

COMMONWEALTH DISABLED PEOPLE'S FORUM



Commonwealth Disabled People's Forum Annual Report January 2024 to December 2024

Right Women members of CDPF Executive and young disabled women on the East and Southern Africa Training In July 24 in Kenya.



Left Chair Sarah Kamau speaking at the United Nations CWS Conference March. Sruti Mohapatara speaking about Accessible Elections in India.



Left: Commonwealth Law Ministers Meeting Zanzibar, March 2024 Side Meeting Right: Secretary General with Scader Louis, CDPF Treasurer in Zanzibar



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Executive Summary

2024 was a crucial year of gains for the influence for CDPF. Our Chair and Treasurer presented at a side meeting at the Commonwealth Law Ministers Meeting in Zanzibar in March. Our Women's Officer and Chair spoke at the UN Commission on status of Women (CSW) also in March. We intervened at the Commonwealth Conference of Education Ministers for more inclusive education for disabled pupils in May. We held 2 very successful side meetings at the Conference of State Parties in New York in June. One online for self-advocates of Autistic people and the second promoting the Commonwealth Disability Inclusion Action Plan (DIAP) supported by UK and Malta Government with disabled people speaking in support from 13 countries.

CDPF worked hard on winning support from High Commissioners and Governments up until the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in Samoa in October. The DIAP seeks to get concrete commitments from the 56 countries of the Commonwealth to Implementing the rights, protections and equality of the 430 million disabled people across the Commonwealth. While we did not succeed in getting it adopted significant progress was made with commitments in Para 6 of the CHOGM communique. Supportive Government were Malta, Bahamas, Jamaica, UK, Kenya, South Africa, Namibia, Australia, Canada, New Zealand, The Gambia, Sierra Leone, Fiji and Samoa.

At the CHOGM members of the CDPF intervened and spoke at the People's, Youth and Women's Forum, where a special newsletter based on the views of our women members was published. We held side meetings on the film *Rising Tides, Rising Voices* about the impact of climate change on disabled people in the Pacific; a highly successful side meeting on extending disability rights across the Commonwealth; CDPF delegates also spoke at the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association's side meeting on Equality and at the IFCO side meeting on organising a greater voice and influence for civil society organisations across the Commonwealth.



As last year, we held a successful we held a successful on line meeting to mark International Disabled People's Day 3rd December (on 2nd December).

CDPF finished the successful training for disabled young leaders from January to May 2024 which involved 150 young activist from 30 countries. The CDPF Executive while reviewing the training has decided to switched to 'in person regional training events' with the first of these

held in July in Kenya for East and Southern Africa. This will be followed in March 2025 in South Asia, West Africa in October 2025, The Pacific in February 2026 and the Caribbean in May/June 2026.

A WhatsApp network of those on the youth training has been formalised into the Commonwealth Disabled Youth Forum with a constitution, elected representatives and programme of on line training. 2 new youth members were also coopted to the Executive and meetings were held with member organisations on ways to enhance involvement of young disabled people.

This forward planning has been made possible by and increase in our grant from Disability Rights Fund in 2025/2025 and a commitment to a direct grant from UKFCDO in 2025/2026. This also meant we ere able to hold a face to face Executive in Kenya in July 2024 attend by 19 Executive members for 5 days; the first face to face meeting since February 2025. A number of rule changes to the constitution were proposed and agreed to work towards financial and organisational independence. CDPF has had ADD International as a fiduciary partner since 2019. Crucial to these changes is a special virtual general assembly of more than 150 delegates to be held in February 2025 to agree these changes and further forward planning. –

Richard Rieser General Secretary CDPF

Message from the Chairperson – Sarah Kamau

Commonwealth Disabled Peoples Forum (CDPF) as the accredited organization with Commonwealth Secretariat has continued to be the voice of disabled people in the commonwealth countries. Disabled people comprise 16% of the global population of over 1.3 billion people. Out of the global population, over 430 million disabled people live in the Commonwealth.

CDPF has had a very productive year especially in lobbying the Commonwealth Secretariat to adopt a Disability Inclusive Action Plan (DIAP), during Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (2024). A lot of efforts were put in place by Organizations of Persons with Disabilities (OPDs) approaching their individual governments prior to CHOGM 2024 to lobby for DIAP adoption, creating awareness and advocating that commonwealth member states commit to accelerating the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD). The DIAP gives a road map on what measures countries need to do in order to fast track the implementation of the CRPD. The communique to the Heads of Government included a paragraph on the DIAP, which was a huge milestone for CDPF. The heads of government agreed to setting up of a High Level Advisory Group and the involvement of representative DPOs/OPDs in the process of implementation of the UNCRPD across the 56 countries of the Commonwealth (with only Tonga to still ratify).

Other milestones include disability equality trainings for youth, women and girls, setting up of a youth forum across the representative OPDs and beyond, attending the law ministers meeting, Commission on the Status of Women (CSW), Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disability (CRPD). CDPF participated actively in championing and lobbying for the human rights of disabled people. In the year under review, Regional Desk interns have been hired to help the growth and development of CDPF through membership recruitment as well as a continual engagement of OPDs in these regions. As we experience the growth, more plans to make CDPF autonomous and a self-standing not for profit and charity organization are underway.

All these strides have been possible because of the support from our donors and development partners who include the Commonwealth Secretariat, Foreign Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO), (ADD), Disability Rights Funds (DRF) and ADD International and members states and governments commitments. With over 18 years since the UNCRPD was adopted at the United Nations, 56 member countries have now ratified the UNCRPD. CDPF envisions all countries not only signing and ratifying it, but putting measures and strategies in place. 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.

Sarah Kamau CHAIR – CDPF

‘To develop a unified voice for the implementation of Disability Rights and Equality for DPOs and disabled people (persons with disabilities) across the 56 countries of the Commonwealth’.

Nothing About Us Without Us.

The Commonwealth Disabled Peoples’ Forum (CDPF) serves as a unifying platform for disabled led organisations and individuals across the Commonwealth. Our purpose is to bring together disabled people’s organisations and their members irrespective of the type of impairment, gender, age, race, sexuality, indigenous and geographical background, religion, or political affiliation—from all Commonwealth nations. We aim to amplify their voices and advocate collectively for the promotion and equalisation of opportunities for all disabled people.

CDPF is committed to engaging with and influencing the structures and organs of the Commonwealth, particularly Governments, the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM). Our efforts align with the principles of inclusion, equality, and empowerment, ensuring that disability rights are central to the Commonwealth’s Charter of Rights and agenda.

The foundation of CDPF is rooted in the adoption of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) by the United Nations General Assembly in December 2006. This was further reinforced by the recognition of its importance by the Commonwealth Heads of Government in their Kampala Statement of November 2007, where they emphasised the need for its adoption, ratification, and implementation throughout the Commonwealth.

Despite these advancements, people with disabilities continue to face inequalities and exclusion across the Commonwealth. In response, CDPF was established to work towards bridging these gaps and ensuring that the rights, dignity, and potential of all disabled individuals are fully realised.

Together, we strive to create a world where every person, regardless of ability, can thrive and contribute as equals in all spheres of life.

The Language We Use @ CDPF

The CDPF use Identity first rather than person first language.

Disabled people: Why we still choose to call ourselves 'disabled people': In the Commonwealth Disabled People's Forum (CDPF) we call ourselves '**disabled people**' because of the development of the '**social model of disability**'.

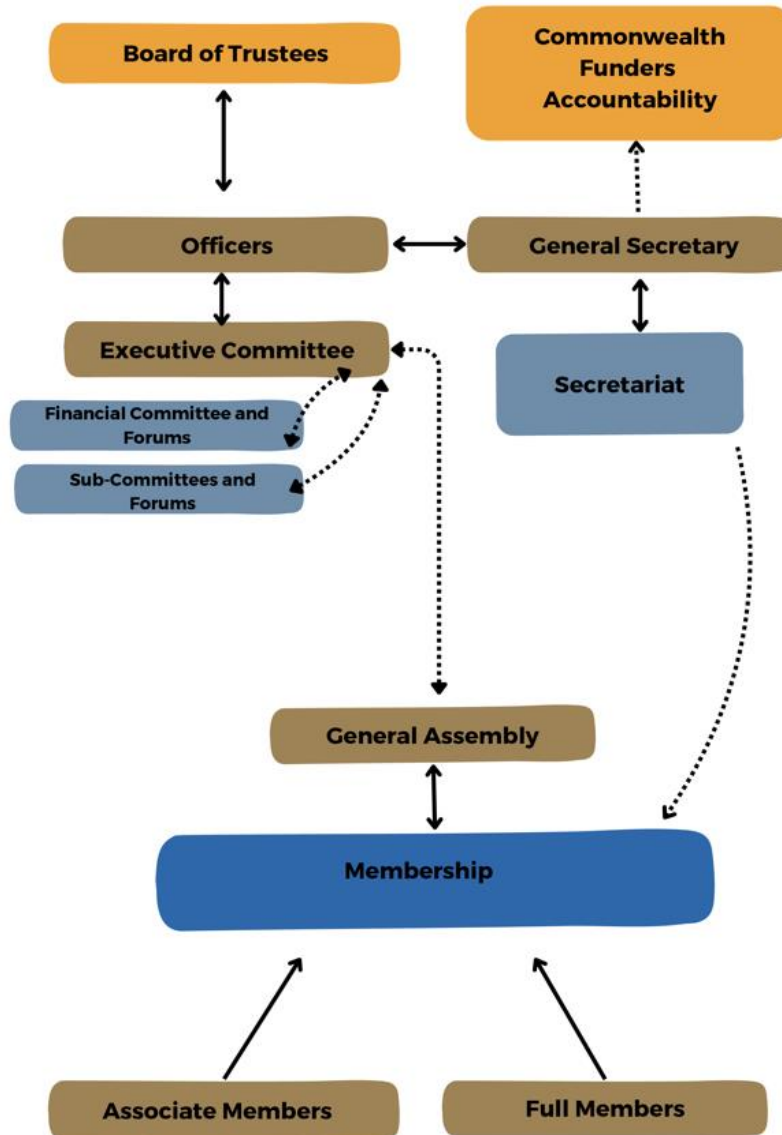
In the C19th and C20th, a disabled person's medical condition was thought to be the root cause of their exclusion from society, an approach now referred to as the '**medical or individual model**' of disability. We use the '**social model of disability**', where the barriers of environment, attitude and organisation are what disable people with impairments and lead to prejudice and discrimination.

So to call ourselves 'persons with disabilities' is to accept that we are objects and powerless. We also 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**'.

