Ellen Spannagel 0:00

Hello, and welcome to Enabling Commons, a podcast at the McGill Center for Human Rights and Legal Pluralism. Enabling Commons is a space for dialogue among persons with disabilities and their allies to explore strategies that will transform our environments, our comments to be meaningfully enabling for all.

Hello, my name is Ellen Spannagel, and this is Enabling Commons. Today we are lucky to have two guests, Mary Keogh, and Gordon Rattray. So Dr. Mary Keogh is the advocacy director for CBM Global where she is responsible for leading their advocacy strategy and partners with disability organizations all over the world. Gordon Rattray is is the international cooperation officer at European Disability Forum, and has done lots of work on disability inclusive disaster risk reduction. So Mary and Gordon I just want to thank you for taking the time to be here with me today and to tell me a little bit about your work and some of the things you've learned in doing all of this work.

Mary Keogh 1:07

Thanks, Ellen

Ellen Spannagel 1:09

So before I started asking you some more specific questions. I was just wondering if you could tell me a little bit about yourself and what you do. And so Gordon, why don't we just start?

Gordon Rattray 1:21

Okay, so yeah, as you said, Ellen, I work for a European Disability Forum. I'm originally from the UK from Scotland. And I've been living in Belgium for the last almost 20 years now. And European Disability Forum represents the rights of persons with disabilities in Europe, we're an umbrella organization of organizations of persons with disabilities in Europe DPOS, or OPDS. And we are are a DPO, an organization of persons with disabilities ourselves. And I'm part of the also, as you said, the International Cooperation team. So I'm more involved with things like what the EU does, outside of Europe, in international cooperation in making sure that all of this work is inclusive of people with disabilities in the countries where the work is being done. And I've been with, I've been with ATF for about a year and a half now. And prior to that, I was working more in humanitarian action and development all with the lens of disability inclusion.

Ellen Spannagel 2:36

And Mary, I know I already introduced you, but I'm wondering if you could just share a little bit about yourself as well.

Mary Keogh 2:44

Yeah, sure. And my name is Mary Keogh. And I'm based in Dublin, Ireland. So I'll try to speak slowly, I generally speak quite fast. I'm a wheelchair user and living in the suburbs of Dublin. And I work with an organization called CBM global disability inclusion. We work alongside persons with disabilities in over 20 countries in the world. We're a new organization, we came from CBM Federation, and we're a start up organization and really bringing with us the experience you've had from before but also looking into new areas around and climate is is is a key part of that. And we the organization or key the key principles that we work with is around partnership with organizations of persons with disabilities. So we're glad you're here with Gordon today because EDF is is somebody that we work quite closely with and I, my role into global is advocacy director. So it's working along with the Federation members for our partners on on disability advocacy. And that's, you know, that ranges from data advocacy to climate work to inclusive health. And there's a broad range of areas that we we support advocacy with. So yeah, so really glad to be here today.

Ellen Spannagel 4:08

Well, thank you both for introducing yourself. Part of the reason why we have both of you together today, talking which is a little bit unusual, because I wanted to ask you about a video that you both had the opportunity to work on. And just to give a little bit of background for people who are accessing the podcast conversation, the 14th session of the conference of States Parties happened last week. And this is this is the conference on the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. And during the events there was a side event on disability inclusive climate action, which is the first time anything like that has happened at conference of states parties. And at the side event they showed a video on the intersection of disability and climate change and this video talked about the impacts of climate change on people with disabilities, barriers, and then also how we can move forward. So how we can move forward in talking about disability inclusive climate action, working with people who are working in climate action, and also Disability Justice bringing people together. Um, so I don't want to take go take up too much space, because you should just go watch the video, which will be linked with the podcast as well. But Gordon and Mary both had a huge hand in helping make the video and make this happen, and also getting just these conversations about disability inclusive climate justice started. So I wanted to hear about your experience in creating the video. How, like, when did this become an idea? How did you start working together on this? So I don't know who would like to answer that one first.

