

External Evaluation of the Disability Rights Fund

Final Evaluation

Executive Summary and
Management Response

* This is an abbreviated version of the report.
The full report is available on the Disability
Rights Fund website.



11 April 2013



Executive Summary

Context

Persons with disabilities account for a disproportionate percentage of the poor in developing countries; 80 per cent of all people with disabilities live in the developing world and represent 20 per cent of the world's poorest people. Disability and poverty are two factors that are highly likely to lead to marginalisation and exclusion. Yet, while persons with disabilities are often the most deprived and marginalised group in any society, they are often ignored by development agencies, donors, and human rights organisations.

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities provides an opportunity to empower people with disabilities and expand their inclusion as equal participants in society and in development efforts.

Profile of the Disability Rights Fund

The Disability Rights Fund (DRF) is a partnership between funders and the disability community that provides grants and other support for work at country-level towards the realisation of rights affirmed in the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. DRF believes that enhancing the participation of persons with disabilities in the realisation of their rights will have an impact on poverty among persons with disabilities.

The Fund began its operations in 2008 and aims to empower disabled persons' organisations (DPOs) to advance the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities at the country level. The Fund's organisational structure integrates persons with disabilities at all levels of governance and staff. It uses a rights-based approach and a movement-building approach.

From 2008 to the end of 2011, DRF received approximately USD 11.4 million in funding. During that period, the Fund distributed close to USD 7 million through 323 small grants and national coalition grants to DPOs in 21 countries for advocacy related to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

Methodology

The evaluation was conducted by an external and independent evaluation team led by two Universalialia evaluation consultants and supported by two associate consultants based in East Africa and South Asia. In consultation with DRF, and informed by a Reference Team set up by DRF, the Evaluation Team developed the evaluation methodology that was used to inform data collection, analysis, and report-writing. The Evaluation Team used the Fund's logframe to assess the effectiveness of the Fund.

The evaluation covered the period from January 2008 to March of 2012. It focused on five pilot countries (Bangladesh, Ghana, Nicaragua, Peru, and Uganda) and 38 selected grantees in these countries (representing 41 per cent of grantees and 64 per cent of grants in the five countries). Approximately 90 individuals were consulted for the evaluation, including Fund staff, members of the Board and the Global Advisory Panel, donors, disability activists and beneficiaries (grantees). The evaluation included field missions to Uganda and Bangladesh.

Evaluation Findings

Overall, the evaluation findings are positive. In a little less than four years, DRF has become a recognised donor for disability rights and has proven to be relevant in contributing to the achievement of results for the benefit of persons with disabilities. These results include national and local level changes in legislation, alternative or independent reports on the CRPD submitted to UN mechanisms, a more inclusive disability rights movement in target countries evidenced by grants awarded to marginalised and new DPOs, and increased grantee capacities through the formation of partnerships and growing knowledge on rights of persons with disabilities.

Relevance of the Disability Rights Fund

The evaluation found that the design and approach of DRF are relevant to the advancement of the rights of people with disabilities as articulated in the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. The use of both a rights-based approach and a movement-building approach was described as appropriate to increase the voices and participation of persons with disabilities in claiming their rights. Informants recognised the relevance of a rights-based approach in the Fund's grantmaking activities and the evaluation found evidence of the application of the five principles of a rights-based approach in all five pilot countries. All grantees based their activities on the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities which provides evidence of the normativity principle. Principles of non-discrimination and participation were also widely applied since persons with disabilities are included at all levels of the Fund: governance, staff, and grantees themselves. This organisational design and structure was described as lending legitimacy and credibility to the Fund and ensuring that grantmaking is informed by realities on the ground. The principles of accountability and transparency are applied throughout the Fund's operations. The evaluation also found evidence of the Fund's efforts to build a social movement, namely through the development of the capacity of rights holders to claim their rights as a group. Grants were awarded in target countries to build a stronger base for DPOs, to do leadership training, to create alliances, and to do direct advocacy.

