Budgeting for inclusion

Lessons from Inclusive Futures on effective reasonable accommodation budgeting

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Inclusive Futures

UKaid
from the British people

Contents

Executive summary

Inclusion is a fundamental human right. Children and adults with disabilities represent 16% of the global population. We have made progress in making a truly inclusive society; however, much work is still needed, and development programmes continue to fall short on inclusion. There is a general perception that including people with disabilities in development programmes is expensive, but this isn't a reality. The costs of exclusion far outweigh the costs of inclusion. **Evidence shows that underemployment of people with disabilities costs low- and middle-income countries up to 7 per cent of their gross domestic product (GDP)[1].**

Development programmes that leave no one behind require reasonable accommodation (RA) budgeting. This is essential for creating truly inclusive programmes where everyone can participate meaningfully.

According to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD, Article 2):

> "Reasonable accommodation" means necessary and appropriate modification and adjustments not imposing a disproportionate or undue burden, where needed in a particular case, to ensure to persons with disabilities the enjoyment or exercise on an equal basis with others of all human rights and fundamental freedoms.[2]

About Inclusive Futures

Inclusive Futures is UK aid's flagship disability inclusive development consortium initiative, co-led by Sightsavers and the International Disability Alliance (IDA). It consists of organisations and specialists working together to deliver real change for people with disabilities in education, health care, employment and livelihoods, including through the Disability Inclusive Development (DID) and Inclusion Works (IW) programmes.

This paper reflects on the experience of DID and Inclusion Works, highlighting essential steps to consider when developing an RA budget, based on our experience and using examples of how our partners have approached it. We found that reasonable accommodation (RA) costs were far lower than expected – just 2.5% of total expenditure for Inclusion Works and 1.6% for DID. This challenges the common misconception that inclusion is costly, showing that **meaningful inclusion is achievable and affordable**.

Leave no one behind: four essential steps for effective reasonable accommodation (RA) budgeting

1

Create RA guidelines from the start

Develop RA guidelines from the start of your programme with the involvement of people with disabilities and organisations of people with disabilities (OPDs). Conduct workshops and training sessions to create a shared understanding of the guidelines, ensuring all team members can implement them. Include simple systems to collect and analyse your financial data so you can improve budgeting. This systematic approach builds organisational capacity for effective RA budgeting.

2

Budget for RA but be prepared to be flexible

Collaborate with people with disabilities and OPDs during programme design to estimate RA needs and establish dedicated funding that responds to their requirements. Create a central RA budget line to allow for flexibility, and advocate early for donors to include responsive budgeting that can adapt to participants' actual needs.

3

Track your RA spend

Consistently track your RA spending to gather evidence for improved budgeting and support OPDs, people with disabilities, and development partners in influencing sector and development programme budgets. Combine this financial data with regular feedback from people with disabilities to continuously improve your approach and ensure their needs are being met.

4

Tap into existing social protection provisions

Partner with people with disabilities and OPDs to help them access existing social protection entitlements. OPDs' expertise and community connections make them essential allies in navigating government systems. This reduces the need for programme-funded RA, while ensuring people get the support they're entitled to. It is also crucial to support OPDs in their advocacy efforts to enhance and improve social protection services.

Context

Inclusive Futures (2018 - 2026) brings together a consortium of partners, including development and humanitarian organisations, disability inclusion specialists, and experts working in media, research, and academia, to innovate and scale approaches to disability inclusion in health, education, livelihoods, tackling negative stereotyping and discrimination. We partner with OPDs to improve the lives of persons with disabilities, creating tangible results, and generating learning about what works, what doesn't and why.

Inclusion is a fundamental human right that ensures all individuals, regardless of their background, abilities or circumstances, receive equitable access to resources and opportunities. Inclusive societies are better equipped to leverage the strengths and contributions of all their populations, enhancing their ability to withstand economic, environmental, social and other shocks and respond to technological shifts, climate change and other global trends[3]. While significant strides have been made for people with disabilities, who represent over 16% of the global population, there are still persistent challenges in realising their legal rights. Development programmes in health, education, and livelihoods, especially in low and middle-income countries, often fail to reach marginalised groups, including those with disabilities.

