

COMMONWEALTH DISABLED PEOPLE'S FORUM



Commonwealth Disabled
People's Forum

MANIFESTO FOR COMMONWEALTH YEAR OF YOUTH (2023)



GREETINGS FROM THE COMMONWEALTH DISABLED PEOPLE'S FORUM CDPF

[a Commonwealth Accredited Organisation] representing more than **450 million disabled people in the 56 countries of the Commonwealth**. [CDPF Members are in 49 Commonwealth Countries with 95 member organisation Disabled People's Organisations DPOs, 46 of who are national umbrella DPOs.] **Check our website www.commonwealthdpf.org**

CDPF understands that disability is socially created as disabled people have physical, mental, sensory, psycho-social and other long-term impairments that in interaction with attitudinal, environmental and organisational barriers, disable them. **This paradigm shift** away from an individual and medical model approach to a social model/human rights approach to disability is essential, to bring about equality for disabled youth and disabled people more generally.

The number of Disabled Children and Youth with long term impairments in the Commonwealth is growing and their exclusion from education, training, employment, health and well being is increasing, especially in low and middle income countries. The World Health Organisation now identify 16% of the population as disabled people, 1.3 billion people. In the Commonwealth where 60% of the population are aged 30 years or under, there are likely to be **230-250 million disabled children and youth in the Commonwealth**.

CDPF calls on Disabled People's Organisations (DPOs) or Organisations of People with Disabilities (OPDs) to champion the rights of disabled youth, develop, listen to and prioritise their concerns and support them to become leaders.

CDPF calls on the Commonwealth and member Governments to prioritise tackling the barriers disabled youth face to leading equal lives and develop long term strategies in the areas highlighted below.

The main statutory instrument for challenging disability is the **United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD)**. This has been adopted and ratified by nearly all Commonwealth countries, but its **implementation is slow** and very patchy. Even in the 25 countries that have enacted laws on this issue, these are often not put into practice. During Year of Youth, Governments should prioritise measures to improve the position of disabled youth in their countries.

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PREJUDICE AND DISCRIMINATION against the above groups is **Disabilism** and is deeply entrenched in all our cultures, reinforced by stereotypes, stigma and traditional beliefs. Focussing on Media, journalists and public relations professionals, Government should be challenging these views (Article 8 UNCRPD) amongst the general population and in schools and colleges.

We urgently need a Commonwealth Protocol on Disability Access and Inclusion to be developed and adopted by the Commonwealth and Member Countries to improve the position for **Disabled Youth** and all disabled people in the Commonwealth. The Commonwealth is lagging behind the United Nations in this. The protocol to include practical procedures on access, representation at Conferences and representative forums and panels. The development of this protocol to be jointly produced with representative Disabled People's Organisations. **(Article 9 UNCRPD)**. **Year of Youth** is a good place to start meeting the diverse voices of disabled youth at local, national and Commonwealth levels.

PRIORITISE DIGITAL INCLUSION which benefits disabled people by allowing them to live richer, more independent lives. Furthermore, digital inclusion aids in the reduction of social isolation and the promotion of social inclusion. Develop strategies for promoting digital inclusion for people with impairments. i.e Make their websites and digital services accessible to people with different impairments e.g deaf, blind, DeafBlind, Learning Difficulties or Neurodiverse, provide training and assistance to disabled people in using digital technologies. Ensure during this Year of Youth all digital communications across the Commonwealth and Governments are accessible. Create more free access points to the internet.

DEVELOP DISABLED YOUTH INVOLVEMENT AND EQUALITY. Innovative, tailored approaches are necessary to guarantee that disabled children and young people are heard and responded to, especially disabled girls, those with communication challenges, mental health issues, learning impairments, neurodiversity or complicated health requirements. Governments should set up mechanisms to hear the representative views of disabled youth on a regular basis.

SUFFICIENT GOVERNMENT FUNDING FOR DISABLED YOUTH INVOLVEMENT. In this Year of Youth Governments must prioritize disabled children and youth in their Program for Government and Budget procedures. Supports and services that are critical to ensuring that disabled children and youth may exercise their rights must be safeguarded. Disabled People's Organisations (DPOs) need to represent the views and voices of the diversity of disabled people to their Governments across the Commonwealth, in line with Article 4.3 and 33.3 of the Convention. A survey of CDPF member organisations showed that DPOs need long-term core funding and that Commonwealth Governments who have ratified the Convention should be providing this. **To make progress with implementing Disability Rights and the UNCRPD, DPOs/OPDs need long-term core support to function** and develop the democratic structures and build capacity for disabled people to work with their Government's to bring this about. **Governments must consider allocating a small proportion of their National Income for this purpose.**

GLOBAL ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE AND COMPENSATION FOR THE IMPACT OF CLIMATE CHANGE. Disabled Youth and people are at enhanced risk of negative impact in events caused by the climate emergency, must be in the vanguard of solutions and they and their needs must be included in all emergency responses.