DRF is also relevant in filling a gap in disability rights funding. While some other donors fund disabled persons organisations, not many focus on funding rights advocacy and charitable funding is still the norm. The Fund is also filling a gap by supporting bilateral donors to channel funding to marginalised and grassroots organisations. The Fund's two funding streams, small grants and national coalition grants, are both appropriate as they address the needs of both emergent and well-established organisations. National coalition grants were judged as beneficial in creating enhanced collaboration within the disability community and stronger voices from the disability community at community and governmental levels. Small DPOs were appreciative of the funding provided through the small grant stream as it constituted a first opportunity for many of them to begin to do rights work.

Stakeholders and grantees noted the ongoing need for organisational capacity development and capacity building on rights and advocacy. The organisational capacities of DPOs were perceived as low and as an important aspect of successful grants. Given its singular mission of grantmaking and its lack of field presence, DRF is unable to engage in large-scale or long-term organisational capacity-building activities for its grantees and has made the strategic decision not to do so. The Fund argues that its grants review and oversight processes provide opportunities to DPOs to develop capacities to manage projects and to write proposals. Some stakeholders suggested other ways to address this issue, such as giving a stronger role to fiscal sponsors for example.

The evaluation found strong evidence of alignment between DRF grantmaking activities and the United Kingdom's Department for International Development's work with civil society and mandate on poverty reduction. The Fund is aligned with three of the five objectives of the civil society priorities set by the Department for International Development, namely the objective of empowering citizens to be more effective participants in decisions and policies; enabling civil society organisations to advocate and hold to account institutions; and building capacity for an active civil society. The Department for International Development recognises the link between poverty and disability, and through its support to DRF can tackle this issue among PWDs in the Fund's target countries. DRF is an essential tool for the Department for International Development to achieve its commitment under Article 32 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities which seeks to ensure that international development programs are inclusive of and accessible to persons with disabilities.

Effectiveness of the Disability Rights Fund

Although DRF does not have an explicit theory of change, the implicit theory articulated in its logframe seems appropriate and likely to lead to expected results. The Fund's theory of change implies that if persons with disabilities are able to advocate for their rights, they are then able to participate in the

achievement of their rights. Through this increased voice and participation, rights of persons with disabilities are increasingly formally recognised by governments, leading eventually to better quality of life.

The effectiveness of DRF was measured against the output and outcome indicators articulated in the Fund's logframe. According to monitoring data, the Fund has met or exceeded all milestones for its planned outputs. The evaluation also found evidence of the achievement of these outputs during interviews and in documents reviewed. The Fund's outputs are contributing to its desired outcome, and it has met all expected milestones for its outcome indicators.

Efficiency of the Disability Rights Fund

The Fund uses many practices that contribute to its efficiency: the inclusion of persons with disabilities in decision making, clear staff roles and responsibilities, appropriate governance structure, and transparent grantmaking processes. Grantees perceive the Fund as a good financial partner and indicated that grant delivery mechanisms were satisfactory. They noted that they received constructive feedback during the development of their proposals, communications are satisfactory throughout the grant cycle, disbursements are timely, and reporting requirements are fair. Many grantees are dependent on DRF for their survival; because of this, they said they would like grant amounts to be larger and/or funding for a longer period of time. A few grantees requested more transparency on the selection process, and several questioned the ability of the Fund to reach the most marginalised groups who do not have the ability to write proposals.

The evaluation found that DRF has increased its funding base and diversified its sources of funding thanks to the efforts of its Executive Director. Since its inception, the Fund has more than doubled the contributions it receives from donors –from USD 1.5 million in 2008 to a projected USD 3.6 million in 2012. Several informants suggested that the responsibility for fundraising should be shared since this task is challenging given the generally low interest of donors to fund disability rights.

Another key element in the evaluation of DRF was the degree of cost-effectiveness and value for money provided by grantmaking activities. The analysis of the Fund's value for money was limited by lack of data on the cost per output and on the number of beneficiaries for each grant due to the nature of the Fund's interventions. This component was assessed using the framework of the 3Es: Economy, Efficiency and Effectiveness, a framework used by the Department for International Development. The Fund's effectiveness is evident in its achievement of planned outputs and progress towards the desired outcome. Its efficiency is demonstrated by its use of good grantmaking practices and its efforts to improve administrative efficiency, in particular by becoming independent of its previous fiscal sponsor, Tides. Evidence of economy was found in the low overhead costs of both the Fund and its grantees, the use of technology for communications, a good ratio of administrative to program costs, and the use of volunteers to carry out some work in DPOs.

