DSROI 10th Anniversary I PANEL 1: Naming the change: Disability and sexuality 10 years later

Thank you, Kriya, for hosting this event, for bringing all of us together, for holding this space of co-creation, for listening to disabled feminists, for amplifying our voices, and for Disability Sexuality Rights Online Institute, which has become a community for many of us, many of us who've been alumni, many of us who've been faculty, many of us who've been associated in very different ways. Yes, whoo, can we have a... I think everybody can do better. You just served tea and coffee.

I think a louder, it's 10, we're done, 10. Thank you, Geeta, for starting us off, and we really want to deepen some of the conversations, take some of the things and build on what Geeta has said, but also bring some of our perspectives in terms of where we are, why these 10 years have been important, and know for people who've asked me before the session, I'm not going to perform stand-up comedy right now, so just to set expectations right, but we'll be having a very, very interesting discussion between the three of us here. We really don't like to call it a panel.

We're more in conversation with each other, and we have the opportunity to have an audience or participants from the floor who would be engaging with this conversation, not just listening to it, but engaging with it, hoping that you all could contribute towards the end as well. We'll take five minutes each to begin with, Janet and Shameem. If we could start off with just looking back at what has been disability and sexuality.

What has this journey looked like in the past 10 years? Where are we today? Where do we see the successes? Where do we see the gaps? What has this journey personally, in the movement, in our communities, countries, but globally, look like for all of us collectively? And for all of these complicated questions, you only have five minutes. Oh, hello. So, hello.

I can't believe I'm here, and I'm going to put to death a lie immediately. It's not 10 years. We started, the idea was born at the AWID Conference in Cape Town in 2000.

Can you, it's not on. It's me. Is it me? Is that better? Right, okay.

So, my hand will droop at some stage, so I will do my best. So, yeah, we started thinking about this in 2008 at the AWID Conference in Cape Town, and I'm actually still carrying around the bag from there, black bag with a wonderful silhouette of an African woman in orange on the front. And that was when the idea first started.

We had a panel and started talking about disability and queer together. And as we came out of that, a whole group of the disabled women who were present at that time started to talk about the need for us to have a collective voice to talk about these issues. And they were giving a small grants fund out to AWID, and it was through that that CREA managed to get the funding to start the course.

And from that point on, we had a collective group, people who are here, people who are sadly not here. Some of the very significant initial contributors were Ekaete, a colleague from Nigeria in Africa who did some brilliant work on sexual and reproductive health, Anita

Guy from here in Delhi, who so many of you will know from within the feminist disability movement, and many, many others whose names I forget. So we were looking at bringing together these three issues of what were classed in that period as disability, sexuality, and rights, looking at the intersections and interconnections between movements, and really trying to build material that came primarily from the global south, and that spoke to marginalized and of marginalized voices.

So it was trying to give a space both to the ideas behind disability and sexuality and rights, but also to the practical work that communities and groups were undertaking at a local level. Now that proved really hard in the early days because what we had was extremely little material that was available to us from the global south. It was there, but finding it, reaching out to the groups, making the connections, pulling the material together with them to a shape that they were happy to use it and share it with us online, or share it themselves online.

There was many different routes that we'd had to follow, and that has built further and further as the years have gone. And now what we have, I feel, is a really wonderful global community. All of these links and networks that have spread out, that have started with our connections from the DSROI, but that now have, can reach back to other partners in the organization, other partners in that network to look to some of the issues that they're trying to work on.

There are still many gaps, and I'll come on to those, but I think one of the things that I have wanted to say is that one of the things that has made this such a powerful space is that we have a very different, I think, a different teaching ethos, that we have provided lectures and PowerPoints and spaces to come together, but as time, as increasingly, as the access recognition has deepened from providing sign and captions and descriptions of images to actually thinking really about people's mental health and emotional needs as they're coming into space, into a space, to their needs around difficulties with access to written material and how that might form. We increasingly began to try and, and I think it came out about naturally, I don't think this was something that was consciously done, but I think the warmth and the welcome and the depth of commitment of those involved in this has led to a space where when we were being given feedback on the assessment of the DSROI, they just had, I think, about 50 responses to our 500, but it's a start, so if any of you haven't filled in an assessment form and you've been at the course, please contact us. But anyway, the actual response, the prominent word that came out from people's feelings about the course was that it was a space of love.

