

# MERGING MOVEMENTS:

Supporting Inclusive Women's Rights Work  
through Innovative Partnerships



**“MADRE is one of the few international women’s organizations taking the initiative and leading by example on disability inclusion. They not only understand their responsibility to promote inclusion of women with disabilities in their work, but they also recognize the incredible opportunity to be an innovator and to drive change through an inclusive, intersectional approach.”**  
– Susan Sygall, Mobility International USA (MIUSA) CEO

Increasingly, women’s rights funders are recognizing the need to be more intentional about including those who are on the margins. As one of the most historically marginalized groups in the world, women with disabilities have long been under-resourced despite their contributions as community leaders. There is a critical need to bridge the women’s rights and disability rights fields by strengthening partnerships between disabled women’s groups and mainstream women’s rights organizations.

Women’s rights funders are in a unique position to influence the groups they already support by ensuring diverse perspectives and leaders are part of their efforts. They can also direct much-needed resources to support women with disabilities directly as they develop and lead their own organizations and movements.

Beginning in 2018, MADRE and Mobility International USA (MIUSA) worked together to better align MADRE’s values of diversity, equity, and inclusion with its internal organizational culture, policies, and practices, and in the work MADRE supports and leads globally. With tailored consultation, training, and technical assistance from MIUSA, MADRE worked to:

- Develop, sustain, and integrate a high level of awareness, consciousness, and capacity around an intersectional disability lens for all MADRE staff
- Translate that understanding and awareness into practical steps that infuse all aspects of MADRE’s work, including operations, development, communication and programmatic actions
- Build the same awareness and capacity in funders, grantmakers, and MADRE’s local partners so that they can be more actively inclusive of people with disabilities in their own work at every level.

This summary note is intended to share a snapshot of the progress and learning trajectory from MADRE and MIUSA’s partnership on the Commitment to Inclusive Excellence Initiative. A full practice note detailing this engagement can be accessed [here](#). The success in the progress that both MADRE and MIUSA have made in this endeavor sets a new standard for how disabled women and girls should be successfully included and celebrated in all programs, services, and leadership of organizations.

# CHANGING ORGANIZATIONAL PRACTICES AND PROGRAMS

With support from MIUSA, MADRE has made significant strides in moving disability inclusion from paper to practice within organizational culture, practices, and programs.

## OPERATIONS AND HUMAN RESOURCES:

- Greater focus on reasonable accommodations at MADRE public events, training and workshops
- New language on disability accommodations in external communications
- Staff recruitment opportunities and practices reach and accommodate people with disabilities

## COMMUNICATIONS:

- Communication products, platforms and digital outreach are accessible to people with disabilities
- Creating a standard guide and protocols for improving and maintaining accessibility
- Leadership of women with disabilities highlighted on MADRE's website

## LEARNING AND EVALUATION:

- Sensitively collecting data on disability inclusion
- Using insight from data to collaborate with partners, make programmatic adjustments and better engage and support people with disabilities

## HUMAN RIGHTS ADVOCACY:

- Human rights advocacy strategies are more inclusive of people with disabilities, and work in solidarity with disabled people's organizations and women with disabilities has expanded
- There is increased access to policy spaces and centers of power for people with disabilities to advocate for themselves and their communities

## GRANTMAKING AND PARTNERSHIPS:

- Partners' programs and movements are more inclusive of women and girls with disabilities
- Programs led by and for people with disabilities are well-resourced. Since 2018, \$400,000 in grants disbursed to advance disability justice worldwide
- In 2020, 20% of programs resourced through MADRE's VIVA Girls Initiative specifically supported girls with disabilities

# Disability Justice Programs in Action

## ADVOCATING FOR THE RIGHTS OF PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES



In Nepal, MADRE resourced local partner, National Indigenous Women Forum (NIWF), to advocate on behalf of the rights of Indigenous women and women with disabilities before the United Nations (UN) Committee for the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). This resulted in the inclusion of the priorities and concerns of women with disabilities in CEDAW's recommendations to the Nepalese government. This win has been an important tool for NIWF to pressure the Nepalese government to acknowledge the rights of Indigenous Peoples, including women with disabilities, specifically.



