**Why a Commonwealth Disability Inclusion Action Plan?**

**Commonwealth Disabled People’s Forum (CDPF)** have been asked to provide reasons why this Disability Inclusion Action Plan should be adopted at Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting CHOGM, October 2024.

The CDPF has over 100 Disabled People led organisations in membership, in 49 Commonwealth countries, with a representative elected Executive Committee. We seek to gain Equality for all the estimated 450 million disabled citizens of the Commonwealth and help member countries to fully implement the [United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities UNCRPD (2006).](https://www.un.org/disabilities/documents/convention/convoptprot-e.pdf)

Based on the CDPF experience of working across Commonwealth countries and within the Commonwealth, attending CHOGM, Forums, Ministerial Meetings and Commonwealth Secretariat events, we have formed the view that disabled people are poorly served in terms of access, equality, inclusion and voice. While we recognise that CHOGM communiques in 2018 and 2022 have mentioned the UNCRPD and its implementation and challenging stigma, we have not witnessed any serious attempts to take forward the disability rights agenda across the Commonwealth.

The United Nations adopted a [Disability Inclusion Strategy](https://www.un.org/en/content/disabilitystrategy/assets/documentation/UN_Disability_Inclusion_Strategy_english.pdf) in 2018.The Commonwealth has no such comprehensive approach to disability.

The Commonwealth Disabled People’s Forum (CDPF) is proposing and lobbying for Commonwealth member states to adopt a Disability Inclusion Action Plan covering Articles and Action Points at the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in Samoa, October 2024.

It is 18 years since the UNCRPD was adopted at the United Nations. All but Tonga of our 56 member countries have now ratified the UNCRPD.

**The implementation of the UNCRPD requires a root and branch change** in the way disability is viewed across our countries. The Convention takes to a new height the movement **from** the treatment of persons with disabilities as “objects” of charity, medical treatment and social protection **towards** viewing persons with disabilities as “subjects” with rights, who are capable of claiming those rights and making decisions for their lives based on their free and informed consent, as well as being active members of society. [The Convention gives universal recognition to the dignity of persons with disabilities.](https://www.un.org/esa/socdev/enable/convinfopara.htm)

**Implementation also requires countries to recognise** “that disability results from the interaction between persons with impairments and attitudinal and environmental barriers that hinders their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others”. (Preamble- e)

**Called a paradigm shift,** the UNCRPD requires countries to view persons with disabilities, including those who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society, on an equal basis with others. (Article 2)

Impairment has been with us as long as there have been human beings. It is society’s response that has to change to ensure full implementation and equality for all persons with disabilities.

[Accessibility](https://www.un.org/esa/socdev/enable/convinfoguide.htm) is addressed on its own in Article 9 and is also a guiding principle of the Convention. This Convention marks the first time that the concept of accessibility is mentioned in an international human rights instrument. The extremely comprehensive way it is conceived in the Convention represents a large step forward in the evolution of thinking in development and disability.

If the Commonwealth at CHOGM 2024 adopts the Action Plan it will provide ways to collaborate across countries on taking forward the implementation of full rights for persons with disabilities, who have not been mentioned in the Commonwealth Charter and other declarations.

The Kigali [Declaration on Child Care and Protection Reform](https://production-new-commonwealth-files.s3.eu-west-2.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/2023-02/Kigali%20DECLARATION%20on%20Child%20Care%20and%20Protection%20Reform.pdf?VersionId=9wtz6M4XiIUnrZqfffqjv.1Ur9ZtKBVu) , in 2022, provided ways of focusing on a forgotten area and has created new consensus across Commonwealth Ministerial meetings such as Education. The Disability Inclusion Action Plan will do likewise in 2024.

The theme of CHOGM 2024 "One Resilient Common Future: Transforming our Common Wealth" looks at the core pillars of the Commonwealth through a resilience lens. CHOGM 2024 aims to strengthen:

* Resilient democratic institutions upholding human rights, democracy, and the rule of law. The Action Plan provides a strong commitment and realistic proposals for achieving human rights, democratic involvement and application of the rule of law for persons with disabilities, who have largely been excluded or overlooked in these areas.
* A resilient environment to combat climate change. Vital for the future of all of us, but persons with disabilities have been shown to be between 2 and 3 times more at risk in emergency situations and will find it harder to adapt to changing climate and environmental conditions.
* Resilient economies that support recovery and prosperity. Persons with disabilities, especially women, continue to be excluded at much higher rates from employment and livelihood opportunities, creating a huge loss of GDP from every country.
* Resilient societies to empower individuals for a peaceful and productive life. Continuing stigma, discrimination and violence against persons with disabilities must be tackled systematically to achieve this pillar.

The Action Plan defines terms and draws upon the UNCRPD, while the Action Points identify a series of actions that will take the implementation of the UNCRPD in each country and across the Commonwealth as a whole, forward in a step change. It will allow for the exchange of experiences, focus on gathering disaggregated statistics, provide training and coordination of expertise and raise the profile of disability rights for all Commonwealth citizens.

It has been argued that we do not need a stand-alone Disability Inclusion Action Plan and that we can prioritise mainstreaming of disability equality alongside gender and other neglected equality areas.

Experience has taught the Disabled People’s Movement that the Commonwealth needs a twin track approach to disability, including measures to enhance the equality of persons with disabilities in all relevant declarations, policies and documents. But because there are specific requirements of reasonable accommodation, support and accessibility that do not apply in other equality areas, we also need a specific Disability Inclusion Action Plan.

2024 is the right year for the Commonwealth to raise its profile on disability equality. As we move forward grappling with increasing financial, economic, social, political and environmental problems; if disability equality and rights for persons with disabilities are not brought centre stage then, the likelihood is they will forever remain in the margins.

Earlier drafts of the Commonwealth Disability Inclusion Action Plan took the title of Protocol and Strategy. CDPF have decided on the advice of the Commonwealth Secretariat, especially Assistant Secretary Professor Luis Franceschi, that many states are fed up with passing declarations and want Action Plans which will help them tackle the barriers faced by persons with disabilities and forward their equality. CDPF Executive has agreed to this change as we think it so important to move implementation of Disability Rights forward across the Commonwealth.

CDPF has not ‘gone to the wall’ on the language. CDPF favour ‘disabled people’ as we are disabled by the barriers in society, not our impairments. It is the social and culturally derived oppression that has to be changed by removing barriers and giving us equal rights. However, we have recognised that a number of States and many people prefer ‘persons with disabilities’ and so we have adopted ‘persons with disabilities’ in this Disability Inclusion Action Plan and when discussing the UNCRPD.

The key message that **is essential is that the Commonwealth “ups its game” on disability and the Action Plan gives this possibility.**

**Commonwealth Disabled People’s Forum March 2024.**

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