Mary Keogh 5:51

Okay, so yeah, I mean, just came about, I mean, we've been having lots of conversations around climate and disability and the intersection of disability and climate with lots of different organizations of persons with disabilities over the last two years, and we did research back in 2019, with our partners, and with a group of disability activists around, you know, what is what are the impacts of climate change. And since then, it's been a journey, you know, internally with us as an organization on this, but also really kind of thinking about how can we get the voices piece or the representation piece? So that was kind of the genesis of the research that we did. And then just in discussion with European Disability Forum, you know, we were talking about, well, would it be interesting to do a video and Gordon has already actually done a lot of work in terms of the European development days, which is actually where it was originally launched. So that was kind of the Genesis Gordon, if I remember of putting together this video,

Gordon Rattray 6:53

It was yes. And, and it all happened, actually, very quickly, that's probably the most surprising thing about it from my side. So we, European development days is an event that happens every year, bringing together organizations involved in, in development, European based, or international organizations involved in development together in Brussels. And because of the COVID situation, this was this year, it was all online. And we, Mary and I were speaking, a few weeks ago, I guess, working out what would be one of the best ways to bring our the topic of European development is this year was about sustainability and the Green Deal and, and climate change, we were trying to think of what would be a good way or an original way of bringing it together. And we thought we would try and develop a video quite quickly, based on the fact that everybody is no so used to using zoom and other online platforms, because we couldn't travel, we couldn't send a film crew, to interview people, but we actually saw it as an opportunity rather than rather than a barrier, because we could now reach people in lots of different countries, maybe more easily than we would have done a year or two ago. So yeah, it all happened actually over the space of about two months maximum, I guess, from first idea to the final video. And it was just a case of we didn't, we didn't specifically sit down and write a script and work out what we wanted to hear said, rather, we kind of put out a call saying, who is interested in giving their views on disability and climate change or climate justice and get in touch with us. And then we interviewed many people, and kind of pulled the script out from that. And it's not really a script, it's more just the views and opinions of people based on their own experience, which is really what we wanted at this stage.

Mary Keogh 9:02

Yeah, and maybe just to come in on that, just to say that, you know, when the call was played, I mean, there are people with disabilities in their organizations and persons with disabilities working in climate. So this is not this is the only ever first piece that has come out from us. And, and, you know, that's whether it's in the policy negotiation space, or there's, you know, people doing research, and there's also, you know, there's projects happening, you know, in small amounts to me and I think, you know, on the on the video, we heard from some Sainimili in the Pacific Disability Forum, and you know, the, the colleaguse from there or the advisory panel of the DICARP program, so there is there is work happening on disability and climate and I think what really wants to achieve in terms of framing the video was not putting it into a policy speaker not determining what would come from the video. So as Gordon said, you know, like we did it, you know, to use a research term, a thematic analysis of what came up across all of the, the interviews and you know, the process was going through the scripts, we, you know, we had zoom, which we recorded the transcripts, and we were able to print them, save them. And then actually, you know, read through them rather than watch the videos and actually see the words. And I think that was really helpful, Gordon, that was a great way to be able to, we could see kind of a story weaving through it. So of course, we put our own kind of editorial piece on this and, but that was kind of how the framing happened on it. So it wasn't with a view in mind to say, well, this needs to be for COP, or this needs to be for the UN or this needs to be. This just needs to tell people stories. And that's what we thought was most important about it.

Gordon Rattray 10:44

I was just going to say to add on to what you said at the beginning, they're very, as well as they're already being some organizations, a person with disabilities who are doing climate specific work. There are many and other disability organizations who are already working in related fields and have a long experience and a long history and a lot of experience in related fields like disaster risk reduction, DRR, and humanitarian action, and development work and a lot of the time that are such big overlaps there, with what's required for effective climate action that for them, it's maybe just a case of tweaking what they're doing or recognizing that what they're doing is actually better related to climate activity. And, and either has to be increased or slightly tweaked, or just identified as as that. So there are a lot of already existing skills and resources and experience out there that's completely applicable to the climate conversation. And it's just a case of maybe making people aware of it on both sides of the of the discussion.

Ellen Spannagel 11:52

I'm wondering if like, just in terms of having everyone like share their experiences, was it really hard like cutting it down? Like, well, there are a lot more people who had more things to say, and it just was impossible to get it down to the 18 minutes right?

Mary Keogh 12:09

Now the long video, I can Yeah, I mean, Gordon, Gordon will tell you just briefly, we had I mean, I can't I don't know the might footage, but it was half five videos per individual. And Gordon did the majority of those interviews. And then it was the transcripts with that. So I think it was like we got it down to need a short, four minute one and a 17 minute one, I think, but I think originally Gordon, what was the original cut, and even at that we were we were so concerned about cutting out people, you know, and editing it down just from our perspective. So that was, I think, we had quite ethical discussions around that and went back and forth on it Gordon.

Gordon Rattray 12:47

Yeah, we Yeah, I think our first cut was in the region of 30 minutes. But when you look more closely, you realize that often people are seeing similar things. So it's a case of, of pulling out the one that's more that's easier to to grasp work or is said more succinctly, rather than rather than the other one, maybe in some cases. But really, the there is no shortage of people who have got things to say about this and in fact there were so many people, the call, the call for people went out also on social media, and there were many that we didn't manage to respond on time. So it couldn't get into the video at all, it probably had some things to say on it as well. Sothere's, there's a huge amount of information and a huge number of people out there who were ready to talk about it, given the opportunity.

