

RESOURCING DISABILITY JUSTICE

OUR FEMINIST JOURNEY TOWARD CENTRING DISABILITY JUSTICE



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SUMMARY

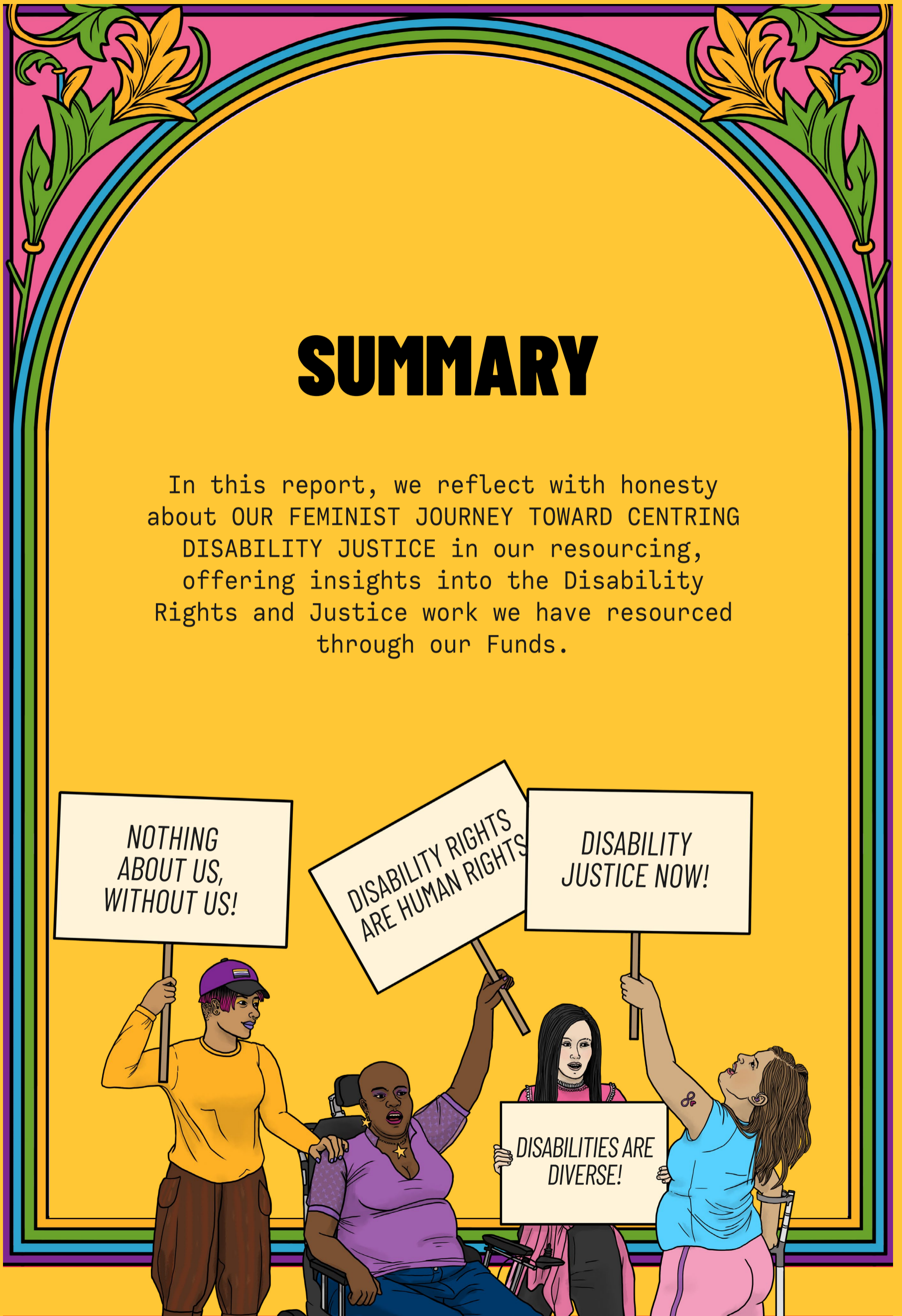
In this report, we reflect with honesty about OUR FEMINIST JOURNEY TOWARD CENTRING DISABILITY JUSTICE in our resourcing, offering insights into the Disability Rights and Justice work we have resourced through our Funds.

NOTHING
ABOUT US,
WITHOUT US!

DISABILITY RIGHTS
ARE HUMAN RIGHTS

DISABILITY
JUSTICE NOW!

DISABILITIES ARE
DIVERSE!



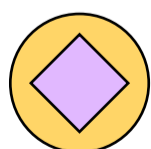
People with disabilities face massive discrimination, segregation, violence, chronic poverty, continuous violations of their human rights, and in the midst of crisis – such as COVID-19 – are disproportionately impacted. For girls, women, and youth with disabilities, the compounding consequences of these injustices are disproportionately exacerbated. Yet, in spite of the extreme systemic violence faced by people with disabilities, they continue to fight against centuries of marginalisation, discrimination, and violence, and have organised a global Disability Rights movement.

And, largely led by Black and Brown girls and youth Disability Rights activists, powered the second wave of the Disability Rights movement that, as Sins Invalid states, brings us to a “path and goal of Collective Liberation, in which we hold the question “How do we move together” - as people with mixed abilities, multiracial, multi-gendered, mixed class, across the orientation spectrum - where no body/mind is left behind.”

In this report, we reflect with honesty about our feminist journey toward learning how to centre Disability Justice in our resourcing, offering insight into the Disability Rights and Justice work we have resourced through our Funds. We highlight reflections and perspectives from the Disability Rights activist advisors that lead the resourcing (grantmaking) decisions, and share key learnings that have been woven through ecosystem and community conversations. In addition, our partners, the Disability Rights Fund and MADRE offer insights into their work.

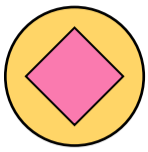


Our key learnings throughout the journey thus far include:



Centre Disability Justice with accountability from the beginning:

In order to be inclusive, we must centre Disability Justice from the beginning and embrace accountability by sharing and asking how we are centring it in our agenda and efforts.



Trust the wisdom, experience, and strategies of people with disabilities:

Support their leadership and participation, especially in key decision-making spaces in philanthropy and beyond. It results in more intersectional grant-making and an opportunity to transform all of our work.



Fund girl and youth Disability Rights activists expansively:

Girl and youth Disability Rights activists are leading powerful efforts despite being under-resourced. With more flexible funding, and through participatory approaches, the potential is limitless.



Engage in an ongoing learning journey around the diversity, intersectionality, and realities of people with disabilities:

Specifically, engage in an ongoing journey with processes and opportunities that support learning around the context, identities, efforts, and barriers faced by people with disabilities.



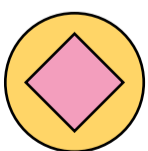
Recognise the intersectional and cross-movement work of girl and young feminist Disability Rights activists

Recognise the powerful ways in which, mirroring their intersecting identities and realities, girl and young feminist Disability Rights activists are organising across a range of movements through intersectional and interconnected efforts.



Prioritise collective care and mental health:

Provide flexible resources and explicitly encourage people to prioritise their collective care and mental health to counter the stigmatisation, discrimination, isolation, and violence that people with disabilities face, especially in crises.



Embrace vulnerability, flexibility, mistakes, and transformation:

Embrace a learning mindset that is grounded in trust-based relationships that allow for vulnerability, flexibility, mistakes, and – ultimately – transformation.

THIS DOES NOT MEAN THAT WE'VE SOLVED IT ALL - we are continuing to challenge ourselves to do better, we make mistakes and strive to learn from our mistakes, and our journey is ongoing as an organisation and as a community of activists to bring forward Disability Justice. We are deeply grateful to the Disability Rights activists, Disability Rights Fund, Women Enabled International, partners, and funders who trusted, supported, and have played an essential role in our ongoing learning, we invite the feminist ecosystem, philanthropic sector, and those committed to social transformation to join us on this path and commitment toward Disability Justice. While we humbly recognise that we are just entering the Disability Rights and Justice ecosystem and space, and understand this is the beginning of our learning journey and work, we believe that a central part of our role and position is to advocate and invite others into this conversation and efforts.

As Estefanía Cubillos Nova, a Disability Rights activist and grantee partner, reflects:
"We must learn together, without language or communication barriers, creating a union between donors, people with disabilities and governments to make our voices heard."



NARRATIVES SHAPE OUR WORLD

As an organisation, we understand the impact that language has in shaping narratives and our understanding of ourselves, each other, and the world. We want to begin this offering by recognising that when talking about disabilities, there is a rich and wide diversity mirroring the diversity in disabilities themselves. We do not believe in a one size-fits-all approach, but rather being in continuous conversation to understand how we can co-create narratives that honour and respect individual and collective experiences. And through this process of co-creation, we re-shape our understanding of our world.



FROM CONVERSATIONS WITH DISABILITY RIGHTS ACTIVISTS, ARTISTS, ORGANISATIONS AND FUNDERS, COMMUNITY DIALOGUES, AND LEARNINGS FROM OTHER RESOURCES, WE CREATED A SET OF GUIDING PRINCIPLES THAT SHAPED THE CREATION AND DESIGN OF THIS ENTIRE PUBLICATION.



Disabilities are not homogenous, there is large diversity across all disabilities and in the way each one is experienced by a person.



Ableism, as captured by Lydia X. Z. Brown, is the systemic oppression of people that are deemed as abnormal, defective, and subhuman, and shows up in conscious and unconscious ways. **We are taking an active approach to dismantle ableist practices and narratives**, and understand that it is an ongoing and learning journey.



People have different preferences on how they would like to be recognised, which must be honoured and respected. For example, some people prefer person-first language (i.e., person with a disability) and others prefer prioritising their disability (i.e., disabled person). The space and flexibility we create to respect the autonomy of each person, especially in the way and how they identify, is a core anti-ableist principle. Throughout this publication, we will use the terms interchangeably to recognise the way in which it was referred by the person/community and to recognise and represent the dynamic way in which they are used across communities.



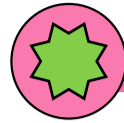
We do not abide by a standard of “normal” created by society so terms like “neurotypical” or “able-bodied” will not be used.



Disabilities intersect with other identities that shape a person’s lived experience.



Communities with disabilities do not need to be saved or placed as an inspirational symbol, but rather need the accountability of allies to support their efforts to protect and advance their human rights.



People and communities are multidimensional and constantly changing. Thus, unlearning the habit of making assumptions requires open and ongoing conversations that are rooted in courage, humility, respect and reciprocity, and the commitment to a continuous learning journey.



Disability accessibility does not translate to disability inclusion. We recognise that disability accessibility – designing, creating, and curating systems, processes, tools, and spaces that all people with disabilities can access and benefit from – must be in direct relationship with disability inclusion.



Disability inclusion – where people with disabilities are part of developing and implementing solutions, systems, processes, tools, and spaces – allows us to be in relationship and partnership to meaningfully contribute as co-creators and decision makers. As the Disability Rights Fund shares, “What does inclusion look like? It looks like people with disabilities engaged in a thoughtful dialogue with people without disabilities throughout the event – networking together, dining together, sharing ideas together and making plans to continue the conversation long after the conference ends.”



Disability Justice, a framework that is part of the second wave of Disability Rights movement and co-created by “disabled activists of color, originally queer women of color in progressive and radical movements that did not systematically address ableism”, is often used in tandem or interchangeably with Disability Rights, and at times, can be confused with inclusion and accessibility. As an organisation, we seek to work intentionally with a Disability Justice framing, as our goal is to contribute toward Disability Justice: “path and goal of Collective Liberation, in which we hold the question “How do we move together” - as people with mixed abilities, multiracial, multi-gendered, mixed class, across the orientation spectrum - where no body/mind is left behind.” - Sins Invalid.



Learn More:

[What does “Disability Justice” mean?, Disability and Philanthropy Forum.](#)

THESE PRINCIPLES HAVE GUIDED US THROUGHOUT THE DEVELOPMENT OF THIS OFFERING.

We are in a continuous process of learning and unlearning and are grateful to the Disability Rights community and individuals, and those who have led the way throughout history to break the bounds of what has been drawn as permissible by an oppressive system to create a world that is not only more accessible, but where we all belong.





WE ARE PURPOSEFUL

Purposeful is a feminist movement building hub for girls and their allies, rooted in Africa and working around the world. Centring the political power of girl and young feminist activists¹, we support their organising at the intersections of multiple movements for justice, through a range of collaborative Funds, as well as direct advocacy and programmatic work on the African Continent and beyond. We firmly believe that by trusting and supporting their leadership and organising, we can build the world we dream of and get closer to our collective liberation. This work is organised across four mutually reinforcing, power-building strategies.

STRATEGIES:



REDISTRIBUTING power assets: Funding girls' resistance

Grounded in feminist principles of solidarity and reciprocity, we are reimagining what it means to hold movement resources in deep relationship and with deep accountability to girls. Working across multiple levels – through global funding windows to deeply rooted community re-granting mechanisms – we re-frame grant-making practice so that girls and young feminists can define and determine resource distribution in the service of their own visions, goals and dreams of freedom.

BUILDING collective power: Building a base, raising consciousness and nurturing solidarity

Grounded in movement theory – and deeply inspired by Black liberation and anti-imperialist movements on the continent and beyond – we hold space for girls to come together, learn together, to ask why, to push back and to transcend. We mobilise girls, young feminists and their allies at scale, modelling new beliefs and shifting cultural conversations in the community at large.



ORGANISING power holders: Influencing and coalition building

We advocate for more and better resources, policies and programmatic practices with and for girls across local, national and global decision-making spaces. We leverage learnings from our own practice to support others to move from protectionist to powerbuilding approaches to supporting girls. Working in partnership with civil society, development and philanthropic communities, we hold learning spaces, convene practitioners, build national coalitions and co-create collective advocacy voice.