Equity

DRF targets appropriate categories of grantees through its focus on the 'poorest of the poor'. The Fund seeks to give equal opportunities to all by focusing on disabled persons, a marginalised group, and also on marginalised persons within this group, such as women with disabilities or indigenous people with disabilities. The country research carried out by the Fund prior to entering a target country provides relevant information to staff and governance to ensure that marginalised disabled persons organisations benefit from the Fund's grantmaking.

Impact

DRF awarded its first grants in November 2008 and these started up in January 2009. Thus it would be premature to anticipate evidence of impacts. There is, however, well documented evidence that the Fund is on track in meeting its planned outputs and outcome as articulated in the Fund's logframe.

Sustainability

DRF could continue to ensure sustainable results without the United Kingdom's Department for International Development funds, but it would have to cut back significantly on its work.

A significant proportion of the Fund's grantees have not developed mechanisms for sustainability after their grant from the Fund ends. Many DPOs depend on the Fund for their survival. In many cases, the non-renewal of a grant would reduce the capacity of grantees to continue their advocacy work. It should be emphasised that DRF does not seek to ensure the sustainability of disabled persons organisations, but focuses on supporting the achievement of sustainable rights frameworks and a strong movement. The Evaluation Team suggests, however, that if DPOs are not sustainable then they will not be able to contribute as spokespersons for the movement in the long term and other mechanisms would be needed to reinforce demand from the disability movement for rights implementation and enforcement.

Innovation & Replicability

The DRF approach to grantmaking is perceived as innovative for several reasons. No other funder is dedicated to giving grants to small DPOs to work on disability rights advocacy. The Fund focuses on reaching the most marginalised through a highly participatory approach, and focuses on the advancement of rights as outlined in the new Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

In terms of replicability, the evaluation found that the speed of advancement of rights varies depending on different legal, political and socio-cultural dimensions in each country. Countries where a vibrant disabled persons community exists are more likely to achieve results more rapidly.

Lessons Learned

When DPOs form alliances of like-minded organisations or work as part of a National Coalition grant, the potential for capacity building and learning opportunities is increased.

Partnerships with the media are a valuable means to help DPOs have a strong impact on their society.

When DPOs with different missions and impairment groups work together toward the same goal, there may be competing voices and conflicts that need to be managed to ensure inclusion.

Ensuring the rights of disabled persons requires both the existence and the implementation of national legislation as well as the enforcement of the legislation at national and local levels.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are presented to inform DRF's future grantmaking in the area of disability rights.

1. The United Kingdom's Department for International Development should continue to support DRF.

The evaluation found that DRF is a relevant and unique funding mechanism that supports disability rights advocacy and the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. It is inclusive and integrates persons with all types of disabilities. It addresses an important gap in funding for human rights. The Department for International Development should continue to support DRF for the following reasons:

- DRF has proven to be a competent and credible entity;
- DRF constitutes a good balance of effectiveness, efficiency and economy;
- DRF is relevant to the Department for International Development's objectives for work with civil society as well as its poverty reduction priority;

- DRF supports the Department for International Development's compliance with Article 32 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities;
- DRF is able to reach small and marginalised DPOs that the Department for International Development cannot reach.

All these findings point toward the need and the relevance of continued support to DRF by the Department for International Development.

2. The DRF Board of Directors should appoint a committee or individual to support the fundraising efforts of the Executive Director.

As described in Finding 16, responsibility for fundraising activities rests solely on the shoulders of the Executive Director. The appointment of a fundraising committee or individual fundraiser to support the efforts of the Executive Director could help in the efforts to increase and diversify DRF funding.

3. DRF should address the need for increased organisational capacities of grantees.

Many DPOs, in particular smaller DPOs with fewer resources, could benefit considerably from increased opportunities for capacity building. Stakeholders interviewed during this evaluation saw the lack of organisational capacities of DRF grantees as a major weakness and risk for DRF.

