



## **Youth In-Focus Roundtable: Solidarity Across the Disability Rights Movement Summary & Recommendations November 30, 2021**

As part of the [Speak Youth to Power](#) campaign, the National Democratic Institute (NDI) is partnering with organizations around the world to convene a series of **Youth In-Focus** roundtable discussions. The roundtables gather young activists and youth development practitioners across regions and disciplines to share strategies for helping young people gain power and influence. Participants will also examine pressing socio-economic issues and barriers that limit youth participation. The roundtables will also center voices that are most impacted by the issues, but often excluded from decision-making spaces, specifically young women, young people with disabilities, LGBTQI+ youth, and Indigenous youth.

### **Overview**

In partnership with [Disabled Peoples' International](#) and the [Arab Forum for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities](#), NDI organized a roundtable on November 30, 2021 examining youth inclusion in the global disability movement. People with disabilities across generations discussed challenges and opportunities for engendering relationships between activists within the disability movement. The roundtable also spotlighted the challenges young people with disabilities face when they try to exercise their agency and leadership. The objectives for the roundtable included:

- Young people with disabilities gain a platform to discuss their experiences and priorities as a means of shaping the discourse and opportunities regarding youth inclusion in the broader disability rights movement.
- Disability inclusion organizations and movement leaders better understand the need for greater solidarity across generations and discuss strategies for collaborating with the next generation of disability activists.

For many participating, a discussion around supporting intergenerational solidarity is timely. As the disability community faces new challenges, it will require the leadership and ingenuity of young people. However, it is clear that young people, despite having valuable ideas, continue to face challenges when pursuing leadership roles and having a seat at the table. This lack of access disproportionately impacts young people with disabilities who face additional environmental and accessibility barriers, including lack of accessible information about the movements and opportunities most relevant to them. Young people expressed challenges engaging with leaders of disabled persons organizations (DPOs) who are often older and are reluctant to make space for younger generations. For instance, older leaders often serve as gatekeepers to workshops and training opportunities that may be of value to young people with disabilities. Established leaders also determine organizational objectives and activities that often exclude young people and their priorities. The young women leaders with disabilities stated they are completely outside of the purview of DPOs and very few have seen any effort to intentionally engage young women or direct resources towards women- and youth-led organizations. At the same time, some older, established



leaders expressed how they want to engage young people, but don't always know how to create opportunities that are meaningful and leverage youth expertise effectively. Both groups highlighted challenges that cut across generations including attitudes and norms that make it difficult to advance rights-based approaches to disability inclusion.

Participants agreed that -- in order for the global disability movement and its allies to be successful in the continued push for disability rights, particularly in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic -- younger and older people with disabilities need to find ways to work together. Young people with disabilities acknowledged that older generations primarily operated in a world without the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), requiring them to be innovative and navigate complex barriers. Although barriers and needs have changed, learning lessons from more senior generations will better ensure that young people can play an effective role and gain access to institutions, such as the Conference of State Parties and the UN General Assembly.

To conclude the conversation, young people with disabilities highlighted priorities that adults with disabilities could support. This included engaging young people in the continued push for the full implementation and compliance with laws relevant to disability rights and accessibility, creating space for young people to be heard, and supporting collaboration between the disability rights and youth movements. The young people also called for a greater focus on intersectionality and how people with diverse identities or certain types of disabilities, such as intellectual or psychosocial disabilities, face additional forms of marginalization. Full inclusion means recognizing and addressing these differences to ensure the disability movement moves forward without leaving anyone behind.

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## **Recommendations**

### **Cross-Cutting**

- Avoid treating persons with disabilities as a homogenous group. There is a diversity of disabilities and identities that come with both overlapping and unique priorities and considerations. What works for one group may not work for another.
- Donors and international organizations should seek to mainstream persons with disabilities, and their priorities, into all programming and work, regardless of whether "inclusion" is the explicit objective. In addition, programming that focuses on young people should also be intentional about including young people with disabilities in all programming areas.

### **Disabled Persons Organizations**

- 1) DPOs should look to other successful movements for examples of how to build solidarity across generations and deconstruct advocacy and organizing silos. This will enable DPOs to institutionalize collective action and move away from the notion that more for one group is less for another.



- 2) DPO leaders should engage young people with disabilities of diverse identities and genders to develop strategies with concrete actions that result in sharing leadership responsibilities and professional development opportunities. This can include engaging young people in designing campaigns and initiatives that directly involve harder to reach disability communities.
- 3) DPOs should be purposeful in building the capacity of young people with disabilities, specifically young women, and raising awareness about their rights. Provide mentorship opportunities between young people and senior level leaders within the organization. In addition to mentoring, young people and senior level leaders need structured opportunities to learn from each other through mutually beneficial collaboration and a shared history.
- 4) DPOs should provide accommodations, such as sighted guides and sign language interpretation as well as support personal assistants to accompany youth with disabilities to ensure young people can participate in their organization's discussions and activities.

### **International Organizations**

- 1) Institutionalize expertise across the organization by recruiting and employing young professionals with disabilities, including those that speak minority languages. Ensure that all staff are educated on disability inclusion practices, including rights and legal frameworks.
- 2) Ensure that all office spaces and buildings are accessible, budget for reasonable accommodation in programs and operations, and guarantee that all information is available in accessible formats.
- 3) Create equitable, non-tokenistic partnerships with DPOs that are built on respect and mutuality. Establish transparent lines of two-way communication as a way for DPOs to relay their priorities and concerns and ensure that their ideas are respected and their needs are addressed.
- 4) Build the power and influence of DPOs by transferring ownership of programming and funding decisions.

### **Donors**

- 1) Ensure equitable access to funding opportunities by continuing efforts to shift funding toward grassroots organizations and initiatives as well as examining how current funding mechanisms can be made more accessible to DPOs. Consider flexible funding mechanisms that respond to the expressed needs of DPOs, including the provision of services. Be open to providing financial support for both short- and long-term initiatives.
- 2) Properly fund DPOs and their organizational needs. Do not assume DPOs should be working for free or implementing programs without funding for overhead expenses or organizational development.
- 3) Institutionalize accessibility and inclusion in all facets of work, including employing persons with disabilities who have a direct role in developing funding opportunities and engaging with grantees, as well as ensuring all information, such as tender notices, are in accessible formats.
- 4) Funding opportunities should reflect the diversity of the disability community and prioritize disability communities facing multidimensional forms of marginalization, including young



people, women, Indigenous peoples and LGBTQI+ communities. Support efforts that seek to unify disability movements and promote and advance cross-disability collaboration and collective action.

- 5) Acknowledge the impact of inadequate data on the advancement of disability rights and prioritize funding data collection and research initiatives, including supporting grantees to participate in census activities. Conduct research to ensure funding is having the desired impact in relation to disability priorities.