- 1 When we say we work with and support girl and young feminists activists we employ an expansive, intersectional perspective, and include activists that are and/or work with: trans and cis girls and young women, nonbinary youth, trans men, intersex youth, girls and youth with disabilities, girls, and youth of color, Indigenous girls and youth, ethnic and cultural minorities, girls and youth coming from rural areas and/or affected by poverty and economic inequality, migrants, and refugees, as well as those affected by climate injustice, to name just a few.



TRANSFORMING power structures: Political advocacy and agenda setting

We work in deep partnership with girls, young feminists and their older feminist allies to hold power-keepers to account. Our advocacy takes different forms in different places, for example, working with girls to lobby for change in their communities, co-creating new policy provisions with local authorities in West Africa, or holding governments to account through formal legal systems.



Read more about our [Theory of Change](#) and [Strategy](#).

Over the last five years of our being and growth, we have been on a journey towards disability inclusion and accessibility. We are not on this journey by accident, it was far from an afterthought. In fact, we know that without deep intention and the willingness to learn, and unlearn, it is not possible to redistribute power and transform our practices. And yet, once this intention is set and people let go of the fear of making mistakes they can engage in intentional and trusting relationships with people with lived experiences and wisdom. **This supports learning, and we realise it is not that hard to create systems and practices that are more inclusive and accessible.**

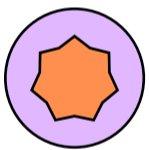
“When we centre those who are pushed to the margins, something unlocks and a whole new way of seeing and imagining the world opens up in beautiful technicolour clarity. And every time we think we’ve gone deep enough, a new possibility at the intersection and at the margins reminds us that we can always be more inclusive, always more expansive, always hold ourselves more deeply to account. That to centre those most excluded means to move a little bit closer to liberation. That indeed is the practice of liberation right within our own home called Purposeful”

ROSA BRANKSY, CO-FOUNDER AND CO-CEO, PURPOSEFUL

“In Sierra Leone, we are all too familiar with the realities which girls with disabilities face in their communities. As they become adolescents and young women, the harsh reality expands to include the real risk of sexual violence, abuse and harrassment. As an organisation, we know that we need to be intentional about reaching this group of girls and over the last five years, we’ve been learning, reflecting and adapting – from supporting girls and young women with disabilities to strategise and resist, challenging the wider negative narratives that exist about all people with disabilities, fighting for radical inclusion in education policy, and seeking to make the spaces we create accessible and inclusive, in Sierra Leone and beyond.”

CHERNOR BAH, CO-FOUNDER AND CO-CEO, PURPOSEFUL

Our journey truly gained momentum in 2020, sparked by the crisis of coronavirus (COVID-19), and our strategising around how our resourcing and programming work would respond. Through our resourcing resistance work, across the [Global Resilience Fund](#), [With and For Girls Fund](#) and [Survivors Solidarity Fund](#), we are learning what it means to move resources to Disability Rights activists, organisations and collectives in ways that are truly inclusive and accessible, both in times of emergency and in the longer term. While in our more programmatic focused work in Sierra Leone, we are using girl-centred media to challenge the entrenched stigma and discrimination that people with disabilities face there. *We invite you to read our sister publication on programming, which offers insight into how we are integrating Disability Justice into girl-centred programming in Sierra Leone and what we're learning from this. And in our storytelling efforts, we have seeded and curated [Our Resistance: Stories of Disability Rights Activists](#) in partnership with the [Stories of Girls' Resistance](#) project to document and amplify the ways in which Disability Rights activists transform and remake the world – their wisdom, reflections, and experiences have been woven throughout this publication.*



We do this in deep partnership with Disability Rights activist advisors, grantee partners, and colleagues, such as the [Disability Rights Fund](#) and [Women Enabled International](#). With trust and care, they hold us to account and act as critical friends that support us on this collective journey of transformation.

Honouring the wisdom, experiences, and resources of Disability Rights activists, movements, and partners, we have curated this publication to share our early learnings and insights into this work and the community relationships holding it – focusing on our resourcing (grantmaking) work. The opening section of the publication provides some contextual background to this work - the challenges and the resistance – drawing on existing literature and resources. It then continues with insights into the Funds we use to resource Disability Rights work, provides a snapshot

of some of the powerful Disability Rights efforts we have supported throughout the world, and highlights reflections and perspectives from the Disability Rights activist advisors that lead the decision-making of our Funds. Finally, we share the key learnings of this journey and, our partners, the [Disability Rights Fund](#) and [MADRE](#) also offer insights into their work and our partnership. We close with the words of Disability Rights activists who we have the privilege to be in community with and have been foundational to our learning.

DISABILITY RIGHTS MOVEMENT:

DISMANTLING COMPOUNDING INJUSTICES WITH RESISTANCE & PERSISTENCE

The United Nations estimates there are more than one billion persons with disabilities in the world and the number, as some Disability Rights activists believe, is expected to continue to rise with more access to resources and awareness of disabilities that are not physically “visible”, coupled with ageing populations globally.



This means that at least 1 out of 7 people in our society have disabilities. Yet, in our current context, plagued by oppressive and exploitative systems that perpetuate structural social hierarchies, inequality, and intersecting injustices, people with disabilities face massive discrimination, segregation, violence, chronic poverty, and continuous violations to their human rights. This includes the rights to education, autonomy of one's bodies and health, and access to fair trial and justice. Some of the factors that place people with disabilities at higher risk of violence include stigma, exclusion from decision-making spaces, as well as a lack of social support services.

Discrimination on the basis of gender and disability greatly impacts girls and women. For example, 25% of girls and women with disabilities are likely to face sexual abuse, 6% are likely to have been forcibly sterilised, and their overall literacy rate is 1%. Age-based discrimination furthers systemic oppression of youth (between the ages 15-24 as per the United Nations) with disabilities facing extreme poverty, barriers to access to education, and unemployment – reaching more than 80% in some countries.

Adolescent girls are at the centre of gender, disability and age, therefore facing compounding intersecting injustices. And the specific experiences of race, class, sexuality, immigration status, and more, further compound systemic oppressions. However, there is an insufficient level of awareness, reflection, and data on the compounding injustices faced by people with disabilities and identities that are further marginalised, including gender expansive youth, girls, Indigenous, and racialised young people. This persistent lack of attention to disability at the intersection of identities, context, and experiences further exacerbates systemic oppression. This is not a new phenomenon, there is a continuous pattern of ignoring people who face discrimination and marginalisation: for example, infamously, people with disabilities were not included in the Millennium Development Goals.

NOTHING ABOUT US WITHOUT US

I first heard the expression “nothing about us without us” in South Africa in 1993. Michael Masutha and William Rowland, two leaders of Disabled People South Africa, separately invoked the slogan, which they had heard used by someone from Eastern Europe at an international Disability Rights conference. The slogan’s power derives from its location of the source of many types of (disability) oppression and its simultaneous opposition to such oppression in the context of control and voice. James Charlton reflects on the slogan in his 1998 book on disability oppression.

This slogan became a clarion call and motto for the Disability Rights groups, activists, and civil society advocating for the creation and adoption of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (C.R.P.D.). Their advocacy resulted in unprecedented levels of involvement and influence in the drafting and negotiation process.

Responding to loudening activists and a growing movement, the last two decades have witnessed an increase in global efforts and action to advance the equality of people with disability. In December 2006, the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities was adopted and opened for signature in March 2007, it would go on to become the most swiftly ratified international treaty to date.

The purpose of the present 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. C.R.P.D. (2006), Art. 1.

In 2011, the World Health Organization and the World Bank would collaborate on the landmark World Report on Disability – a report relied on by activists and allies around the world for their advocacy. In 2015, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals (S.D.G.s) explicitly named people with disabilities as part of the principle of **“leave no one behind”** and five of the 17 Goals refer to people with disabilities.

However, there is still a significant way to go. For example, the most recent S.D.G. report shares that “[o]ut of 10 S.D.G. indicators that require disaggregation by disability status, data are available for only 2 of them.” A 2020 publication on advancing equality notes that only “27% of constitutions explicitly prohibit discrimination on the basis of disability.” - and as we see below, the commitments made on global stages are often forgotten in times of crises.



THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC AND COMPOUNDING CRISES

The ongoing global COVID-19 pandemic, has amplified every single inequity, oppression, and form of violence experienced by people with disabilities – furthering isolation and increasing barriers to access basic health services, education, and employment. In the midst of the lockdowns and increase in government restrictions, disabled people were severely affected as they are more likely to work in the informal sector, which resulted in lower access to financial security and fewer social safety nets. According to the United Nations, people with disabilities are more likely to contract and die from COVID-19 than people without disabilities. In addition, many people with disabilities require support for daily movements, special equipment, and have diverse forms of communication which were disrupted by the COVID-19 measures. As reports have identified, in the COVID-19 pandemic young people and women with disabilities have faced the following barriers:



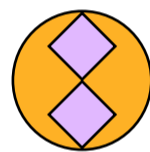
Higher risk of domestic, sexual, and gender-based violence



Lack of access to education and employment



Increased depression and mental health issues that impact other pre-existing conditions



Increased violence and violations of human rights

Cultiv8 Africa, a youth-led organisation in Zimbabwe, captures the lived reality for young women with disabilities in the COVID-19 pandemic in this short documentary.

The impact of the pandemic should not be seen as an isolated crisis. Rather, it is an example of how existing inequity, discrimination, criminalisation, and stigmatisation has led to conditions that place people with disability in extremely vulnerable conditions – decreasing their livelihood and killing them. As DefendDefenders shared in their Overlooked and Unseen: Human Rights Defenders Living with Disabilities in Conflict Countries report, persons

with disabilities are disproportionately affected by risks in situations of conflict and humanitarian emergencies. They face greater risks of being caught in conflict, left behind, have their rights violated, and their well-being and lives deprioritised. And in the face of climate change, people with disabilities are also disproportionately impacted due to the systematic failure in centring Disability Rights in climate change efforts and emergency and humanitarian responses.

THE RESISTANCE AND PERSISTENCE: NOTHING ABOUT US WITHOUT US

In spite of the extreme systemic violence that greatly impacts persons with disabilities, the community with disabilities has fiercely fought against centuries of stigmatisation, marginalisation, and discrimination, and powerfully organised a global Disability Rights movement to continue to advocate for and protect their human rights.



The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities is an example of a monumental win. Created by the movement, it is a global policy that in a large part, stems from advocacy efforts from Disability Rights organisations and groups, activists, and advocates demanding the protection of their rights. Across the world, the movement has created transformational change, with some of the wins including: demanding the inclusion of persons with disabilities in decision-making spaces; increasing the visibility of persons with disabilities across popular culture to reduce paternalistic and ableist narratives; pushing for mandates that require protection of the human rights of a person with disabilities; increasing access to health – especially sexual and reproductive health – and education; and celebrating the power, richness, and diversity of people with disabilities and disability culture.

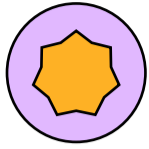
Girls and youth Disability Rights activists, especially “disabled people of color, immigrants with disabilities, queers with disabilities, trans and gender non-conforming people with disabilities, people with disabilities who are houseless, people with disabilities who are incarcerated, people with disabilities who have had their ancestral lands stolen, amongst others,” are at the forefront of the second wave of the Disability Rights movement. A driving force of Disability Justice – it is a framework that recognises and works to dismantle intersecting oppressions experienced by persons with disabilities. It is a framework that reminds us that without Disability Justice, there is no feminism, because at the core of feminism, our goal is to dismantle all forms of oppression that marginalise, exploit, stigmatise, and control our bodies and territories – ableism being one of the root forms of oppression

With creativity, solidarity, resistance and persistence, disabled girls and young feminist activists are leading transformational change at the intersection of movements and across territories and spaces to defend their human rights and bring us closer to a world where we all belong.

An illustration of a Black woman with her hair in a bun, wearing a green sweater and pink pants, sitting cross-legged. She is reaching out with her right hand towards a cluster of colorful stars (yellow, pink, orange, and blue). A vibrant rainbow arches over her. The scene is framed by a decorative border with green leaves and yellow flowers on the left side.

RESOURCING DISABILITY RIGHTS WORK

Grounded in feminist principles of solidarity and reciprocity, we are reimagining what it means to hold movement resources in deep relationship and deep accountability to girl and young feminist activists. At its core, our resourcing resistance initiatives focus on supporting the resistance, resilience, and care of girl and young feminist movements. They do this by reframing grant-making practices so that girl and young feminist activists can define and determine resource distribution in the service of their visions, goals and dreams of freedom. We firmly believe that by trusting and supporting their leadership, organising, and politicised work, we can build the world we dream of and get closer to our collective liberation.

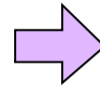


Through the With and For Girls Fund, Global Resilience Fund, and Survivors Solidarity Fund, we work with and for girls and young feminist activists to resource their organising across movements, contexts, issues and thematics.

Since 2019, we have provided over:



\$ 5.4 million (USD)
in flexible grants to over
**500 grassroots groups and
organisations, both formal
and informal, registered and
unregistered**

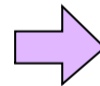


across
108 countries
in the world

These figures are ever increasing as we access and unlock more resources in service of our commitment to girl and young feminist movements.

