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**Module 13 Summary: Building DPOs - Campaigning and Increasing OUR voice.**

1. **OBJECTIVES OF MODULE 13**

Today it is necessary that disabled people speak up and stand up for human rights. 2023 marks the 75th Anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). The UDHR  serves as a beacon of hope for people all around the world. Adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on December 10, 1948, it defines the basic rights and freedoms that all human beings are entitled to, regardless of their race, gender, religion, or nationality.

1. **THE LANGUAGE CDPF USES**

**Disabled people**: We choose to call ourselves ‘disabled people’: In the Commonwealth Disabled People’s Forum (CDPF) because of the development of the ‘social model of disability’. We view ourselves as united by a common oppression so are proud to identify as ‘disabled people’ rather than ‘people with disabilities’. When we are talking about the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities we will use ‘people or persons with disabilities’.

1. **DPOs and UNCRPD**

* The CRPD presents multiple opportunities for organizations of persons with disabilities to engage in advocacy at all levels, including national implementation and engaging with the human rights and sustainable development process at the United Nations.
* Article 40 of the CRPD stipulates that States Parties (signatories to the Convention) shall meet regularly in a Conference of States Parties (COSP) to consider any matter with regard to the implementation of the Convention. Since 2008, the COSP has been held annually at the UN headquarters in New York, covering a range of themes and issues in round-tables, interactive dialogues and side-events.
* The Civil Society CRPD Forum is held annually ahead of the Conference of States Parties to the CRPD, at the United Nations in New York.
* The Forum gives space for open discussion and sharing of a huge diversity of experience and perspective from across the disability rights community, and the opportunity to engage with governments, UN bodies and others from across civil society. IDA support the coordination and facilitation of the Forum by the wider movement of organisations of persons with disabilities.

1. **What is a DPO?**

* Disabled persons’ organisations or DPOs are representative organisations or groups of disabled people, where disabled people constitute a majority of the overall staff, board, members and volunteers in all levels of the organisation. It can include organisations of relatives of disabled people (only those representing disabled children, people with intellectual disabilities, Deafblind or those with brain injury or dementia). But the primary aim of these organisations is empowerment and the growth of self-advocacy of disabled people.
* DPOs may be “single-disability” organisations and represent individuals with a particular type of impairment, such as a hearing or visual impairment such as country branches of the World Blind Union, or they may be “cross-impairment’ such as the National Union of Disabled Persons of Uganda (NUDIPU) which is a national umbrella organisation of associations of disabled people which are non-governmental, autonomous and voluntary in nature.
* DPOs may be stand-alone organisations or may exist in connection to Community Based Rehabilitation (CBR) programmes. In many countries, DPOs undergo a process of formal registration, but this is not the case for all groups. Organisations of disabled people may go by a number of different names such as disability Self-Help Groups (SHGs), savings and lending groups or Disabled People’s Groups (DPGs). In many countries there are also networks of disabled people's organisations.
* When different DPOs decide to form a network, this can result in forming a cooperation with common goals and objectives or cross-disability alliances. If the network of DPOs is more structured and establishes itself with yet another level of representation, a cross-disability federation emerges. A federation of DPOs (at national or regional level) usually has a well-defined structure and is a membership organisation with a legal status for e.g. National Union of Disabled Persons of Uganda (NUDIPU) and National Disability Network in India. Disabled people's organisations also exist at the international level, e.g. the World Federation of the Deaf, the World Blind Union, Disabled Peoples International; many of these have joined together to form an international network known as the International Disability Alliance (IDA). This came together out of the International Disability Caucus which was key to get disabled people’s views into the UN CRPD while it was being negotiated. [[1]](#footnote-0)

1. **Roles played by DPOs**

There are broadly three theme areas in which DPOs operate:

* **Participation and factors that facilitate participation**
* **Development of partnerships and connections**
* **Self-development and self-help**
* **Participation and Factors that facilitate Participation -** In this review, participation was defined broadly to encompass participation in all aspects of community life, such as political processes, social and cultural activities (Governance and Social Development Resource Centre, 2016).There was some evidence that DPOs were involved in a range of different activities that promoted the participation of disabled people either directly or by facilitating upstream factors of participation, such as increasing knowledge of the rights of disabled people or increasing their confidence.

