

Celebrating the short life of an Australian NGO

By Deborah Rhodes¹

In the context of major changes in the world of development agencies, one small NGO, called Australia Pacific Islands Disability Support (APIDS) has recently made the decision to cease operations as an independent organisation. It has recently become a project under the auspices of another NGO, after 11 years of successful partnerships and collaboration with Pacific disabled peoples' organisations (DPOs). What happened and why? Did we reach our goal and are no longer needed? Did we fail and therefore need to close down? Or were the benefits of our work overwhelmed by the costs of compliance? What lessons does the relatively short life of APIDS have for other Australian aid NGOs?

Introduction

The world of aid and development NGOs is rapidly changing (e.g. IDS² and IRIN³). On one hand, small 'boutique' NGOs are proliferating⁴, particularly as young, well-connected and energetic individuals travel more, witness inequality and poverty and respond by deciding to 'do something' or 'make a difference.' Books, motivational speakers and social media extoll and encourage this approach. In individualist societies like Australia, located in a neighbourhood where it is easy to find a cause, many people respond accordingly. Access to social media means that people can generate funds very quickly for a group of women here or an orphanage there, with a smart graphic-based campaign and effective networks. The number of NGOs signing up to the umbrella body, Australian Council for International Development (ACFID) has increased substantially in recent years. Members grew from 77 in 1995⁵ to 132 in 2017, with most new members being small agencies with a relatively narrow scope.

On the other hand, multi-faceted international NGOs, such as Oxfam, Save the Children and World Vision, with decades of experience and largely grounded expertise in complex and diverse areas of social and economic change and humanitarian responses, face new existential challenges (see for example Overseas Development Institute, Bond, Australian Council for International Development). Competing causes, reducing government aid budgets, the complexities of working globally, limits to collating and applying lessons learned at organizational levels and the emergence of humanitarian and other disasters, combine to make the lives of these organisations more difficult than ever. Periodic discussions of mergers, re-structures and widespread cuts to NGO staff seem insufficient to address the enormity of these changes.

Does Australia really need hundreds of separately governed NGOs, each with legislative reporting requirements and systems, as well as partners and projects? Do developing countries really benefit from hundreds of separate independent organisations, each with their own boards? To survive, these

¹ Deborah held the role of Vice President throughout the life of APIDS. Other board members contributed to the drafting of this paper. All errors are the responsibility of the author. Contact her on Deborah.rhodes@bigpond.com

² <http://www.ids.ac.uk/opinion/the-survival-instinct-how-international-ngos-can-adapt-for-the-future>

³ <https://www.irinnews.org/analysis/2017/03/27/local-aid-agencies-still-waiting-bigger-share-funding-cake>

⁴ <http://devpolicy.org/australian-development-ngos-future-fragmented-20161010/>

⁵ ACFID Annual Report 2014-15

https://acfid.asn.au/sites/site.acfid/files/resource_document/ACFID%20Annual%20Report%202015%20Final.pdf

organisations need to monitor progress from a distance, generate evidence of results, sustain diverse and cross-cultural relationships, plan at organizational, project and partnership levels, as well as report on all aspects of their work. When the development literature suggests that deep understanding of the multiple complexities associated with change in each particular country, long-term commitment and partnerships, combined with flexible and responsive programming, are key to success⁶ what is the future for multiple separate boutique NGOs working internationally? In a world of greater compliance and control mechanisms set by governments, how can people 'with a cause' best contribute to reducing inequality and achieving positive change?

This is the story of APIDS within the broader context of development, NGOs, partnerships and disability inclusion. The experience of APIDS raises some suggestions and questions for others to consider, even if the answers come out differently.

Background to a new NGO

APIDS began in 2005, the result of a fortuitous meeting of minds. Robyn James was placed in 2003 as an Australian volunteer with the Fiji Disabled People's Association (FDPA at the time – now Fiji Disabled People's Federation FDPF). She quickly became aware of the marginalization of the organization from many aspects of Fiji life, including mainstream civil society networks and funding opportunities. Working with strong leaders with disability in Fiji, who were well connected globally in the lead up to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in 2008, Robyn recognized the opportunity for collaboration and better support. At the time, FDPA was one of several small disabled people's organisations (DPOs) in Fiji and in the Pacific region. DPOs comprise people with disabilities themselves advocating for greater recognition and inclusion.

