POLICY G014: DISABILITY INCLUSION POLICY

Responsible person:	CEO	Version:	1.1
Approved by Board of Directors on:	27 February 2019	Scheduled review date:	June 2027

PREAMBLE

This policy was written by So They Can (Australian Entity) for use across all So They Can offices. So They Can operates five offices registered in each of Australia, Kenya, Tanzania, New Zealand, England & Wales and the USA, which are part of the So They Can Global Alliance. In this policy, 'CEO' means CEO of So They Can (Australian Entity). Unless specified otherwise the 'Board' refers to the board of So They Can (Australian Entity). This policy is intended for all So They Can staff, Board members and volunteers, in all 5 So They Can offices. So They Can procedures are consistent with So They Can policies.

BACKGROUND

So They Can recognises that over a billion people, about 15% of the world's population, have some form of disability[1] and around 80 percent of them live in developing countries. This makes the global population of persons with disabilities collectively one of the poorest and most marginalized segments of society[2].

So They Can is aware of the interlinked cycle of poverty and disability, as people with disability not only experience disproportionately high rates of poverty, but being poor also increases the likelihood of disability. So They Can understands that a person with disability is less likely to have access to rehabilitation, education, skills training and employment, which could otherwise reduce poverty. So They Can recognises that disability can be the consequence of poverty when there is no access to adequate nutrition, preventative and curative health care, clean water and sanitation, and working conditions.

So They Can seeks to ensure that people with disability and their communities experience empowerment, equality, dignity, and justice. So They Can recognises that girls and women with a disability face discrimination on two fronts because of their gender and their disability. In addition, women and girls with disabilities are two to three times more likely to be victims of sexual and physical abuse than women and girls without disability.

So They Can believes that the community has a critical role in addressing the inclusion of persons with disability and will intentionally support programs and projects that assist the community in advancing their inclusion.

[1] WHO & World Bank, 2011
[2] ILO, 2007

DEFINITIONS

So They Can recognises the complexities of disability and has adopted the following World Health Organisation definition:

Disabilities is an umbrella term, covering impairments, activity limitations, and participation restrictions.
An impairment is a problem in body function or structure.
An activity limitation is a difficulty encountered by an individual in executing a task or action.
A participation restriction is a problem experienced by an individual in involvement in life situations.

Disability inclusive development specifically seeks to ensure that people with disability both participate in and benefit from development activities on an equal basis with others – it is both process and outcome

So They Can Representatives – are all individuals and institutions who act on behalf of So They Can regardless of whether or not there is a formal legal agreement between them and So They Can. This includes, but is not limited to, all trustees, members, directors, employees, contractors, consultants, advisors, volunteers, and implementing partners irrespective of which country their role is situated. In this document So They Can refers any or all of the international So They Can entities registered in Australia, New Zealand, Kenya, Tanzania and USA.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

The So They Can Disability Inclusion Policy is underpinned by the following principles:

Non-discrimination

Non-discrimination means ensuring that all persons with disabilities (including men and women; girls and boys; and persons with physical, sensory, intellectual, mental and/or psychosocial disabilities) have equal opportunities to access and benefit from So They Can projects and activities and that no action by So They Can contributes to creating or reinforcing barriers.

Awareness

Raising awareness of disability and its implications among So They Can representatives, partners and communities it work with is the first step in enabling progress towards disability inclusion. For example, creating awareness about disability in a school can help to increase the acceptance of children with disabilities and improve the interaction between children with and without disabilities. A teacher who knows about disability is more likely to identify the additional learning needs of a child in his/her classroom and to help facilitate simple changes and adaptations that can make a great difference in the accessibility of the school to persons with disabilities.

Accessibility

Accessibility involves removing the physical, communication, attitudinal and institutional barriers that persons with disabilities face in accessing and participating in So They Can projects and activities. So They Can believes that accessibility is a core element of many social and economic rights. Removing multiple barriers which prevent access in society is a key requirement for the inclusion of people with disabilities. Accessibility includes the following dimensions:

- **Physical accessibility**: removing barriers in the infrastructural environment. Ensuring access to buildings, water supply and sanitation facilities, roads and transport services means designing them in a way that they are usable by all people, including all persons with disabilities.
- **Information and communication accessibility**: ensuring information provided can be read or understood by persons with disabilities. Accepting and facilitating the use of sign language, Braille, plain language, barrier-free documents and other alternative modes of communication.
- **Institutional accessibility**: ensuring equal access to justice, property and financial services, social services (e.g. in the health or education sector), as well as social protection and poverty reduction programs.
- **Economic accessibility**: ensuring affordability of services and information and communication technologies.

POLICY

So They Can believes that every individual should be valued as a full member of society and that disability awareness and inclusion are anchored upon respect for human equality and diversity. So They Can acknowledges the close link between gender and disability and the significant impact of poverty on disability inclusion.

So They Can programs and projects seek to remove barriers to participation and achieve equal opportunity and equitable outcomes for children, youth and adults with disability. The purpose of this Disability Inclusion Policy is to provide direction for So They Can representatives and its partners to strategically support people with disability within programs, procedures, systems and accountabilities.

As a signatory to the ACFID Code of Conduct, So They Can adopts the following Quality Assurance Framework commitments in its culture and philosophy and programming:

- Commitment 2.4. We promote the empowerment of people with disabilities
- Commitment 1.1. We respect and protect human rights
- Commitment 1.2. We respect and respond to the needs, rights and inclusion of those who are vulnerable and those who are affected by marginalisation and exclusion

POLICY IN ACTION

By adopting this Policy So They Can management commits to:

- promoting the importance of disability-inclusive development practices in poverty alleviation and sustainable development to So They Can representatives and partner organisations;
- providing staff with regular disability awareness training and relevant information on disability-inclusive development practices;
- taking into consideration issues of disability and inclusion for people living with disabilities in project design, appraisal, monitoring and evaluation;
- ensuring that equal opportunities exist in all areas of employment and that recruitment and selection decisions are based on merit according to qualifications, skills, abilities, experience and aptitudes and not affected by irrelevant personal characteristics;
- conducting a cross-cutting issues analysis and policy reflection during initial assessment of all new So They Can Projects and re-assess again in annual Project Plans ;

- aiming to ensure all So They Can projects, meetings and communications are accessible and inclusive;
- identifying and locating local people with disability in order to ensure they have the opportunity to participate in, and contribute to programs and projects we support;
- monitoring and evaluate projects and programs in order to track the difference they're making to children, youth and adults with a disability;
- using appropriate and respectful language and terminology, and challenge staff and partners who perpetuate discrimination against people with disability.

RELATED DOCUMENTS

- So They Can Policy and Manual Register
- So They Can Gender Equality and Women Empowerment Policy
- ACFID Code of Conduct, Quality Assurance Framework

Date	Version	Comment
27 February 2019	1.1	Review of the policy in line with DFAT requirements
29 March 2021	1.1	Policy reviewed by So They Can International office; no changes made
3 May 2023	1.1	Policy reviewed by So They Can International office; no changes made
18 June 2025	1.1	Biennial policy review, added England & Wales entity into preamble