Now, I've never, I mean, I was so moved by that because I've never heard that expressed about a space of learning, that you could come to learn, to share, to build commitment, and that it could really feel as a true feminist disability solidarity space ought to, a space of love. And I think that says something very powerful about all those women and men, trans people, intersex people, gender fluid people, all those of us who've been involved in the course. I think it says something very powerful about the types of people who've been there and the commitment that they've shown.

Thank you so much, Janet. I think it's so beautifully, I mean, it's not easy to share the journey of so many years. By 10 years, we meant 10 institutes.

Just to clarify, 10 years, we meant 10 institutes. So it's been longer. And really, I think holding on to the community, the solidarity, the space of love.

I think the disability community has been talking about how access is love, dignity is love, inclusion is love. And building all of that in this space and enabling people experience that love rather than seeing access as love, right? I think those are the steps that are victories, that are really successes that come forth along with the sense of community, belonging, and solidarity. Shamim, on that, if I can move to you to share more thoughts about where the movement of disability sexuality you see has moved in the 10 years, according to you, in your context, or even globally.

Everybody has a personal mic, sorry. Hi, everyone, can you hear me? Okay. No? Hello? Can you hear me? No? Okay.

Hi, everyone, good evening. My name is Shamim Salem. I am a black, light-skinned woman.

I am from Mombasa, Kenya, East Africa. And I've been one of the people sometimes holding space for DSRI. And for those who may not know, I think DSRI is Disability Sexuality Rights Online Institute.

As someone who is based in a country that often a lot of things are silenced or restrictive, I think it's important to highlight what DSRI has been or has felt like in the movements that I exist in, especially within the disability and LGBTI movements in East Africa. And I think one of the important aspects of DSRI is the practicalization of the disability justice framework. And I think for me, it's how this as a framework has sort of affirmed all parts of ourselves, that it's not just, we're not just one thing, but also we're not just seeking one thing.

And I think allowing all the various aspects of ourselves to come up, whether it's talking about LGBT issues, or they're talking about abortion issues, or they're talking about religion and other aspects of our lives. The other thing that I think DSRI has sort of brought to life is the issue of how intentional we can be about cross-movement work. And I know we really speak a lot about this, but seeing how we develop work processes or how we develop processes that allow us to really engage with each other in holistic ways and not like in just tokenistic ways, but really, really seeing disabled folks or like queer folks and seeing how our issues are related.

Okay. In my region, I think recently, DSRI has started having DSRI East Africa. And this as an institution has been very powerful in centering conversations about sexuality, especially in a context or in a continent that very much shies away from conversation about sex, but also more importantly about LGBT issues.

And I think for me, this is very, very important because what it means is it centers sexuality, but also like all, as I said, all parts of our existence so that we as queer people who are disabled are not, you know, like we don't have to pick one, but also like just understanding the nuances, understanding also like the different intersectional ways that we exist in society. Because in a country like Kenya, which can be, has like very homophobic laws, it still gives me privilege as a disabled person or rather access as a disabled person. So what does that mean? And really just thinking about solidarity and I'm glad that Gita mentioned about the passing of the anti-LGBT bill in Ghana yesterday or the day before yesterday.

And I think for me, it's the question is how do we show up in solidarity for the Ghana queer community? How do we really show up beyond like sending messages of support, love and light? Yeah, and I also want to echo what Janet said about DSRI humanizing us. A lot of times we are doing statements to the UN, we are doing reviews of the CRPD, we are doing big things, but I think at the center of it is the aspect of love, but also like the joy that DSRI brings. Someone feeling that this is a safe space for them to like come out or a safe space for them to find community and just really bring the full cells into this space.

So I feel like the emotional aspect and I think finally I want to speak about the issue of access as a political issue. And a lot of times I know we grapple with how do we ensure reasonable accommodation? How do we ensure everyone is included? But I think with the practice that we have put in place in DSRI, it's really seeing each other from an individual perspective, but also as a collective. And I think this is a really good practice in ensuring that people feel included.

When you talk about community it's beyond the, like saying it's beyond the NGO strategies, it's beyond the theory of change, it's how do I really, really see you as Janet? How do I see you as Nidhi and each other, right? And I think eventually this is the work that we all aspire to. Yeah, and I'd say I'm very proud to be a part of it. Thank you.

