



Statement at Side Event: 20 Years of the UNCRPD: Addressing Multiple and Intersectional Forms of Discrimination and Stigma against Women and Girls with Disabilities

**By Richa Sharma-Dhamorikar
Director of Advocacy & Research
TCI Global**

Good morning everyone.

My name is Richa Sharma-Dhamorikar, and I am the Director of Advocacy and Research at Transforming Communities for Inclusion, TCI Global, Thank you to the organizers for having us here, my fellow panellists and participants who have come here to attend, even on the last day.

I identify as a woman with a psychosocial disability, and our group continues to be an underrepresented and historically oppressed group. My organization is a post-CRPD inclusion movement and a membership-based organization of persons with psychosocial disabilities. We have 28 members from 21 countries across the globe. We are guided by the extraordinary vision of the CRPD, and it gives me immense pleasure to be part of this session marking 20 years of this glorious Convention.

In these 20 years, the CRPD has given our movement a language that many of us did not have before, and that many of our senior leaders, here and gone, fought for. It has enabled women with psychosocial disabilities to say clearly that we are rights-holders, not objects of pity or care. It has strengthened OPD leadership, opened space for cross disability solidarity and given us tools to challenge coercive and violent systems and That progress matters to us, But the promise of the CRPD remains unevenly realized, especially for those living at the intersections of different identities.

This reflection is also taking place at a time when anti-rights narratives are gaining ground in many regions, often using the language of family, honour, culture, sovereignty, or care to weaken gender justice, bodily autonomy, and accountability for violence. For women with psychosocial disabilities, this is deeply concerning, because these same words have too often been used to justify confinement, forced practices, control, and the silencing of our testimony.

We are glad this discussion renews the focus on intersectionality, because in our experience it is still discussed more in theory than in practice. We are often asked to prioritize one identity over another as women, as persons with psychosocial disabilities, as an indigenous person or migrant. We are asked to choose just one, but we are all these things at once. If intersectionality is to mean anything in practice, it must change who is seen, who is believed, who is supported, and who is invited to lead. Women with psychosocial disabilities are too often pushed to the margins by States, services, and even social justice movements. But we are building bridges, because transforming systems of violations and exclusion cannot and should not be done in silos.

One of the most persistent violations we face is the denial of legal capacity. The moment we receive a diagnosis or label, we are too often treated as non-persons before the law and within our communities. Others are allowed to speak over us and for us while our own will and preferences are ignored. These denials are often codified in laws and policies that continue to enable disability-specific deprivation of liberty and other paternalistic and protectionist measures in the name of best interests. They are part of a global pattern in which patriarchy, ableism, colonialism, medical model of disability and psychiatric violence intersect to control our bodies, silence our voices, and deny our rights.

This denial affects every part of life: where we live, who we live with, whether we can work, study, own property, raise children, access justice, participate in public life, or seek support on our own terms. It also shapes how violence against us is seen. Too often, our testimonies are not believed, our choices are questioned, and our pain is treated as a symptom rather than evidence of rights violations.

This is why we must also rethink what protection means. For women with psychosocial disabilities, protection cannot mean more control over us. It cannot mean segregation, confinement, or surveillance. We need accessible justice, independent monitoring, survivor centered complaint mechanisms, supported decision making, peer led support during crisis, safe housing, and accountability and reparations for violence and discrimination committed by families, institutions, service providers, and the State.

Even 20 years after the CRPD, we can still be institutionalized at any time, in hospitals, group homes, nursing facilities, prayer camps, or even our own homes. Institutions, in any form, are in direct contradiction to the CRPD and can never be homes for us. When women are rendered invisible through institutionalization, violence against us becomes easier to ignore, deny, and normalize.

The deeper problem is that coercion has been treated as the default, while freedom is treated as an experiment. Institutions, guardianship, substitute decision making are presented as normal systems, while peer support, supported decision making, community based rights based crisis support, and community inclusion are asked to prove themselves again and again. This logic must be reversed. The burden should not be on us to prove that freedom works. The responsibility should be on States to justify why systems that have produced violence, disappearance, exclusion, and death continue to receive legal protection and public funding.

And we know another way is possible because OPDs are already building it with immensely limited resources. Across our movement, persons with psychosocial disabilities are documenting rights violations, supporting survivors to claim legal capacity and access justice, build capacity through peer learnings, strengthening peer and community support to step in when rights violations occur, developing indicators and tools to monitor and check for CRPD compliance of their models, and creating responses rooted in dignity, choice, autonomy, so that crisis is no longer used as a justification for taking away our freedom. These are not just abstract alternatives, but they are practical expressions of the CRPD when those most affected lead the process.

That's why OPDs must not be treated as occasional consultees, check box participants or service innovators alone. We are knowledge producers, keepers of movement histories, CRPD monitors, builders of rights based responses, and accountability actors. Our participation must be resourced, sustained, and treated as central to accountability.

So, as we reflect on 20 years of the CRPD, our priorities for the future are clear.

First, States must repeal all laws that allow disability specific deprivation of liberty, and deny legal capacity to persons with psychosocial disabilities

Second, States must invest in deinstitutionalization and community and OPD led models that promote supported decision making, community support systems and access to mainstream services that allow people to live with dignity in the community.

Third, access to justice must be made real for women and girls with psychosocial disabilities who experience discrimination, violence and institutional harm. Our testimony must be believed, our legal capacity must be respected, and accountability mechanisms must be accessible to us.

Fourth, women with psychosocial disabilities and our OPDs must be meaningfully included, and funded, especially women and girls led, Global South led, and grassroots organizations. Participation must mean leadership, resources, and power.

Fifth, international cooperation must support the full implementation of the CRPD by centring OPD leadership, enabling cross country learning, and strengthening gender responsive, community based supports. Donors, UN agencies, governments, and human rights organizations must ensure that their funding, partnerships, and technical assistance advance deinstitutionalization, autonomy, and inclusion, rather than reinforcing coercive or segregated models.

The CRPD did not ask the world to create smaller institutions, softer coercion, or more polite forms of control. It asked for a transformation of communities itself.

We are not asking to be included at the margins of systems that continue to harm us. We are asking for those systems to be abolished and dismantled, AND for laws, policies, budgets, and services to be grounded in inherent dignity, autonomy, interdependence, equality, and accountability, the very principles of the CRPD.

Not in another 20 years, but now. Thank you.
