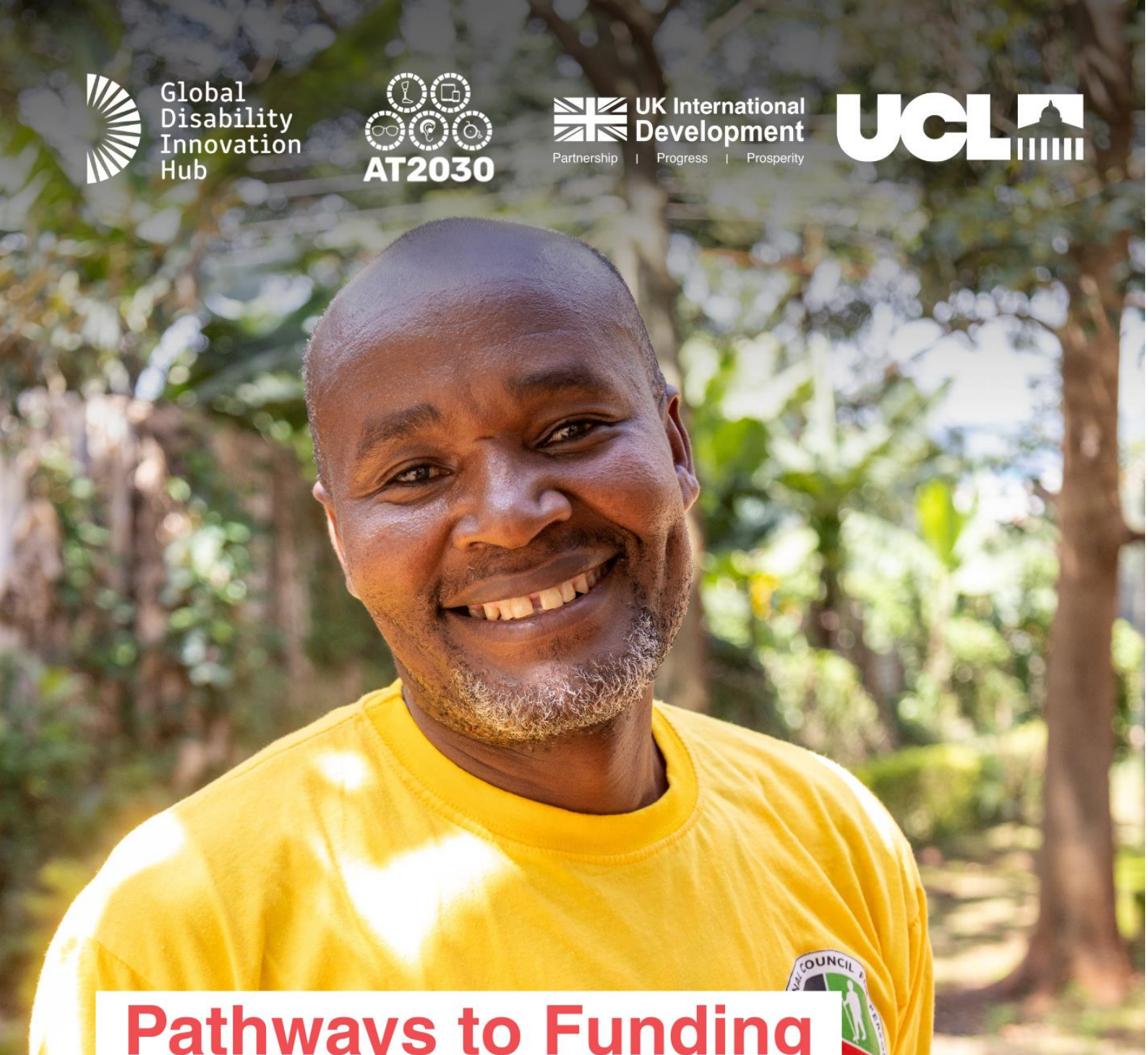




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Pathways to Funding for Organisations of Persons with Disabilities (OPDs) in Low-and Middle-Income Countries (LMICs)

Plain text report

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Prepared by the Global Disability Innovation Hub



Our Thanks

This report was written by Rebecca Joskow and Anna Landre and led by Pollyanna Wardrop of Global Disability Innovation (GDI) Hub. We worked with eight Organisations of Persons with Disabilities (OPDs) to write this report:

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

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GDI Hub team members have supported this work, including Louise Gebbett and Amélie de Vazelhes.



OPD Funding and its impact on programmes to improve access to Assistive Technology (AT)

The UK- international development funded AT2030 programme, led by GDI Hub, tests ‘what works’ to improve access to life-changing Assistive Technology (AT). Through this work, GDI Hub found that OPDs are often well-placed to support access to AT in their communities.

The World Health Organisation estimates that by 2050 over 3.5 billion people will need AT, but 90% will not be able to get it. Because OPDs are rooted in lived experience and local networks, they are often best placed to understand what people need, help people get the right AT, and connect them to services, training, and peer support.

But when OPDs are under-funded, their ability to do this work is severely limited. Removing barriers to OPD funding is therefore essential to improving access to life-changing AT.

OPDs need funding to run programmes and advocate for disability rights, but also to create accessible working environments. This ensures people with disabilities can take part in and lead OPDs. This includes using assistive technologies and software such as screen readers (for example, NVDA or JAWS) or hearing aids.

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



Contents

Our Thanks	1
OPD Funding and its impact on programmes to improve access to Assistive Technology (AT).....	2
1 Executive Summary.....	6
Key Words	8
2 Background & Context.....	14
2.1 Why we did this research	14
2.1.1 Why OPD participation is essential.....	14
2.1.2 How limited funding holds OPDs back	16
2.1.3 Current situation of disability funding.....	16
3 How we did this research	17
3.1 How we collected the data.....	17
3.2 Working with OPDs.....	18
3.2.1 Identification and outreach	18
3.2.2 Selection of OPD partners	18
3.2.3 What OPDs did as part of this research	19
3.3 Funder Survey	19
3.4 Data Analysis	19
3.5 Limitations of our approach	20
3.6 Use of AI.....	20
4 Our key findings.....	21
4.1 Funding sources, pathways and engagement.....	21
4.1.1 Mapping OPD funding sources.....	22



4.1.2	Pathways to funding	23
4.1.3	How OPDs work with partners and funders	23
4.1.4	Barriers in funding systems.....	24
4.1.5	Underfunding of OPD rights and disabilities.....	24
4.1.6	What the Disability Reference Group survey showed.....	26
4.1.7	How external funding affects OPDs	26
4.1.8	Budget rules are the barrier (not costs)	28
4.1.9	Enablers: what helps OPDs get funding.....	29
4.2	External Funding Sources	31
4.3	Inaccessible information about funding opportunities	31
4.4	Complex application and selection processes.....	32
4.5	Lack of budgeting for indirect costs and reasonable accommodations	34
4.6	Perceived risks in funding OPDs.....	36
4.7	Enablers: what helps in external funding structures	36
4.8	Case study: Reviewing funding systems with community input.....	38
4.9	Power and relationships between funders, OPDs, and intermediaries.....	39
4.10	Impact of charity model and donor mistrust.....	40
4.11	Competition, gatekeeping, and the role of intermediaries.....	40
4.12	Communication challenges	42
4.12.1	Enablers: what helps build fairer relationships	43
4.13	OPDs' operational capacity	44
4.13.1	Barriers: what limits operational capacity	44
4.13.2	Enablers: what helps operational capacity	46
4.14	How OPDs deliver their work	49



4.14.1	Barriers: what stops OPDs delivering work	49
4.14.2	Enablers: what helps OPDs deliver work	53
4.15	What we found: a thematic framework.....	54
5	Emerging opportunities and practices.....	57
5.1	Innovative practices	57
5.1.1	Alternative funding approaches	57
5.1.2	Participation, partnerships and advocacy.....	58
5.1.3	Emerging opportunities to fund OPDs	60
6	Recommendations.....	63
6.1	Recommendations for funders	63
6.1.1	How to fund OPDs.....	63
6.1.2	How to embed disability-inclusive budgeting.....	64
6.1.3	How to build OPD capacity	64
6.1.4	How to design funding processes.....	65
6.1.5	How to work in partnership.....	65
6.2	Recommendations for OPDs.....	66
6.3	Recommendations for closer collaboration across OPDs and funders	67
	References.....	70



1 Executive Summary

Organisations of Persons with Disabilities (OPDs) play important roles as policy and governance experts, strategic partners, and advocates for the inclusion of people with disabilities, including speeding up access to assistive technology. Despite this central role in disability rights advocacy, many OPDs work with limited funding. This weakens their ability to continue their work, and to influence the shaping of strategies, policies, and interventions.

For this review, we set out to map the current funding environment for OPDs in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs). We wanted to find out:

- where financial resources come from
- how they arrive at OPDs
- what gets in the way (barriers)
- how these barriers might be removed.

