Pathways to Funding

for Organisations of Persons with Disabilities (OPDs) in Low-and Middle-Income Countries (LMICs)

Landscape review of sources, barriers and opportunities

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Prepared by the Global Disability Innovation Hub

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Disability
Forum

BLIND VISUALLY IMPAIRMENT
SOLOMON ISLANDS

FEAPD

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DISABLED
PERSONS
OF KENYA
UDPK

NONDO

The Welfare Society for the Disabled
WESOFOD

(TUSPO)

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- 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)

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GDI Hub team members who have supported the direction and management of this work include Louise Gebbett and Amélie de Vazelhes.

GDI Hub Inclusive Finance examines the dynamic global ecosystem of money mechanisms, levers, flows, and impacts to determine opportunities for shaping a fairer world for disabled people and all people.

Language Note: This report uses both “people with disabilities” and “disabled people” to reflect and respect differing language preferences.

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The Intersection of OPD Funding and Access to Assistive Technology

UK International Development Funded AT2030, led by GDI Hub, tests ‘what works’ to improve access to life-changing Assistive Technology (AT) for all. Through delivering this program, GDI Hub finds that OPDs are often particularly well-positioned to support access to AT within their communities. The World Health Organization projects that by 2050 over 3.5 billion people would benefit from AT, but 90% will not have access. As organizations rooted in lived experience and local networks, OPDs can be best placed to identify needs, support appropriate AT provision, and connect individuals to services, training, and peer support.

However, when OPDs themselves are under-resourced, their capacity to bridge the AT access gap is significantly constrained. Tackling the barriers to funding for OPDs is critical to ensuring people have access to life-changing AT.

Furthermore, OPDs require adequate funding not only to deliver programmes and advocate for disability rights, but also to create accessible working environments that enable people with disabilities to participate in and lead such organisations, including using assistive products (for example, screen reading technology such as NVDA or JAWS or hearing aids).

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Foreword

Organisations of Persons with Disabilities (OPDs) play vital roles as policy and governance experts, strategic partners, advocates, and community implementers of work to progress equity and inclusion of people with disabilities, including accelerating access to assistive technology. Despite their integral role in disability rights advocacy, many OPDs operate with minimal and insecure funding, undermining their ability to sustain operations, be involved in, and have influence over the shaping of strategies, policies, and interventions.

For this review, we set out to map the current funding environment for OPDs in in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs): identifying where financial resources come from, how they arrive at OPDs, what stands in the way of access, and opportunities to remove these barriers. Drawing from the evidence, we find that current funding structures and practices of remunerating OPDs are often at odds with the objective of driving global disability rights and equity through OPD involvement. Drawing on the challenges and positive practices identified, we present recommendations for both OPDs as well as current and prospective funders, with the aim of initiating constructive action towards sustained operational capacity and meaningful participation of OPDs in the future.

Ensuring the inclusion and rights of persons with disabilities depends on both public and private actors allocating sufficient capital to disability-inclusive agendas. Yet, financing for social and sustainable development is tight (and tightening) and funding of disability-inclusive development is insufficient even prior to official development assistance (ODA) cuts.[1]With the OECD projecting a $6.4 trillion financing gap by 2030 without major reform,[2] and the potential of the private sector to accelerate inclusion remaining under leveraged,[3] the consequences of shortfalls are significant

[1]'Situational Analysis of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities: In Lessons & Conclusions from Thirty-Four Countries | InfoNTD', The United Nations Partnership on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNPRPD), 2024, https://www.infontd.org/resource/situational-analysis- rightspersons-disabilities-lessons-conclusions-thirty-four-countries.

[2]OECD, 'Global Outlook on Financing for Sustainable Development 2025: Towards a More Resilient and Inclusive Architecture', *Global Outlook on Financing for Sustainable Development* 2025 (February 2025), https://doi.org/10.1787/753d5368-en.

[3]Global Disability Summit, *Global Disability Inclusion Report* , March 2025, https://www.globaldisabilitysummit.org/resource/global-disability-inclusion-report/.

for the 16% of the global population measured as having a disability;[4] 80% of whom live in low-and-middle income countries (LMICs).[5] This reality underscores the imperative to strengthen the systems by which capital can reach OPDs. We find that the challenges OPDs have in accessing financial resources - and the challenges organisations have in working with and remunerating OPDs - are not attributable to OPD work and collaboration being too expensive, but because systems and modes of operation on both the funder and OPD side do not always align. Some of the barriers identified in this Review are shared across civil society actors (CSOs) and reflect wider processes of NGO-ization, whereby CSOs are required to conform to formalised, Western organisational models. Other barriers are OPD-specific, notably the frequent failure of funding organisations to recognise accessibility and reasonable-adjustment costs as non-negotiable, rights-based requirements.

OPDs describe funding availability as scarce and approaches unsuitable even when funders intentionally seek out OPDs. Administrative requirements overstretch OPD capacity with intensive application, due diligence, and reporting demands. At the same time, short-term, project-based engagement, legal and regulatory barriers, inaccessible online application platforms, inadequate overhead income, and undervaluation of contributions, constrains OPDs' ability to contribute meaningfully to projects or sustain their independent operations.

Barriers to funding are not experienced equally across OPDs, and intersecting factors such as gender, impairment type, rural or conflict-affected context, and socioeconomic status significantly shape access to resources and operational capacity.

Likewise, the barriers that funding organisations shape for OPDs are both structural and individual, both of which can be addressed. Funder leadership and willingness to act as disability justice allies plays a crucial role in driving this shift.

This report outlines an optimal approach: where flexible, core funding with built-in capacity strengthening is accessible for OPDs and supports them to sustain

[4]'Global Report on Health Equity for Persons with Disabilities', 2022, https://www.who.int/teams/noncommunicable-diseases/sensory-functions-disability-andrehabilitation/global-report-on-health-equity-for-persons-with-disabilities.

[5]'Global Report on Health Equity for Persons with Disabilities', 2022, https://www.who.int/teams/noncommunicable-diseases/sensory-functions-disability-andrehabilitation/global-report-on-health-equity-for-persons-with-disabilities.

operations, retain staff, and advance their agendas and impact. Advocating for such funding structure does not preclude other forms of working with, funding and remunerating OPDs; such as project-based contracts and fee-for-service arrangements. However, across all approaches, there must be a consistency in equitable and fair remuneration, accessibility, reasonable adjustment, and flexibility, alongside a focus on building local capacity.

Just as funders must adjust their behaviour to be more OPD-inclusive, we encourage OPDs to further develop operational capacity to support the receipt of increased funding; by improving internal systems, policies, infrastructure, visibility, and evidence generation. Reflecting this, the report presents recommendations for *both* funders and OPDs to meaningfully collaborate on securing funding to improve the lives of people with disabilities. As an employee of a bilateral development agency describes in response to our survey:

> *"There are huge structural barriers that funders need to examine internally, and potentially adjust in the way resources are allocated, for OPDs to engage with 'traditional' funding partners. There needs to be actions on both sides to remove barriers and relax or diversify funding requirements / due diligence and share capacity with OPDs and across stakeholders to get to a mutually agreed 'middle ground".*

We hope the publication of this review paired with 'Access to funding: good practice guidance from and for organisations of persons with disabilities', takes us a step closer towards constructive dialogue and complementary action.

We are especially grateful to our OPD partners in this research for their honesty and expertise, and to the funders who took time to contribute their experiences.

Pollyanna Wardrop, Senior Researcher, Global Disability Innovation Hub

Definitions

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 as it pertains to the disability community and is either:

- Majority-run and -controlled by disabled people, including at leadership/board levels; or
- Run by supporters of disabled people, if the disabled people 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 organisation.[6]

Assistive technology: An umbrella term for assistive products and their related systems and services. Assistive products can range from physical products such as wheelchairs, glasses, prosthetic limbs, white canes, and hearing aids to digital solutions such as speech recognition or time management software and captioning.[7]

Budgeting: In the context of this review, budgeting refers to planning and allocating public, organisational or investment funds in a way that actively accounts for the money required to include people with disabilities and OPDs.

Civil Society Organisations (CSOs): Non-government groups that work to support people, communities, or causes, often to promote social good, rights or public interests.

Core funding: Money that supports an organisation's everyday work, such as staff, rent, and office costs, rather than funding limited to one specific project.

Development finance: Funding used to achieve social, environmental and economic outcomes that benefit people and the planet.[8] The OECD monitoring of the Addis Ababa Action Agenda (AAAA) breaks down the main categories of finance as: "Domestic public resources; domestic and international private business and finance;

[6] 'Anna Landre and Global Disability Innovation Hub, 'The Global DPO/OPD Map: An Open-Source Data Collection of Disabled People's Organisations Worldwide', AT2030 Programme, University College London, 2025.

[7] WHO and UNICEF, 'Global Report on Assistive Technology', 2022, https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789240049451.

[8] 'Demystifying Development Finance', IFAD, accessed 16 April 2026, https://www.ifad.org/en/w/explainers/demystifying-development-finance.

international development cooperation; international trade as an engine for development; debt and debt sustainability; addressing systemic issues; and science, technology, innovation and capacity building". [9]

Due diligence: Checks that funders do before giving money, such as on basic policies, financial records, organisational documents, and evidence of past work to understand if your organisation is trustworthy, well managed, and able to use funds responsibly.

Intermediaries: Organisations that receive fundings and pass it on to OPDs, often via "sub-grants."

Fiscal justice: "Fiscal justice is about people having the space, voice and agency to exercise their rights in order to monitor and influence fiscal systems to ensure that they are fair, mobilise greater revenue, and increase and improve spending for quality public services for all."[10]

Financing vs. funding: Financing is the act of obtaining or furnishing money or capital for a purchase or enterprise. Funding is money provided, especially by an organisation or government, for a particular purpose.[11]

Funders: In the context of this review, 'funders' encompasses any agency, including donors, UN agencies, INGOs, and private sector institutions, that mobilises its own resources (via institutional funds or public donations) to provide OPDs with the financial means to implement programs.[12]

Funding landscape: The overall picture of who provides funding, what types of funding are available, and how organisations can access it.

[9] 'Financing for Sustainable Development', accessed 16 April 2026, https://www.un.org/esa/ffd/publications/aaaa-outcome.html.

[10] Oxfam, *Fiscal Accountability for Inequality Reduction: Empowering Citizens to Ensure That Fiscal Systems Are More Progressive and Government Policies on Tax and Spending Benefit the Many, Not the Few* , 2017.

[11] 'Financing v Funding: There Is a Difference | VT Bond Bank', accessed 16 April 2026, https://www.vtbondbank.org/resource/financing-v-funding-there-difference.

[12] Global Action on Disability (GLAD) Network, *Locally Led Disability-Inclusive Action OPDs' Access to Humanitarian Funding and Partnerships in Jordan, Ukraine and Pakistan.* (2024).

Indirect costs (overheads): These are the operating and administrative costs not directly tied to project activities, such as rent, audit fees, and bank charges.[13]

Intermediary: An organisation that receives funding from a donor and then distributes that funding to other organisations, such as OPDs. They sit between the donor and the organisations implementing the work.

NGO-ization: The pressure on civil society actors to become formal, professionalised NGOs. [14][15]

Official development assistance (ODA): "Government aid that promotes and specifically targets the economic development and welfare of developing countries". ODA has been the primary source of financing for development aid since it was adopted by the OECD's Development Assistance Committee (DAC) in 1969**.**[16]

Operational capacity: An organisation's ability to run effectively day to day, including systems, staff, skills, and processes needed to deliver your work.

Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) Development Assistance Committee (DAC) disability policy marker: A monitoring tool introduced in 2018 that lets DAC members flag whether their official development assistance (ODA) projects are designed to support the inclusion and empowerment of people with disabilities on a three-point scale.[17]

- **Score 2 (Principal/Disability-focused):** Disability inclusion is the main objective of the activity.
- **Score 1 (Significant/Disability-related):** Disability inclusion is an explicit objective but not the main reason for the activity.

[13]Global Action on Disability (GLAD) Network, *Locally Led Disability-Inclusive Action OPDs' Access to Humanitarian Funding and Partnerships in Jordan, Ukraine and Pakistan.* (2024).

[14]Andrzej Klimczuk, 'NGOization: Complicity, Contradictions and Prospects', *Journal for the Study of Radicalism* 9, no. 1 (2015): 173–77, https://doi.org/10.14321/jstudradi.9.1.0173. 13 'Official Development Assistance (ODA)', OECD, accessed 16 April 2026, https://www.oecd.org/en/topics/official-development-assistance-oda.html.

[15]'OECD DAC Disability Marker', *European Disability Forum* , 25 November 2022, https://www.edffeph.org/oecd-dac-disability-marker/.

[16]'United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD))', 2006, https://social.desa.un.org/issues/disability/crpd/convention-on-the-rights-of-persons- withdisabilities-crpd.

[17]'OECD DAC Disability Marker', *European Disability Forum* , 25 November 2022, https://www.edffeph.org/oecd-dac-disability-marker/.

- **Score 0:** The activity does not target disability inclusion in a significant way.

Reasonable adjustment: Adjustments or support provided so that people with disabilities can participate fully and equally, such as accessible formats, assistive technologies, or flexible ways of working.

Sub-granting: When an organisation receives a grant from a funder and gives some of that grant to a smaller organisation (e.g., an OPD) to carry out certain activities that were specified by that grant.

United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD): **"**An international human rights treaty, adopted by the United Nations in 2006", that sets out the rights of persons with disabilities and the responsibilities of governments to respect, protect, and fulfil those rights.[18]

[18]'United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD))', 2006, https://social.desa.un.org/issues/disability/crpd/convention-on-the-rights-of-persons- withdisabilities-crpd.

Background

Why did we do this research?

We undertook this research for three main reasons:

1. OPDs play vital roles as lived experience experts, strategic partners, policy advocates, and community implementers of work to progress equity and inclusion they face.
2. Despite the stated importance of their meaningful participation in disability inclusive development, many OPDs operate with minimal and insecure funding.
3. The reality of limited and shrinking funding for disability-inclusion and disability inclusive development globally underscores the imperative to strengthen the systems by which capital can reach OPDs.

The Central Role of OPD Participation

Involving people with disabilities and representative OPDs in programming, policy, strategy, design and implementation intended for their inclusion is a human rights imperative[19] and doing so ensures that programme outcomes are better informed and rooted in the lived realities of people with disabilities. Meaningful participation of people with disabilities and the concept of 'nothing about us without us' is at the heart of the disability rights movement, intrinsic to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD). [20]

United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, Article 4, General Obligations, 2006

"In the development and implementation of legislation and policies to implement the present convention, and in other decision-making processes concerning issues relating to persons with disabilities, States Parties shall closely consult with and

[19]'UN Disability Inclusion Strategy', accessed 16 April 2026, https://www.un.org/en/content/disabilitystrategy/.

[20]United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, Article 4, General Obligations, 2006

actively involve persons with disabilities, including children with disabilities, through their representative organizations."

United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, General Comment No. 7 (2018), clarifying obligations under Article 4.3 and Article 33.3

"The access to the least restrictive [non-conditional] funding and resources is an integral and vital pre-condition [part of the right to freedom of association] for the effective participation of persons with disabilities, and essential for DPOs/OPDs to ensure the capacity-building of persons with disabilities for DPOs/OPDs to grow internally. States parties should ensure that any organization is able to seek and secure funds and resources from domestic and international donors, including private individuals, private companies, all public and private foundations, CSOs, state and international organizations. Funds should not only be intended for service providers but rather be aimed at existing and potential DPOs/OPDs focusing primarily on advocacy."

While the CRPD does not create legal obligations for non-State actors such as donors, funders, businesses, international organisations, or NGOs, many global frameworks call on these actors to align their work with CRPD principles and to work in partnership with OPDs.

Key examples include:

- The UN Disability Inclusion Strategy (UNDIS), which commits UN entities to engage OPDs across all programming and operations.[21]
- The IASC Guidelines on Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities in Humanitarian Action, which require humanitarian actors and partners to work with OPDs at all stages of the humanitarian programme cycle.[22]

[21]'UN Disability Inclusion Strategy', accessed 16 April 2026, https://www.un.org/en/content/disabilitystrategy/.

[22]'IASC Guidelines, Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities in Humanitarian Action, 2019 | IASC', accessed 16 April 2026, https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/iasc-guidelines- oninclusion-of-persons-with-disabilities-in-humanitarian-action-2019.https://www.internationaldisabilityalliance.org/sites/default/files/ida_global_survey_202 2 _final.pdf.

Restricted OPD influence due to lack of funding

Financial flows shape how agendas are resourced, which forms of knowledge are valued, which actors can have agency in decision-making, and which initiatives and outcomes are ultimately realised. Despite their integral role in disability rights and advocacy, many OPDs operate with minimal and insecure funding. This undermines their ability to sustain operations, be involved in, and have influence over the shaping of strategies, policies, interventions, and decision-making.

Disability funding climate

The International Disability Alliance (IDA) suggests 3–7% of the total development programme budget should be allocated for OPD engagement and inclusion, rising to 10– 15% for programmes focused on disability rights or inclusive development.[23] However, at a national level, disability laws and policies are rarely budgeted for,1 and as of 2025, despite people with disabilities representing 16% of the global population (1.3 billion people), 4 disability inclusion receives just 0.2% of global aid.[24] Historically, development finance has overlooked disability inclusion, treating it as an "add-on" rather than a core component of effective, rights-based development. As the World Bank wrote in 2015 how "…when persons with disabilities are not explicitly included in development programming, they are often left out".[25] However, marking a programme as 'disability inclusive' [26] does not guarantee that OPDs have been substantively involved in shaping its design, governance, or implementation.

Recent international development funding cuts have exacerbated the already short supply of funding for the meaningful participation of people with disabilities. A global survey found that 84% of civil society organisations (CSOs) lost funding in 2025 due

[23]International Disability Alliance (IDA), *Not Just Ticking the Box? Meaningful OPD Participation and the Risk of Tokenism* (2022), https://www.internationaldisabilityalliance.org/sites/default/files/ida_global_survey_2022_fin al.pdf.https://www.globaldisabilitysummit.org/resource/discussion-paper-on-opdengagement/.

[24]'GDS Commitments Implementation Report', *Global Disability Fund* , 25 June 2025, https://globaldisabilityfund.org/document/gdf-in-action-implementing-global- disabilitysummit-commitments-locally/.

[25]'How Can the World Bank Better Support Persons with Disabilities? Send Us Your Ideas', World Bank Blogs, 2015, https://blogs.worldbank.org/en/voices/moving-goals-action- disabilityinclusive-development.

[26]'United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD))', 2006, https://social.desa.un.org/issues/disability/crpd/convention-on-the-rights-of-persons- withdisabilities-crpd.

to funding rollbacks.[27] 75% of humanitarian respondents to a Disability Reference Group (DRG) survey report that "their work on disability inclusion was already being impacted by these cuts and policy shifts".[28] A 2025 GDI Hub survey of 378 surveyed OPDs across 102 countries found that just over a third of organizations (38.4%) reported a significant recent change in their funding.[29] The most cited reason for any funding change was a funder policy change (40.0% of those reporting any change), followed by COVID-19 (9.4%).[30] Among the 115 organizations reporting a reduction, 31.3% attributed this to USAID stop-work orders. [31]

Amid ODA cuts, the 4th International Conference on Financing for Development held in June 2025 positioned the private sector as essential for development.[32] The World Economic Forum finds, however, that "…although 90% of companies claim to prioritise diversity, only 4% of businesses are focused on making offerings inclusive of disability."[33]

[27]IFES - The International Foundation for Electoral Systems, 'Assessing the Impact of Foreign Aid Rollbacks on Civil Society', Global Democracy Sector Survey, September 2025, https://www.ifes.org/publications/assessing-impact-foreign-aid-rollbacks-civil-society. 22 Jelena Jezdovic, *DRG Report: Impact of Funding Cuts on Persons with Disabilities - Disability Reference Group* , 28 July 2025, https://disabilityreferencegroup.org/portfolio-items/drg- reportimpact-of-funding-cuts-on-persons-with-disabilities/.

[28]'Closing the Disability Inclusion Gap with Business Leadership | World Economic Forum', accessed 16 April 2026, https://www.weforum.org/impact/disability-inclusion/.

[29]'Anna Landre and Global Disability Innovation Hub, 'The Global DPO/OPD Map: An Open-Source Data Collection of Disabled People's Organisations Worldwide', AT2030 Programme, University College London, 2025.

[30]'Anna Landre and Global Disability Innovation Hub, 'The Global DPO/OPD Map: An Open-Source Data Collection of Disabled People's Organisations Worldwide', AT2030 Programme, University College London, 2025.

[31]'Anna Landre and Global Disability Innovation Hub, 'The Global DPO/OPD Map: An Open-Source Data Collection of Disabled People's Organisations Worldwide', AT2030 Programme, University College London, 2025.

[32]'4th International Conference on Financing for Development', United Nations, June 2025, https://www.un.org/en/civil-society/1st-prep-com-session-ffd4.

[33]'Closing the Disability Inclusion Gap with Business Leadership | World Economic Forum', accessed 16 April 2026, https://www.weforum.org/impact/disability-inclusion/.

Methodology

Data Collection

All research activities were conducted online and included:

- Literature review
    - The literature review relied mainly on grey literature due to the limited availability of academic research on OPD funding. Much of the existing knowledge in this area is documented in reports from donors, UN agencies, conferences, and civil society and practitioner networks. A small number of academic sources were also reviewed to provide theoretical context and support interpretation of the findings.
- Semi structured interviews with eight OPDs
- Survey across funders (eight responses)
- Participatory workshop with OPDs to validate findings, identify gaps, and contribute best practices to build the final outputs:
    - The workshop lasted 2 hours 15 minutes and was structured in two parts. The first part focused on reviewing and refining the findings through participant feedback, while the second used a participatory activity to generate practice based recommendations and examples to be incorporated into the final guidance for OPDs.

OPD collaboration

GDI Hub selected OPDs to collaborate with on this project in two stages, prioritising diversity across geography, organisational type, and disability representation.

Identification and outreach:

Based on desk research and the Global DPO/OPD Map,[34] we shared an expression-of-interest form with a selected group of 16 OPDs in low- and middle-income countries. The aim was to bring together a diverse group of OPDs that represented:

[34]'Anna Landre and Global Disability Innovation Hub, 'The Global DPO/OPD Map: An Open-Source Data Collection of Disabled People's Organisations Worldwide', AT2030 Programme, University College London, 2025.

- Grassroots/local organisations and umbrella organisations;
- Pan disability and impairment specific organisations, including underrepresented impairment types;
- Geographic diversity across regions, including underrepresented regions;
- Urban and rural context;
- Gender diversity, prioritising women-led OPDs; and
- A diversity of funding and income sources.

Selection of OPD partners:

From the OPDs who expressed interest, eight were selected based on:

- Alignment with the sampling criteria above;
- Described motivation and interest in contributing to the project; and
- Representation of our funder priority countries.

Activity:

OPDs collaborated on the following stages of the research process:

- Sharing perspectives on barriers, enablers, and recommendations during interviews and workshop;
- Shaping the survey questions directed at funders;
- Validating the thematic analysis findings and identify gaps;
- Contributing directly to the development of the OPD Good Practice Brief, through sharing templates, advice, and case studies;
- Reviewing and providing feedback on the draft findings and recommendations; and
- Disseminating, localising, and sharing findings.