**a) Knowledge of Rights -** To advocate effectively for their participation in society, disabled people need to first know about their rights. Studies report that DPO members were more aware of their rights and privileges after joining groups.

**Case Study – DPO Australia[[2]](#footnote-1)**

Disabled People’s Organisations Australia (DPO Australia) is an alliance of four national (DPOs). DPO Australia promotes and advances the human rights and freedoms of all disabled people in Australia by working together on areas of shared **knowledge**, strategic priorities and opportunities.

**b) Confidence for Participation –** Research has shown that members reported being more connected with society in general after joining the groups. It was suggested that the group helped members get used to participating in activities outside their homes, and increased their confidence to be involved in activities such as shopping and visiting friends.

**Case Study –** DPI-Asia-Pacific. The seminars and membership meetings of local, national and international organisations bolster the feelings of solidarity in disabled people, as participants in the DPI Asia/Pacific Regional Convention in 1984 felt: “It helped create power for people”. “Knowing that you are not on your own is a very empowering bit of knowledge. It gives you a strange sense of security and the will to create change”. “It was a wonderful experience for me. I felt I was part of the majority and normal again, not just a "poor thing" in a wheelchair.” [[3]](#footnote-2)

**c) DPOs as Changemakers and Influencers - Political processes and Advocacy**

Case Studies

Members of mental health self-help organisations in seven **African countries**, in a study, were involved in political processes by representing their organisations in local, national and international forums to lobby for their rights to education, housing, employment and basic mental health services. Newspapers reported DPO members were involved in global discussions pertaining to the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

**Case Study India – Accessible Elections- National Disability Network** fought a long and protracted battle with Chief Election Commission and government authorities from 2004 to 2019, for their right to vote on a par with other citizens. Voters having one of the 21 disabilities(impairments), mentioned by the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act 2016, are termed as voters with disabilities. According to the strategic framework on accessible elections finalised at a two-day national consultation held in 2018, the EC agreed to look at alternative voting methods like advance voting or early voting, voting from home, postal vote, transport assistance to PwDs or mobile polling stations for disabled people.Among the minimum facilities and services announced during the awareness programme for disabled people included ramps, wheelchairs, accessible toilets, braille stickers on Electronic Voting Machines , volunteers with sign language training at polling stations, magnifying glasses for low-vision voters, dummy ballot sheets for blind people, doorstep transport, among others[[4]](#footnote-3).

**d) Awareness-raising Activities - Sashakt Campaign[[5]](#footnote-4)** in Odisha, India, led to awareness of disability rights in an entire state of Odisha in India in the year 2018. Sashakt campaign has been designed to create awareness about laws and the rights of disabled people. It is an attempt at an Equal India, an Inclusive India and an India where differences are accepted and diversity celebrated. Over 20,000 people with disabilities and youth came together in Odisha to initiate the campaign in India which reached 100,000 people. It was a multi-level, multi-stakeholder campaign to build awareness of disability issues, and support for an inclusive and accessible environment for disabled individuals.

**Development of Partnerships and Connections –**

There is evidence to suggest that DPOs often contribute to the development of networks and relationships among disabled people and their families, as well as forming networks and alliances with external, non-disability related organisations.

**Networks between DPOs  -** In several papers, DPOs were able to collaborate or ally with similar groups in their local areas to develop supportive partnerships. In **South Africa**, DPOs joined together to form a regional body for collaboration between psychosocial disability groups.). A DPO in **Malaysia** maintained a number of alliances with other disability-related groups and agencies and joined together as a recognised confederation (within Disabled Peoples International) with two other disability societies.

**3. Self-development and Self-help**

**Case Study** **Inclusive Education** – Alliance for Inclusive Education (ALLFIE[[6]](#footnote-5)) has a vision of ‘a world where inclusive education is a right not a struggle.’ ALLFIE is a disabled people-led organisation, which seeks to build alliances with individuals and organisations who share our vision. ALLFIE’s relationships and influence stretch over a wide range of networks and alliances interested in education, inclusion, Disabled children’s services.