We also look at what helps OPDs access and use funding well (enablers). We found that many current ways of funding OPDs do not support the goal of strengthening global disability rights or fairness. Based on the challenges and good practices we identified, we share recommendations for OPDs and for funders. Our aim is to support practical action that builds OPD's long-term capacity and ensures they can take part meaningfully in the future.

Ensuring the rights and inclusion of people with disabilities depends on governments, funders, and private organisations investing enough money in disability-inclusive work. But funding for disability-inclusive development was low even before recent cuts to official development grants (UNPRPD 2024).

The OECD estimates a global funding gap of \$6.4 trillion by 2030 (OECD 2025) unless major changes are made. At the same time, the private sector has largely untapped potential to accelerate inclusion (Global Disability Summit 2025). These shortfalls have serious consequences for the 16% of the global population living with



a disability, 80% of whom live in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs) (WHO 2022).

With money less available, it becomes even more important to improve the pathways that money can reach OPDs.

Our evidence shows that the challenges OPDs face in getting funding – and the challenges organisations face in paying OPDs fairly – are not because OPD work is too expensive. Instead, the systems and ways of working used by funders and OPDs often do not match.

Some barriers are shared with other civil society organisations (CSOs) and reflect wider pressures to fit formally established organisational models. Other barriers are specific to OPDs, for example when funders fail to recognise accessibility and reasonable-adjustment costs as essential, rights-based requirements, not optional extras.

OPDs describe funding as scarce and often unsuitable, even when funders actively try to work with them. Administrative demands such as complex application forms, due diligence checks, and detailed reporting overstretch OPDs' capacity. At the same time, short-term project contracts, legal and regulatory barriers, inaccessible online systems, low income to cover overheads, and undervaluing OPD contributions all limit OPDs' ability to take part meaningfully or to sustain their organisations.

These barriers to funding do not affect all OPDs equally. Gender, type of impairment, rural or conflict-affected areas, and socioeconomic status all shape access to resources and capacity.

The barriers created by funding organisations are both structural and individual, and both can be changed. Funders need to lead on this, and to commit to disability justice in practice, not just in principle.

This report sets out an approach where OPDs can access flexible, core funding that includes support to build capacity. This kind of funding helps OPDs keep their organisations running, retain staff, and advance their agendas and impact.



This does not rule out other ways of working with OPDs and the leadership of persons with disabilities, such as project contracts or fee-for-service work. But across all approaches, OPDs must get fair pay, accessible processes, reasonable adjustments, and flexibility, alongside a focus on building local capacity.

Just as funders must adjust their practices to be more OPD-inclusive, OPDs also need to develop their systems, policies, communication, and build their evidence base, so they can receive more funding. This report gives recommendations for both funders and OPDs to work together to improve the lives of people with disabilities.

As an employee of an international development agency described in response to our survey:

“There are huge structural barriers that funders need to examine internally for OPDs to engage with ‘traditional’ funding partners. There needs to be actions on both sides to remove barriers and relax funding requirements.”

We hope that this review, alongside *Access to Funding: good practice guidance from and for organisations of persons with disabilities*, moves us closer to better dialogue and joint action. We are especially grateful to our OPD partners for their honesty and expertise, and to the funders who kindly contributed their experiences.

Pollyanna Wardrop

Senior Researcher, Global Disability Innovation Hub

Key Words

Assistive technology (AT)

Assistive technology is a broad term for assistive products and the systems and services that support them.



Assistive products can be physical items, such as wheelchairs, glasses, prosthetic limbs, white canes, and hearing aids. They can also be digital tools, such as speech recognition software, time management apps, and captioning (WHO and UNICEF 2022).

Barriers

Barriers are things that make OPDs' work harder, or block OPDs' work.

Budgeting

In this review, budgeting means planning and setting aside money in a way that actively includes the costs needed to involve disabled people and OPDs. It can refer to public budgets, organisational budgets, and investment funds.

Civil Society Organisation (CSO)

A CSO is an organisation that it is not a business, and not part of the government. CSOs work to support people, communities, or causes. They often promote social good, rights, or social change.

Core funding

This is money that supports an organisation's everyday work, rather than funding limited to one single project. For example, core funding pays for staff, rent, and office costs.



Development finance

This is money used to create social, environmental, and economic improvements that benefit people and the planet (IFAD 2026). The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) breaks development finance into several categories, including:

- Domestic public resources
- Domestic and international private business and finance
- International development cooperation
- International trade as an engine for development
- Debt and debt sustainability
- Addressing systemic issues
- Science, technology, innovation and capacity building (United Nations 2026).

Due diligence

These are checks that funders do before giving money. They usually look at things like an organisation's basic policies, financial records, organisational plans, and evidence of past work. It helps funders to understand if your organisation is trustworthy, well managed, and can use funds responsibly.

Enablers

Enablers are things that support OPDs to do their work well.

Fiscal justice

Fiscal justice means fairness in how governments collect and spend money. It is about making sure tax systems, budgets, and public spending do not disadvantage certain groups, and that public services are properly funded.

Financing vs. funding

Financing is how money is raised or managed for a purchase or organisation. It often includes loans private capital, or other investment tools.



Funding is money that is provided to support work, projects or a specific purpose. It usually comes as a grant or payment from an organisation or government and does not need to be paid back.

Funders

In this review, funders are any agencies or organisations that use their own resources (such as organisational funds or public donations) to provide OPDs with the money they need to run programmes. Funders often include donors, UN agencies, international non-governmental organisations (INGOs), and private-sector institutions (Glad Network 2024).

Funding landscape

The funding landscape is the overall picture of who provides funding, what types of funding exist, and how organisations can access it.

Indirect costs (overheads)

These are the costs of running your organisation, including paperwork and administration. They are not directly linked to project activities. Examples include rent, audit fees, and bank charges.

Intermediary / Intermediaries

An intermediary is an organisation that receives funding from a donor and then distributes that funding to other organisations, like OPDs. They sit between the funder and the organisations doing the work.

NGO-ization

This is the process where social movements become more formal and professional, often because funders require it. As a result, they can move away from grassroots activism and begin to work more like formal NGOs (Klimczuk 2015).



Official development assistance (ODA)

ODA is government aid that supports the economic development and welfare of developing countries. ODA has been the main way governments finance development aid since it was adopted by the OECD's Development Assistance Committee (DAC) in 1969.

Operational capacity

Operational capacity is an organisation's ability to run well day to day. It includes the systems, staff, skills, and processes needed to deliver its work.

Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD)

Development Assistance Committee (DAC) disability policy marker

This is a monitoring tool introduced in 2018 that lets DAC members show whether their official development assistance (ODA) projects are designed to support the inclusion and empowerment of people with disabilities. Projects are given a score of 0, 1, or 2 to show how central disability inclusion is to the work.

- **Score 2 (Principal / Disability-focused)**
Disability inclusion is the main objective of the activity.
- **Score 1 (Significant / Disability-related)**
Disability inclusion is a significant objective, but not the main reason for the activity.
- **Score 0 (Not targeted)**
The activity does not target disability inclusion.

Organisations of Persons with Disabilities (OPD) (also DPO)

An Organisation of Persons with Disabilities (OPD) or Disabled People's Organisation (DPO) is a civil society organisation that represents disabled people.

The main purpose of an OPD is to advocate for the rights of disabled people.

An OPD is either:



- **Mostly run or led by disabled people.**

This includes disabled people in leadership roles and on the board.

Or

- **Run by supporters of disabled people**, when disabled people need support because of access or legal requirements. In this case, self-advocacy and self-determination must still be a core part of the organisation. (Landre and GDI Hub 2025)

Reasonable adjustment

Reasonable adjustments are changes to services or support so that people with disabilities can take part fully and equally. They can include accessible formats such as Braille or Large Print, assistive technologies, or flexible ways of working.

Sub-granting

This is when an organisation receives a grant from a funder and gives some of that grant to another organisation (for example, an OPD) to carry out specific activities required by the original grant.

United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD)

The CRPD is an international human rights treaty, adopted by the United Nations in 2006. It sets out the rights of persons with disabilities and the responsibilities of governments to respect, protect, and fulfil those rights (United Nations 2006).



2 Background & Context

2.1 Why we did this research

We carried out this research for three main reasons:

1. OPDs play important roles as lived experience experts, strategic partners, and policy advocates. They work to advance fairness and inclusion.
2. Despite their recognised importance, many OPDs operate with minimal, insecure and short-term funding.
3. Global funding for disability inclusion and disability inclusive development is limited and shrinking. This makes it even more urgent to strengthen the systems that get money to OPDs.

2.1.1 Why OPD participation is essential

Involving people with disabilities and representative OPDs in planning, policy, strategy, design and delivery is a human rights imperative (United Nations 2006). It also means that programme outcomes are better informed and grounded in the lived realities of people with disabilities. The meaningful participation of people with disabilities – and the concept of ‘nothing about us without us’ – is at the heart of the disability rights movement, and central to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

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, State Parties shall closely consult with and actively involve persons with



disabilities including children with disabilities, through their representative organisation”

United Nations Conventions 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 precondition [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 organisation 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 organisations. Funds should not only be intended for service providers but rather be aimed at existing and potential DPOs/OPDs focusing primarily on advocacy.”