Thank you so much, Hameem. I think between you and Janet, just what DSRI has brought in the last couple of years and how people have taken things forward within the communities, but also working more closely with each other. So truly understanding and respecting intersectionality, but also including those conversations and including people because of that.

Somewhere also leads to a lot of cross movement work. And that's really been a concrete thing that we've seen. Just if I had to zoom out of DSRI and look at the disability sexuality work in the last 10 years, look at the progress globally, but also within India.

It's really interesting because the more you have disabled feminists who find their voices, who find their identities, who are able to articulate and ask for rights, articulate their experiences because they found that communities as articulating and resonating experiences. What we've particularly seen within the country is that there has been a challenge to the male dominated disability rights discourses. The very patriarchal disability rights discourses where gender is slowly finding its place plus also sexuality is finding its place.

Complicating the simplified narratives of what accessibility looks like. So when there are asks like accessible toilets are important, how it fits into the discussion or how it even interacts with the discussions of what gender neutral toilets look like. Or what it means before the conversations came up about gender neutral toilets to what it means to have gender toilets and an accessible toilet.

And how does it play into the ungendering of people with disabilities? Starting from these conversations to really thinking about technology which enables and brings access to persons with many disabilities. And bringing gender and sexuality in the mix of that. So when we talk about, and I find it very interesting because we talk about cross movement work but what I have seen in addition to that within India but I would repeat globally as well.

That we needed sort of a cross movement dialogue within the disability movement. Because of the diversity that it holds but also because of the diverse perspectives and the idea on gender and ideas on sexuality that the movement held. And this was visible again like you said in not just formal UN spaces, in the reporting globally et cetera but it was also seen in conferences.

In the way access and technology was put forward. Or in the way discussions happened let's say at the commission for status of women, at the cusp and so on and so forth. Very importantly what we saw as a shift with DSROI and other efforts around disability sexuality rights.

But with the movement building and the cross movement building and spaces to learn and unlearn most importantly. That we started seeing a little more resources. We've been talking about there's not enough resource so I can't say many resources to it.

Disability sexuality but we saw that some funders who were working with gender and sexuality said okay but disability is an issue within gender sexuality. So thinking about what this cross movement impact or what this community solidarity. Where did it start and what kinds of impact did it have? It had an impact within the community of disability but it also had an impact where we see cross movement which are the other actors that it influenced.

It influenced multilaterals, it influenced to some extent of donors, philanthropists and the general public. I think today in many country contexts you stand up and they know that at least you exist. They know that disability sexuality or disability and gender is something that's been spoken about.

They may agree or not agree. But I think 10, 12, 14 years ago that wasn't even a space that was heard about. And I think visibilizing, recognizing is actually the first step even before acceptance.

So unless we achieve that the growth may have been slow in some areas. The growth may have been really fast in some others. But it's been very interesting and as usual I'll just say when I started work 13 years ago on disability sexuality with point of view on a project that they were partnering with CREA.

It was very interesting because I was a young activist. I'm still young, I'll give you my image description. But you know the conversation was like, oh maybe she wants to have sex and so she's talking about sex.

To now we have students in universities doing PhDs on sexuality, on the need for intimacy, on pleasure, on friendships, on social acceptance or inclusion, on intersectionality. And I think that itself speaks volumes. Within a context I'd like to say India has progressed but we still have a very, very narrow cultural context.

And so in that context this movement in the last 13 years which I've also personally witnessed has been immense. And everybody collectively is responsible for this. So that's where we are but with this I think Arushi forgot to hit the bell for me.

It's like you get a minute extra because you're facilitating. But I'd like to come back to you Janet to frame this more broadly. So you've really beautifully taken us through the history of DSROI, the beginnings, the commitment that people brought and what it has meant for different communities, right? But where do you see it go from here? Where do you, what are your hopes? I wouldn't, I can call them gaps but I also want to frame it as what are your hopes that the community itself, not just DSROI can achieve at this intersection of disability, sexuality and gender? Thanks Nidhi.

Well you can see what being involved with the DSROI has done to me. It's turned my hair white, my face still white. I'm wearing very bright pink.

Nidhi and I are the sisters in pink tonight. So we sit here shining brightly on the stage. What are my hopes? I, well, what the DSROI became has, it was so far beyond anything I could ever have imagined.