The Disability Inclusive Development (DID) programme (2018 - 2026) is a consortium co-governed by Sightsavers and IDA. It works to promote disability inclusion within mainstream development, generating research and evidence to improve outcomes for people with disabilities.

Inclusion Works (2018 – 2022) supported people with disabilities to access formal employment in Bangladesh, Kenya, Nigeria, and Uganda. The programme built skills and confidence for job seekers with disabilities while working with employers to create more inclusive workplaces.

This paper reflects on these two Inclusive Futures programmes, highlighting essential steps to consider when developing an RA budget based on our experience. This document is not intended as a guide on how to budget for RA or how to run an inclusive development programme. Instead, it offers practical steps that can be adapted to different contexts. If your programme aims to promote an equitable and sustainable world where no one is left behind, making budgetary provisions that help remove barriers and enable people with disabilities to meaningfully participate within an environment, context, or project is essential[4]. In Inclusive Futures, incorporating RA has been critical in supporting people with disabilities to access services, and in meaningfully including people with disabilities and their representative organisations in programme governance.

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Yakubu, a wheelchair user, at an inclusive cataract screening in Kogi, Nigeria.

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OPD members, parents and teachers gather for a photo outside an Inclusive Futures project school in Nigeria.

> ...the reasonable accommodation provided… has been essential in enabling my full participation and contribution to the implementation of inclusive education programmes. They have not only enhanced my ability to collaborate and lead but have also built my capacity to engage in broader discussions on inclusive education…. It is crucial to continue prioritising reasonable accommodation to ensure that individuals with disabilities can participate fully and contribute their valuable insights and experiences to the development of inclusive policies and programmes.
>
> **OPD member, Joint National Association of Persons with Disabilities, Nigeria**

Report scope

This learning paper is intended for mainstream development organisations and has been developed to:

- Communicate our spending on RA in a way that's relevant to mainstream development organisations, minimising bias from our governance and delivery model and excluding factors beyond our control or budget (e.g. staff policies on RA)
- Address RA budgeting for individual development programmes rather than organisation-wide approaches
- Illustrate that there is no one-size-fits-all for RA budgeting, which varies depending on the programme and context. We focus on how it can be done, which can then be adapted and/or replicated by others
- Help build the case that it is essential to budget intentionally to design and deliver effective disability-inclusive programmes. One important aspect of this budget is RA, which serves as one of the methods for ensuring inclusivity. This paper will focus solely on RA and not cover the broader approach of inclusive budgeting[5]
- Present essential steps and lessons for developing a successful RA budget based on our experience

What is reasonable accommodation?

According to the **United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD, Article 2)**:

> "Reasonable accommodation" means necessary and appropriate modification and adjustments not imposing a disproportionate or undue burden, where needed in a particular case, to ensure to persons with disabilities the enjoyment or exercise on an equal basis with others of all human rights and fundamental freedoms.[6]

Sandip – supported through our education project in Nepal – does walking exercises to build his strength at a rehabilitation centre.

Inclusive Futures is committed to implementing RA in line with this UNCRPD definition. We have integrated RA expenses into allowable costs and developed guidance and tools to support RA budgeting.

There is no universal standard for RA costs in development programming, as they depend on the sector, programme design and context. Inclusive Futures is a disability-focused programme that takes a comprehensive approach to ensure meaningful engagement of OPDs. This includes removing barriers, enhancing accessibility by effectively applying RA to project participants, and enabling full participation in decision-making.

The definition of RA within programme delivery is constantly evolving. We recognise that there is an important distinction emerging between general accessibility measures, which some argue should be standard in all development programmes, and individual-specific reasonable accommodations. From this perspective, accessible venues and materials would represent baseline inclusion costs rather than RA. This distinction matters for two reasons: first, it prevents organisations from being constrained by the concept of what is "reasonable," potentially limiting inclusion funding; second, it preserves flexible RA budgets for individuals who require additional accommodations beyond general accessibility provisions. However, the principles of RA should be applied to development programming.

