



Delegates' at DGS3: Official delegates from CDPF were Saraha Kamau – Chair (Kenya), Richard Rieser - General Secretary (UK), Kerryann Ifill – Vice Chair (Barbados); CDPF Executive Officers in the photograph are Clare Gibellini - AFDO (Australia), Eric Ngondi - UDPK (Kenya), Muawiyath Mohamed Didi – MAPD (Maldives), Ashnafunnah Nahar Misti – WDDF (Bangladesh); Other in the photograph are Samuel Kabue, CDPF Patron and UNCRPD Com Member (Kenya), Laura Kanushu MP -CPA PWD Network (Uganda), Erin Brown – (Bahamas), Nancy Maguire –ROFA (UK) & Akakpo-Numado – FETAPH (Togo). See the article on GDS3 in this newsletter for more details. (Photo Credit: CDPF Secretariat).

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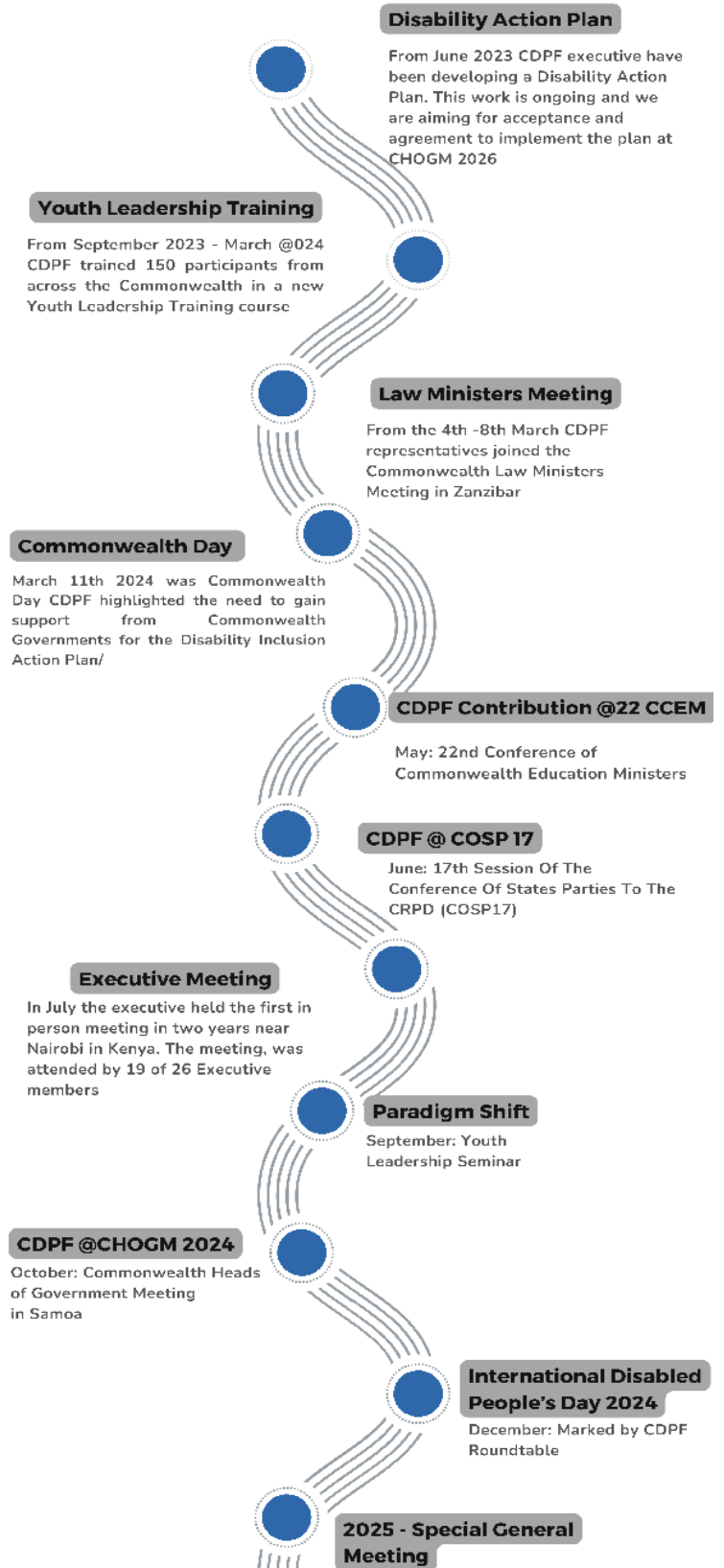
CDPF ANNUAL REPORT 2024 - EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

CDPGF Annual Report 2024 can be viewed at [CDPF Website](#).

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.

2024's Activities



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 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.



Photo Description: 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).

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. Two new youth members were also co-opted 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 an 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 are 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.

Amman-Berlin Declaration on Global Disability Inclusion



Among the Declaration's commitments to disability inclusion are two specific targets for international development cooperation. According to these, actors endorsing the declaration will: (a). strive for all their international development programs to be inclusive of and accessible to persons with disabilities, by actively making a positive contribution to inclusive and full equality and to non-discrimination and by doing no harm and

(b). strive to ensure that at least 15 percent of international development programs being implemented at the country level pursue disability inclusion as an objective ("**15 % for the 15 %**" -which ensures that at least 15% of international development programs are dedicated to the integration of persons with disabilities, who represent 15% of the global population according to the World Health Organization). (Photo Courtesy: CDPF Secretariat)

Recent cutbacks in international aid from USAID following the election of President Trump has led to widespread cutbacks to vital disability programmes in 134 countries. Overseas aid cutbacks are happening in Germany, France, United Kingdom, Netherlands, Belgium and a range of other donor countries. Trump's approach is based on breaking with more than 70 years of a rules based and equity approach and is inimical to a disability rights approach. All countries that support the sentiments of the [Amman-Berlin Declaration](#) must increasingly pool their efforts and funding to support its achievement.