In 2003, Robyn met Deborah Rhodes, a development practitioner with 20 years of experience in Pacific countries, while she was studying for a Master in International Development. Deborah's research focused on the use of rights-based approaches by Fijian DPOs. When Robyn suggested 'something needs to be done' to support Pacific DPOs, Deborah did not hesitate to agree.

Robyn mentioned that FDPA had come across a small number of other Australians with expertise in disability rights and interest in Pacific contexts. They were keen and quickly mobilized by Robyn and Deborah to form a group to work collaboratively in this area. The obvious idea at the time was to establish a new NGO. We do recall wondering whether other existing organisations might be able to be convinced to do this kind of work, but considered none were suitable at the time.

APIDS was born, with the dual goals of supporting Pacific DPOs and advocating for greater recognition of disability issues in the broader Australian aid program. The founding members shared the philosophy that people with disabilities are experts in their own lives and advocacy organisations. We also shared the view that Pacific Islanders with disabilities know their country best as well as their own priorities. These became part of the foundational principles for APIDS.

It did not take long to generate shared understanding among us about the purpose of our new organization, despite our varied backgrounds. Our first brochure, intended to sign up members and demonstrate the kinds of values we thought important, stated that APIDS will assist by:

⁶ For example, see Green, D (2017) **How Change Happens**, Oxford, UK

- Initiating activities that will improve the quality of life for current and future generations
- Improving the knowledge and physical resources of people with disabilities and promoting their integration into society
- Sharing information with people with disabilities in the Pacific Islands
- Educating the Australian community on issues related to people with disabilities in Pacific Islands.

Collectively, we understood contemporary principles and realities associated with aid effectiveness, appealing to donors and members, collaborating in partnership with Pacific organisations and working inclusively. We expected APIDS to focus at DPO level, rather than at Government or community levels. We expected DPOs to initiate their own ideas rather than for us to suggest strategies and we expected to support DPOs to undertake their own work, with 'on tap' support. We understood that previous practice had often perpetuated the disempowerment of people with disabilities in developing countries, and we sought to contribute respectfully towards empowerment and achieving rights-based objectives. We also were highly aware of the need to avoid the harm that is sometimes caused when new organisations seek to assist others in contexts they do not understand. Our collective theoretical understanding about aid and development and extensive practical experience was also deemed important.

We confidently sought to put these ideas into practice and avoid the pitfalls of many others who had gone before us. We would not insist on partners submitting complex project proposals and we would not spend a large proportion of funding on monitoring our funding. We knew that excessive documentation is a major barrier for people with disabilities who have may have had limited access to education. Instead we intended to build trust-based partnerships and respond to DPOs' great ideas for advocacy and community mobilization. We sought to monitor these partnerships during field visits undertaken as part of board members' other work in the region, during regular Pacific-wide conferences organized by PDF and through PDF itself, who assisted us with monitoring where possible.

Establishing a new organisation

The process of establishing an NGO, in our case a company limited by guarantee, may appear relatively straightforward in a world of internet. However, many steps were tedious, demanding and seemed unnecessary given the purpose and scope of the group. We had no intention of having staff, running an office or organizing major fundraising events – our view was that moral support, advocacy, professional collaboration, collegiality and small grants were the top priorities. We all undertook these tasks voluntarily, in solidarity with those in the Pacific who operated with little or no funding. For us to be able to send tiny grants to the growing number of partner DPOs in Pacific countries, we faced more legal and administrative hurdles. We needed to set up a separate entity, with trustees, legal agreements and yet more paperwork. We worked under the expert guidance of World Relief Australia, in order to be able to legally send funds overseas. This meant we needed to prepare a project proposal according to their requirements and report to them regularly on progress and expenditure, to comply with Government legislation.