This paper offers our interpretation of RA for the scope outlined above, while acknowledging differing viewpoints and approaches within programme delivery. Our analysis reflects how these expenses were tracked during implementation, recognising that future programmes may benefit from distinguishing between baseline accessibility and individual RA costs.

Methodology

This learning report is based on practical experiences and analysis of how Inclusive Futures programmes and partners captured RA costs in their budgets and organisational accounting systems. We conducted seven key informant interviews with our consortium partners: Humanity & Inclusion, Light for the World, Sightsavers, Social Development Direct, Sense International, and the DID Fund Management Team to complement our financial analysis.

Our analysis focuses on activities conducted in our programme countries, excluding 'global' work such as research and fund management, which would not be universal to other development programmes. We also omitted RA costs from our governance partner IDA, as their dual role in governance and as a 'grant recipient' represents a scenario unlikely in typical development programmes.

We categorised RA expenses using specific budget lines, including assistive devices, materials, sign language interpreters, personal support assistants, travel, accommodation, digital costs, workplace improvements, and venue hire. Throughout this paper, when we refer to RA costs (as tracked in our programmes), we acknowledge these categorisations reflect our implementation approach rather than universal definitions. During our analysis, we identified risks that RA costs might be understated if incorrectly categorised in partner reports. While we corrected instances during review, the complexity of costs means some RA costs may be concealed within broader transactions.

Yakubu, a wheelchair user and OPD member, uses a taxi to return home after attending an eye health assessment in Kogi, Nigeria.

RA costs as a percentage of total spend

During programme co-creation, the amount of reasonable accommodation (RA) needed was not clearly understood due to the absence of reliable published evidence and guidance. At that time, DID had an RA budget of £400,000, which represented approximately 1.35% of the total budget. Addressing this evidence gap was an objective for DID and Inclusion Works, as it was expected that RA would be a key cost driver. The financial structure of both programmes was therefore designed to capture and analyse RA costs. RA categories were identified in conjunction with IDA.

Table 1: DID and Inclusion Works RA spend

RA budget line	DID	Inclusion Works
Accessibility in events and workshops*	£222,979	£113,497
Assistive devices	£137,310	£12,496
Materials	£55,061	£3,063
Accommodation	£17,580	£14,169
Personal support assistants	£6,989	£46,044
Travel	£3,654	£39,121
Digital costs	£2,189	
Total RA spend**	**£445,762**	**£228,390**
Total programme spend (exc. VAT)	**£27,585,599**	**£9,225,361**
% of total RA spend	**1.6%**	**2.5%**

* Including sign language interpreters' fees, consultants, live caption, online sign language interpretation costs, translations, venue hire and travel costs to workshops.

** Up to 31 May 2025 for DID, and for all of Inclusion Works.

We found that RA represented 2.5% of Inclusion Works' total expenditure and 1.6% of DID's. Accessibility for events and workshops was the largest category in both programmes – half of all RA spending in Inclusion Works and over a third in DID. This reflects the importance of enabling full participation for people with disabilities.

The programmes' different approaches shaped their other RA priorities. DID's focus on community-level work meant that assistive devices were critical (31% of RA spending) to help people access local services. Inclusion Works' centralised training required more support for transport (17%) and personal assistants (20%) to enable participation in structured courses.

When calculated as a percentage of activity costs alone (excluding salaries, overheads and programmatic costs), RA spending rises to 5.2% for DID and 10.6% for Inclusion Works. This higher percentage reflects that Inclusion Works worked exclusively with people with disabilities rather than within mainstream programmes, where RA costs would typically be lower. The proportions within each budget category remained largely unchanged, suggesting consistent RA patterns regardless of how costs are calculated. This activity-focused analysis may help development programmes plan more accurately for RA costs, as it reflects the direct programme implementation expenses where RA is most needed.

Akai, a young boy supported under an Inclusive Futures inclusive education project in Kalobeyei refugee settlement in northern Kenya, uses his wheelchair at school.