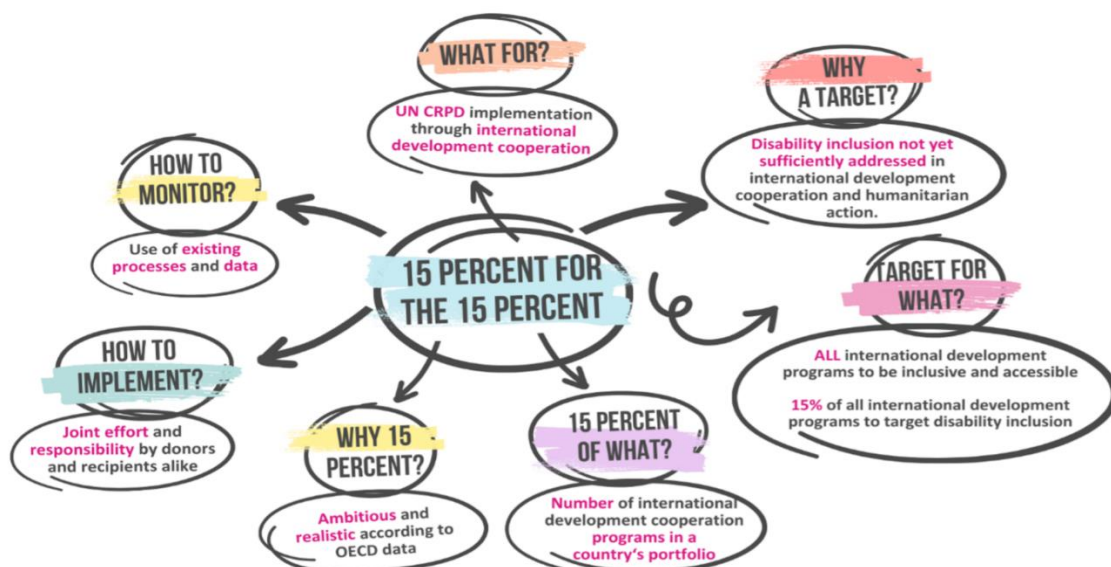


Image Description: Image Description: Graphic on the "15 percent for the 15 percent", which is introducing an overview of reasons behind, basic principles, and ways of monitoring the implementation of the target. (Source: IDA/BMZ via GDS website)

Commonwealth Democracy an Antidote to Trump

In the changing Global Order and rise of international insecurity the Commonwealth Charter and commitment to Parliamentary Democracy, Separate Judiciary, Freedom of the Press and expression stands in marked contrast to growing autocracy in many parts of the world with the associated marked diminishment of disabled people's rights. CDPF represent representative disabled people's organisations in 51 countries of the 56 countries we have a majority in all regions. The recent votes for Governments in Canada and Australia supporting these principles are to be applauded.

CDPF Urges US President to Reverse Harmful Policy on Disability Rights

[Resolution on President Trump's Freeze on Public Expenditure including USAID](#)

The Commonwealth Disabled People's Forum (CDPF), at its Special General Meeting, calls on the President of the United States to immediately withdraw a policy that threatens decades of global progress in advancing the rights of disabled people.

On **27 January 2025**, President Trump announced a new policy through the Federal Office of Management and Budget, claiming it would “root out waste” and “block woke programmes.” This policy resulted in a **90-day freeze** on disability-related services and payments to over **70 million disabled Americans**, while also halting the **\$60 billion US foreign aid programme**, including nearly all disability-inclusive initiatives. Though only **\$30 million** of this aid went directly to disability projects through USAID in 2023, a much larger share flowed via the State Department to inclusive programmes globally. All are now suspended, impacting **hundreds of projects** in at least **130 countries**, including critical inclusive education programmes in **Commonwealth nations** like Jamaica, Bangladesh, Nigeria, and Rwanda.

The freeze—repeatedly struck down in US courts (e.g., **4 February 2025**)—poses a clear threat to disabled people worldwide. Worse still, disability policies have been removed from government websites, and legal protections are being quietly dismantled. While the United States has never ratified the **UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD)**, this action signals a dangerous regression. Alarming rhetoric has compounded the harm. Following a tragic **Washington DC airport crash** (2 February), Trump blamed equal employment opportunities for disabled air traffic controllers, without evidence, and has previously stated that “disabled people should just die.” **CDPF urges all donor governments and UN bodies to:**

1. **Pressure the US** to withdraw the cuts and restore inclusive aid;
2. **Bridge the funding gap** if US support is not reinstated;
3. **Defend disability rights** as a core human rights issue—not a “woke” trend;
4. **Reform aid systems**, not eliminate them—fund DPO-led initiatives and employ more disabled people.

We must act now to ensure disability inclusion is not sacrificed to political expedience. Equality is not negotiable—it is a right.

RICHARD RIESER - CDPF General Secretary

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Commonwealth Disabled People's Forum – May 2025.

CDPF EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE AS OF 08TH APRIL 2025

The governance and operation of the Commonwealth Disabled People's Forum (CDPF) have been formally transferred to the trustees and the larger executive committee will offer guidance and insight (currently 29 members including trustees), Policy oversight and development will be managed via various working groups, with main decisions returning to the full board. CDPF had a number of changes of our Executive and Board as we move towards becoming a Charity Incorporated Organisation.

- Chair:** Sarah Muthoni Kamau, United Disabled Persons, Kenya.
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Uganda kihembowilb@gmail.com Trustee
- Indigenous Peoples Representative:** Diethoro Nakhro, National Centre for Promotion of
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Trustee

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Asia: Rasanjali Pathirage, Disability Organisations Joint Front DOJF Sri Lanka rasanjali1979@yahoo.com

Asia: Yoon Loong Wong Malaysian Confederation of the Disabled attending wongyoonloong@gmail.com

Asia: Ashnafunnah Nahar Misti, Women with Disabilities Development Foundation (WDDF), Bangladesh wddf.08@gmail.com

CO-OPTIONS

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Survivors Mental Health: Rose Umutesi, National Organisation of Users and Survivors Psychiatry in Rwanda roseumutesi11@gmail.com

Indian Ocean, Mauritius: Dookoo Suvan Sharma, Federation of Disabled People's Organisations Mauritius (FDPOM) soovan12paix@gmail.com

Maldives: Muawiyath Mohamed Didi (Muthu), Maldives Association of Persons with Disabilities, mohamed.muawiyath@gmail.com

Youth Member: Namwanje Gorret, Uganda, Commonwealth Disabled Youth Forum namwanjedorret084@gmail.com

Youth Member: Shishiro Raulo, India, Commonwealth Disabled Youth Forum sisirraul410@gmail.com

GENDER BREAKDOWN

11 Men and 17 Women of 28-Person Executive. Full details with photographs are available at [CDPF website](#).

CDPF 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: (1). Dame Jane Campbell, UK; (2). Rosemary Kayess, Australia (3). Floyd Morris, Jamaica (4). Sir Robert Martin, New Zealand (deceased September 2024) (5). Samuel Kabue, Kenya (6). Shauib Chalklen, South Africa & (8). Ikponwosa Ero, Ghana

RICHARD RIESER - CDPF General Secretary

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Commonwealth Disabled People's Forum – May 2025.