Across our funding, we have awarded:

**\$475,000 (USD) to
59 disability rights-focused
grantee partners working**

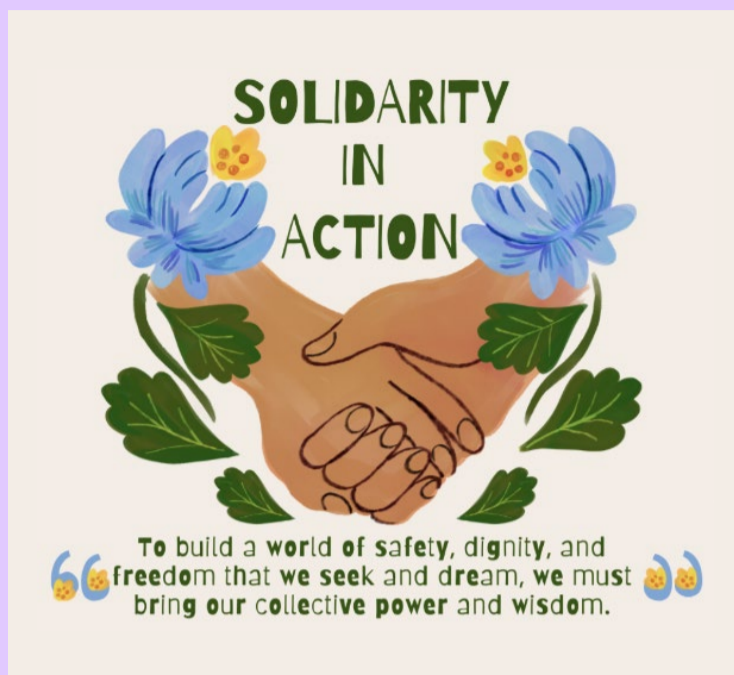


across
34 countries
in the world

Our application data and dialogue with grantee partners leaves us with no doubt that disability activists are organising in every corner of the world, across movements and agendas. Some of the efforts supported include: accessible sexual and reproductive health and rights education and resources; frontline service providers to survivors of violence in basic sign language; capturing the lived realities of young women with disabilities in the COVID-19 pandemic through a documentary; advocacy and lobbying for equal access to education

and/or employment; challenging negative narratives in communities; and skills training for girls, young women, and youth with disabilities to realise their power. In the next section, we will share the stories that sparked each Fund, provide an overview of how they work, expand on our learnings around the practices of resourcing girls and young feminist activists' Disability Rights efforts and, in partnership with grantee partners and funder partners, explore how to further Disability Justice.

SOLIDARITY IN ACTION: THE POWER OF MOVING MONEY THROUGH COLLECTIVE STRATEGIES



Read more about our recent experience in times of crisis with D.R.F. in this co-written [blog](#) in Alliance Magazine.

Like much of our work, our grantmaking is done in deep solidarity with ally funders and partners. This is illustrated most recently by our collective action with the Disability Rights Fund to move money to groups in Ukraine.

“As the crisis in Ukraine has unfolded, the Disability Rights Fund (D.R.F.) and Purposeful came together quickly to move resources to organisations of persons with disabilities with a focus on young disabled activists and disabled women-led groups – as their lives are disproportionately impacted and deprioritized in crises. We moved together with speed, trust, and solidarity to do what neither could do alone.”



WITH AND FOR GIRLS FUND AND COLLECTIVE

The With and For Girls Collective found its home in Purposeful in 2019 and, guided by the new vision and strategic plan launched in 2021, reconceptualised its work into two spheres – the **With and For Girls Fund** and the **With and For Girls Collective**.



The With and For Girls Fund

Is the first Africa-rooted global fund for and by girl and young feminist activists, resourcing – through participatory approaches – girls and young feminists’ resistance across the globe. Our primary and foundational ambition is to resource girl and young feminists’ activism and organising in healthy, sustainable and truly responsive ways. We reimagine grant-making practice so that girl and young feminist activists can define and determine resource distribution in the service of their own visions, goals and dreams of freedom.



The With and For Girls Collective

Is a collective space for diverse social justice funders dedicated to learning and transforming their own grantmaking practices and reorganising power to drive more resources to girl and young feminist activists’ politicised work. The Collective influences and advocates across philanthropic and development spaces for more and better resources as well as practices in service of girls and young feminist movements.

The With and for Girls Fund model is based on an open database that allows groups to submit their profiles throughout the year. The model also has funding windows that allow issue based, general and themed resource movement throughout the year. In 2021, we partnered with Disability Rights Fund to distribute resources with a key focus on girls, young women and non binary people with disabilities under 30 years of age. While Disability Rights

groups and efforts are among the funding priorities of the With and For Girls' Fund and have been supported through our previous grantmaking with the Disability Rights Fund, we felt that having a dedicated funding window for groups working on disability was critical to ensure we are intentionally reaching Disability Rights groups as they often face many barriers to access funding – so the Notre Lumière funding round was born.

Notre Lumière means “our light” in French. As an organisation, we see this “light” as inclusion for people with disabilities in our resourcing resistance work. Launched in mid-2022, this funding round is still ongoing and at the time of writing, **we were in the process of transferring funds to 33 grantee partners in 23 countries. Each group is receiving between \$5,000 and \$7,000 (USD) – a total of \$208,000.**

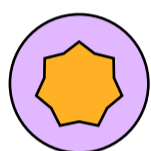


GLOBAL RESILIENCE FUND

As the realities of COVID-19 began to unfold in early 2020, it quickly became clear that girls and young women, trans and non-binary people, and persons with disabilities – already battling the compounding effects of patriarchy, white supremacy and imperialist extraction – would be some of the very worst affected. Yet, despite facing compounding injustices and impacts of the pandemic and other crises, girl and young feminist activists were organising – bringing creativity, joy, love, and liberatory tactics – and responding to the emergency while continuing their long-term strategies for change. It is in that context the Global Resilience Fund (G.R.F.) was launched in May 2020. Housed and facilitated by Purposeful, the G.R.F. was seeded by an initial cross-section of 25 funders as a crisis COVID-19 response fund focused on resourcing girl and young feminist activists’ brave and transformative strategies.



From May to December 2020, the G.R.F. moved \$1M to 234 organisations led by girl and young feminist activists from around the world – [click here to read more about our learnings setting up the fund to resource young activists throughout compounding crises](#). In 2021, G.R.F. continued to support these groups by providing funding for their collective care and collaboration efforts and moved resources to young people who were experiencing the COVID-19 crisis within the context of other bursting crises. For example, to groups in Afghanistan in partnership with [MADRE](#), in Myanmar in partnership with Tharthi Myay Foundation and directly to groups in Lebanon, Haiti, and the Occupied Territories of Palestine. While continuing to provide accompaniment (accompaniment is a process of walking side by side towards feminist liberation and social justice, with a grantee partner’s needs, realities, and expertise front and centre - read more about our accompaniment approach [here](#)) to current partners, in 2022, G.R.F. has focused on supporting the resilience, collective care and movement-led work of girl and young feminist activists in emerging and intersecting crises.



Since the launch of the G.R.F., we have firmly believed that without disability justice, there is no justice – much less relief or recovery in any crisis context.

Thus, from the beginning, we have held an explicit intersectional lens that centres the leadership of Disability Rights activists to reimagine and co-create all aspects of the resourcing process. This ensures we reach the powerful, creative and resilient efforts that are often excluded from funding opportunities. As our partners at the Disability Rights Fund shared, it is incredibly important to truly commit to resourcing Disability Rights groups as currently only **2% of all global human rights funding is directed to persons with disabilities.**

With the expertise and leadership of disability rights activists and organisations, G.R.F. resourced an unprecedented number of Disability Rights groups led by girl and young feminists with disabilities across the world – leveraging over \$200,000 to support 13% of 30 groups. This breakthrough was made possible because G.R.F. included organisations focused on Disability Rights – [Disability Rights Fund](#) and [Women Enabled International](#); two Disability Rights activist advisors; and donor partners with expertise in funding Disability Rights. This allowed us, by drawing on collective knowledge and lived experience, to create an accessible and inclusive process. Catherine Townsend, a senior advisor on Disability Rights at Ford Foundation and an integral part of making the G.R.F. more accessible and inclusive, reflected:

“the transformation that the Global Resilience Fund made in just 10 months, to be inclusive of people with disabilities, has seriously taken 10 years for other institutions. I’m not being dramatic. I don’t know how and why, but that’s the truth.”

SURVIVORS SOLIDARITY FUND

SURVIVORS SOLIDARITY FUND

In 2020, confronted with the rape and death of a five year old girl in Sierra Leone, Purposeful conspired with survivor leaders and allies nationally and globally to take collective action by launching the Survivors Solidarity Fund.² Tired of waiting for change and for free, quality services for survivors to be resourced, activists and allies crowdfunded resources across constituencies – from community members in villages to eminent personalities in the diaspora – modelling a new kind of philanthropy. In six weeks, over USD \$100,000 was raised through bank transfers, mobile money, Paypal, cheques and cash donations.

The money was shared among four grassroots organisations, providing them with vital unrestricted resources to build on the essential work they already do for survivors. Recognising that girls and women with disabilities are often more vulnerable

to violence and abuse, yet face even more barriers to accessing response services, one of the four organisations, SMART Women's Initiative, partnering with Sierra Leone National Association of the Deaf, pioneered sign language training for other three Survivors Solidarity Fund partners: including paralegals with Legal Access through Women Yearning for Equality, Rights and Social Justice (LAWYERS) and healthcare workers with the Rainbo Initiative and Aberdeen Women's Centre.

We know that this training is only the start of a long journey to ensuring frontline service providers can provide quality services to survivors with disabilities. Fuelled by the collective grief and rage of a nation, this is a Fund unlike any other and as we look towards replenishment and future grantmaking to frontline services providers, we will continue to centre the survivors of sexual violence, in particular those that sit at the intersections of oppression.



² Read more about what we learned about doing this work practically in lessons we shared with The West Africa Civil Society Institute and follow the Fund's journey on the website.

Girls Forum Uganda

Girls' Forum Uganda (G.F.U) enables economically vulnerable youths to equitably access educational and skills training to generate income to cater for their own health and development needs in Uganda. As a result of the Covid-19 lockdown and a reduction in public transport, GFU's service delivery was affected. The needs of youth during the ongoing pandemic have not been prioritised and young people are experiencing socio-economic challenges and a lack of access to basic needs, such as healthcare, food and education. Many healthcare centres have been forced to close, and the youth-friendly centres are not easily accessible to people living in rural areas. GFU has supported adolescent girls, youth, women and disabled people to get access to healthcare, particularly ART for HIV+ people. They also aim to provide food and educational materials.



UGANDA

A picture of girls and young women holding a book and school supplies

Palabras poderosas

Born in 2020, palabras poderosas started life as a feminist reading circle, providing space and time to visibilise the literary work of women. The collective has evolved to become a feminist platform with a vision of creating change – focusing on sexual and reproductive rights, confronting taboos, such as menstruation, and creating safe spaces where girls and women, including girls and women with disabilities, can learn, unlearn, question, create art, collectivise, resist and gather as sisters. All the while, continuing to raise awareness of the artistic, scientific and social work of women.



PANAMA

A group of people from palabras poderosas pose together at a meeting

Mujeres con capacidad de soñar a colores

In 2018 Mujeres con Capacidad de Soñar a Colores (Women with the Capacity to Dream in Colour) was established by a collective of women with disabilities. Grounded in the promotion of the rights of women with disabilities, the group uses art and participatory methods to build solidarity and friendship among women with disabilities, challenge and transform the social structures that perpetuate violence, injustice and discrimination faced by women with disabilities and raise consciousness around sexual and reproductive health and rights and collective care.



GUATEMALA

A collective of girls and women with disabilities display their artwork.

iGirls

Grounded on the slogan of “disability is not inability”, iGirls is a collective of girls who support girls with disabilities with skills training in areas such as advocacy, photography, tailoring, entrepreneurship, computer and technology consultancy and repair, web designing, fashion design and project management. They do this work to show communities that to be a girl with a disability is to be resilient and that when they are supported, they can become power agents for change in their homes and communities.



SIERRA LEONE

Girls and young women from iGirls gathered around a table.

Toward a better tomorrow for development and empowerment

Believing that actions speak louder than words, Toward a Better Tomorrow for Development and Empowerment, was founded in 2019 by a group of girls and young women. The organisation is focused on defending the rights of all groups of marginalised girls, including girls with disabilities. They work to create a society where all girls and women can thrive in safe spaces.



JORDAN

A group of smiling girls pose with an older woman, they are wearing aprons and cooking food together.

Más que bipolar

“No hay salud, sin salud mental” – there is no health, without mental health. Más Que Bipolar is a community of young activists seeking to end the stigma that exists around neurodiversity and psychosocial disability.



PERU

Four members of the Más Que Bipolar (More than Bipolar) collective laughing and wearing bipolar stigma busting tshirts.

المنتدى الشبابي لذوي الاحتياجات الخاصة

Youth forum for people with disabilities, yemen



Led by a group of young women with disabilities, the Youth Forum for People with Disabilities aims to gather people with disabilities in community with each other to collectively solve problems and advocate for their rights and equality. Activities include leadership skills and awareness building for girls and young women with disabilities to support them to individually and collectively advocate for themselves in their communities.

جمعية الرحمة للمعاقات ازيلال - المغرب

Errahma association

Errahma Association defends the rights of girls, women, and children with disabilities and advocates for their rights to access basic services. It promotes their inclusion through increased access to educational and rehabilitation programs for young women with disabilities and better schooling conditions for girls and children with disabilities so they can live in dignity and challenge the stereotypes entrenched in the collective societal mindset against people with disabilities.



MOROCCO

A group of young activists from Errahma association gathering outdoors, smiling, and bringing their hands together.