Leave no one behind: Four essential steps for effective reasonable accommodation (RA) budgeting

There is a general perception that including people with disabilities in programmes is expensive, but this isn't a reality. **The costs of exclusion for society are far greater than the costs of inclusion**. If your programmes aim to promote an equitable and sustainable world where no one is left behind, it is crucial to include RA in your budgets.

To ensure successful disability inclusion, all participants must be able to meaningfully engage in development programmes, regardless of their impairments. Programme planning should address RA needs and allocate sufficient funds so that everyone is included.

> I was provided with…an aide [personal support assistant] which really helped me a lot during the implementation… This really gives me joy and courage to concentrate more to give my best in terms of facilitation.
>
> **OPD member, Hope for the Handicapped Persons Foundation (HHPF), Kaduna, Nigeria**

Amina (left), founder of TIRKPOP Charity Foundation, speaking at a workshop on barriers to health care for women with multiple and complex disabilities, with her personal support assistant (right).

Our experience in Inclusive Futures taught us that RA budgeting is an ongoing process requiring continuous refinement. We identified four essential steps for effective RA budgeting:

1. Create reasonable accommodation guidelines from the start

Establish a shared understanding of RA with all team members and staff from the start of your programme through workshops and training. Involve OPDs in developing RA guidelines by drawing on their expertise and ensuring adequate time for collaboration. The guidelines should promote fairness, transparency, and provide avenues to challenge decisions. Ensure compliance with relevant country policies, such as Kenya's new disability act, which establishes RA as a legal requirement in employment, education, health, justice, and access to services[7]. This is essential for fostering staff skills and ensuring full participation of people with disabilities in your programme. Recognising that some project participants do not understand what reasonable accommodations are, IDA emphasised the importance of ensuring everyone grasps this concept:

> A way around this is to create more innovative ways of explaining what RA is, for example, easy read versions… it is key that project staff know how to build budgets for RA at project level.
>
> **Staff member, IDA, consortium partner and programme co-lead**

Risikat Toyin Muhammed, an OPD partner in our inclusive education project in Kaduna, Nigeria.

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Create simple systems and templates to collect financial data consistently, using Excel spreadsheets if database resources are limited. Ensure all team members and staff understand data collection and analysis, and their importance. Provide flexible sample budgets for team members and staff, use separately coded budget lines for RA spending to facilitate accurate analysis (see Annex 1 for typical examples). Understanding your programme spend is crucial for learning and advocating effectively for RA budgets.

> At the start of the project, there was no separate budget for RA [at project level]; it was embedded within the main project activities, making it difficult to track RA costs independently. As a result, we didn't have a solid reference, but we included estimated figures. [After support from Inclusive Futures] we've been able to separate all RA costs and book them separately from the activity expense line.
>
> **Staff member, Light for the World, consortium partner**

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Sarada (left) supports Sasmita (middle), and another coffee farmer to grow coffee in Nepal. Inclusive Futures' project adapted coffee farming and processing tools so they could be used by people with disabilities.

Build in regular training for all staff, team members and OPDs to make sure they understand the guidelines and how to implement them. Include refresher training to address any challenges and ensure that new staff understand the guidelines you are using. International development and humanitarian organisations promoting RA budgeting should also apply these principles internally, demonstrating their commitment through their practices.

> Once we started to work on Inclusive Futures, there was a real feeling that if we were going to talk the talk, we had to walk the walk – we needed to step up what we were doing internally, and in our development practice, on disability inclusion.
>
> DID has had a huge influence on the organisation…Working on DID sparked an internal disability inclusion review, a practical implementation plan, and the formation of a disability inclusion working group. Employment policies are now explicit around reasonable adjustment, and RA is enshrined in company policy. All staff are made aware of support available on reasonable adjustment, and we are now registered as a Disability Confident Committed Employer. In all of this, the DID footprint is clear.
>
> **Staff member, Social Development Direct, consortium partner**

Key learning

Create RA guidelines from the start of your programme with the involvement of people with disabilities and OPDs. Conduct workshops and training to create a shared understanding of the guidelines, ensuring all team members can implement them. Include simple systems to collect and analyse your financial data so you can improve budgeting. This systematic approach builds organisational capacity for effective RA budgeting.