Remuneration was provided at GDI Hub consultant rate levels, 30% upfront and 70% in arrears.

Funder survey

A survey was designed to capture the approaches, barriers, and successes of engaging OPDs from the perspective of those who currently or seek to collaborate with, contract, and fund them. The survey was sent to over 50 diverse organisations

ranging from INGOs, to Government Agencies, Multilateral Development Institutions, Financial Institutions, and Foundations. Eight organisations responded to the survey.

The survey was first drafted by GDI Hub and reviewed and updated through OPD feedback.

Data Analysis

Semi-structured interviews with partner OPDs were analysed using a reflexive thematic analysis approach[35] to identify key themes related to OPD experiences of accessing and managing funding. These themes were then validated and refined during the participatory workshop and used as the analytical framework for the overall study. Findings associated with research for the Global DPO/OPD Map, another GDI Hub project, provided quantitative validation of funding patterns.[36] Due to the small sample size, the survey findings are not representative of funders overall; however, responses were qualitatively coded and grouped to identify key themes.

Limitations

OPD collaboration was participatory, not co-design; the approach and ambitions for the project were initially designed by GDI Hub. OPD perspectives were provided through key informant interviews, survey question review, finding validation workshops, and report review. This work was conducted in English, a barrier for organisations who may have only been able to participate in non-English languages. We recognise that this limitation reflects broader barriers within funding ecosystems where language requirements can restrict the participation of OPDs.

Future work which has greater OPD ownership should account for proportionate resourcing and a longer timeline. OPDs were represented by an individuals, selected for their knowledge or organisational funding and financial processes. Thus, the findings may not reflect the full range of views within each organisation. The findings

[35]'Toward Good Practice in Thematic Analysis: Avoiding Common Problems and Be(Com)Ing a Knowing Researcher', October 2022, https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/26895269.2022.2129597.

[36]'Anna Landre and Global Disability Innovation Hub, 'The Global DPO/OPD Map: An Open-Source Data Collection of Disabled People's Organisations Worldwide', AT2030 Programme, University College London, 2025.

reflect patters amount the 8 participating OPDs, of global and organisational diversity, and thus are not a representative sample for OPDs in LMICs globally. Responses from funding organisations may also be biased toward those with stronger existing partnerships with OPDs, who may have been more likely to fill out the survey.

Ethics

This research received favourable ethical approval from the University College London (UCL) Department of Computer Science Research Ethics Committee (Reference: 16149/001).

Use of AI

Google LM Notebook was used to support the literature review, including organising and summarising sources. Microsoft co-pilot was used to copy-edit and simplify technical language. All analysis, interpretation, and final content were reviewed and validated by the authors.

Findings

This section synthesises evidence from the literature review alongside insights from the funder survey and OPD interviews. Across this evidence, we identify key barriers and enablers to OPD access to funding within five interconnected themes:

- Funding sources, channels and arrangements;
- External funding structures;
- Power dynamics and relationships between OPDs, funders, and intermediaries;
- Operational capacity; and
- Implementation and delivery.

Funding sources, pathways and engagement

Informed by this research, Figure 1 below provides a snapshot of funding sources OPDs currently use to operate and deliver their work. For the purposes of this review, the term 'Funding' includes both external funding and earned income.

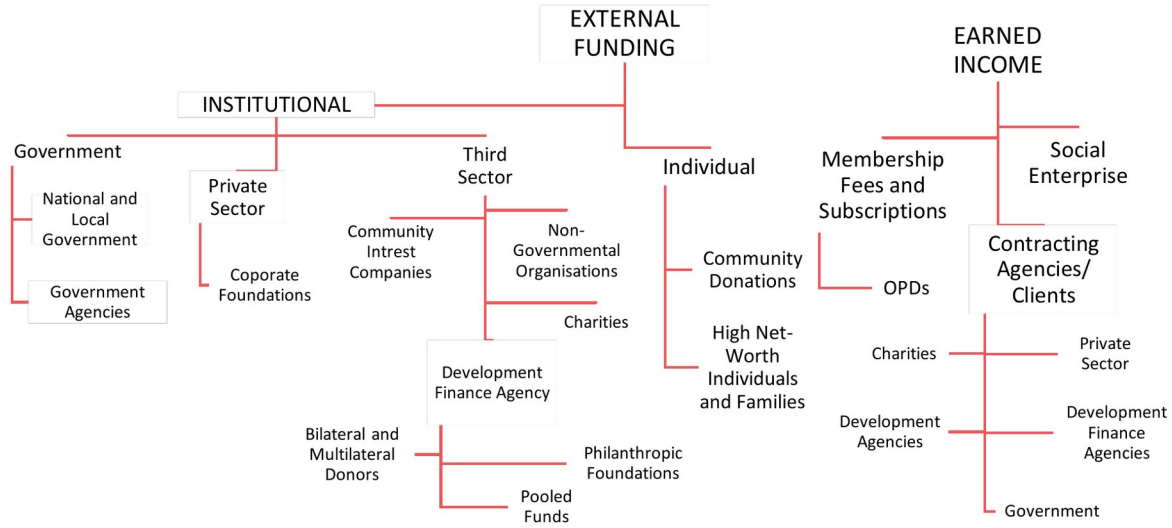

Figure 1 OPD Finance Resource Map.

Earlier GDI Hub research indicates that OPDs in LMICs often rely on international development civil society grants as a primary source of funding[37], and as such we primarily focus the challenges and opportunities across this ecosystem. We also examine additional funding sources, including consultancy and services contracts, social enterprise models, local government funding, and donations.

Pathways to funding

OPDs indicated that available external funding is predominantly short-term, project based grants, often accessed through intermediaries. Both funders and OPDs noted that funding opportunities are shared through relational modes (such as existing relationships, through recommendations from partners/funders, informal referrals or national/local OPD federations/umbrella bodies). OPDs also cited open calls for proposals as another channel through which to access external funding. In interviews, national umbrella OPDs reported relying mostly on international grant funding, but that their member OPDs rely mostly on membership fees and government funding.

Mapping OPD funding sources

Earlier GDI Hub research indicates that international civil society grants are the most frequently cited primary source of funding among OPDs.[38] Other external sources mentioned in OPD interviews included private foundations and wealthy international donors, while local government funding was reported far less often.

Several OPDs described efforts to diversify income streams to sustain their operations, including the establishment of social enterprises. In some cases, these enterprises were also used to create employment opportunities for persons with disabilities. Engagement with the private sector was cited as a rare, but potentially overlooked opportunity, particularly in relation to corporate social responsibility initiatives.

[37]'Anna Landre and Global Disability Innovation Hub, 'The Global DPO/OPD Map: An Open-Source Data Collection of Disabled People's Organisations Worldwide', AT2030 Programme, University College London, 2025.

[38]'Anna Landre and Global Disability Innovation Hub, 'The Global DPO/OPD Map: An Open-Source Data Collection of Disabled People's Organisations Worldwide', AT2030 Programme, University College London, 2025.

Membership fees were cited by many OPDs, a pattern supported by earlier GDI Hub research,[3940] although their role varied. Some organisations noted that these fees are largely symbolic, contributing little to overall income. Others, however, emphasised their importance in fostering member commitment, ownership, and internal accountability, even where the financial contribution is modest.

Engagement with partners and funders

OPDs reported that their involvement in development programmes is often limited to one-off or consultative engagement, typically at the end of a process or in an advisory role. Likewise, no surveyed funder reported OPDs having decision making authority, and only one funder indicated that OPDs are engaged as a core partner across all disability related work.

However, all eight surveyed funders reported working with OPDs through participatory design, consultation, implementation partnerships, and advocacy, with four funders reporting OPDs acting as lead partners in some work, and two noting the use of OPD advisory boards for projects, strategy, or programmes.

As one respondent International NGO indicated:

> *"OPD partnership is very diverse and depending on the country context, their priorities and programmatic alignment, they are engaged in various stages of delivery in programmes. The advocacy work is jointly coowned with OPD partners whilst in advisory work, OPD bring in lived experience, expertise" (INGO, Survey).*

However, these forms of engagement were reported less often by OPDs and likely partly reflect a response bias, as funders demonstrating stronger partnership practices, and funders already aware of and sympathetic to the importance of working with OPDs, may have been more likely to respond to the survey.

[39]'Anna Landre and Global Disability Innovation Hub, 'The Global DPO/OPD Map: An Open-Source Data Collection of Disabled People's Organisations Worldwide', AT2030 Programme, University College London, 2025.

[40]Louise Gebbett et al., 'OPD Capacity Building for a Disability Inclusive Future Kenya Project Report', AT2030 Programme, March 2025, https://www.at2030.org/opd-capacity-building-for- adisability-inclusive-future-kenya-project-report/.

Barriers: funding sources, channels and arrangements

This section examines three key barriers that arise from the ways disability rights funding is sourced, channelled, and structured: the chronic underfunding of disability rights and OPDs, the impact of external funding, and budget issues. These barriers to funding are not experienced equally across OPDs, and our research indicates that intersecting factors such as gender, type of impairment (particularly psychosocial and intellectual disabilities), rural or conflict-affected contexts, and socioeconomic status significantly shape access to resources and participation.

Underfunding of disability rights and OPDs

Over the past decade, the funding landscape for civil society organisations (CSOs) has been evolving due to shifting donor priorities, the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, and broader political and economic pressures.[41] In 2025, major aid cuts by G7 countries, including the United States, the United Kingdom, Germany, and Sweden, placed inclusive programmes at further serious risk.[42][43] One survey found that 84% of civil society organisations (CSOs), lost funding in 2025 because of these cuts.[44] These reductions have had a direct and damaging effect on CSOs, including OPDs, undermining their ability to sustain core functions and ensure their programming is inclusive. Funding cuts also force OPDs to cancel projects and lay off staff.

> *"The funding is a big problem, because of USA cuts. Many of the international organisations who are working with us also faced a funding shortage, and many of our programmes cancelled because of USAID cuts. So currently there is ... a shortage of funds." (OPD, KII)*

[41] Anisha Saggu et al., *A Mapping of the Current Funders of Disability Inclusion and Other Equalities Areas Globally* , Disability Inclusion Helpdesk Report No: 145 (Inclusive Futures, 2025).

[42] *Global South: The Critical Handbook* , ed. Shaun Grech and Karen Soldatic (Springer International Publishing, 2016), https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-42488-0_27.

[43] 'Disabled People's Organisations Coalition | Whaikaha - Ministry of Disabled People', New Zealand, accessed 16 April 2026, https://www.whaikaha.govt.nz/about-us/who- weare/engaging-with-the-community/disabled-peoples-organisations.

[44] '4th International Conference on Financing for Development', United Nations, June 2025, https://www.un.org/en/civil-society/1st-prep-com-session-ffd4.

> *"...it is a headache, you know, accessing funds, you know, every year, you know, how can I maintain my staff? How can I maintain my office? You know, the admin cost... how can I continue members' work?" (OPD, KII)*

OPDs described negative effects of funding scarcity, including intensified competition among OPDs, INGOs, and other civil society organisations for a shrinking pool of funding. Several OPDs noted that larger INGOs or non-disability-focused organisations are often better positioned to compete in this environment as they typically have established donor relationships, greater visibility, and dedicated fundraising and operations.

Disability Reference Group (DRG) Survey (June 2025)

75% of humanitarian respondents 2025 stated that their work on disability inclusion was already being impacted by these funding cuts and policy shifts. Many respondents of the DRG report survey also highlighted the impact of funding cuts on participation and leadership of OPDs:

- "Closure and phase out of OPDs' operations that were actively engaging in various ongoing response", and
- "Even though the funding cuts have affected the inclusion of persons with disabilities in humanitarian interventions, there has been very little effort made towards empowering organizations of persons with disabilities to carry out projects and activities in this light. There remain very few funding opportunities tailor-made for OPDs".