THIRD GLOBAL DISABILITY SUMMIT BERLIN 31-03 APRIL 2025: CDPF BRIEF REPORT

This is a summary version of the article named "[Message from Global Disability Summit Berlin](#)" published by the CDPF. [Special Newsletter](#) on Global Disability Summit (GDS3) is also available at the CDPF website.

The third Global Disability Summit (GDS3), co-hosted by the governments of Germany and Jordan in collaboration with the International Disability Alliance (IDA), took place in Berlin from 1st to 3rd April 2025. The event brought together over 4,500 participants from around the globe, including governments, international organisations, NGOs, and Organisations of Persons with Disabilities (OPDs).

Civil Society Forum: Missed Opportunities

The Summit was preceded by the Civil Society Forum on 1st April, which gathered more than 500 representatives from DPOs and NGOs. While the forum aimed to reflect the views of the global disability community, many participants expressed frustration at the lack of interaction and engagement. The statement presented had already been finalised by the IDA's Civil Society Reference Group, leaving no room for amendments or real-time feedback. Despite its reflection of the five regional seminar outcomes, the day consisted of sterile panel sessions with questions submitted via QR code, lacking meaningful dialogue.

Regional Consultations: A Foundation of Inclusion

The outcomes of the GDS3 were influenced by five regional consultations:

- **Asia:** 14–15 February, Bangkok
- **Latin America:** 9–11 December, Rio de Janeiro
- **Arab Region:** 13–14 November, Amman
- **Africa:** 5 September, Nairobi
- **Europe:** 6 December, Berlin

These summits allowed OPDs/DPOs to significantly shape the GDS3 agenda. Additionally, a pre-Summit Inclusive Education Workshop took place in Cambridge in September 2024, contributing important insights to the Inclusive Education strand of the summit.

Summit Highlights and Shortcomings

Despite the impressive attendance and global attention, many structural issues persisted. Over 200 requests were submitted for side events, but only about 20 were accepted, and interaction was minimal. CDPF submitted proposals for a side meeting, a fireside chat, and an exhibition booth but received no approvals. Most exhibition booths were allocated to familiar international NGOs, with few DPOs represented.

The 'fireside chats' stood out as a best practice, using silent headphones and wall-projected text to avoid sensory overload. However, many designated spaces remained unused, indicating missed opportunities to expand these inclusive formats.

The summit culminated in the launch of the **Amman-Berlin Declaration**, calling for 15% of international development funding to be allocated to the 15% of the global population who are disabled. This declaration was endorsed by around 60 countries and 20 international organisations.

CDPF's Position: Turning Words into Action

CDPF actively supported the Amman-Berlin Declaration by distributing a leaflet urging action beyond promises. Our message: **to turn the declaration into meaningful change, five key actions are needed.**

1. **Reversing Aid Cuts:** Recent cutbacks in disability-focused development aid, especially following the U.S. presidential transition, have harmed programmes in 134 countries. European nations, including Germany, the UK, and the Netherlands, are also scaling back. CDPF calls on all endorsing countries to pool resources to ensure sustainable progress.
2. **Empowering OPDs:** For the UNCRPD to be implemented effectively, DPOs/OPDs must be resourced and recognised as leaders. We call on NGOs to:
 - Accept DPO leadership: "Nothing About Us Without Us"
 - Support DPO capacity-building
 - Shift from charity/medical models to rights-based approaches
 - Share resources and power with DPOs
 - Ensure that welfare and service models empower disabled people
3. **Identity and Language Matter:** CDPF advocates for the use of "disabled people" to emphasise the role of social and systemic barriers. Our cross-impairment approach encourages solidarity and mutual expertise across impairment types, not as a matter of semantics, but of strategy and empowerment. We must internalise that our oppression is not our fault—and organise accordingly.
4. **Disabled Women and Girls:** Disabled women face multiple oppressions including sexism and harassment. Two-thirds of the CDPF Executive are women, and our Women's Forum continues advocacy through research and engagement with global gender-focused platforms. We demand mainstream women's movements and states address the specific barriers facing disabled women and girls.
5. **Inclusive Education:** Despite clear mandates in UNCRPD Article 24 and SDG 4, exclusion and segregation in education persist. CDPF urges urgent investment in inclusive education, including teacher training, curriculum reform, and accessibility measures. Education is both a right and a foundation for national development.

The **Amman-Berlin Declaration** calls for a 15% for 15% target with endorsing countries and organizations thriving to ensure that **at least 15 percent** of international development programs being implemented **at the country level** pursue disability inclusion as an objective. 90 governments and organizations endorsed the declaration already during the time of the summit. The full list of endorsers and supporters is now available in the **Global Disability Summit** [official website](#).

A Turning Point

This Summit occurs at a pivotal time. Will states and civil society meet their obligations, or will they retreat under pressure from increasingly authoritarian ideologies? CDPF remains committed to resistance, unity, and the pursuit of equality. It's time to turn declarations into change—and build a world where disabled people lead, thrive, and are no longer left behind.

PROGRESS OF DISABILITY INCLUSION ACTION PLAN

Commonwealth Disability Inclusion Action Plan (DIAP) is a key initiative by Commonwealth Disabled People's Forum (CDPF) in early 2024. Now the Commonwealth Secretariat formally adopted with a dedicated Advisory Group and a member states Experts Working Group to draft the DIAP to be reviewed during Commonwealth Law Ministers Meeting (CLMM) in Fiji, February 2026 and adopted during CHOGM 2026.