2. Budget for reasonable accommodation but be prepared to be flexible

Set aside a portion of the budget for RA during the design phase, working with OPDs to understand their needs. Use this input to estimate the type and scale of costs your programme might encounter, depending on your approach and context. This proactive approach is more cost-effective than retrofitting later and strengthens your case to donors who may not grasp RA costs. Establishing a specific RA budget rather than distributing costs across activities provides flexibility in how and when to utilise it. Additionally, budget for ongoing costs like maintenance and replacement of assistive devices to ensure lasting impact. Create a sustainability plan for providing these devices beyond the project's completion.

Allow for flexibility within your RA budget. Collaborate with people with disabilities to understand their unique needs, which can vary widely based on individual circumstances and contexts[8]. To facilitate flexibility in your budget, consider implementing regular budget updates. This approach allows for budget allocations to be adjusted across different lines as needs evolve. Establishing a contingency fund is also essential for addressing unforeseen requirements. This flexibility is essential for fostering responsive and inclusive programming; however, be prepared to advocate to donors for support in flexible budgeting.

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Nataparin helping her son Emus with his wheelchair as they go to school in Turkana County, Kenya.

Key learning

Collaborate with people with disabilities and OPDs during programme design to estimate RA needs and establish dedicated funding that responds to their requirements. Create a central RA budget line to allow for flexibility, and advocate early for donors to include responsive budgeting that can adapt to participants' actual needs.

> [We] gained valuable insights on incorporating [flexible] budgets. They [the project team] made it a priority to include the costs associated with inclusion in their budget. They also maintain an overall budget allocation to cover unexpected expenses related to reasonable accommodations.
>
> **Staff member, Light for the World, consortium partner**

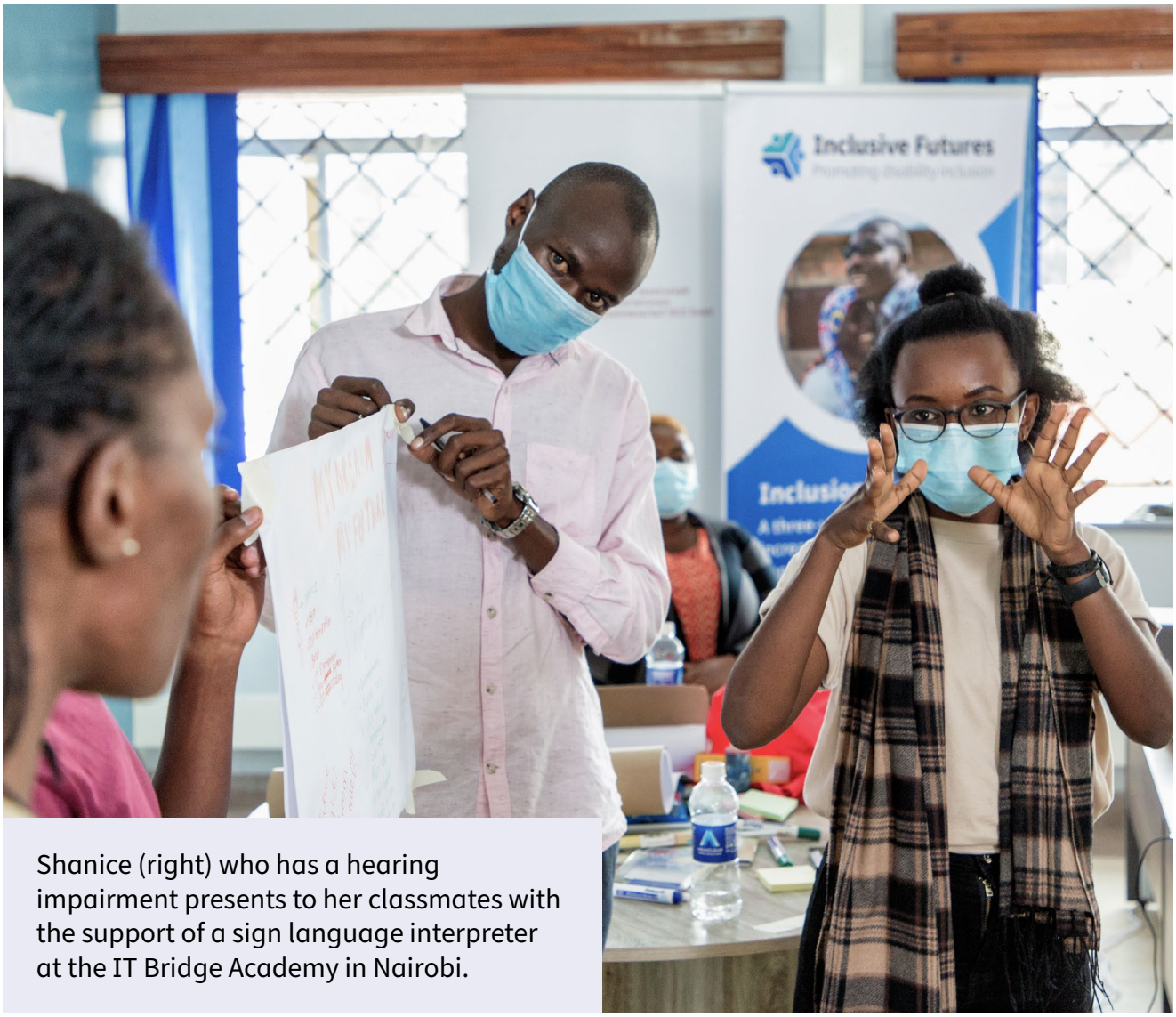
3. Track your reasonable accommodation spend