The CRPD does not create legal obligations for organisations, such as funders, businesses, international organisations, or NGOs. However, many global frameworks and standards expect these organisations to align their work with CRPD principles and to work in partnership with OPDs.

Key examples include:

- The UN Disability Inclusion Strategy (UNDIS). This requires UN organisations to work with OPDs across all programmes and operations (United Nations 2026).
- The IASC Guidelines on Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities in Humanitarian Action. This requires humanitarian organisations and partners to work with OPDs at all stages of the humanitarian programme cycle (IASC 2019).



2.1.2 How limited funding holds OPDs back

How money moves shapes which goals get funded, whose knowledge is valued, who gets a say in decision-making, and what gets done. Despite their integral role in disability rights and advocacy, many OPDs operate with minimal and insecure funding. This undermines their ability to keep their operations running, take part in key processes, and influence decisions that affect the lives of disabled people.

2.1.3 Current situation of disability funding

The International Disability Alliance (IDA) suggests 3-7% of the total development programme budget should be allocated for OPD engagement and inclusion. For programmes focused on disability rights or inclusive development, they recommend increasing this to 10-15% (IDA 2022).

However, disability laws and policies are rarely budgeted for at a national level (UNPRPD 2024). As of 2025, disability inclusion receives only 0.2% of global aid, even though people with disabilities make up 16% of the world's population. That's around 1.3 billion people (Global Disability Fund 2025).

Historically, development finance has overlooked disability inclusion, treating it as an "add-on" rather than a core part of effective, rights-based development. As the World Bank noted in 2015, "... when persons with disabilities are not explicitly included in development programming, they are often left out" (World Bank 2015). However, simply labelling a programme as 'disability-inclusive' (OECD 2026) does not guarantee OPDs are meaningfully involved in shaping its design, governance, or implementation.

Recent international development funding cuts have worsened the already short supply of money available for the meaningful participation of disabled people. A global survey found that 84% of civil society organisations (CSOs) lost funding in 2025. Money that had previously been available to CSOs was reduced, cut, or withdrawn. Three-quarters of humanitarian workers in the Disability Reference Group



(DRG) survey reported that their work on disability inclusion was already being affected by these funding cuts and policy shifts (Jezdovic 2025).

A 2025 GDI Hub survey of 378 OPDs across 102 countries found that just over a third (38.4%) had experienced a recent significant change in their funding (Landre and GDI Hub 2025). The most common reason given was a change in funder policy (40.0%), followed by the impacts of COVID-19 (9.4%). Among those reporting a reduction in funding, nearly one third (31.3%) attributed it to USAID stop-work orders, where USAID issued formal instructions to pause or stop work that had been funded.

At the same time, the 4th International Conference on Financing for Development (June 2025) called on the private sector to play a bigger role in development (United Nations 2025). But the World Economic Forum reports that “...although 90% of companies claim to prioritise diversity, only 4% of businesses are focused on making offerings inclusive of disability.” (World Economic Forum 2026).

3 How we did this research

3.1 How we collected the data

We carried out all research online. This included:

- Literature review: We reviewed existing published information on OPD funding. Most of this came from reports by donors, UN agencies, conferences, civil society organisations, and practitioner networks. There is limited academic research on OPD funding, but we reviewed a small number of academic sources to help us analyse the findings.
- In-depth interviews with eight OPDs
- Survey of funders (eight responses)
- Workshops with OPDs: We ran a workshop with OPDs that lasted just over two hours. It had two parts:



- Part 1: We shared our findings and asked participants to tell us what we had missed.
- Part 2: We ran a group activity to gather practical ideas and examples for the final guidance for OPDs.

3.2 Working with OPDs

We chose OPDs to work with in two stages. We prioritised diversity across geography, type of organisation, and disability representation.

3.2.1 Identification and outreach

Using desk research and the [Global OPD Map](#), we contacted 16 OPDs in low- and middle-income countries and invited them to express their interest in taking part. We wanted to bring together a diverse group of OPDs representing:

- Grassroots and local organisations
- Umbrella organisations
- Pan-disability and impairment specific organisations, including underrepresented impairment types
- Geographic diversity across regions, including underrepresented regions
- Urban and rural contexts
- Gender diversity, with a focus on women-led OPDs
- A range of funding and income sources.

3.2.2 Selection of OPD partners

From the OPDs who expressed interest, we chose eight based on:

- How well they matched the diversity criteria above
- Their motivation and interest in contributing to the project
- Whether they were based in countries of this report's funder priorities.



3.2.3 What OPDs did as part of this research

OPDs took part in the following stages:

- Sharing their views on barriers, enablers, and recommendations during interviews and workshop
- Shaping the survey questions directed at funders
- Reviewing our findings and identifying gaps
- Contributing to the OPD Good Practice Brief, by sharing templates, advice, and case studies
- Reviewing and commenting on recommendations
- Sharing and adapting the findings within their own communities and networks.

We paid all OPD participants for their time at GDI Hub consultant rates: 30% at the start and 70% on completion.

3.3 Funder Survey

We designed a survey for organisations that fund, contract, or work with OPDs. We wanted to understand their approaches, what works, and what gets in the way. The survey was reviewed and updated with input from OPDs.

We sent the survey to over 50 organisations, including INGOs, governments, international development institutions, financial institutions, and foundations. Eight responded.

3.4 Data Analysis

We analysed the interviews to identify key themes (Braun and Clarke 2022) about how OPDs experience accessing and managing funding. We then reviewed and refined these themes during the workshop and used them to structure the overall study.

Findings from our Global OPD Map Project helped confirm patterns in OPD funding. Because only eight funders responded to the survey, the results do not represent



funders as a whole. However, we grouped and analysed the responses to identify key themes.

3.5 Limitations of our approach

This project was initially designed by GDI Hub. As a result, our collaboration with OPDs was participatory rather than co-design, meaning OPDs contributed to the research but did not shape it from the start. OPD perspectives were provided through:

- Sharing their experiences in interviews
- Reviewing the survey questions
- Checking our findings in the workshop
- Reviewing the report.

This work was conducted in English, which was a barrier for organisations that could only take part in other languages. We recognise that this reflects wider barriers in funding systems, where language requirements can limit OPDs' participation.

Future work that gives OPDs greater ownership will need more time and adequate resources. Each OPD was represented by one person, chosen for their knowledge of funding and financial processes. The findings may therefore not reflect the full range of views within each organisation.

The findings reflect patterns among the eight participating OPDs and cannot be taken as representative of all OPDs in low- and middle-income countries. Responses from funders may also be skewed toward those with stronger existing partnerships with OPDs, who were perhaps more likely to respond.

3.6 Use of AI

We used Google NotebookLM to help organise and summarise sources for our literature review. We used Microsoft Copilot to copy-edit and simplify technical language. All analysis, interpretation, and final content were reviewed and approved by the authors.



4 Our key findings

This section summarises what we found from the literature review, the funder survey, and the OPD interviews. We identify key barriers and enablers to OPD funding across five connected themes:

- Funding sources, pathways, and engagement
- External funding structures
- Power and relationships between OPDs, funders, and intermediaries
- OPD operational capacity
- OPD operational delivery

4.1 Funding sources, pathways and engagement

Figure 1 shows the main funding sources OPDs currently use to operate and deliver their work. For this review, 'funding' includes both external funding and earned income

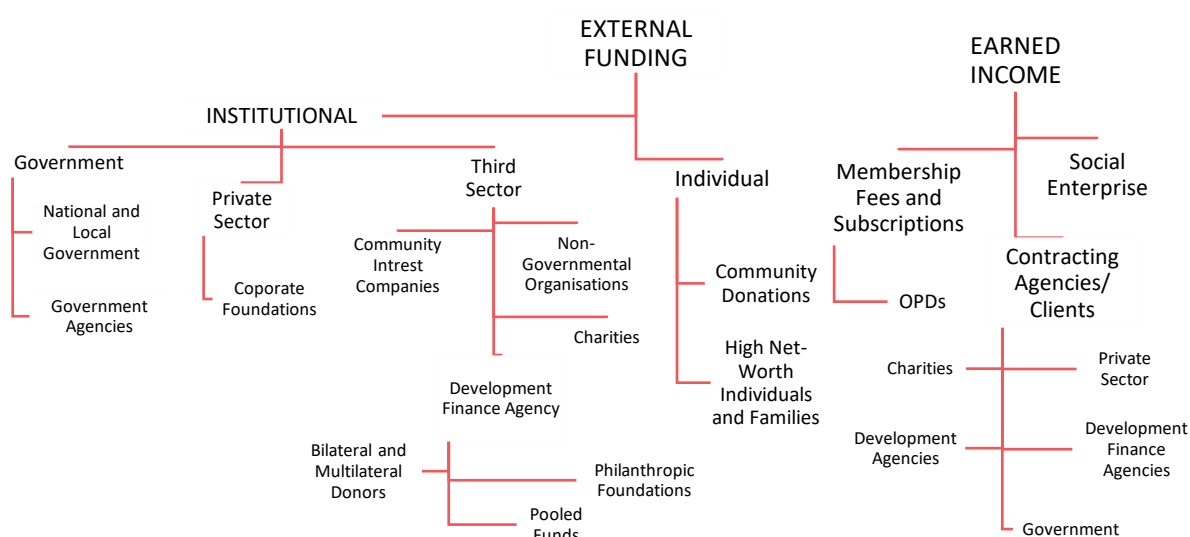


Figure 1 OPD Finance Resource Map.