In sum, funding cuts constrain OPDs' ability to access funding directly and to participate on equal terms within development partnerships, despite their central role in advancing disability-inclusive development.

Impact of external funding arrangements

Because many OPDs depend on international grants as their primary funding source, they are exposed to shifts in donor priorities and fluctuations in global development funding. Short-term project grant arrangements were frequently cited by participants as a major barrier to sustaining OPD operations, maximising long-term impact, and building enduring partnerships.

While grants provide important opportunities, they are typically competitive, timebound, and restricted to specific activities, limiting the ability of OPDs to sustain operations and contribute on equal terms. Earlier research similarly notes that funding available to OPDs is often limited in both scale and duration, with many grants lasting only one to three years and few extending beyond longer time horizons.[45] As one participant explained:

> *"Most of our funding is project-based, and we might not have much funding for operations" (OPD, KII).*

Participants also highlighted how sub-granting arrangements can reinforce unequal power dynamics. In some humanitarian and development contexts, OPDs are engaged primarily as 'last mile'[46] implementers rather than strategic partners. For example, OPDs may be subcontracted by international NGOs or UN agencies to assist with beneficiary registration or community outreach but remain excluded from higher-level programme design, budgeting, and decision-making processes. This can also leave sub-granted OPDs particularly vulnerable to funding cuts and shifting donor priorities.

Figure 2 illustrates how OPDs often ultimately receive relatively small amounts of funding through successive layers of sub-granting*.

[45]A K Dube and Gladys Charowa, 'Are Disabled Peoples' Voices from Both South and North Being Heard in the Development Process? A Comparative Analysis between the Situation in South Africa, Zimbabwe, United Kingdom and Northern Europe', GOV.UK, accessed 16 April 2026, https://www.gov.uk/research-for-development-outputs/are-disabled-peoples-voices- fromboth-south-and-north-being-heard-in-the-development-process-a-comparative- analysisbetween-the-situation-in-south-africa-zimbabwe-united-kingdom-and-northern- europe.

[46]Global Action on Disability (GLAD) Network, *Locally Led Disability-Inclusive Action OPDs' Access to Humanitarian Funding and Partnerships in Jordan, Ukraine and Pakistan.* (2024).

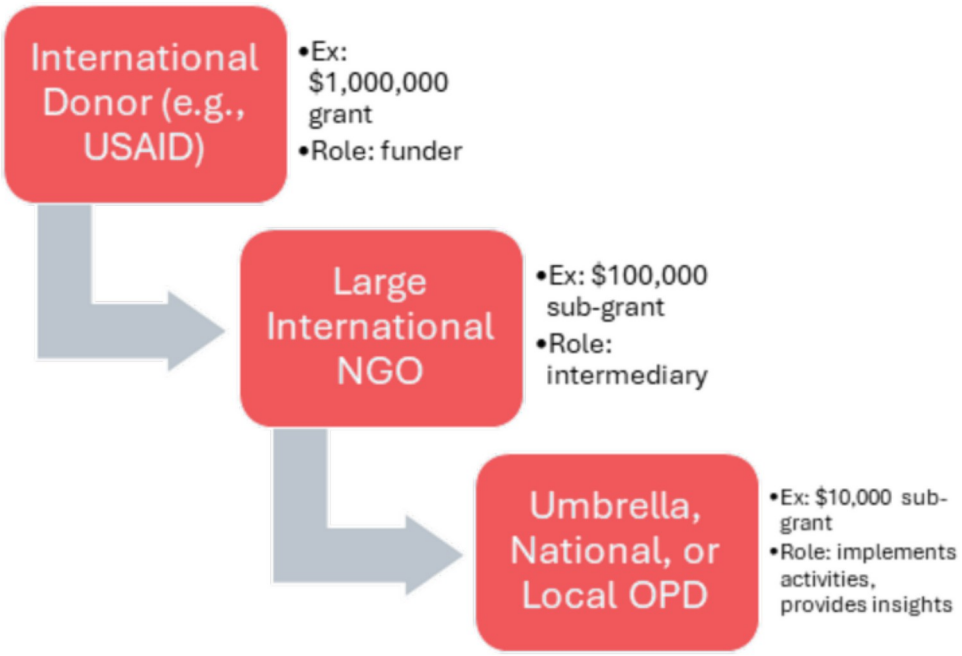

Figure 2 Funding flows to OPDs through sub-grant arrangements.

*Note: The amounts presented are illustrative only and are used to demonstrate funding flows; they do not represent actual grant values.

Earlier research finds that funding for OPDs is often fragmented across multiple small grants from different donors, reducing efficiency and limiting the overall value for money of funding systems.[47] This can create high transaction costs, requiring OPDs to invest significant time and resources in preparing multiple applications and managing complex reporting requirements.[48]

Budget arrangements, not overall cost, as the barrier

Though no funder surveyed cited cost as a barrier for working with OPDs, funders did say that budget constraints were a barrier.

This may indicate that the challenge is not the cost of working with OPDs, but the limited amount of budget set aside in the design of projects or funding opportunities to engage with civil society. Similarly, a respondent from a multilateral development agency described that the way contracts are structured, such as project design, funding models, and prefinancing arrangements, can act as a barrier:

[47] Anisha Saggu et al., *A Mapping of the Current Funders of Disability Inclusion and Other Equalities Areas Globally* , Disability Inclusion Helpdesk Report No: 145 (Inclusive Futures, 2025).

[48] Global Action on Disability (GLAD) Network, *Locally Led Disability-Inclusive Action OPDs' Access to Humanitarian Funding and Partnerships in Jordan, Ukraine and Pakistan.* (2024).

"Contractual constraints go beyond due diligence and relate to the structure of contractual agreements e.g. the design of projects and funding opportunities, the pre-financing opportunities". (Multilateral Development Agency, Survey)

Enablers: funding sources, arrangements, and channels

This section explores key enablers related to funding sources, channels, and arrangements, with a particular focus on the preferred funding models identified by OPDs and funders as most effective in supporting sustainable, rights-based disability work. Both groups highlighted the need for more flexible, long-term, and partnership-oriented funding models.

Table 1 shows preferred funding arrangements based on OPD perspectives, with funder perspectives included where they align. A separate column includes key quotes that give examples of these arrangements and explain why they are needed.

Table 1: Preferred funding arrangements

Preferred Funding Arrangement	OPD and Funder Perspectives (Illustrative Quotes)
Multi-year and flexible core funding	"[Funder] provides sustainable, long-term flexible funding until 2030. [Funder] channels funds to seven countries via [INGO] and the OPDs implement the project. [Multilateral development agency] is supporting coordinating these countries and working together." (OPD, KII) "OPD partnership is seen [as] strategic within our organisational strategy. We have made [a] number of internal and external commitments to support this. This is central to creating accountability. In our programme work with mainstream NGOs and partners, we make it explicit that OPD engagement needs to be budgeted. OPDs have [an] explicit role in the programme management including oversight on monitoring inclusion." (International NGO, Survey)
Direct, rather than sub granted, funding	"Direct, trust-based, and disability-informed funding models particularly those that combine institutional support with flexible implementation are the most effective for strengthening OPD leadership and sustainable regional impact." (OPD, KII) "Digital direct funding platforms (mobile money-based grant disbursement systems) tailored, for example, to East Africa." (OPD, KII)

Preferred Funding Arrangement	OPD and Funder Perspectives (Illustrative Quotes)
Flexible contracts	"We have been more keen on contracts lately because of the flexibility in this funding, more leeway in budgeting and how we implement activities and can make more money from it." (OPD, KII)
Ongoing partnership models	"Regular partners are key." (OPD, KII) "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." (Multilateral development agency)
OPDs shaping priorities or coming up with their own proposals under a broad donor objective	"... we had to co-create the project with the [nonprofit organisation] team...we thought that it was a very productive partnership because they allowed us to come up with the priority areas." (OPD, KII) "Co-design alongside a lead OPD - this enabled the project to be shaped based on the local priorities." (Nonprofit organisation, Survey)

Flexible Grant Funding: Flexible grant structures enabled an OPD to response to immediate and emerging needs identified by its members, local people with disabilities. The OPD described using flexible funding to provide assistive devices, in-kind support, and essential items during urgent situations, alongside ongoing advocacy activities, without being restricted to one narrow activity area.

External funding structures

Overall, despite ongoing gaps between aspiration and practice, OPDs and funders participating in this study articulated a largely shared vision for preferred funding arrangements, though this may partly reflect the profile of funders involved.

External funding structures

External funding structures are the systems, sources, and processes through which OPDs access funding from external actors such as donors, foundations, development agencies, and international NGOs. This section focuses on both the barriers embedded in funding calls/processes and the enablers that can make these systems more inclusive.

Barriers: external funding structures

Barriers within external funding structures include inaccessible information about funding opportunities, burdensome application and selection processes, the routine exclusion of indirect costs and reasonable accommodations from budgets, and funder perceptions of risk associated with supporting OPDs.

Inaccessible information about funding opportunities

Information about funding opportunities is often difficult for OPDs to access. Online application platforms may not be compatible with screen readers, creating barriers for blind or visually impaired applicants. In addition, calls for proposals are frequently shared through channels that smaller or local OPDs cannot easily access. As a result, OPDs may miss opportunities because they are either unaware of them or unable to engage with the application process.

Burdensome application and selection processes

Due diligence requirements, while intended to ensure accountability and transparency, can act as a structural barrier for OPDs as they are often designed for larger organisations with established administrative and financial systems. For smaller or newer OPDs, the absence of established financial systems, documents, or policies can mean they are not considered eligible for funding from the outset. In general, CSOs face pressures of 'NGO-ization',[49] whereby diverse and often informal civic actors are required to conform to formalised NGO structures, governance models, and compliance systems to access funding or engagement opportunities. This can make CSOs less political and less community-led, as they focus on reducing institutional risk and complying with funders and regulators' demands rather than being accountable to the communities they represent.[50]

[49]Andrzej Klimczuk, 'NGOization: Complicity, Contradictions and Prospects', *Journal for the Study of Radicalism* 9, no. 1 (2015): 173–77, https://doi.org/10.14321/jstudradi.9.1.0173. 13 'Official Development Assistance (ODA)', OECD, accessed 16 April 2026, https://www.oecd.org/en/topics/official-development-assistance-oda.html.

[50]Andrzej Klimczuk, 'NGOization: Complicity, Contradictions and Prospects', *Journal for the Study of Radicalism* 9, no. 1 (2015): 173–77, https://doi.org/10.14321/jstudradi.9.1.0173. 13 'Official Development Assistance (ODA)', OECD, accessed 16 April 2026, https://www.oecd.org/en/topics/official-development-assistance-oda.html.

Likewise, all funding organisations reported selecting the OPDs they work with based on 'governance and management capacity'. The next most common selection criteria were:

- Demonstrated experience in similar work;
- Thematic focus (e.g., climate change, education); and
- Compliance with due diligence requirements.

However, OPDs reported that they often cannot meet donor paperwork requirements, even when they can deliver projects, particularly for OPDs without dedicated technical staff. They also noted that application processes are often inaccessible, with challenges including unmet disability access needs, language barriers, and requirements for technical expertise and lengthy, well-written proposals.