So what the future holds, I do not know. I mean, okay, so technology has changed and has taken us forward in leaps and bounds in terms of the communication we can have. But I think it's the depth of connections that we have built that has been the real sense of possibility within this movement.

But in a sense, that makes me more determined that over time, we should, I should commit to and hopefully the DSROI can commit to looking at the spaces that we would really like to move towards. And this has been conversation that has floated around the room as we've talked over the last two, three days. So the questions that have kept coming up have been, what about a space for intellectually disabled people who want to do the course? When are we going to create something that they can come on? Because the course, as it stands, is not fit for purpose.

And just doing a little bit of twiddling around the edges with access is never going to make it fit for purpose. Where do class and caste sit in our thinking? There are many communities who are not English speakers and they tend often to be the more economically deprived communities in India. In other parts of the world, there are different limitations for people in terms of language and of economic capacity.

And the course, even if we can provide free access to the course, we've realized that we also have to think about free web access. We really need to support people so that those without resources to pay can actually access. Do you have even a mobile phone or a tablet that you can look at these things? I mean, there are so many people around the world, disabled people, people from sexual minority groups who are never going to be able to access the course, but we have to, as a group, think about the possible ways in which we can widen this out.

What other things have struck me? I think one of the questions that has been floating around in my mind, and it's sort of arisen from bits of work I've done recently and from the current context, is where do disability and war, disability and militarization fit in? So we're, all of us, so intensely aware of the increased number of people with injuries and people who in the future will be disabled because of the war in Gaza, the war in Ukraine, the war in the Congo, and the many other wars that are, if not happening at a high level, that are rumbling along, causing damage to people, the wars in homes, the damage, the domestic violence that creates. And I think one of the things that I want to say here very clearly, we are about disability, we're about sexuality. Where is sexual disability? Where is the discussion, which I would really like to see us build, about the women who are damaged because of sexual violence, for whom that is a permanent and ongoing impairment, whether physical, emotional, there are so many ways in which that can be damaged.

So I think that's, I think those are questions that I'm going to ask Shameem to pick up on and maybe the conversation about militarization, which we'd started to have, I'd be really interested to hear your thoughts about where you think that could move to within the movement and within the course. Yes, can you hear me? Okay, I think before the conversation about militarization, it's, I think, my thoughts for what I hope for, and you've spoken a lot about that, and for me, part of it is for the principle of disability justice to be ingrained in every aspect of different movements, to be part of a DNA, because I feel like it's not something that only sits with disabled folks or disabled activists, and I hope that we can find ways also like tapping into like indigenous knowledge, indigenous communities, and how there's so much resource, there's so much skills and knowledge that we can continuously put in practice. I think also like the conversation about race is very important, and I know a lot of times it's something that happens like in the global north, but I think it's also an important conversation within our spaces.

Also, I think there's a conversation about accountability in how the disability justice as a course needs to happen within different spaces, for example, if it's like funding, if it's like feminist spaces, if it's like government spaces, so because I feel like this is something that we've spoken about having more than 500 alumni, so how do we support them to move forward with this, but also I think it's something we've seen very much needed, I think with conversations from colleagues from Nigeria, from Ghana, from other parts of the world, it's something that is very much needed, and yes, the conversation about militarization, I think it's something very important, and I think colleagues within the next panel will also speak more about it. I definitely think it's a conversation we need not shy away from. As the world is becoming more and more a scary place to live in, but I think it's conversations that disabled folks need to be part of, and also be part of, and I think it's important for our voices to be heard around those aspects.

I also think there's a conversation about the exploitation of, the word has just, English has left my head. It's post 5 p.m., so my English has ended. Now I'm thinking in Kiswahili.

Yeah, I think there's a lot of exploitation of negative, basically the cultural war in the global north, right? What's happening right now in Africa with the anti-rights, anti-gender movements, a lot of it is an exploitation from America, with the American evangelicals, and I think even as disabled folks, as disabled activists, we are not safe, so to speak, from it, because also we know the intersectionality, which you've been speaking about a lot, about this intersectionality of disability and queerness, and the anti-rights conversation, I think it's also something that really needs to happen, because just the other day, the Ghana bill was passed. The next day it could be Kenya, the next day it could be some other country, and I think it's the soft powers that we need not to forget about, and just like, yeah, continuously have those conversations and hold people accountable, hold our donors accountable, hold the people accountable, hold our friends accountable. Thank you, Arushi.