Earlier GDI Hub research found that OPDs in low- and middle-income countries often rely on international development, and civil society grants as the main source of funding (Landre and GDI Hub 2025). As a result, this review focuses on the challenges and opportunities within this funding system. We also look at additional funding sources, including:

- Consultancy
- Services contracts
- Social enterprise models
- Local government funding
- Donations

4.1.1 Mapping OPD funding sources

Earlier GDI Hub research shows that international civil society grants are the most common main source of funding for OPDs. In interviews, OPDs also mentioned private foundations and wealthy international donors. Local government funding was mentioned far less often.

Several OPDs described efforts to diversify their income to keep their organisations running, including setting up social enterprises. In some cases, these also created jobs for people with disabilities. Engagement with the private sector was described as rare but potentially overlooked, particularly through corporate social responsibility initiatives.

Membership fees were mentioned by many OPDs, a pattern supported by earlier GDI Hub research (Landre and GDI Hub, 2025; Gebbett et al. 2025). However, their role varied. Some organisations noted that these fees are largely symbolic and contribute little to overall income. Others emphasised their importance for building member commitment, ownership, and internal accountability, even where the financial contribution is modest.



4.1.2 Pathways to funding

OPDs reported that most available external funding comes through short-term, project-based grants, often accessed through intermediaries. Both funders and OPDs noted that funding opportunities are usually shared through existing relationships, recommendations from partners and funders, informal referrals, or OPD umbrella bodies. OPDs also mentioned open funding competitions as another way to access external funding.

Interviews with national umbrella OPDs revealed that they rely mostly on international grant funding, while their member OPDs tend to rely on membership fees and government funding.

4.1.3 How OPDs work with partners and funders

OPDs reported that their involvement is often limited to a single consultation or advisory role, usually brought in at the end of a process rather than from the start. Similarly, none of the funders surveyed said OPDs have decision-making authority, and only one said OPDs are engaged as a core partner across all disability-related work.

However, all eight funders said they work with OPDs through joint planning, consultation, delivery partnerships, and advocacy. Four said OPDs acted as lead partners in some work, and two noted using OPD advisory boards for projects, strategies, 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 co-owned with OPD partners whilst in advisory work, OPDs bring in lived experience expertise” (INGO, Survey).



However, OPDs reported these forms of engagement less often. This may partly be because funders with stronger partnership practices – those already aware of and supportive of working with OPDs – may have been more likely to respond to the survey.

4.1.4 Barriers in funding systems

This section looks at three key barriers that arise from the way disability rights funding is sourced, distributed, and structured:

1. The chronic underfunding of disability rights and OPDs
2. The impact of external funding
3. Budget issues.

These barriers do not affect all OPDs equally. Factors such as gender, type of impairment – particularly psychosocial and intellectual disabilities – rural or conflict-affected locations, and socioeconomic status all significantly shape which OPDs can access resources and take part.

4.1.5 Underfunding of OPD rights and disabilities

Over the past decade, funding for civil society organisations has shifted in response to changing donor priorities, the COVID-19 pandemic, and wider political and economic pressures (Pousadela and Cruz 2016). In 2025, major aid cuts by G7 countries – including the United States, the United Kingdom, Germany, and Sweden – put inclusive programmes at further serious risk (OECD 2025, IDDC 2025). One survey found that 84% of civil society organisations lost funding in 2025 because of these cuts. This has directly damaged OPDs' ability to keep running and deliver inclusive programmes. Many have been forced to cancel projects and lay off staff (IFES 2025).

"The funding is a big problem, because of USAID 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)

“...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 several effects of funding scarcity, including more intense competition among OPDs, INGOs, and other civil society organisations for a shrinking pool of money. Several OPDs noted that larger INGOs and non-disability-focused organisations often have an advantage – they typically have established donor relationships, greater visibility, and dedicated fundraising teams.

4.1.6 What the Disability Reference Group survey showed

Three quarters of humanitarian respondents in 2025 said their work on disability inclusion was already being affected by these funding cuts and policy shifts. Many respondents to the Disability Reference Group survey also highlighted the impact of funding cuts on participation and leadership of OPDs. Examples included minimal funding opportunities to counter these cuts for OPDs:

“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 organisations of persons with disabilities to carry out projects and activities in this light. There remain very few funding opportunities tailor-made for OPDs”.

Funding cuts therefore restrict OPDs' ability to access money directly and to participate on equal terms, despite their central role in this work.

4.1.7 How external funding affects OPDs

Because many OPDs depend on international grants as their main funding source, they are exposed to shifts in donor priorities and changes in global funding. Participants frequently described short-term project grants as a major barrier to keeping their organisations running, achieving long-term impact, and building lasting partnerships.



While grants provide important opportunities, they are typically competitive, time-limited, and restricted to specific activities. This limits OPDs' ability to keep running and engage as genuine partners. Earlier research confirms that funding for OPDs is often limited in scale and duration. Many grants last only one to three years, with very few lasting longer (Dube and Charowa 2026).

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 – where an organisation passes part of its grant to another – can reinforce unequal relationships. In some humanitarian and development contexts, OPDs are used mainly as frontline delivery organisations rather than strategic partners (Vermont Bond Bank 2026). For example, OPDs may be subcontracted by international NGOs or UN agencies to support community outreach or help register people for support, but remain excluded from higher-level programme design, budgeting, and decision-making. This leaves them particularly vulnerable to funding cuts and shifting donor priorities.

Figure 2 illustrates how OPDs often receive relatively small amounts of funding after passing through successive layers of sub-granting. The amounts shown are illustrative and do not represent actual grant values.

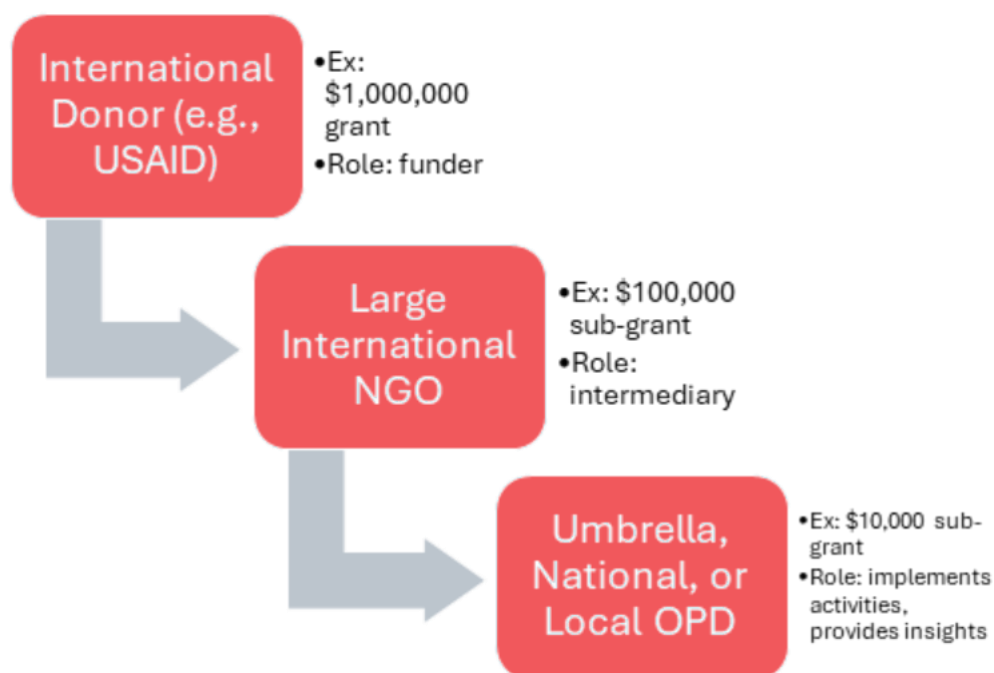


Figure 2 Funding flows to OPDs through sub-grant arrangements.

Earlier research (Saggu et al. 2025) also shows that OPD funding is often fragmented across multiple small grants from different donors. This reduces efficiency and creates significant administrative burdens. OPDs must invest considerable time preparing multiple applications and managing complex reporting requirements (Vermont Bond Bank 2026).