Track and analyse your RA spending consistently across programmes to understand how resources are being used and to ensure comparability. While initial budgeting can be challenging, collecting and analysing financial data regularly provides evidence for decision-making. This helps OPDs and development partners influence sector and development programmes for appropriate RA funding and improves accuracy for future budgets.

Incorporate feedback from people with disabilities into regular processes to assess whether their needs are being met and to inform future RA budgeting. Simple, accessible feedback forms after activities can capture valuable insights for improvement.

Key learning

Consistently track your RA spending to gather evidence for improved budgeting and support OPDs, people with disabilities, and development partners in influencing sector and development programme budgets. Combine this financial data with regular feedback from people with disabilities to continuously improve your approach and ensure needs are being met.



Shanice (right) who has a hearing impairment presents to her classmates with the support of a sign language interpreter at the IT Bridge Academy in Nairobi.

4. Tap into existing social protection provisions

This can help offset project RA costs. When social protection entitlements for people with disabilities exist and the systems are easy to access, there is less need to finance RA from programme budgets, such as providing transport grants or affordable assistive technology. Collaborating with OPDs to advocate for social protection entitlements helps reduce reliance on programme budgets. Development programmes, therefore, vary in their RA budget needs depending on their ability to connect participants with existing government support.

OPDs are key partners in helping people with disabilities access existing social protection services. Development programmes can enhance partnerships between OPDs and government authorities to improve access to entitlements. Collaborating with OPDs boosts their advocacy capacity while leveraging their expertise and community ties. Supporting OPDs in advocacy is essential for improving social protection services. When local providers and families understand rights, they can better connect people with disabilities to social protection, reducing reliance on project funding. OPDs are crucial in helping families access resources and navigate government systems.

> Embedding disability inclusion at the outset and throughout the development of national systems is central to achieving change at scale…. Practical steps can be taken in all sectors, including creating laws and regulations to guarantee equitable access, enhancing data collection to monitor inclusion and identify specific support needs, training frontline staff and other key actors, and systematic engagement with people with disabilities and OPDs to design and implement inclusive policies, programmes and environments.
>
> **Global Disability Inclusion Report, 2025**

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Victoria, a member of the Albino Foundation, assists with collecting disaggregated data on people with disabilities attending an inclusive eye health clinic in Kogi, Nigeria.