Thank you. I think everything has been said, but I'll still make an attempt. I think it's really, for me, how I look at the hope for the future, gaps, what we can do more, maybe that's more active.

You know, at the risk of repeating myself from what Janet and Shameem have said, I'd really like to say that onus is not, onus of change, onus of inclusion, onus of bringing this intersection to the front is not just on disabled feminists. That'll be really the hope for the future. And why I say this, I not just say, you know, echoing some more examples that Shameem gave, but also if I had to name a few tensions, we can call them fault lines, we can call them debates, we can call them tensions, we can call them evolving conversations, right? And when there are evolving conversations, how many disabled feminists or women and gender marginalized persons are at the table? When we're talking about age of consent, when we're talking about child marriage, when we're talking about female genital mutilation, when we're talking about action on any old or emerging issues, the question is, do disabled people, particularly those marginalized by gender, are they at the table? Do we think that they are important in this conversation? The age of consent is absolutely critical.

You'll hear it in the next panel as well. Disabled people have been talking about capacity and consent through the years in the movement, right? It's the biggest question that's been put on our identity, on our sexuality, on our gender orientation, on everything that we do. And so why are we left, because it's a sexuality conversation? Are we still somewhere through active or passive erasure or active or passive leaving out of disabled people, are we still desexualizing them, right? So when we're talking about online spaces and safety in online spaces, when we're talking about online spaces for sexual expression, when we're talking about violence in online spaces, how many disabled women are a part of that conversation? Or how many queer persons with disabilities are really actively included in those conversations? So I do agree that all of us need to build this network and capacity to move into these areas, to mainstream, to cross disability rights, to do more intersecting work.

But I also think that the onus needs to shift, and that would be my hope of slowly shifting the onus across movements, but also across emerging issues. And that commitment would be really critical in taking not disability gender ahead at this intersection, but disability, sexuality, gender, and in all of those contexts, right? It was interesting, because when India published their G20 commitments, there was some mention of women being disproportionately impacted by the climate change, and health, and sexual health, and reproductive health, and all of that. Some of that was mentioned or inferred by some of the feminists.

And I said, but throughout the commitment, there is no mention of disability except in a place. And somebody pulled out one sentence and said, you're mentioned in education, that you need some support in education. I said, sure.

I mean, you imagine if feminism was mentioned, not fair, India doesn't use the word feminism, sorry. Women's rights, women were mentioned only in education. So I think which piece of the pie we think belongs to whom, but also which piece of the pie persons with disability should be contented with.

Like Shamim and Janet said, when it's conflict and disaster, at the Feminist Foreign Policy Conference recently, there was a lot of discussion, and anxiety, and anger about the crisis that's ongoing, but not once were disabled people mentioned. And the impact of this conflict and war, there were cries of women and children are really being impacted, and you know the atrocities. And I was like, but what happened to the disabled people? Right, and I think just not, just taking a moment to think about who are we missing out, which intersections remain behind.

Janet mentioned within disability, which intersections we're leaving out, with disability and other identities. But I think a little more active, a little more proactive, we've moved a long way from whenever we have started, but there is a very, very long way to go. And I'm hoping that we collectively can move on this path ahead.

With this, I'll give a quick image description of myself, which I should have done at the start. I am wearing pink, as Janet has already publicized. I am wearing a pink long dress.

I'm a woman in my, I won't tell my age, Indian looking woman with her hair open and wearing a necklace and earrings and having some bracelet in my hand and watch on the other. With this description and my pronouns, which are she and her, I'd like to open the floor for any comments, any inputs. It's not just questions, so I will put questions at the end.

Seeing any questions as well, but really your comments, your thoughts, your reflections, anything that you'd like to add to the disability, sexuality, gender rights journey in your experience, in your context, in your work, in your hopes, in your dreams, in your future. There'll be someone from the CREA team who'd be assisting, supporting me. Yes? But you have to raise your hands for them to even support me.

The problem for all of you is I know quite a few people in the audience, so if no one volunteers, I can just be like, oh, you wanted to speak next. Any thoughts? Yes? Hi, everyone, I'm Pallavi. My question is, it's not even a question.

I don't know how we would do this. What I'm sitting with is a thought of the disability and sexuality movement. We have so much of information.

