

Nirmita Narasimhan

Summary

Nirmita is a Policy Director with the Centre for Internet and Society, working in the areas of policy research and advocacy related to IP reform and technology access for persons with disabilities. She is involved in drafting the Indian National Policy for Electronic Accessibility and also works closely with different departments of the Government of India to bring accessibility into their policies and programmes. She has authored several reports on accessibility which are being used by policymakers worldwide. She has also presented papers on ICT and Accessibility at international fora like the IGF and is the Director, Global Reports, for G3ict. She has also participated in the World Blind Union Treaty negotiations at WIPO. Nirmita has won several awards for her work, one of which was the National Award for Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities, which she received from the President of India in December 2010. Her educational background includes degrees in Law, German and Music.

Experience

Centre for Internet and Society - Research and Advocacy

2008- till date

As a Policy Director with the Centre for Internet and Society, Nirmita's current work focuses on copyright reform, accessibility, Intellectual Property reform, working with disability organizations, governments and UN bodies in advocating for digital accessibility, promoting open access with the Government of India and other issues which are part of the policy space in ICT accessibility in India.

Key Achievements

Some of Nirmita's key achievements are listed below:

Awards

- Received the [National Award](#) for Empowerment of Persons With Disabilities from the President of India in December 2010
- Conferred the [NIVH \(National Institute for the Visually Handicapped\) Excellence Award](#) in December 2011

Advocacy

- Spearheaded successful campaign to amend the Indian Copyright Law to incorporate exceptions and limitations for the print disabled - the amendments were passed in 2012, paving the way for print disabled persons in India to get access to books in alternative formats. The effort included carrying out and submitting detailed research

on the legality of exceptions and limitations for the print disabled under Indian copyright law to the government , bringing together all stakeholders and disability rights organizations and running public awareness campaigns and meeting with government representatives, parliamentarians and publishers, time and again, to present the case for accessibility

- Launched and carried out four [Right to Read campaigns](#) around India in collaboration with other partners in [Chennai](#), Calcutta and New Delhi to raise awareness on the need to amend copyright law. As part of the public awareness campaigns, Nirmita was interviewed by several newspapers as well as the NDTV – Hindu Metro television channel
- Regularly [participated](#) in the negotiations for a Treaty for Persons with Print Disabilities taking place at the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) as NGO observer.
- Member of the [Dynamic Coalition on accessibility and Disability](#) at the Internet Governance Forum (IGF).
- Participated in the [Right to Read event](#) held in the European parliament in May 2010 and participated in the UN expert committee on implementation of the UNCRPD with respect to ICT and electronic accessibility for persons with disabilities in developing countries in June 2010.
- Featured on the ITU [‘Girls in ICT’](#) portal
- Hosted several accessibility related events at the CIS office such as the Access India Bangalore meeting in 2009, Bookshare meeting and Retina India meetings on a regular basis

Policy

- Participated as an ITU accessibility expert in ITU- Nepal Telecom Authority [workshops](#) on making mobile phones accessible for persons with disabilities and co-authored report making suitable policy recommendations for promoting accessibility
- Was a member of the [IT core group](#), part of the advocacy initiatives launched by the National Centre for the Promotion of Employment of Disabled People (NCPEDP) for the implementation of the UNCRPD in India
- Participated in the drafting process for the Indian National Electronic Accessibility Policy of the Department of IT
- Serves on the [advisory board to NASSCOM](#) (software industry association in India) as accessibility expert

- Worked closely with different departments and bodies of the Government of India such as the Department of Information Technology and the Universal Service Obligation Fund (USOF) to bring in accessibility into their policies and programmes. The USOF has since introduced a [scheme specifically for persons with disabilities](#), for the first time in India.
- Prepared a report for UNESCO on documenting inclusive education policies and good practices on the use of ICT in education for persons with disabilities in the Asia Pacific region.
- Organized an international conference on Enabling Access to Education through ICT for persons with disabilities (www.edict2010.in) in October 2010 in New Delhi, in collaboration with UNESCO, ITU, WIPO, G3ict and several Indian partners.
- Organized the [Focus group meeting](#) on Audio visual media accessibility for ITU-T in February 2012 in New Delhi.

Research and Publications

- Edited a print handbook on e-accessibility for policy makers, which is an abridged version of the E-accessibility Toolkit for Persons with Disabilities, a joint publication of G3ict-ITU. The handbook was sent to regulators and ministries of IT in all the member states of ITU and has also been translated into [Russian](#). These publications are available on www.e-accessibilitytoolkit.org as well as the CIS [website](#).
- Prepared reports in the capacity of ITU accessibility expert, on making mobile phones and services accessible for persons with disabilities in [Nepal](#) and Afghanistan. The reports study the existing legal and policy framework for e-accessibility in these countries and makes specific policy recommendations
- Researched and published reports in the capacity of expert for ITU and UNESCO on accessible mobile telephony and accessible ICT for education in the Asia Pacific region
- Presented papers in international fora like the IGF and the Asia Pacific conference on mainstreaming ICT technologies which was held in Bangkok in August 2009. The focus of these was primarily policy formulation for ICT and electronic accessibility.
- Published report on [Universal service for Persons with Disabilities](#)
- Authored [paper “Web Accessibility Policy making – An International Perspective”](#) which involved a comparison of global internet and electronic accessibility policies and identifying common themes and best practices. The report is available in both print and electronic formats on the G3ict and CIS web sites.
- Published [“Accessibility of Government websites in India : A Report”](#) which involved conducting a survey of 7800 websites of the Government of India for accessibility. The

report analyzed the results of this survey and was sent to all ministries and departments for IT in Indian states and union territories.