DRF grantees need and want more coaching and support to become stronger organisations. To accomplish this, consulted stakeholders suggested that fiscal sponsors could play a more preeminent role and be given additional responsibilities in building capacities of grantees. These could include but are not limited to:

- Ad hoc advice and coaching to grantees on specific issues related to their organisation;
- Training sessions to selected groups of grantees on how to manage their organisations, how to increase their membership, how to develop a mission or values for their DPOs, how to work with results-based management principles, etc.;
- Technical assistance and oversight of the work of grantees throughout the grant through weekly meetings.

It was beyond the mandate of this evaluation to conduct a cost analysis or feasibility study of any of these options, but DRF could and should base its final decision on (i) financial implications, and (ii) the likelihood of obtaining greater results through these interventions.

4. DRF should develop clear country exit strategies and emphasise their importance in grant agreements.

DRF has developed a preliminary framework for exit from focus countries (country strategies are built around 6-year initial timelines). It should continue to develop country exit strategies and inform grantees and other stakeholders, specifically through the grant agreement or during Grantee Convenings. DPOs will know from the outset that they will need to have a plan for funding to continue their activities when the DRF grant ends.

There are currently no clear mechanisms in place to ensure the continuity of the disability rights movement in the eventuality of DRF leaving a country. Many DPOs are dependent on DRF funding for their survival, and it is unclear how movements can continue if no DPOs exist. This may also point to the need for DRF and other funders to develop a strategy to ensure movement building beyond DRF involvement.

5. DRF Program Officers should collect and share knowledge across countries to leverage successful advocacy interventions or initiatives.

While DRF shares lessons learned within target countries through annual Grantee Convenings, interviewees also felt that DPOs could also benefit from the knowledge and experience of DPOs in other countries.

While organising ‘regional’ Grantee Convenings may not be possible, given cost and logistical issues, DRF Program Officers who oversee grantees in many countries could share knowledge or successes from one country to another. This could be done through one-on-one conversations with DPOs and/or at regular grantee convenings.

6. DRF Program Officers should develop and incorporate a gender strategy in DRF’s strategic planning and work.

Although DRF funds organisations of women with disabilities and tracks data on inclusion of women with disabilities in grantee organisations, it does not have a gender strategy. A clearly defined strategy on gender would be useful in guiding DRF further in its resolve to reach the ‘poorest of the poor.’ In addition, given DRF’s strategic objective “to implement and refine strategies and mechanisms which empower persons with disabilities to achieve rights,” the introduction of a gender strategy could be one way of refining the existing DRF Strategic Plan 2010 – 2012.

Management Response

Introduction

This evaluation provides valuable feedback that will help the staff and board of the Disability Rights Fund reflect on lessons from its first four years of grantmaking. The findings and recommendations of the evaluation offer deeper understanding and new perspectives about our practices and intended results. Already, the evaluation has contributed to discussions within our team about how to strengthen our processes and practices.

We wish to acknowledge the hard work of the Universalia evaluation team as well as the time dedicated to this evaluation by our key stakeholders – our donors and advisors who provide leadership, and our grantees, Disabled Persons' Organisations around the world, whose achievements are reflected in the evaluation's findings. An Evaluation Reference Group, made up of evaluation experts, also provided strategic advice throughout the process.

As a follow-up on our commitment to transparency and to ensure advancement of a broad understanding of disability rights advocacy, we are publishing the full report on our website.

Management's Views on Recommendations

Management concurs with the broad thrust of the evaluation findings and recommendations and will undertake actions to address issues raised. Specific responses to recommendations are given below.

Recommendation 1: The United Kingdom's Department for International Development should continue to support DRF.

Agree.

DRF will continue on the same grantmaking and advocacy course to remain relevant to development partners, including donors and the disability rights movement.

Recommendation 2: The DRF Board of Directors should appoint a committee or individual to support the fundraising efforts of the Executive Director.

Agree.

During the November 2012 DRF Board meeting at which the evaluation was presented, the Board emphasized its commitment to fundraising and approved the hiring of a development professional to begin the process of diversifying DRF's funding base. The Board is also committed to supporting fundraising efforts.

Recommendation 3: DRF should address the need for increased organisational capacities of grantees, including through fiscal sponsors.

Partially agree.

DRF has made a strategic decision to expend our limited resources on capacity building in advocacy and rights knowledge rather than general managerial, financial, or fundraising capacity.

To this end, DRF is committed to increasing the rights advocacy capacity of grantees, and tracks this capacity through our logframe.