I'm sure a lot of research has been done. I know for sure not much has been done in terms of deaf women. I'm part of a group of six deaf co-researchers are doing some research on what is happening with deaf women, and they were not able to find any research.

So I'm sitting with this thought that what we can do to get this conversation to the ground, to that deaf girl in the school, because I've been in the field for the past 15 years, and to be really honest, it's heartbreaking, but I don't really see the change being taken to that ground level. So that girl did not know about their bodies or what sexuality is 15 years back, and even now, if we see, very little has moved. So I'm just sitting with this thought.

What we can do to bring that change to that level if there's anything, yeah. Thank you, Pallavi. Can we take one more question if there is, and then Shamim, you'd address this briefly in your first, so bring it to the mic.

Hi, I'm not an alumni of, I'm Priya Das, and I work for a management consultancy firm called Oxford Policy Management, and my question is this. So in my profession, I'm constantly sort of, you know, we're writing bids and getting grants of many, many, many millions from funders like FCDO and others, where somehow, it's the popular term now is GEDC, right? Gender Equality, Disability, Social Inclusion, which gets reduced to one section and part of that, where millions are being, and government policies are being streamlined, government mechanisms are being streamlined around climate change, livelihoods, et cetera, and it's really, I always feel that it's just a very tokenistic acknowledgement of what is often called a social value. My question is, how does this conversation that's going on in this room, the movement, how does that engage with this space where millions are being spent on policies and programs, et cetera, where GEDC just becomes like one social value? Wow, okay.

We'll start with the first question. Thank you, Priya. We'll need a couple of minutes to unpack that.

But also, Janet and Sharmim, I'll invite both of you, before I can respond to Pallavi, but really, both your perspectives on how do you reach the girl who's in this school, waiting for information even about her own body? Oh, it's such a deeply problematic issue, isn't it? Because there are so many disabled and deaf girls out there who have not been reached around the world. So, we try and we try harder. We have the buildings of the movement, but I think we have the course, so please join us on the course and we'll work out with you how to plan for building forward.

There were, you know, so there's resources, possibilities that we can share. I know there was a great bunch of deaf women did us a wonderful community-based, what we call radical action, describing the community work they were doing with other deaf women around violence about four or five years ago that we've shown and used regularly on the course, and that's had a real impact on people who've seen the Institute, or been through the Institute. I think one of the things, maybe we need an Institute, I don't want to split the Institute up into separate bits, but it's clear that there are particular needs that deaf women and girls are facing, and so it's about together, jointly building resources, and I think this is where it has to be a community effort.

It's not simply, for me, about deaf women working in a silo and we're saying, you're deaf, you get on with doing your bit. It's about that joint sharing of resources, of knowledge, of energy and effort, and building towards something. You will have the skill, you will have the knowledge, you will have the best understanding about the places and the people, about the gatekeepers, which I think is crucial.

There are so many gatekeepers in the disability community who work very hard to keep the mention of sexuality right out the door. They want no involvement with it. And so it's about working together, supporting the work that you are doing as well as we can as a community, and taking things forward.

So I can't predict how it would go. I can't, but I think, you know, there are an enormous number of disabled feminists around the world, and it's about drawing on our strength and resources that we, as deaf and disabled feminists, can reach out to the young deaf girl, the young girl in a wheelchair, the young autistic girl, the young girl with cerebral palsy, or the young institutionalized girl with psychosocial disabilities. We have to find ways, because their future cannot be a dead end.

It has to move forward for them. Jannetta, I'm not sure maybe she wants to respond to the first question, or we can do the second one. Would you? I think I agree with you, Jannetta.

I think there needs to be intentional solidarity with the girls, the women, the children, the people in the spaces that we don't reach. I'll just say, like as an example, in Kenya, one of conversations around sexuality, especially when we're talking about sexuality to like adolescent kids or like children, it's quite problematic, because there's a whole conversation about you're recruiting people to be LGBTQ. And I think in those cases, usually it's like we don't want to engage, because we don't want to be seen as we're recruiting kids.

However, I think someone said something that it's not about us, it's about those kids, it's about those people in spaces that they do not have access to this information. Think about the children who might be experiencing things like sexual violence, or just not being able to understand different concepts, understand the possibilities of their identities and their existence. So I think there needs to be like collective strategies on how we can do that.