The 56 countries of the Commonwealth comprise 2.7 billion people (including an estimates 430 million disabled people). All but one (Tonga) have ratified, but progress towards implementation of the Rights and protections contained in the UNCRPD are extremely slow in being implemented. Last year the Commonwealth Disabled People's Forum) put forward a draft Commonwealth Disability Inclusion Action Plan (DIAP) to the Heads of Government in Samoa. While not adopted it was agreed to set up a High Level Disabled People Advisory Group advised by representative OPDs/DPOS and representatives of the State Parties to achieve an agreed draft. This process is underway and it is hoped it will go to CHOGM 2026 for agreement after being presented to the Commonwealth Law Ministers Meeting in Fiji in February 2026. If adopted the DIAP will lead to sharing of expertise and experience across countries to implement key areas of the UNCRPD.

COMMONWEALTH DISABILITY INCLUSION ACTION PLAN - [ACTION POINTS](#)

We recognise the UNCRPD prohibits discrimination based on disability. It represents a paradigm shift from the traditional, charity, medical model to a social, human rights model of disability, recognizing people with disabilities as equal rights holders. To this end the 56 Commonwealth Governments and the Commonwealth Secretariat will:

- A. Within two years of this agreement CHOGM agree to hold a meeting of Commonwealth Ministers with responsibility for Disability to consider and share experiences on its implementation with a view to this becoming a regular Commonwealth event;
- B. Gather disaggregated statistics in line with the Washington Group questions and protocols in Census, Household Surveys and other statistical activities;
- C. Collaborate in setting up a Commonwealth Country Dashboard on progress on the Disability Inclusion Action Plan and implementation of the UNCRPD;
- D. The Commonwealth Secretariat will support country members and civil society organizations in the reporting requirements to the UN CRPD Committee in Geneva;
- E. For ongoing collaboration in expertise and financial assistance between member countries, especially between those more economically developed and the rest to develop implementation of the UNCRPD and disability equality;
- F. Ensure that reasonable accommodations over access to buildings, access to information and accommodation is increasingly built into the planning of Commonwealth events;
- G. Over time, develop a pool of Disability Equality Trainers and Access Auditors, within and between Commonwealth countries to facilitate Disability Equality Training and Access Audits of buildings and infra-structure;
- H. Develop the capacity in collaboration with Disabled Persons' Organisations (DPOs) to run systematic Disability Equality Training for Government Ministers, Members of Parliament, Civil Servants, Advisors and Non-Governmental Organizations;

- I. Run all Development Plans through the requirements of the UNCRPD and the need for disability equality;
- J. To increase the number and seniority of persons with disabilities employed in the Governments and the Commonwealth Secretariat;
- K. Work with the private sector to develop cheap and effective assistive devices and technology and ensure its distribution to those who would benefit most;
- L. Develop inter-country training and exchange of technicians who are able to develop the necessary competency to utilize such devices;
- M. To implement the UNCRPD; the Commonwealth should give priority to collaborating in developing Inclusive Education, Health Care, Work opportunities for persons with disabilities and supporting measures that will enable persons with disabilities to take part in elections and stand for office;
- N. Set up a Commonwealth Disability Advisory Committee with representation from DPOs in the Regions, CDPF, Reps of State Parties, Commonwealth UNCRPD Committee Members and others relevant.
- O. Recognising that persons with disabilities are at significantly more risk in climate emergency events and humanitarian situation, agree to prioritise their support and inclusion in climate emergency preparation measures and support in other humanitarian situations.
- P. Support the organisation and involvement of Women with disabilities and Youth with disabilities and other underrepresented groups of people with disabilities such as indigenous people, neuro-diverse individuals, those with mental health conditions and those with cognitive impairments.

We will campaign to get this Disability Inclusion Action Plan agreed at CHOGM 2026 in June 2026 in Antigua Barbuda by the Commonwealth Heads of Government.

Supported by following [National Umbrella OPDs/DPOs](#).

RICHARD RIESER - CDPF General Secretary.

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Commonwealth Disabled People's Forum March 2024.

SAMOA COMMUNIQUÉ OF THE COMMONWEALTH HEADS OF GOVERNMENT MEETING (CHOGM)

One Resilient Common Future: Transforming Our Common Wealth
Communique Page 5 states.....

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.

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With over a decade of experience as a disability rights activist and co-founder of the Spinal Injuries Association of Malawi (SIAM), I have witnessed first-hand how funding can either sustain or strangle activism.

When we founded SIAM in 2011, we had a clear vision and community mandate, but without legal registration, we couldn't access funding. For nine years, we operated under another organization just to keep our peer support work alive. This meant limited control, misaligned priorities, and fragmented efforts. Without registration, we weren't properly recognized or respected. This dependency on intermediaries hampered our growth and restricted our autonomy and agency. This experience, the first of many, reinforced how bureaucracy and donor requirements systematically disadvantage emerging disability-led organizations.

For disability activists, whose work is deeply rooted in lived experiences and grassroots organizing, **restrictive funding models hinder efforts to challenge systemic barriers** and respond to the evolving needs and opportunities in our communities. As calls for more inclusive, rights-based funding for disability advocacy grow louder, there is an urgent need to rethink how money flows, who controls it, and whether the dominant funding structures truly support disability-led movements or inadvertently undermine them.