Language-Words can reflect as well as influence the way people think



Structure of CDPF





CDPF Members List 2024

- Anguilla** Department of Social Development (Observer/ally)
- Australia** People with Disabilities Australia (Full)
- Australia** First Peoples Disability Network Australia (Associate)
- Australia** Australian Federation of Disability Organisations (AFDO)(Full)
- Bahamas** Connects, Disability Advocacy & Inclusion (Associate)
- Bangladesh** National Grassroots Disability Org (Associate)
- Bangladesh** Access Bangladesh Foundation (Associate)
- Bangladesh** Women with Disabilities Development Foundation WDDF (Full)
- Bangladesh** Disabled Child Foundation (DCF)
- Barbados** Barbados Council of the Disabled (Full)
- Belize** Assembly for Persons with Diverse Abilities (Bapda) (Full)
- Botswana** Federation of the Disabled (Full)
- Cameroon** Platform Inclusive Society for Persons with Disabilities (Full)
- Canada** Council of Canadians with Disabilities (CCD) (Full)
- Canada** Inclusion Canada (Associate)
- Canada** Autism Alliance of Canada (AAC). (Associate)
- Canada** Environmental Health Association of Quebec. (Associate)
- Dominica** Dominica Association Persons with Disabilities DAPD (Full)
- Fiji** Fiji Disabled People's Federation (Full)
- Gabon** Fédération Nationale des Associations des et pour Personnes Handicapées du Gabon (FNAPHG). (Full)
- Gambia** Gambia Federation of the Disabled (GFD). (Full)
- Gambia** Gambia Association of Physically Disabled (GAPD). (Associate)
- Gambia** The Gambia Organisation of the Visually Impaired (GOVI). (Associate)
- Ghana** Ghana Federation of Disability Organisations GFD (Full)
- Guyana** Guyana Council of Organisations for Persons with Disabilities (Full)
- India** Swabhiman Smile Foundation (Associate)
- India** National Centre Employment Disabled People (Full)
- Jamaica** Combined Disabilities Association (Full)
- Kenya** Ability Society (Self Advocacy Orgs) (Associate)
- Kenya** United Disabled Persons of Kenya UDPOK (Full)
- Kenya** Disability Development Network Community Board Organisation DDNCBO (Associate)
- Kiribati** Te Teo Matoa (Full)
- Lesotho** Lesotho National Federation of Org. of the Disabled LNFOD (Full)
- Malawi** Disabled Women In Africa DIWA (Associate)
- Malawi** Federation of Disability Orgs. in Malawi FEDOMA (Full)
- Malawi** VIHEMA Malawi Visual Hearing Impairment Membership Association

(Associate)

Malawi Spinal Injuries Association of Malawi SIAM. (Associate)**Malaysia** Damai – Disabled Persons Association (Associate)

Malaysia Harapan OKU. (Associate)

Malaysia Malaysian Confederation of the Disabled. (Full)

Maldives Maldives Association of Persons with Disabilities (Full)

Malta Malta Federation of Organisations of Persons with Disabilities (MFOPD) (Full)

Mauritius Youth with Disabilities Empowerment Platform (Associate)

Mauritius Federation of Disabled People's Organisations Mauritius (Full)

Montserrat Montserrat Association for Persons with Disabilities (Associate)

Mozambique Mozambiquian Association of Disabled People FAMOD (Full)

(Associate)

Mozambique Mozambican Association of Women with Disabilities (Associate)

Mozambique Mozambican Mental Health Users Association AMUSAM (Associate)

Namibia Autism Association of Namibia. (Associate)

Namibia National Federation of People with Disabilities in Namibia (Full)

Nauru Nauru Persons with Disabilities Organisation (Full)

New Zealand Kapo Maori Aotearoa (Associate)

New Zealand Disabled Persons Assembly, Deaf Action (Associate)

New Zealand Disabled People's Organisations (DPO) Coalition (full)

Nigeria Advocacy for Women with Disabilities Initiative AWWDI (Associate)

Nigeria Association for Comprehensive Empowerment of Nigerians with Disabilities (ASCEND) (Associate)

Nigeria Joint National Association of Persons with Disabilities of Nigeria JONAWPWD (Full)

Nigeria National Association of Women with Disabilities NAWID (Associate)

Nigeria Family Centred Initiative for Challenged Persons FACI (Associate)

Nigeria Spinal Cord Injuries Association of Nigeria. Associate

Pakistan Policy Research And Development (PRAND) Organization. (Associate)

Pakistan Special Talent Exchange Program (Full)

Papua New Guinea Papua New Guinea Assembly of Disabled Persons (Full)

Rwanda Rwandan Union of the Blind RUB (Associate)

Rwanda National Union Disabilities Organizations in Rwanda NOUSPR (Full)

Rwanda Rwanda Ex-Combatants and Other People with Disabilities Organisation RECOPDO (Associate)

Rwanda Rwandan Organization Women with Disabilities UNABU (Associate Delegate)

Rwanda National Organisation of Users and Survivors of Psychiatry NOUSPR. (Associate)

St Lucia National Council of and for People with Disabilities St Lucia Inc. (Full)

St Vincent and the Grenadines Voice of the Disabled. (Full)

Samoa Nuanua OI Alofa (Full)

Sierra Leone Sierra Leone Union on Disability Issues SLUDI (Full)

Solomon Islands People with Disabilities Solomon Islands (Full)

South Africa Disabled Persons South Africa (Full)

South Africa Autism South Africa (Associate)

South Africa South African Disability Alliance SADA. (Associate)

South Africa South African National Council for the Blind SANCB (Associate)

Sri Lanka Disability Organisations Joint Front DOJF (Full)

Sri Lanka Sri Lanka Foundation for Rehabilitation of the Disabled SLFRD

(Associate)

Swaziland (Eswatini) Federation of Disabled Persons in Swaziland (FODSWA)
(Full)

Tanzania Association of the Deaf (CHAVITA) (Associate)

Tanzania Tanzanian Federation of Disabled Persons Organisations SHIVYAWATA
(Full)

Togo Federation Togolaise Des Associations De Personnes Handicapees (Fetaph)
(Full)

Tonga Naunau O'E Alamaite Tonga Association (Full)

Trinidad and Tobago Persons with Visual Impairments Associate (Associate)

Trinidad and Tobago Trinidad and Tobago Chapter of Disabled Peoples'
International. (Full)

Tuvalu Fusi Alofa Association (Full)

Uganda National Union of Disabled Persons of Uganda-NUDIPU (Full)

Uganda Legal Action for Persons with Disabilities (Associate)

Uganda Youth Physical Disability and Development Forum (Associate)

Uganda The Voice of the Youth with Disabilities. (Associate)

Uganda Triumph Mental Health Support (TRIUMPH) (Associate)

Uganda Uganda Federation of Hard Of Hearing (UFHOH)(Associate)

Uganda Uganda National Association of the Deaf (UNAD) (Associate)

UK National Federation of the Blind (Associate)

UK (Wales) Disability in Wales and Africa DWA (Observer/ally)

UK Reclaiming Our Futures Alliance ROFA (Full)

Vanuatu Vanuatu Disability Promotion & Advocacy Association VDPA (Full)

Zambia Zambia Federation of Disability Organisations ZAFOD (Full)

Zambia Deafblind Association of Zambia(DBAZ). (Associate)

Zambia Deaf Youths Hub (Associate)

Countries 51, **Full Members** 49, **Associates** 50, **Observer/Ally** 2

PATRONS

Patrons are well known disabled people from around the Commonwealth who support the aims and promote the influence and growth of CDPF.

The following have agreed to be CDPF Patrons for 2024:

Dame Jane Campbell, UK

Rosemary Kayess, Australia

Floyd Morris, Jamaica

Sir Robert Martin, New Zealand (deceased September 2024)

Samuel Kabue, Kenya

Shauib Chalklen, South Africa

Ikponwosa Ero, Ghana



CDPF's Executive Members

Executive members from the top left to right: Shishiro Raulo Youth Member, India; Namwanje Gorret, Youth Member Uganda; Rasanjali Pathirage, Asia, Faatino Utumapu, Pacific; Mohua Paul, Asia; Abia Akram, Asia; Rose Umutesi, Survivors Mental Health; Dookoo Suvan Sharma, Indian Ocean, Mauritius; Ganesh Singh, Caribbean; Clare Gibellini, Australia; Rebekah Kintzinger, Australia, Britain, Canada, New Zealand and Malta; Rachel Chomba, Africa; Eric Ngondi, Africa; Patience Ogolo-Dickson, Africa; Alina Thandiwe Mfulo, Africa; Chair, Sarah Muthoni Kamau, Africa; Prasanna Kuruppu, Communication Officer, Sri-Lanka; Vice-Chair Dr Sruti Mohapatra, India; Vice-Chair Kerryann Ifill, Barbados; General Secretary, Richard Rieser, UK; Treasurer, Scader Louis, Malawi; Emile Gouws Representative for Intellectual Disability and under-represented groups, South Africa, Gaudence Mushimiyimana, Women's Representative, Rwanda; Kihembo Wilbert, Elected Youth Representative, Uganda; Diethoro Nakhro, Indigenous Peoples Representative, India.

CDPF EXECUTIVE

Executive Committee Composition Officers:

The Executive includes regional representatives and officers, ensuring balanced representation and accountability.

Chair – Sarah Kamau

2 Vice Chairs and Treasurer - Dr Sruti Mohapatra and Kerryann Ifill and Scader Louis

General Secretary – Richard Rieser

Women’s Officer - Gaudence Mushimiyimana

Youth Officer - Kihembo Wilbert

Officer for Under-Represented Groups - Emile Gouws

Communications Officer - Prasanna Kuruppu

Indigenous People’s Officer - Diethoro Nakhro

2 coopted Youth Members: Namwanje Gorret and Shishiro Raulo

Regional Representatives:

Africa: 4 Representatives - Alina Thandiwe Mfulu, Patience Ogolo-Dickson, Eric Ngondi and Rachel Chomba

South Asia/Malaysia: 4 Representatives - Abia Akram, Mohua Paul, Rasanjali Pathirage and Havindar Kaur

Caribbean: 1 Representatives - Ganesh Singh

Pacific: 1 Representative - Faatino Utumapu

ACNAUK (Americas, Canada, New Zealand, Australia, UK): 1 Representative Rebekah Kintzinger and Clare Gibellini,

Co-opted Members: Up to 6 individuals to address specific needs or provide additional expertise.

Pacific Region Simon Delaiano , Survivors Mental Health Rose Umutesi, Indian Ocean,

Mauritius Dookoo Suvan Sharma, India Saista Parwin, Deaf Blind Simate Simate (deceased December)

Gender Breakdown

11 Men 18 Women of 29-person Executive

The Trustees of the Registered Company in the UK Commonwealth Disabled People’s Forum Ltd Company Registration 7928235 are:-

Chair Sarah Muthoni Kamau , United Disabled Persons Kenya

Vice-Chair Dr Sruti Mohapatra, Swabhimani, Odisha, Eastern India

Vice-Chair Kerryann Ifill, Barbados Council of the Disabled

General Secretary Richard Rieser, Reclaiming Our Futures Coalition, United Kingdom

Treasurer Scader Louis, Federation of Disability Organisations in Malawi (FEDOMA)

Communication Officer Prasanna Kuruppu, Disability Organisations Joint Front DOJF, Sri Lanka

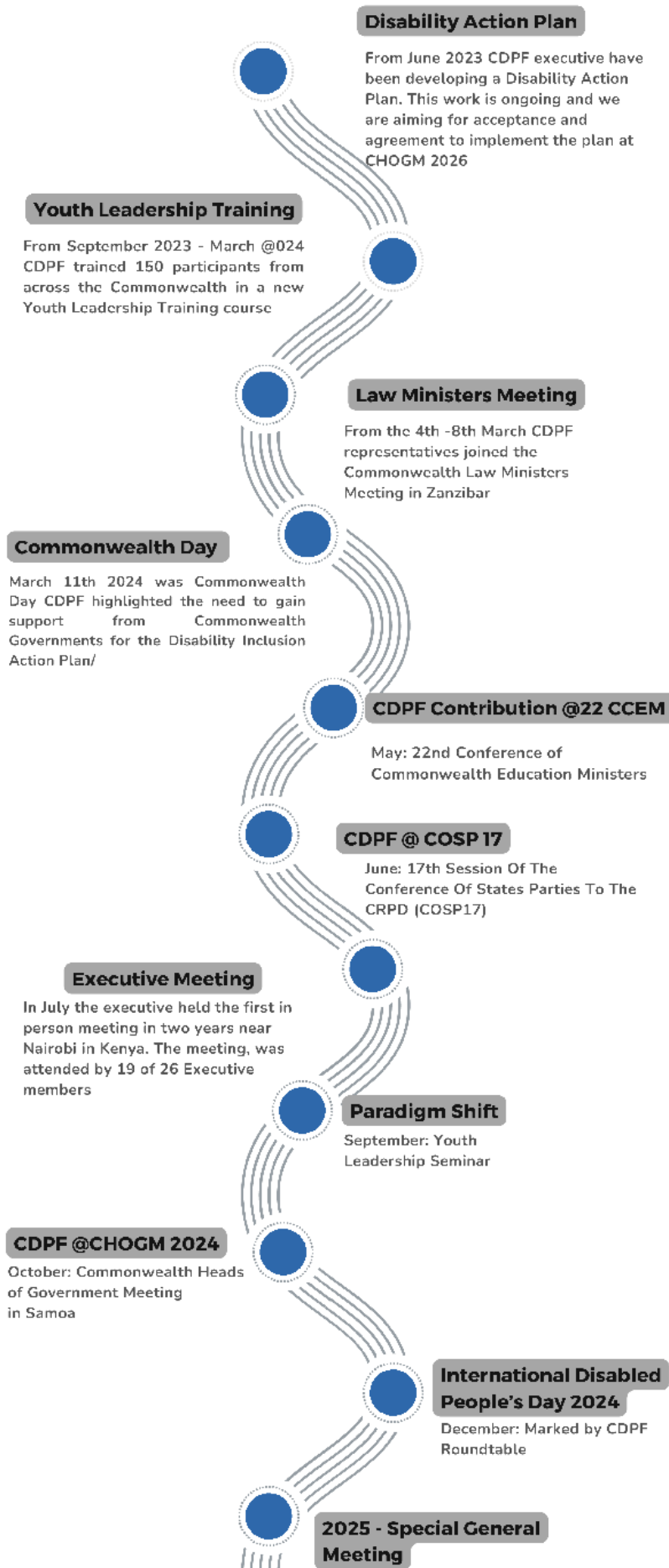
Women’s Representative Gaudence Mushimiyimana, Rwandan Organization Women with Disabilities UNABU Africa