And I know like a lot of people find creative ways of like working with people, with communities, but also I think, as I said earlier, there's a lot of potential, a lot of skills, a lot of knowledge within indigenous communities. If you're thinking about reaching, say the Maasai community in Turkana, which is a region in Kenya, which does not have a lot of access to say, for example, internet or technology. And I think working in partnership with those communities, just really radicalizing how we do our activism to be outside of hotels, outside of, you know, like very sophisticated, structured ways of doing our activism.

I think looking at various ways in which we can support the communities, but also like hold hands with them to actually do that, because the assumption also is not, is that there's still so much knowledge and skills in those communities, in our communities, rather than we are going to tell you this, we are going to show you this, right? I think an acknowledgement of that and just finding ways of holding each other to support the people we are not reaching to at the moment. Right, brilliant. I'll again zoom into the India context a little bit since one of you asked a question.

I do want to repeat what Janet said around gatekeepers, and this takes me back to a little story, and I do want to share this. I was again, I'm mentioning point of view again, I was heading sexuality disability there, and we went to this school as part of our trainings, right, to a deaf school, and we had a deaf trainer with us, because we'd, at point of view, done the training of trainers, and then we had people across disabilities be a part of it, and then we supported them or worked with them to co-facilitate trainings in their respective disabilities, right? So we had deaf trainers work with us, and we went to deaf schools to conduct these sexuality trainings. Of course, the first thing was teach them about pregnancy, but don't talk about sex, and we were really puzzled because we were like, how do we jump from this is your body to now you're pregnant, and what do we do in between? Like, the film has gone bad, do we put a dark screen there, or, you know, it was really puzzling, and we said, okay, we'll talk about pregnancy, and we'll talk about menstruation, and then, of course, we said, but we are only talking about the process to get pregnant, so we mentioned sex, right? But it was very interesting because we went there, and I still remember, you know, our deaf trainer was training, and I'm blind, and so there was this school teacher who was sitting next to me and saying, I'll interpret for you, right? Because you're blind, of course, you can't see the sign that the deaf trainer's making.

My colleague knows sign language, and she's sighted, so she could see and support, and I was sort of intervening whenever I thought it was important. And it was so interesting because the teacher as the interpreter told me, and we had this basic question of how many, you know, a woman's body, and the basics, right? Going back to what is, quote, unquote, seen as a normal woman's body. How many holes do you have down there, right? And then something the teacher said, and she said, the trainer's saying that you menstruate from the place you pee.

And I looked at my colleague, and I said, what is she training? Because I thought the trainer's gone wrong, right? Sometimes there is a communication gap. We were also, these were new trainers in sexuality, and my colleague said, what happened? I said, what is she training? What is she saying? She said, what happened? I said, she just said that you menstruate from where you pee. And my colleague said, I'm 99% sure that's not what she said, because I do understand sign language, but let's confirm.

We paused the trainer, and we communicated. We said, if you're not understanding sign language, you write it. What were your last three sentences? She wrote it down for us, and she had not miscommunicated.

I went back to the teacher, and I asked her, and this was a woman who was teaching at a deaf school, who was married, who had children. And she said, I actually did not know. Now that you're telling me, it's a new information for me.

Where does the gap really start? And I think to reach the girl in the school, to reach the girl in the NGO, to reach the deaf girl in this deaf organization, it's also important to build capacities of people who are dealing with them. Even if not directly the young people, themselves, but at least with the staff, at least with the teachers. And that is why it's important there are multiple points of access.

Of course, we did many trainings at Point of View, but that's not where one, it wasn't one organization when we were doing that, right? And there were many other organizations working again in mental health and disability, sexuality, like different disabilities, right? But the point is that the work isn't enough, but there are also multiple ways to access this work. Janet mentioned about enrolling in the course. I do also want to say on behalf of CREA that there's DSROI Hindi, there's DSROI India, right? Which, whereas again, it's a shorter course, you can enroll in that, there are different concepts that are built in it.

Different means on disability and sexuality, but the approach is different. So just to say that I think when we are mapping out where the change is needed, there are multiple levels where the change is needed, where there's informational gap, where there's not just access gap, but solid informational gap, and not just because of access barriers, right? Gender barriers, cultural barriers, and so on and so forth. Sorry, we'll quickly just respond to the second question, and I think we should stop because we're eating into the next panel's time.

