

A close-up portrait of a man with dark, curly hair and a slight stubble, looking directly at the camera with a neutral expression. The background is dark and out of focus.

***A Movement to Change One Billion Lives***

**Disability Rights Fund & Disability Rights Advocacy Fund  
Strategic Plan  
2017 - 2020**

The Disability Rights Fund (DRF) and the Disability Rights Advocacy Fund (DRAF) are grantmaking collaboratives that empowers persons with disabilities to advocate for equal rights and full participation in society.

The Disability Rights Fund (DRF) started as a project of the Tides Center in 2008 and began independent operations as the Disability Rights Fund (a 501c3 organization) and the Disability Rights Advocacy Fund (DRAF, a 501c4 organization) in April 2012.

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Cover photo: Bahri Fedou is an advocate for the rights of youth with disabilities in Tunisia and is a DRF Global Advisory Panel member. He has been actively involved in the inclusion of disability rights in the new Tunisian Constitution. Photo by Andy Isaacson.

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### Acronyms

CRPD	[United Nations] Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
DPO	Disabled Persons' Organization
DRAF	Disability Rights Advocacy Fund
DRF	Disability Rights Fund
LGBTIQ	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex, Queer
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals

## INTRODUCTION

The *Strategic Plan 2017-2020* coincides with the start of our tenth year of operations as the Disability Rights Fund and Disability Rights Advocacy Fund – a natural reflection point. Building on findings from the Learning Evaluation (March 2015) that confirmed the effectiveness of our model, the new strategic plan does not call for radical change. Rather, it is a refinement and adaptation of our work to best integrate our learning and to respond to emerging opportunities and a changing landscape.

The strategic plan comes on the heels of a very successful and exciting 2015, which brought progress and positive change not just within our organization, but also across the national and global disability community.

One of the global community's greatest achievements was the inclusion of concrete references to persons with disabilities in the new global development framework, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Another global achievement in 2015 was the passage of the disability-inclusive Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction.

At the same time, the threat to the closing of civil society space and risks to human rights defenders is foremost in our focus moving forward. We need to be particularly cognizant of governments that put limitations on foreign sources of funding for groups that defend human rights or aim to hold the government to account.<sup>1</sup> We also need to be aware of people and institutions that persecute individuals working to defend human rights.

This strategic plan takes into account the context --as well as the challenges and opportunities-- in which we operate. As such, it is intended to be a living document that enables DRF and DRAF to remain responsive and nimble in a complex and ever-changing world. By defining a process for ongoing monitoring and adaptation, we will use it as a guide to help us prioritize, adapt and learn, rather than as a rigid strategy that ties our hands in the face of internal and external shifts. With that purpose in mind, the next few pages confirm our vision and mission, set out a framework, and define our strategies and areas of focus for the period from 2017 to 2020.

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<sup>1</sup> Kenneth Roth notes, "Around the world, governments are doing their best to strangle funding for the civilian groups that dare to challenge their power and hold them to account." (Roth, Kenneth. "The Great Civil Society Choke-out." *Foreign Policy Magazine*, January 27, 2016).

## ABOUT US

### Our Vision

A world where persons with disabilities fully participate in society and enjoy equal rights and opportunities on an equal basis with others

### Our Mission

The Disability Rights Fund supports persons with disabilities around the world to build diverse movements, ensure inclusive development agendas, and achieve equal rights and opportunity for all.

The Disability Rights Advocacy Fund supports persons with disabilities in the developing world to advance legal frameworks to realize their rights.

We resource organizations led by persons with disabilities, primarily in Africa, Asia, the Pacific Islands, and the Caribbean, that are leading efforts to secure rights for all. Through grantmaking, advocacy, and technical assistance, DRF and DRAF support Disabled Persons Organizations (DPOs) to use global rights and development frameworks, such as the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) – ensuring no one is left behind.

### Our Structure

The Disability Rights Fund (DRF) is a pooled fund, which combines the resources of multiple governmental and private donors, and in doing so, enables these donors to harmonize their efforts and efficiently reach marginalized groups of persons with disabilities.