Many funding models come with predefined objectives and deliverables, often designed by donors and institutions with little direct experience in disability rights work. This top-down approach forces disability activists to adapt their priorities to fit funding criteria, rather than allowing them to pursue the issues that matter most in our communities. At SIAM, we quickly discovered that after overcoming the registration barrier, we faced new frustrations under the guise of donor restrictions and "risk" appetite. It was clear that donor perspectives and policies deemed our core peer support work, hospital and home visits, and mentoring as "too risky," even though these activities are central to achieving the right to independent living, in line with Article 19 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD). Instead, funding was restricted to administrative costs and "less risky" interventions. Funding what they deemed appropriate **side-lined the very activities Spinal Cord Injury (SCI) survivors most needed.**

Most funding is allocated through short-term grants, often lasting only a year or two. **Disability rights advocacy, however, is about systemic change.** This requires long-term commitment, relationship-building, and policy influence. Prevalent funding models prioritize quick, measurable outputs like trainings, distribution of assistive devices, or one-off awareness events while neglecting the deeper, long-term work of challenging and shifting power, dismantling systemic barriers, and building leadership within the disability community. This keeps Organizations of Persons with Disabilities (OPDs) small, reactive, and dependent, rather than resourced and able to grow as agents of change. All too often (and often with the best intentions), its funders decide what's important, how change happens, and on what timeline all without input from the very communities they claim to support. For disability activists, this further compounds the **ableism we are challenging.** For true disability

justice, we need **funding that trusts OPDs, invests in their long-term capacity, and supports movement-building beyond short-term projects.**

What we need is **fairer and more flexible funding.** This isn't just about supporting disability activists; it's about **redefining the power dynamics** in the funding ecosystem. When activists have control over their resources, we can set our own priorities based on real community needs, not donor expectations. We can invest in long-term strategies that build lasting systemic change. And critically, we can operate with autonomy, reducing dependence on external approval. This gives us the space to challenge oppression without fearing financial retaliation. **Flexible funding is not just a financial mechanism, it is a tool for shifting power.**

As a disability activist, let me be clear: when funders retain control, they are forcing us to justify our strategies to people who may have no direct experience of our realities. Instead of trusting our lived experience and expertise, we're made to fit into predefined boxes. Not only does this create a power imbalance, it also creates an upside-down reality — where funders, not people living with disabilities, decide what counts as progress.

This top-down model also kills the very activism and agency it claims to support. It side-lines the issues that matter most in our communities and reduces disability-led movements to small, project-based operations, **dependent rather than empowered.**

When funding comes with heavy conditions or centralized control, it feels corrosive. Many activists grow to distrust external support because it often undermines autonomy, distorts priorities, or fosters dependency. That distrust is not only valid, it's rooted in our experiences.

Poorly designed funding doesn't just fail to help; it actively weakens our movement's capacity. Instead of building collective power, it often creates hierarchies, competition, and fragmentation, especially when only certain groups are seen as "fundable." For our movements to thrive, support must be flexible, empowering, and rooted in trust. **Only then will disability justice flourish.**



Scader Louis is a disability rights activist. She is the co-founder of the Spinal Injuries Association of Malawi (SIAM), a Fellow of the Association of Chartered Certified Accountants (FCCA), Commissioner of the Malawi Human Rights Commission (MHRC), Deputy Chairperson of the National Executive Council (NEC) of the Federation of Disability Organizations in Malawi (FEDOMA), and Treasurer General of the Commonwealth Disabled Peoples Forum (CDPF). She is also an ambassador for the Fairer Funding Community. Photo Courtesy: Scader Louis via CDPF website

SCADER LOUIS - CDPF Tresurere & Federation of Disability Organisations in Malawi

BARRIERS AT THE INTERSECTIONS: EXPLORING THE OVERLAP OF DISABILITY & LGBTQIA+ ISSUES

Disability and LGBTQIA+ issues intersect in complex and often overlooked ways, especially in developing regions where systemic discrimination intensifies marginalization. Both groups face shared experiences of stigma, exclusion, and structural barriers, further compounded by cultural norms that pathologize and stigmatize their identities.

In many cases, access to essential services is systematically denied. For example, in Fiji, Masi, a transgender woman with a physical disability, endures dual discrimination: bus drivers refuse her free disability transport passes and mock her gender identity, telling her, “We don’t want your kind on our bus.” As a result, she is forced to rely on unsafe public spaces for social interaction. Pacific women with disabilities in Fiji and Samoa similarly report significant obstacles in accessing sexual health services and legal protections, with 74% facing healthcare access challenges due to pervasive stigma.

Violence and abuse are also prevalent. In Kenya, women with disabilities experience intimate partner violence at rates two to four times higher than non-disabled women. Cases involving disabled LGBTQIA+ victims are often dismissed by authorities, as highlighted by a Kenyan advocate who observed, “When something happens to a disabled person, it’s not taken as seriously... even by police.” Pacific studies further reveal that disabled LGBTQIA+ individuals face heightened risks during pregnancy, compounding their vulnerability. Economic and social marginalization is another critical concern. Data from Africa indicates that poverty rates among disabled LGBTQIA+ people in Ghana, Kenya, and Mali are disproportionately high, with intersectional discrimination severely limiting their educational and employment opportunities. Transgender individuals with disabilities are particularly at risk of homelessness due to family rejection and workplace bias.

Cultural stigma remains deeply entrenched. Medicalized stereotypes persist, with autistic individuals being three to six times more likely to experience gender dysphoria. Additionally, disabled sexuality is often either desexualized or hyper sexualized, and conservative norms in places like Fiji and Kenya frame disability as a “curse,” further exacerbating LGBTQIA+ stigma. These intersecting crises call for comprehensive policy responses. Solutions must include inclusive healthcare through provider training on the inter-sectionality of LGBTQIA+ and disability issues, legal reforms to enforce anti-discrimination laws across both identities, and community support—such as funding for safe spaces like Fiji’s peer-led HIV clinic networks.

By centering the voices and experiences of people from the Pacific, Africa, and similar regions, advocates can challenge the twin forces of ableism and homophobia with integrated, culturally responsive solutions. Now is the time for policymakers, service providers, and community leaders—including those in disability and LGBTQIA+ civil society to act: by listening to those at the intersection, investing in inclusive programs, and ensuring that no one is left behind. Only through collective action can we dismantle the barriers that hold back LGBTQIA+ individuals with disabilities and build societies where everyone is valued and protected.

CLARE GIBELLINI - CDPF Ex Officer & Australian Federation of Disability Organisations

BREAKING BARRIERS, INSPIRING CHANGE: SKOLL WORLD FORUM 2025
OXFORD, UNITED KINGDOM, APRIL 1–4, 2025

Mohua Paul, Chairperson of Access Bangladesh Foundation and Executive Committee Member of the Commonwealth Disabled People's Forum (CDPF), represented global disability leadership at the Skoll World Forum 2025, held in Oxford, UK. She was one of eight disability leaders worldwide selected for the inaugural cohort of Skoll Disability Inclusion Leaders, recognized for their impactful work in advancing disability equity and inclusive development.

