

Nirmita Narasimhan

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Summary

Nirmita, a Policy Director with the Centre for Internet and Society, works in the areas of policy research and advocacy related to technology access for persons with disabilities. A globally reputed accessibility advocate, she has worked with governments in India and abroad and intergovernmental organisations to bring accessibility into policies and programmes. She has worked with global organizations like G3ict and ITU to author several reports on accessibility which are being used by policymakers worldwide. Nirmita has received many awards for her work, including the National award from the president of India in 2010. Her educational background includes degrees in Law, German and Music.

Awards

- [NCPEDP-Mphasis Universal Design Award](#) for exemplary work in the field of Universal Design in August 2016
- [NIVH \(National Institute for the Visually Handicapped\) Excellence Award](#) in December 2011
- [National Award](#) for Empowerment of Persons With Disabilities, December 2010
- MS Lin Scholarship in 2005) by the Inter Pacific Bar Association (IPBA)

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 work spans copyright reform, various domains of electronic accessibility, partnering with disability organizations, governments and UN bodies in advocating for digital accessibility, promoting open source assistive technology and other issues which are part of the policy space in ICT accessibility in India and globally.

Advocacy

- Played a key role in 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 multi-year effort included detailed research on the legality of exceptions and limitations for the print disabled under Indian copyright law, bringing together stakeholders and disability rights organizations, running a Right to Read campaign in collaboration with other partners to raise public awareness, meeting with government representatives, parliamentarians and publishers to push the case for accessibility.
- Participated in key international fora including the [World Intellectual Property Organisation \(WIPO\) negotiations on the Marrakesh Treaty](#) to facilitate access to published works for persons who are blind, visually impaired or otherwise print disabled, [Right to Read event](#) held in the European parliament in May 2010 and 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.

Policy

- Over the years, served as an ICT accessibility expert with global and Indian organizations such

as ITU, UNESCO, NASSCOM Advisory board; also featured on the ITU [‘Girls in ICT’](#) portal. Board member, CPR South, Aarti Labs

- As an ITU expert on ICT accessibility for persons with disabilities, contributed to many reports including [global report on mobile phones](#), ITU [e- accessibility handbook for policy makers](#) (as editor), prepared detailed reports on access to ICTs and mobile phones for the regulatory authorities of Nepal and Afghanistan and submitted a joint report with G3ict and ITU on Inclusive Disaster Management for persons with disabilities and other vulnerable groups to the meetings of the ITU-D study groups 1 and 2 in March and April 2017.
- As expert engaged by UNESCO, drafted Accessible ICT procurement Policy and Guidelines for Accessible Publication for the Government of Uganda in 2015.
- Participated in the drafting process for the [Indian National Electronic Accessibility Policy](#) notified by the Department of electronics and Information Technology in October 2013.
- Played a key role to bring accessibility into the policies and programmes of different departments of the Government of India such as the Universal Service Obligation Fund (USOF), Department of Information Technology etc. The USOF has since introduced a [scheme specifically for persons with disabilities](#), for the first time in India.
- Organized international conferences and discussions on accessibility, such as [EDICT](#) (Enabling Access to Education through ICT for persons with disabilities) in collaboration with UNESCO, ITU, WIPO, G3ict and several Indian partners and the [Focus group meeting](#) on Audio visual media accessibility for ITU-T (2012).
- Provided comments to the Government of India on the Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities’ [Vision Document 2030](#) and the [draft Rights of Persons with Disabilities Rules](#).

Research and Publications

- [e-Accessibility Policy Handbook for Persons with Disabilities](#) (Editor, print version) 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](#).
- Making mobile phones and services accessible for persons with disabilities in [Nepal](#) and Afghanistan.
- ITU and UNESCO on [accessible mobile telephony](#) and accessible ICT for education in the Asia Pacific region respectively.
- 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.
- [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."
- Provided an advisory note to 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.
- Directed publication of 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. For instance, reports have been prepared on [Banking](#) and accessible broadcasting and emergency response and submitted to the relevant ministries and agencies.

- Compiled and published in partnership with the Office of the Chief Commissioner for Persons with Disabilities a book titled the [National Compendium on Policies, Programmes and Schemes for Persons with Disabilities](#) for persons with disabilities in both English and Hindi.

Other publications

- [The ICT Opportunity for a Disability-Inclusive Development Framework](#): as part of a report by the Broadband Commission for Digital Development, G3ict, IDA, ITU, Microsoft, the Telecentre.org Foundation and UNESCO.
- [Universal service for Persons with Disabilities](#): Published by G3ict in cooperation with the Hans Foundation.
- [Web Accessibility Policy making – An International Perspective](#): Published by G3ict in cooperation with the Hans Foundation.
- [Accessibility of Government websites in India: A Report](#)
- [Inclusive Disaster and Emergency Management for Persons with Disabilities](#): Submitted to the National Disaster Management Authority of India.
- [Accessibility of Political Parties Websites in India](#)
- [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.
- [Inclusive Financial Services - Global Trends in Accessibility Requirements](#): published by G3ict.

Capability building

- Implemented a project to enhance the open source screen reader NVDA to make it compatible with Indian languages and to develop Text-To-Speech (TTS) capability for 10 Indian languages. This has widened the reach of accessible ICT to a large section of the Indian population who are only conversant with regional languages. A brief demonstration of NVDA may be found [here](#).
- Organised web accessibility trainings for web developers around India and set up a wiki on accessibility at [accessibility.cis-india.org](#) in collaboration with National Internet Exchange of India (NIXI)
- Organized a [national conference](#) on the use of ICT for empowerment of persons with disabilities along with Loyola College, Chennai in 2009.
- Arranged for the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.0 to be translated into Hindi. This is now on [W3C India's website](#).

Media Publications

- [An India Where the Disabled have a Choice](#) (Dataquest, August 5, 2016)
- [We Tested 18 Government Apps, and Most are not Fully Accessible to the Disabled](#) (Factor Daily, August 31, 2016)
- [Mobile Apps Are Excluding Millions Of Indians Who Want To Use Them](#) (Huffington Post; September 22, 2016)
- [Why Are There So Few Books For The Print-Impaired?](#) (Huffington Post; November 3, 2016)

- [The Quest for Education](#) (Your Story; November 24, 2016)

Prior experience

2003-2005

- Worked as an associate lawyer on a variety of cases (drafting agreements, memoranda, carrying out research and giving legal advice) with Applied Law services as well as other senior lawyers in lower as well as appellate courts in Delhi

Education

- PhD (Karnatic Music), Faculty of Music, Delhi University (2013)
- L.L.B, Campus Law Centre, Faculty of Law, Delhi University (2002)
- B.A. Hon's (German), Jawaharlal Nehru University (1998)