

DFAT speech for the Fifth Session of the UN Committee on Social Development – Leaving No One Behind

Australia is committed to ensuring that no one is left behind from the 2030 Agenda.

At the same time, we recognise that not every development actor can achieve all things for all people. Acknowledging this reality upfront is less harmful than simply assuming that our interventions will trickle down to all marginalised groups without any deliberate effort on our part.

Australia has learned this lesson from experience. Our progress with the ‘leaving no one behind’ agenda is real, particularly in regards to gender equality and disability inclusion, but our challenges remain.

For example, gender equality and women’s empowerment are at the centre of Australia’s foreign policy, economic diplomacy and overseas aid program.

We have learned that retrofitting gender equality is difficult – aid initiatives that intend from the outset to promote gender equality are far more successful. Effective interventions respond to existing power structures and complex influences and pick the right partners – host government, civil society organisations, the private sector or religious organisations can all play a role in advancing gender equality.

Australia is also a leading provider of disability-inclusive development assistance. Australia supports disability-focused aid investments, as well as mainstreaming activities that include people with disabilities as participants in development work across all sectors.

We seek to check our assumptions that our investments will automatically reach women and girls and people living with a disability without any specific effort on our part.

Likewise, we are concerned at the assumption that a focus on ethnic minorities will trickle down to indigenous peoples too.

Indigenous peoples comprise 5% of the global population but 15% of the world’s poor. They are at heightened risk of being left behind due to systemic disadvantages and the political choices of governments.

Many development agencies are focusing upon indigenous peoples but individual action is not sufficient. Indigenous peoples will be left behind unless development actors take individual as well as collective action.

Australia is not professing to be a leader in regards to indigenous issues. But we are keen to have this conversation, and in partnership with actors across the international system, we are committed to ensuring that no one is left behind.

371 words (limit is 550)