

One Resilient Common Future: Transforming our Commonwealth



COMMONWEALTH HEADS OF GOVERNMENT MEETING 2024

APIA, SAMOA, 21-26 OCTOBER 2024

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COMMONWEALTH DISABLED PEOPLE'S FORUM
C/O WORLD OF INCLUSION
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THE COMMONWEALTH



Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting, 21-26 October
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CDPF

The Commonwealth promotes democracy and equality across its member countries with over 2.5 billion citizens. Over 450 million are persons with disabilities, mainly young people. The purpose of Commonwealth Disabled People's Forum (CDPF) is to bring disabled people, regardless of type of impairment, gender, age, race, indigenous & geographical background, religion, political affiliation from all countries of the Commonwealth, together with a view to having one voice to advocate for promotion and equalization of opportunities for all disabled people.

The theme of this year's event (2024 CHOGM) is: One Resilient Common Future: Transforming our Commonwealth. The leaders will focus their discussions on global economic, environmental and security challenges, and how the Commonwealth can work together to boost trade, innovation and growth to build a more peaceful, sustainable future. Commonwealth Disabled People's Forum (CDPF) is going to monitor the fact that these discussions are woven into the fabric of inclusion, inclusive practices and accessibility.

The Commonwealth Women's Forum will bring together delegates from around the Commonwealth to highlight women's political, economic and societal contributions while identifying policies to advance gender equality and peace for all. Outcomes from the forum will inform discussions among Commonwealth leaders on promoting gender equality and women's empowerment – helping to ensure that women and girls are included at the highest level of decision-making on issues directly affecting them. The programme will provide the opportunity for participants to focus on four priority areas, namely:

- Women in leadership
- Women's economic empowerment
- Gender and climate change
- Ending violence against women and girls

The purpose of the survey conducted by CDPF Women Forum of Commonwealth Disabled People's Forum (CDPF) is to gather information on the participation of women with disabilities/disabled women in the four priority areas to ensure that Commonwealth's Women influences all policies to be disability inclusive.

It is estimated that more than one billion people in the world experience some form of disability. The average prevalence rate in the female population 18 years and older is 19.2 per cent, compared to 12 per cent for males,¹ representing about 1 in 5 women. Disabled women are not a homogenous group. They experience a range and variety of impairments, including physical, psychosocial, intellectual and sensory conditions, that may or may not come with functional limitations. The diversity of women and girls with disabilities also includes those with multiple and intersecting identities, such as being from a particular social class or ethnic, religious and racial background; refugee, migrant, asylum-seeking and internally displaced women; LGBTQI+ persons; women living with and affected by HIV; young and older women; and widowed women, across all contexts. The systemic marginalization, attitudinal and environmental barriers they face lead to lower economic and social status; increased risk of violence and abuse including sexual violence; discrimination as well as harmful gender-based discriminatory practices; and barriers to access education, health care including sexual and reproductive health, information and services, and justice as well as civic and political participation. This hinders participation on an equal basis with others.

To engage and influence the structures and organs of the Commonwealth and especially the heads of government of Commonwealth countries, we are here - Ms. Sarah Muthoni, Chair (Kenya) and Dr. Sruti Mohapatra (India), Vice-Chair of CDPF. I recently led research across the 56 countries of the Commonwealth to understand the barriers and gaps to the full and effective participation of disabled women and girls in the four priority areas of 2024 CHOGM Women's Forum namely: Women in leadership, Women's economic empowerment, Gender and climate change and Ending violence against women and girls. The goal of this research is to contribute to Commonwealth Women's efforts of achieving gender equality and empowerment of all women and girls with disabilities and ensure their full and effective participation in all aspects of life on an equal basis with others in the context of development, leadership, climate change and ending violence.

Hope you enjoy the read.



Dr. Sruti Mohapatra

Vice Chair, Commonwealth Disabled People's Forum (CDPF), London

Founder and CEO, Swabhiman, Bhubaneswar

2022 Awarded by President of India

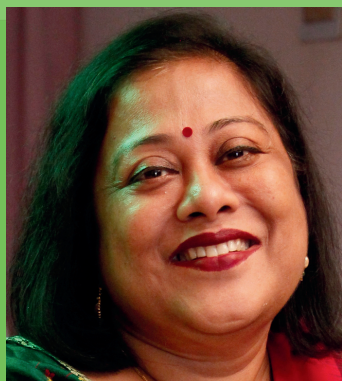
TEDx Speaker (5) and Winner of 77+ awards

Member, National Focus Group - Inclusive Education (NCF-NEP 2020), Ministry of Education (ME), GoI (Government of India)



ABOUT SARAH KAMAU, KENYA

Sarah Kamau is a woman with physical disability and has a Master's degree. She is currently the Chair, Commonwealth Disabled Peoples Forum (CDPF) and has long serving experience spanning to over thirty years in different capacities within public and private sector in Disability Right and Inclusion. She serves in various boards including United Disabled Persons of Kenya (UDPK), an umbrella body of all Disabled Persons Organizations in Kenya.



ABOUT DR SRUTI MOHAPATRA, INDIA

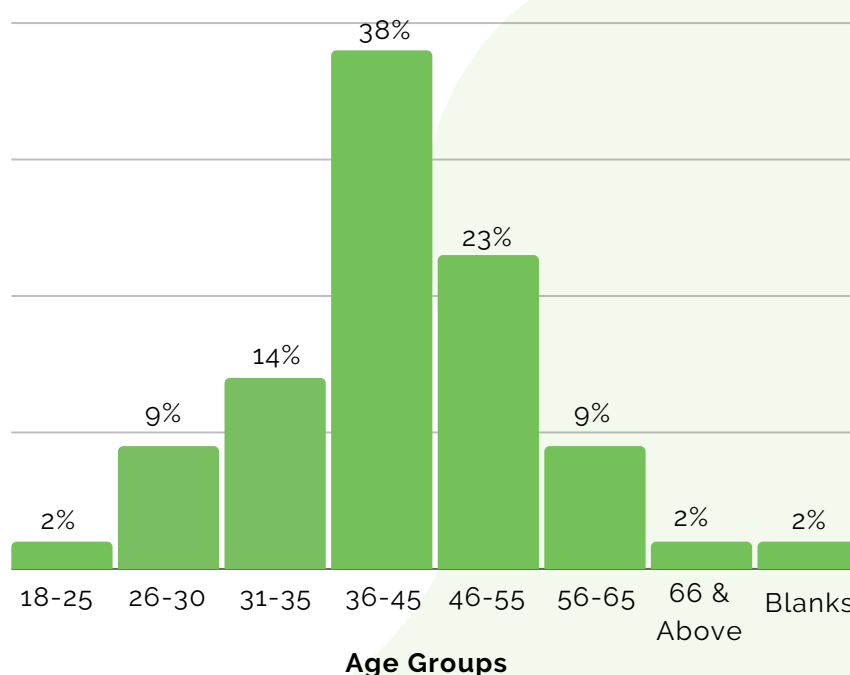
Sruti Mohapatra injured her spinal cord in a car accident. A brilliant student, frontline activist and an inclusive education expert, she is a wheelchair user who campaigns for equity and disability rights. She has chaired the Odisha State Commission for the Protection of Child Rights and is a member of the National Focus Group in Inclusive Education of India.