Alina Thandiwe Mfulu, Disabled Persons South Africa

Secretariat – Staff that manage the day-to-day activities of CDPF and work with the General Secretary

- Martha Aldridge – Assistant: Admin Data – martha.aldridge@comonwealthdpf.org
- Thomas Bush – IT Consultant - bush.thomas@gmail.com
- Katie Cohen – Assistant to the General Secretary – katie.cohen@commonwealthdpf.org
- Nady Martin – Social Media Comms consultant – Nadavya.music@gmail.com
- Richard Rieser – General Secretary – richard.rieser@commonwealthdpf.org
- Gemma White – Administrator contracted from ADD – gemma.white@add.org.uk

2024's Activities



CDPF Representation at External Events

March 2024

Commonwealth Law Ministers Meeting

Location: Zanzibar

Delegates: Sarah Kamau, Scader Louis

UN Consultation on the Status of Women

Location: New York

Delegates: Sarah Kamau, Gaudence Mushimiyimana, Rasanjali Pathirage

May 2024

African Seminar on the Future

Dates: 9th and 10th May

Location: Kenya

Details: Flyer distributed

Delegate(s): Eric Ngondi

Commonwealth Conference of Education Ministers

Dates: 16th and 17th May

Location: London

Delegate(s): Richard Rieser

June 2024

UN COSP17 (Conference of States Parties to the CRPD)

Location: New York

Delegates: Abia Akram, Richard Rieser, Sarah Kamau, Rasanjali Pathirage

Virtual Session: Autism in Africa (Emile Gouws)

September 2024

Committee of the Whole on Draft Communiqué

Date: 3rd September

Location: London

Delegate(s): Richard Rieser

October 2024

CHOGM (Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting)

Dates: 19th to 26th October

Location: Samoa

Delegates:

Main Delegation: Richard Rieser, Sarah Kamau

People's Forum: Sruti Mohapatra, Sarah Kamau, Rasanjali Pathirage

Women's Forum: Kihembo Wilbert, Saista Parwin

Youth Forum: Representatives joined by Rhoda Garland (Disability Commissioner, Malta) and Faatino Utumapu (NOLA, Samoa)

Summary of CDPF Executive and Officers Meetings - Key Decisions (2024)

11th January 2024: Full Executive, Zoom – 18 attended, 3 apologies.

22nd February 2024: Officers Meeting, Zoom – 10 attended.

- Amended DIAP version agreed and circulated.

19th March 2024: Full Executive, Zoom – 14 attended, 3 apologies.

- New Memorandum of Understanding with ADD Int agreed (valid until Sept 2025).

18th April 2024: Officers Meeting, Zoom – 10 attended, 1 apology.

- Rebekah Kintzinger (Autism Canada) coopted to replace Steve Estey.

22nd May 2024: Full Executive, Zoom – 14 attended, 7 apologies.

- Clare Gibellini coopted to represent Australia.
- Budget heads of £300,000 from UKFCDO finalized.
- Business Plan agreed.

9th-11th July 2024: Face-to-Face Executive Meeting & Training of Trainers, Maanzoni Lodge, Kenya – 19 attended.

- Discussions on membership issues, rule changes, LGBTQIA+ policy and CHOGM. Women and Girls Initiative discussed, Face to Face Training Trainees/with Governments
- Policy Areas- Political Participation
- Law and Justice
- Climate Emergency
- Inclusive Education
- Training included sessions on inclusive education, employment, political participation, climate change, and UNCRPD mechanisms.

27th August 2024: Officers Meeting, Zoom – 9 attended, 2 apologies.

- Addressed issues arising from Kenya training.

5th September: Full Executive, Zoom – 17 attended, 5 apologies.

- Officers not to carry out regular paid work for CDPF.
- Engaged UK-based Assistant to Gen Sec.
- Finance Working Group established.
- Additional £50,000 funding approved for accessibility, CHOGM, and Kenya trip.

8th October: Management Committees, Zoom – 10 attended, 1 apology.

- 2 youth members coopted (Namwanje Gorret, Sishiro Raulo).
- CHOGM DIAP video and report produced.
- Katie Cohen confirmed as Assistant to Gen Sec.

13th November: Full Executive, Zoom – 15 attended, 6 apologies.

- Agreed Work Plan for 2025/26.
- Charity objectives proposed.
- LGBT policy paper discussed.

2nd December: Disability Roundtable to mark International Disabled People's Day -

<https://commonwealthdpf.org/cdpf-roundtable-marking-international-disabled-peoples-day-2024/>

17th December: Executive Meeting – Report agreed by 15, 3 apologies.

- Appointing Third Sector Law approved.
- Special General Assembly planned for 14th February 2025.
- Budget for 2025/26 finalized.
- FCDO funding announced.
- March 2025 training in Delhi with NRCEDP partnership confirmed.

The Commonwealth Disabled People’s Forum (CDPF) employs a robust system of communication and governance to ensure inclusive and representative decision-making across its diverse membership. Newsletters: Regular updates to inform members of ongoing initiatives, achievements, and opportunities. Electronic Mail: Timely dissemination of key updates and announcements. Surveys: Tools to gather members’ views on various subjects, ensuring their voices shape CDPF’s direction. Virtual Meetings: Frequent Zoom sessions to foster engagement and collaboration among members. Face-to-Face Meetings: Occasional in-person gatherings for more in-depth discussions and strategic planning.

Programs and Activities in 2024

Development of the Disability Action Plan in 2024

The Commonwealth Disabled People's Forum (CDPF) has been developing, proposing and lobbying for Commonwealth member states to adopt a Disability Inclusion Action Plan covering Articles and Action Points.

This work has included:

1. Initial Engagement with the Commonwealth Secretariat

Conducted a Round Table with the Commonwealth Secretariat (30th November–1st December) to discuss prioritising a Commonwealth Disability Protocol and forming a High-Level Disability Advisory Group. This was an in person a meeting joined by another 90 representatives on- line.

While the Secretariat prioritised the Advisory Group, CDPF advanced work on the Protocol independently, later evolving it into the Commonwealth Disability Inclusion Action Plan (DIAP).



Delegates at a two-day Commonwealth conference have outlined strategies and actions to achieve true equity and inclusion for all persons with disabilities where Commonwealth Secretary-General pledges support to '**STRONG AND UNIFIED**' disability movement. See the article in this newsletter for more details. (Photo Credit: The Commonwealth Secretariat).

Development of the Disability Protocol/DIAP

2. Drafted and circulated two versions of the Protocol to CDPF members for feedback. Mailed all High Commissioners. Shared in meetings revised drafts with the High Commissioners of Australia, Antigua and Barbuda, Barbados, Canada, Gambia, Kenya, Malta, Mauritius, Namibia, New Zealand, Nigeria, Samoa, South Africa, Sri Lanka, Togo, and the UK.

3. Collaboration with Supportive States Met with Luis Franceschi of the Commonwealth Secretariat, who suggested a more specific focus on a Disability Inclusion Action Plan (DIAP). Formed a Steering Group of supportive State Parties, meeting: 13th June in New York. 6th August and 10th September online. Worked to get in communique at COW and at CHOGM. Got some mention not adopted.

“ 6. Heads reaffirmed their commitment to ensuring, protecting and promoting the full realisation of the human rights and fundamental freedoms of all persons with disabilities, to fully implement the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), and to implement the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the related Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Recalling the 2023 Report of the Commonwealth Roundtable on Advancing the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, Heads urged the Commonwealth Secretariat to prioritise and expedite the establishment of a High-Level Advisory Group of Persons with Disabilities together with representatives of Organisations of Persons with Disabilities from across the Commonwealth, to effectively support member states, in advancing the rights of people with disabilities. Heads commended the ongoing work towards the finalisation of a Disability Inclusion Action Plan, and the important role of National Human Rights Organisations in monitoring CRPD implementation.”

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

Environment, Climate Change, and Disabled People

The Commonwealth Disabled People’s Forum (CDPF) remains committed to addressing the intersection of environmental issues, climate change, and the rights of disabled people. Recognising the unique vulnerabilities and challenges faced by disabled individuals during climate-related and other emergencies, the CDPF has taken proactive steps to advocate for disability-inclusive approaches in this critical area.

Policy Development and Frameworks

- **Disability Equality Training (2021):**
Module 6 of the training programme introduced participants to the impact of climate change on disabled people and strategies for disability-inclusive disaster risk reduction (DiDRR).
- **Environment Subcommittee (2023):**
Formed to reinforce CDPF’s commitment to climate-related challenges, the subcommittee convened on **30th August, 19th September, and 12th October**. Chaired by **Dookhoo Suvan Sharma (Mauritius)**, it included representation from Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, India, Malawi, and Guyana.
- **Policy Statement:**
The subcommittee developed the **CDPF Policy Addressing the Needs in Calamities, Risks, and Emergencies**, aligned with **UNCRPD Article 11**. This policy, included as Appendix 5, provides a comprehensive framework for ensuring the rights and needs of disabled people are prioritised during disasters and emergencies.

Advocacy and Representation

- **Participation at COP28:**
CDPF was represented at COP28 in Dubai by **Dookhoo Suvan Sharma**, who established

critical contacts despite limited access to the Blue Zone. The CDPF continues to advocate for the **Commonwealth Secretariat (ComSec)** to grant recognised status to delegates from Accredited Organisations, ensuring greater inclusion and influence in future UN Climate Conferences.

- Climate policy can be viewed in appendix

Youth Leadership Training Course

This year we finalised the Disabled Youth Leadership Online Course. To address the generational gap in disability leadership, CDPF initiated the Disabled Youth Leadership Online Course in September 2023, running through March 2024.

The programme aimed to build skills in advocacy, leadership, and community mobilisation. Participation: Over 150 young disabled participants from 33 (as represented below) Commonwealth countries were recruited through national member organisations, ensuring diverse regional representation.

Nigeria 24	Malaysia 4	Australia 2	Togo 1
Kenya 17	Rwanda 4		Canada 1
Bangladesh 10	Tanzania 4	Dominica 2	Botswana 1
Uganda 14	Sierre Leone 4	Guyana 2	Zambia 1
Namibia 7	The Gambia 4	St Lucia 2	Trin & Tobago 1
South Africa 6		Mozambique 2	Kiribati 1
Malawi 6	Solomon Isl. 4	Ghana 2	Malta 1
India 5	Cameroon 3	Lesotho 2	Papua New Guinea 1
Pakistan 5	Sri Lanka 3	Barbados 2	

Richard Rieser, the General Secretary, took on the main task of writing Course Books and developing presentations selected members of the Executive.

<https://commonwealthdpf.org/training/disabled-youth-leadership-course/>

The Training Sub-Sub- Committee Executive:- Richard Rieser (Gen Sec. UK), Sarah Kamau (Kenya), Eric Ngondi (Kenya), Sruti Mohapatra (India), Emile Gouws (South Africa) Prasanna Kuruppu (Sri Lanka), Khiembo Wilpert (Uganda), Kerryann Ifill (Barbados), Ganesh Singh (Guyana), Dookoo Suvan Sharma (Mauritius), Gaudence Mushimiyimana (Rwanda), Racheal Chomba (Zambia), Patience Ogulu Dickson (Nigeria). Co-optees Charlotte Young (Australia), Carly Fox (Canada), Christopher Cope (Barbados), Nathalie Murphy (Dominica) All contributed to oversight and providing presentations.

The Sub-committee met on 3 occasions and largely shaped the Course and it's methods and made recommendations to the Executive.

The Modules were comprised of a handbook, topical videos and a monthly regional meeting All videos and live meetings were captioned and had a BSL interpreter.