MADRE's human rights advocacy team has influenced the UN Secretary General to push for full participation of women with disabilities in peace implementation and the realization of the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda. MADRE's recommendation that "peacekeeping and special political missions ...improve their monitoring and reporting of threats and violence against activists including women human rights defenders, with data disaggregated by ... disability" was included in the Secretary General's 2019 report on the implementation of the WPS agenda to the UN Security Council.



## RESOURCING PROGRAMS LED BY AND FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

In **Palestine**, MADRE partnered with the **Palestinian Medical Relief Society (PMRS)** to provide urgent and long-term focused health services to communities affected by violence with the Israeli military and with little to no access to health services. MADRE supported PMRS to run mobile clinics that provided post-operative care including check-ups, medication, wound dressing, and physiotherapy services as well as the provision of assistive devices to promote long-term care and mobility for nearly 300 Palestinians with disabilities.



In **Sierra Leone**, through the **VIVA Girls Initiative**, MADRE is supporting **Women with Disabilities Yearning for Equal Opportunities (WoDYE0)**, an expert on the intersection of women and girls with disabilities, public health crises, and post-conflict contexts, to disperse food aid and PPE and raise awareness of COVID-19 with posters, flyers and video clips that target the diverse needs of people with disabilities, including information on sexual and reproductive health. WoDYE0 is also ensuring cases of gender-based violence (GBV) are reported by creating an SMS and WhatsApp reporting platform for women and girls to use during the pandemic and beyond.



# Guiding Principles for Human Rights Organizations and Funders on Disability Inclusion

A few key guiding principles emerged as a result of MADRE and MIUSA's engagement that can guide organizations and funders as they decide future priorities:

- **Consult disabled women and girls:** Ensure that the expertise and experiences of women and girls with disabilities inform and guide your work by consulting with women and girls with disabilities. Ask whether your partners and grantees collaborate with groups led by women and girls with disabilities or include them in their decision-making and activities. Ensure that you are reaching out to women with disabilities when recruiting staff, board members, advisors, consultants, and interns.
- **Twin-track approach:** Beyond ensuring that people with disabilities can access all programs, there may be reasons to implement programs specific to people with disabilities. Disability-focused programs can build a sense of community, empowerment and pride, or focus on disability-specific resources or considerations. Implementing a combination of programs accessible to all while also offering disability-specific programs, as needed, is known as the “twin-track approach.”
- **Infiltration strategy:** Practice “infiltration,” a more proactive and intentional approach to inclusion. Infiltrate the disability community's events, share information with disability networks, and invite members of the disability community to your events and programs. By infiltrating, we accelerate inclusion and form partnerships with organizations and movements so that we all move forward together.
- **Budget for inclusion:** Unlike other types of diversity, disability inclusion may require additional and proactive strategies to ensure that dedicated financial resources are available to remediate or remove environmental, communications and other barriers to access. Allocating 3-5% of your budget for disability inclusion is recommended.

# Shaping a New Feminist Future

MIUSA has worked with many large international organizations and funders who are now taking the stance of requiring reasonable accommodations. The impact of this shift will change the world and the lives of millions of people with disabilities, especially women and girls with disabilities, who have been historically excluded. MADRE has set the bar high and has been a leader and a pioneer in meaningfully changing the status quo for inclusion of women and girls and people with disabilities. The high level of commitment from MADRE's Executive Director and staff, and MADRE's dedication to implementing new strategies in how it works with partners and grantees, is a landmark cause for celebration.

MADRE's progress and learnings have positioned the organization to be a model to its peers and partners for how to be more intentional about disability inclusion in their practices and programs. Though its new strategies, policies, and changes may take time to perfect, MADRE's effort is bold, meaningful, and paves the way for other organizations to learn from MADRE's experience. It is both MIUSA and MADRE's hope that by sharing this experience we will catalyze other organizations and funders to be more inclusive, as we all work together for a more just and equitable world.



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