SURVEY OF EXPERIENCE AND OPINIONS OF WOMEN WITH DISABILITIES IN THE COMMONWEALTH (Women in leadership, Women's Economic Empowerment, Gender and Climate Change and Ending Violence against Women and Girls)

The profile of respondents portrays the picture of disabled men and women, among the age group of 36-45, being the highest (50, 38%), followed by those between ages 46-55 (30, 23%). There was a sharp fall to 14% (18), being the next highest responses from age groups 31-35. Age groups 26-30 and 56-65 were next highest with 9% (12) each. Those in age group 66 and above, and those who didn't disclose their ages constituted the next group criterion with age groups scored next with 3% (2) each.

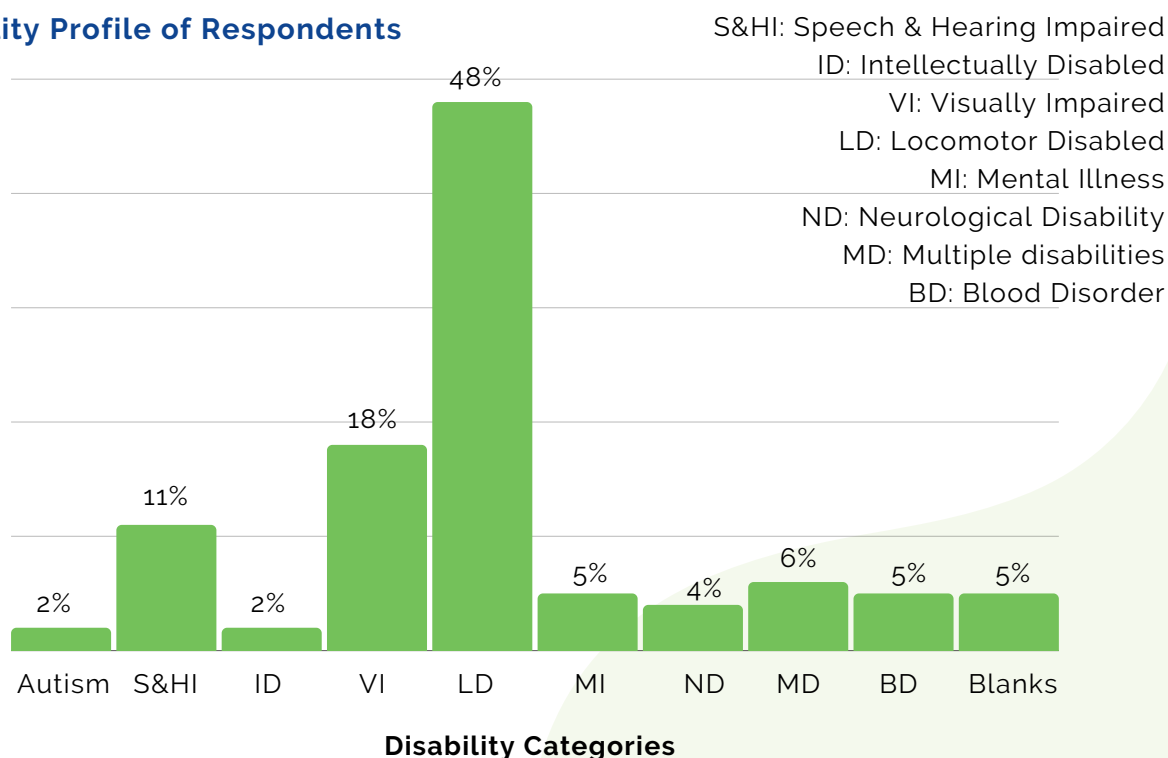
Among the respondents 119 were women, 2 were from LGBTQ category and 11 were men. There was stark difference in opinions too. 2% of the respondents did not reveal their gender. While the younger men (26-30) were more accommodative and liberal, the older men expressed reservations in education, employment and climate responses with regards to disabled women and girl child.

Age Profile of Respondents

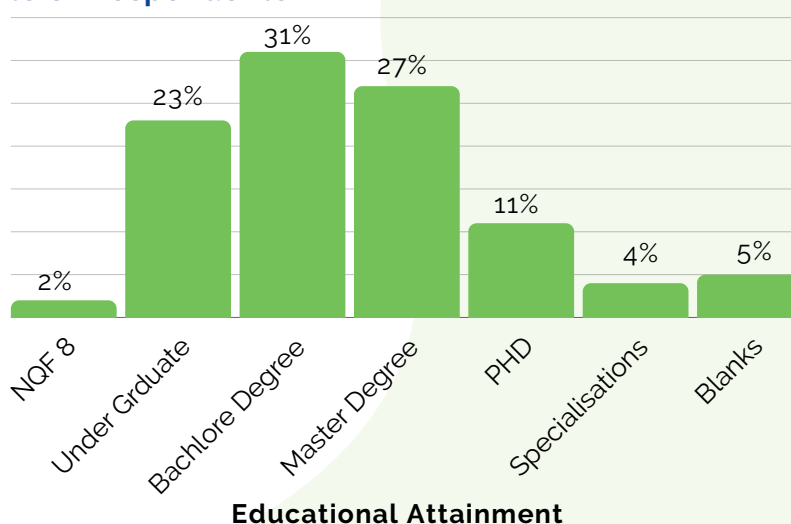


- Disability categories
 - Mobility impairment or locomotor disability were the highest respondents (63, 48%)
 - Visually impaired (23, 18%)
 - Speech & hearing impaired respectively (15, 11%).
 - Among the locomotor disabled are included polio affected, spina bifida, dwarfism affected, spinal cord injured, amputees, stumped appendages in hands and legs, burn impacted and people with cerebral palsy.
- Regional Distribution of Respondents
 - Asian – 27%
 - African – 59%
 - European – 3%
 - North America – 5%
 - Oceania – 6%

Disability Profile of Respondents



Educational Profile of Respondents



WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP

An estimated one in five women live with a disability. Historically, their equal participation and inclusion in society has been hindered by systemic marginalization and structural barriers, which often lead to less access to: education, health care (including sexual and reproductive health), information, public services, justice as well as less participation in civic and political processes and decision-making.