مبادرة ونام الشبابية المختصة بفننة الصم

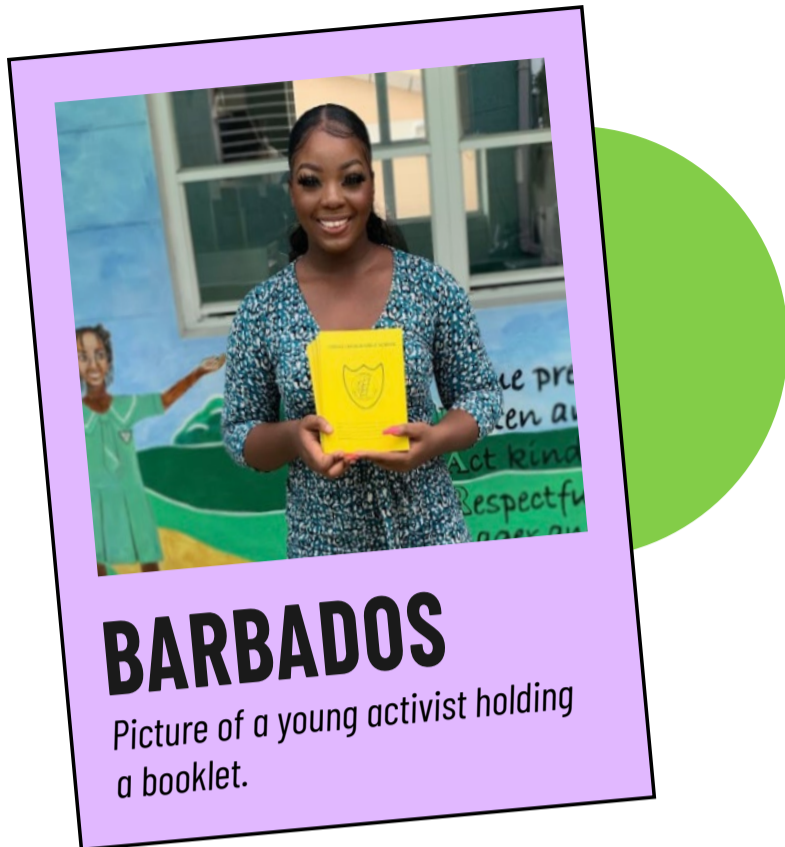
Wyam youth initiative, yemen

Four deaf young women came together and formed the Wyam Initiative in response to the lack of concern around the rights of the deaf community; and the increasing marginalisation of this group in the economic, social, political and cultural fields. Their main activities focus on peacebuilding, empowerment, and education. Ensuring that visual materials are available, the group carries out sign language training courses for workers in the academic and health sectors.



Udruzenje za kulturu, afirmaciju i savjetovanje "k.a.s." banja luka

Bosnia and Herzegovina: Completely run by girls and young women, K.A.S. was founded in January 2016 and implements projects on gender equality, gender and peace, peace activism, gender and art, girls' empowerment, gender based violence against girls with disabilities, deaf culture, empowerment of deaf adolescent girls, etc. K.A.S. also does research work and since 2016 has published several books, brochures and booklets about gender studies, gender equality, girls' rights, women's heritage, women's history, peacebuilding, art and culture as tools for peace-building and conflict prevention.



Humanity barbados

Founded and led by a young autistic woman, Humanity Barbados aims to support children and young people with different types of disabilities to access quality education. They do this through financing educational needs, such as school fees, school meals, books and uniforms, and providing assistive technology. By providing access to education, Humanity Barbados also aims to challenge and reduce the stigma and discrimination girls with disabilities face in their homes and communities.



I-Create youth, United States of America

I-CREATE YOUTH (I.C.Y.) strives to be a love language for disabled students, and a vessel to give back to the disabled community for those who support disability activism. Founded in June 2020 by a 16 year old girl, I.C.Y. blossomed out of a desire to make disability advocacy a collective, and not individualistic, endeavor. It became an effort to meet fellow disabled students, share their stories, and raise awareness for our unique but shared experiences. I.C.Y. initially focused on creative writing for visually impaired (VI) students through educational workshops, letter exchanges between VI schools and mainstream schools, and educational newsletters. Since then, I.C.Y. has launched a remote fellowship program for each fellow to work with a mentor on a disability research project (whether it be eco-ableism or disabled representation in children's literature); and a literary collective that publishes work by disabled writers. They are currently holding a summer program similar to the annual fellowship program.



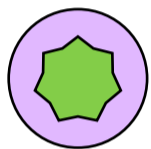
Sustainable Development Organization for Women, Afghanistan

Sustainable Development Organization for Women (S.D.O.F.W.) was founded by five girls and young women (aged 19 to 25) with disabilities, to address the problems faced by persons with disabilities in their communities. S.D.O.F.W. works to improve the quality of life of girls and women with disabilities, protect their human rights through social-psychological integration and promote an environment where all girls and women with disabilities have equal access to health, rehabilitation, education, employment, the physical environment and information. Today, S.D.O.F.W. has 13 part and full time staff – all girls and young women with disabilities and works with a network of 28 girls and young women with disabilities.

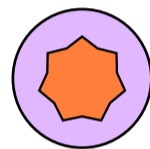
PARTICIPATORY DECISION-MAKING: REFLECTIONS AND PERSPECTIVES FROM DISABILITY RIGHTS ACTIVIST ADVISORS

Across the With and For Girls Fund and Global Resilience Fund, we work with an activist advisory to lead decision-making. The activist advisors, comprising 15 - 20 girl and young feminist activists, bring their knowledge, expertise, and community connections to identify funding needs, design the grantmaking call, review applications and make funding decisions. The advisory is intersectional and intergenerational, prioritising girl and young feminist activists with disabilities (below the age of 30), girls and young women of colour, LGBTQIA+ youth, Afrodescendant, Indigenous, immigrants and refugees, as well as those living in urban slum areas, rural areas, occupied territories, and in conflict-affected settings.

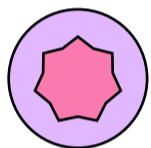
Role of the advisory:



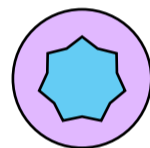
Participate in the design of funding calls



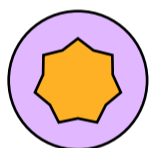
Support in accompaniment to grantee partners



Decide how funding is allocated



Engage in key advocacy and key spaces for girls funding and organising.



Support Funds at key moments to monitor progress against the strategic plan



Disability Rights activists that have been or currently are advisors offered insights to their experience of this role:



*I liked the way you worked with people with disabilities to make the selection. There is a slogan we always use, **nothing about us without us**, and girls with disabilities. Most of the time it's people with disabilities who are the first to know how we can really solve these challenges, which facilities we need, etc. I loved the way you involved people with disabilities from the beginning and I love the way they are not left behind - the way you brought in a sign language interpreter for Maselina. She was comfortable and even I was comfortable, so it shows that where there is facilitation, anything can be done.*

I also loved the way you were friendly and how you kept checking with us to see if there was anything you could do to make it more accessible. Flexibility, representation and remembering that people with disabilities cannot be left behind - you remember the facilities needed, and all of this enables the person with disabilities to fully and meaningfully engage in this process.

-

ANISIE BYUKUSENGE, RWANDA (FORMERLY AN ADVISOR, ANISIE NOW WORKS WITH PURPOSEFUL AS A PROGRAMME ASSISTANT WITH THE WITH AND FOR GIRLS' FUND TEAM)



I was surprised at this work, I have never been an Advisor with any organisation before. The process was so unique. I was afraid about scoring the applications but having the entire score sheet and questions made it easier... By being an Advisor, I learned so much about the work of other girls and women with disabilities, I even discovered some types of disabilities for the first time and the different barriers and discrimination they face. I learned about four groups being led by girls and women with disabilities in Sierra Leone, I didn't even know they existed.

I love the way Purposeful communicates with us and gives us full power as Advisors. They don't do the work for you. We are in charge and we do everything but they give us a safe space and create a friendly working atmosphere.

-

MONICA YEANIE GHALIWA, SIERRA LEONE

This is something we need to continue to look at, as for young women it is very hard to get access to funding. Because of the way that the community sees our young people, especially in the Pacific, there are still a lot of difficulties in ensuring the funding reaches communities. There is a need to encourage young women with disabilities to always look for new ideas and not have mixed feelings about their rights. I did not have access to education until the later part of my life. Sometimes reading and connecting to questions and the [funding] criteria, the language that is used is very intense sometimes. That was my experience. Now I can understand a lot more, Because of the training in literacy I have gone through. I have experienced that the language can be a great barrier, especially for young women like myself. Connecting signed language with written, with grammar, was a huge barrier for me.

-
MASELINA LUTA, SAMOA

KEY LEARNINGS FROM OUR ONGOING JOURNEY TOWARD CENTRING DISABILITY JUSTICE

We recognise that we're at the start of a long journey to ensure that all our work is inclusive, accessible, and truly reflective of Disability Justice. As we continue on this path, we are committed to centring the wisdom and lived experience of Disability Rights activists and organisations. In this section, we humbly offer our key – and interwoven – learnings in the hope that others join us in these efforts and put some of them into practice. Our learnings are grounded in both real experience and deep, reflective conversation with Disability Rights activists, Disability Rights organisations, funders with expertise in funding Disability Rights, and with the Purposeful team leading this work internally.



1. Centre disability justice with accountability from the beginning:

In order to be inclusive, centre Disability Justice from the beginning and embrace accountability by sharing and asking how it is centred in our agenda and efforts.

“Most of the time, disability is an add on. Someone or a group sets something up and afterwards realises ‘oh we should think about disability’, not about how inclusion of women and girls with disabilities actually influences the structure from the start.”

-
CATHERINE TOWNSEND, SENIOR ADVISOR ON DISABILITY RIGHTS AT FORD FOUNDATION

Strategies and programs tend to be designed without consideration for disability inclusion and accessibility, are not mainstreamed in budgets and processes and, usually, people with disabilities are not included in leadership roles or decision-making spaces. This is all unfortunately too common and replicates and exacerbates injustices. By working intentionally with our partners, we have built, and in some cases, rebuilt stronger programs, systems and processes.

Through the Global Resilience Fund and With and For Girls Fund, we have learned that disability inclusion and accessibility does not always require a labour- or resource-intensive process. Simple, practical, cost-free solutions opened up a range of possibilities for Disability Rights activists. For example, having downloadable MS Word applications rather than PDFs, or including stipends to cover sign-language translations for advisors. Further, it is easier, faster,



and cheaper to lower barriers from day one of design rather than retrofit it later. By budgeting for it from the beginning, planning for it becomes easier rather than looking for more resources once contracts are signed and budgets approved. Whilst it's important not to invisibilise the human and capital cost of doing this work, we also shouldn't use resources as an excuse not to make our work more accessible and inclusive.

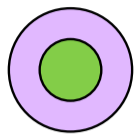
As funders, we play a critical role in modelling inclusive practices, as well as in holding ourselves and others accountable in how we centre disability accessibility and inclusion in our work. By sharing our journey toward inclusivity and accessibility, with honesty and humility being open to critique, and asking for help when needed, we are creating a reflective practice that ensures we are constantly thinking about how those often at the margins can be at the centre of our social justice agenda.

"If you're a rights funder, you have to push an agenda. And it only comes up as a pushback when it's something that people don't really want to do. I've heard time and time again "we asked the community, we trust the community, we asked our community of grantees, and nobody was interested in disability". And we know that is because communities are not inclusive."

**DIANA SAMRASAN, FOUNDER
OF DISABILITY RIGHTS FUND**

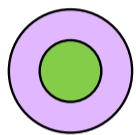
Removing grant application barriers

With support from the Disability Rights Fund, we intentionally worked to overcome any barriers people with disabilities may face when applying to our funds.



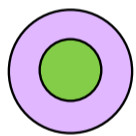
Application format:

Specifically, engage in an ongoing journey with processes and opportunities that support learning around the context, identities, efforts, and barriers faced by people with disabilities.



Language, especially being explicit in naming disability, is critical:

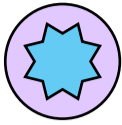
It is important that girls and young people with disabilities can identify themselves in Advisor Terms of References; grant calls for proposals; and that they know this funding is for them. We can not assume that Disability Justice communities think money for feminist movements is also for them. Since the beginning of our partnership with Disability Rights Fund, they have been very supportive in pushing us to explicitly name and actively mention people with disabilities in our texts.



Being flexible around criteria:

Our funding is normally targeted at groups whose membership is 30 years old and younger. We realised that for people with disabilities, especially girls and women, this age restriction is challenging. *As Anisie Byukusenge shares, “in developing countries, becoming an advocate for yourself takes a long time. It is even harder for girls with disabilities - they’re less likely to attend school and if they do go to school, they might start later and not have the learning support they need. Even leaving their bedroom or home can be a challenge, because of stigma and discrimination they face. We have to be mindful of this reality – becoming an activist, having your voice heard and getting the right level exposure is more challenging. So we increased the age limit from 30 to 35, we saw more applications, especially in Sub-Saharan Africa.”*

Despite trying to remove barriers, we have noticed that the majority of funding applications came from groups in Sub-Saharan Africa. While we made a concerted effort to reach groups in other regions, including expanding timelines and leveraging the relationship with Disability Rights Fund, we are still left asking ourselves: why is this geographical spread so different from our other funding rounds? We’ll make space to answer this through learning calls with the future grantee partners from these regions. This is just one example of how learning must be constant in order to improve our practice.



2. Trust the wisdom, experience, and strategies of people with disabilities:

Support their leadership and participation, especially in key decision-making spaces in philanthropy and beyond. It results in more intersectional grant-making and an opportunity to transform all of our work.



“There is a slogan we always use, nothing about us without us, and girls with disabilities. Most of the time it’s people with disabilities who are the first to know how we can really solve these challenges, which facilities we need, etc.”