Indirect support for organisational development is provided by Program Officers as part of their oversight of and support to grantees. In addition, as of 2013, donors have provided some support for specific organisational capacity building initiatives in Uganda and the Pacific. These initiatives will help inform whether we need to or can adjust our technical assistance to include more traditional organisational capacity building for all grantees in the future.

DRF is not convinced that capacity building of any kind should occur through fiscal sponsors. The roles and capabilities of fiscal sponsors are not uniform across countries, or even within a country. Given the diversity of fiscal sponsors, DRF believes that this recommendation is not viable across the board. In cases where it is viable, DRF is working with fiscal sponsors to ensure that grantees get needed added support. For example, in Peru, DRF has worked closely with fiscal sponsor, APRODEH, to support an emergent organisation of people with psychosocial disabilities.

Recommendation 4: DRF should develop clear country exit strategies and emphasise their importance in grant agreements.

Partially Agree.

We agree that we should develop clear country exit strategies. To this end, in November 2012, the board reviewed a general exit strategy. Based on this strategy, exit steps were detailed for implementation in the three Latin American countries where DRF works. This process is further informing how DRF works with grantees around exits.

We do not agree with the suggestion to emphasize exit in a grant agreement letter. Doing so would set up unclear expectations and poor relations at the outset of a relationship with a grantee. Most organisations know that donor funding will not last indefinitely. It is also unrealistic to expect all or even most grantees to develop a sustainability plan when the donor prospects for DPOs are so limited.

Further, DRF does not agree that the disability rights movement depends solely on DRF. The movement and the majority of DPOs in any one country existed prior to DRF's entry and will continue to exist beyond DRF's exit. While not necessarily as effective without sufficient donor funds, most DPOs have learned how to exist in very resource poor environments.

Recommendation 5: DRF Program Officers should collect and share knowledge across countries to leverage successful advocacy interventions or initiatives.

Agree.

Program Officers recognize their role as the interface between grantees in different countries and act as a conduit for knowledge and good practices across borders. They regularly share examples of key documents, such as Disability Acts. Some grantees, with DRF support, have also attended regional fora and global conferences and trainings, where they have been exposed to different perspectives. DRF has also created effective ways of sharing resources, knowledge, and experiences through online and social media avenues. In addition, as of January 2012, DRF's Program Officer for Strategic Partnerships is playing a key role in sharing information across countries through providing technical assistance to grantees addressing legislative change and monitoring of rights in all DRF countries. Through her efforts, we expect to deepen grantee learning across countries.

Recommendation 6: DRF Program Officers should develop and incorporate a gender strategy in DRF's strategic planning and work.

Agree.

We are currently updating our overall organisational Strategic Plan and will discuss how to systematically incorporate gender into our work.

Management's Views on Findings

DRF concurs with the majority of the findings in the full evaluation. We are pleased with findings that underline DRF's relevance to the advancement of the rights of people with disabilities as articulated in the CRPD. This section provides clarifications on six out of 21 findings.

Finding 4: DRF stakeholders and grantees noted the need for both organisational capacity development and capacity building on rights and advocacy.

Partially Agree.

While DRF did some work to increase CRPD knowledge and advocacy capacity of our grantees over the period 2008-2011, in 2012, with the support of Australian Aid and the initiation of the Program Officer for Strategic Partnerships position, we developed a technical assistance plan to detail the activities we will undertake to further enhance grantee rights advocacy and CRPD understanding, and to build movements.

As noted above, we have focused on these areas of capacity building because they are directly related to achieving the goal, outcome, and outputs stated in our logframe. We are testing some more traditional organisational capacity building and will increase this type of capacity building as warranted and possible.

Finding 10: Grantees were generally satisfied with DRF selection process, support for proposal development, and DRF's management of their grants. Most would like to see longer-term grants.

Partially agree.

Some grantees interviewed indicated that they were not aware of the rules and procedures regulating the award of grants and selection of grantees. Procedures and criteria for selection are elaborated in detail in letters of interest processes and requests for proposals, on our website, and at Grantee Convenings and outreach meetings. Program Officers also answer questions and provide critical support during the application process.