4.1.8 Budget rules are the barrier (not costs)

None of the funders who responded said that cost itself was a barrier to working with OPDs. However, funders did point to budget constraints as a challenge. This suggests the problem is not what OPDs cost, but how little budget is set aside at the design stage to engage with civil society organisations.

A respondent from a multilateral development agency similarly noted that the way contracts are structured – including project design, funding models, and pre-financing arrangements – can act as a barrier:



“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)

4.1.9 Enablers: what helps OPDs get funding

This section looks at what helps OPDs access funding. It focuses on the funding models that OPDs and funders say work best for rights-based disability work. Both groups said they need funding that is flexible, long-term, and built on good partnerships.

Table 1 shows the funding approaches that OPDs prefer, with funder views included where they agree. A separate column shows quotes that illustrate these approaches and explain why they matter.

Preferred funding arrangement	OPD and funder perspectives (illustrative insights)
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)
Flexible contracts	“We have been keener 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 developing their own proposals within a broad donor objective	“... we had to co-create the project with the [non-profit 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.” (Non-profit organisation, Survey)



Flexible grant funding	Flexible grant funding helped an OPD respond quickly to the immediate and emerging needs of its members – local people with disabilities. The OPD said it used flexible funding to provide assistive devices, in-kind support, and essential items during urgent situations, alongside advocacy activities. This was possible because the funding was not restricted to one narrow activity area.
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Table 1: Preferred funding arrangements

4.2 External Funding Sources

Overall, despite ongoing gaps between preferences and practice, OPDs and funders in this study described a largely shared vision for preferred funding arrangements. However, this may partly reflect the profile of funders who took part.

External funding structures are the systems and processes through which OPDs access money from outside organisations, such as donors, foundations, development agencies, and international NGOs. This section looks at both the barriers built into funding applications and processes, and what can make these systems more inclusive.

Barriers include hard-to-access information about funding opportunities, demanding application and selection processes, the regular exclusion of indirect costs and reasonable adjustments from budgets, and funder concerns about risk when working with OPDs.

4.3 Inaccessible information about funding opportunities

Information about funding opportunities is often difficult for OPDs to access. Online application platforms may not work with screen readers, creating barriers for blind or visually impaired applicants. Funding opportunities are also frequently shared through channels that smaller or local OPDs cannot easily reach. As a result, OPDs



may miss out simply because they are unaware of opportunities or cannot engage with the application process.

4.4 Complex application and selection processes

Due diligence requirements are intended to ensure accountability and transparency but they can act as a significant barrier for OPDs. These processes are often designed for larger organisations with established administrative and financial systems. For smaller or newer OPDs, not having these systems, documents, or policies in place can mean they are ruled out before they even get started.

More broadly, civil society organisations face pressure to become more like formal NGOs, adopting professional structures, governance models, and compliance systems in order to access funding. This is sometimes called 'NGO-ization'. It can make organisations less political and less community-led, as they focus on meeting funder requirements rather than remaining accountable to the communities they represent (Glad Network 2024).

All funding organisations said they select OPDs based on 'governance and management capacity'. The next most common selection criteria were:

- Demonstrated experience in similar work
- Thematic focus (for example, climate change or education)
- Compliance with due diligence requirements.

However, OPDs said they often cannot meet donor paperwork requirements, even when they are fully capable of delivering projects. This is especially true for OPDs without dedicated technical staff. They also noted that application processes are often inaccessible, with barriers including disability access needs not being met, language barriers, and requirements for technical expertise and lengthy, well-written proposals.

Eligibility requirements, such as the need to have a bank account and funding history, are also barriers for many OPDs. As one participating OPD explained:



“...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 include the need for formal registration, a legal identity as an organisation, compliance with national and international financial systems, access to banking services, and meeting taxation requirements. These can prevent OPDs from meeting basic eligibility conditions for funding.

Affiliation requirements were also raised as a barrier, particularly when applying for funding from the US or UK. Examples include the need for an international partner affiliation or US non-profit status (known as 501c3 designation).

OPDs said that funding selection criteria are often not designed with them in mind – especially in open funding rounds aimed at civil society broadly. Participants noted that selection criteria often fail to account for the different and overlapping challenges faced by different groups within the disability movement. Specific OPD concerns included:

- **Gender**

Organisations led by, or focused on, women with disabilities can face additional barriers. Intersecting discrimination based on both gender and disability means that women-led OPDs have historically had fewer opportunities to gain the resources, technical skills, and connections that would establish them as recognised contributors in the eyes of international donors.

- **Organisational maturity**

Funders sometimes prefer more established, larger organisations over smaller, local, or grassroots OPDs. As highlighted in the literature: “Mostly donors concentrate on national and regional organisations leaving out the grassroots level ones” (Dube and Charowa 2026).



- **Geographic region**

Funding opportunities are limited for organisations working in insecure, hard-to-reach, or remote areas. This includes OPDs based in small island nations, as well as those working with nomadic or pastoralist communities – people who move regularly with their livestock.

- **Disability focus**

Funders often choose non-disability-focused organisations over OPDs.

- **Impairment group**

Funders prioritise certain impairment groups over others.

These criteria make it harder for smaller, rural, local, or newer OPDs to access funding, as well as those working with less mainstream disability groups.

4.5 Lack of budgeting for indirect costs and reasonable accommodations

Denying reasonable accommodation is discrimination under the UN Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities (CRPD). Yet OPD involvement – and the reasonable adjustments needed to enable OPDs to take part – are often excluded from project budgets. Participants consistently described these costs, such as sign language interpreters, Easy Read materials, personal assistants, and assistive products, as essential. Without them, OPDs cannot fully take part.

OPDs are, by definition, made up of and working with disabled people, who often face higher costs of living and working. This means OPD budgets may be higher than those of other civil society organisations, which can make their proposals less competitive. But without covering these costs, OPDs simply cannot participate on equal terms. As one interviewee explained:



"[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 also described difficult negotiations with donors and partners over whether accessibility costs should be included in budgets. These discussions can result in accessibility being cut, 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)

Although seven of the eight funders surveyed said they offer reasonable adjustments to OPDs, this research suggests that in practice this is far from the norm. OPDs noted that when accessibility and reasonable adjustment costs are missing from a budget, it creates barriers throughout delivery. Without these costs, OPDs cannot fully participate in meetings, consultations, or project activities. This challenge also arises in mainstream projects, where OPDs often have to advocate for basic disability-inclusive provisions, such as accessible toilets, assistive devices, and inclusive education strategies for children with disabilities.

Funders also noted that limited internal knowledge of disability inclusion was a barrier, including among the intermediary organisations they work through. Together,



these experiences show how current funding systems often fail to treat accessibility and reasonable adjustments as the essential rights-based requirements they are. This places extra financial and administrative pressure on OPDs, limiting their ability to participate on equal terms.

4.6 Perceived risks in funding OPDs

Funders generally did not see working with OPDs as uniquely risky. However, some highlighted challenges around alignment, communication, and partnership expectations. OPDs, in contrast, described feeling excluded from broader civil society efforts and encountering reluctance from funders rooted in assumptions and stigma about disability.

Some funders said there were no risks unique to OPDs, noting that risks depend on context, capacity, and delivery arrangements rather than the type of organisation. Where risks were identified, they included the possibility of OPDs overpromising impact, being drawn into activities that do not reflect their own priorities, and the damaging effects on OPDs when funding is reduced or ended. One funder also noted that the disability community sometimes uses specialist advocacy language that assumes technical and cultural knowledge, which can create barriers when working across sectors.

While funders may not see working with OPDs as uniquely risky, differences in language, networks, and ways of working can affect collaboration. OPDs also described deeper structural barriers: stigma, accessibility costs, and funder reluctance to engage.

4.7 Enablers: what helps in external funding structures

The main enablers here are about improving how funding opportunities are designed and communicated. These include targeted outreach to OPDs, simplified and accessible application processes, adapted eligibility and due diligence requirements,



inclusive selection criteria, better internal funding systems, and clear requirements to budget for accessibility and core organisational costs.

Table 2 summarises what OPDs say funding opportunities should include in order to engage OPDs effectively.

Features in funding calls for OPDs	What this should include
Targeted outreach to OPDs	Calls intended for OPDs should include active and direct 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 work with assistive technologies, use clear and simple language, and avoid unnecessary administrative burden for smaller organisations.
Flexible application formats	Rather than requiring extensive written documentation from all applicants, application processes should allow alternative ways of applying. These could include short concept notes, one-page proposals, video submissions, and phone-based applications.
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. Funders must ensure these factors are considered during scoring and decision-making.
Improving internal funding systems	Funders may need to review and adapt their own systems to reduce barriers to OPD participation. This should involve 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	Funding calls should require budgeting for accessibility, reasonable adjustments, 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.