The Disability Rights Advocacy Fund (DRAF) supports country-level disabled persons organizations to lobby for ratification of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and to ensure legal frameworks advance inclusion. The DRAF also supports regional and global initiatives, such as the Indigenous Persons with Disabilities Global Network, which strengthen cross-movement efforts by highlighting diverse voices.

Both funds address marginalized groups within the disability community and at the grassroots level so that no one is left behind in development. Our grantmaking reaches groups such as women with disabilities, youth with disabilities, people with psychosocial disabilities, people with intellectual disabilities, albinos, little people, indigenous persons with disabilities, and the Deafblind.

DRAF and DRF include persons with disabilities at all levels, from advisory to staffing to governance. Our Global Advisory Panel advisors come from all over the world and reflect a cross-section of the disability and broader human rights communities. Advisors help us tackle key questions arising from our work. Grantmaking Committees for DRF and DRAF are composed of donor representatives and advisors and make strategy and grant recommendations to the board. The boards of directors have experience in disability and human rights and philanthropy, as well as financial, legal, and organizational development expertise. Our expert global staff also includes persons with disabilities and represents diverse geographies.

This structure enables our programming to be grounded in reality and centered on learning and participation.

## Our Impact

In less than ten years, the Funds have documented success around their highest goals: increasing disabled persons organizations' participation in ratification of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD); development of national and local legislation, policies, and programs in accordance with the CRPD; and civil society submissions to international human rights monitoring mechanisms. Persons with disabilities are increasingly engaging and participating in decision making in their communities and countries.

The graphic below illustrates our impact to date.

Description of image: \$17 million in grants, 30 plus countries, 260 plus disabled persons organizations, 800 plus rights campaigns (leading to) legal protection for persons with disabilities; access to justice; inclusive health, education, and employment services; accessible public information; political participation; resources for social inclusion; inclusive disaster risk reduction



## FRAMEWORK

Going forward, we will build on our successes and work with our allies to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by supporting the disability community to ensure that development efforts are in line with the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

Our framework is based on the theory that a strong and inclusive disability rights movement will drive an inclusive agenda, ultimately achieving rights for all and leaving no one behind. Our framework has three prongs: Building Movements, Driving the Agenda, and Achieving Rights.



### Building Movements

We believe that a strong and inclusive disability movement – extending from local to national, regional, and global levels – is the cornerstone for rights to be recognized and achieved for all persons with disabilities.

Activists with disabilities around the world are rejecting a charity approach and asserting the human rights of the one billion people with disabilities. Their unique perspectives on rights make them a tremendous asset to the broader rights movement. Unfortunately, not all leaders or funders recognize that disability rights are fundamentally human rights.

We will strive to:

- Increase inclusion of marginalized groups – such as women with disabilities, the Deafblind, people with psycho-social disabilities, and indigenous persons with

disabilities – in the broader disability movement so they can demand change together with other actors

- Increase partnerships between disabled persons organizations and other development and human rights actors to strengthen connections and impact for all
- Strengthen advocacy capacity of the disability movement to advocate for lasting systems change and ongoing rights monitoring
- Facilitate collaborations with other human rights movements and donors to raise awareness and the resources needed to achieve collective impact so that no one is left behind

## **Driving the Agenda**

We support persons with disabilities themselves to advocate for changes that leave no one behind and drive the agenda for disability inclusive development.

For too long, persons with disabilities have been marginalized and ignored. The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, brought about by the strong activism of persons with disabilities, initiated a sea change in how persons with disabilities are seen – from passive recipients to active participants.

We will strive to:

- Support persons with disabilities to raise their voice and visibility at decision-making tables where laws, policies, budgets, and programs are determined
- Increase funding for the inclusion and full participation of persons with disabilities
- Promote leadership of persons with disabilities in national, regional and global human rights and development arenas
- Build alliances among disabled persons organizations and with development and civil society organizations to advocate for inclusive implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals

## **Achieving Rights**

Systemic inclusion of persons with disabilities advances everyone towards the vision of dignity and security of every human being.

