partnership with Trocaire an OPD capacity assessment tool for organisations to self-assess their institutional capacity across a diversity of measures:

1. Mission and strategy
2. Leadership and accountability
3. Governance and risk management
4. Bank account and cash management

The tool helps organisations understand the level of institutional capacity needed to access funding, identify any gaps, and create space for reflection on areas that require improvement.

Link to tool here: [WESOFOD Capacity Assessment Tool 2026](#)

Federation of Ethiopian Associations of Persons with Disabilities in Ethiopia has also developed a capacity assessment tool which covers leadership and governance, systems and structures, human resources, programme management, planning and M&E, partnerships, and knowledge management. For specific funding readiness checks, see the sections on “financial management” and “grants and sub-grants management”.

Link to tool here: [FEAPD Capacity Assessment Tool 2026](#)



United Disabled Persons of Kenya (UDPK) has developed a capacity assessment approach for women-led OPDs in Kenya. OPDs can use a similar checklist to reflect on key organisational capacity areas. Key capacity areas to assess include:

1. Management (Financial management and reporting systems, communication systems, Human resource and staffing)
2. Service delivery and advocacy (Ability to conduct advocacy and lobbying activities)
3. Vision, mission, and organisational objectives
4. Governance (Board structure and functions)
5. External relations (Communication, Partnerships and networking, Influence and legitimacy)

Link to full report here: [UDPK Capacity Assessment Report 2018](#)

Data and evidence

Use data and evidence to make the case for disability inclusion to funders. It is well known that data on disability prevalence and experience is significantly lacking, and differing definitions, methodologies, and contexts, impact the accuracy and comparability of disability statistics. There are, however, emerging resources that OPDs can draw on:

- World Bank's [Disability Data Hub](#) is an open data initiative providing access to disability-disaggregated development data.
- The Valuable 500's [Global Disability Legislation Index](#) is a guide to disability legislation across 100 countries.
- GDI Hub's AT2030 [Insights Portal](#) is a portal including data on disability and assistive technology across different countries.
- Sector evidence such as Energy access: Transforming Energy Access's [White Paper on Opportunities for Disability-Inclusive Energy Access](#).



“Most of these applications will really require having a data to reference, data that has brought the need for the application”

Tanzania Users and Survivors of Psychiatry Organization (TUSPO)

It’s important to note, however, that some disability advocacy work may not be statistically evidenced-based because of a lack of data. In this case, continue to value and center lived experience data. This is particularly valuable in when OPDs work in geographic isolation with high communication costs and limited donor presence such as Small Island Developing States (SIDS).

“I would like the donors to welcome the OPDs to share their real examples or the real lived experiences.”

Northern Nomadic Disabled Persons’ Organization (NONDO)

Confidence

Be confident in your lived experience and local connections to apply for funding.

UDPK encouraged other OPDs to be confident and apply for opportunities, as OPDs have a lot of lived experience and good community connections. Even if a funding application is unsuccessful, by applying you have made the connection, and they may begin to know of you. An example shared by one OPD illustrates this dynamic. Although the organisation did not receive the funding they applied for, the process of applying created a connection with the funder. As a result, the OPD is now invited to participate in the funder’s strategy review meetings.



Visibility

WESOFOD emphasised that visibility is key for both OPDs and funders, given that OPDs are doing so much for their communities that often goes unrecognised. Findings from the Funding Landscape Review found that funders most commonly report sourcing or finding OPDs through existing relationships or through national or local OPD federations or umbrella bodies.

Make your organisation locally and globally visible. Strategies to do so include:

- Attending meetings and join civil society networks which can help make you visible and provide you with important information about wider international development priorities and activities;
- Annual celebrations, thank you letters, celebrating public holidays;
- Broadcasting activity across different mediums: Radio, [newsletters](#), photos, digitally, through branding, websites, or social media;
- Inviting funders to your offices;
 - Including advocacy and dissemination approaches within proposals and projects;
 - Communicating transparency, accountability, and responsibility by demonstrating impact to donors; and
 - Adding your OPD to the [Global Map of Disabled People's Organisations](#)

“We have realised when we are in meetings and making connections, we are networking and we are able to share our work. We are able to show them the evidence of our work.”