To set up a simple website, which might attract funds from anyone in Australia, we were required to register our organization with many State Government authorities, each with different reporting

requirements and paperwork. In reality, the number of donors to APIDS rarely exceeded a few dozen people, but to maintain the website, annual returns were required even if no funds were generated from a particular state. The arrival of the Australian Charities and Not for Profits Commission (ACNC) heralded simpler procedures overall, a welcome change. While we were still required to submit initial paperwork and annual reporting, including sharing our financial information, reporting to a single national body rather than multiple state bodies is much more efficient.

Our founding group was rather highly qualified and certainly well-connected. One of the founding Directors, Maryanne Diamond went on to be the President of World Blind Union, winner of the prestigious international Louis Braille award, and Chair of International Disability Alliance. She also received an Order of Australia in 2014 and was nominated as finalist in the Victorian of the Year awards in 2017. Another, the founding President, Daniel Stubbs, had been the CEO of the ACT Council of Social Services, before studying for a law degree by distance education, while living in New Caledonia, and undertaking major research pieces on disability issues in the region for the United Nations⁷. Another, Bill Jolley, had long played leadership roles on the boards of Seeing Eye Dogs Australia and Blind Citizens Australia and had deep experience of DPOs in Australia and global disability movements.

Board members clearly had strong backgrounds in international development, disability inclusion and policy but importantly all of us also had strong relationships with DPO members and work experience in Pacific countries. Respect-based relationships and the trust that comes with long-term collaboration, are critical for the achievement of culturally relevant and sustainable development outcomes in Pacific contexts.

Our work gathers energy

Collectively, we used our experiences and networks to shape our advocacy and support activities. As some of us travelled to Pacific countries as part of our professional work, we met and supported emerging DPOs. We used a partnership approach to our work, developing trust and collaboration with DPOs. Once low-key agreements were signed, we offered small grants for DPOs to achieve their own objectives. We signed 18 agreements between 2006 to 2015 (see Table 2). With our combined expertise in international development and disability inclusion, we found our advice was in demand when the Australian Government decided to develop its first policies on disability inclusion for the aid program. We also found that our presence at the regional meetings of DPOs, under the newly formed Pacific Disability Forum, was valued. One of us became the interpreter for the French-speaking delegations, and we also informally assisted people to understand jargon into simplified English or Melanesian pidgin, in which one of our Directors is fluent. Some of us were also asked to draft conference communiques and facilitate meetings between DPOs and development partners.

The importance of DPOs became even evident in the early 2010s. CRPD gives DPOs an official role to represent the views of people with disabilities and advocate for disability rights in all countries. Development donors also began to engage with DPOs on a wide variety of policy and programming issues. DPOs began to change, grow and attract more and more development partners. While many remain entirely voluntary and fragile, others set up offices, employed staff members and attracted substantial funds. Our partners were delighted when we offered small grants for them to do their own

⁷ Available at <http://wwda.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/pacificsisters1.pdf>

activities, defined within their own contexts and frames of reference. We didn't ask for 'project proposals' but a simple request, with a short explanation of how they'd proceed. The average size of grants was approximately A\$1,500. Some DPOs were happy with A\$500 grants and others able to absorb around A\$3,000 every 6 to 12 months.

Over the 11 years of APIDS grants (2007 to 2017), a total of A\$232,800 was provided directly to DPOs in the form of small grants. The annual average was just over A\$21,163 and the maximum funding was \$48,530 in 2015. Table 1 and Figure 1 summarise the annual funds (both are provided for accessibility). Table 2 lists the names and countries for each of the DPO partners.