Children with disabilities receive disability identification cards, known as Golden Citizen cards, in Bangladesh.

Tapping into existing government provisions to offset project reasonable accommodation costs

In our project in Bangladesh, OPDs played a key role in helping families secure government disability ID cards for children with disabilities. These cards unlock access to disability allowances, assistive devices, educational support, and healthcare benefits. They also provide formal recognition needed for inclusive education programmes and social protection schemes.

OPDs worked directly with families to explain the benefits and navigate the application process, while home-based education facilitators provided technical support. This approach proved effective – 170 children have obtained disability ID cards so far, significantly improving their access to essential services and rights.

This approach will also affect the project's costs for RA because the government offers specific support through disability cards. As a result, the project does not need to allocate budget to cover this support, which reduces the overall RA expenses for the project.

Key learning

Partner with people with disabilities and OPDs to help access existing social protection entitlements. OPDs' expertise and community connections make them essential allies in navigating government systems, reducing the need for programme-funded RA, while ensuring people get the support they're entitled to. It is also crucial to support OPDs in their advocacy efforts to enhance and improve social protection services.

Conclusion

Exclusion comes with a cost, not only for individuals but for whole societies. Our analysis addresses the misconception that including individuals with disabilities is expensive. While interpretations of RA continue to evolve, one fact remains constant: the investment required for inclusion is minimal compared to the substantial costs of exclusion – confirming that meaningful participation is both achievable and affordable.

The four essential steps outlined in this paper – building guidelines early, budgeting flexibly, tracking spending consistently and tapping into social protection – provide a tested approach for development programmes. Working in partnership with OPDs brings expertise that reduces costs, improves outcomes, and creates initiatives that truly meet the needs of individuals with disabilities. This drives meaningful change towards an inclusive society where everyone can thrive.

Development programmes committed to leaving no one behind must prioritise RA budgeting. When properly implemented, these approaches enable everyone to participate meaningfully, ensuring programmes **achieve genuine inclusion**.

Students hoping to pursue a career in technology, graduate from the IT Bridge Academy in Nairobi, Kenya.

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Annex 1: Typical examples of RA expenses

Accommodation	Use for personal assistants' accommodation costs (hotel)
Assistive devices	Use for supporting equipment. For instance canes, purchasing or hiring of a wheelchair, crutches etc.
Capacity strengthening	Include budget for training your staff, consultants (business development advisors), mentors and partnering company staff on disability inclusion. If needed, budget for disability and accessibility auditing, or accessibility testing for digital platforms like apps or websites.
Digital costs	This includes the costs for software and online solutions, for instance, speech and screen readers, braille reading and any accessible software.
Materials	Use for costs incurred to make a document in an accessible format. For instance, training material for people with disabilities, braille documents, illustrations and 'easy to read' versions.
Personal support assistants (PSAs)	This includes paying fees, allowances, per diems, stipends (wherever is allowable) to PSAs/Caregivers to people with disabilities.
Sign language interpreters	This includes costs related to sign language interpreters' fees and captioning costs.
Travel	All travel costs for PSAs: visa, flights, transport to/from the airport. It also includes the costs for travel upgrades for people with disabilities (someone may need to travel business class due to his/her condition, but please check before booking travel in a higher class). It's important to set aside additional travel and subsistence for PSAs i.e. if you have 25 people for a workshop and three need PSAs, you can budget for an increase in participants to enable people to come with their assistants. Also covers the hire of accessible vehicles and medical transport.
Venue hire	Not only should you consider the accessibility of your training centre, but you should also factor in the number of wheelchair users when deciding how many people to have in a training room. Factor in those who might attend with their PSAs. This includes the costs for audiovisual hired equipment, ramps and the cost of the room (as it should have been checked for accessibility).
Workplace	This includes the costs to make the workplace accessible, for instance, accessible toilets, ramps, doors accessible for wheelchairs, and accessible furniture.
Other costs	This should only be used if there is no option you can use from the other categories.

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