Northern Nomadic Disabled Persons' Organization (NONDO)



One OPD described sending newsletters to funders quarterly and annually and requested meetings to update prospective partners about their work; another described how they became better known through their building being physically visible by a highway. Such visibility can also help raise awareness of the work OPDs do and challenge the attitudinal barriers that people may hold toward persons with disabilities and their representative organisations.

Be intentional about communicating your impact. Ways of doing so can include:

- Using case studies, testimonials, and storytelling to bring your work to life;
- Considering short, compelling documentaries that illustrate the “before and after” of your interventions;
- Integrating human interest stories into reports to make them more relatable and powerful; and
- Starting with something tangible that you can show.

[The Global Map of Disabled People’s Organisations](#) is the largest-ever collection of OPDs across the transnational disability advocacy community. On the Map, you’ll find data like contact information, scope of work, and more that can help you learn about and connect with a certain organization.

OPDs can request to join the map. Adding an organisation can be done digitally via a form that takes around 10 minutes to complete, which is then sent to our researchers for vetting. The form is currently available in English, Spanish, and French.

The Map is delivered by UCL Global Disability Innovation Hub, as part of the AT2030 programme, funded by UK International Development.

One OPD noted that some funders believe that OPDs cannot deliver or implement projects effectively, and that showing clear results and tangible impact is one way to challenge and change this perception.



Define your niche

A niche is what makes your OPD distinct. For example, the group of people with disabilities you represent, the geography you work in, or the specialised knowledge and experience you contribute.

- Be specific about who you serve (e.g., women with disabilities, pastoralist communities, youth);
- Focus on a few key areas rather than trying to do everything; and
- Clearly articulate what unique strengths your organisation has.

Membership

Membership of umbrella bodies which support individual OPD advocacy, visibility and funder engagement was encouraged.

“[We are] A regional OPD platform working across multiple countries to strengthen collective advocacy, visibility, and engagement with funders and regional institutions”

ASEAN Disability Forum (ADF)

Work well as a collective ecosystem. ADF describes the regional coalition as an umbrella OPD established following consultations across 10 countries.

Working with regional governmental mechanisms;

- Amplifying marginal voices;
- Pooling resources and voices; and
- Bridging power dynamics and supporting negotiations between donors and local OPDs.



Networks can provide opportunities for visibility and building relationships with funders. As such, we recommend you join them. Such networks include:

- [CIVICUS](#): Provides advocacy, networking opportunities, and resources for civil society organisations, including OPDs.
- [International Disability and Development Consortium \(IDDC\)](#): Includes NGOs and research institutions and can help OPDs connect with development programmes and partnerships.
- Regional OPD networks
 - [African Disability Forum](#)
 - [ASEAN Disability Forum](#)
 - [Pacific Disability Forum](#)

"We are actively working with [African Disability Forum], and they are also channelling donors or funding through them. So, they are actively supporting us."

Federation of Ethiopian Associations of Persons with Disabilities (FEAPD)

Umbrella OPDs can also support member organisations through access to funding, being closer to and communicating to members what funder priorities are, and – as previously mentioned - institutional capacity building.

Funders also have an important role to play, as umbrella organisations often cannot offer meaningful support to their members without adequate resources. At the same time, some umbrella organisations can control access to funding in ways that make it harder for smaller, local OPDs to apply or receive support.



Partnerships and collaboration

While the current funding landscape often creates a culture of competition, several OPDs mentioned the importance of collaborating and supporting each other.

Collaborate. Collaboration, particularly with regional networks, can be invaluable for advocacy and fundraising and removing silos.