ANISIE BYUKUSEGE, DISABILITY RIGHTS ACTIVISTS,
FORMER ADVISOR FOR THE GLOBAL RESILIENCE FUND,
PURPOSEFUL TEAM MEMBER, AND STORYTELLER IN OUR
RESISTANCE: STORIES OF DISABILITY RIGHTS ACTIVISTS

In spite of the extreme systemic violence and marginalisation that greatly impacts persons with disabilities, the community with disabilities has fiercely fought against centuries of stigmatisation, marginalisation and discrimination. They have powerfully organised a global Disability Rights movement that has led to transformative social change that has already benefited the world. However, Disability Rights activists’ wisdom, experience, and strategies are not usually trusted or included, especially when it comes to meaningful leadership. To truly dismantle ableism, we must trust and support people and communities with disabilities, as they are the experts of their realities and context and can define how to bring about sustainable and relevant resolutions.

Working closely with Disability Rights activist advisors and Disability Rights organisations has been both foundational and nourishing to our work. By ensuring their participation and trusting their leadership and expertise, all aspects of our grantmaking processes were challenged. This allowed us to remove the typical barriers that prevent Disability Rights movements from reaching resources; and create processes at speed and with inclusion, accessibility, and diversity as guiding principles. This resulted in reaching an unprecedented number of Disability Rights groups, especially those led by people with disabilities. In our learning journey, this has been an example that you do not need to sacrifice inclusion and participation, especially in moments of crises when people with disabilities are most often impacted.



“We not only want opportunities, we can also generate them. I know that we must concentrate all our efforts so that more girls and women with disabilities lead. We can achieve this if we have funds available to create and finance projects, directed by us, based on trust and without rigorous formats that wear us down. Because there is no point in having a lot of resources when we are not included or consulted on how we can access funding.”

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ESTEFANÍA CUBILLOS NOVA, GRANTEE PARTNER AND STORYTELLER IN OUR RESISTANCE: STORIES OF DISABILITY RIGHTS ACTIVISTS



3. Fund girl and youth Disability Rights activists expansively:

Girl and youth Disability Rights activists are leading powerful efforts despite being under-resourced. With more flexible funding, and through participatory approaches, the potential is limitless.

“We need dedicated funding for our efforts. True justice is not possible without Disability Justice”

-
DISABILITY RIGHTS ACTIVIST, DISABILITY JUSTICE COMMUNITY DIALOGUES

Understanding ongoing injustice, violence, and violations of human rights faced by communities with disabilities, we must recognise that ableism is an ongoing crisis that continues to be ignored, while impacting more than half of the people across the world. For youth, Indigenous, LGBTQIA+, and racialised people, ableism creates deeper marginalisation and impact. Yet, it is girl and young feminist activists with disabilities, and intersecting identities, who are at the frontline of social justice efforts. As Daphne Frias, an unapologetically Latina youth activist, shared *“Disabled people live at the intersection of all systems of oppression and social justice issues. There isn’t one issue or one intersection where you will not find disabled individuals advocating for or experiencing the effects of those issues.”*

Across all of our funding rounds, we try to ensure that we reach diverse groups, including specific outreach to networks and groups led by activists with disabilities. In the deliberation of decisions around resources, we have been intentional to ensure the representation of groups led by girls or young feminist activists with disabilities. This was done through a dynamic discussion at the activist advisor panels and careful consideration of groups with disabilities, as well as other core identities and communities who are often left out of funding, such as LGBTQIA+ youth, sex workers, girls, and groups working on climate justice. Additionally, the Global Resilience Fund and With and For Girls Fund had dedicated funding rounds focused on Disability Rights to ensure that Disability Rights groups are reached and resourced.

It is clear from the collective actions led by global Disability Rights movements; the efforts undertaken to secure the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in the early 2000s; through the stories captured in *Our Resistance: Stories of Disability Rights Activists*; and emerging from our grantee partners; – if resourced equitably, the potential of Disability Rights groups and the Disability Rights movement to further our social justice work is limitless.

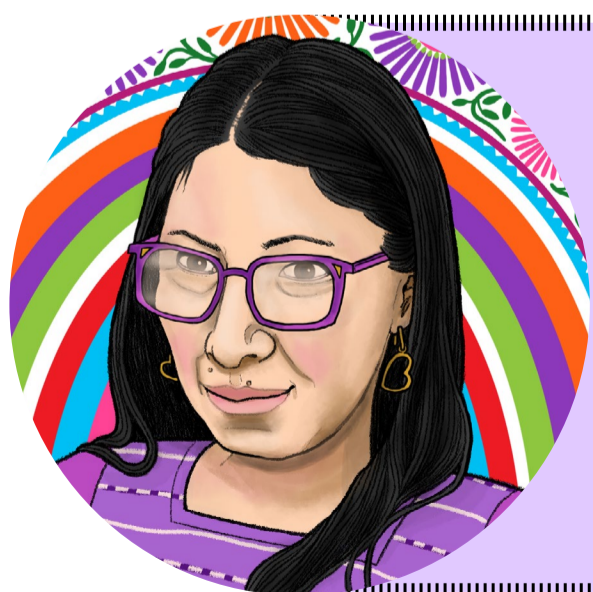
“As a movement, we have to create strategic alliances in order to work with all communities with disabilities to guarantee and protect our rights, ensuring that we have the resources that we need, not from a charity perspective, but what we rightfully deserve.”

DISABILITY RIGHT ACTIVIST, DISABILITY JUSTICE COMMUNITY DIALOGUES



4. Engage in an ongoing learning journey around the diversity, intersectionality, and realities of people with disabilities:

Specifically, engage in an ongoing journey with processes and opportunities that support learning around the context, identities, efforts, and barriers faced by people with disabilities.



“We hierarchise the differences to see who can do more than the other. And those who can’t, we minimise them, we exclude them. We don’t see that these differences are complementarity. That is structural violence”

ELIZABETH PATRICIA PÉREZ, DISABILITY RIGHTS ACTIVISTS
AND STORYTELLER, OUR RESISTANCE: STORIES OF
DISABILITY RIGHTS ACTIVISTS

Communities with disabilities are diverse, multidimensional, and intersectional. The experiences and identity of each person with disability varies. For disabled people holding identities that face multiple systems of oppression, such as racialised girls and queer youth, their lives are further marginalised. In our conversation with Disability Rights activists during the Disability Justice Dialogues and due to the way in which Disability Rights tends to be set as a siloed agenda/effort, activists shared the importance of moving away from hierarchising disabilities, making assumptions about disabilities, context,

identities, as well as knowledge levels in our work, with our teams and partners. Rather, grounded in the diversity and intersectionality of the community, we should engage in a constant learning journey through skills and knowledge building processes and opportunities that support everyone in understanding the context, realities, efforts, and barriers faced by people with disabilities. We continue to work with the Disability Rights Fund to support our own team on this journey, while we have also provided dedicated learning spaces for the activist advisors we work with.

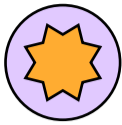


“It is so important to educate families of people with disabilities. So much pressure is put on the person with a disability, but the families and communities need to do their work too. They need to understand how to reimagine what has been for too long held as the norm, but yet is excluding people in the society. For instance braille or sign language, why isn’t this accessible at all schools. Why are there places that only have stairs and no ramps?

Why do we keep creating the same oppressive structures that are not serving all of us?”

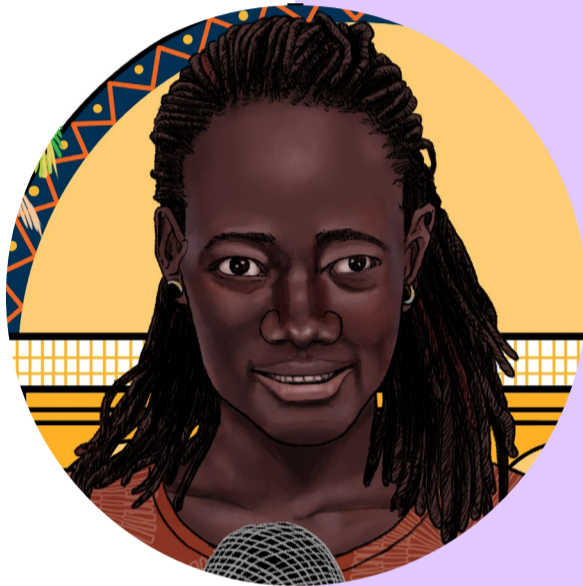
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**DISABILITY RIGHTS ACTIVIST,
DISABILITY JUSTICE COMMUNITY
DIALOGUES**



5. Recognise the intersectional and cross-movement work of girl and young feminist Disability Rights activists:

Recognise the powerful ways in which, mirroring their intersecting identities and realities, girl and young feminist Disability Rights activists are organising across a range of movements through intersectional and interconnected efforts.



“People with disabilities are out in the street, every day the cost of living is rising and more people are in the street. We need to take action. I like to break the bias, there is nothing we cannot do. Yes, I lost my sight but I knew I could redefine my life to support others. I want inclusion in every aspect of life.”

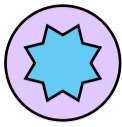
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**MONICA YEANIE GHALIWA, DISABILITY RIGHTS ACTIVIST
AND STORYTELLER, *OUR RESISTANCE: STORIES OF DISABILITY
RIGHTS ACTIVISTS***

“What I found amazing is seeing the intersectional nature of the work that girls with disabilities are doing, when we categorise who’s doing what, among the different groups, it’s not as if the girls with disabilities are working on the thing of disability. They’re working on food insecurity on LGBTQ issues, and all these other things.”

—
JUDY DIERS, FORMER PROGRAM OFFICER AT FORD FOUNDATION

As we learned through *Our Resistance: Stories of Disability Rights Activists*, girl and young feminist Disability Rights activists are advancing Indigenous rights, responding to crises, furthering LGBTQIA+ efforts, ensuring accessible education, and breaking disability stigma through art and representation. Our grantmaking application data also provides incredible insight into the work groups are already

doing, and their dreams for expanding on this if they receive funding and support. Some groups invest in consciousness-raising about violence, sexual and reproductive health and rights, bodily autonomy and/or education rights, while others strengthen advocacy skills, offer livelihoods training, and provide access to psychosocial support and/or support access to assistive devices.



6. Prioritise collective care and mental health:

Provide flexible resources and explicitly encourage people to prioritise their collective care and mental health to counter the stigmatisation, discrimination, isolation, and violence that people with disabilities face, especially in crises.



“People that don’t know me see me and want to help me to do things, then they ask me like this: ‘do you need help, do you? Or how do I help you?’ And I’ve found that I don’t need help so much as time, time to be. Time.”

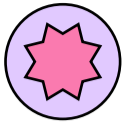
NUR MATTA, DISABILITY RIGHTS ACTIVISTS AND STORYTELLER, *OUR RESISTANCE: STORIES OF DISABILITY RIGHTS ACTIVISTS*

“We make the radical choice to love ourselves and our communities as we show up to the work. We embrace rest and care as a central piece of the movement toward social change. And we advocate for improved access and inclusion for all, especially young women and girls with disabilities around the world who have too often been excluded.”

ANNA PICKETT, DISABILITY RIGHTS ACTIVISTS AND WITH AND FOR GIRLS FUND ADVISOR

As a Disability Rights Activist shared in the Disability Justice Dialogue: “The mental health of people with disabilities needs to be a priority – we experience so much stigmatisation, discrimination, isolation and violence. Yet there is such a terrible lack of access to resources and services to support our mental health and many of these services and resources are not developed with people with disabilities in mind.” And, even with flexible resources, people so often struggle to prioritise collective care and mental health in the face of so many needs they experience in their communities. Being explicit in resources to support collective care and mental health encourages people to prioritise it.

We recognise the importance of collective care and mental health and are committed to supporting these efforts, especially for communities facing multiple oppressions, through funding and accompaniment spaces. Through our grantmaking, have resourced the collective and self-care, healing, and mental health and wellness needs of girl and young feminist activists through an explicit care and wellness grantmaking round. And, in our accompaniment, we have supported the resilience, collective care, and well-being of girl and young feminist activists through dedicated spaces to share resources, create connections, and build community, such as the Disability Justice Community Dialogues.



7. Embrace vulnerability, flexibility, mistakes, and transformation:

Embrace a learning mindset that is grounded in trust-based relationships that allow for vulnerability, flexibility, mistakes, and – ultimately – transformation.

“Fear of using the wrong terminology is such a huge stumbling block for mainstream organisations. People need to understand that starting to take steps is still an improvement”.

-
SUZANNAH PHILLIPS, DIRECTOR OF STRATEGY FOR WOMEN ENABLED

“I felt safe enough to say – I don’t know how to do this, I need some help. None of you made us feel judged for what we didn’t know, you just appreciated that we were trying and you were by our side. Even simple stuff like the support on the website and making documents accessible. It felt like a safe enough space to say ‘lets try this, but can you do this with us?’. Space to make mistakes and not use the right language and for that to be okay. I think it’s a testament to what it means to build a philanthropic field that is truly feminist.”

-
ROSA BRANSKY, CO-CEO, PURPOSEFUL

People and institutions hold a deep fear of saying the wrong thing and making mistakes. This holds people back from being inclusive. Throughout our learning process, we have been letting go of fear and found there are simple things you can do that increase inclusivity. Being in a trust-based relationship with activists, other funders and organisations, creates space to be vulnerable and to say ‘I don’t know how to do this’ and ask for help. This offers an invitation for those with deep expertise to accompany the process and shape the work. From the early rounds in the G.R.F. through to Notre Lumière, we are learning and constantly evolving.