Figure 1 Funds provided by APIDS by year

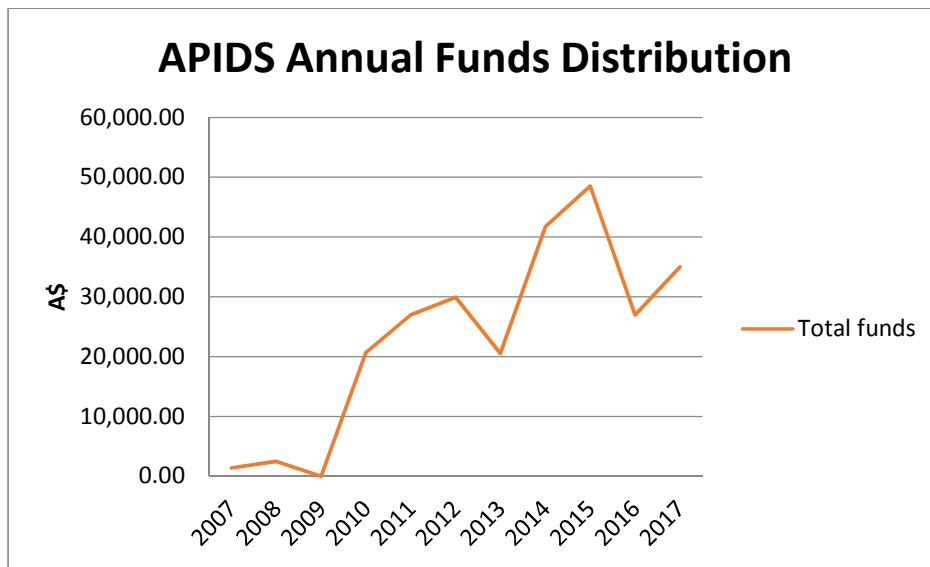


Table 1 Funds provided by year

Year	Total funds
2007	1,400
2008	2,500
2009	0
2010	20,670
2011	27,000
2012	29,950
2013	20,500
2014	41,750
2015	48,530
2016	27,000
2017	35,000
TOTAL FUNDS	A\$232,800

Table 2 Names and countries of DPO partners and countries

DPO name	Country
Cook Islands National Disability Council	Cook Islands
Disability Promotion and Advocacy	Vanuatu
Fiji Disabled People's Federation	Fiji
Fiji Association of the Deaf	Fiji
Fusi Alofa	Tuvalu
Naunau'o e Alamaite Tonga Association	Tonga
Nauru Disabled People's Association	Nauru
Nuanua O Le Alofa Inc	Samoa
Omekesang	Palau
People with Disability Solomon Islands	Solomon Islands
Papua New Guinea National Assembly of Disabled Persons	Papua New Guinea
Pohnpei Consumers Organization	Federated States of Micronesia
Psychiatric Survivors' Association	Fiji
Ra'es Hadomi Timor Oan	Timor Leste
Spinal Injuries Association	Fiji
Te Toa Matoi	Kiribati
United Blind Persons of Fiji	Fiji
Pacific Disability Forum	Regional

Over time, APIDS Board members settled into a pattern of attending meetings, building and sustaining collaborative partnerships and communicating about small grants and DPO progress. We also actively participated in sector discussions with others, for example through the Australian Disability and Development Consortium (ADDC)⁸. We took up a valuable opportunity to work with PDF to undertake research about the capacity pathways for Pacific DPOs. We contributed towards many other learning and research processes. One of us facilitated ADDC's annual learning and development events and wrote the current guidance for Australian NGOs on how to ensure development programs are disability inclusive⁹. Independently and collaboratively we contributed to disability inclusion in many ways.

APIDS changes and our contexts change too

In late 2009, we added two new highly skilled and enthusiastic directors. One, Kate Matairavula, had helped create the first sign language dictionary in Fiji as an Australian volunteer and now holds a senior role in The Deaf Society. Another, Sally Baker, brought many years of disability inclusive development experience, first as an Australian volunteer in Samoa and then as a researcher with the Nossal Institute for Global Health. And in 2015, two founding directors and Kate decided to move on, due to their other commitments. Three highly experienced and capable board members were elected to replace them. They were Sophie Plumridge, previously Executive Officer for ADDC; Elena Jenkins, a researcher and disability rights campaigner; and Darryl Barrett, who joined us with a strong policy and government background in disability inclusive development in Asia. Their enthusiasm and support for APIDS'

⁸ <http://www.addc.org.au/>

⁹ http://www.addc.org.au/documents/resources/disability-inclusive-development-practice-note-dec-2015_1620.pdf

approaches combined with extensive relevant expertise and experience made them excellent additions to the board.