- In general, women still represent a minority of decision-makers worldwide, and there is no official data on the representation of women with disabilities in political decision-making. Today, only
 - 24% of the world's parliamentarians are women.
 - 6% of Heads of State and 5% of Heads of Government are women.
 - Among the Commonwealth countries only India and Malta have women Presidents, Hon'ble Draupadi Murmu and Hon'ble Myriam Spiteri Debono respectively.
 - Samoa has a woman Prime Minister, the Hon Fiamē Naomi Mata'afa.
 - In short, women's voices are missing in the political spaces.

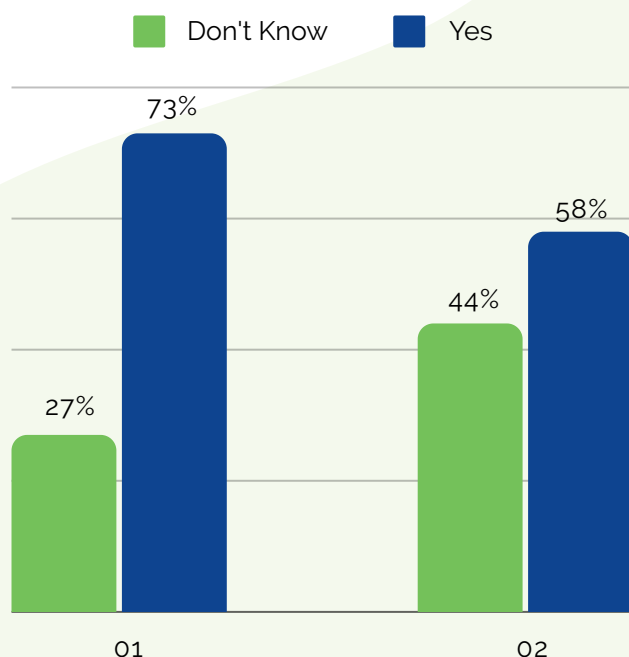
- Awareness about Well Known disabled women
 - Only 95 (73%) respondents knew at least one nationally known woman leader/politician/minister/legislator/MP with disability in their country and
 - 18 respondents (27%) were not aware of this fact.
 - 58% were aware of disabled women celebrities..

In the Commonwealth four countries in three regions of the Commonwealth that have met the global target of 30% and effectively advanced the participation of women in decision-making at all levels. This has been through electoral reform in New Zealand (Pacific region), party voluntary quotas in South Africa (Africa region), and legislative quotas in Bangladesh and India (Asia region).

With approximately 40% women in local government, parliament and cabinet, South Africa is one of the Commonwealth's best performers with regard to women's political participation. Bangladesh and India have excelled in mainstreaming women into local governance structures, following constitutional amendments to reserve one third of all local government seats for women in India in 1992, and institutional reforms to increase women's active participation in Bangladesh in 1997. These actions have seen more than one million women elected to India's Panchayat Raj and Bangladesh's Union Parishad (UP).

In CDPF survey we found that disabled women were barely represented in government bodies. However, when they got opportunities they excelled and created a space of their own. I was nominated by the Chief Minister of Odisha as Member of statutory body - State Commission for Protection of Child Rights in 2012 and rose to become the Chairperson owing to my innovative and inclusive actions. Today due to my expertise and innovative inclusive education models, am the Member, National Focus Group - Inclusive Education (NCF-NEP 2020), Ministry of Education, Government of India; Board Member, National Council of Teacher Education (NCTE), Ministry of Education, GoI; and a Member, National Mentoring Mission, ME, GoI; Vice Chair, Commonwealth Disabled People's Forum (CDPF), London and also a lead on Inclusive Education.

Awareness on women in leadership position and women celebrities

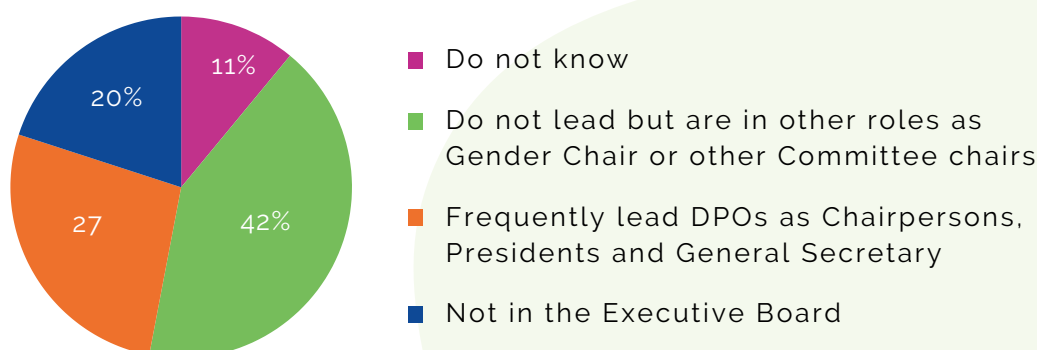


1 - Awareness of disabled women in political leadership position

2 - Awareness of disabled women as Celebrities

- 79% of the respondents stated that in a leadership position they were treated differently than their colleagues.
- In decision making in national coordination mechanisms/bodies on disability matters,
 - disabled women were not represented 35%
 - Under represented 55%.
- In DPOs and NGOs
 - 27% stated that disabled women were leading DPOs as Chairpersons, Presidents and General Secretary
 - 42% stated that disabled women do not lead DPOs but are in other roles such as Gender Chair or other Committee Chairs.
 - 20% said disabled women were never in the Executive or Governing Board of organisations.

Leadership position occupied by disabled women in DPOs



Many governments have made significant progress in the implementation of the CEDAW towards the eradication of discrimination against women in general, however they have left out women with disabilities in the process. Key among the neglected area is the advancement of equal and inclusive participation and the representation of women and girls with disabilities. Most of the women with disabilities participation and representation that has been a one-off kind of achievement and mostly at the national level. The lack of a comprehensive enabling legal and policy environment has heavily contributed to the exclusion of women and girls with disabilities in political and public life and especially in self-representation. It is the creation of such a missing enabling environment and its prudent implementation that will make the realization of rights enshrined in the Convention at hand a reality.

Implementation of the CRPD (Article 29 – Participation in political and public life) together with the implementation of CEDAW will ensure a full reality or enjoyment and exercise of rights for women and girls with disabilities.