- Published article "[Technology for Accessibility in Higher Education](#)" in a commemorative journal of the Indian Institute of Management, Bangalore, on Enabling Access for Persons with Disabilities to Higher Education and Workplace - Role of ICT and Assistive Technologies.
- Published an article "[The Business Case for Web Accessibility](#)" as part of NASSCOM Foundation's accessibility handbook titled "Understanding Web Accessibility — A Guide to create Accessible Work Environments"
- Advised the government of the Indian state of Madhya Pradesh on issuing a notification to make their electronic communication accessible. Based on this, the government issued [a notification](#) mandating adherence to WCAG 2.0 and use of Unicode font for all their departments.
- Currently directing research on accessibility in specific sectors in India, with the aim of presenting the information to the concerned authorities and relevant stakeholders for discussions and action. One of the sectors under consideration is [banking](#).

Capability building

- Presently managing a project to develop the open source screen reader NVDA to make it compatible with Indian languages and to develop Text-To-Speech (TTS) capability for 15 Indian languages. This will widen the reach of accessible ICT to a large section of the Indian population who are only conversant with regional languages.
- Also supervising a project to compile a [national resource kit](#) of laws, policies and programmes on persons with disabilities in different states and union territories which will be compiled and published both in English and Hindi and sent to NGOs, governments and panchayats(local administration at the village level) throughout India.
- Completed a [project for digitization of higher education books](#) into the daisy format along with the Indian Institute of Technology, Kharagpur and the Daisy Forum of India. This project came under the scheme of the National Mission for Education through ICT (NMEICT) under the Ministry of Human Resource and Development.
- Conducted several national level workshops on web accessibility for web developers around India, notably in Delhi, Bangalore, Thiruvananthapuram and Chennai.
- Organized a national conference on the use of ICT for empowerment of persons with disabilities along with Loyola College, Chennai in 2009.

- Carried out projects for the National Internet Exchange of India (NIXI) which included conducting a web accessibility workshop and putting up a wiki on accessibility which can be found at accessibility.cis-india.org
- Arranged for the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.0 to be translated into Hindi. This is now on [W3C India's website](#).

Applied Law Services – Associate Lawyer

2004- 2005

- Awarded the MS Lin Scholarship (sole Indian recipient in 2005) by the Inter Pacific Bar Association (IPBA) and attended the IPBA conference in Bali, as an MS Lin scholar in May 2005;
- From 2004-2005, worked with Applied Law Services – a corporate law firm in Delhi and dealt with drafting agreements, memorandums etc, carrying out research and giving legal advice

Prior legal experience

2003-2005

- Worked as an associate lawyer with Mr. Rungta (Advocate, Delhi High Court) on a variety of cases, in both lower as well as appellate courts and also gained exposure to practice in tribunals as well as other quasi-judicial bodies.
- Carried out some freelance research on Indian environmental law and wildlife protection.

Other Interests

German

- Studied the German language for four years (1995-1999), and during this period acquired fluency in the language and gained an in depth knowledge of the history, literature and culture of Germanic countries.
- Stood first in the BA (Hon's) course in German at Jawaharlal Nehru University in 1998
- Has worked as freelance translator and German instructor

Indian Classical Music

- Student of Dr. Radha Venkatachalam, Professor of Music, Delhi University and under the guidance of Sri T.R. Subramaniam, renowned Karnatic music maestro.

- Recipient of the Sahitya Kala Parishad scholarship from the Delhi Government for advanced study in the field of Karnatic music
- Gold Medallist in MA (Music) in Delhi University and has submitted dissertation towards a PhD in Karnatic Music, at Delhi University
- Accredited artiste with All India Radio and has given many performances at festivals and concert venues across India

Education

Degree	Institution	Year
PHD (submitted dissertation)	Faculty of Music, Delhi University	Ongoing
M. Phil	Faculty of Music, Delhi University	2006 (Ranked 1 st)
L.L.B *	Campus Law Centre, Faculty of Law, Delhi University	2002
MA	Faculty of Music, Delhi University	2004 (Gold medalist)
BA (Hon's) German	Jawaharlal Nehru University	1998 (Ranked 1 st)
Sangeet Shiromani (Karnatic Music)	Delhi University	1997

Personal Details

Date of Birth : 1st July, 1978

Address : D-2-2122, Sobha Ruby Apartments, Nagasandra Post, 8th Mile, Tumkur road, Bengaluru, Karnataka, India. 560073

Telephone : +91 80 23746131

Mob: +91 98458 68078

Email : nirmita@cis-india.org,

nirmita.n@gmail.com

Marital Status: Married, with one daughter