1. **DPO Case studies**
   * **Case Study – Single Disability Organisation**

The World Blind Union (WBU) ([www.worldblindunion.org](http://www.worldblindunion.org)) is the internationally recognized organisation, representing the 253 million blind and partially sighted persons in 190 member countries. They are the voice of the blind, speaking to governments and international bodies on issues concerning blindness and low vision in conjunction with our members. WBU brings together all the major national and international organisations of blind persons and those organisations providing services to people with low vision to work on the issues affecting the quality of life for blind people.

* **Case Study -Cross Disability Organisations**

**IDA – International Disability Alliance[[7]](#footnote-6)**, is an Alliance of 14 global and regional organisations of people with disabilities/disabled people. IDA brings together over 1,100 organisations of disabled persons and their families from across eight global and six regional networks. Together they promote the rights of disabled people across the United Nations' efforts to advance human rights and sustainable development. The cornerstone of IDA’s work is the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN CRPD).

* **National DPO NDN – National Disability Network, India[[8]](#footnote-7)** . NCPEDP New Delhi, felt that disabled people and disability groups should be encouraged to take the leadership role in this crusade in disability empowerment.  ights movement is spread equitably across the entire country, and there is an environment of empathy towards the rights and the needs of disabled people.

Some of the Networks achievements have been:

* Getting disability included in the Population Census 2001
* Successfully advocated for India’s ratification of CRPD
* Proper enumeration of people with disabilities in Census 2011
* Successfully advocated for a new Disability Rights Bill based on CRPD
* Submitted Stakeholder’s Report on Disability for India’s Universal Periodic Review
* Submitted Parallel Report on Disability for India’s CEDAW review
* Submitted Parallel Report on Disability for India’s CRC Review
* **Africa Disability Alliance (ADA)[[9]](#footnote-8)** is an African knowledge-based agency that works through networks to advocate for the human rights of disabled people. ADA also created the **Network of African Women with Disabilities** (NAWWD), which focuses on advocating for women with disabilities with governments and the U.N.
* **Local**

**The Council of Disabled Persons in Zimbabwe[[10]](#footnote-9)** (<https://www.fodpz.org>) promotes awareness about the needs and abilities of disabled people and the need for their integration into community through its Outreach Program. Village leaders are sensitized to begin to look at including disabled people in community life.

**Canada**, the Manitoba League of the Physically Handicapped in conjunction with the Mennonite Central Committee, ran a programme. Disabled people spoke to school children about disabled people's issues. The premise behind such a program is that children will be exposed to a disabled person and hear that person's point of view.

1. **OUR CALL AS CDPF**

* We need DPOs to hold our governments to account for inclusive development and growth.
* The CDPF also calls on governments to take the following longer-term steps to strengthen the participation and voice of people with disabilities in the grassroots:
* Actively involve disabled people and their representative organizations, and civil society, in planning of all aspects that impact the lives of the disabled.
* Allocate adequate financial to build the capacity of DPOs and empower DPOs and networks to participate in the policy formation process, monitor the implementation and be vocal in ensuring dignity of living of all people with disabilities.
* Build travel support for DPO participation in national, regional and international meets that impact lives of disabled. Host countries to create support for logistics during the events.

1. See video of Michael Stein wheelchair using Professor at Harvard Law School on Drafting of UNCRPD <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GWIf_NzpvYo> Especially from 7.38 on role3 of disabled people in making the UNCRPD. [↑](#footnote-ref-0)
2. <https://dpoa.org.au/> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
3. <https://www.independentliving.org/docs5/RoleofOrgDisPeople.html> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
4. <https://vikaspedia.in/social-welfare/differently-abled-welfare/schemes-programmes/accessible-elections> [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
5. [www.sashakt.co.in](http://www.sashakt.co.in) [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
6. <https://www.allfie.org.uk/campaigns/educate-dont-segregate> [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
7. <https://www.internationaldisabilityalliance.org> [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
8. <https://www.ncpedp.org/National_Disability_Network%28NDN%29> [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
9. <https://www.africadisabilityalliance.org/> [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
10. <https://www.fodpz.org> This was the first DPO is Southern Africa helping to start DPSA and others led by Joshua Malinga. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)