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EDUCATION. Disabled Youth and Children are disproportionately excluded from all levels of education. Progress towards implementing inclusive education systems is too slow with the barriers of access, teacher preparation, unsuitable curriculum and assessment not being sufficiently funded or addressed. Disabled children and youth are impacted by bullying and they must be engaged in the formulation, implementation, monitoring, and revision of anti-bullying policies in schools and colleges and be educated as rights holders. **Specific schemes to improve take up and access to school, college and universities must be developed in the Year of Youth.**

DISABILITY EQUALITY TRAINING. All business leaders and public service professionals i.e. doctors, nurses, civil servants, social workers, teachers and lecturers need training based on the **paradigm shift from Medical to Social Human Rights Thinking on Disability**, its implications and undergo Awareness Raising and Training for Disability Equality. **Disabled Youth should be trained and empowered here to take the lead.**

EMPLOYMENT, VOCATIONAL TRAINING & TRANSFORMATION OF ECONOMIC ACTIVITY
Disabled Youth are disproportionately unemployed and not economically active. CDPF calls for a massive uplift in effort to provide accessible employment training. Pressure on employers to recruit disabled staff and a focus on supporting disabled youth to set up their own enterprises

EQUALITY FOR DISABLED YOUNG WOMEN. Public campaigns supported by Governments to challenge and prevent the high levels of sexual abuse and discrimination we are subjected to. Implement prosecutions against abusers. Support and promote disabled young women into public service jobs and create measures for private enterprise to do likewise. **Governments need to take a lead in implementing effective measures and public awareness against harassment and abuse against disabled young women and girls.**

HEALTH INCLUDING MENTAL HEALTH needs to be more focused on in early intervention, and preventative ways to improve the emotional health and well-being of disabled Youth and children, as well as providing assistance for their families. There must be Equal disability access to child and adolescent mental health care.

INCREASE PROVISION AND ACCESS TO MOBILITY AIDS, REHABILITATION, ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY FOR DISABLED YOUTH: Sign Language, Braille, Mobility Aids, Auxiliary & Alternative forms of communication are essential to address various barriers disabled youth face. **Having the right equipment, support and professional expertise available at local centres is a priority to help unlock the potential of disabled youth.** Governments should develop projects to deliver these during Year of Youth & beyond.

EQUALITY FOR NEURODIVERSE YOUNG PEOPLE AND OTHER UNDERREPRESENTED GROUPS SUCH AS DEAFBLIND YOUTH AND YOUTH WITH MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES. Governments to recognise the high and growing incidence of neurodiversity and prioritise funding for training teachers, education staff and creating employment opportunities and forums for self-advocacy for those who are neurodiverse and others with conditions that are not commonly catered for. **Legislation should be enacted and implemented for these groups with a focus on self-advocacy and supported decision making.**

FAMILY LIFE AND RELATIONSHIPS. Disabled Youth and children to grow up as accepted and useful members of families and community is preferable to institutionalisation. Young disabled people should have full access to Sex and Relationships education, be supported and empowered to develop relationships and family life.

INDEPENDENT LIVING. The Year of Youth should be used to mobilise resources and support for ending segregation of disabled Youth and children and the provision of inclusive independent living solutions.

SPORT AND CULTURAL EVENTS ACROSS THE COMMONWEALTH NEED TO BE INCLUSIVE OF DISABLED YOUTH. Such events locally, nationally and Commonwealth-wide should be utilised to bring about inclusion and a transformation of public attitudes to disabled people. When such events are held, DPOs/OPDs need to be fully involved to develop access, awareness and equality training.

POLITICAL REPRESENTATION. Disabled Youth should be prioritised for engagement and full involvement in the democratic system at all levels from local to national. Positive action should be exercised in selecting candidates, creating access, support and in selecting disability policy issues to be legislated and implemented.

LEGAL SYSTEM. In the Year of Youth measures should be introduced to make it easier for Disabled Youth to resolve their issues in the courts and tribunal system. These to include reasonable accommodations, free legal representation and positive action for recruitment to work in the judicial system.

PEACE, MORE EQUAL AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT. Enhance work on implementing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by mobilising Disabled Youth and their families to embed programmes and actions for sustainable development in the local community, businesses, schools, colleges and the media and setting up local participatory structures to monitor and take forward Government commitments to implementing the SDGs.



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