For each module there is a course handbook which captured the essence of the presentation and included the assessment activities.

The course ran successfully from September 2023 to March 2024 [with a month's break during December 2023], with one module delivered each month. Each module included an online presentation, background reading materials, activities, and an interactive seminar. Participants also engaged through an online platform, fostering discussion and collaboration throughout the course.

Module 1 – Implications of Paradigm Shift Individual/Medical to Social/Human Rights Approach – Introduced Dr Sruti Mohapatra, Vice Chair CDPF

Module 2 – Organising for Disability Equality and the Struggle for Equality Introduced by Sarah Kamau, Chair of the CDPF

Module 3 - Ensuring Equity within the Disabled People's Movement – Impairment, Gender, Ethnicity, Age, Class, Rural/Urban, etc - Introduced by Kerryann Ifill, Vice-Chair of the CDPF

Module 4 – Building DPO Democracy and Building National Coalitions – Introduced by Scader Lewis, Treasurer of CDPF

Module 5 – DPO Fundraising, Budgeting, Balance Sheets, Project Management and Monitoring Government Spending for Inclusion – Introduced by Scader Louis, Treasurer of CDPF

Module 6 – Disabled People's Organisations Influencing Government to Improve the Position of Disabled People

Overall, we received detailed feedback from 57 of the participants on the training.

Ratings (Scale 1–5):

- **Content:** 4.7
- **Knowledge Gained:** 4.7
- **Understanding Improved:** 4.5
- **Administrative Support:** 4.6

And here is some feedback in the participants own words:

“I will start working actively in the organization I belong to. I have learned various ways to conduct campaign for disability rights. Definitely, I have learnt a lot in this course.” Balappagari, India

“Educate and encourage to keep contributing as a disability advocate; I will actively use this knowledge for the development of people with disabilities”. Aminu, Nigeria

“I am convinced that the most important thing is to claim our place and lead the advocacy ourselves. The slogan Nothing about us without us is a very important one to start with.” Komlan, Togo

“I think the most important thing is to engage the government to stand by the principles outlined in the UNCRPD and conduct awareness campaigns at the community level. Principles such as universal design and reasonable accommodation should be at the heart of all development work without fail. This will remove the barriers that disabled people experience in ordinary life at all levels.” Ngirazie, Malawi

“As a result of completing this course, I plan to actively engage in the Disability Movement by volunteering with local organizations, advocating for inclusive policies, and educating others about disability rights and accessibility.” Rahman, Bangladesh

The Disabled Youth Leadership Online Course fostered a network of young, committed leaders across Commonwealth countries. These leaders are now equipped to advance disability inclusion and rights within their communities, organisations, and governments.

CDPF at the Commonwealth Law Ministers Meeting – 4th - 8th March 2024

The CDPF participated in the Commonwealth Law Ministers Meeting (CLMM) in Zanzibar, which focused on Technology and Innovation: How Digitalization Paves the Way for the Development of People-Centered Access to Justice.

The CDPF hosted a side event on 4th March in collaboration with the Commonwealth Human Rights Unit, titled “Practical Pathways to Strengthen Access to Justice for Persons with Disabilities.” Moderated by Steve Onwuasoanya, Acting Head of the Human Rights Unit, the event featured panelists including CDPF Chair Sarah Kamau, CDPF Treasurer Scader Louis, Angelina Atabong (Cameroon’s Ministry of Justice), and Justice Ilvin Mugeta (High Court of Tanzania). Over 30 judicial officers, judges, and Attorney Generals from Commonwealth countries attended.

The session highlighted the barriers disabled people face in accessing justice, such as inaccessible infrastructure, lack of reasonable accommodations, and attitudinal biases. Practical recommendations included adopting standardised guidelines for justice accessibility, providing formal training on disability inclusion for legal professionals, and leveraging technology to create accessible legal resources. Examples from Tanzania, which has digitised its legislation, and Cameroon, which is improving court accessibility and training magistrates, showcased progress in these areas. Feedback from countries like Namibia, Malawi, and Seychelles underscored the need for collaborative efforts and capacity building, reaffirming the importance of CDPF’s advocacy for systemic change in Commonwealth legal systems.

CDPF's broadsheet on this event can be viewed here:

<https://commonwealthdpf.org/projects/policy-law/>

Commonwealth Day – 11th March 2024

CDPF highlighted the need to gain support from Commonwealth Governments for the Disability Inclusion Action Plan <https://commonwealthdpf.org/commonwealth-day-2024/>

Inclusive Education Broadsheet for CCEM - 16 May 2024 - 17 May 2024

The 22CCEM took place at Marlborough House in May of 2024, London, United Kingdom. Organised and hosted by the Commonwealth Secretariat, the Government of Kenya served as the Chair. In honour of this event CDPF produced an Inclusive Education Broadsheet which can be found here: <https://commonwealthdpf.org/inclusive-education/>

CDPF Activities at the UN Committee of State Parties (COSP17) and Related – 10th-13th June 2024

Events The Commonwealth Disabled People’s Forum (CDPF) made a significant impact at COSP17 through active engagement in side-meetings, formal sessions, and strategic advocacy efforts. This participation highlighted the forum’s leadership in promoting the Disability Inclusion Action Plan (DIAP) and advancing the rights of disabled individuals across the Commonwealth.

Delegation Overview The CDPF delegation to COSP17 included: Chair: Sarah Kamau (Kenya) Vice Chair: Sruti Mohapatra (India), accompanied by her Personal Assistant (PA) General Secretary: Richard Rieser (UK), accompanied by his PA Members: Abia Akram (Pakistan), accompanied by her PA, and Rasanjali Pethridge (Sri Lanka) Highlights of Participation Side Meeting Success The CDPF hosted a side meeting that was widely regarded as a major success, drawing over 85 participants—a notably high turnout for such an event. Financially supported by the Government of Malta, the meeting featured a Ministerial speaker and diverse presentations from the Pacific, Caribbean, Africa, India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, the UK, and Australia. This representation underscored the broad support for CDPF and the DIAP.

A highlight was the endorsement by Luis Franceschi, Deputy Secretary-General of the Commonwealth.

Neurodiversity Advocacy CDPF also hosted and chaired the first-ever side meeting for neurodiverse individuals from Africa. Held online, this groundbreaking event engaged over 50 live participants, offering a platform for often-overlooked voices. Engagement at Civil Society Forum On 10th June, Sarah Kamau and Abia Akram represented CDPF at the Civil Society Forum, presenting from the platform to an audience of 350 activists from DPOs and NGOs. The forum showed improved inclusivity compared to previous years, a change influenced by CDPF's earlier advocacy critiquing undemocratic engagement practices. Nonetheless, CDPF emphasised the need for further reforms to better collect and reflect civil society perspectives, particularly through the International Disability Alliance (IDA).

COSP17 Sessions During the formal proceedings on 10th June, Richard Rieser delivered a compelling intervention, emphasising the critical role of inclusive practices and civil society engagement in advancing disability rights globally. Commonwealth-Specific Meetings and Activities Commonwealth Meeting (11th June) Sarah Kamau represented CDPF at a Commonwealth meeting chaired by Luis Franceschi. Although attendance was modest, the meeting facilitated valuable networking opportunities, including a key connection with delegates from The Bahamas. CDPF Meeting (12th June). In contrast to the earlier Commonwealth meeting, the CDPF-hosted meeting was dynamic and well-attended, reflecting the forum's growing influence. Sponsored by Malta and the UK, the event was chaired by Sarah Kamau and featured speakers including: Abia Akram Richard Rieser and Guest Speaker Luis Franceschi, who called on Commonwealth states to endorse and implement the DIAP at the upcoming Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM). Conclusion CDPF's participation at COSP17 showcased the forum's leadership in disability advocacy, from engaging in high-profile meetings to amplifying underrepresented voices through innovative side events. These efforts have strengthened CDPF's position as a pivotal organisation driving disability rights within the Commonwealth.

Supporting Materials:

Watch the recorded session on the UN WebTV platform:

<https://webtv.un.org/en/asset/k19/k19mt5tulz>

Learn more about CDPF events: <https://commonwealthdpf.org/events/>

Listening to the voices of autism self-advocates in the Global South: Ubuntu, “Stories from Africa”

12 June 2024 12:30 – 14:00 am EST

New York City, United States – Online

Host: The Commonwealth Disabled People's Forum (CDPF)

Zoom Link: <https://us02web.zoom.us/join/zoom/register/tZUtcO2srT4vGdHHZjayoi8IW-4Z0Q7hkNt>

[12th June Online Meeting Leaflet \(Word document\)](#) **Download**

[Read the article in THISABILITY on the meeting.](#)

Executive Meeting in Kenya –

The CDPF held a successful Face-to-Face Executive Meeting at Maanzoni Lodge, outside Nairobi, Kenya. This marked an important milestone for many Executive Committee (EC) members, as it was their first in-person gathering. The meeting, attended by 19 of 26 Executive members, ensured that all access needs were met, fostering a collaborative and inclusive environment.

Organisational Developments Constitutional Changes: A number of significant organisational changes were discussed and agreed upon, with formal amendments to the Constitution to be proposed at the Virtual General Assembly (January–March 2025).

Youth Representation: The elected committee of the Commonwealth Disabled Youth Forum (CDYF) participated in discussions regarding individual membership criteria. It was agreed to co-opt two additional youth representatives to the Executive Committee until the General Assembly.

Expansion of Membership: A recruitment drive was approved to include Disabled Persons Organisations (DPOs) from the UK Overseas Territories as Associate members.

Policy and Working Groups Several working groups were established to develop and refine key policies: Financial Controls Policy Justice and Law Climate Emergency Inclusion of Under-Represented Groups Parliamentary Involvement and Elections Policy on Disability, Sexuality, and LGBTQ+ Rights: A drafting group is working on this policy, which will be presented at the General Assembly.

Women's Forum Meetings of the Commonwealth Disabled Women's Forum were conducted, emphasising the importance of gender representation and inclusion in CDPF initiatives.

In Person Training for Young Disabled Leaders - 8th to 11th July, 2024, Kenya

CDPF hosted a Face-to-Face Training Programme for 14 Young Disabled Leaders from East and Southern Africa. (See more detail in Youth Report below)

Regional In-Person Training in Africa

Responding to participant feedback from the online course, CDPF held its first in-person training in Africa in July 2024. This intensive program targeted alumni from seven countries—Kenya, Malawi, Uganda, Tanzania, Rwanda, South Africa, and Zambia—and emphasized peer exchange, confidence-building, and interactive learning. You can read Kihembo Wilbert's (Youth Coordinator CCDYF) account of the CDPF Executive Meeting in Kenya [Here](#)

- **Selection Process:** Participants were nominated by national member organisations, ensuring equal gender representation.
- **Accessibility:** Training was fully inclusive, with accommodations such as personal assistants and simultaneous captioning.
- **Impact:**
 - 98.7% of participants reported readiness to apply their knowledge.
 - 96.2% rated learning outcomes positively.
 - 95% praised the organisation and methodology.

Key features included: **Mentorship:** Each young leader was paired with a 1:1 mentor from the Executive Committee. **Development Activities:** The youth leaders participated in targeted training sessions. Simultaneously, the EC engaged in separate developmental activities aimed at capacity building. Participants lauded the inclusive approach, interactive sessions, and mentoring provided by CDPF's Executive Committee.

Photos from CDPF Meeting at Maanzoni Lodge, Nairobi, Kenya July 2024

We held a face to face Executive attended by 19 members followed by a three day training and development session. There were two meetings of the CDPF Women's Forum This was paralleled and overlapped with a 3 day face to face disabled youth training on 10th, 11th and 12th July drawn from 7 countries in East and Southern Africa. On the morning of Friday 13th July a number of CDPF Officers, representative of United Disabled People of Kenya held a fruitful half day Roundtable, with representatives of various Kenyan Government Ministries, together with the Kenyan Human Rights Commission and Dr Samuel Kabue of the UNCRPD Committee.



Left: CDPF Executive Women Executive Members make up the core of the CDDPF Women's Forum



Right : Training Activity during Youth Training



Various photos of the Executive Meeting and Training



CHOGM SAMOA October 2024.