WOMEN'S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT

Women with disabilities face additional barriers to their participation in the economy and society compared to men, with and without disabilities, and relative to nondisabled women, resulting in unequal parental rights, discrimination in their private life and the workplace, reduced employment opportunities, lower earnings, and high exposure to gender-based violence (World Bank, 2022). Disability sets the experiences of women with disabilities apart from those of nondisabled women by converging two statuses that interact with one another: the type, severity, and visibility of one's disability influences the degree to which she is subjected to societal expectations about her gender (Gerschick 2000). Such multiple and complex barriers, including negative bias and misconceptions about their capacity, have been found to deprive women with disabilities of access to education, employment, health care, and family life (Quinn et al. 2016). Available data show that the employment rates of women with disabilities are lowest compared to men with disabilities and nondisabled men and women (ILOSTAT 2010–2021).

The United Nations estimates that 75 percent of women with disabilities are unemployed and women with disabilities who are employed often earn less than their male counterparts and women without disabilities. Gender disparities also exist in education. While the overall literacy rate for persons with disabilities is 3 percent, UNESCO estimates that it is just 1 percent for women and girls with disabilities.

"People with disabilities in general face difficulties in entering the open labour market, but, seen from a gender perspective, men with disabilities are almost twice as likely to have jobs than women with disabilities. When women with disabilities work, they often experience unequal hiring and promotion standards, unequal access to training and retraining, unequal access to credit and other productive resources, unequal pay for equal work and occupational segregation, and they rarely participate in economic decision making" (Arthur O'Reilly. "Employment Barriers for Women with Disabilities" in "The Right to Decent Work of Persons with Disabilities." Paper No. 14. International Labour Organization 2003).

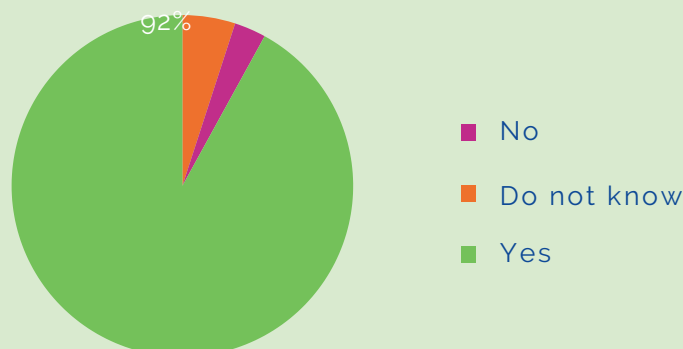
Survey findings:

- Governments were promoting equal rights and opportunities in the labour market for the disabled
 - 63% denied.
 - 28% believed that governments in their countries were taking steps to improve the situation.
 - 10% were unaware.
- Disabled women experienced discrimination in hiring and promotion in their countries
 - 85% agreed
- Disabled women were paid less for same job.
 - 73% stated that disabled women experienced unequal pay for the same job to men with disabilities and women without disabilities.

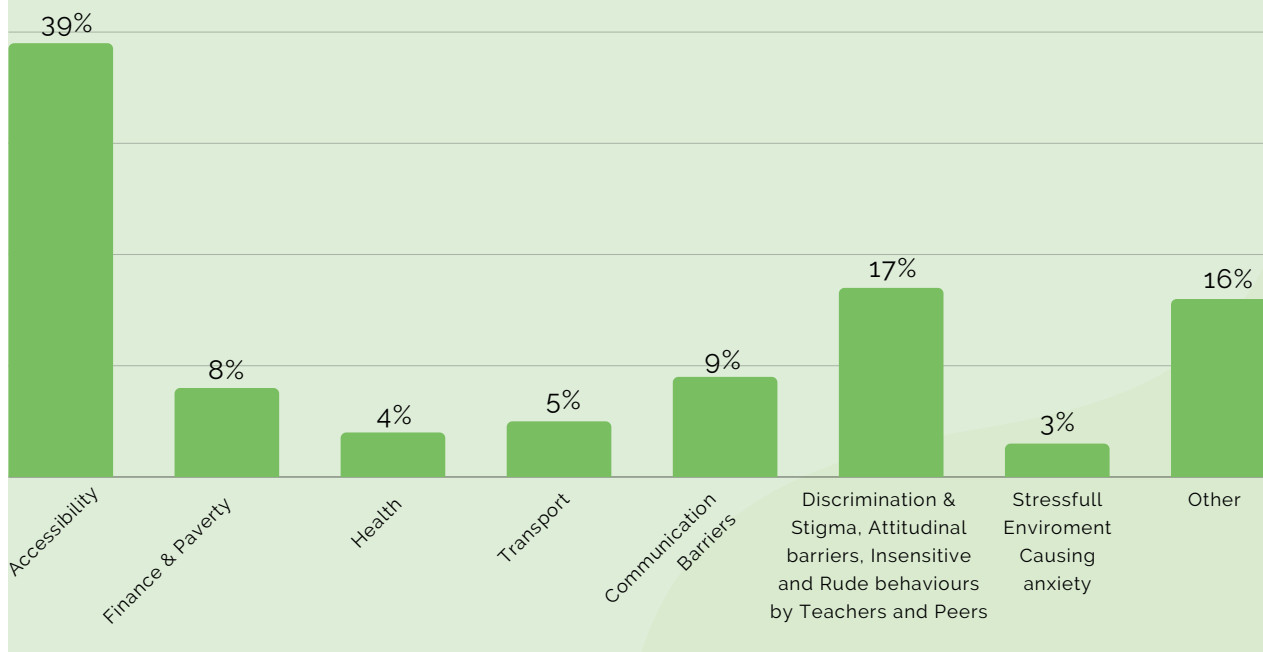
The most severe barriers that disabled women experience in attending and participating in skill development, vocational and job related trainings, they ranked them as underneath:

- Lack of information.
- Unfriendly learning environment including both inaccessibility and attitudinal barriers.
- Lack of funds for vocational training payment.
- If the trainings are linked to joining jobs, they do not provide jobs to women with disabilities.
- Lack of adequate education to qualify for the training programs.

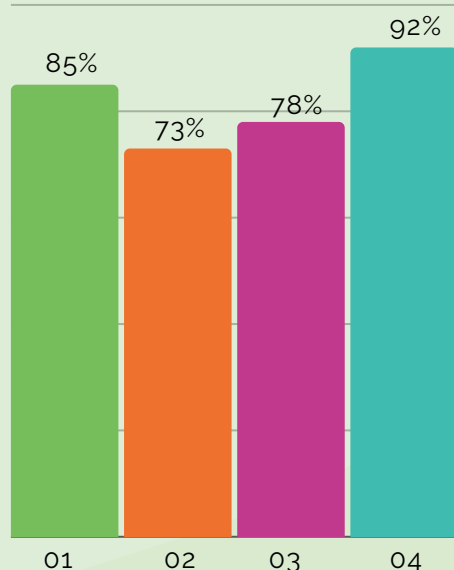
Disabled Women Face Multiple Barriers in Accessing Economic Opportunities



Barriers to Education and Career Progression



Discrimination in Various Employment Related Categories



1. Discrimination in hiring and promotion
2. Unequal/Lesser pay for same job
3. Barriers in access to bank credit and market linkages
4. Discrimination and barriers in attending and participation in skill development, vocational and job-related trainings.