Table 2: Preferred features of funding calls to engage OPDs

4.8 Case study: Reviewing funding systems with community input

One funding organisation reported implementing a project to improve internal engagement systems and working arrangements with community-based groups. As part of this work, the organisation collected data from 149 individuals, representing



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

4.9 Power and relationships between funders, OPDs, and intermediaries

This section looks at how relationships between funders, OPDs, and intermediaries shape access to resources, influence, and decision-making.

Barriers include unequal relationships created by funding arrangements, continued experiences of being treated as charity recipients rather than rights holders, competitive funding environments, gatekeeping by intermediaries, and poor or inaccessible communication between funders and OPDs.

When asked about OPD decision-making authority, no funder said that OPDs hold decision-making power. Most funders said OPDs provide input that informs decisions, but do not make decisions themselves. OPDs echoed this, describing limited control over the design and impact of their work:

“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).

Research also notes that funding arrangements often place OPDs below international NGOs in the funding chain, limiting their direct engagement with funders and concentrating resources within larger organisations based in wealthier countries (Dube and Charowa 2026).

These patterns suggest that current funding structures reinforce unequal relationships and limit the long-term capacity and leadership of OPDs.



4.10 Impact of charity model and donor mistrust

OPDs said they feel some funders continue to view them – as people with disabilities – through a charity lens rather than a rights-based one. Many OPDs reported that disability stigma influences these perceptions and affects the level of trust funders place in OPDs. Earlier research also notes that OPD representatives are still frequently seen as 'beggars' or unproductive by the public and policymakers. This undermines funders' confidence in OPDs as professional organisations (Gebbett et al. 2025). As one OPD noted:

"I remember I visited some private sectors, some businesspeople, 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 also noted that cultural and contextual differences can shape donor perceptions of their capacity and credibility. Funding criteria often reflect Western organisational models, which may not align with the realities of OPDs.

4.11 Competition, gatekeeping, and the role of intermediaries

Competition and gatekeeping within funding systems can further limit OPDs' access to resources, influence, and decision-making. International, national, or umbrella organisations often act as intermediaries. While these organisations can play a useful coordinating role, research highlights longstanding concerns about how this works in practice. Chataika and McKenzie (2016) question who ultimately benefits from these relationships, asking whether capacity building efforts strengthen international organisations more than the OPDs they claim to support.

These concerns were echoed by our 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 delivery.



3. Gatekeeping in sub-granting processes, where funding opportunities are shared mainly within established networks, locking out newer or smaller OPDs.

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 support them:

“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 lead to limited engagement with OPDs in programme design, tokenistic consultation, and assumptions about organisational capacity or technical knowledge. Some described being included only symbolically, often at the very end of a process, so that photos could be taken to demonstrate inclusion. One OPD noted that these images are then used to reassure funders, who rarely check directly with OPDs about their actual involvement:

“[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).

4.12 Communication challenges

Participants highlighted challenges in accessing and communicating with donors, particularly when trying to build relationships with large international foundations, corporations, or development agencies. Many OPDs described difficulty knowing how or where to start when approaching funders. 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 organisation] 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)

A frequently raised challenge was the lack of feedback from donors after applications are submitted. Several participants described submitting proposals and hearing nothing back. One OPD called these funders 'ghost donors.' Hearing nothing back is both demoralising and wasteful. Without feedback, OPDs cannot understand why their applications were unsuccessful or how to improve future ones.



4.12.1 Enablers: what helps build fairer relationships

OPDs suggested several ways to build more trusting, equal and transparent relationships between OPDs, funders and intermediaries. These included developing trust through ongoing partnerships, improving communication, and support from umbrella organisations and networks.

4.12.1.1 Develop trust through ongoing partnerships

OPDs reported that relationships with regular partners tend to be more equal. Ongoing partnerships build trust and stronger recognition of OPD expertise.

4.12.1.2 Improving communication

OPDs also highlighted their role in demonstrating transparency and accountability. This includes keeping in regular contact with funders, maintaining clear records, and sharing evidence of impact. Funders should complement this by providing feedback on proposals and creating accessible ways for OPDs to get in touch, such as dedicated contact points or helplines.

4.12.1.3 Umbrella organisations and networks

Participants also highlighted the potential of umbrella OPDs and networks to support local OPDs in navigating funding systems. They described several ways umbrella organisations already do this, or could do more:

- Helping members understand funder priorities and develop the policies they need
- Sharing funding opportunities and coordinating partnerships
- Leading or coordinating consortia so that smaller or less-resourced OPDs can access larger funding opportunities
- Supporting OPDs to develop proposals and navigate the application process
- offering training, mentoring, and capacity building to strengthen organisational systems



- Helping OPDs become more visible to funders and build useful relationships.

However, many umbrella OPDs reported challenges in fulfilling this role when their own funding is limited and uncertain.

4.13 OPDs' operational capacity

The unequal relationships and persistent funding shortages described above leave many OPDs with limited capacity to operate. This creates practical barriers to securing and managing funding. Research shows that OPDs are often under-resourced to meet the demands placed on them, particularly in leadership roles and functions that need specialist skills (Whaikaha – Ministry of Disabled People 2026). This section looks at the practical barriers this creates, and what can help.

4.13.1 Barriers: what limits operational capacity

The main barriers to operational capacity include difficulties recruiting and retaining skilled staff, limited internal systems and structures, and low visibility.

4.13.1.1 Difficulties recruiting and retaining skilled technical staff

In interviews, OPDs repeatedly described the difficulties of recruiting and retaining staff, particularly specialist roles such as grant writers and finance personnel. This reflects a pattern identified in wider research. 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 (Vermont Bond Bank 2026). In conflict zones like Ukraine, OPDs struggle to find and keep financial professionals, as many are 'headhunted' by international NGOs offering much higher salaries (Vermont Bond Bank 2026). As one interviewee explained:

"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. This really becomes a problem" (OPD, KII).

This creates a vicious cycle: inadequate funding prevents OPDs from hiring and keeping skilled staff, and without skilled staff, OPDs struggle to meet funding requirements.

4.13.1.2 Limited internal systems and structures

Several OPDs reported limited internal systems and policies, particularly among grassroots organisations. Gaps included financial management, governance, safeguarding, HR policies, and monitoring and reporting. These limitations make it difficult to meet donor due diligence requirements, as described in the previous section.

A related challenge is the difficulty of gathering data and evidence. Many OPDs have limited resources to carry out research or collect information about their work. Without this, it is harder to demonstrate impact or show funders the need for their work when applying for funding.

4.13.1.3 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 in remote or hard-to-reach areas. Without an online presence, it can be harder for funders and partners to find 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).



4.13.2 Enablers: what helps operational capacity

Operational capacity can be strengthened by building visibility, making use of governance, policy, and advocacy skills, and investing in capacity building.

4.13.2.1 Strategies to build visibility

Despite limited resources, many OPDs actively work to raise their profile with funders and the wider public. This includes using news media, social media, and public communications to demonstrate 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 highlighted the value of establishing physical spaces or community activities to help change public perceptions about disability.

4.13.2.2 Governance, policy, and advocacy skills

Governance, policy, and advocacy skills are a real strength for many OPDs. Many actively advocate for more inclusive funding systems, particularly the recognition of accessibility and reasonable adjustment costs as essential rights-based requirements. For example, participants described training programmes designed to help governments, funders, and other organisations include disability in their 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 (Office of the Attorney General 2023), which provides grants for OPDs.

4.13.2.3 Capacity building

Participants stressed that funders should invest in building OPD capacity as part of their funding, rather than rejecting proposals because of gaps in organisational systems or structures. Several OPDs noted that strengthening internal capacity would improve their ability to access, manage, and sustain funding. Funding that prioritises capacity building, rather than only short-term project delivery, can help create more equal relationships between OPDs and funders.

4.13.2.4 Case study: 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 programme. The training gave them an opportunity to further develop their ideas and pitch them:

"During the boot camp, it was a one-week training, and after the training we were supposed to pitch an idea for the organisation, a three-minute pitch. There was a total of 10 organisations, and we were the only



*disability organisation. 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.

Area of capacity	What support is needed
Digital skills development	Some OPD leaders reported gaps in digital skills, including using smartphones, assistive technologies, and online platforms. Strengthening these skills could help OPDs access funding information, engage with donors, and use digital tools for advocacy, networking, and fundraising.
Mapping funders and accessing funding information	Participants highlighted the need for support to identify relevant funders and understand their priorities. Each donor has different thematic and geographic interests. Support is needed to identify which funders align with an OPD's work and to keep track of funding opportunities.
Proposal development, grant writing, and reporting	OPD staff reported the need for training in developing strong proposals, writing grant applications, account management, and reporting to donors.
Organisational and financial systems	Many OPDs highlighted the need to strengthen financial management and organisational systems. This includes developing the policies, financial procedures, and administrative structures required by funders.



Staff development and leadership	Participants highlighted the need for broader institutional capacity building. This includes strengthening staff skills and supporting leadership development, particularly for women with disabilities.
Research and building an evidence base	Some OPDs expressed the need for support to carry out 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 to build relationships with donors and partners. This includes 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. This includes developing websites, reports, and online platforms so that funders can better understand their work.