At a high-profile side event titled “Celebrating DEI: Leaders Spearheading Inclusion and Impact” hosted by the Missing Billion Initiative and CBM Global Mohua joined fellow changemakers, funders, and thought leaders in a dynamic dialogue on driving systemic change for disability inclusion.

(Photo: Mohua Paul with other Disability Inclusion Leaders in promotional banner of the event at Skoll World Forum 2025)



A respected advocate with decades of experience, Mohua co-founded Access Bangladesh Foundation to promote the rights and inclusion of persons with disabilities across Bangladesh. Her leadership journey, which began at the Centre for the Rehabilitation of the Paralyzed, has been marked by a deep commitment to challenging exclusion and shaping inclusive policy and practice.

Speaking at the Forum, Mohua addressed the urgent need for inclusive education, skills development, and workforce participation in low- and middle-income countries. She called on international donors and partners to invest in long-term, disability-inclusive development strategies.



“This story isn’t about me it’s about the millions still left behind. We must walk together to create a world where no one is excluded,” she stated.

(Photo description: Mohua Paul, in the right side of the photo with other Disability Inclusion Leaders during the event in the Skoll World Forum 2025).

Representing the South Asian disability movement on a global platform, Mohua stood alongside leaders from Mexico, Nigeria, Vietnam, Kenya, India, and the Philippines. The cohort collectively demonstrated how disability leadership drives broader social change and deepens the reach of inclusive solutions. Throughout the Forum, Mohua engaged in key sessions and networking opportunities, consistently advocating for inclusive approaches within global development frameworks.

The CDPF proudly celebrates Mohua's leadership and meaningful contribution to one of the world's most influential gatherings for social innovation. Her voice, and the voices of her fellow Disability Inclusion Leaders, are helping to reshape global development through a lens of rights, equity, and representation.



(Photo: Photo: Mohua Paul with other Disability Inclusion Leaders after the event at Skoll World Forum 2025)

MOHUA PAUL – CDPF Executive Officer & Chairpersons Access Bangladesh Foundation

Note: The SKOLL Foundation, established in 1999 by philanthropist Jeff Skoll, is dedicated to fostering a sustainable world of peace and prosperity. It achieves this by investing in, connecting, and championing social entrepreneurs and innovators who develop bold, equitable solutions to pressing global challenges. The Foundation's multifaceted approach includes: *Investing*: Providing financial support to social entrepreneurs with compelling visions and proven solutions; *Connecting*: Facilitating a global network through events like the Skoll World Forum, promoting collaboration among innovators, funders, and stakeholders. *Championing*: Amplifying the work of social innovators through storytelling, thought leadership, and strategic partnerships. To date, the SKOLL Foundation has invested over \$1.2 billion worldwide, supporting 476 organizations across five continents. Its flagship initiative, the SKOLL Awards for Social Entrepreneurship, annually honours 4–6 leaders with unrestricted grants to scale their impact. Through these efforts, the Skoll Foundation continues to catalyze transformational social change, addressing issues from environmental sustainability to human rights.

SITUATION REPORT 01: ADVANCING DISABILITY INCLUSION IN SRI LANKA

INSIGHTS FROM THE 2025 SITUATION ANALYSIS - SEPTEMBER 2024

Introduction

Sri Lanka has made notable strides in promoting the rights of persons with disabilities, particularly following its ratification of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) in 2016. However, significant challenges persist in translating these commitments into tangible improvements in the lives of persons with disabilities. The 2025 Situation Analysis and Country Brief, developed under the United Nations Partnership on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNPRPD) initiative, provide a comprehensive overview of the current landscape, highlighting systemic barriers and proposing actionable recommendations for inclusive development.

Methodology

The Situation Analysis employed a multi-faceted approach, conducting an induction training program for stakeholders, incorporating desk reviews, stakeholder consultations, and field assessments. Key stakeholders included government agencies, Disabled Persons' Organizations (DPOs), civil society organizations, and development partners. The analysis focused on identifying gaps in policy implementation, service delivery, and societal attitudes towards disability.



(Photo: an induction training reaching 30 stakeholders comprising representatives from the government, disabled person organizations, and civil society organizations engaged in disability inclusion, was conducted by UNDP Sri Lanka in May 2024. Photo credit UNDP Sri Lanka).

Key Findings

1. Policy and Legislative Framework

While Sri Lanka has enacted several laws aimed at protecting the rights of persons with disabilities, including the Protection of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act No. 28 of 1996, enforcement remains weak. The absence of comprehensive anti-discrimination legislation and inadequate monitoring mechanisms hinder effective implementation. Moreover, outdated definitions and classifications of disability fail to capture the diverse experiences of persons with disabilities.

2. Education

Access to inclusive education is limited. Many schools lack the necessary infrastructure, trained personnel, and learning materials to accommodate students with disabilities. As a result, enrollment and retention rates for children with disabilities are significantly lower compared to their peers. The lack of early identification and intervention services further exacerbates educational disparities.

3. Employment

PWDs face considerable barriers to employment, including discriminatory hiring practices, inaccessible workplaces, and limited vocational training opportunities. Despite policies promoting employment quotas for PWDs in the public sector, compliance is minimal. The private sector also demonstrates low levels of inclusivity, often due to misconceptions about the capabilities of persons with disabilities.

4. Healthcare and Rehabilitation

Healthcare services are not adequately equipped to meet the specific needs of persons with disabilities. Physical inaccessibility, lack of assistive devices, and insufficient training among healthcare providers contribute to substandard care. Rehabilitation services are scarce, particularly in rural areas, limiting the potential for persons with disabilities to achieve optimal functioning.

5. Social Protection

Social protection programs targeting PWDs are fragmented and often insufficient. Eligibility criteria are stringent, and benefit amounts are inadequate to cover basic needs. Additionally, there is a lack of awareness among persons with disabilities about available services, leading to underutilization.

6. Data and Research

Reliable and disaggregated data on disability is lacking, impeding evidence-based policymaking. Existing data collection methods do not align with international standards, resulting in underreporting and misrepresentation of the disability population.