CDPF had 5 delegates Richard Rieser General Secretary People's Forum and CHOGM Rep., Sarah Kamau (Kenya) Chair, Sruti Mohapatra (India) Vice Chair, Women Forum, Kihembo Wilbert (Uganda)

and Saista Parwin (India) Youth Forum . We were joined by Rhoda Garland from Disability Commissioner Malta and Fatino Utumapu from our local affiliate NOLA.



Vice Chair Sruti Mohapatra and other presenters at panel on Gender Equality at the Women's Forum Samoa October 2024



CDPF Side Kihembo Wilpert, Luis Franceschi, Sruti, Rhoda Garland, Sarah Kamau, Saista Parwin, Faatino Utumapu, Richard Rieser, Priyanka Radhakrishnan MP

Speakers at CPA side meeting on Equality Minister Leonora Qereqeretabua Fiji, Sruti Mohapatra, Priyanka Radhakrishnan MP, Stephen Twigg CPA



People's Forum panel with Fatino Utumapu



Delegation at Conference entertainment and dinner. RR speaking at Independent Forum Commonwealth Organisations IFCO Side Meeting.

CHOGM 2024: A Reflection on Achievements and Progress

The Commonwealth Disabled People's Forum (CDPF) had a significant presence at the 2024 Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM), leveraging the opportunity to advance disability-inclusive policies and actions across Commonwealth nations. This reflection outlines key meetings, achievements, and progress made during CHOGM 2024.

Pre-Meeting Preparation

The CDPF team convened a preparatory session aboard *The Pacific Explorer* on Sunday, 20th October. This session laid the groundwork for the events, including finalising materials such as 300 leaflets for distribution to raise awareness of disability inclusion across various CHOGM platforms.

Youth Forum

Initially, CDPF had no representation at the Youth Forum. However, following discussions, Kihembo Wilbert was nominated to represent CDPF, ensuring that the perspectives of disabled youth were included in critical dialogues. This was an important step in amplifying youth voices within the broader disability rights framework.

CHOGM Side Meetings

1. Disability and Climate Change – Film Screening and Discussion

Date & Time: Monday 21st October

Venue: Main Hall

The event highlighted the disproportionate impact of climate change on disabled individuals, particularly in the Pacific. Featuring the film *Rising Tides, Rising Voices* (audio described and captioned), speakers shared grassroots efforts to champion disability-inclusive climate action.

Speakers:

- Sarah Kamau (Chair, CDPF, Kenya)
- Dr. Richard Rieser OBE (General Secretary, CDPF, UK)
- Jodie Santos (Disability Justice Project Film Maker)
- Faatino Utumapu (CDPF Executive, Samoa)
- Sovaia Sisi Coalala (Pacific Disability Forum)

This session underscored the urgency of implementing UNCRPD Article 11 to protect disabled individuals in climate emergencies.

2. Commonwealth Parliamentary Association Meeting

Date: Wednesday 23rd October

This session featured Dr. Sruti Mohapatra (Vice Chair, CDPF, India), who addressed the need for a paradigm shift from a medical/charity model to a rights-based approach to disability inclusion.

3. General CDPF Meeting

Date Wednesday 23rd October

Venue: Law Court TC 1

This meeting emphasized the Disability Inclusion Action Plan as a transformative tool to align with CHOGM themes, including human rights, climate resilience, and economic inclusion. Speakers such as Hon. Priyanca Radhakrishnan MP (New Zealand) and Rhoda Garland (Malta) joined to discuss solutions that ensure no one is left behind.

Attending CHOGM 2024 brought numerous benefits for the Commonwealth Disabled People's Forum (CDPF), significantly advancing its mission of disability inclusion. Despite initial gaps in representation, CDPF successfully ensured active participation across key platforms, including the Youth Forum and parliamentary discussions, amplifying the voices of disabled individuals. The forum also served as a vital stage for robust policy advocacy, with a strong focus on disability-inclusive climate action and commitments to advancing UNCRPD Article 11. Through the distribution of 300 informational leaflets and the impactful screening of *Rising Tides, Rising Voices*, CDPF raised awareness and brought critical disability rights issues to the forefront. CHOGM also provided a unique platform for fostering alliances with policymakers, youth leaders, and advocates, paving the way for future collaboration.

The Commonwealth have published the below on their website:

[A more inclusive Commonwealth](#)

During the events of CHOGM Week in October, member nations also:

- Highlighted the fact that [millions of young people cannot attend school](#), particularly in vulnerable regions, and agreed to a renewed focus on inclusive and safe learning;
- Agreed to increase [efforts to tackle non-communicable diseases](#) and prioritise mental health while recommitting to eliminate cancer, including cervical cancer;
- Discussed [a new model for sport–government engagement](#);
- [Recognised the challenge of ageing populations](#) and welcomed the launch of the Ageing Well in the Commonwealth: A Roadmap for Healthy Ageing Across the Life Course report, underscoring the need to promote holistic wellness at all stages of life; and
- Agreed to establish a high-level advisory group and a Disability Inclusion Action Plan.

CHOGM 2024 was a pivotal moment for CDPF to drive meaningful change, advocating for the rights of disabled people across areas like climate resilience and youth inclusion. While significant progress was made in aligning Commonwealth nations with disability-inclusive frameworks, ongoing efforts will be crucial to sustain and expand upon these achievements.

Youth Leadership and Empowerment Initiatives

The Commonwealth Disabled People's Forum (CDPF) is dedicated to fostering the next generation of disabled leaders across the Commonwealth. Recognising that 60% of the Commonwealth's population is under 30, CDPF has prioritised youth leadership as a cornerstone of its mission to ensure inclusive, representative, and sustainable advocacy for disability rights.

2023: A Year of Milestones in Youth Leadership

Development of the Youth Manifesto

In early 2023, the CDPF Youth Forum launched the Youth Manifesto, a pivotal document reflecting the aspirations, challenges, and policy priorities of young disabled individuals across the Commonwealth. Released during the Commonwealth Year of Youth celebrations, the manifesto serves as a blueprint for advocacy and youth empowerment.

Youth Representation at the 13th Commonwealth Youth Ministers Meeting

In September 2023, CDPF successfully secured representation for disabled youth at the 13th Commonwealth Youth Ministers Meeting in London. The delegate underscored the importance of integrating disability rights into youth-focused agendas, advocating for the meaningful inclusion of disabled youth in Commonwealth policymaking.

Disabled Youth Leadership Online Course

To address generational gaps in leadership, CDPF introduced an **online leadership course** in September 2023, running through March 2024. The program focused on advocacy, leadership skills, and community mobilisation, engaging:

- **150+ participants** from **33 Commonwealth countries**, recruited through national member organisations to ensure diverse representation.
- **Impact:** Participants formed a global network of committed young leaders advancing disability inclusion in their respective countries.
- **The course materials are available here:**
<https://commonwealthdpf.org/training/disabled-youth-leadership-course/>

Establishment of the Commonwealth Disabled Youth Forum (CDYF):

The Commonwealth Disabled Youth Forum (CDYF) emerged as an inspiring initiative from the 2023-2024 Commonwealth Disabled People's Forum (CDPF) Youth Leadership Course. Conceived within a WhatsApp group for the course participants, CDYF aims to unite and empower disabled youth across the Commonwealth. It has grown into a vibrant community advocating for the rights of disabled youth while nurturing future leaders.

Notably, CDYF nominated two steering committee members to join the CDPF committee, ensuring the youth voice is represented at the decision-making level.

2024: Building on the Foundation

Regional In-Person Training in Africa

Responding to participant feedback from the online course, CDPF held its first in-person training in Africa in July 2024. This intensive program targeted alumni from seven countries—Kenya, Malawi, Uganda, Tanzania, Rwanda, South Africa, and Zambia—and emphasized peer exchange, confidence-building, and interactive learning. You can read Kihembo Wilbert's (Youth Coordinator CCDYF) account of the CDPF Executive Meeting in Kenya [Here](#)

- **Selection Process:** Participants were nominated by national member organisations, ensuring equal gender representation.
- **Accessibility:** Training was fully inclusive, with accommodations such as personal assistants and simultaneous captioning.
- **Impact:**
 - 98.7% of participants reported readiness to apply their knowledge.
 - 96.2% rated learning outcomes positively.
 - 95% praised the organisation and methodology.

Key features included: Mentorship: Each young leader was paired with a 1:1 mentor from the Executive Committee. Development Activities: The youth leaders participated in targeted training sessions. Simultaneously, the EC engaged in separate developmental activities aimed at capacity building.

Participants lauded the inclusive approach, interactive sessions, and mentoring provided by CDPF's Executive Committee.

Empowering Change Webinar on Youth Inclusion in Leadership

In September 2024, CDPF hosted two webinars advocating for increased representation of disabled youth in organisational leadership and decision-making. These webinars highlighted a call to action for greater inclusivity and visibility of young leaders. You can watch excerpts from the Seminars [Call to Action](#), [Paradigm Shift](#), [Youth Webinar](#)

CHOGM Youth Forum Participation

CDYF representatives participated in the Commonwealth Youth Forum during CHOGM week in Samoa, bringing critical perspectives on disability rights. Reflections on this experience are available [here](#).

Commonwealth Disabled Youth Forum (CDYF): A Youth-Led Movement

The Commonwealth Disabled Youth Forum (CDYF) has become a vibrant network advocating for the rights of disabled youth. CDYF has grown into an impactful platform.

- **Youth Representation:** CDYF nominated two members to join the CDPF Steering Committee, ensuring youth voices influence decision-making.

The graphic is a blue-themed poster for a webinar. At the top, it says 'COMMONWEALTH DISABLED YOUTH FORUM (CDYF) PRESENTS' in white and yellow text. Below that, 'EMPOWERING CHANGE WEBINAR' is written in large white letters, with 'SHIFTING THE PARADIGM ON DISABILITY' in a yellow box underneath. The central part of the graphic features six circular portraits of speakers, each with their name and title below. The speakers are: Kihembo Wilbert (Youth Coordinator, CDYF - Uganda), Richard Risser (General Secretary, CDPF - UK), Namwanje Gorret (Program Coordinator, CDYF - Uganda), Dr. Emile Gouws (Neurodiversity Expert, Unrepresented Groups, CDPF - South Africa), Dr. Sruti Mohapatra (Inclusion Expert (+27 Years), Vice Chair, CDPF - India), and Clare Gibellini (Co-Chair - National Autism Strategy, Australia). At the bottom, there are two yellow boxes indicating the dates: 'DAY 1 11 SEPTEMBER 2024 1PM - 3PM BST' and 'DAY 2 12 SEPTEMBER 2024 8AM - 10AM BST'.

- **Survey Insights:** In 2024, CDYF conducted a survey identifying barriers in education, employment, digital accessibility, and social inclusion for disabled youth. The findings guide efforts toward fostering inclusivity across the Commonwealth. You can find the full report on here: <https://kihembo.com/diary/commonwealth-disabled-youth-forum-cdyf-2024-survey-report>

Advocacy and Climate Change Engagement

CDYF advocates for greater community awareness and action on climate change, highlighting the disproportionate impact on disabled individuals. Sensitising communities about these challenges remains a priority for future initiatives.

CDYF Plans for 2025

1. Membership Certificates

CDYF plans to issue branded certificates to members, recognising their contributions and strengthening community ties.

2. Social Media Campaign

To enhance visibility and participation, CDYF will launch a campaign spotlighting young disabled leaders across the Commonwealth. Featuring one leader every three months, this initiative aims to inspire engagement and amplify their impact ahead of CHOGM 2026.

3. Peer-to-Peer Online Meetings

CDYF will facilitate virtual meetings across Commonwealth countries, fostering dialogue and idea-sharing among disabled youth. Insights from these discussions will inform strategic actions at the executive level.

CDPF remains steadfast in its commitment to empowering young disabled leaders, recognising their pivotal role in shaping a more inclusive Commonwealth for generations to come.

CDPF Women's Forum Update

Below: Mrs Mushimiya Gaudence
Chair CDPF disabled women's forum

Girls and women with disabilities experience discrimination at the intersection of gender and disability that further exacerbates inequalities in all spheres of their lives including but not limited to education, health, justice, financial decision making, political participation etc. By recognizing the status of disabled girls and women a specific forum Disabled Women's Forum was constituted under CDPF in 2022 to ensure the voices of disabled women is amplified and their specific needs taken into accounts.