We have made many mistakes along the way and continue to unlearn and challenge ourselves. If we did not have these experiences to shape us, we would not have grown and reached more girls and young feminist activists with disabilities. Introspection and humility as a funder is key in our mindset. As individuals, we all want to get this right, to use the correct terminology and to foresee every challenge that may arise, but we’re also learning as we do this. We are careful to be gracious with ourselves and with others as we work collectively to be better allies to people with disabilities.



DISABILITY RIGHTS FUND: A case study in listening, learning, and doing *In solidarity ... supporting Purposeful to take action*

By Kerry Thompson, Disability Rights Fund/Disability Rights Advocacy Fund (D.R.A.F.), Inclusion & Accessibility Development Manager

When it comes to disability inclusion, most foundations will tell the Disability Rights Fund (D.R.F.) that “disability inclusion is so important, but that disability is not our target population.” These same foundations and adjacent movements are working to advance the rights of women, LGBTQIA+ communities, Indigenous Peoples, and/or other marginalised groups. We have news for those foundations, people within those populations do indeed have disabilities.

Foundations that say they do not work on disability issues are, either consciously or unconsciously, pausing the dialogue right there. But a dialogue must happen. There can be no true advance in social justice if foundations exclude one billion people – the 2011 estimate by the World Health Organisation and World Bank.

For the last 15 years, D.R.F. and D.R.F.’s sister fund, the Disability Rights Advocacy Fund (D.R.A.F.), have tried to spark a dialogue on why disability inclusion is important to include in philanthropy.



STARTING A CONVERSATION

D.R.F./D.R.A.F. and Purposeful, as organisations, as colleagues and as friends, have been in spaces and conversation together for many years. In more recent times, this partnership has deepened. One moment that sparked this deepening was during a virtual convening hosted by Purposeful, when D.R.F. asked participants to stop using the chat function because it was making the space inaccessible for some persons with disabilities. **Following the convening, Purposeful reached out to D.R.F. to understand more.**

HOW WAS THE CHAT FUNCTION MAKING THE PLATFORM INACCESSIBLE?

The platform was accessible in many ways, including sign language interpretation and closed captions, however during a powerful spoken word performance, people used the chat function to share how much they loved it – the result was that the performer’s screen reader was interrupted and she was being distracted, as she tried to deliver her spoken word.

Some of the most common features of virtual platforms tend to be the least accessible, including the chat function. A person using a screen reader cannot easily navigate in and out of the chat space, nor are they able to answer polls. For those who are low vision, the chat function has limited customisation settings to enlarge the font size. So... when you’re hosting or facilitating online platforms, think about how using the chat function as a tool for communication, such as introductions and collecting questions, can and does make the space inaccessible.



NOT ONLY DID PURPOSEFUL LISTEN, BUT THEY ASKED QUESTIONS, AND TOGETHER, WE TOOK ACTION!

FROM LEARNING TO ACTION

A conversation that began many years ago about how to make grantmaking more inclusive of girls and women with disabilities has grown into a collaboration. D.R.F./D.R.A.F. and Purposeful have written blogs together on what it means to be a participatory grantmaker, including giving girls and women with disabilities a seat on grantmaking committees and advisory boards. We’ve joined forces to co-host side events at the Commission on the Status of Women and the Conference of States Parties on the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

Most recently, we’ve developed a strategic grantmaking partnership, where Purposeful proposed co-funding a dedicated With and For Girls Fund

window (Notre Lumiere), focusing on girls and their allies with disabilities. As part of this process, Purposeful will lead learning and documenting what it means to resource girls with disabilities – centring both the process and the outcomes of the project – to create evidence for the field of philanthropy, with the ambition of building and sustaining this work for the long term. Our grantmaking partnership has also enabled us to rapidly respond to the crisis in Ukraine, funding to Organisations of Persons with Disabilities. “We moved together with speed, trust, and solidarity to do what neither could do alone,” shared Rosa Bransky and Jen Bokoff – [Solidarity Action Moving Money Collective Strategies](#) (Alliance Magazine).

BEYOND ACTION

As Purposeful continued to seek out D.R.F./D.R.A.F.'s expertise on specific areas of disability inclusion, we approached Purposeful to collaborate for a pilot of D.R.F.'s new coaching services.

This offer was two-fold:

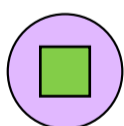
1. D.R.F. provided Purposeful with an accessibility audit of their With and For Girls Fund communication platforms and application process. We provide the team with detailed feedback and practical recommendations on how to make changes and adaptations to increase accessibility and inclusion.

"This is the beginning of a long journey... We have used the feedback to adapt our platforms Notre Lumiere but it will also benefit all our future funding rounds. There has been a massive amount of learning and growth through the simple training and conversations with D.R.F.. This is really shifting how we have worked."

-
PURPOSEFUL TEAM MEMBER

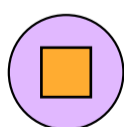
2. We also provided two virtual training sessions for the entire Purposeful team on how to create accessible in-person and virtual events for persons with disabilities. This focused on the "why" and "how" but also included practical exercises to support the team to apply what they're learning. The timing was a great lead-up to Purposeful co-hosting the 10th Africa Conference on Sexual Health and Rights held in Sierra Leone that took place in June 2022.

THE LESSONS WE LEARNED AS D.R.F./D.R.A.F.



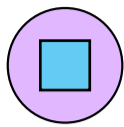
Lesson one: a conversation about disability inclusion should have a beginning but not an ending.

The collaboration between D.R.F./D.R.A.F. and Purposeful began many years ago, but as you can see, we haven't ended the conversation on disability inclusion. Both organisations continue to ask themselves: how can we do better?



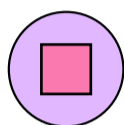
Lesson two: learning is a two-way street.

D.R.F./D.R.A.F. agreed to provide coaching on inclusive grantmaking and provided two virtual trainings. While we shared our expertise on disability inclusion with Purposeful members, they shared with D.R.F./D.R.A.F. what we could do to be better educators, helping us to fine-tune our coaching expertise and offering.



Lesson three: Creating safe spaces for questions.

One of the takeaways in coaching Purposeful on disability inclusion was to value and encourage curiosity. Purposeful reminded D.R.F./D.R.A.F. that not everyone feels comfortable asking questions about disability inclusion. They may be afraid of saying the wrong thing or offending people. We gave people the opportunity to submit anonymous questions in advance and encouraged curiosity from the start of the session, dedicating ample time for questions and discussions.



Lesson four: Disability inclusion requires a team effort.

Organisations can fall into a trap of selecting one person on their team who is the point person on disability inclusion, but this is not sustainable, especially when there is inevitable staff turnover. True disability inclusion at an organisation means everyone has a role in creating it. D.R.F./D.R.A.F. were thrilled to see most of the Purposeful team attending the training sessions on disability inclusion.

We continue to be in solidarity with Purposeful as they navigate their disability accessibility and inclusion journey. D.R.F./D.R.A.F. hopes that others in the philanthropic space can see the value of listening, learning and doing.



Weaving Intersectional Justice: MADRE's Journey in Inclusion and Collective Liberation

As an international human rights organisation and feminist funder, MADRE is rooted in progressive movements for peace, justice, and women's human rights. While our work has always been inclusive of people with disabilities, our understanding of inclusion has expanded and become more intentional thanks to the power-building work of the Disability Justice movement.

Here, we share our first steps in integrating a disability justice lens into our mission, vision, work, and our hopes for continued learning and evolution. Learning with, and from people with disabilities has been, and continues to be, a critical part of our journey in illuminating and addressing our biases and beginning to weave intersectional justice into existence.

OUR FIRST STEPS IN PRIORITISING DISABILITY JUSTICE

At the time of our founding in 1983, the feminist movement had a limited interpretation of inclusion regarding people with disabilities. Because of this limitation – and despite our emphasis on intersectionality – we initially considered people with disabilities mainly as beneficiaries of women’s care work, along with children and the elderly. This perception of vulnerability began to shift thanks to the Disability Justice movement amplifying the critical and powerful insights and experiences of people with disabilities. In 2018, MADRE began an in-depth, five-year strategic planning process to deepen our understanding of intersectionality. As a result, we explicitly committed to building the power, voice and agency of five communities living in the midst of war, disaster, and its aftermath: young women and girls; Indigenous women; Afro-descendant women; LGBTQIA+ people; and women with disabilities.

We knew that for Disability Justice to be meaningfully integrated into our culture, values, and work, we needed to learn directly from the expertise of the Disability Justice movement. In late 2018, Mobility International U.S.A. (M.I.U.S.A.) and MADRE partnered to begin integrating disability justice as a core part of our feminist values and principles. This partnership had three goals. **The first** was for MADRE’s staff to develop, sustain, and integrate a high level of awareness, consciousness, and capacity around an intersectional Disability Justice lens. **The second** was to translate that understanding and awareness, into practical steps that infused all aspects of our work, including operations, development, communications, and programmatic actions. **The third** was to build the same awareness and capacity in funders, grantmakers, and MADRE’s local partners so that they could be more actively inclusive of people with disabilities in their own programs at every level. These goals were translated into practical steps, which included implementing an organisational assessment, conducting two staff trainings, developing concrete and measurable action plans, remote technical assistance, and materials for dissemination of results and lessons learned to relevant stakeholders.

Outcomes of our action plans included updates to our website, integration of a disability lens in our advocacy efforts, and budgeting for accommodation across all our programs and work.

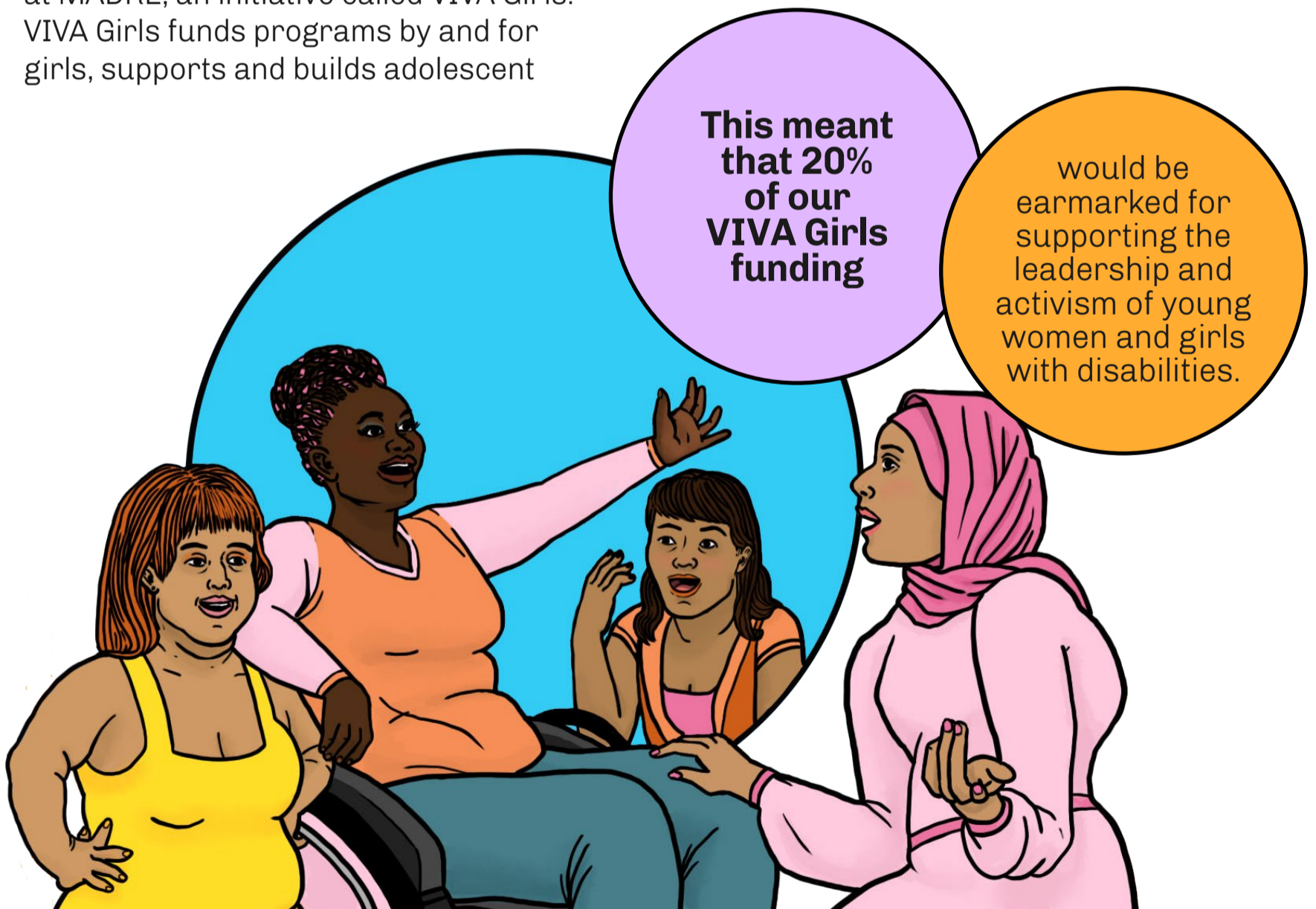
Our formal partnership with M.I.U.S.A. concluded in March 2021 and we made a commitment to continue our learning process using the following guiding principles for inclusion that emerged from our engagement: consult young women and girls with disabilities; use a twin-track approach to disability inclusion (described below) in our programs; budget for inclusion; and practice “infiltration”, a more proactive and intentional approach to accelerate inclusion. As an institutional ally to the Disability Justice movement, “infiltration” can be practiced in various ways including joining disability movement spaces, sharing information with movement actors and networks, and including people with disabilities in our events and programs so that we all move forward together. As a result of our initial engagement and ongoing commitment, MADRE began to more deeply explore the connections between ableism and other systems of oppression and how ableism presents itself in our work and all of our movements for justice.