Over 11 years, APIDS submitted narrative reports, organized audited annual financial reports, created a new website, and complied with multiple taxation, legal and other administrative requirements. We only ever raised relatively small amounts of funds (maximum of \$50,000 per year) and overall more than 90% was provided directly to DPOs. Australian Government legislation required us to send our funds through a third party, in our case World Relief Australia (WRA)¹⁰, which understandably took a percentage of funds for this service. If not for this requirement, and a few very minor direct costs, all our funds would have gone directly to DPOs. All of the work we did as APIDS directors when visiting countries was done voluntarily and we paid our own flights and expenses to attend and work at Pacific disability conferences.

In the early 2010s, a small number of Pacific DPOs began to secure funding from development donors. In some cases this was quite significant funding. For example, DPOs in Samoa, Papua New Guinea and Fiji have now attracted either national government or substantial donor funds. Thus, they had reduced necessity for additional funds from APIDS. Also, as the Australian Government's policies on disability inclusive development¹¹ have been implemented, all development programs funded by DFAT are required to include steps to operate in disability inclusive ways. Primarily, this means consulting with DPOs, which has created extra demands on them as organisations. To a lesser extent, this has meant there are more options available to DPOs in terms of sources of advice and support.

In the period 2005 to about 2010, APIDS was frequently mentioned as a key partner for Pacific DPOs in public statements and meetings. Over subsequent years, with many other development partners entering the scene, our support became relatively less important. In 2013, APIDS recognized this shift and began to question the need to continue, particularly given the disproportionate administrative requirements of operating in Australia. We asked our partners some questions, within a context of seeking to close the organization. We were overwhelmed by the plea for us to continue! Pacific DPOs reported that they valued APIDS for the following benefits:

- shared commitment to common goals
- joint leadership on disability inclusion
- contribution to capacity of Pacific DPOs which has resulted in stronger organisations and more effective planning
- advocacy training
- introduction of strengths based thinking and approaches for DPOs, which has contributed to increased levels of confidence, motivation and capacity
- provision of expertise through joint research with PDF on capacity of Pacific DPOs
- contribution to the development and maintenance of offices of DPOs for example in the form of office rent, equipment, furnishings and supplies
- promotion of DPOs as the key conduit for disability inclusive development in the region
- shared understanding of CRPD and the need for its ratification in the region

¹⁰ <https://www.wra.org.au/>

¹¹ <http://dfat.gov.au/about-us/publications/Pages/development-for-all-2015-2020.aspx>

- smooth running of project funding cycle for DPOs
- participation in meetings, events and celebrations which strengthens bonds and shared understanding
- contribution to priority organisational expenses such as travel costs and ongoing salaries
- regular funding for short term activities
- provision of advice, knowledge and assistance for PDF activities.

Partner organisations pleaded with us to continue, arguing:

- APIDS' role is still very relevant and important, even though the environment has changed
- the threat of cuts in aid from Australia means that the broader funding environment is uncertain, so APIDS' role is more critical
- APIDS' support is regarded as beneficial, flexible, responsive, relevant and timely (particularly compared with other sources of funding)
- APIDS' support is important for DPOs' work in planning, project delivery and achieving success
- APIDS enables DPOs to support their affiliates at branch level, outside capital cities, and to support the work of sub-groups such as youth groups and women's groups
- APIDS contributes to DPOs' understanding of the broader context of aid and development and disability inclusive development in particular
- APIDS' ways of working enable DPOs to meet their own priorities.

In the face of this, we agreed to continue. To ease the administrative burden on a few individuals, we sought to spread duties more evenly across the directors. While this created a less-than-coherent approach to communications, it worked relatively well and operations continued as before: grants were provided; communications continued; we visited our partners when we could; and we held meetings, organized audits and submitted reports.