Since its establishment, disabled women forum conduct survey on status of girls and women with disabilities whereby the issues of limited chances for education and economic empowerment opportunities came on the top of the barrier to full enjoyment of their human rights. The forum defined priority areas to address identified barriers are 1) Education, employment and Economic Empowerment 3) Promote Gender Equity, 4) Health care services and 5) political participation. In addition to the five strategic areas, there are other three crosscutting issues of desegregated data by gender and disability, stigma and discrimination and accessibility that the forum ensure are addressed across all the forum's interventions.



Through the year 2024 the CDP disabled women's forum has witnessed a growing awareness among the Accredited Commonwealth Women's Forum, established linkages and networks relevant for future disability inclusive mainstream women's organizations and movements across the commonwealth countries. We have amplified voices for girls and women with disabilities through different global advocacy platform: CSW68, Commonwealth Women's Forum at CHOGM 2024, commonwealth law ministers meeting and COSP17.

As we celebrate our success as disabled women's forum we also recognise the work ahead and ensure the journey to a unified movement of women with disabilities stronger to inspire a mainstream women's movement across the commonwealth countries we started we started will reach the goal.

I extend my heartfelt gratitude to all committed and passionate advocates girls and women with disabilities members of the forum and unwavering support from DPF secretary General and the Commonwealth Secretariat. Our particular recognition goes to the gender Department at the Commonwealth Secretariat for all the financial and moral support be where the forum is today and celebrate what we have achieved. Together the forum celebrate partnership, power, influence and dream to building a strong movement across the commonwealth.

Let us stand on the side of every disabled woman, every disabled girl who need our hands! It is difficult to denounce violence when you know you are still 100% depending on someone else and most of the time you depend on perpetrator! This is the case of many girls and women with disabilities. This is our concern that we hope to change the narrative together with you all as women with disabilities, mainstream OPDs, partners, donors and finally our sisters girls and women without disabilities?

We thank you for being part of gender and disability transformative journey over the year 2024!

Mrs MUSHIMIYIMANA Gaudence, Chair CDPF disabled women's forum

Highlights and Impact of CDPF Women's Forum Activities in 2024

The Commonwealth Disabled People's Forum (CDPF) established its Women's Forum in 2022 to ensure focused advocacy on the unique challenges faced by disabled women across the Commonwealth. Since its inception, the Women's Forum has become a formidable voice, driving policy and social change on behalf of women and girls with disabilities. In 2024, the forum made significant strides, including conducting a **landmark survey** that shed light on the heightened inequality experienced by disabled women. CDPF remains resolute that the Women's Forum will continue to be central to its mission, with its initiatives embedded in the forthcoming **Disability Inclusion Action Plan (DIAP)**.

Advocacy at the 68th Commission on the Status of Women (CSW68)

New York, USA | March 2024

At CSW68, CDPF reinforced the critical importance of disability inclusion within the Commonwealth Gender Agenda. During the National Women's Machinery side event, strategies were shared to actualise the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), ensuring accelerated gender equality by addressing barriers unique to women and girls with disabilities.

Key topics included:

- **Economic Empowerment:** Advocating for equal employment opportunities and addressing wage disparities.
- **Sexual and Reproductive Health (SRH):** Highlighting the exclusion faced by women with disabilities in SRH services and education.
- **Inclusive Education:** Underscoring the critical lack of sign language materials and accessible learning environments, especially for hearing-impaired women.

Delegates: Rasanjali Pathirage (Sri Lanka), Sarah Kamau (Kenya), and Dr. Sruti Mohapatra (India) were instrumental in presenting CDPF's vision, emphasising the necessity of a Disability Inclusion Strategy and Action Plan to address these challenges.

Contribution to the 19th Pre-Sessional Working Group of CRPD

Geneva, Switzerland | March 2024

CDPF presented its alternative report to the CRPD, identifying systemic gaps in Sri Lanka's disability rights implementation and providing recommendations for reforms. Notable achievements included:

- Advocating for an **independent monitoring commission** for persons with disabilities.
- Bridging discrepancies between government and civil society narratives through direct dialogue with the CRPD Committee.

Delegate: Rasanjali Pathirage represented CDPF and Sri Lanka, drawing attention to the lived realities of disabled women in marginalised communities, ensuring their voices were heard at the global level.

Commonwealth Women's Forum at CHOGM 2024 - Apia, Samoa | October 2024

The Women's Forum at CHOGM 2024 focused on key areas, including women in leadership, economic empowerment, and gender-equitable responses to climate change. CDPF played a pivotal role, highlighting:

- **Barriers to Leadership:** Persistent underrepresentation of women with disabilities in political and civic spaces. CDPF called for specific interventions, such as electoral reforms and quotas, to boost representation.
- **Economic Disparities:** The forum exposed stark employment and wage gaps for disabled women. CDPF urged governments to adopt disability-inclusive labour policies and eliminate discriminatory practices.
- **Intersectionality in Climate Resilience:** Recognising the unique vulnerability of women with disabilities to climate disasters, CDPF advocated for accessible infrastructure and inclusive disaster risk reduction policies.

Delegates: Sarah Kamau (Chair, CDPF, Kenya), Dr. Sruti Mohapatra (Vice-Chair, CDPF, India), and Faatino Utumapu (Samoa) led discussions, emphasising actionable frameworks like the Disability Inclusion Action Plan (DIAP). Their advocacy culminated in a strong call for the adoption of DIAP at CHOGM, setting a precedent for inclusive development across the Commonwealth.

Broader Impact and Survey Insights

A landmark survey conducted by CDPF revealed:

- **Leadership Representation:** Women with disabilities are significantly underrepresented in decision-making roles across Commonwealth nations.
- **Economic Inclusion:** 85% of respondents reported discrimination in hiring and promotion, and 73% faced unequal pay compared to their peers.
- **Violence and Justice:** 88% of respondents agreed that disabled women face two to three times more gender-based violence than nondisabled women, highlighting systemic barriers to accessing justice.

Delegate Contributors: Rasanjali Pathirage (Sri Lanka), Sarah Kamau (Kenya), and Mohua Paul (Bangladesh) spearheaded data collection and analysis, ensuring the survey results informed strategic discussions at key forums.

Commitment to Collective Advocacy

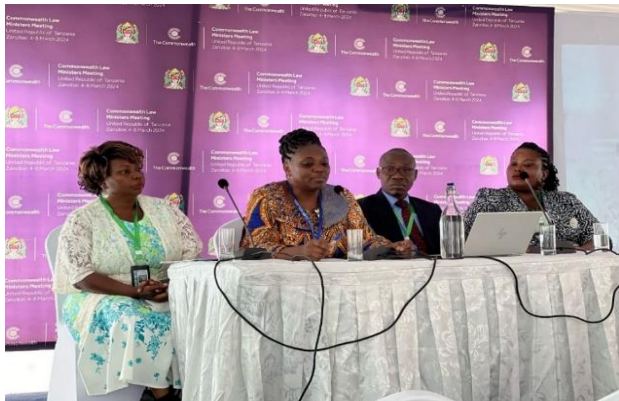
Through events like CSW68 and CHOGM, CDPF reinforced its role as a unified voice for disabled women across the Commonwealth. Delegates, including Sarah Kamau, Dr. Sruti Mohapatra, and Faatino Utumapu, championed the inclusion of disability rights in global gender agendas, laying the groundwork for sustained progress towards an equitable, inclusive future.

COMMONWEALTH LAW MINISTERS MEETING REPORT

The Commonwealth Law Ministers Meeting (CLMM) was held in Zanzibar from March 4th to 8th, 2024. The theme of the workshop was '**Technology and Innovation: How digitalisation paves the way for the development of people-centred access to justice**'. The discussions covered a wide range of issues, including digital assets, electronic resources for efficient legal systems, the protection of women and girls, strengthened access to justice for people with disabilities and developments in climate policy and legislation. A key focus was on examining responsible ways to leverage technology to improve law and access to justice, especially for marginalised people. The outcomes from the meeting were meant to advance mandates from Commonwealth Heads of Government Meetings, held later in October 2024, at Apia Samoa, to include the Declaration on Equal Access to Justice, in line with Sustainable Development Goal target 16.3 of ensuring equal access to justice for all. CDPF Chair, Sarah Kamau and Treasury, Scader Louis represented CDPF at that meeting.

In collaboration with the Commonwealth Human Rights Unit, CDPF was engaged in two successful side-event on Practical pathways to strengthening access to justice for disabled people in the Commonwealth. The side event was attended by over 30 Judicial officers, Judges and Attorney Generals from various Commonwealth countries. The session was moderated by Steve

Onwuasoanya, Acting Head of the Human Rights Unit. Panelists included CDPF Chair, Ms. Sarah Kamau, CDPF Treasurer Ms. Scader Louis, Ms. Angelina Atabong, Sub-Director of International Cooperation, Cameroon Ministry of Justice and Justice Ilvin Mugeta, Judge of the High Court of Tanzania and Vice President of the Commonwealth Magistrates and Judges Association. Ms Scader Louis also had the opportunity to discuss and lobby for the adoption of the CDPF Disability Inclusion Action Plan with the then Commonwealth Secretary-General General, Rt. Hon. Patricia Scotland KC



In the picture above – From far left CDPF Chair Sarah Kamau, Ms. Angelina, Judge Mugeta and CDPF Treasurer, Scader Louis during the event



Ms. Scader Louis with the Her Excellency Patricia Scotland

The Commonwealth Human Rights Unit covered the event on Twitter see <https://x.com/commonwealthsec/status/1764628293850952064?s=46&t=OfC2NFFOm13fX-WiqJWb7Q>

Disabled Girls Empowerment Pilot Project 2024-2026

The forum is implementing a three years African **Disabled Girls Empowerment Pilot Project 2024-2026**. The focus of the projects is to develop and implement innovative methods to encourage and bring about an increase in the effective inclusive education of disabled girls in primary education; increase in participation of disabled teenage girls who have completed primary/secondary education in job skills training projects that lead to meaningful self/ employment and to enhance solidarity of disabled girls in effectively challenging gender based violence. The implementation of **Disabled Girls Empowerment Pilot Project will serves as an opportunity for learning and** developing tools for selecting and managing grass root projects in two selected countries. The CDPF women’s forum therefore started the process to recruit two Project implementing disabled women’s led organizations in African Commonwealth countries

The year 2024 was marked with Women Forum face to face Meeting in Nairobi 2024

Held in the evening of Monday 8th and 10th July 2024 at Maanzoni in Nairobi the forum meeting brought together women trainees and women members of CDPF Executive Committee. On the agenda the following topics were discussed

1. Progress made by the CDPF women’s forum
2. The CDPF women’s Forum we want within 5 years: dreams/aspirations/expectations, value, working principles, structures, networks, relationships, partnerships, engagement, working strategies etc
3. Girls and women initiatives
4. Representation at CHOGM

Disabled women’s Participants agreed to put in place disabled women’s regional representation according to the following region

1. Africa
2. Asia
3. Caribbean
4. Canada
5. Australian and Newzeland/Southern Pacific
6. UK& Malta

At CDFP level deputy chair and secretary for the women's forum were agreed to be put in place..



Group shot of the CDFP Women's Forum in Kenya

Establishment of Regional Desks and Recruitment of Interns

During late 2023 and the early part of the 2024 the Executive considered establishing multiple offices and independent legal entity status in a number of countries starting in India. Upon investigation such registration would prove too costly and would raise significant issue for governance. It was therefore decided to get agreement with a number of our DPO member organisations to host a CDPF regional desk and recruit an intern to be jointly supervised by the DPO and a regional Executive member. At the July Executive DPOs were agreed and subsequently MOA were signed in September 2024 and the Commonwealth Disabled People's Forum (CDPF) took a significant step forward by working with six Disabled People's Organisations (DPOs) across the Commonwealth to establish Regional Desks.

These desks are pivotal to CDPF's mission of enhancing membership and gaining deeper insights into the lives of disabled people throughout the Commonwealth. The overarching goal is to achieve better representation across member states, identify best practices, and highlight ongoing challenges faced by disabled people. With this knowledge, CDPF is better positioned to influence Commonwealth-wide policy and drive meaningful action.