Recommendations

1. Strengthen Legal and Policy Frameworks

- Enact comprehensive anti-discrimination legislation that aligns with the CRPD.
- Establish robust monitoring and enforcement mechanisms to ensure compliance with disability-related laws.
- Update definitions and classifications of disability to reflect contemporary understandings.

2. Enhance Inclusive Education

- Invest in infrastructure upgrades to make schools physically accessible.
- Provide specialized training for teachers on inclusive education practices.
- Develop and distribute accessible learning materials.
- Implement early identification and intervention programs.

3. Promote Employment Opportunities

- Enforce employment quotas for persons with disabilities in the public sector.
- Incentivize private sector employers to hire PWDs through tax benefits and subsidies.
- Expand vocational training programs tailored to the needs of persons with disabilities.
- Conduct awareness campaigns to challenge stereotypes and promote workplace inclusivity.

4. Improve Healthcare and Rehabilitation Services

- Upgrade healthcare facilities to ensure physical accessibility.

- Train healthcare providers on disability-inclusive practices.
- Increase the availability of assistive devices and rehabilitation services, particularly in underserved areas.

5. Expand Social Protection Programs

- Simplify eligibility criteria to increase access to benefits.
- Adjust benefit amounts to meet the actual cost of living.
- Enhance outreach efforts to raise awareness about available services among persons with disabilities.

6. Strengthen Data Collection and Research

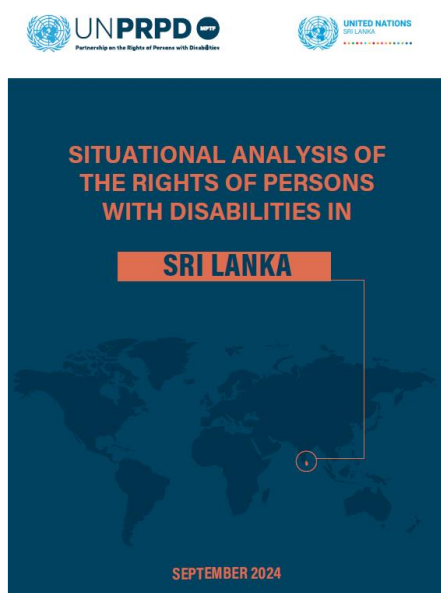
- Adopt standardized data collection tools that align with international guidelines.
- Ensure data is disaggregated by disability type, gender, age, and location.
- Utilize data to inform policy development and program implementation.

Conclusion

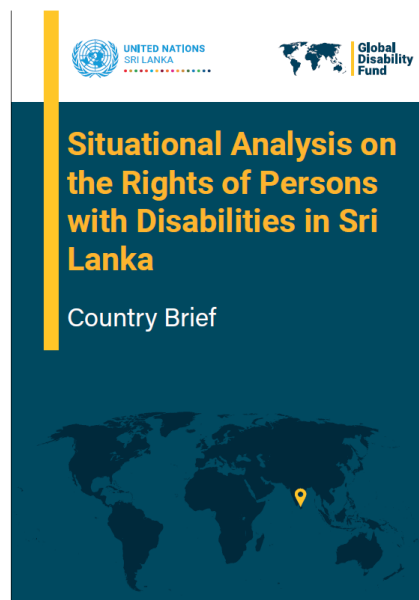
The 2025 Situation Analysis and Country Brief underscore the urgent need for concerted efforts to advance disability inclusion in Sri Lanka. By addressing systemic barriers and implementing the outlined recommendations, Sri Lanka can move towards a more inclusive society where PWDs enjoy equal rights and opportunities. Collaboration among government agencies, civil society, and development partners will be crucial in driving this transformative agenda forward.

For more detailed information, please refer to the full reports:

[Sri Lanka Situation Analysis](#)



[Sri Lanka Country Brief](#)



This article is a very brief summary of the **“SITUATIONAL ANALYSIS OF THE RIGHTS OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES IN SRI LANKA-SEPTEMBER 2024”** developed by the UNDP in Sri Lanka with technical support from partners including OPDs, government counterparts, UN agencies, and local colleagues. Technical support was provided by the UNPRPD Technical Secretariat throughout the process. (Authors: Prasanna Kuruppu, National Consultant for UNDP & Murali Padmanabhan, WFP, International Consultant for UNDP).

PRASANNA KURUPPU- CDPF Communications Officer & President Sri Lanka Foundation for the Rehabilitation of the Disabled – (SLFRD).

CPDF NOTICES:

BRIEF ON THE 18COSP: WHAT'S SIGNIFICANT THIS YEAR?

Eighteenth Session of the Conference of State Parties (18COSP) to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) will take place at the United Nations Headquarters, New York 10-12 June 2024. This year, the Overarching Theme of the Conference is *ENHANCING PUBLIC AWARENESS OF THE RIGHTS AND CONTRIBUTIONS OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES FOR SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT LEADING UP TO THE SECOND WORLD SUMMIT FOR SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT*. There are another 03 *Sub Themes* and the details are as per below (provisional) agenda.

09 June 2025 from 10.00 am to 06.00 pm (Conference Room 04) **Civil Society Forum:**

Session 1 (10:15–11:30 am) on the Impact of anti-diversity political narratives and the Global Financial Situation on the work of the disability community.

Session 2 (11:45 am –1:00 pm) on COSP Sub theme 01

Session 3 (3:00–4:15 pm) on COSP Sub theme 02

Session 4 (4:30–5:45 pm) on COSP theme 03

10 June 2025 from 10.00 am to 01.00 pm & 03.00 pm to 06.00 pm (General Assembly Hall)

Opening of the Conference of States Parties (item 1) chaired by Ms. Bjørg Sandkjær, Assistant Secretary-General for Policy Coordination, UNDESA. Matters related to the implementation of the Convention (a) **General debate.**

11 June 2025 from 10.00 am to 01.00 pm (Conference Room 04) Round-table discussions 01:

Empowering persons with disabilities and enhancing social development policies through innovative financing (co-chaired by Ms. Zuleikha Tambwe, Vice President of the Conference, Tanzania, and Mr. Javier Güemes, ONCE)

11 June 2025 from 03.00 pm to 06.00 pm (Conference Room 04) Round-table discussions 02:

Leaving no one behind: using artificial intelligence as a tool for supporting inclusivity to strengthen the participation of persons with disabilities (co-chaired by Mr. David Pedroza, Vice President of the Conference, Peru, and Ms. Susan Mazrui, G3ICT).