Persons with disabilities often lack access to adequate food, clean drinking water and sanitation, education, health services, and meaningful employment. Climate change, conflict, and food insecurity increase devastation of the extreme poor; women and children with disabilities are among the most vulnerable.



Significant progress in realizing human rights is crucial to reducing poverty and inequality. The Sustainable Development Goals, coupled with the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, provide a roadmap towards the vision of dignity and security of every human being. In this era, we have a tremendous opportunity to address the rights and inclusion of those who, thus far, have been left behind.

We will strive to:

- Ensure persons with disabilities are included in government policies, budgets, and programs to improve the lives of all persons with disabilities
- Advocate for appropriate information, including statistical and research data, to identify and address barriers faced by persons with disabilities
- Engage allies – including development actors, policymakers, and human rights activists – to support persons with disabilities in the achievement of rights
- Improve the capacity of persons with disabilities to use the CRPD to participate in their national development processes, especially as nations progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals

## STRATEGIES

DRF and DRAF employ multiple strategies to achieve strong and sustainable impact for persons with disabilities as described above. We work closely with donors, international development actors, governments, human rights activists, grantees, and other partners to achieve systemic change. Our strategies – grantmaking, advocacy, and technical assistance – describe the primary ways we build movements, drive agendas and achieve rights:



### Grantmaking

Our approach to grantmaking models the inclusive society we aim to achieve. Our participatory grantmaking model puts decision-making about strategy and grants in the hands of disability rights activists.

Our [model](#) challenges the paradigm that sees persons with disabilities as passive recipients for charity or medical intervention. We support advocacy by persons with disabilities as active participants in decision-making in society and together with government to change laws, policies, budgets, data collection, development programs, and more.

We leverage donor investments and learning in disability-inclusive approaches through a pooled fund. We add value to donor funds and ensure that resources are used effectively through due diligence procedures, including an intensive application review process and one-on-one relationships with and oversight of grantees. An extensive network and partnerships in the broader disability community helps to assess and monitor progress and results.



The threat to civil society space around the world is drowning out marginalized voices, making it difficult for persons with disabilities to engage in decision-making processes for policy, legislation, and programs. There is also insufficient disaggregated data and evidence to enable persons with disabilities to effectively advocate for their rights.

We increase visibility and knowledge of disability rights amongst government, development, and human rights actors. We support persons with disabilities to advocate at local and national levels, as well as to participate in global mechanisms. These efforts are aimed at building understanding, changing mindsets, and influencing policies and official reports to be disability inclusive.

Through our convenings and participation at regional and global events, we deepen connections within the disability community and between disabled persons organizations and broader civil society to enhance collective impact for social change. Our advocacy efforts, as well as those of our grantees, are aimed at systems change to realize rights for all persons with disabilities.



A rapidly changing world requires organizations and leaders with skill sets and knowledge that impact long-lasting systemic change. The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities mandates participation of representative organizations of persons with disabilities in the implementation and monitoring of rights. Without technical and financial resources, however, it is difficult for these organizations to participate with governments in the achievement of rights and inclusive development.

We facilitate information sharing and capacity building of disabled persons organizations and leaders through partnerships with leading networks, organizations, and experts. Strengthening advocacy capacity empowers persons with disabilities to participate fully and effectively in society on an equal basis with others.

## FOCUS AREAS

Within our work, focus areas enable us to highlight issues in need of greater attention or tighter alignment with allies in human rights and development. Focus areas facilitate attention to and learning from topics that are relevant to the work of our key partners, but do not represent a limiting focus. The focus areas – challenging inequality, promoting gender equity, and demanding climate justice – build on our achievements and on new global opportunities and context.