Ensuring disabled men's and women's equal right to participate in all economic, social and cultural rights is a mandatory and immediate obligation of the states. It is therefore crucial that disability-inclusive policies are included in all policies and programmes so as to ensure the full and equal fulfilment of human rights of women and men with a disability. It is important to respect the gender equality principle by refraining from discrimination, analyzing all legislation, policies and programmes with regard to discriminating effects that they might have on women or men, and ensuring that discrimination is not continued (gender mainstreaming). It is necessary to protect the gender equality principle by combating prejudices, overcoming cultural, traditional, religious and other customs that aggravate gender inequalities, establishing norms with regard to the gender equality principle within or outside constitutional law, prohibiting discrimination on the grounds of a person's gender in both the public and private sector. Under strategies for economic empowerment of women with disabilities, special programmes need to be developed for

providing education, employment and other rehabilitation services to the women with disabilities, keeping in view their special needs; special educational and vocation training facilities to be set up and programmes undertaken to rehabilitate abandoned disabled women/ girls by encouraging their adoption in families, support to house them and impart them training for gainful employment skills.

GENDER AND CLIMATE CHANGE

Vulnerability to climate change impacts is not determined by external climatic conditions alone, but rather through the interaction between ecosystems, climate-related hazards, the built environment, governments, communities, individuals and other social factors (Rothe, 2017). Those most vulnerable to the adverse effects of climate change are persons who already face marginalisation; these include populations that possess a particular socio-economic status, geographic location, gender, disability and age. Interestingly, these population groups contribute the least to the production of greenhouse gas emissions, which cause climate change (IPCC, 2018). In July 2020, the United Nations Human Rights Council made history when it adopted a resolution on climate change and the rights of persons with disability. The resolution calls on governments to adopt a disability-inclusive approach when taking action to address climate change (Human Rights Council, 2019). This was the first time the council had directly addressed the rights of persons with disability as they relate to climate change.

Excerpts from panel discussion on promoting and protecting the rights of persons with disabilities in the context of climate change (Report of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, 2021): Climate emergency is affecting the rights of all people worldwide. Disabled people, who constituted 15 per cent of the world's population – approximately 1 billion individuals – experienced climate change impacts differently and more severely than others. Majority of disabled persons lived in poverty. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change had found that the poorest people suffered the worst effects of climate change through lost income and livelihood opportunities, displacement, hunger and adverse health impacts. An analytic study carried out by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) on climate change and persons with disabilities, Human Rights Council resolution 41/21 (see A/HRC/44/30), determined that poverty was one of the key components affecting the exposure of disabled persons to the impacts of climate change. Other factors included discrimination and stigma. Intersecting factors relating to gender, age, ethnicity, geography, migration, religion and sex could put persons with disabilities at even higher risks. Disabled people were often among those most adversely affected in an emergency and among those the least able to access emergency support. Both sudden onset natural disasters, such as flooding and landslides and increasingly frequent extreme weather events, and slow onset events, such as rising temperatures and sea levels and biodiversity loss, seriously affected access to food and nutrition, safe water and sanitation, health-care services and medicines, education and training, adequate housing and decent work for persons with disabilities.

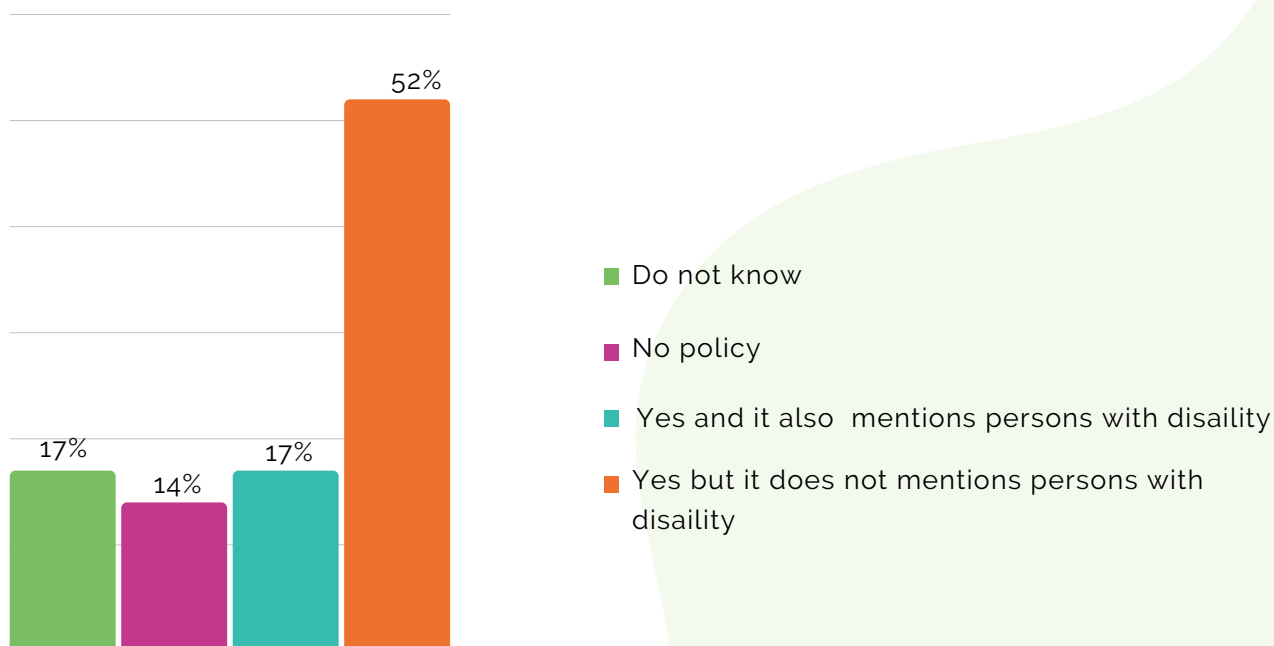
Survey Findings:

As of 2024, 55 of the 56 Commonwealth countries have ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD). CRPD Article 11 states that in situations of risk and humanitarian emergencies provisions must be made for the disabled by government. However in the Commonwealth

- 20% disabled women were not aware about this provision
- 54% said their governments had made no provision
- 26% were aware of such provision in their respective countries.