Recognising the importance of developing in-country skills and maintaining an agile organisational structure, CDPF partnered with the following DPOs to host and supervise Interns at each regional desk. These Interns will play a crucial role in expanding regional membership and building a robust knowledge base:

Host Organisations and Regional Coverage

- 1. West Africa Region Desk:** Hosted by the Joint National Association of Persons with Disabilities (JONAWPWD). This desk supports Cameroon, Sierra Leone, The Gambia, Gabon, Ghana, Nigeria, and Togo. **Intern Abubakar Mumbu Idris appointed to the role.**
- 2. Southern Africa Region Desk:** Hosted by the Zambia Federation of Disability Organisations (ZAFOD). This desk covers South Africa, Namibia, Botswana, Zambia, Malawi, Lesotho, Eswatini, Mauritius, and Mozambique. **Intern John Mvula appointed to the role.**
- 3. East Africa Region Desk:** Hosted by United Disabled Persons of Kenya (UDPK). This desk serves Kenya, Tanzania, Rwanda, and Uganda. **Intern Jerry Okiki appointed to the role.**
- 4. India Region Desk:** Hosted by Swabhimani - State Disability Information and Resource Centre. This desk encompasses India's states and territories, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, and the Maldives. **Intern Rudra Narayan Behera appointed to the role.**
- 5. Caribbean Region Desk:** Hosted by the Guyana Council of Organisations for Persons with Disabilities (GCOPD). This desk supports Antigua and Barbuda, The Bahamas, Barbados, Dominica, Grenada, Jamaica, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Trinidad and Tobago, Belize, Guyana, Anguilla, British Virgin Islands, Cayman Islands, Montserrat, Turks and Caicos Islands, and Bermuda. **Intern Anajalie Sookra appointed to the role.**
- 6. Pacific Region Desk:** Hosted by People with Disabilities Solomon Islands. This desk covers the Solomon Islands, Tuvalu, Vanuatu, Papua New Guinea, Nauru, Fiji, Samoa, Tonga, Kiribati, Singapore, Malaysia, and Brunei Darussalam. **Ellen Rofo appointed to the role.**

Purpose of the Regional Desks

The Regional Desks aim to further CDPF's objectives of promoting disability equality and supporting the implementation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) across the Commonwealth. Their scope includes:

- Developing a comprehensive database of DPOs in the region and maintaining a list of relevant contacts in governments, DPOs, and NGOs.
- Promoting membership in CDPF, particularly in the Commonwealth Disabled Women's Forum, Commonwealth Disabled Youth Forum, and other committees focused on issues such as Climate Emergency, Inclusive Education, and Inclusive Employment.
- Disseminating information, newsletters, and best practices to stakeholders.
- Researching and publicising examples of good practice.
- Collating and developing databases and knowledge resources for CDPF.
- Facilitating regional training events where resources allow.
- Supporting other activities as directed by CDPF's Executive Committee.

Progress Update

The Interns have now completed their induction and have begun connecting with our member organisations. We are delighted that many of you have warmly welcomed them. We would greatly appreciate your continued support as the Interns will be reaching out again soon to gather potential case studies of good practice, particularly in areas where reasonable adjustment is effectively implemented. In particular they will be seeking information on:

- Reasonable accommodation
- Accessibility
- Effectively challenging disability discrimination
- Implementing disability rights legislation
- Universal design
- Governments working effectively with representative organisations of disabled people

These case studies will be invaluable as they will be showcased at the upcoming International Disability Summit and contribute to a growing bank of information to be presented at the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) in 2026. By working together, we can highlight successes, share knowledge, and advance the cause of disability equality across the Commonwealth.

Commonwealth Scholarship Commission Support and Recommendations

In 2024, the Commonwealth Scholarship Commission (CSC) celebrated 65 years of delivering Commonwealth Scholarships. Since the program's inception in 1960, over 31,000 individuals have benefited from these scholarships, starting with the first cohort of 175 Scholars. The CSC continues its mission to identify talented individuals with the potential to act as catalysts for positive change within their communities and globally. Committed to principles of equal opportunity and non-discrimination, the CSC encourages applications from diverse candidates and has supported 72 disabled Scholars from 15 countries since 2018.

The CDPF (Commonwealth Disability Partnership Fund) is proud to have continued its collaboration with the CSC throughout 2024 by providing recommendations for applications to the CSC's Masters and PhD Schemes for disabled applicants. This partnership underscores the shared commitment to fostering inclusive opportunities for scholars across the Commonwealth.

Assessment and Selection Process

The assessment process for the 2024 cohort was conducted rigorously and transparently. There were 63 Masters applicants and 21 PhD applicants. Following the agreed-upon criteria, the selection was based on the merit of aggregate scores.

A panel comprising Sruti Mohapatra, Kerryann Ifill, Sarah Kamau, and Richard Rieser convened to evaluate and finalize the applications. After thorough deliberation, the panel recommended 10 Masters nominations and 5 PhD nominations. These recommendations were submitted to the CSC on Saturday, 7th December, and acknowledgment of receipt was confirmed on 10th December.

While several appeals were lodged following the selection, the process was reviewed and deemed fair. The General Secretary has communicated with the appellants to affirm that the decisions was final, as the selection adhered strictly to the established criteria and procedures.

The CDPF is pleased to continue contributing to this impactful initiative, supporting the CSC in empowering the next generation of disabled leaders and changemakers across the Commonwealth.

Advocacy Actions in 2024

During 2024, CDPF played an advocacy role on several critical issues, using our members voice and demonstrating our commitment to advocating for the rights and dignity of disabled people. One notable issue addressed was the National Commission for Persons with Disabilities (NCPWD) Statement on the Alleged Assault of Hamza Waziri by the Nigeria Police Force.

The National Commission for Persons with Disabilities (NCPWD) condemned in the strongest terms the alleged assault on Hamza Waziri, a distinguished member of our community, by officers of the Nigeria Police Force. This reprehensible act, captured in a video currently circulating on social media, shows Mr. Waziri being brutally battered while exercising his constitutional right to peaceful protest in front of the Bauchi State Government House.

Hamza Waziri is not only a person with a disability but also a respected member of the CODE Board of Trustees, a Mandela Washington Fellow, a Chevening Fellow, and the Founder of the Initiative for the Liberalization of Physically Challenged People in Nigeria. In response, CDPF formally wrote to the Secretary General of the Commonwealth and the President of Nigeria, protesting this treatment of a legitimate protestor and urging immediate action to address this violation of human rights.

CDPF remains steadfast in its advocacy for justice and the protection of rights for all persons with disabilities, continuing to work towards systemic changes that ensure inclusivity and respect.

Participation in Political and Public Life: 2024 - A Year of Transformation

The year 2024 marked an unprecedented surge in global elections, providing a crucial opportunity to advance the political rights of persons with disabilities (PwDs). Organizations like the Commonwealth Disabled Peoples Forum (CDPF), National Centre for Promotion of Employment for Disabled People (NCPEDP), and National Disability Network (NDN) launched a coordinated campaign to ensure the inclusion of disabled individuals in political life. Dubbed the "Year of Elections," 2024 saw extensive lobbying for disabled representation, focusing on Article 29 of the UNCRPD.

Article 29 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) emphasizes the right of persons with disabilities to participate in political and public life on an equal basis with others. It obligates States Parties to adopt measures ensuring that this right is upheld without discrimination and with full accessibility.

- Legislation and measures to guarantee to persons with disabilities, in particular persons with mental or intellectual disability, political rights, including, if it is the case, existing limitations and actions taken to overcome them
- Measures taken to ensure the right to vote of all persons with disabilities, on their own or to be assisted by a person of their choice
- Measures taken to ensure the full accessibility of the voting procedures, facilities and materials
 - Indicators measuring the full enjoyment of the right to participate in political and public life of persons with disabilities
- Support provided, if any, to persons with disabilities for the establishment and maintenance of organizations to represent their rights and interests at local, regional and national level.

Disabled people including blind and partially sighted people face barriers to voting which include:

- their voting rights not being communicated in an accessible way

- not having the support they need when registering to vote or voting
- physical, psychological and information barriers when voting at a polling station
- the method of voting - making a cross in a specific location on a piece of paper - being a principally visual exercise

In the UK Disabled voters are entitled to the following accommodations:

- Assistance with Ballot Marking: Voters may ask for help from the Presiding Officer to mark their ballot. They may also bring someone to assist them, such as a family member over 18 or another registered voter.
- Tactile Voting Devices: These are available to aid those with visual impairments or limited dexterity, allowing them to mark the ballot paper easily.
- Large-Print Ballot Papers: Every polling station should display a large-print ballot paper for reference. Voters who require it can take this version into the booth, although it cannot be used for voting.
- Assistance Outside the Polling Station: When a polling station is inaccessible, the Presiding Officer must bring the ballot paper to the voter outside.

A recent analysis of Disabled People using their rights under the Electoral Act in **Nigeria** 2019 General Election made the following points:

- The Electoral Act (as amended) provides opportunities for enhanced voting participation of disabled people during elections in Nigeria but majority of them are not aware of these provisions.
- The research found that the electoral officials did not follow all the provisions of the Electoral Act during the 2019 elections, and this affected the voting participation of many disabled people.
- Non-availability of braille ballot papers and sign language interpreter at the voting centres as well as restriction placed on mobility on the day of election restricted the participation of disabled people in the 2019 general elections in Nigeria.
- The study recommended an improvement in the implementation of the Electoral Act by the electoral officials to improve voting participation of disabled people in Nigeria.
- The study recommended that electoral reforms that include electronic voting system and transmission of results should be implemented and strengthened in subsequent elections in Nigeria.¹

India, with its record-breaking elections, became a critical battleground for advocacy, as these efforts emphasized the integration of accessible polling measures and the political empowerment of disabled voters.

In 2024 the National Centre for Promotion of Employment for Disabled People (NCPEDP) along with National Disability Network (NDN) embarked on the campaign '*Disabled People in Politics*' in advance of may of the elections with an aim to work towards political inclusion. Apart from two national consultations, 9 regional consultations have been held across India. Various steps were taken:

- Highlighting the huge number of voters with disabilities
- How the vote of citizens with disabilities matter
- Release of a Manifesto by Citizens with Disabilities. NCPEDP, NDN, NCRPD, 15000 people and 600 organisations worked in developing the Manifesto for & by Citizens with Disabilities
- Presentation of the manifesto Political parties and leaders of political parties
- Meetings with the media

¹ <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/09687599.2022.2090900>

The Indian Communist Party included 9 of 14 of the Manifesto Asks and more importantly INC (Indian National Congress) party, the main opposition, announced in their manifesto the expansion of Articles 15 and 16 of the Constitution to include protection against discrimination based on disability; this represents a seismic shift in how society perceives and includes persons with disabilities.

“For too long, we’ve been relegated to the sidelines, seen as mere beneficiaries of welfare programs rather than as active contributors to the nation’s progress. But with this bold step, the Congress Party acknowledges our inherent dignity and rights as equal citizens”, said Arman Ali, Executive Director NCPEDP and Convenor NDN. He further stated:

“By recognizing disability alongside other grounds of discrimination, such as race or gender, Congress is sending a powerful message: Disability rights are human rights, and they must be enshrined in our constitutional framework”.

Initiatives included regional consultations and campaigns highlighting the importance of accessible voting and the power of the disabled vote. Despite these efforts, significant challenges persist, such as the absence of disabled MPs in India's 2024 Lok Sabha elections, underscoring the need for broader representation in political institutions.

Key actions have been identified to address systemic barriers.

- Ensuring accessibility in voting includes training election officials,
- enforcing accessibility standards at polling stations,
- Ability to use tactile voting devices or Braille ballots.

Moreover, empowering young disabled voters through targeted education and outreach campaigns is crucial to strengthen participation and foster representation. Parliamentary efforts must also prioritize improving voting system operations, aligning with constitutional and international commitments like the RPwD Act and the UNCRRPD.

Political parties have a critical role in fostering inclusion. Encouraging the nomination of disabled candidates ensures leadership roles reflect the diversity of the population and address specific challenges faced by persons with disabilities. Representation not only amplifies advocacy but also inspires others in the community to engage politically. By implementing these measures, the path toward an inclusive democracy becomes more robust, ensuring that persons with disabilities are active contributors to shaping their societies.

Despite notable progress, significant challenges remain. While initiatives like the release of manifestos and regional consultations mobilized voters and increased awareness, the lack of elected disabled MPs in India's 2024 Lok Sabha elections highlighted persistent systemic barriers. Moving forward, implementing measures such as expanding constitutional protections against discrimination and ensuring the accountability of electoral officials will be critical. The efforts in 2024 have laid a solid foundation, but achieving full political inclusion for persons with disabilities requires sustained advocacy, robust legislative action, and an unwavering commitment to equality.

