



TCI at COSP 18

Empowering persons with disabilities through arts

Dear Chair,

Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to speak at this unique side-event,

And I want to congratulate the missions of Italy and Portugal and all other organizers and co-organizers for organizing this successful side-event,

I also want to express my gratitude to the work Mr. Dario, you are leading in Italy,

My name is Waqar Puri and I am representing Transforming Communities for Inclusion-TCI, a global OPD of persons with psychosocial disabilities,

Very briefly I also want to emphasize in continuation to what Mr. Dario you have highlighted, and join you in voicing against psychiatric oppression persons with psychosocial disabilities face,

The UN convention – specifically the article 30 recognizes that cultural life, recreation, leisure, and sport are not luxuries, but are human rights and are integral to well-being, identity, and belonging.

But unfortunately, this right remains denied systematically for our movement of persons with psychosocial disabilities,

We are often seen as incapable of living in mainstream communities, we are denied of enjoying and rejoicing the cultural life.

Cultural participation requires freedom, visibility, and dignity. But many of us are segregated from mainstream communities and are sent to close door institutions where cultural spaces remain hostile or inaccessible.

At **Transforming Communities for Inclusion (TCI)**, we know that culture and creativity are not just tools of healing—they are forms of expression, wellbeing, resistance, self-awareness and empowerment. Our members in Asia, Africa, and Latin America are leading arts based tools to promote community inclusion initiatives and practices,-- rooted in rights, lived experiences, and collective action for development.

Our members in their communities have been using art, folk songs, dancing, traditional games and activities, as a medium to express themselves, foster dialogues, and conversations around disability inclusion. They have used these practices as a medium to engaging on taboo and social injustices topics in a safe way. Women with psychosocial disabilities have used these practices to break barriers in accessing community spaces, these grassroot inclusion practices

have supported safe spaces for community members to express themselves, owing to their familiarity and a culturally acceptable repertoire.

One of the most inspiring models comes from our founding member, the Bapu Trust in India, they have pioneered an arts-based, non-medical approach to psychosocial well-being, where art is not just a therapy which imposed on people— but is a medium through which people reclaim their voices, express trauma, rebuild social relationships, and reimagine their futures.

Through music, dance, visual storytelling, and theatre, persons with psychosocial disabilities become active cultural participants—not as objects of care, but as artists, activists, and creators of meaning.

These grassroots models challenge dominant psychiatric frameworks. They do not rely on confinement or coercion. They work with communities, and not against them. And most importantly, they are led by people with lived experience.

Creative expressions in our movement has become a pathway to social transformation. It brings visibility to us and our issues. It restores power to those disempowered by systemic exclusion.

But these initiatives are underfunded, undervalued, and often marginalized in policy spaces.

We urge governments, donors, and UN agencies to:

- Recognize community arts-based practices as legitimate, rights-based alternatives to institutional and clinical settings.
- Invest in peer-led, culturally rooted practices that promote psychosocial inclusion.
- Ensure that national policies and cultural programs are co-designed with persons with psychosocial disabilities, especially women, youth, and those from marginalized communities.

Thank you.