Ellen Spannagel 13:38

Um, that's most of the questions I had about the video, but just because the video is, as part of your work, and you know, one of your strategies in your work on this intersection. I wanted to hear more about when you started to do work on disability inclusive climate action, specifically, and how how your work is how your approach to that work has changed. Because you know, as you're saying, like the video has had a positive impact. And it's it is it's something where people are sharing their experiences. It's accessible, it's short, it's easy to watch. What are some mistakes, I guess, that you have made as you started to get into the work of disability, inclusive climate justice and some things you've learned kind of in this process?

Gordon Rattray 14:29

Go ahead Mary.

Mary Keogh 14:30

That's a good question. Ellen Thanks, Gordon. I think it Well, I mean, I can share just internally from our side and CBM global, you know, when we did the research back in 2019, it was kind of putting, you know, more kind of, well, you know, you're struggling between climate justice, climate adaptation, and all of these terminologies that go with it, but generally it was around trying to wear, you know, raise awareness of it. There was a lot of work already done on this with former colleagues and CBM that had, you know, led the way on this. And then you know, with CBM global last year, we adopted an environmental policy last year and, and then also really started looking at what what this means. So now there's a, there's a much more awareness level of it, it was always there, but it's kind of brought it to life. And, you know, there's a new working group set up now within our organization to actually look at this across our advocacy programs and the advisory work that we do. So I think sometimes when you do things from an advocacy perspective, it can bring change into organizations as well, or it can influence this. And so I think, you know, that's what we've kind of seen. And, you know, the mistakes are, I think we all learn, I mean, I'm a firm believer and learn from mistakes, because they make so many of them. But, you know, I think the piece on how do we, how do we position this so that, you know, it's kind of adaptation, and it doesn't create a whole parallel of new work to be done, that we really look at how to integrate this into, you know, the DNA of our organizations, you know, because I think many mistakes have been made in the past with anything that has a thematic aspect to it, like gender, or disability is always nearly seen as a parallel or an add on. So I think the climate piece, we've learned from mistakes in the past, I think the climate piece is so transformative, that it really has to go across everything we do and how we live. So I'm not so sure that answers your question, but I think we can, there's lots of lessons from before about how we bring, you know, a thematic area like this and into our work or an approach as we call it, rather than thematic. Yeah.

Gordon Rattray 16:39

Yeah. And, and I could say, from our perspective, I mean, we're already advocating to the EU that their Green Deal is disability inclusive, so things like when they're considering reconstruction of buildings, or building things in new ways to make sure that it's all done accessibly, and, you know, having accessible transport systems, and that persons with disabilities and their organizations are involved in the planning of all these things from the very beginning. So like, again, like I was saying earlier, you know, for in some ways, it's a case of applying the, of applying the techniques that we've used in the past to this new concept. So focusing on participation of people with disabilities and things like accessibility and inclusion and, and remembering that people with disabilities are often the people who are living more in poverty, so are going to be more impacted by some of the climate mitigation things that may result in price increases that kind of thing. And maybe one of the learnings that certainly I personally I've had quite recently, I wouldn't say this is a year and organizational thing, but personally, I've kind of realized that we should be more and more stressing that we are allies of the climate movement, and not give the perception that we're somehow against the things that are happening, you know, the debates about plastic straws, and but there are solutions for these things. And we're here to provide the solutions, because, you know, we've got the experience of overcoming these problems in other fields. So we need to make sure that the climate movement doesn't see the disability movement as someone who's just or an organization or, or a movement that is just creating problems for them. It's quite the opposite. We know that we're an ally there to make sure that we find that they find solutions that work for everyone.

So in that vein, like what what have you learned about bridging together organizations that are primarily focused on climate and sustainability, and then organizations, working for people with disabilities, who you know, are often working in silos and like you're saying, like the interest of one or the other sometimes, harmfully pitted against the other in like the media and things like that. So what have you learned about trying to have those organizations working towards the same goal and partnering together?

I can, certainly speaking about things in the past where we've where we've made collaborations work in fields like Disaster Risk Reduction and humanitarian action, accessibility. When you get people to understand the benefits of disability inclusion, and for some people, that's really easy, like for web developers, when when they make the click that accessible, websites are more, they work better and they are better for many more people than person with disabilities. When they make that click, the game's over, it's easy. They've got the message. And we've had this experience with with other things in other fields like DRR and and humanitarian and development things and I think it's, it's it's going to happen with the climate the climate discussion as well, we're maybe just at early stages at the moment.