Table 3: Capacity building needs identified by OPDs

4.14 How OPDs deliver their work

4.14.1 Barriers: what stops OPDs delivering work

4.14.1.1 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.



The main barriers to effective delivery include unrealistic expectations, unfavourable payment arrangements, not being paid fairly for expertise, and difficulties when donor priorities do not match OPD priorities.

4.14.1.2 Unrealistic delivery expectations

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

- Reporting templates and procurement systems are often designed for larger organisations and do not work well for smaller, grassroots OPDs.
- Donors often expect heavy reporting even for small grants, which puts a strain on OPDs.
- Some donors underestimate the time needed for activities, particularly for meaningful engagement with disability communities.
- Frequent reporting and administrative demands from funders can stretch 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)*

Extensive reporting requirements can limit OPDs' ability to focus on delivering good work. 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.
- 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)

This is probably a common issue across civil society organisations, not unique to OPDs. However, other funders noted that it is 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).



4.14.1.3 Unfavourable payment arrangements

OPDs described several challenges around payment. In many cases, OPDs are invited to consultations, advisory groups, or project activities without adequate compensation for their time and expertise. Where payment is offered, it typically takes the form of consultancy fees, day rates, or reimbursement of travel costs only. While some OPDs receive fair consultancy rates, many reported receiving only modest payments.

"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 their participation in unpaid activities as an investment in potential future partnerships, while being mindful of the staff time they commit.

Delayed payments were also raised as a challenge. For organisations with limited financial reserves, late payments can cause serious cash-flow problems and affect their ability to deliver activities as planned.

4.14.1.4 When donor priorities do not match OPD priorities

A further challenge is when donor priorities do not reflect what OPDs and their communities actually need. In some cases, OPDs reported adapting their work to fit donor priorities in order to access funding, even when these priorities do not fully reflect community needs – a common pressure faced by civil society organisations, often described as ‘NGO-ization’ (Glad Network 2024). 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)*

4.14.2 Enablers: what helps OPDs deliver work

We identified several practices that can support fairer and more effective delivery of funded projects. These include involving OPDs early in project design, establishing fair and flexible payment arrangements, and creating inclusive delivery and monitoring practices.

Practice	What it means
Early involvement by OPDs in project design	Participants emphasised the importance of involving OPDs from the start, rather than bringing them in only at later stages. When OPDs are involved only at the end of a process, their ability to shape decisions is limited and problems can arise during delivery.
Fair and flexible payment arrangements	Paying OPDs fairly for their time and expertise is an important enabler. Useful approaches include funding that covers running costs without restrictions on how it is spent, payments tied to agreed milestones, and other flexible payment structures that make it easier for OPDs to participate and reduce their financial risk.



Inclusive implementation and monitoring practices	Participants highlighted several funder practices that can make delivery and monitoring 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 financial or monitoring templates where appropriate. Making sure funding reaches local organisations was also highlighted as important, particularly when money passes through intermediaries or umbrella OPDs.
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Table 4: Practices that help OPDs deliver work

4.15What we found: a thematic framework

Table 5 summarises the barriers and enablers across our five key themes:

- Funding sources
- External funding structures
- Power and relationships
- OPD operational capacity
- OPD operational delivery.

Theme	Barriers	Enablers
Funding sources, pathways, and arrangements	• Underfunding of disability and OPDs • Short-term and restrictive external funding arrangements, worsened by recent cuts • Budget rules that block access to funding	• Multi-year and flexible core funding • Direct funding to OPDs • Flexible contracts • Ongoing partnership models • OPDs shaping priorities or developing their own proposals within a broad donor objective



External funding structures	• Limited and inaccessible information about funding opportunities (including digital inaccessibility of online platforms) • Inaccessible application and selection processes • Difficulty budgeting for indirect costs • Lack of recognition of reasonable accommodations as essential, rights-based requirements • Perceived risks in funding OPDs	• Targeted outreach to OPDs • Simple and accessible application platforms and processes • Flexible application formats • Inclusive eligibility and selection criteria • Adapted due diligence requirements that reflect OPD realities • Improving internal funding systems • Requirement to budget for accessibility and core costs
Power and relationships between OPDs, funders, and intermediaries	• Unequal relationships shaped by funding arrangements • Experience of charity model and donor mistrust • Competition, gatekeeping, and intermediaries limiting OPD 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 unstable funding • Limited systems and structures • Limited visibility with donors and within wider civil society	• Strategies to increase visibility and recognition of OPD work • Strengthening advocacy, fundraising, and organisational skills • Capacity building tailored to each OPD's situation and needs



Operational delivery	• Donor expectations around timelines, outputs, or capacity • Unfair payment arrangements and inadequate compensation for OPD expertise • Gaps in funding for accessibility and reasonable accommodations during delivery • Difficulties when donor priorities do not match OPD priorities	• Early and meaningful involvement of OPDs in project design • Fair, flexible, and timely payment arrangements • Inclusive delivery, monitoring, and evaluation practices • Regular communication with funders and sharing successes
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Table 5: Summary of key barriers and enablers

These findings centre OPD perspectives and lived experiences. Funder perspectives are included throughout to give a fuller picture, while keeping OPD voices central.



5 Emerging opportunities and practices

As official development assistance (ODA) continues to be cut, OPDs may need to look beyond traditional funding models and explore alternative approaches (OECD 2025).

OPDs have long been creative out of necessity, developing flexible funding strategies to keep their work going. Learning from these approaches is essential to finding more inclusive and sustainable ways to fund OPDs in the future.

5.1 Innovative practices

This section highlights creative approaches OPDs have developed in response to funding cuts, as well as promising models for fairer partnership, participation, and advocacy.

5.1.1 Alternative funding approaches

Some organisations are exploring funding approaches beyond traditional aid grants. These include developing multiple sources of income and more flexible ways of receiving money. These approaches can help OPDs become more financially stable, rely less on short-term project funding, and keep greater control over their priorities and work. Examples are outlined below.

5.1.1.1 Ukraine: 'no-regret' funding (Vermont Bond Bank 2026)

- At the start of the conflict, some UN agencies set aside their usual partnership requirements to provide rapid, direct funding to local OPDs so they could get aid to people who needed it.
- One donor in Ukraine decided to cover all of its OPD partners' running costs to help them survive the war.
- Ukrainian OPD 'Fight for Right' used flexible funding with no restrictions on how it could be spent to set up a warm room for winter and accessible toilet facilities for its 17 wheelchair-using staff members.



5.1.1.2 Jordan: social enterprise and community fundraising (Vermont Bond Bank 2026)

- One OPD in Jordan runs a social enterprise offering beauty training courses to the public, generating income to cover office rent and utilities.
- Jordanian OPDs often raise flexible income by organising sports and cultural activities or appealing for donations from their communities, rather than relying solely on international aid.
- Because some local leaders had limited literacy, one OPD coordinator shifted from text-based updates to voice notes in a WhatsApp group to make funding information accessible.

5.1.1.3 Social enterprise and local income generation

- One OPD established a skills training centre as a social enterprise to generate income and support its work. It also set up a construction company specialising in Universal Design, which means designing buildings and spaces that everyone can use, including disabled people. Both initiatives created jobs for people with disabilities.
- Another OPD described turning to local enterprise models when external funding was restricted. The organisation opened a bakery to generate income and continued operating largely through volunteer efforts during periods without external funding.

5.1.2 Participation, partnerships and advocacy

This section highlights examples of how OPDs actively lead and shape participation, partnerships, and advocacy to promote fairness and inclusion within funding systems.

5.1.2.1 Kenya: disability-inclusive budgeting advocacy (IDDC 2025)

- OPDs in Kenya have shaped national disability budgeting through consistent advocacy and policy work. After training from the Centre for Inclusive Policy



and the African Disability Forum, OPDs analysed five years of disability-related public spending in Kenya (2019 to 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 policy briefs.
- This advocacy contributed to concrete changes, including:
 - Funding for assistive devices within the new Social Health Insurance Fund
 - Increased education budget allocations for schools serving children with disabilities
 - Expanded cash transfer programmes to reach people with higher support needs
 - New budget lines for people with albinism and neurodiverse people.
- A major outcome was the adoption of Kenya's National Disability Policy (2024), which provides a structure for disability-inclusive budgeting in future cycles.

5.1.2.2 Guyana: challenging 'cost stigma' (Singh 2025)

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

5.1.2.3 Central African Republic (CAR): local partner capacity building (Vermont Bond Bank 2026)

- In the Central African Republic, a donor funded an INGO to implement a three-year programme. The INGO worked with a local partner to deliver aid.



- The programme included several capacity building activities, including strengthening the local partner's financial systems.
- As capacity improved, the amount of funding passed from the INGO to the local partner increased every year.
- 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.