;

12 June 2025 from 10.00 am to 01.00 pm (Conference Room 04) Round-table discussions 03:

Recognizing and addressing the rights of Indigenous persons with disabilities and their role in advancing disability inclusion (Co-chaired by Ms. Elizabeth Tudor-Beziés, Vice President of the Conference, Canada, and Ms. Christine Kandie Lebelit, Endorois Indigenous Women Empowerment Network of Kenya).

;

12 June 2025 from 03.00 pm to 06.00 pm (Conference Room 04)

Matters related to the implementation of the Convention (c) **Interactive Dialogue among States parties, the United Nations system and other stakeholders on the implementation of the Convention** chaired by Mr. Chatura Perera, Minister, Permanent Mission of Sri Lanka to the United Nations, President of the Conference (Sri Lanka).

[Official UN Official Web Page](#) for detailed information.

Keeping in line with the format and the tradition; this year also has the following program line-up where more than 70 formal/informal side events are also scheduled so far.

[Brief Details of Side Events](#) from Monday, 09 June – Thursday, 12 June 2025.

UPCOMING EVENTS

CDPF SIDE EVENTS DURING THE 16COSP 19 - 12 JUNE 2025

CDPF are supporting two side meetings. If you will be in New York at COSP 18 contact CDPF General Secretary via email: rlrieser@gmail.com

SIDE EVENT 01: STRENGTHENING RESILIENCE IN EMERGENCIES AND CLIMATE CHANGE THROUGH ENHANCING DISABILITY INCLUSION IN THE COMMONWEALTH

Tuesday, Jun 10 2025 from 10.00 am – 11.15 am (EST) Conference Room 04 (In Person + UN Webcast)

Organizer: Commonwealth Secretariat.

The overarching objective is to raise awareness and share best practices on opportunities and challenges to strengthen resilience through ensuring the active and informed participation of persons with disabilities in the development of legislation and policy related to emergencies and climate change. Specific objectives are:

- Discuss obstacles encountered by persons with disabilities in participating in policy and legislative processes related to emergencies and climate change.
- Share effective means of facilitating inclusive and participatory policy development and implementation of programmes related to emergencies and climate change.
- Exchange experiences, expertise and good practices in strengthening participation of persons with disabilities in the implementation of Article 11 of the CRPD.
- Underscore the importance of intersectional approaches to participation.
- Highlight meaningful engagement and collaboration between disabled people's organisations and states in implementing Article 11 of the CRPD.

SIDE EVENT 02: WORKING TO DEVELOP A UNIFIED APPROACH TO IMPLEMENTING THE UNCRPD ACROSS THE COMMONWEALTH

Thursday, Jun 12 2025, 4:45pm - 6:00pm (EST) Conference Room 11 (In Person + UN Webcast)

Organizer: Permanent Mission of Bahamas to the United Nations.
Co-Sponsored by the Permanent Mission Malta to the United Nations and the Permanent Mission of the United Kingdom.

Chair: Sarah Kamau - CDPF Chair & United Disabled Persons Kenya

Speakers: Hon. Myles Larada - Minister Social Services, Information and Broadcasting, Bahamas; Rhoda Garland - Commissioner for the Rights Persons with Disabilities, Malta; Representative of the Government United Kingdom; Richard Rieser - CDPF General Secretary; Justin Pettit - Commonwealth Secretariat; DPO/OPD reps from South Asia, Caribbean, Africa and Pacific.

Working to develop a unified approach to implementing the UNCRPD across the Commonwealth. The 56 countries of the Commonwealth comprise 2.7 billion people (including an estimates 430 million disabled people). All but one (Tonga) have ratified, but progress towards implementation of the Rights and protections contained in the UNCRPD are extremely slow in being implemented. Last year the Commonwealth Disabled People's Forum put forward a draft Commonwealth Disability Inclusion Action Plan (DIAP) to the Heads of Government in Samoa. While not adopted it was agreed to set up a High Level Disabled People Advisory Group advised by representative OPDs/DPOS and representatives of the State Parties to achieve an agreed draft. This process is underway and it is hoped it will go to CHOGM 2026 for agreement. If adopted the DIAP will lead to sharing of expertise and experience across countries to implement key areas of the UNCRPD. Up to date reports on progress and scope on this project will be given.

UN CHARTER BODY / TREATY BODY REVIEW OF COMMONWEALTH COUNTRIES

CRPD COMMITTEE STATE PARTY REVIEWS OF COMMONWEALTH COUNTRIES

COUNTRY	STATE PARTY REPORT DUE/SUBMITTED	REVIEW DATE	SESSION
Canada	11-Apr-20 / 07-Nov-20	6-Mar-25	32 Session
Cyprus	27-Jul-21/26-Jul-22	Aug-27	37 Session
Kiribati	16-Oct-23	Aug-25	33 Session
Maldives	14-Apr-23	Aug-25	33 Session
Nigeria	26-Mar-21	6-Mar-25	21 Pre Session
Pakistan	18-Oct-19	Sep-26	35 Session
Seychelles	2-Nov-23	6-Sep-26	24 Pre Session
Sierra Leone	29-Aug-20	6-Mar-25	21 Pre Session
Sri Lanka	12-Mar-18/ 18-Oct-19	Sep-26	35 Session
Trinidad and Tobago	9-Jun-21 / 9-Jun-21	6-Aug-25	22 Pre Session
Tuvalu	14-Apr-23	6-Mar-25	32 Session
United Kingdom	8-Jul-23	6-Mar-26	23 Pre Session

UNIVERSAL PERIODIC REVIEWS OF COMMONWEALTH COUNTRIES

COUNTRY	UPR SESSION	REVIEW DATE
Grenada	49 th Session	Feb-25
Guyana	49 th Session	Feb-25
Jamaica	50 th Session	Jul-25
Kenya	49 th Session	Feb-25
Kiribati	49 th Session	Feb-25
Lesotho	49 th Session	Feb-25
Maldives	50 th Session	Jul-25
Papua New Guinea	49 th Session	Feb-25