Strict eligibility requirements, such as the need to have a bank account and funding history, are barriers for a lot of OPDs. As one collaborating OPD raised:

> *"...how will [new OPDs] have funds in their account if no one wants to fund them to get started?" (OPD, KII).*

Legal and regulatory barriers related to formal registration, legal identity, compliance with national and international financial systems, access to banking services, and taxation compliance can prevent OPDs from meeting basic funding eligibility conditions. Affiliation requirements were also cited as an entry barrier, particularly in the context of applying for funding from the US or UK (e.g., international partner affiliation, 501c3 designated requirements).

OPDs described funding selection criteria as not designed with OPDs in mind, particularly with mainstream civil society calls. For instance, participants reported that selection criteria may overlook intersectional considerations within the disability movement. Specific OPD concerns included:

- **Gender:** There can be additional barriers faced by organisations led by or focused on women with disabilities. Intersecting discrimination based on both gender and disability means that women-led OPDs have historically had fewer opportunities to acquire the resources, technical skills, and connections that

would establish them as 'relevant contributors' in the eyes of international donors.

- **Organisational maturity:** Funders sometimes exhibit a preference for more established, larger organisations rather than smaller, local, or grassroots OPDs. As contextualised by the literature: 'Mostly donors concentrate on national and regional organisations leaving out the grassroots level ones'.[51]
- **Geographic region:** There are limited funding opportunities for organisations operating in insecure, hard to reach, or remote geographic regions, including OPDs based in small island development states (SIDS) as well as pastoralist or nomadic disability communities.
- **Disability focus**: Funders often choose non-disability-focused organisations over OPDs
- **Impairment group:** Funders prioritise certain impairment groups over others.

This creates high entry thresholds for OPDs, especially for smaller, rural, local, or emerging organisations and those working in less mainstream disability focus areas.

Lack of budgeting for indirect costs and reasonable accommodations

Denial of reasonable accommodation is discrimination under the UN CRPD[52]. OPD involvement and the reasonable accommodations required to enable participation are frequently excluded from project budgets. Participants consistently described how costs related to reasonable adjustments, such as sign language interpreters, Easy Read materials, personal assistants, and assistive products, are essential. This creates key challenges for OPDs.

Because OPDs are definitionally made up of and working with disabled people, who often face higher costs of living and working, accessibility and administrative costs can make OPD budgets higher than those of other CSOs, which may impact proposal competitiveness. However, without covering accessibility costs, OPDs cannot participate equally. As one interviewee mentioned:

[51]Oag Office of the Attorney General, *THE PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES ACT, CHAPTER 183 R.E. 2023* , 1 July 2025, https://elibrary.osg.go.tz/handle/123456789/2226.

[52]'Situational Analysis of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities: In Lessons & Conclusions from Thirty-Four Countries | InfoNTD', The United Nations Partnership on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNPRPD), 2024, https://www.infontd.org/resource/situational-analysis- rightspersons-disabilities-lessons-conclusions-thirty-four-countries.

> *"[OPDs] cannot employ people with disabilities if [we] don't create the enabling environment for them. [We] cannot run a project for people when [our] office is not accessible." (OPD, KII)*

Participants described negotiations with donors and partners over whether accessibility costs should be included in project budgets. These discussions can be difficult and may result in accessibility being reduced, questioned, or excluded altogether:

> *"... We many times have back and forth with donors, with partners. There are very few partners who are reasonable, who really accommodate. But most partners, that's the tussle between them and OPDs in meetings, in planning budgets. We present some of these needs. To participate, we need to have access, we need support ... I cannot go to meetings without my personal assistance... For them, it's too much, you are asking too much ... Sometimes they ignore you, sometimes they don't even invite you to other meetings. They sideline you." (OPD, KII)*

Whilst seven of the eight funders who participated in the survey said that they offer reasonable adjustments to OPDs, this research suggests that this is not the norm. OPDs noted that lack of accessibility and reasonable adjustments in budget also create issues at the project implementation phase, preventing OPDs from fully participating in meetings, consultations, and project. This challenge is also reflected in mainstream projects, where OPDs often need to advocate for disability-inclusive considerations (e.g., in education, assistive devices or accessible toilets for children with disabilities).

Funders also noted internal knowledge of disability inclusion as a barrier to this, as well as the knowledge of downstream intermediaries to offer accessibility and reasonable adjustments. These experiences highlight how current funding structures often fail to recognise accessibility and reasonable adjustment as essential rights based requirements, placing additional financial and administrative burdens on OPDs and limiting their ability to participate on equal terms.

Funders generally did not view funding risks as specific to OPDs, though some responses highlighted challenges related to alignment, communication, and partnership expectations. OPD perspectives did, however, describe feeling siloed from broader civil society efforts and facing reluctance from funders due to preconceived notions about disability and disabled people.

Some funders stated that there were no risks unique to OPDs, noting that risks are like those encountered when working with any local organisation and depend on context, capacity, and delivery arrangements. Where risks were identified, these included the possibility of overpromising project impact, OPDs being drawn into activities that do not advance their own priorities, and the repercussions of reducing or ending funding. One funder also noted that the disability community may 'speak' in a particular advocacy language, assuming technical and cultural knowledge related to disability, which may create barriers when working across sectors.

These responses suggest that while funders may not perceive OPD engagement as uniquely risky, differences in language, networks, and sector integration may affect collaboration, alongside structural barriers that OPDs described as linked to stigma, accessibility costs, or reluctance from funders to engage.

Enablers: external funder structures

Enablers within external funding structures focused primarily on improving the design of funding calls, including targeted outreach to OPDs, simplified and accessible application processes and formats, adapted eligibility and due-diligence requirements, inclusive selection criteria, improved internal funding systems, and explicit requirements to budget for accessibility and core organisational costs.

Table 2 shows synthesised insights and advice from OPDs on what funding calls should include to effectively engage OPDs.

Table 2: Preferred features of funding calls to engage OPDs

Feature of OPD specific calls	What this should include
Targeted outreach to	Calls intended for OPDs should include active and direct

Feature of OPD specific calls	What this should include
OPDs	communication with OPDs rather than relying only on websites or newspapers. This may include outreach through OPD networks, umbrella organisations, mailing lists, and direct contact with local organisations that may not regularly access mainstream funding platforms.
Simple and accessible application processes	Application requirements should be proportionate to the size of the grant and accessible in local languages and formats. Materials should be compatible with assistive technologies, use clear and simple guidance, and avoid unnecessary administrative burden for smaller organisations.
Flexible application formats	Application processes should allow alternative ways of applying, such as short concept notes, one-page proposals, video submissions, or phone-based applications, rather than requiring extensive written documentation from all applicants.
Adapted eligibility and due diligence requirements	Eligibility criteria should reflect the realities of OPDs, including organisations with fluctuating budgets, limited infrastructure, or no website. Funders should consider alternative ways to verify an organisation's experience, such as references, community recognition, or work history.
Inclusive selection criteria	Selection processes should recognise the additional barriers faced by some OPDs, including women-led organisations, rural organisations, small island developing state (SIDS) organisations, or those representing marginalised disability groups, and ensure these factors are considered in scoring and decision-making.
Improving internal funding systems	Funders may need to review and adapt their own systems to reduce barriers to OPD participation, including consulting with OPDs and community-based organisations to identify where application, partnership, or reporting processes unintentionally exclude smaller or informal groups.
Requirement to budget for accessibility and core costs	Calls should require budgeting for accessibility, reasonable adjustment, and core operational costs. This may include staff accessibility needs, assistive technology, interpretation, transport, and administrative support, ensuring these are treated as standard project costs rather than optional additions.

Investing in internal systems improvement:

One funder organisation reported implementing a project to improve internal engagement systems and working arrangements with community-based groups. The organization described collecting data from 149 individuals representing 111 local

organisations, including women led groups, OPDs, and Indigenous Peoples' Organisations to inform improvements.

Power dynamics and relationships: between funders, OPDs and intermediaries

This section examines power dynamics and relationships between funders, organisations of persons with disabilities (OPDs), and intermediaries, highlighting how these relationships shape access to resources, influence, and decision-making within OPD funding.

Barriers: power dynamics and relationships between funders, OPDs, and intermediaries

Barriers within these relationships include unequal power dynamics created by funding arrangements, continued experiences of charity-based models and donor mistrust, competitive funding environments, gatekeeping and the influence of intermediaries, and challenging or inaccessible communication between funders and OPDs.

Power imbalances and impact of funding arrangements

When asked what best describes the decision-making authority of OPDs in their work, no funder organisation said that OPDs have decision-making authority.

Most funder organisations (five) said that OPDs provide input that informs decisions, but do not make the decisions themselves. This was reflected, too, by OPDs who describe lack of control over initiative design and impact:

> *"OPDs typically contribute as implementing partners, advisors, trainers, researchers, or community mobilisers, and are frequently contracted for consultations, outreach, or accessibility inputs rather than serving as decision-makers" (OPD, KII).*

Similarly, the literature notes that funding arrangements often position OPDs downstream to international NGOs, limiting direct engagement with funders and concentrating resources within larger Northern organisations.[53]

This suggests that current funding structures reinforce unequal power dynamics and constrain the long-term capacity and leadership of OPDs.

Experience of charity model and donor mistrust

OPDs reported perceiving that some funders continue to view them, as people with disabilities, through a charity lens rather than a rights-based one. Many OPDs reported feeling that disability stigma influences these perceptions and affects the level of trust placed in OPDs by funders. This is further contextualised by earlier research findings where OPD representatives note that people with disabilities are still frequently perceived as 'beggars' or unproductive by the public and policymakers, which erodes donor confidence in the professional capacity of OPDs.[54] As one OPD noted:

> *"I remember I visited some private sectors, some business people, and they saw me and they threw coins at me, they threw coins at me thinking that you are there to beg" (OPD, KII).*

OPDs noted that cultural and contextual differences can also shape donor perceptions of their capacity and credibility, with funding criteria often reflecting Western models of organisational practice that may not align with the realities of OPDs.

Competition, gatekeeping, and intermediary impact on influence

Competition and gatekeeping within the funding ecosystem can further restrict OPDs' access to resources, influence, and decision-making power. Larger International, national, or umbrella organisations often act as intermediaries. While these organisations can play a supportive coordinating role, the literature highlights

[53]Oag Office of the Attorney General, *THE PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES ACT, CHAPTER 183 R.E. 2023* , 1 July 2025, https://elibrary.osg.go.tz/handle/123456789/2226.

[54]Anisha Saggu et al., *A Mapping of the Current Funders of Disability Inclusion and Other Equalities Areas Globally* , Disability Inclusion Helpdesk Report No: 145 (Inclusive Futures, 2025).

long standing concerns about this dynamic. Chataika and McKenzie (2016)[55] question [56]

These concerns were echoed by our interview participants, who highlighted 1) limited influence for local OPDs where intermediaries control funding or implementation, 2) competition when umbrella organisations shift from a coordinating role into project implementation, and 3) gatekeeping in sub-granting processes where opportunities are shared primarily within existing networks. One OPD representative described how organisations that focus on disability but are not led by people with disabilities are 'seen as the specialists' and may compete directly with OPDs rather than supporting them:

who ultimately benefits from these relationships, asking whether capacity building efforts strengthen international organisations more than the OPDs they claim to support.

> *"Instead of building [capacities of] OPDs, [organisations that focus on disability led by nondisabled people] want to continue to exist, they want to continue to run. So, they compete, they keep opportunities to themselves, and they don't share, they don't capacitate OPDs, they compete with them" (OPD, KII).*

Participants reported that these perceptions can result in limited engagement with OPDs in programme design, tokenistic consultation, and assumptions about organisational capacity or technical knowledge.

