



Women Gaining Ground

Oral Statement on the theme of Equal and Inclusive Representation of Women in Decision-making Systems – with focus on women with disabilities

For General Discussion at CEDAW 84th Session

International Women’s Rights Action Watch Asia Pacific makes this statement on behalf of Women Gaining Ground, a global South consortium which is led by CREA, Akili Dada, IWRAW Asia Pacific and 16 strategic partners in Bangladesh, India, Kenya, Uganda and Rwanda, including women with disabilities-led organizations.

The structural and intersectional nature of violence and discrimination experienced by women with disabilities is also reflected in their exclusion from decision making systems at all levels. Decision making systems exist not just in formal and public spaces but also within communities and families. Decision making systems can be ableist, heteronormative and sexist. Stereotypes and negative attitudes towards women with disabilities becomes a barrier in the perception of them as leaders and decision makers, which is exacerbated by legal frameworks not sufficiently implementing Article 12 nor 19 of the CRPD on legal capacity and independent living.

Women with disabilities are a diverse group who may have various, multiple intersecting identities. They can have a disability but also be elderly, young, queer, transgender, intersex, a refugee, an oppressed ethnic, religious or racial minority. Hence, it is important to consider the spectrum of experiences in decision making spaces.

Accurate, disaggregated data need to be collected on the representation of women with disabilities across decision making spaces. There needs to be more investment in political education at the community level, commitment to financial resources, ensuring accessibility and participation in formal and informal political spaces in order to recognize women with disabilities

as leaders and decision makers. A stronger commitment towards state obligations under CEDAW and CRPD needs to be ensured, especially with the objectives of ensuring substantive equality and non-discrimination. It is key to ensure that organizations representing women with disabilities, have access to funds in order to participate in decision-making processes, both mainstream and disability-specific; it is equally important to support the representative organizations in conducting independent monitoring and evaluation on the implementation of their rights enshrined in Conventions.

Civil society participation is one of the ways women with disabilities, who are already invisible, are able to partake in public and civic issues. This space must be safeguarded and made fully accessible both within the global human rights systems as well as national spaces. This journey to an equal and inclusive decision making system will be incomplete without a careful consideration of a more inclusive, feminist, participatory definition of leadership and capacity.