“Working as a united front strengthens our collective voice, increases visibility of our issues, and enhances influence. When we act together, it becomes much harder for funders and stakeholders to overlook our priorities.”

Northern Nomadic Disabled Persons Organization (NONDO)

“Let us not compete with each other, let’s collaborate and support each other”

Welfare Society for the Disabled Sierra Leone (WESOFOD)

Develop strategic partnerships. Benefits include:

- The combination of advocacy and technical expertise;
- When working with partnerships over a longer time, you build trust and learn to understand what they need and how they work;
- Positioning OPDs as indispensable actors rather than beneficiaries; and
- Contributing valuable expertise in disability inclusion, which is highly relevant and can strengthen broader development programs.



Maintain good relationships with the current funders you have. For example, by keeping them up to date on what you are doing and the impact you have created.

Multi-year partnership model: ASEAN Disability Forum (ADF), International Disability Alliance (IDA), and Australia’s Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT)

In this model, ADF receives flexible funding over several years to support both its day-to-day operations and its wider regional work. This includes core costs like staff, systems, and coordination, as well as activities like advocacy, policy work, and learning across OPDs. ADF is involved in planning, budgeting, and decision-making, working closely with partners rather than just receiving funds. This approach has helped ADF build stronger systems, maintain stable leadership, and engage more consistently at the regional level. It shows that when OPDs receive long-term, flexible funding and are treated as equal partners, they can be more effective, sustainable, and influential.

“Building and maintaining relationships with partners and donors is critical. For small OPDs, trust-based partnerships developed over time are often more effective than one-off funding applications.”

Blind and Visually Impaired People of Solomon Islands (BVIPSI)

When working in partnerships, be open and clear about budgets, agree on roles and responsibilities together, and set expectations early to reduce the risk of conflicts and support effective coordination.

Identify partners whose strategic priorities align with your OPD’s work. As one funder explained:



'[We recommend/like/look for/aim for] Long term engagement to establish shared mandate / mutually beneficial areas of collaboration. Not partnering for the sake of partnering - identifying OPDs with shared interest or mandate and co-building a project together.'

A global tool developed by Inclusive Futures, supported by UK International Development, can help OPDs identify potential partners and funders whose priorities align with their work: [A mapping of the current funders of disability inclusion](#). However, further mapping at the regional or local level would be useful.

Types of funding

Many OPDs struggle to get stable, core funding to cover basic running costs. Long-term, flexible funding like this is still rare.

Diversify income for operational costs. Ways OPDs describe financing operational costs within the challenging environment include:

- Local fundraising;
- Establishing a supporting local business entity or social enterprise (examples being a skills training centre and a construction business);
- Seek funding from foundations, which is more likely to be flexible;
- Seeking funding from flexible contracts, with fair pay for time and expertise; and
- Seeking core funding for maintaining operations, retaining staff, and enabling meaningful participation in development processes.

BVIPSII highlighted that OPDs can still have strong impact even with limited funding, especially by sharing technical knowledge and lived experience in areas like legal and justice work. Doing this also helps build their reputation as trusted and credible partners.



Advocate for budgeting for disability inclusion and reasonable accommodation.

OPDs describe promoting accessibility costs as standard by:

- Delivering budget advocacy and training for government ministries and
- Including budgeting for accessibility as a requirement within their Partnership Policy.

“[...] we demand a budget for all reasonable accommodations, as mentioned in the formations on the rights of persons with disabilities”

Ethiopia Women with Disabilities National Association (EWDNA)

Ethiopian Women with Disabilities National Association (EWDNA) has developed a disability inclusion tool and checklist which can be a helpful resource for OPDs when explaining the CRPD, disability inclusion, and budgeting for accessibility to funders who may be less familiar with these areas. The guidance also supports a gender sensitive approach, which many funders are increasingly prioritizing.

Link to tool here: [EWDNA Disability Inclusion Tools and Checklist](#)



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