Some described being included only symbolically, and that people with disabilities and OPDs are often involved only at the very end, mainly so photos can be taken to show inclusion. As one OPD perceived, these images are then used to reassure funders, who rarely check with OPDs directly about their involvement: [57]

[55] Tsitsi Chataika and Judith A. McKenzie, 'Global Institutions and Their Engagement with Disability Mainstreaming in the South: Development and (Dis)Connections', in *Disability in the*

[56] Anisha Saggu et al., *A Mapping of the Current Funders of Disability Inclusion and Other Equalities Areas Globally* , Disability Inclusion Helpdesk Report No: 145 (Inclusive Futures, 2025).

[57] *Global South: The Critical Handbook* , ed. Shaun Grech and Karen Soldatic (Springer International Publishing, 2016), https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-42488-0_27.

> *"[International organisations], they don't...in practice, you don't see them working with us. They only come to you maybe when they want photos…and we are funding our own participation… people with disabilities are really, really bearing the cost of their participation" (OPD,KII).*

OPDs also challenged assumptions that they lack structure or professionalism, noting that many organisations maintain governance and accountability even with limited resources. As one respondent stated:

> *"They say we don't have capacity — we want to shatter that narrative… even local OPDs often have structures, even without an office… OPDs care about institutional strengthening" (OPD, KII).*

Challenges with communication

Participants highlighted challenges in accessing and communicating with donors, particularly when trying to initiate relationships with large international foundations, corporations, or development agencies. Many OPDs described difficulty identifying entry points to engage with funders or understanding how to approach them. Accessing private foundation funds often requires a prior relationship with the donor, effectively locking out newer or grassroots OPDs. One participant explained the challenge of reaching major donors without existing networks or contacts:

> *"How can I reach, for example, this [nonprofit organization] funding? How do I reach them? How do I reach these big organisations for example, [company], in this corporate responsibility funding? And when I don't know someone in the organisation, it becomes very difficult for me." (OPD, KII)*

Another commonly reported challenge was the lack of feedback or communication from donors after applications are submitted. Several participants described experiences of submitting proposals and receiving little or no response from funders, referred to by one OPD as 'ghost donors.' The lack of response can have multiple impacts for OPDs. Participants described this as psychologically discouraging and administratively burdensome. Without a response from donors, OPDs are often

unable to understand why applications were unsuccessful or how they might improve future submissions.

Enablers: power dynamics and relationships between funders, OPDs and intermediaries

OPDs suggested several ideas for developing more trusting, equal and transparent relationships between OPDs and funders and intermediaries, including developing trust through ongoing partnerships, improving communication, and support from umbrella organisations and networks.

Develop trust through ongoing partnerships

OPDs reported that with regular partners, or certain funders, power dynamics can be less unequal. This can result in higher trust and recognition of OPD expertise.

Improving communication

OPDs also highlighted their role in demonstrating transparency and accountability by maintaining regular communication with funders, keeping clear and trackable records, and sharing evidence of programme impact. This should be complemented by funders providing feedback on proposals and creating accessible forums or communication channels, such as hotlines, to enable more direct engagement.

Umbrella organisations and networks

Participants also highlighted the potential of umbrella OPDs and networks to play an enabling role for OPDs within the funding ecosystem. Participants described several ways in which umbrella organisations already support or could support local OPDs:

- Helping members align work to funder priorities and build policies;
- Sharing funding opportunities and coordinating partnerships;
- Leading or coordinating consortiums that allow smaller or less resourced OPDs to participate in larger funding opportunities, where appropriate;
- Supporting proposal development and providing technical assistance throughout the application process;
- Providing training, mentoring, and capacity building to help OPDs strengthen their organisational systems;

- Enabling visibility and relationship-building.

However, many umbrella OPDs cite difficulties fulfilling this supportive role for their member organisations when their funding is also limited and uncertain.

Operational capacity

Against the backdrop of the socio-economic context described above, power imbalances and persistent funding shortages translate into constrained operational capacity for OPDs, creating practical barriers to securing and managing funding. As reflected in the literature, OPDs are often under resourced to meet the demands placed on them, particularly in leadership roles and functions requiring specialised skills.[58] This phenomenon shapes the operational barriers and enablers examined in this section.

Barriers: operational capacity

Key operational capacity barriers among OPDs include difficulties recruiting and retaining skilled staff, limited systems and organisational infrastructure, and low visibility.

Difficulties recruiting and retaining skilled technical staff

Difficulties with recruiting and retaining staff, particularly technical staff such as grant writers or finance personnel, were repeatedly mentioned by OPDs in the interviews, and validated by the literature. In countries like Pakistan and Jordan, community-based OPDs are often forced to rely on volunteers because they cannot afford the full-time staff needed to manage a professional finance department.[59] In conflict zones like Ukraine, OPDs face an acute shortage of financial professionals, as many are "headhunted" by international NGOs that can offer much higher salaries.[60] As described by one interviewee:

[58]'Disabled People's Organisations Coalition | Whaikaha - Ministry of Disabled People', New Zealand, accessed 16 April 2026, https://www.whaikaha.govt.nz/about-us/who- weare/engaging-with-the-community/disabled-peoples-organisations.

[59]Global Action on Disability (GLAD) Network, *Locally Led Disability-Inclusive Action OPDs' Access to Humanitarian Funding and Partnerships in Jordan, Ukraine and Pakistan.* (2024).

[60]Global Action on Disability (GLAD) Network, *Locally Led Disability-Inclusive Action OPDs' Access to Humanitarian Funding and Partnerships in Jordan, Ukraine and Pakistan.* (2024).

> *"You don't have permanent people. And you recruit someone, you build his capacity, and then because you don't have money for sustaining him, he will go for another green pasture with your knowledge, and you must start again and again and again. This really becomes a problem" (OPD, KII).*

This reinforces a cycle of exclusion, where inadequate funding prevents OPDs from hiring and retaining technical staff, and the absence of technical capacity then limits their ability to meet funding requirements.

Limited systems and organisational infrastructure

Several OPDs reported limited internal systems, policies, and organisational infrastructure, particularly among grassroots actors. This included gaps in financial management systems, governance structures, safeguarding and HR policies, and monitoring and reporting processes. These limitations can make it difficult to meet donor due diligence requirements, as outlined in the previous section. Data and evidence gaps were also identified as a related challenge. Many OPDs described limited capacity and resources to conduct research or generate robust data, which makes it difficult to demonstrate impact or evidence need when applying for funding.

Lack of visibility

Many OPDs reported limited visibility, often lacking a website, social media presence, or formal office space. This is particularly common for grassroots OPDs operating in remote or hard to reach areas, such as townships, which can make it more difficult for funders and partners to identify and engage with them.

> *"Most OPDs don't have office space, and some might not have a Facebook page. You don't see them around. They're hard to locate, and that lack of visibility is a real barrier" (OPD KII).*

Enablers: operational capacity

Operational capacity can be strengthened through strategies such as increasing visibility, leveraging governance, policy, and advocacy skills, and investing in capacity building.

Strategies to build visibility

Despite resource constraints, many OPDs actively develop strategies to strengthen their visibility and credibility with funders and the wider public. This includes using news media, social media, and public communication to demonstrate their impact, share case studies, and build trust through transparency and accountability. As one participant explained:

> *"We are well known by working on media, social media and printed media. By increasing our visibility and showing our evidence-based impact, by demonstrating our history and case studies. The strategy is showing transparency, accountability, and responsibility, and showing our impact to donors" (National OPD, KII).*

Some OPDs also pointed out the importance of establishing visible, physical spaces or activities within communities to change perceptions about disability.

Governance, policy, and advocacy skills

Strong governance, policy, and advocacy skills emerged as a key strength among OPDs. Many organisations actively advocate for more inclusive funding systems, particularly the recognition of accessibility and reasonable accommodation costs as essential rights-based requirements. For example, participants described training initiatives designed to support stakeholders to integrate disability inclusion into budgeting processes.

> *"We just did a national training of NGOs on inclusive financing ...we offer that training to ministries, departments and government so that everyone is involved in making sure disability is included in budgets" (National OPD, KII).*

Advocacy has also contributed to the creation of dedicated government funding mechanisms for OPDs. In Tanzania, participants highlighted the establishment of the National Disability Fund under the Persons with Disabilities Act[61] which provides grants for OPDs.

[61]Oag Office of the Attorney General, *THE PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES ACT, CHAPTER 183 R.E. 2023* , 1 July 2025, https://elibrary.osg.go.tz/handle/123456789/2226.

Participants stressed that funders should consider investing in OPD capacity as part of project approaches, rather than merely rejecting proposals due to perceived gaps in organisational systems or infrastructure. Several OPDs noted that strengthening internal capacity would improve their ability to access, manage, and sustain funding. Funding structures that prioritise capacity strengthening and organisational development, rather than only short-term project delivery, can help address unequal power dynamics.

NOW Us (Nothing About Us Without Us) Award by Voice

An OPD representative described how after their funding application was unsuccessful, they were invited to participate in a boot camp linked to the funding program. The training created an opportunity to further develop their ideas and pitch them.

> *"Because we had applied for their funding and did not get it, we were nominated for that boot camp. During the boot camp, it was a one-week training, and after the training we were supposed to pitch an idea for the organization, a three-minute pitch. There was a total of 10 organizations, and we were the only disability organization. We pitched, and that's how we got the award" (OPD, KII).*

Table 3 presents the key areas of capacity strengthening identified by OPDs, along with examples of the types of support needed in each area.

Table 3: OPD-Identified Capacity Building Needs

Areas of capacity	What support is needed
Digital skills development	Some OPD leaders reported gaps in digital literacy, including use of smartphones, assistive technologies, and online platforms. Strengthening digital skills could support OPDs in accessing funding information, engaging with donors, and using digital tools for advocacy, networking, and resource mobilisation.
Mapping funders and accessing funding information	Participants highlighted the need for support in identifying relevant funders and understanding their priorities. OPDs noted that each donor has different thematic and geographic interests,

Areas of capacity	What support is needed
	and support is needed to map which funders align with their work and how to track calls for proposals.
Proposal development, grant writing, and reporting	OPD staff reported the need for training on developing strong proposals, writing grant applications, account management, and completing donor reporting requirements.
Organisational and financial systems	Many OPDs pointed out the need to strengthen financial management and organisational systems, including developing policies, financial procedures, and administrative structures required by funders.
Staff development and leadership	Participants highlighted the need for broader institutional capacity building, including strengthening staff skills and supporting leadership development, particularly for women with disabilities.
Research and evidence generation	Some OPDs expressed the need for support to conduct research, surveys, and needs assessments to generate evidence that can strengthen proposals and demonstrate community needs to funders.
Networking and relationship building with donors	Participants noted the need for support in building relationships with donors and partners, including guidance on how to approach funders, communicate effectively, and develop long-term partnerships
Communication and visibility	OPDs highlighted the importance of strengthening skills in documenting and communicating impact, including developing websites, reports, and online platforms so that funders can better understand their work.

Implementation and delivery

Implementation and delivery refer to OPDs' ability to plan, manage, and carry out funded activities in line with donor requirements and community priorities. Findings from this study highlight that unfavourable funding arrangements, under recognition of expertise, unrealistic expectations can constrain OPDs' ability to implement programmes effectively and sustainably.

Barriers: implementation and delivery

The barriers to effective implementation and delivery include unrealistic expectations, unfavourable payment arrangements, insufficient compensation for

expertise, and challenges that arise when donor priorities do not align with OPD priorities.

Unrealistic delivery expectations

OPDs described several challenges related to funder expectations during project implementation and reporting:

- Donor templates and procurement systems are often designed for larger organisations and may not align with the operational capacities of grassroots OPDs;
- Donors often expect heavy reporting even for small grants, which strains OPDs. Some donors were perceived as underestimating the time required for activities, particularly meaningful engagement with disability communities; and
- Frequent reporting and administrative requirements can place significant strain on limited staff time and resources.