Mary Keogh 20:07

Yeah, I think I mean, you know, as Gordon said, there's been quite a lot of collective action before. And I just think back in terms of, you know, we, as an INGO, you know, the alliances that we work through, like, for example, the International disability development Consortium, the IDDC, you know, really, when we look at the, how the SDGs came about in agenda 2030, that whole collective action, then in partnership with the disability movement is really, really critical. So, you know, then it's looking at so we do you have the experience of collective action. And I think there's, there's probably dialogues that are needed around some of these points like that Gordon spoke to your base, you know, that, you know, the straws conversation, or the those kind of flashpoints that have come up, and to have that kind of, you know, general understanding. But I think, you know, all of what the climate justice movement speak to, is all what the disability movements preferred in terms of equality and redistribution, and just and fair world, I don't think any of us are, you know, in any disagreements with that. So I think there is a bridge pieces for em, for how to start working together even more closely, and how, you know, we can we can bring that collective knowledge into that space as well. So I think movements are never easy, like, as in I don't mean, like any particular movement, but movements in general, collective action, takes time and takes trust to build up. But, you know, it could be seen it being so successful in the past before. So I think we'll continue to see that.

Ellen Spannagel 21:37

Yeah, thank you, thanks for sharing. Um, in terms like, I know, the video that you produced together was about building awareness. And again, just letting the experience of people with disabilities really just speak, like let people with disabilities speak for themselves about their knowledge on climate action. But I'm wondering what, what both of your separate organizations but also like, together as partners and your collaboration, what are your priorities? And you kind of elaborated on this a little bit already, Gordon, but like, what specific priorities for disability inclusive climate action will be? And some of the things like I guess, like putting into action, some of the the things we heard from people in the video on a way forward for disability inclusive climate action, what are some next steps that your organizations and you both together will be working towards?

Gordon Rattray 22:36

Yeah, as you said, I touched on a few earlier. So you know, things like,when identifying and investing in green jobs, make sure that, that people with disabilities are included in are able to get those jobs are included in that new workplace marketplace. When developing new infrastructure, whether it's building infrastructure, or telecommunications, infrastructure that's more Climate Neutral or climate friendly, and make sure that it's also fully accessible, it's always is always financially, in economically good value in the long term, it may be seen as a cost in the beginning, but it shouldn't be seen as a cost, it should be seen as an investment, because long term, it's it's better for everyone. Things like transport, as I said, making sure it's awfully accessible, and making sure that any extra costs that do result as climate action are not going to impact people with disabilities disproportionately. And one of the keys to all that, again, as I said earlier, is having people with disabilities involved from the very beginning in all the discussions and decision making. I mean, these are, these are legal obligations anyway, for governments, it's not something that it's just a nice thing to do. It's actually an obligation. And it's beneficial, and it's going to mean the result is better for everyone.

Mary Keogh 24:11

Yeah, I think as a as INGO, we think there's actions that we can take which are, you know, around kind of supporting capacity building around climate and disability, I think that came out through the video. You know, I mean, in the past, the whole climate discussion has been very technical and scientific. And now we have this this whole discourse around you know, social justice linking climate and social justice together. So, you know, some kind of, um, we're going to be working on a toolkit, that's the next thing now, in the coming weeks around trying to distill down you know, what are the key things to know, you know, in terms of policy, what are the key things to know in terms of trying to influence at national level or at the global level like in terms of COP, and I think one of the the, the, one of the points that struck me from the video was I think was from Jason, who basically said, you know, the need for leadership. So I think, you know, kind of I NGOs working to support opd’s develop leadership, and you know, creates that kind of, you know, co production space around this is really critical, because as Gordon says, it's the voices of persons with disabilities and people disabilities need to be part of the solution to change for climate. So that's really critical role of opd’s today.

Gordon Rattray 25:28

Yeah, and picking up on that, what that requires, is because because OPD’s organizations or persons with disabilities are already full time busy doing things, whether it's whatever it is to do with advocacy towards other parts of life. So what this requires is financial commitment and support, as well as materials and information and education, in capacity building of DPO’S OPD’s It's also a sustainable financial commitment towards building their internal human resources and governance structures so that they can continue to engage, you know, whether it's whether our projects for maybe one or two years that involve a DPO, an OPD, and that funding needs to make sure that that organization of persons with disabilities can continue after the project has finished, to engage at the same level in that topic, otherwise, the money is short term and hasn't been hasn't been useful.