Some grantees have requested longer-term grants and the ability to submit proposals in languages other than the five used by the Fund from 2008-2011. Given our standing as an intermediary grantmaker – raising funds on a regular basis – and our staff capabilities and resources, it would be difficult to provide longer-term grants or to work in many more languages. However, since the evaluation, we have expanded our two-year grants through a new funding stream for Mid-Level Coalitions and have added French as a language.

Finding 12: While DRF has increased its base funding and has diversified its sources of funding, it is currently unable to meet the demand for DRF grants from eligible applicants.

Partially agree.

DRF's three-stage review process selects grantees, not only based on eligibility, but also based on strategic objectives of the Fund in each country and on assessment of the best cohort to fund for movement building. Because of this, not all "eligible" applicants will receive grants. In our opinion, this is not a negative result.

Nonetheless, it is true that there are limited DRF resources for grants or for additional countries, and there are limited resources in general for the rights work of DPOs. DRF addresses these limits through advocating for additional resources with other grantmakers and donors.

While alluded to in the evaluation, the evaluation focused on DRF's grantmaking strategy and logframe, and did not discuss our advocacy strategy - the aim of which is to increase the visibility of rights-based approaches to disability amongst key stakeholders, including donors, grantmakers, and human rights organisations. We do this by sharing information, content, and resources about promotion and protection of the rights of persons with disabilities and by influencing these stakeholders to be more inclusive of persons with disabilities.

Finding 15: DRF identifies lessons learned at the strategic level, and has a mechanism for sharing knowledge among grantees but does not yet have a mechanism to share knowledge across countries.

Partially agree.

While in the period under evaluation, there was no defined mechanism for sharing knowledge across countries, DRF did do this in various and ad-hoc ways: (1) As noted above, Program Officers shared best practices and critical documents (such as Disability Acts) between countries; (2) DRF's website included a resource section with important tools for advancement of rights in different languages and from different

sources; (3) DRF supported some grantees to attend regional or international fora where they could learn from others working in the same field; and (4) Program Officers regularly met to discuss developments in their respective countries and debate issues of concern.

As explained above, DRF's Program Officer for Strategic Partnerships is now playing a key role in sharing information across countries through providing technical assistance to grantees addressing legislative change and monitoring of rights in all DRF countries. Through her efforts, we expect to deepen grantee learning across countries.

Also, in January 2013, DRF staff developed a communications plan that provides more transparency regarding our grantmaking and promotes knowledge sharing and learning amongst grantees.

Finding 19: A significant proportion of DRF grantees have not developed mechanisms for project sustainability post-DRF funding.

Partially agree.

Financial sustainability is an issue that is not unique to DRF grantees. In many of the countries in which we operate, funding sources for disability rights are very limited and it is difficult, if not impossible, for grantees to access other support or revenue streams. Whenever possible, Program Officers link grantees to other sources of funding, and there is evidence that a number of grantees have been able to leverage DRF funding to achieve other sources of support.

DRF's emphasis has been on ensuring the sustainability of the rights advanced by DRF grantee projects, rather than on grantee organisational sustainability.

DRF funds advocacy projects precisely because the outcomes of advocacy are more sustainable and impact more people than other types of support. When a law or policy or government program is changed to better advance rights of people with disabilities, that outcome is more sustainable over the long term and outlasts the project or organisation that initiated the change.

Finding 21: The potential for scaling up is somewhat limited given the different contexts and countries in which it operates.

Partially agree.

We acknowledge that countries and context are different and that impact takes longer in certain places due to various factors, such as political will, the strength of the disability movement, civil society and government relations, and legal frameworks.

However, it is important to note that since 2008, DRF has expanded its grantmaking from seven pilot countries to 24 countries (including 14 Pacific Island countries) and six regions around the world. The limitation for scaling up is not so much bound by "different contexts and countries," but by the lack of resources to expand.

Conclusion

We understand that we operate in a rapidly evolving and interdependent world. We are committed to being accountable to the results articulated in our logframe, but at the same time, we hope to be open and responsive to adapt to new opportunities. To conclude, we would like to emphasize one of our guiding principles:

Learning and Change: Embracing an open approach to the work we are doing to advance the rights of persons with disabilities. This requires learning from our actions, responding to needs as well as successes, and changing course when appropriate.