Timeline constraints can limit the quality of community-based service delivery. As one OPD reported:

> *"Funders may misunderstand the time and trust building required for community consultation, particularly with women with disabilities, rural members, and persons with intellectual and psychosocial disabilities." (OPD, KII)*

Heavy reporting can limit OPDs' ability to focus on high quality delivery. As one OPD stated:

> *"There are funders who give very minimal funding but require heavy and frequent reports. You find that OPDs are spending most of their time working on those reports, while the funding is not even enough to cover the level of effort required from staff members." (OPD, KII)*

When asked what support they think OPDs may need to strengthen or improve their funding relationship with partners, two funder organisations mentioned aspects related to OPD ways of working including:

- Clear, timely communication about ongoing activities, progress updates, and any issues or challenges that arise; and
- Professional communication and approaches in partnership.

As one funder mentioned:

> *"Communication can be a barrier - we've seen examples where OPDs do not engage or communicate professionally for scoping calls (e.g. not turning up on multiple occasions without explanation)" (International NGO, Survey)*

We infer that this is likely common for engagement across civil society organisations and not unique to OPDs.

However, other funders noted that it's not simply about holding OPDs to account. As one funder emphasised:

> *"...there is balance between understanding the foundational and structure context/barriers that OPD face and providing clear expectations/target-based delivery and feedback so that OPDs can continue to learn and develop" (Multilateral Development Agency, Survey).*

Unfavourable payment arrangements and inadequate compensation for expertise

OPDs also described challenges related to payment arrangements. In many cases, OPDs are invited to participate in consultations, advisory groups, or project activities without adequate compensation for their time and expertise. Typical payment arrangements include consultancy or facilitation fees, daily honoraria, or reimbursement of travel and per diem expenses only. While some OPDs receive market rate consultancy contracts, many reported receiving only modest stipends.

> *"Payment is very rare. Most of the time we are consulted and invited to meetings just to give our ideas, but nobody is going to pay us. Sometimes we accept this because we want to ensure our issues are included, but that does not mean we should not be paid for our time and contributions." (OPD, KII)*

Some participants described participation in unpaid activities as an investment in potential future partnerships, while being mindful of the staff time they invest.

Delayed disbursement of funds was also cited as a challenge. For organisations with limited financial reserves, delays in payments can create cash flow risks and affect their ability to implement activities as planned.

Opportunity costs when donor priorities are misaligned with OPD priorities

Another challenge identified was the misalignment between donor priorities and the priorities identified by OPDs and the communities they represent. In some cases, OPDs reported adapting their work to fit donor priorities to access funding, even when these priorities do not fully reflect community needs, a common pressure faced by CSOs known as 'NGO-ization'[62]. As one OPD noted:

> *"Different partners have different priorities and sometimes sub-partners want you to work on their priority areas rather than what is a priority for you. And because you need that funding, you are not going to disagree." (OPD, KII)*

Enablers: implementation and delivery

Several enabling practices were identified that can support more effective and equitable implementation and delivery of funded projects involving OPDs: early involvement by OPDs in project design, fair and flexible payment arrangements, and inclusive implementation and monitoring practices.

Early involvement by OPDs in project design

Participants underscored the importance of involving OPDs from the outset of projects, rather than bringing them in only at later stages. When OPDs are only involved at the end of a process, this can limit their influence and create practical difficulties during delivery.

[62]Andrzej Klimczuk, 'NGOization: Complicity, Contradictions and Prospects', *Journal for the Study of Radicalism* 9, no. 1 (2015): 173–77, https://doi.org/10.14321/jstudradi.9.1.0173. 13 'Official Development Assistance (ODA)', OECD, accessed 16 April 2026, https://www.oecd.org/en/topics/official-development-assistance-oda.html.

Fair and flexible payment arrangements

Appropriate compensation for the time and expertise of OPDs was identified as an important enabling factor. Examples include unrestricted overhead funding, milestone based payments, and other flexible payment structures that enable participation and reduce financial risk for OPDs.

Inclusive implementation and monitoring practices

Participants also identified several funder practices that can make implementation and monitoring processes more accessible and effective for OPDs. These include flexible reporting arrangements, such as quarterly rather than monthly reporting, and allowing OPDs to use their own internal financial or monitoring templates where appropriate. Ensuring that funding reaches local organisations was also highlighted as an important consideration, particularly when funding is channelled through intermediaries or umbrella OPDs.

Thematic framework

Table 4 summarizes the barriers and enablers across five key themes: funding sources, channels and arrangements; external funding structures; power dynamics and relationships between OPDs, funders, and intermediaries; operational capacity; and implementation and delivery.

Table 4: Summary of key barriers and enablers

Theme	Barriers	Enablers
Funding sources, channels, and arrangements	Underfunding of disability and OPDs Negative impact of external funding arrangements and funding cuts Budget barriers	Multi-year and flexible core funding Direct funding Flexible contracts Ongoing partnership models OPDs shaping priorities or coming up with their own under a broad donor objective
External funding structures	Limited and inaccessible information about funding opportunities (esp digital inaccessibility of online	Targeted outreach to OPDs Simple and accessible application platforms and processes

Theme	Barriers	Enablers
	application platforms) Inaccessible application and selection processes Budgeting for indirect costs Lack of recognition of reasonable accommodations as essential, rights-based requirements Perceived risks in funding OPDs	Flexible application formats Inclusive eligibility and selection criteria Relaxed due diligence requirements Improving internal funding systems Requirement to budget for accessibility and core costs
Power dynamics between relationships between OPDs, funders and intermediaries	Power imbalances shaped by funding arrangements Experience of charity model and donor mistrust Competition, gatekeeping and intermediary impact on influence Challenging communication	Supportive umbrella organisations and networks Opportunities for direct dialogue and relationship building between OPDs and funders
Operational capacity	Difficulties recruiting and retaining skilled staff due to limited funding stability Limited systems and organisational infrastructure Limited visibility with donors and within wider civil society	Strategies to increase visibility and recognition of OPD work Strengthening advocacy, fundraising and organisational skills Targeted capacity building tailored to organisational context
Implementation and delivery	Expectations from donors regarding timelines, outputs or capacity Unfavourable payment arrangements and inadequate compensation for OPD expertise Gaps in funding for accessibility and reasonable accommodation during implementation Opportunity costs when donor priorities do not align with OPD priorities	Early and meaningful involvement of OPDs in project design Fair, flexible and timely payment arrangements Inclusive implementation, monitoring and evaluation practices Maintain regular communication with funders and share successes

These findings showcase OPD perspectives and lived experiences, shedding light on the barriers and enablers shaping their engagement with current funding systems.

Funder perspectives are interwoven throughout to provide a more holistic view while endeavouring to centre OPD voices.

Emerging opportunities and practices

In the context of major reductions in official development assistance (ODA),[63] there may be an increasing need for OPDs to look beyond traditional development the financing models that feature largely in the prior sections and instead explore alternatives.

OPDs have long been innovating out of necessity, adopting flexible and clever funding strategies to sustain their work. Recognising and learning from these approaches is essential to identifying more inclusive and sustainable funding pathways going forward.

Innovative practices

This section highlights innovative practices, including alternative funding sources developed in response to ongoing ODA reductions, as well as promising models for more equitable OPD partnership, participation, and advocacy.

Alternative funding approaches

Some organisations are exploring alternative funding approaches beyond traditional aid grants, including diversified income streams and more flexible financing models. These approaches can support OPDs to improve financial stability, reduce reliance on short-term project funding, and retain greater control over priorities and operations. Examples are outlined below.

Ukraine: 'no-regret' funding10

- At the start of the conflict, some UN agencies waived traditional partnership requirements to provide rapid, direct funding to local OPDs for the 'last mile' delivery of aid.
- One donor in the Ukraine made an executive decision to cover 100% of its OPD partners' indirect costs to ensure they could survive the war.

[63] *Global South: The Critical Handbook* , ed. Shaun Grech and Karen Soldatic (Springer International Publishing, 2016), https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-42488-0_27.

- Ukrainian OPD ‘Fight for Right’ used unrestricted overhead funding to establish a ‘warm room’ for winter and accessible toilet facilities for its 17 wheelchair-using staff members.

Jordan: social enterprise and community fundraising10

- One OPD in Jordan runs a social enterprise providing beauty training courses to the public to generate income for its office rent and utilities.
- Jordanian OPDs frequently raise unrestricted income by organising sports and cultural activities or appealing for individual community donations rather than relying solely on international aid.
- Because some local leaders had limited literacy, one OPD coordinator shifted from text-based updates to sending voice notes in a WhatsApp group to ensure information on funding was accessible.

Social enterprise and local income generation

- One OPD established a social enterprise skills training centre to generate income and support its organisational work. The organisation also founded a Universal Design construction company, using business activities to sustain its programmes while promoting accessible infrastructure and inclusive design. Both initiatives also provided employment opportunities for people with disabilities.
- Another OPD described turning to local enterprise models to sustain their activities in the face of restricted funding. The organisation opened a bakery to generate income locally and continued operating largely through volunteer efforts during periods without external funding.

Participation, Partnerships and Advocacy

This section draws on examples of best practice to show how OPDs actively lead and shape participation, partnerships, and advocacy efforts to promote equity and inclusion within funding systems.

Kenya: disability-inclusive budgeting advocacy29

- OPDs in Kenya have influenced national disability budgeting through sustained advocacy and policy engagement. Following training delivered by

the Centre for Inclusive Policy and the African Disability Forum, OPDs were supported to analyse five years of disability-related public spending in Kenya (2019–2024). Using this analysis, UDPK and other OPDs engaged in Kenya's public budget processes, where public participation is a legal requirement, and developed position papers and formal memoranda.

- This advocacy contributed to concrete budgetary changes, including the inclusion of funding for assistive devices within the new Social Health Insurance Fund, increased education budget allocations were secured for schools serving children with disabilities, cash transfer programmes were expanded to reach people with higher support needs, and new budget lines were introduced to support people with albinism and neurodiverse people
- A significant policy outcome was the adoption of Kenya's National Disability Policy in 2024, which establishes a framework to guide disability-inclusive budgeting in future cycles.

Guyana: challenging 'cost stigma'31

- The Guyana Council of Organisations for Persons with Disabilities (GCOPD) advocates against the perception that braille, sign language, and mobility aids are 'too expensive' luxuries, arguing they are essential human rights costs that must be built into every grant.
- Leaders in Guyana highlighted that rigid budgets often prevent them from attending meetings if they discover a sudden need for specialised transport that was not pre-approved in the grant.

Central African Republic (CAR): local partner capacity building10

- In the Central African Republic (CAR), the donor funded an INGO to implement a three-year programme. The INGO worked with a local partner in the CAR to deliver aid.
- The programme included several capacity building interventions such as strengthening the financial systems of the local partner. Thanks to this support, the amount of funding from the INGO to the local partner increased every year due to its improved capacity to absorb and manage grants.

- By the end of the three years, the local partner was able to independently apply for and secure funding directly from other donors and humanitarian agencies.

ASEAN Disability Forum: A regional movement built without funding

- ADF was established in Bangkok in 2011 by leaders of Organisations of Persons with Disabilities representing the ten ASEAN Member States. At the time of its establishment:
    - No institutional donor support existed
    - There was no permanent secretariat
    - No operational funding was available
- ADF gradually gained recognition among regional institutions, governments, and development partners, transforming from a grassroots network into a regional disability movement platform. Policy outcomes include ASEAN Enabling Masterplan on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2025 and ASEAN Disability Conferences.

Emerging opportunities to fund OPDs

Much of this research focused on the international civil society funding landscape, reflecting both the primary funding source cited for the majority of the OPDs and the area where participants reported the greatest challenges. However, it is also important to consider opportunities to diversify beyond this funding ecosystem, especially given the shrinking resource environment. As such,

OPDs identified opportunities related to strengthening local and national funding mechanisms and engaging with the private sector.