Thank you, Priya, for asking that question about policy spaces or the whole terminology of GET-C. I think there would be one reflection that I'd like to ask. In any of these places, where you're pitching the bid, who's providing funding? In the larger development organizations, larger, and I'm talking about really big ones, how many people with disabilities do you see at the decision-making table? Right, when we said policies around gender needs to be changed, the buckets need to be changed, the way gender is seen needs to be changed, we had, we pushed our way through for women and gender marginalized persons to be at the table, to be in decisions, to be the program leads, to be et cetera, et cetera, et cetera but the terminology of GET-C has really bucketed us all together and within those, some of the identities are not really present and unless we have people there, we will not be able to do justice to what this GET-C means.

I'm not saying that allies cannot bring to the table some understanding of the gender equality, disability, social inclusion, but also inclusion is a huge subject and unless we see, so pushing people or encouraging them to be in policy spaces, encouraging them to be in leadership spaces is something that I would see as a long-term solution and for more immediate solutions, you can just have many of us very, very capable disabled people as consultants on board. Okay, I'm gonna pass to Jana and Shameem if you wanna add to the GET-C conversation and then we'll wrap up. Not so, I didn't want to add so much to that conversation but to a point that I think is my, sort of one of my real wishes for the future is that we break down ableism, that those normative, those norms about the able body, the able mind, the able soul, the able way of being in the world just are no longer the standards by which we work and that all of us, disabled and non-disabled, work towards breaking that down.

It is everybody's responsibility here and our world will not change until we all take that on. Not to respond to your question because I think Nidhi did a really good job but I think centering disability voices and voices of disabled folks would be important, an important conversation because I feel like if we do that then everything else is covered, yeah. So breaking down ableism, centering disabled people's voices.

Okay, Charu, we have two more panels. Can you hold it for the next panel? Yeah, there is time for Q&A in the next panel and I'm using my facilitator's power, okay. So what Pallavi mentioned, right, about the deaf girls, I hope other deaf people can see me clearly, okay.

So Saurav is signing, Charu is signing at the stage. So you are sharing your experiences, right, about this intersectionality, all those things. I absolutely know about it but I think I would like to suggest here when we talk about feminism, right, so women, deaf women also, they didn't understand what feminism word is.

They were also lacking behind, right? They didn't actually get the meaning of feminism. So in feminism also we are talking about the disability, sexuality, all those things. So DEWT, Deaf Women 2, which is a social platform where we spread across the videos related to all these contents and topics.

So we wanted all the deaf women to know about all those things, whether disability, feminism, all those things because they are facing challenges due to access. So, and also for a deaf participant, there should be a deaf presenter. And unless we do have interpreter but there could be some misconception as well.

That's how people won't be getting it. So interpreter is not equivalent to the 100% of a deaf signer, correct? For example, you just talked about that there are two holes, right? And there is, I mean for the MC1 there is a different hole. So it is more important to have a deaf trainer for a deaf participant.

So I would definitely, being a founder of DEWT, I would definitely like to collaborate with you. I know there are millions of million deaf women. There are people who are belonging to queer community as well.

We can have them as well and we can collaborate, right? And before that, you can have a training to the master trainers who are themselves deaf women and that's how they can go ahead and they can teach whatever in your course is there, right? So that would not take a, that would not be a tedious process also. That would not require a hearing trainer, right? And we can definitely collaborate on this. This course is actually going to benefit a lot of deaf women and we are very few here, right? Only seven to eight deaf women.

But there are a lot of deaf women who are still missing on these information. So we can definitely work on it. Thank you for listening to me.

Thank you so much, Charu. Thank you. Thank you for having that platform and thank you for sharing about it.

And with this, Charu has really brought the point that I was about to speak. Summarizing again, I think the last words that we have spoken, not last words, last words on this panel right now, dismantling ableism and for the benefit of all of us, not just persons with disabilities. Centering people with disabilities in the conversations and also moving.

You know the mantra of nothing about us without us? We've moved to the mantra of nothing without us. And I think that's really important when we think of cross movement, intersectionality, solidarity, or making progress together. Thank you for being a wonderful audience.

Thank you for engaging with us and listening to us. We're very excited to hand it back to Agnes and please stay on for the rest of the evening. We have some more fantastic conversations and as Geetha mentioned, a lovely party at the end.

So thank you.