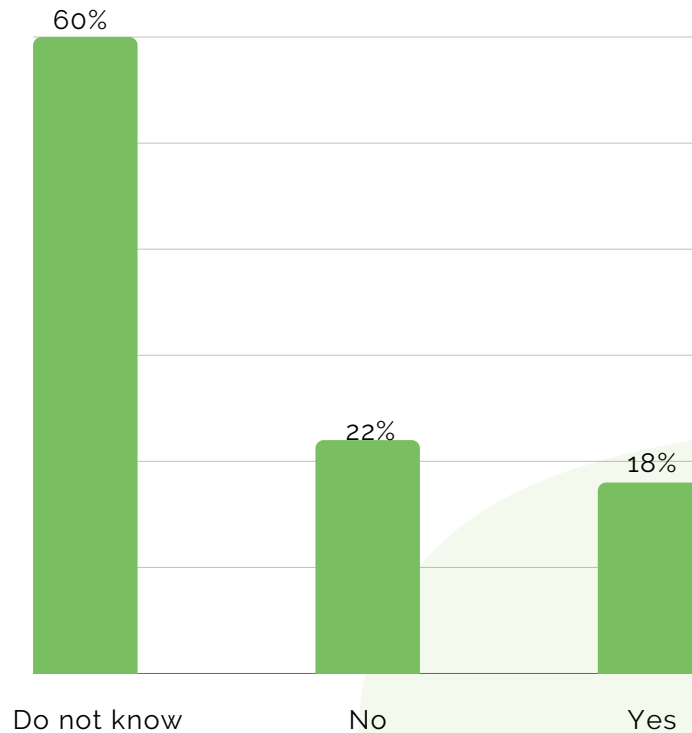
- Survey queried about countries having a Climate Change Policy or Disaster Risk Reduction policy:
 - 63% denied.
 - 52% said country had a policy/policies but there was no mention of disabled people.
 - 17% confirmed countries had a policy/policies with mention of disabled people.
 - 17% were unaware of such a policy/policies.

Awareness of Country's Policy on Climate Emergency and Disaster Risk Reduction



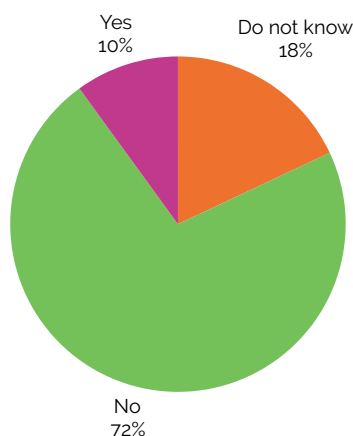
- Accessibility of the preparatory meeting venues and various rescue and relief emergency shelters
 - Majority respondents (67%) said some shelters and very few meeting venues had accessibility features and mostly it was confined to a ramp.
 - 8% shelters and meeting venues were fully accessible.
 - During the rescue and relief stages the disabled received the maximum support from the NGOs and DPOs (42%) followed by government (23%) and the neighbourhood/village community (20%).
 - 14% of the respondents were unaware of any emergency provision or support.
- During rescue stage, men may be evacuated easily, but this was not considered culturally appropriate for women. For ex. in some contexts, men with disabilities may be physically carried by anyone in an evacuation, but this may not be considered possible for women with disabilities.
 - 60% of the respondents agreed
 - 18% reported that they were unaware of such religious/cultural constraints.
- On specific query if rescue and relief centers provided disability aids and assistive devices as part of the relief kit (For ex. batteries for hearing aid or wheelchairs)
 - 66% respondents expressed no knowledge of such a provisions
 - 22% strongly said disability aids and devices were never a part of relief kits.
 - 18% said yes, that relief kits provided disability aids and assistive devices as part of the relief kit. However, on further query they stated they had heard/read about it but never seen a relief kit or shelter providing disability aids and devices.

Disability aids and devices in Relief kits and shelters



- When the survey asked for three major challenges that disabled women face in rescue and relief centers, the stories were endless as were the number and variety of challenges/barriers.
 - Access to information and early warning systems.
 - Inaccessible physical environment.
 - Lack of accessible communication.
 - Lack of knowledge among rescuers and shelter managers on disability, reasonable accommodation, where and how to hold while rescuing, assistive devices, aids etc. needed.
 - Inappropriate treatment including lack of privacy in washrooms and sleeping spaces.
 - Sexual harassments.
 - Discrimination and stigma.
 - Lack of psycho-social support and calm spaces.
 - Lack of emergency medicine and necessary medical equipment.
 - Lack of reproductive health related kits.
 - Non-availability of prescription food.
 - Lack of essential daily therapy.
 - Complete absence of counsellors.
- Information and communication accessibility is one of the strong pillars of CRPD implementation by governments.
 - 72% respondents said there was no availability of information in accessible formats for the disabled such as in Braille, Large Print, Audio, Easy to Read, Pictorial etc.
 - 10% were unaware of such a provision.

Availability of climate and disaster related information in accessible formats



As a way forward, governments need to develop specific guidance to ensure the participation of women and persons with disability and their representative organisations in climate change-related actions and decision-making. More studies are also needed to assess how multiple mobility drivers, including climate change, interact with one another and lead to persons with disability being relocated on a temporary or permanent basis. More awareness about climate change policies and plans is needed so that women and persons with disability can be aware of how they are catered for in these policies and plans. Climate change experts, disability and women experts, NGOs, state and national officials, and ground-level officials all have to work together to incorporate persons with disability into climate change plans.

ENDING VIOLENCE AGAINST DISABLED WOMEN AND GIRLS

Discrimination towards people with disabilities, coupled with attitudes towards women in patriarchal societies, put women and girls with disabilities at this increased risk for violence. Although women and girls with disabilities experience many of the same forms of violence that all women experience, when gender and disability intersect, violence has unique forms and causes, and results in unique consequences (Ortoleva and Lewis, 2012). Women and girls with disabilities are particularly targeted by perpetrators of violence because of social exclusion, limited mobility, a lack of support structures, communication barriers, and negative social perceptions.

"Older women and women with disabilities are under-represented in much of the available research on violence against women, which undermines the ability of programmes to meet their particular needs," said Dr Lynnmarie Sardinha, Technical Officer at WHO and the UN Special Programme on Human Reproduction (HRP) for Violence against Women Data and Measurement, and author of the briefs.

"Understanding how diverse women and girls are differently affected, and if and how they are accessing services, is critical to ending violence in all its forms." (WHO, 2023).

Intimate partner and sexual violence are the most common forms of gender-based violence globally and affect around 1 in 3 of women. Women with disabilities are still subjected to these types of violence, but also face specific risks and additional forms of abuse, sometimes at the hands of caregivers or health care professionals. These include coercive and controlling behaviours such as withholding of medicines, assistive devices or other aspects of care, and financial abuse.