Celebrations

In 2015, APIDS celebrated its 10th anniversary, with a fabulous dinner with our directors, supporters and friends. An attractive and accessible celebration booklet was produced, highlighting stories from many of our partners about their efforts and positive collaboration with APIDS. Many copies of the booklet travelled to Pacific countries and have since popped up unexpectedly in offices and communities. We increasingly shared good news stories on social media as more of our partners joined in. Our approaches and contributions were celebrated widely.

Nagging questions continued

But by early 2016, the question arose again about whether we were needed in the context of reducing demand for our existence, relative to the amount of administration required to remain as a registered company. We comprised a group of super capable professionals with busy lives and families to support, and none of us had the time to dedicate to complying with others' systems simply to remain in existence: we felt any time we had spare should be for our DPO partners. Setting up new fundraising processes, reporting, organizing meetings and typing up minutes, and submitting forms to multiple Australian organisations for compliance purposes rather than for the sake of adding value, began to make little sense.

In April 2016, a board meeting was called to address the future of APIDS. A paper was drafted by one of the directors, drawing on contemporary literature about development and the roles of NGOs. The paper documented the changes that had occurred in APIDS' life, issues about our status, potential options for the future and recommendations. Board discussions focused on APIDS' core strengths and we realized these could easily continue, even if we did not have a legal entity in place. Advocacy, provision of technical, moral and other forms of support as well as funding could all be continued, without the administrative load.

After hours of discussion, consideration of options and soul-searching, it was agreed that we would enter into a process of winding down as an Australian registered organisation. Importantly, as individuals and as a group, we wanted to continue to collaborate with DPOs and support disability inclusion in the region at multiple levels for the foreseeable future. Equally importantly, our partners were consulted individually and collectively. We explained that from their perspective, very little would change, even if APIDS closed as an organization, and they expressed no concerns. Moral support and collegiality would continue, funds could still be provided and expertise would still be on tap, not on top. Engagement with partners could be sustained just as it had previously, just without the formality of an Australian-registered organisation.

A way forward

In searching for ways to sustain our strengths but shed our burdens, we found that under WRA, we could operate as a 'project' rather than as a registered company. This arrangement is a convenient way of continuing our efforts, with reduced compliance burdens, which are carried by WRA for the cost of a small fee from funds collected. In early 2017, a last burst of energy was given to the multitudes of tasks associated with de-registering as a company, including taking down the website, submitting documents to various institutions and advising members and partners. At the end of August 2017, a letter arrived from the Australian Securities and Investments Commission to say APIDS had officially been deregistered. It was cause for celebration!

Lessons learned

While in many ways APIDS' journey is unique, our experience suggests that other groups of people and organisations may benefit from the lessons we have learned and the questions raised. These are summarized in Table 3 below.

Table 3 Lessons, questions and possible solutions from APIDS' experience

Lesson learned	Questions to consider	Possible solutions
Bringing together people who are enthusiastic, knowledgeable and skilled is an important contribution to change	Who best to bring together? What mix of skills and experience is required in relation to the goals of the collective group?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Carefully consider the mix of personal qualities and expertise (and networks) needed for a functioning group • Build shared understanding among the group and enable regular reflection • Avoid founders syndrome
Avoiding harm caused as a result of	How can respect-based collaborative arrangements be	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure that different agendas are explicit and understood