5.1.2.4 ASEAN Disability Forum (ADF): a regional movement built without funding

- The ADF was established in Bangkok in 2011 by OPD leaders from ten ASEAN Member States. At the time:
 - 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, growing from a grassroots network into a significant regional disability movement.
- Policy outcomes include the ASEAN Enabling Masterplan on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2025 and a series of ASEAN Disability Conferences.

5.1.3 Emerging opportunities to fund OPDs

Most of this research focused on international civil society funding, as this is where most OPDs get their money and where participants reported the greatest challenges. But it is also important to consider ways to diversify beyond this, especially as resources shrink. OPDs identified opportunities around strengthening local and national funding and engaging with the private sector.



5.1.3.1 Local funding 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.

- 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 fundraising: Building OPDs' ability to raise money locally can reduce their dependency on international aid and help them become more sustainable.
- Supporting local innovation: Encouraging and investing in OPD-led social enterprises can create reliable income, employment opportunities, and greater disability inclusion in local economies. Informal models such as cooperatives (shared group businesses), VICOBA-style savings groups (community saving and lending), and disability-inclusive agribusiness (accessible farming and food businesses) offer practical, locally grounded ways for OPDs to generate income.

5.1.3.2 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)



The private sector accounts for 60% of GDP, 80% of international investment, and 90% of jobs in developing countries. Yet it remains a largely untapped source of funding and partnership for OPDs.

Two OPDs suggested that businesses should direct their corporate social responsibility (CSR) disability inclusion efforts toward OPDs. However, for this to be sustainable, businesses need to make a genuine, long-term commitment to disability inclusion rather than one-off or voluntary gestures.



6 Recommendations

These recommendations focus primarily on international civil society funding, as this is where OPDs face the greatest challenges and most often access money.

However, they may be relevant to any type of funder. Our recommendations are in three parts:

- Recommendations for funders
- Recommendations for OPDs
- Recommendations for closer collaboration across stakeholders.

6.1 Recommendations for funders

For organisations working with OPDs, we recommend providing multi-year, flexible core funding and involving OPDs in designing and making decisions about programmes. Other forms of collaboration can also be valuable, as long as they are built on capacity building, fair pay, accessibility, reasonable adjustments, and flexibility.

6.1.1 How to fund OPDs

1. **Fund OPDs directly and involve them in designing and making decisions about programmes.** OPDs emphasised the importance of receiving funding directly, rather than through intermediaries, and being involved from the very start.
2. **Provide multi-year, flexible core funding.** Long-term core funding is essential for keeping OPDs running and for treating them as genuine strategic partners.
3. **Strengthen direct funding pathways.** Direct funding, combined with fair pay and accessibility budgets, supports OPD leadership and participation.



4. **Provide core funding that supports day-to-day operations.** Allocate resources to support an organisation's ongoing work, not only specific activities.
5. **Embrace flexibility.** Allow OPDs to use funds for needs they have identified themselves, such as hiring specialist staff or improving digital accessibility.
6. **Invest in sustainability.** Move towards ongoing and long-term strategic partnership models.

6.1.2 How to embed disability-inclusive budgeting

1. **Embed disability-inclusive budgeting as standard.** Accessibility, reasonable accommodation, and fair compensation must be recognised as rights-based requirements and integrated into all budgets.
2. **Include accessibility as standard costs.** Budgets should cover sign language interpretation, assistive technology, personal assistance, Easy Read materials, and any other support needed for OPDs to take part fully.
3. **Pay OPDs fairly for their time and expertise.** Budgets should include fair pay and account for the additional time, coordination, and running costs needed for accessible participation.
4. **Strengthen disability inclusion within budgeting systems.** Integrate disability into budgeting and tracking frameworks, for example by labelling and tracking disability-related spending, and encourage adoption at national and regional levels. OPD engagement should be built into funding design from the outset.

6.1.3 How to build OPD capacity

1. **Integrate capacity building within funding approaches.** Lack of formal or 'NGO-ised' structures should not be used to deny funding. Capacity strengthening should be built into budgets.



2. **Make capacity building fundable.** Offer training, mentorship, preparatory support, or financial backing to help smaller OPDs meet funding requirements.
3. **Adapt support to diverse OPD contexts.** OPDs vary widely, from umbrella organisations to grassroots groups. Support should reflect each organisation's context and priorities.

6.1.4 How to design funding processes

1. **Create dedicated funding opportunities for OPDs.** Funding processes should be more accessible, flexible, and responsive to disability-led organisations.
2. **Establish dedicated funding specifically for OPDs.** Consider setting aside funding specifically for OPDs, with targeted outreach to underrepresented groups such as rural, women-led, or marginalised disability communities.
3. **Apply flexible and proportionate due diligence requirements.** Use alternative ways to verify organisations' experience, offer support before funding decisions are made, simplify documentation, and adapt criteria for smaller or newer OPDs.
4. **Create simplified and accessible application platforms and processes.** Provide accessible formats, for example concept notes, sign language interpretation, and Easy Read materials, and ensure digital platforms are screen-reader friendly and available in local languages.
5. **Use flexible reporting approaches.** Reporting should reflect grant size and organisational capacity, and may include audio, video, or simplified templates while maintaining accountability.

6.1.5 How to work in partnership

1. **Involve OPDs early and meaningfully.** Early involvement allows OPDs to shape programmes based on community needs and lived experience.



2. **Create formal opportunities for OPD participation.** Funders can use their influence to promote OPD representation in decision-making spaces, for example through quota systems in national development boards and funded programmes.
3. **Proactively partner with OPDs as suppliers, contractors, and delivery partners.** This embeds inclusive practice throughout operations.
4. **Locate OPDs and identify collaboration opportunities.** Businesses should find OPDs, understand their expertise, and explore where partnership, contracting, or funding could strengthen inclusion for customers and employees as well as broader social responsibility outcomes. Treat OPDs as expert suppliers whose lived experience and specialist services add real value.

6.2 Recommendations for OPDs

(See also our separate document ‘Good Practice Guidance’.)

These recommendations support OPDs to strengthen their internal systems, increase visibility, and improve access to funding.

1. **Gradually build your capacity to meet funding requirements.** Develop your organisational systems, governance, and ability to manage funds over time, while continuing to advocate for simpler and more accessible funding processes.
2. **Build your internal systems and structures.** Strengthen financial management, governance, staffing, and reporting to meet common donor due diligence requirements.
3. **Use capacity assessment and planning tools.** Self-assessment tools and capacity milestones can help identify gaps, plan improvements, and demonstrate readiness to funders.
4. **Work with umbrella organisations and peer networks.** National and regional OPD networks can support members through training, mentoring,



and sharing practical tools to reduce paperwork pressures and improve access to funding.

5. **Increase your visibility, networking, and communication.** Many funding opportunities are shared through relationships and networks, so being known and connected matters.
6. **Actively share organisational work.** Use meetings, newsletters, reports, photos, social media, and community engagement to 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 what your organisation has achieved can help challenge assumptions about OPD capacity and strengthen funding applications.
9. **Demonstrate reliability through consistency and transparency.** Maintain clear systems and open communication, and show funders how you manage money and deliver impact.
10. **Prioritise transparency and accountability.** Keep clear records of income and spending to show that funds are managed responsibly.
11. **Keep in regular contact with funders.** Share updates, invite funders to events or site visits, and show them the impact of your work.

6.3 Recommendations for closer collaboration across OPDs and funders

These recommendations aim to strengthen collaboration, communication, and shared understanding between OPDs and funders.

1. **Strengthen communication and dialogue.** Participants highlighted the need for more consistent communication, feedback, and opportunities for dialogue



so OPDs and funders can better understand each other's requirements, constraints, and priorities.

2. **Improve communication channels.** Clearer systems for responding to enquiries and giving feedback on proposals can help OPDs understand funding decisions and improve future applications, while helping funders receive more relevant proposals. This may include named contact points, helpdesks, or agreed ways of getting in touch.
3. **Create opportunities for dialogue and learning.** Forums, conferences, and regular engagement can support two-way understanding, helping OPDs understand donor priorities and processes, and helping funders understand OPD contexts, strengths, needs, and constraints.
4. **Create opportunities for OPDs to engage in funding decisions.** Strengthening OPD participation in wider funding discussions, including budget advocacy, policy dialogue, and funding strategy, can help connect funding systems with disability-led organisations. OPD inclusion should extend beyond civil society spaces.
5. **Invest in disability expertise and support more strategic partnerships.** Participants emphasised that effective partnerships need stronger disability expertise within funding institutions, alongside more strategic engagement by OPDs.
6. **Deepen disability expertise within donor institutions.** Donors should involve people with disabilities as advisors, staff, or technical experts, and hire specialists with lived experience of disability and knowledge of the CRPD – such as OPD Engagement Officers (International Disability Alliance and Norad 2022). This helps strengthen coordination with national disability movements.
7. **Build partnerships based on shared priorities.** Identifying areas of overlapping priorities can support meaningful collaboration and help OPDs apply for funding more strategically, focusing on areas where their expertise, lived experience, and local knowledge add the most value.





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