SEEDING DISABILITY JUSTICE IN OUR GIRLS' PORTFOLIO THROUGH GRANTMAKING

With the tools and action plans developed by M.I.U.S.A., MADRE began to actively integrate a lens of disability justice into all aspects of our work. Our grantmaking and partnerships team actioned this integration through our programs, partnerships, and grants using a twin-track approach: supporting our existing grantee partners to make their programs accessible to people with disabilities and directly supporting the leadership of women and girls with disabilities. In this piece, we will focus on the latter.

While building our deeper disability lens, we were also creating a new strategy specifically designed to resource girls at MADRE, an initiative called VIVA Girls. VIVA Girls funds programs by and for girls, supports and builds adolescent

girls' leadership, and co-creates space for girls' voices in social movements with an intergenerational and intersectional approach. Leveraging the learning from our partnership with M.I.U.S.A., we recognised the opportunity to prioritise Disability Justice as part of our overall vision for VIVA Girls. As a result, we allocated our resources in this portfolio to MADRE's five priority populations (Indigenous, Afro-descendant, LGBTIQ+, internally displaced peoples/refugees, and women and girls with disabilities) and all the intersections within these communities. This was in contrast to MADRE's previous approach of resourcing communities based on geography.



Insights from our partners

In 2019, we put our strategy into action and launched an open call process for proposals that was designed to specifically target the needs and expertise of girls. We advertised and accepted the applications in four languages (English, Spanish, French, and Arabic) and developed audio descriptions of the process and the application in all four languages. We also accepted applications submitted in multiple formats including audio and video recordings. This opened access to people with hearing and visual disabilities and to applicants who may have otherwise found traditional grant processes inaccessible due to varying levels of literacy, access to technology, and other context-specific barriers. The recalibration of our process yielded an unprecedented number of applications (1,633) for work that was

inclusive of, or led by, young women and girls with disabilities. Overall, this first call for proposals received over 5,000 applications in a matter of weeks, pointing to both the critical need for more resources for young feminists with intersectional identities and the power of inclusion as a tool for increasing accessibility for everyone.



Despite our progress, we were still falling short of resourcing young feminists with disabilities at our goal of 20% of our total VIVA grantmaking. Most of our applicants were women or men, with or without disabilities, working on behalf of girls with disabilities instead of young women and girls with disabilities themselves leading organisations.

We asked other organisations funding in the Disability Justice space if they had also observed this gap. What we discovered, is that the organising of young feminists with disabilities is more nascent than other movements due to systematic injustices that exclude or invisibilise this group in a multitude of spaces. Therefore, we recognised we needed to be more proactive in expanding our outreach efforts and to take a step back to critically examine our processes and recalibrate where responsibilities lie in the relationship between donor and grantee. We regularly asked the questions: What is necessary for our due diligence and what is unnecessarily onerous to our partners? How can we truly “shift the power” in the feminist ecosystem in terms of the protocols and practices that we put in place? How do we ensure our existing processes are not leaving people behind?

Insights from our partners

One of MADRE's cornerstone beliefs is that women and girls are experts in their own lives and that their lived experiences are critical in shaping our work. Therefore, we knew we needed to centre the expertise of young women with disabilities to help us discover new ways of reaching the community.

We hired one of our grantee partners, Estefania Cubillos, to help us uncover barriers and find solutions for reaching young women and girls with disabilities. She shares her observations and learning from accompanying us on this journey here:



WORKING WITH MADRE: TRUST, SOLIDARITY AND COLLECTIVE LEARNING

-
BY ESTEFANÍA CUBILLOS NOVA

I first learned about MADRE in 2019. I was in Eugene, Oregon at M.I.U.S.A.'s WILD Program, a training for women across the world with disabilities on leadership and activism. As part of the program, funders interested in deepening their understanding of disability justice can join the last three days of the training. MADRE was present for this event, as a part of their broader engagement with M.I.U.S.A. Cassandra, the MADRE staff member present, approached me and we had a brief but encouraging conversation. She encouraged me to apply for funding for my projects.

I was very young and had no experience applying for grants from international funders – I didn't even know the meaning of the word "grant" – but the M.I.U.S.A. training had taught me, and other girls with disabilities around the world, how to get funding.

This was something that I was curious about because it seemed wonderful to connect with people who could fund my vision to lead a WILD training program in Panama. I had a dream of doing a three day WILD replica which included self-defense classes and sexual and reproductive health workshops. But people told me that with M.I.U.S.A.'s seed funding, I could only cover one afternoon or one day of training.

Insights from our partners

I was discouraged for a moment, but I began to look for sponsorships in banks, yoga centres, and even in parks. At the beginning, they did not pay attention to me. But, with a lot of persistence, I managed to get the mayor's office of the district where I live to lend me the only accessible bus they have, a park for the karate classes, and a sensei. Still, the most challenging thing to access was funding.

I tried to get support from companies. I even met with executives who told me that they would support me, but after our meetings they did not answer my calls. Then, one night, exhausted and remembering Cassandra and MADRE, I decided to write in Spanish asking if they could support me. I was not sure if they would read my email because it was in Spanish.

A few days later, I had forgotten about the email I had written to MADRE until one day when Cassandra invited me to Skype with the VIVA Girls team, Divya and Laura. I was accompanied on the call by Marissa, a mentor of mine. We took this call at the Patronato Luz del Ciego, an organisation that at that time supported me to receive funds internationally. I remember it was about an hour-long conversation! I was nervous, but Marissa and I felt that it went well. I liked being able to say at that moment that there were girls or women with disabilities who were being left out of the most important conversations among women, especially girls with intellectual disabilities.

In early 2020, MADRE wrote an email telling me that I had been chosen for the grant and I cried with joy because my WILD program in Panama could run for three whole days! It was a phenomenal experience. I also received support from the Rotary Club and local doctors. I successfully overcame my first project challenge!

After our WILD Panama Program, the participating girls developed action plans and were set to replicate them in their communities, but the pandemic prevented that. Therefore, we supported them financially with part of the grant provided by MADRE and the other sponsors because employment opportunities decreased. I also submitted a report to MADRE and M.I.U.S.A. I thought it was great that I could submit it in Spanish to MADRE because the communication with a lot of organisations is always in English and I didn't have that much experience with written English.

When the pandemic started in 2020, The VIVA Girls team also provided a \$9,500 emergency grant to help people with disabilities in Panama.

When we received the grant, we worked together with friends and family members who acted as volunteers to visit many neighbourhoods. There, we supported girls, boys, women, and men with different disabilities with bags of food, sanitary napkins, hygiene products, and other products such as catheters for people in wheelchairs.

During the pandemic, there were not many organisations for people with visual impairments or for people with other disabilities supporting the community. Marissa and I were almost alone trying to coordinate all these logistics. We even had to ask the government for special permission to go outside our homes because people could only go out for two hours a week in Panama. There is also no current data on how many people with disabilities live in the territory. Little by little, a woman with a physical disability provided us with data by Whatsapp and we managed to benefit 106 people. It was a great experience because I was depressed at home thinking that I would never go out again and that my leadership projects had been cut short.

After the COVID emergency response worked, we worked for two years on the Impulsando Liderazgos Project which is also funded by MADRE. It has meant a lot because I was able to include the topic of sexual and reproductive rights, a controversial topic among the more socially conservative parts of the community. It has been an outstanding achievement to carry out training in the city and in rural areas about this.

Something interesting about MADRE and their work is that they also amplified my voice. When they shared the opportunity to write for the blog *Rewriting The Narrative*, I thought it was great. I contributed to the blog the article, “*Orgullosas de Nuestra Identidad*” in Spanish, and other articles. I also started to support the *Colectivo Generación Igualdad [The Inclusive Generation Equality]*.

I also saw how MADRE was very active on Twitter and other networks in promoting our work and voices. This was phenomenal because I felt my voice and the voice of other VIVA girls were heard, that they really believe in us and our talents.



...they trusted me, and that they gave me autonomy.

That is why, when in 2022 the VIVA team asked me to join the team as their accessibility consultant, I was very excited. I was also amazed because I did not know that my knowledge would have so much reach. I also found it novel and a bit intimidating at first to work with an organisation where everyone spoke English. Those thoughts were left behind when I realised that MADRE would provide interpretation, that they trusted me, and that they gave me autonomy. At the beginning, it was very challenging for me. I thought it might be a lot of work. I had always worked in media where hours were long and I didn't know how to achieve a work/life balance.

When I got to know MADRE's work, I learned that I could perform equally well without the need to burn myself out. I also learned the importance of being paid fair wages. Additionally, I learned how to be specific in the interviews I conducted with girls with disabilities to understand the barriers they faced and the solutions they presented to achieve real and accessible access to funds.

This experience allowed me to know how to work in two languages. My intuition and the Google translator were my allies on email! Maybe there are many things I need to improve as a consultant to operate at the international level, but I also know that I have a lot of potential and that is why I feel that the work I did went well.

One of my biggest challenges and opportunities was for me to interact with young women and girls with different disabilities and different intersectional identities. For example, I had the opportunity to interview a young woman with an intellectual disability for the first time. This was a learning for me in how to accommodate different abilities. I also interviewed a trans girl with visual impairment from Costa Rica. I was very respectful of her experiences both as a person with a disability and as a person with a different gender identity and I tried to make her feel comfortable sharing her perspective with me.

In this consultancy, Laura and Divya always supported me and gave me the autonomy and confidence I needed. It is great to work when you have all the accessibility resources to do so because many organisations do not invest in language interpretation or sign language, subtitles, etc.

I believe that the VIVA Girls team trusts and believes in me and in all girls and women with disabilities around the world, so the responsibility has always been enormous but it has been very rewarding to work with MADRE. I feel proud to say that I have worked with them because they believe in feminism like I do and I do not feel so alone in a patriarchal world and that sees feminism as a threat.

Currently, I was able to make partnerships with We Are Purposeful, this is thanks to my training with M.I.U.S.A., the approach MADRE had with me, and the opportunity to write for the Women Enabled International blog.

SOME REFLECTIONS AS WE ENTER THE NEXT PHASE OF OUR WORK:

The learning that resulted from our close partnership with Estefania provided us with many valuable lessons on how to be a more effective and thoughtful funder of girls with disabilities.

For example, there is a continuum of needs and approaches within the disability community. Any grantmaking approach that we develop must take into account this rich diversity and create room for a dynamic and deeper exploration alongside the movement of how we understand “ability” and “ableism.” Another lesson is to recognise the role men currently play

in creating space for young women with disabilities to gain access to resources and opportunities. As a feminist funder, we must acknowledge the patriarchal roots of this dynamic and ensure resources and capacity expands from men to girls. Therefore, in the short term, we need to be thoughtful about how we work with men in order to channel resources and capacity to young women with disabilities who are currently denied access, while simultaneously seeding a longer-term vision of directly supporting young feminists with disabilities and their activism, on their own terms.

For us, the working relationship with Estefania and learning from her research revealed some of the commitments the feminist movement needs to make to centre Disability Justice. As we work more closely with partners from the movement, we are actively learning about our own unconscious biases and the considerable work that we still need to do to create a world that is accessible to all people with both visible and invisible disabilities.

And we are learning that Disability Justice, like many other forms of justice, calls for the dissolution of binaries and creates room for all the nuances in between that can lead us to a world in which people with disabilities are leading and shaping the discourse on “ability” and our collective liberation. As Mia Mingus, Disability Justice advocate and writer, said:

“ACCESS FOR THE SAKE OF ACCESS OR INCLUSION IS NOT NECESSARILY LIBERATORY, BUT ACCESS DONE IN THE SERVICE OF LOVE, JUSTICE, CONNECTION, AND COMMUNITY IS LIBERATORY AND HAS THE POWER TO TRANSFORM.”





SUPPORTING DISABILITY RIGHTS ACTIVISTS AND COMMUNITIES

As an organisation, as a funder and fundraiser, as a partner and as individuals, the last five years have been a journey of unlearning and learning – we’re evolving how we work and who we are to be stronger allies to girls and young feminist activists with disabilities.

As we look back, we also look forward to the next five years and beyond. We will continue to build the skills and knowledge of our people to put disability accessibility and inclusion first, to create physical and virtual spaces that ensure people can meaningfully participate, and directly resource the resistance of the disability activists and collectives at the forefront of this work.

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While we humbly recognise that we are just entering the Disability Rights and Justice ecosystem and space, and believe that this is the beginning of our learning journey, we are committed to working toward Disability Justice, knowing that the principle of intersectionality is essential to this work and that working to dismantle ableism as individuals and as an organisation, is

central to our collective liberation. Tangibly, this means a commitment to increasing the pool of resources to young disability activists both through our direct funding and through our philanthropic advocacy; it means continuing to find structural ways to deepen inclusion across our work; and through it all, it means centring the voices and expertise of the young activists who are working every day to build a world that is more inclusive and accessible, safe and free and full of all of the boundless possibilities they deserve.

With deep gratitude to the Disability Rights activists, Disability Rights Fund, Women Enabled International, partners, and funders who trusted, supported, and have played an essential role in our ongoing learning, we invite the feminist ecosystem, philanthropic sector, and those committed to social transformation to join us on this path and commitment toward Disability Justice.



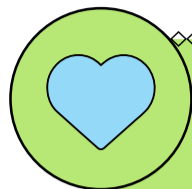
As they have shared with us in their own words, disability rights activists:



“tired of being talked-about rather than in conversation with”

-

ANONYMOUS COMMUNITY DIALOGUE PARTICIPANT



“make the radical choice to love ourselves and our communities as we show up to the work. We embrace rest and care as a central piece of the movement toward social change. And we advocate for improved access and inclusion for all, especially young women and girls with disabilities around the world who have too often been excluded.”