externally-driven agendas is paramount	developed and undertaken when different organizational imperatives are involved?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continually seek to understand the drivers of change in other contexts Focus on humility and contribution rather than ‘driving’ change from outside
Setting up a registered company in Australia as an NGO is highly burdensome	Is it necessary to create a formal, registered NGO, to be able to operate in partnership, offer moral support as a collective, and provide funding overseas?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consider becoming a project within an existing multi-partner NGO, rather than sustaining a separate formal entity Operate informal partnerships, although remember it is illegal to send funds overseas without an officially auspiced organization.
Maintaining the administrative load of an NGO is time-consuming	Do you have sufficient personnel with the time, over many years, to maintain multiple administrative processes, which appear less focused on quality outcomes and partnerships and more focused on Australian perceptions of compliance?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consider whether maintaining an NGO is worth the benefits for communities or partners in the countries where you work If you decide to appoint paid staff, consider the implications for fund-raising just for Australian compliance purposes – the treadmill!
True partnerships across cultures require sustained effort and can be challenging. For people from individualist cultures such as Australia, this is not a natural way to work, so we need to reflect and consider how we come across in culturally respectful ways.	<p>How can we work in truly collaborative ways with people and organisations from cultures which are different from our own?</p> <p>How can we continually strengthen our understanding of the contexts in which we work, to inform our own expectations and those of our partner organisations?</p> <p>How can we sustain a reflective approach to all our work, when the environment in which we work focuses on other priorities (producing results, complying with others’ requirements, completing others’ forms....)?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consider the specific requirements of partnership development and maintenance – time, people, enthusiasm, long-term commitment, flexibility, adaptiveness, cultural respect etc. Consider how to meet the need to continually deepen understanding of the contexts in which you work, to understand the complexities involved, the drivers of change, the influences on development and the changes that affect these. Consider how to do so, at low cost! Develop skills and systems to support true partnership & reflection processes.
The context in which aid is delivered is highly complex and rapidly changing	How will you keep up to date with contemporary approaches to development, partnership, aid effectiveness, legal requirements for NGOs etc?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure your board includes a range of personnel who are interested and capable of keeping up with these changes Schedule regular reflection and review.
If you achieve your goal quickly, there is no need to continue	Are there other ways to contribute to these or broader systemic changes? For example,	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> While you may feel the ‘development need’ is always there, in reality, change largely happens when there is demand

just for the sake of it.	could individuals or networks join a broader movement? Could existing organisations be supported to work differently? Could we successfully advocate individually or collectively without maintaining a formal organizational structure? Could we document our experiences to share with others, without sustaining an organizational structure?	for it from people, especially leaders, and organisations in their context. Thus, you need to monitor the demand and try to understand the reasons for changes. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Most importantly, there is value in continually asking the question about whether continuing on the treadmill of competitive fundraising in Australia is actually a useful thing to do.
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The last point in Table 3 is one of the most important issues for other NGOs to consider: whether it is necessary to continue to maintain an NGO as a separate entity, if other ways to contribute towards change are more feasible and as likely (or more likely) to be effective. Of course, it is always possible to construct an answer that says ‘people are in need’ but is the labour-intensive and costly maintenance of a full organizational structure the most appropriate means to respond? We have witnessed other NGOs, which find they are caught in a cycle of having to raise money to keep operating and to keep operating to raise money. They spend inordinate energy trying to find multiple ways of continuing and fund-raising without deeply considering whether the energy is proportionate to the value they contribute in that form. There is plenty of evidence that transferring ‘wealth’ from one country does not address ‘poverty’ in another. Rather, success is more likely in the context of long-term, respectful collaboration based on shared commitment and ongoing learning between citizens and organisations.

What next?

The board members have agreed to continue to work collaboratively as a project management group under WRA. We have negotiated a Memorandum of Understanding between us, WRA and the Pacific Disability Forum, covering these new arrangements. The funds we raise will be channeled through PDF to its members, which are the same DPOs that APIDS partnered with during its 11 years. PDF is able to maintain close contact with its members, since it is governed by them. PDF will therefore be up-to-date with current priorities and emerging issues and they will work in Pacific cultural ways. They will also be able to treat us as supportive collaborative colleagues and friends, who are on tap to assist however we can.

APIDS board members will continue in their own ways, both deliberately and opportunistically, to contribute to the achievement of disability inclusive development. We will both work in the Pacific, in Australia and globally, as we can. And most importantly, Pacific DPOs will continue to grow in experience and scope. Based on existing strengths, they will change at a pace they can manage, in ways that work for them within their own countries and communities and with a wide range of partners. The partnership and collaboration will continue, on a solid foundation, the Australian paperwork burden will be significantly reduced, and Pacific DPOs will continue to work towards their own goals.

November 2017