Mary Keogh 26:36

Yeah, all about sustainability. Exactly. I think the research piece as well is really critical. And I think research that's led by persons with disabilities, researchers with disabilities is really, really important to. So I think, you know, really more encouraging programs like that, and, and all of those programs that are now popping up, I'm seeing them in universities everywhere, MA and climate justice MA you know, masters of this and, you know, I think that's the type of thing we start to need to also getting disability inclusion into those curriculums. So that it's, it's considered as much as gender would be as much as you know, working with people who are living in poverty. So I think those intersecting areas are really important also.

Gordon Rattray 27:19

And thinking of a very simple practical solutions, you know for organizations working in the so called mainstream part of climate action, inclusive employment, you know, employ people with disabilities in your organization. That's how you learn about disability inclusion internally. And once you start doing it internally, then then it's automatically going to be externally more inclusive. You know, it's a lot of the times it's, it's these things are not that complicated when you start looking at solutions.

Ellen Spannagel 27:46

So the Yeah, the last question I had was, it was a personal one. And I just wanted to ask you, I guess what has been something important that you have learned in this process of creating the video and then also doing work on disability inclusive climate action, so something that you have learned from either other experts and activists or just a line of thought of yours that maybe has changed or has become more important, you just have been thinking about more and more frequently, just something to leave me with that you have learned personally in this process?

Mary Keogh 28:31

I'm thinking

Gordon Rattray 28:32

For me, it's probably probably a bit of a vague answer. But for me, it's a genuine interest in the topic itself, an increased genuine interest in the topic itself. It's like, some things that you learn more about, you lose less interest in. But with this one, the more I learn about it, the more I'm interested in it. And that's a good thing for sure for, for the fact that I'm probably going to be working in it more and more.But yeah, more more and more genuinely interested in it, the more I knew about it.The old cliche goes as well, very true, the more you know about it, the more you realize you don't know about it, so there's lots to learn.

Mary Keogh 29:16

I think for me, what I learned what I yeah, I mean, yeah, I think the pulling together videos like this, or any type of communications, is really, you know, there's an ethical piece that goes within around co production and getting agreement. And, you know, we went through that whole process. I mean, obviously, you know, getting consent forms and, and that's so, you know, in the production level, that's what struck me around that in terms of learning that that's always kind of you always have to think of, you know, we'd love to technical things as well, that we needed to think about if that came up during the video to make it as fully inclusive as possible. And then just personally around climate. I mean, I think, you know, the more you read about this, the more you realize that this really is about transforming how we live our lives, it really is because we don't really start to think about the impact that we have as individuals. And even while it might be small, it's still an impact on the choices that we can make in our lives to try and be less, have less impact. I think it's really important. And so, to me, you know, that's a critical thing. And also the trying to make it less technical and more about how we want to live our lives and the movement we feel about human rights and equality is something as well, I think that's always learning for us all the time. Yeah.

Ellen Spannagel 30:41

Thank you both for answering the question. And that that was it. That was all the questions I had. But again, like I just wanted to say, if there was something that you felt was missing from the conversation, or a question that I should have asked, please, like, now's the time.

Mary Keogh 31:00

yeah, I mean, I think you could, you know, you could ask, like, for listeners, you know, in terms of your own, you know, particularly if there are kind of persons with disabilities listening, or people from kind of social movements, and you're engaged with with government on this is asked the question, where is disability in the climate policy? Or is the I think that's a critical piece, even just that starting point is, is really important to do? And would be maybe just one follow up again,

Ellen Spannagel 31:31

That's hugely helpful. Gordon, is there anything you'd like to say?

Gordon Rattray 31:35

No, not really, I guess I was thinking that it's probably pretty clear from the video, as we said at the beginning, as well, but it's very much about personal perspectives. And we don't mention during the video, any of the legal obligations that we touched on earlier in the conversation. So it's really whenever anyone is watching the video, or using the video or planning to use the video in any of their work. Remember that it's not just these are not just personal opinions, or people, you know, these things are, are, are grounded in, in legal documents and governments are legally obliged to include people with disabilities. And those documents those frameworks and, and, and laws exist. So maybe in the future, we'll do something else we'll add something onto this video, maybe make it more appropriate for different contexts, I don't know. But, but everything that said in the video is is underpinned by, by legal documents, the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, it's all in there, and it all holds the duty bearers to account. So it's not just nice thoughts from nice people.

Ellen Spannagel 32:47

Yeah, yeah, absolutely. Well, I wanted to thank you both for taking the time to answer all my questions and to talk about the process of creating the video. And for those of you listening to the podcast, remember that the video that Gordon and Mary helped produce, disability inclusive climate justice, is linked to this podcast episode and be sure to check it out.

Thank you for listening to Enabling Commons. Stay tuned for our next episode, and take care