Local funding ecosystems and government support

> *"OPDs need sustainable and flexible funding… it is very important for OPDs so they can capacitate themselves and manage more funding independently without depending on international funding." (OPD, KII)*

Participants highlighted the importance of strengthening locally rooted funding models that reduce reliance on international donors and support.

- *Increasing government support:* Participants argued that national and local governments should play a stronger role in supporting OPDs through dedicated funding mechanisms and institutional partnerships.
- *Strengthening local resource mobilisation:* Building the ability of OPDs to access and mobilise resources locally can reduce dependency on international aid and strengthen organisational sustainability.
- *Supporting local innovation:* Encouraging and investing in OPD-led social enterprises can provide an additional pathway for generating sustainable income, while also creating employment opportunities and advancing disability inclusion within local economies. Informal economy models such as cooperatives (shared group businesses), VICOBA-style savings groups (community-based saving and lending), and disability-inclusive agribusiness (accessible farming and food businesses) offer practical, locally grounded ways for OPDs to generate income.

Private sector engagement

> *"Within the private sector, it's a very big gap which we are not really exploring. It's something we need to look into." (OPD, KII)*

With the private sector responsible for 60% of GDP, 80% of international capital flows, and 90% of jobs in developing countries,[64] it is an underexplored landscape for OPD funding and partnership. While two OPDs suggested that businesses should channel corporate social responsibility (CSR) disability inclusion into OPDs, the sustainability of such approaches will depend on strengthening the business case for disability inclusion, moving beyond short-term or voluntary engagement and toward more strategic and long-term investment.

[64] 'Disability at a Glance 2023 : Catalysts of Change : Disability Inclusion in Business in Asia and the Pacific', ESCAP, accessed 16 April 2026, https://www.unescap.org/kp/2023/disabilityglance- 2023-catalysts-change-disability-inclusion-business-asia-and-pacific.

Recommendations

These recommendations focus primarily on funding within the international civil society context, as this is where OPDs report both the greatest challenges and often access funding; However, they may be relevant to any type of funder. They are structured in three parts: recommendations for funders, recommendations for OPDs, and recommendations aimed at supporting closer collaboration across stakeholders.

Recommendations for funders

For organisations working to or seeking to work with OPDs, we recommend providing multi-year, core, flexible funding that supports organisational sustainability. We also recommend directly involving OPDs in co-design and decision-making. We do not, however, recommend dismissing other forms of collaboration such as OPDs as partners, informants, participants, advocates, consultants and community implementers; so long as core principles of building local capacity, equitable and fair remuneration, accessibility, reasonable adjustment and flexibility are applied.

Our recommendations are as follows:

1. ***Fund OPDs directly and involve them in co-design, co-creation, and decision making:*** OPDs emphasised the importance of being funded directly, rather than through intermediaries, and involved from the concept and design stage of projects.
2. ***Early and meaningful engagement:*** Early involvement allows OPDs to shape programmes based on community needs and lived experience.
3. ***Direct funding:*** Direct funding combined with fair remuneration and accessibility budgets can strengthen OPD leadership and participation.
4. ***Formal mechanisms for OPD participation:*** Funders can use their influence to promote and incentivise mechanisms that embed OPD representation in decision making, such as quota systems in national development boards and funded programmes.
5. ***Provide multi-year, core, flexible funding that supports organisational sustainability:*** OPDs highlighted the importance of long-term, flexible core

funding for disability work rather than short-term project grants, and being recognised as strategic partners, for organisational sustainability.

6. ***Provide core funding:*** Allocate resources that support an organisation's existence and day-to-day functioning rather than just specific activities.
7. ***Embrace flexibility:*** Allow OPDs to use funds for self-identified needs, such as hiring specialised staff (e.g., accountants or HR officers) or improving digital accessibility.
8. ***Invest in sustainability:*** Funders should move toward ongoing and long-term strategic partnership models.
9. ***Embed disability-inclusive budgeting as standard:*** Accessibility, reasonable accommodation, and fair compensation for OPD time and expertise must be recognised as rights-based requirements and systematically integrated into all project and administrative budgets, rather than treated as optional or exceptional expenses.
10. ***Include accessibility as standard costs:*** Project and operational budgets should cover accessibility and accommodation needs, such as sign language interpretation, assistive technology, personal assistance, Easy Read, and other participation-related supports required for meaningful involvement.
11. ***Ensure ethical pay for OPD time and expertise:*** Budgets should include fair remuneration for OPD contributions and account for the additional time, coordination, and overhead costs often required for accessible participation and inclusive engagement.
12. ***Strengthen disability inclusion within budgeting systems:*** Funders can reinforce this approach by integrating disability into budgeting and tracking frameworks, for example through disability-inclusive budget tagging (like gender-responsive budgeting), and encouraging adoption at a national and regional level. OPD engagement should be structured into funding design from inception at the highest level.
13. ***Integrate capacity building within funding approaches:*** Participants emphasised that lack of formal, Westernised, NGO-ised organisational structure should not be used as a reason to deny funding. Instead, capacity strengthening should be built into budgets to enable OPDs to develop the systems needed to access and manage funding over time.

14. ***Make capacity building fundable:*** Funders could consider offering training, mentorship, or preparatory support to organisations that are not yet able to meet funding requirements. This may include approaches such as fiscal sponsorship that allow smaller OPDs to access funding while strengthening their organisational systems.
15. ***Understand that capacity needs vary significantly across OPDs:*** The OPD sector is diverse, spanning umbrella organisations to national organisations to smaller grassroots groups. Support should be adapted to the context and priorities of each organisation rather than based on assumptions.
16. ***Create dedicated funding opportunities for OPDs and ensure funding processes are accessible and proportionate:*** OPDs drew attention to the need for funding processes that are more accessible, flexible, and responsive to the realities of grassroots and disability-led organisations.
17. ***Establish dedicated funding calls for OPDs:*** Funders should consider establishing funding windows or calls specifically for OPDs to ensure communications reach disability-led initiatives through currently often relational modes. Targeted outreach or prioritisation criteria may also help include

underrepresented OPDs, such as rural, women-led, or marginalised disability groups.

18. ***Have flexible and proportionate due diligence requirements:*** Due diligence should be applied proportionally with flexible compliance pathways, alternative forms of verification, pre-award support, and simplified documentation to reflect the size, risk level, and capacity of the organisation and grant. Eligibility criteria and compliance requirements should be adapted for smaller or emerging OPDs where appropriate.
19. ***Create simplified and accessible application platforms and processes:*** Applications and information about funding opportunities should be available in accessible formats (e.g., submitting concept notes rather than detailed proposals, sign language interpretation, Easy Read, etc.), particularly ensuring digitally accessible application platforms and supporting documentation are compatible with screen readers and local languages.

20. ***Flexible reporting approaches:*** Reporting requirements should reflect grant size and organisational capacity, and may include alternative formats such as audio, video, or simplified reporting templates where appropriate, while maintaining accountability.
21. ***Proactively partner with OPDs as suppliers, contractors and delivery partners to embed inclusive practice throughout their operations***
22. ***Locate OPDs and map collaboration opportunities:*** Business should identify relevant OPD organisations, engage with them to understand their expertise, and document where partnership, contracting or funding could strengthen customer and employee inclusion as well as broader social responsibility outcomes. Treat OPDs as expert suppliers and consider them for contracting where their lived experience and technical services add value.

Recommendations for OPDs

(See 'good practice guidance'):

1. ***Gradually strengthen institutional capacity to meet funding requirements:*** OPDs highlighted the importance of gradually developing organisational systems, governance, and fund management capacity to meet donor requirements, while continuing to advocate for simplified and more accessible funding processes.
2. ***Build organisational systems and compliance capacity:*** Strengthen internal structures such as financial management, governance, staffing, and reporting systems to meet common donor due diligence requirements.
3. ***Use capacity assessment and planning tools:*** Self-assessment tools and capacity milestones can help organisations identify gaps, plan improvements, and demonstrate readiness to funders.
4. ***Work with umbrella organisations and peer support:*** National and regional OPD networks can support members through training, mentoring, and sharing practical tools to reduce administrative burden and improve access to funding.
5. ***Increase visibility, networking, and communication to improve access to funding opportunities:*** Funders and OPDs noted that many funding opportunities are shared through relationships, referrals, and networks, making visibility important for accessing funding.

6. ***Strengthen visibility and communication:*** OPDs should actively share their work through meetings, newsletters, reports, photos, social media, and community engagement to provide regular communication, demonstrate impact, and build trust with funders.
7. ***Participate in networks and civil society platforms:*** Joining national, regional, and international networks can increase visibility, provide information about funding opportunities, and strengthen collective voice.
8. ***Demonstrate evidence and impact:*** Using data, lived experience, and examples of successful implementation can help challenge assumptions about OPD capacity and strengthen funding applications.
9. ***Demonstrate reliability through consistency and transparency:*** Build funder trust by maintaining clear systems, open communication, and visible accountability in how funds are managed and impact is delivered.
10. ***Prioritise transparency and accountability:*** Maintain clear, trackable records of income and expenditure to demonstrate responsible financial management.
11. ***Engage in regular communication with funders:*** Sustain ongoing engagement by sharing updates, inviting funders to events or site visits where possible, and showcasing programme impact.

Recommendations for closer collaboration across OPDs and funders:

1. ***Strengthen communication, dialogue, and mutual understanding between OPDs and funders:*** Participants highlighted the need for more consistent communication, feedback, and opportunities for dialogue so that both OPDs and funders can better understand each other's requirements, constraints, and priorities.
2. ***Improve communication channels:*** Clearer systems for responding to enquiries and providing feedback on proposals can help OPDs understand funding decisions and improve future applications, while also helping funders receive more relevant and realistic proposals. This may include designated contact points, helpdesks, or mutually agreed communication channels.

3. ***Create spaces for dialogue and knowledge exchange:*** Forums, conferences, and regular engagement opportunities can support two-way understanding, allowing OPDs to better understand donor priorities and processes, while enabling funders to better understand OPD contexts, strengths, needs, and constraints.
4. ***Create opportunities for OPD engagement in financing processes:*** Strengthening opportunities for OPDs to engage in broader financing discussions, including budget advocacy, policy dialogue, and funding strategy processes, can help bridge gaps between funding systems and disability-led organisations. Inclusion of OPDs in forums should not just be designated to civil society dialogue.
5. ***Invest in disability expertise and support more strategic partnerships across both funders and OPDs:*** Participants underscored that more effective partnerships require stronger disability expertise within funding institutions, as well as more strategic engagement by OPDs.
6. ***Increase direct engagement and co-learning:*** Regular engagement between OPDs and funders can help ensure that funding approaches are informed by lived experience, practical knowledge, and local context, while also helping OPDs better understand donor requirements and constraints.
7. ***Deepen disability expertise:*** Donor institutions and programmes should strengthen internal disability expertise, including by involving people with disabilities as advisors, staff, or technical experts, and by hiring specialists with lived experience of disability and knowledge of the CRPD, such as OPD Engagement Officers[65], to help coordinate between donor-funded programmes and national disability movements.
8. ***Build partnerships based on shared Priorities:*** Identifying areas of overlapping priorities can help ensure collaboration is meaningful and can support OPDs to apply for funding more strategically and engage in areas where their expertise, lived experience, and local knowledge add the most value.

[65]International Disability Alliance and Norad, 'Discussion Paper on OPD Engagement - Global Disability Summit', *Promoting Engagement of Organizations of Persons with Disabilities (OPDs) in Development and Humanitarian Action* , August 2022, https://www.globaldisabilitysummit.org/resource/discussion-paper-on-opd-engagement/.

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