### Challenging Inequality

One billion people, or fifteen percent of the world’s population, are people with disabilities, and eighty percent live in developing countries. Persons with disabilities, on average as a group, are more likely to experience adverse socioeconomic outcomes than persons without disabilities, such as less education, worse health, less employment, and higher poverty rates.<sup>2</sup>

According to the World Bank and World Health Organization’s 2011 World Report on Disability, “Disability is a human rights issue because people with disabilities experience inequalities – for example, when they are denied equal access to health care, employment, education, or political participation because of their disability.”<sup>3</sup>

We aim to ensure access to employment, health services, education and justice, on an equal basis to others.

*In many parts of the world, persons with disabilities continue to face abuse, neglect, and oppression. They lack access to education, access to justice. Sometimes, they may not even realize their human rights are violated. View the Open Society Foundation’s [video](#), “People with Disabilities Face Barriers. Inequality Shouldn’t Be One of Them.”*

### Promoting Gender Equity

Challenges are compounded for those people with disabilities also facing discrimination based on gender identity and sexual orientation<sup>4</sup>, which can lead to greater isolation and risk of violence.

We aim to ensure that the voices of women and LGBTIQ persons with disabilities are heard so that they can access equitable opportunities. We hope to break down gender stereotypes and norms that exclude women with disabilities and include men in

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<sup>2</sup> The World Bank, <http://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/disability/overview>, accessed 2/18/16

<sup>3</sup> World Health Organization and the World Bank, *World Report on Disability*, 2011, p. 9.

<sup>4</sup> Gender identity and sexual orientation refers to women and girls with disabilities and LGBTQI (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex, Queer) persons with disabilities

countering negative stigma. We also aim to meet the particular needs of women and LGBTIQ persons with disabilities.

*“Women and girls with disabilities face different layers of discrimination and marginalization. We are exposed to higher levels of poverty, violence, forced sterilization, and exclusion from schools than other people,” said Catalina Devandas Aguilar, Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and former team member of the Disability Rights Advocacy Fund. Listen to her interview on [United Nations Radio](#)*

## Demanding Climate Justice

For persons with disabilities, especially in rural or remote areas, the impact of climate change can be especially devastating because of attitudinal, environmental, and institutional barriers. During natural disasters, persons with disabilities are often at greatest risk of injury or death, and even being left behind, due to the inaccessibility of support, services, and systems.

We aim to amplify voices of persons with disabilities, especially in vulnerable areas, to ensure their needs and priorities are included in climate change related planning, disaster risk reduction, and actions for adaptation.

*The Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction represents a groundbreaking agreement that sets a new benchmark in efforts to strengthen inclusion. According to DRF advisor and CEO of the Pacific Disability Forum, Setareki Macanawal: “There has to be a broader and a more people-centered preventive approach to disaster risk. Disaster risk reduction practices need to be multi-hazard and multi-sectoral, inclusive, and accessible in order to be efficient and effective. Persons with disabilities and their organizations are critical in the assessment of disaster risk and in designing and implementing plans tailored to specific requirements.” Read about this in the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction [news](#).*

## MONITORING PROGRESS

As a learning organization and a participatory grantmaker, our strategic plan must be a living document that enables us to update and adapt our approach as we collaborate and learn and as circumstances change. And, a plan is only as valuable as its implementation.

As a companion to the strategic plan, our results framework and theory of change allows us to link the strategy to goals, outputs, outcomes and indicators.

To ensure relevance and effectiveness of the strategic plan, DRF and DRAF will utilize internal processes to manage and monitor implementation and performance, including:

- Annual work plans and performance management agreements with staff aligned to the strategic plan
- Progress tracked through our monitoring and evaluation manual and logframe and through independent evaluation
- Annual review and adaptation of the strategic plan by the staff and Board of Directors

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

This Strategic Plan is a result of a year-long participatory process that involved our key stakeholders through multiple consultations and discussions. We are grateful for the time, commitment, hard work and invaluable perspectives of the members of DRAF and DRF's Boards, Grantmaking Committees, staff, and Global Advisory Panel, as well as for the work of our grantees, who never cease to make the world a better place for all.