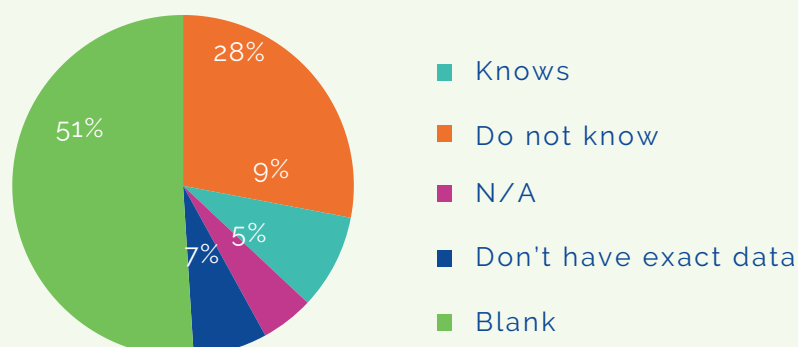
Survey result:

- CRPD Article 16 states that the countries should have appropriate legislative, administrative and other measures to protect persons with disabilities, both within and

other measures to protect persons with disabilities, both within and outside the home, from all forms of exploitation, violence and abuse, including their gender-based aspects.

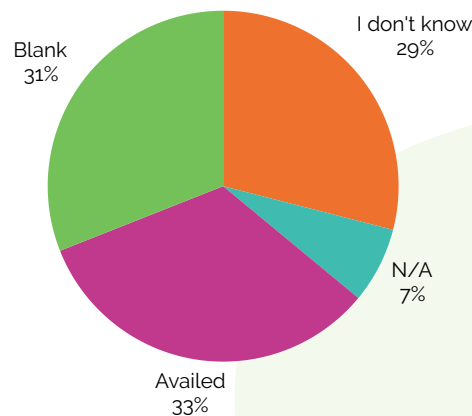
- 52% respondents confirmed that it held true for their country.
- Did women and girls with disabilities experience two to three times more gender-based violence than woman without disabilities
 - 88% agreed.
 - 89% of those who agreed stated that disabled women and girls also experience specific and unique forms of gender-based violence due to
 - Due to their impairment.
 - Forced treatment like hysterectomy.
 - Denial of legal and decision-making capacity.
 - Violations of sexual and reproductive rights.
- When asked which form of abuse do disabled women and girls are meted out with, the underneath was the response:
 - Economic abuse or the act that makes or attempts to make a woman financially dependent (11%).
 - Psychological violence or the act or omission that causes or is likely to cause mental or emotional suffering of the victim and leads to other forms of abuse (21%).
 - Sexual violence or the act that is sexual in nature, committed against a woman or her child to make a woman subjugated and cooperate under pressure (27%).
 - Physical violence or the act that includes bodily harm, committed against a woman or her child to subjugation and coerced cooperation for financial benefits and sexual pleasures among others (41%).
- With regards to justice being delivered to the petitioners, CRPD has an elaborate article. Article 13 states people with disabilities must have effective access to justice (courts, lawyers, documents in accessible format, sign language interpreters) on an equal basis with others.
 - 75% respondents negated
 - 16% said the structures existed
 - 9% were unaware of such provisions
- On the matter of police maintaining a database of cases registered under violence against women and girls with disabilities,
 - 63% denied
 - 22% said it was maintained.
- When queries about the number of cases registered under violence against women and girls with disabilities in past one year in respective country, county, city or any other entity, the response for number of cases registered could be confirmed only by 9% respondents validating the respondents who had said no to database.
 - 51% no response.
 - 28% said they do not know.
 - 5% answered randomly that was not considered.
 - 7% did not have exact data exact data.

Cases registered by police on violence against disabled women



- The graph underneath speaks about available data on the number of women and girls with disabilities who have accessed services and programmes to prevent and address violence in the past year (in your area - specify if it is country, county, city or any other data).
 - Only 33% have availed services.
 - 31% did not respond,
 - 29% said they do not know about such programs and
 - 7% answered randomly that was not considered.

Disabled women who accessed services and attended programs to prevent and address violence



- In violence related responses there is a huge section who is unaware of the issue or is not forthcoming to talk about it which is evident from responses in I do not know, N/A and not giving any response.
- Huge budgetary allocation is needed for creating awareness around the issue, the laws, the punishment and fines and government programs available for victims to benefit from.

Women with disabilities may also feel more isolated and feel they are unable to report the abuse, or they may be dependent on the abuser for their care. Like many women who are abused, women with disabilities are usually abused by someone they know, such as a partner or family member. Most often, violence or abuse against women with disabilities is by their spouses or partners (Breiding, 2015). But women with disabilities can also face abuse from caregivers or personal assistants (Barret, 2009; Plummer, 2012). Women with disabilities who need help with daily activities like bathing, dressing, or eating may be more at risk of abuse because they are physically or mentally more vulnerable and can have many different caregivers in their life (Baylor College, Fact Sheet#1).

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VOICES FROM ACROSS THE COMMONWEALTH

Perception of women with disabilities

"Nearly one in five women worldwide have a disability in comparison to one in seven men."

"For too long, the issues of women with disabilities have remained invisible both within the disability rights movement and the women's rights movement."

"As a Deaf woman living in Nigeria, inclusion in civic and political life means having the same rights, opportunities, and access as everyone else, regardless of my hearing status. This includes the right to vote, run for office, participate in public meetings, and express my opinions freely. It also means having access to information and resources in formats that I can understand, such as sign language interpretation and closed captioning."

Compared to men without disabilities, we women with disabilities are three times more likely to be illiterate."

"Women with disabilities experience various types of impairments—including physical, psychosocial, intellectual, and sensory conditions—that may or may not come with functional limitations."

"We, women with disabilities, face significant barriers in accessing adequate housing and services"

"In my country, women with disabilities are ... more likely institutionalized than men with disabilities."

"Governments must improve data availability on disabled women and girls, especially in education, employment and different forms of violence experienced by women and girls with disabilities in different parts of the world."

Disabled women in leadership

"Despite some progress in making its voice heard, the disability community, especially women with disabilities, remain largely excluded from public life and decision-making processes."

"To me, inclusion in civic and political life means being intentional in ensuring true participatory democracy, thus removing all undue barriers to allow every citizen to engage in the civic and political discourse. Furthermore, ensuring the political decision table reflects the diversity and voices of all citizens, irrespective of their background or abilities."

and among these women, only one woman with disability was elected."

"Legal restrictions affect the voting rights and participation in groups such as women with psychosocial disabilities."

"I am autistic and partially deaf woman. I demand for disability advocacy, including mainstreaming women with disabilities voices, ensuring sexual and reproductive rights, accessible education and support services, and addressing funding disparities. Commonwealth must give importance to considering us at all levels of policy and ensuring our meaningful participation."