-

ANONYMOUS COMMUNITY DIALOGUE PARTICIPANT

“demand our rights because we deserve to be respected in our community.”

-

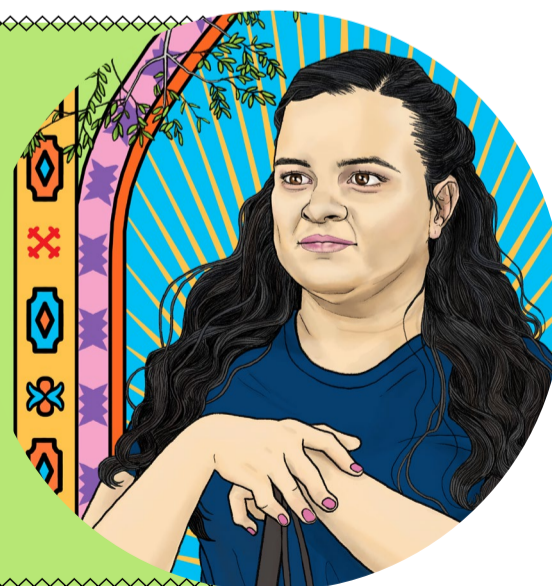
AMINATA, SIERRA LEONE



“dream of a more just world for people with disabilities, especially for girls and women. You may ask, how could there be a more just world? It’s simple, I wish that when a child acquires a disability, they are not limited. That their families are better prepared, so that the disability is not seen as a calamity or as a reason to overprotect them and prevent them from enjoying the world.”

-

ESTEFANÍA CUBILLOS NOVA, COLOMBIA



Have power, and it is their right to have inclusive spaces to exercise their power:



“people that don’t know me see me and want to help me to do things, then they ask me like this: “do you need help, do you? Or how do I help you?” And I’ve found that I don’t need help so much as time, time to be. Time.”

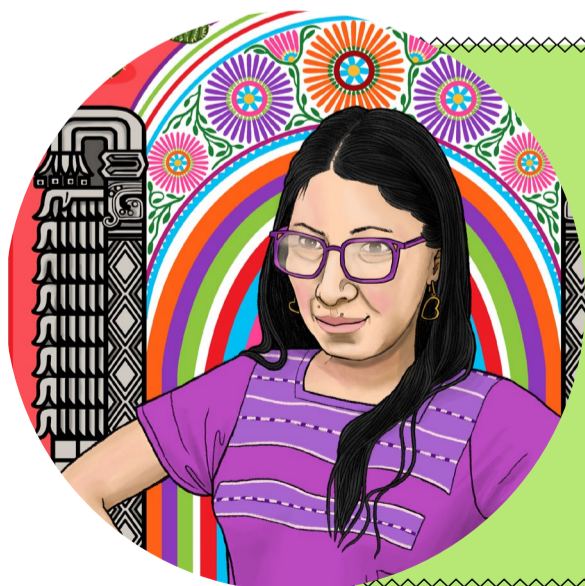
-
NUR MATTA, PUEBLA, MEXICO

“becoming an advocate for yourself takes a long time. It is even harder for girls with disabilities - they’re less likely to attend school and if they do go to school, they might start later and not have the learning support they need. Even leaving their bedroom or home can be a challenge, because of stigma and discrimination they face. We have to be mindful of this reality - becoming an activist, having your voice heard and getting the right level exposure is more challenging.”

-
ANISIE BYUKUSENGE, RWANDA



Name ableism as a core social injustice and system of oppression that needs to be dismantled:



“We hierarchise the differences to see who can do more than the other. And those who can’t, we minimise them, we exclude them. We don’t see that these differences are complementarity. That is structural violence”

-
ELIZABETH PATRICIA PÉREZ, CHIAPAS, MEXICO



“Having a disability is not the limitation... the limitation is the system that creates them.”

-
**INDIRA AZUCENA VARGAS,
AMAZONIAN KICHWA-ECUADOR**

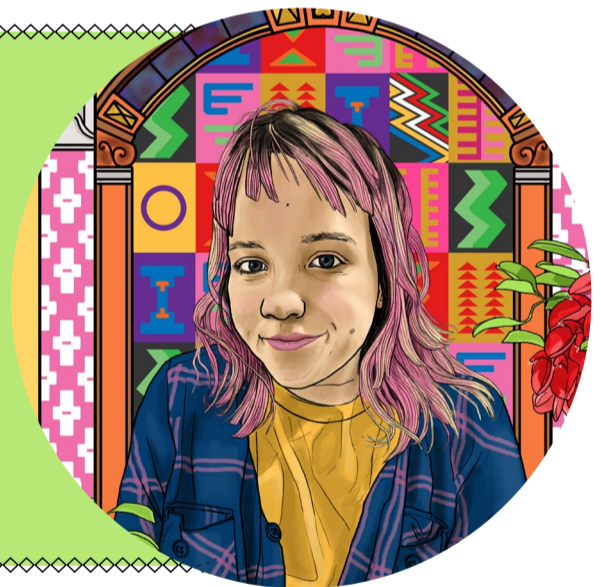


And, “As a movement, we have to create strategic alliances in order to work with all communities with disabilities to guarantee and protect our rights, ensuring that we have the resources that we need, not from a charity perspective, but what we rightfully deserve.”

-
ANONYMOUS COMMUNITY DIALOGUE PARTICIPANT

Because “The truth is that it is so important to be able to share our own experiences, our struggles, and to recognise our interconnection with each other. To know we are not alone- the system may want us to think that, but can’t let it crush us.”

-
MARIANA VELIZ, BUENOS AIRES, ARGENTINA



“Remember and remind yourself daily that progress and positive change are possible. Better future for next generations is possible and achievable, but it all starts with us and that one first little step. Stay strong and brave.”

-
DRAGA GAJIĆ, BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We are deeply grateful for all wisdom, experiences, and resources that contributed – directly and indirectly – to the creation of this report that, above all, is dedicated to Disability Rights activists. Their leadership, resistance, and bravery are reminders of the power of the Disability Rights movements and their critical role in pushing forward the feminist and human rights agenda, as there is no feminism without Disability Justice.

This report was co-written by Anisie Byukesenge, Emma Mulhern, Jody Myrum, Laura Vergara, Liesel Bakker, Ruby Johnson, edited by Rochelle Jones, illustrated by Abi Stevens, and designed by Atelier Galo (Alina García).



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The illustrations in this publication have been created by Abi Stevens, an illustrator and product creator based in the UK. She creates vibrant digital illustrations intended to inspire, educate and promote conversation. She is chronically ill and much of her practice involves advocacy and empowering messages for her community, including her own pin, sticker and clothing designs. Her style incorporates elements of historical art forms such as stained glass windows, architecture, and illuminated manuscripts, and references symbolism and folklore to create colourful and emotive illustrations with depth of meaning and a powerful visual impact.

CONTRIBUTIONS/QUOTES

We intentionally limit edits to reflections and contributions, especially to activist's words. This extends to grammar and phrasing. Even with translation, we try to remain true to their words to ensure we are honouring their wisdom and experience. Some of the contributions presented in this publication have been translated.

FURTHER INFORMATION

Follow our social media channels for more insights and learning from our work. If you have a specific question about this work or report, please email us at info@wearepurposeful.org

RESOURCES³

1. 10 Principles of Disability Justice by Sins Invalid
2. Ableism/ Language by Lydia X. Z. Brown
3. Access is Love reading list guide by Sandy Ho, Mia Mingus, and Alice Wong
4. Activism Across Generations by Marc Climaco, Ford Foundation
5. African Journal of Disability
6. Against accessibility? It's time to decolonise ableism by Lilian Bankiyan-Monfard
7. Arrow for Change: Women with Disabilities: Disabled, Sexual, Reproductive by Arrow and Crea
8. Assistive Technology in urban low-income communities in Sierra Leone & Indonesia by Global Disability Innovation Hub
9. Bolivia's caravan of courage leaves a bittersweet legacy for disabled protesters by Jonathan Watts
10. Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
11. Count me IN! Research Report on Violence Against Disabled, Lesbian, and Sex-working Women in Bangladesh, India and Nepal by Crea
12. COVID-19 Disability Rights Monitor
13. COVID-19, Gender, and Disability Checklist: Ensuring Human Rights-Based Sexual and Reproductive Health for Women, Girls, and Gender Non-conforming Persons with Disabilities during the COVID-19 Pandemic by Women Enabled International and United Nations
14. Climate Change, Environmental Activism, and Disability By Valerie Novack and Daphne Frias

3 Please note that this resource list is not inclusive of all the Disability Justice resources available across the world.

- 15.** [Disability Crosses Borders](#)
- 16.** [Disability Resource Library by Disability & Philanthropy Forum](#)
- 17.** [Disability History, Culture, and Community: Learn about Disability Identity by Disability & Philanthropy Forum](#)
- 18.** [Disability Justice resource directory by Creating Freedom Movements'](#)
- 19.** [Disability Justice Intersection with Racial Justice and Queer/Trans Liberation by Lydia Brown](#)
- 20.** [Disability Visibility Project by Alice Wong](#)
- 21.** [Disability Inclusion Pledge by Disability & Philanthropy Forum](#)
- 22.** [Disability News Library by Peter Torres Fremlin](#)
- 23.** [Experiences of attitudes in Sierra Leone from the perspective of people with poliomyelitis and amputations using orthotics and prosthetics by Emmelie Andregård and Lina Magnusson](#)
- 24.** [It's Time to Recognize the Leadership of Persons with Disabilities for Inclusive Humanitarian Response by Jo-Ann Garnier, Disability Rights Fund](#)
- 25.** [Factsheet on Persons with Disabilities by the United Nations](#)
- 26.** [Factsheet: Youth with Disabilities by the United Nations](#)
- 27.** [Funding For Intersectional Organizing: A Call To Action For Human Rights Philanthropy by Human Rights Funders Network](#)
- 28.** [Fragmented yet together: the disability movement in Sierra Leone by Amélie van den Brinka, Willem Elbers, and Aisha Fofana Ibrahimc](#)
- 29.** [Girls' and women's literacy with a lifelong learning perspective: issues, trends and implications for the Sustainable Development Goals by Louise Wetheridge.](#)
- 30.** [Girls Circle Impact Film by Purposeful.](#)
- 31.** [Overlooked and Unseen: Human rights defenders living with disabilities in conflict countries \(Ethiopia, Somalia, and South Sudan\) by Defend Defenders](#)
- 32.** [Merging Movements: Supporting Inclusive Women's Rights Work Through Innovative Partnerships by MADRE and Mobility International USA](#)
- 33.** [Moving at the Speed of Trust: Disability Justice and Transformative Justice panel with Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha and Elliott Fukui](#)
- 34.** [Second Edition of Skin, Tooth, and Bone: The Basis of Movement is Our People by Sins Invalid](#)
- 35.** [Social Justice: What's disability got to do with it? By Ford Foundation](#)
- 36.** [Scars Tell Stories: A Queer and Trans \(Dis\)ability Zine by Colin Kennedy Donovan, Qwo-Li Driskill](#)
- 37.** [Participatory Grantmaking Is Your Future by Nikki Brown-Booker](#)
- 38.** [Policy Brief: A Disability-Inclusive Response to COVID-19 by the United Nations.](#)
- 39.** [Policy Brief: the Impact of COVID-19 on Women by the United Nations.](#)
- 40.** [Putting fundamental rights of persons with disabilities on the map by UCLA School of Public Health](#)

- 41.** Queer Disability Justice Dreams panel discussion with Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha and Sami Schalk
- 42.** Reserving the trend: The time is now to fund Disability Rights by Lorraine Wapling, Arlene Wilson-Grant, and Aapurv Jain at the Disability Rights Fund / the Disability Rights Advocacy Fund
- 43.** Responses to climate change leaving disabled people behind by Áine Kelly-Costello, Peter Torres Fremlin
- 44.** Resourcing Women and Trans Led Disability Rights Movements in Asia by Women's Fund Asia
- 45.** Using the Inter-American Human Rights System to Advance the Rights fo Women and Girls with Disabilities by Women Enabled International
- 46.** Terms to Avoid When Writing About Disability by National Center on Disability and Journalism
- 47.** Towards a Trans Feminist Disability Studies by Niamh Timmons
- 48.** The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on jobs and incomes in G20 economies by G20
- 49.** The Body Is Not An Apology: The Power of Radical Self-Love by Sonya Renee Taylor
- 50.** The Camp That Ignited a Movement by Nicole Newnham and Jim LeBrecht, Crip Camp
- 51.** There Is No Justice That Neglects Disability by US Rep. Ayanna Pressley & Rebecca Cokley
- 52.** Time for Philanthropy to Confront Ableism by By Sandy Ho and Jen Bokoff
- 53.** Sierra Leone 2015 Population and Housing Census Thematic Report on Disability by Francis Kabia and Umaru Tarawally
- 54.** Sierra Leone Integrated Household Survey report 2018 by Statistics Sierra Leone, the World Bank, and Government of Sierra Leone.
- 55.** Youth with disabilities and COVID-19 by SALTO Participation and Information
- 56.** We can't address disability without addressing race by Lydia X. Z. Brown
- 57.** What Is Disability Culture? By Steven E. Brown, Institute on Disability Culture
- 58.** What is Disability Justice? By Disability Philanthropy Forum
- 59.** What people with disabilities have to teach us about climate change by Ximena Saskia Warnaars, Ford Foundation

RESOURCING DISABILITY JUSTICE

Feminists journeys toward Centring Disability Justice



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