Financial Summary

Note Re ADD International's role as Fiscal Sponsor for the Commonwealth Disabled People's Forum ("CDPF")

ADD International has been acting as Fiscal Sponsor to CDPF since 2019. The most recent MoU covers the period up until 30th September 2025. As Fiscal Sponsor, ADD receives, hold, dispenses and reports on the project funds in accordance with the terms of the grant agreements with donors to CDPF. As Implementing Agency, CDPF plans, conducts and reports on all project activities, and provides ADD with all necessary budgets, receipts and other information to enable ADD to fulfil its remit as the Fiscal Partner. CDPF does not currently exist as a separate legal entity but is seeking to form an independent organisation over the period of the current MoU.

The following note, separates the funding that ADD International is managing as Fiscal Sponsor for CDPF and shows the restricted income and expenditure and resultant balances for the different projects and donors that are related to CDPF.

Project	Donor	Balance 1.1.2024	Income	Expenditure	Balance 31.12.2024	
III. Project Name XXXX						
<i>Grant Number: 21-155 (GDS18 grant) USD 75,000</i>						
<i>Grant Number: 21-156 (OPD Strengthening grant) USD 5,000</i>	Disability Rights Fund	3,985	-	16	3,969	
Sub-total		3,985	-	16	3,969	CDPF 3
IV. Project Name XXXX						
<i>Grant number 47593834</i>	<i>Global</i>					
<i>Disability Summit (GDS) USD 90,000</i>	<i>Core</i>					
<i>Support USD 20,000</i>	Disability Rights Fund	- 7,745	50,820	28,041	15,034	
Sub-total		- 7,745	50,820	28,041	15,034	CDPF 4
V. Project Name XXXX						
<i>Grant number 6377517 USD 439,800</i>	Disability Rights Fund (FCDO)	-	346,211	176,965	169,246	
	Sightsavers	-	3,000	3,000	-	
Sub-total		-	349,211	179,965	169,246	CDPF 5
CSC						
	Commonwealth Scholarship Commission	- 2,120	2,800	680	-	
Sub-total		- 2,120	2,800	680	-	
CommSec						
	Commonwealth Secretariat (Youth)	-	2,500	540	1,960	
Sub-total		-	2,500	540	1,960	
Total Funds Managed as Fiscal Sponsor of CDPF		- 5,880	405,331	209,243	190,209	

Funding of CDPF's Activity

Since its inception in 2007/2008, the Commonwealth Disabled People's Forum (CDPF) has faced challenges in securing sufficient funding. However, significant progress has been made on this front over the past two years.

Early Funding and Initial Activities

At its founding, the CDPF received a grant from the UK Government to support its inaugural conference in 2008 and another for a conference held in Uganda. In 2011/2012, the Commonwealth Foundation funded a training project in the South Pacific. Following this, the organization experienced a period of inactivity with limited funding and organizational momentum.

Revival and Progress

The CDPF was revitalized at an impromptu side meeting during the Disability Global Summit in 2018. A grant from the Disability Rights Fund (DRF), sourced through the UK Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (UKFCDO), enabled a re-founding General Assembly (GA) in New York in June 2019. At this assembly, the constitution was amended, an executive committee was elected, and a work plan was adopted. In February 2020, the executive committee met face-to-face in Malta, where they established several working practices and policies. However, the onset of COVID-19 disrupted plans for in-person training. The deferred grant was ultimately used to deliver a highly successful online training course in 2021. [Learn more about this training course here: <https://commonwealthdpf.org/training/disability-equality-capacity-building>.]

Advocacy and Representation

In 2022, CDPF sent delegates to the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) in Kigali, where it became evident that disability equality was being largely overlooked by the Commonwealth Secretariat and at CHOGM. Determined to address this, the CDPF secured additional funding from the DRF to disseminate training materials, support organizational operations, and ensure representation at various forums.

Youth Leadership Initiative

To align with the Year of Youth in 2023, the CDPF developed a training course aimed at encouraging young disabled individuals to take on leadership roles within the disability movement. DRF provided a grant to organize this course, and in early 2024, the Commonwealth Secretariat awarded a small grant to complete and evaluate the initiative. The course's alumni formed a WhatsApp group to maintain connections, which evolved into a recruitment hub for the Commonwealth Disabled Youth Forum.

Women's Empowerment Initiatives

The Women's Section of the Commonwealth Secretariat has also supported CDPF activities, funding a disabled women delegate participation in the UN Conference on the Status of Women in March, the Bahamas Conference of Ministers of Women's Affairs, and the Women's Forum at CHOGM Samoa.

Expanding Funding and Strategic Goals

In 2023, during the Conference of State Parties (COSP), CDPF organized three successful side meetings and initiated discussions with the Disability Section of the UKFCDO to increase

funding. Following a meeting with Minister Andrew Mitchell in autumn 2023, the UKFCDO agreed to provide a substantial increase in funding through DRF. This agreement resulted in a £350,000 grant, which included £50,000 for promoting the Disability Inclusion Action Plan, attending CHOGM in Samoa, and enhancing accessibility and organizational administration.

Upcoming Transition and Ongoing Support

Starting April 1, 2025, CDPF will transition to holding its grant directly from the UKFCDO through its fiduciary partner, Action on Disability and Development. The anticipated funding for 2025/26 is £300,000, with potential increases in subsequent years.

Commonwealth Scholarships

Over the past four years, CDPF has facilitated recommendations for Commonwealth Scholarships, with up to five PhD and ten Master's candidates endorsed annually. For the last three years, the Commonwealth Scholarship Commission has provided a small grant to support this effort.

With sustained efforts and increased funding, CDPF continues to make meaningful strides in promoting disability equality and inclusion across the Commonwealth.

Focus for the Future

The CDPF is working towards holding and managing its own funds. This includes activating its status as a Company Limited by Guarantee, applying for Charity Commission registration, and setting up a dedicated bank account. This transition is a key driver for overhauling the organization's constitution. We remain deeply grateful for the support from Action on Disability & Development International Ltd, which has operated under a Memorandum of Agreement. Moving forward, we plan to continue this partnership through a Service Level Agreement for accountancy, bookkeeping and administration led by Gemma White.

The new CDPF Trust Board will need some UK-based trustees and the other trustees will be made up of CDPF Executive Officers. While meeting infrequently, it will oversee governance and supervision, delegating most tasks to a Management Committee of Executive representatives that will meet 7-8 times per year. This committee will report to the Elected Executive, which meets quarterly and is accountable to the General Assembly. A special virtual General Assembly is planned for February 2025 to finalise the new constitution, with aspirations for a face-to-face General Assembly and Conference in the Caribbean in 2026.

Training remains a cornerstone of our efforts. While online courses allow broad participation, they lack the cohesion and alliance-building benefits of in-person gatherings. CDPF has launched a "Training the Trainer" series to address this need. The inaugural course, held in Kenya in July 2024, trained 14 young participants and received positive evaluations. Future sessions are planned for Delhi, India (March 2025); West Africa (October 2025); Fiji (February 2026); and the Caribbean (aligned with CHOGM 2026). These sessions will also include roundtables with government ministers and officials to discuss progress on implementing the UNCRPD.

The Executive aims to expand policy development through functioning subcommittees focused on key areas: Women's issues (via the Women's Forum), Youth (via the Commonwealth Disabled Youth Forum), Environment and Climate Emergency, Inclusive Education, Employment and Training, LGBTQ+ issues, and Political Representation. These subcommittees will have the ability to co-opt members from affiliated organisations.

Working with the recently appointed Regional Interns, based within six member organisations, we aim to strengthen our membership, develop a database tracking reasonable accommodations, legislative progress, and government support for DPOs.

The Commonwealth Parliamentary Association has agreed to partner us on this work. The main aim of this will be to further the arguments for the adoption at CHOGM 26 of the Commonwealth Disability Inclusion Action Plan.

Richard Rieser – General Secretary

CDPF Climate Policy

Policy Addressing the Needs in Calamities, Risks, and Emergencies in Accordance with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) Article 11

Executive Summary: The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) Article 11 recognizes the unique risks and rights of persons with disabilities during calamities, risks, and emergencies. COP 28 must prioritize the inclusion of disabled people in climate change adaptation and disaster risk reduction efforts. The UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR) emphasizes the urgent need to break the cycle of disaster and inequality. High-risk countries often face widespread poverty, making action imperative.

“The purpose of the Commonwealth Disabled People’s Forum (CDPF) is to unite disabled people—regardless of impairment type, gender, age, race, indigenous and geographical background, religion, or political affiliation—from all Commonwealth countries. This unity aims to create a collective voice advocating for the promotion and equalization of opportunities for all disabled people and to engage with and influence the structures and organs of the Commonwealth, particularly the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting.”

Introduction: Disabled people are disproportionately affected by climate change-induced disasters and emergencies. COP 28 must address this disparity by integrating the principles of UNCRPD Article 11 into climate action policies.

Universal Declaration of Human Rights:

- **Article 1 (UDHR):** All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.

United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities:

- **Article 1 (UNCRPD):** The purpose of the Convention is to promote, protect, and ensure the full and equal enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms by all persons with disabilities, and to promote respect for their inherent dignity.

Persons with disabilities include those with 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.

I. Legal Framework and Obligations:

1. **Ratification and Implementation:**
 - Encourage all countries to ratify and implement the UNCRPD, incorporating its principles into national laws and policies, particularly for disaster risk reduction and emergency response.
2. **Access to Information and Communication:**
 - Ensure disabled people have equal access to information, including early warnings and evacuation instructions, by providing accessible formats and technologies.
 - Include a country-specific overview detailing relevant laws and measures

II. Inclusive Disaster Preparedness and Response:

1. **Accessible Infrastructure:**
 - Promote the development and maintenance of inclusive infrastructure to facilitate safe evacuation, sheltering, and transportation for disabled people.
2. **Training and Capacity Building:**

- Invest in training programs for emergency responders, focusing on disability-inclusive disaster response and communication.
- Provide clear examples of how disabled people are currently accommodated in disaster management.

III. Data Collection and Monitoring:

1. Population Statistics:

- Collect and provide data on the proportion of disabled people within populations, regions at risk, and prevalent calamities.

2. Accountability and Reporting:

- Establish mechanisms for regular reporting on the inclusion of disabled people in disaster management and climate adaptation efforts, including the allocation of climate-related funding.

IV. Ensuring Accessibility and Non-Discrimination:

1. Universal Design:

- Promote universal design principles to ensure all infrastructure, communication, and services are inherently accessible to disabled people.

2. Reasonable Accommodations:

- Encourage the provision of reasonable accommodations to enable disabled people to fully participate in disaster preparedness and response activities.

V. Participation and Consultation:

1. Inclusion in Decision-Making:

- Actively involve disabled people in developing and implementing climate adaptation and disaster risk reduction strategies at all levels.

VI. Financing and Resource Allocation:

1. Resource Allocation:

- Dedicate funding for disability-inclusive disaster risk reduction and climate adaptation programs, prioritizing the needs of disabled people.

2. Partnerships:

- Foster collaboration between governments, civil society organizations, and disabled persons organizations to maximize resources and expertise.

3. Reparations:

- Advocate for sufficient reparations from developed countries to the most at-risk nations, especially small island and coastal states.

Conclusion: To achieve climate resilience and sustainable development, COP 28 must integrate the principles of UNCRPD Article 11 into climate action policies. This ensures disabled people are not left behind during calamities, risks, and emergencies, safeguarding their rights, dignity, and safety.

By adopting the recommendations in this policy paper, COP 28 can advance the global agenda for disability-inclusive disaster risk reduction and climate adaptation, fostering a more equitable and resilient future for all. As affirmed by the Commonwealth Disabled People’s Forum: “To engage and influence the structures and organs of the Commonwealth, and especially the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting.”

Agreed Executive: 18th October 2023



To ratify and implement UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the Sustainable Development Goals in every Commonwealth country and develop inclusive policies.

To develop a unified voice for the implementation of Disability Rights and Equality for DPOs and disabled people (persons with disabilities) across the 56 countries of the Commonwealth.

Nothing About Us Without Us.

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