"In various platforms I hear that a blind woman suffers from twin disability of being a woman and being visually impaired. Our task in the years to come is not only to remove deficiencies but also to eradicate attitudinal barriers and bring about significant cultural reforms so that gender equality becomes a well-accepted norm. Parental and societal attitudes towards visually impaired women largely determine the type of service delivery programme that are undertaken for their education and welfare."

Disabled women and economic empowerment

"Technology sees skills before gender and disability. Living with hearing disability and persevering to carve out a place in the world of work, I was immensely empowered by technology. The power of technology in ensuring that no one is left behind is immense."

"I overcame my disability to become an entrepreneur. I am now a leader in my community, teaching other women how they can empower themselves and overcome poverty."

"Occupational segregation negatively affected my employment participation and outcomes. So, too, did sexism and ableism. Further, disabled women of color and multi-marginalized disabled women experienced disproportionately worse outcomes because of intersecting forms of discrimination such as racism in my country."

Women with disability are also one of the poorest groups overall in the Commonwealth.

"Women with disability are more likely than those without disability to have been sexually harassed in the workplace in the last 5 years (48% and 32% respectively)."

Gender, Disability and Climate Change

"Across the globe, persons with disabilities experience mortality rates up to four times higher in natural disasters than people without disabilities."

"Climate emergencies are very traumatic experience in general for anyone. This is exacerbated for a neurodivergent person by many factors and a lot of the time rescue and relief workers are not equipped to handle the needs of neurodivergent disabled folks."

"The 'shelter for PWD' mostly facilitate men with mental illnesses as majority of men makes up this population. The women are left behind because they are less vocal about their mental illnesses due to being ashamed or have no community support. Also, the ONE SINGLE designated shelter for PWDs in the entire country of Belize is not conducive for others with different types of disabilities. All PWDs are pretty much 'piled' in one shelter which still pose safety risks."

"In some areas of my country, during recent floods, in the shelter we had limited assistance for sensory impairment, relief camp lacked accessible infrastructure, such as accessible restrooms or washrooms, making it difficult for us to meet basic needs. The assisting personnel in relief camps were not trained or sensitized to our needs and treated us rudely."

"In my country, women with disabilities face additional layers of complexity. Physical assistance from men, such as being carried, is seen as inappropriate due to norms of modesty and privacy. In many cases, families or communities face difficulties in providing the necessary assistance due to these cultural constraints, potentially leaving us, women with disabilities, in a more vulnerable position during evacuations."

Ending violence against disabled women and girls

"We need to prioritize women with disabilities in ensuring that like all other women who are fighting for access to justice, access to resources, women with disabilities [should] also have the same opportunity or enjoy the same opportunities as every other woman because before a woman is recorded as a woman with a disability, she is a woman."

"Both deaf women and women with psychosocial disabilities usually lack an understanding of how the legal system works. Rather than being supported, they are judged."

In a court of law, having the negative label of "an unsound mind" means that women with psychosocial disabilities are stripped of their legal capacity. This means "we cannot enjoy access to justice on an equal basis with others."

"I have been a victim. We women with disabilities experience violence at a higher rate and for longer periods of time than women in the general population."

"Violence against women is preventable. There is considerable scope for governments and communities to prevent violence before it occurs."

WOMEN LEADERS IN CDPF EXECUTIVE

**Chair**

Sarah Muthoni Kamau
United Disabled Persons
Kenya

**Vice-Chair**

Dr Sruti Mohapatra
CEO, Swabhiman,
Odisha, Eastern India

**Vice-Chair**

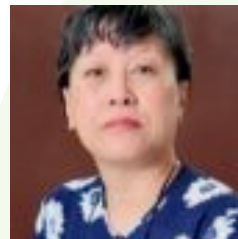
Kerryann Ifill
Barbados Council of the
Disabled

**Treasurer**

Scader Louis
Federation of Disability
Organisations in Malawi
(FEDOMA)

**Women's
Representative**

Gaudence
Mushimiyimana Rwandan
Organisation of Women
with Disabilities

**Indigenous Peoples
Representative**

Diethoro Nakhro,
National Centre for Promotion
of Employment for Disabled
People, Nagaland, India

**Africa**

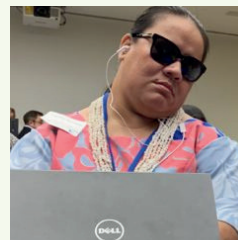
Alina Thandiwe Mfulo,
Disabled Persons South
Africa

**Africa**

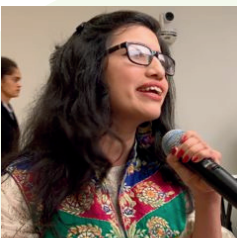
Patience Ogolo-Dickson
Advocacy for Women with
Disabilities Initiative
(AWWDI) Nigeria

**Africa**

Rachel Chomba
Zambia Federation of
Disability Organizations
(ZAFOD)

**Pacific**

Faatino Utumapu, Nuanua
O Le Alofa, Samoa

**Asia**

Abia Akram
Special Talent Exchange
Programme, Pakistan

**Asia**

Mohua Paul
Access Bangladesh
Foundation

**Asia**

Rasanjali Pathirage
Disability Organisations
Joint Front DOJF Sri
Lanka

**Youth Representative**

Saistha Parwin
Member, Swabhiman,
Odisha, Eastern India

DISABILITY INCLUSION ACTION PLAN (DIAP)



We at the Commonwealth Disabled Women's Forum strongly urge all Commonwealth State Parties to support the adoption of the Disability Inclusion Action Plan (DIAP) at this year's Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) in Samoa. The Disability Inclusion Action Plan (DIAP) aims to advance the inclusion, protection, and full and equal enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms by persons with disabilities across the Commonwealth. The Plan outlines essential actions to ensure that the needs of disabled individuals are fully recognized and addressed.

<https://commonwealthdpf.org/disability-inclusion-action-plan/>

CDPF has constituted a Disabled Women's Forum with members beyond the CDPF Executive Committee. This ensures the voices of disabled women is amplified within the Accredited Commonwealth Women's Forum, has wider reach of women, establishes linkages and networks with mainstream women's organizations and movements like Commonwealth Women Forum and UN Women.



General Secretary

Richard Rieser
Reclaiming Our Futures
Coalition, United
Kingdom

Email; Richard Rieser, General Secretary
rlrieser@gmail.com

[www. commonwealthdpf.org](http://www.commonwealthdpf.org)

Commonwealth Disabled People's Forum
c/o World of Inclusion
78, Mildmay Grove South,
LONDON N1 4PJ