



# Atlas Alliance

## Global Disability Summit (GDS) Mobilization Manual

Experiences by the Atlas Alliance mobilizing for the GDS 2022

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# Table of contents

Global Disability Summit (GDS) Mobilization Manual .....	1
GDS Mobilization Manual .....	3
Executive summary .....	3
Glossary of terms .....	5
Introduction .....	8
What is the GDS Mobilization Manual? .....	8
Methodology .....	11
Mobilization for the GDS 2022 .....	12
Strategy .....	12
Mobilization Activities .....	13
Challenges .....	21
Outcomes .....	27
Summary of the most useful outcomes .....	27
Key Lessons Learned .....	33
Summary of Main Recommendations to Mobilizers (CSOs): .....	35
Mobilizing for GDS Youth .....	38
Summary of key lessons learned .....	42

# GDS Mobilization Manual

- based on the Atlas Alliance's experience of mobilizing for the Global Disability Summit 2022.

## Executive summary

The total amount spent on world-wide Official Development Assistance (ODA) was almost 1800 billion USD in 2021. Yet the number of projects targeting persons with disabilities made up less than 2 % of the international aid projects between 2014 and 2018. Aid projects targeting disability inclusion represent less than 0.5 % of all international financing between 2014 and 2018. That is why mobilizing civil society to push the alarm button is important.

To capitalize on the available resources, we need strong DPOs that communicate clearly to their country leaders what they should prioritize. And we need leaders who are willing to listen. We have developed this manual, based on our mobilization of DPOs and civil society for the Global Disability Summit 2022, to nudge DPOs around the world to assume this role in their country context.

The manual starts with a brief introduction and historical background, then takes you straight to the mobilization activities conducted, what worked and what didn't work quite as well. It then presents the challenges, most prominently that the commitments were not ambitious and clear enough – especially those from the OECD-DAC countries – and that the voices of the grassroots and most marginalized groups are not heard as clearly as they should.

In addition, a real challenge to the mobilization was the late and incomplete information communicated about the GDS, its purpose and the mechanisms to submit commitments. The youth summit, organized by and for youth with disabilities, should also have been better integrated into the planning and communication work for the high-level event. That way we could have drawn more attention to this particularly vulnerable and important group and the number and quality of commitments targeting youth could have been higher.

The recommendations are summarized in the chapter Key Lessons Learned. Key recommendations are:

- Start planning early
- Communicate clearly
- Quality over quantity – support governments, donors and other stakeholders to prepare solid commitments that will make a real change for persons with disability
- Commitments should be guided by SMART indicators, and should ideally lead to increased and traceable funding

## The GDS 2022 in a nutshell

The GDS 2022 consisted of three events, the High-Level Summit at 16-17.02, a Civil Society Forum at 15.02 and a Youth Summit at 14.04, 2022. All three events were online, due to the corona pandemic.

The Youth Summit (or GDS Youth) differed from the other two events both in duration and in the use of online platform, where the co-hosts (IDA, UNICEF, the Atlas Alliance and Youth Mental Health Norway) decided to do a 24-hour Zoom-webinar to ensure inclusion of youth in all time zones. More about this in chapter 6 of the manual, *Mobilizing for GDS Youth*.

- DPOs should lead the mobilization work and assume a leading role in partnerships with other CSOs when it comes to mobilization and advocacy for the GDS
- The most marginalized groups and their representative organizations must be included in the planning processes and their views reflected in the outcomes of the GDS

At the very end of this manual, you will find a section on the mobilization for GDS Youth. GDS Youth was a 24-hour digital journey of the time zones, including panel debates and interactive discussions, led by youth with disabilities from all continents. It produced a 16-point charter – the Youth Call for Action – consisting of pleas to the world leaders on the most important things that need to change to fully include youth with disabilities in society.

Recommendations for mobilizing attendance and advocacy ahead of GDS Youth 2025, based on the experience of working towards the GDS Youth 2022, are listed.



*Photo by: Somali Disability Network.*

## What is the Atlas Alliance?

The Atlas Alliance is an umbrella organization of disabled persons' organizations working to promote the rights and improve the living conditions of people with disabilities in the Global South. Our goals are equal rights for all and that all Norwegian development aid and humanitarian efforts are inclusive and traceable.

The Atlas Alliance was established by organizations of persons with disabilities in 1981. The organizations that created the foundation were:

- The Norwegian Association of Disabled,
- The Norwegian Federation of Organizations of Disabled Persons,
- The Norwegian Association of the Blind and Partially Sighted, and
- The Norwegian Association of Persons with Developmental Disabilities

Later, the Norwegian Association for Spina Bifida and Hydrocephalus, Youth Mental Health Norway, and Signo joined the alliance.

## Glossary of terms

**Advocacy:** Active engagement by civil society actors, such as OPDs and NGOs, to influence policy makers and other duty bearers to make changes. Changes can include creating supportive policies for persons with disabilities, reforms of harmful traditions affecting the rights of persons with disabilities or ensuring the funding and implementation of supportive policies and programs.

If executed well, advocacy can achieve the following:

- **Policy change:** For example, the Millennium Development Goals did not include persons with disabilities; after a strong advocacy campaign by disability activists, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) now include persons with disabilities.
- **Change in practice:** For example, a local school does not have classrooms ramps, advocacy by students with disabilities and their families results in the construction of ramps.
- **Change in social, behavioral, or political attitudes:** For instance, carrying out an advocacy campaign to ban or regulate certain cultural practices that inhibit disability inclusion.

**The Atlas Alliance:** The Atlas Alliance is a Norwegian umbrella organization of DPOs working to fulfill the human rights of persons with disabilities in developing countries.

**Civil society:** Is made up of citizens and organizations outside of government and business. NGOs (Non-Governmental Organizations) are part of civil society. CSOs and International NGOs (INGOs) are also considered to be part of civil society.

**COSP:** Conference of State Parties to the United Nations Convention of Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN CRPD).

**CSOs:** Civil Society Organizations.

DPOs: Disabled Persons' Organizations. The term refers to the social model used to define disability, implying that persons are disabled by the barriers in society, not their impairments. DPOs are the legitimate representative organizations of persons with disabilities and work to fulfill the human rights of disabled people. Persons with disabilities or their families must make up most members and board members. Some in the disability movement have chosen to use the term OPD (see below).

Duty-bearers: Duty-bearers are those actors who have a particular obligation or responsibility to respect, promote and realize human rights and to abstain from human rights violations. The term is most commonly used to refer to State actors, but non-State actors can also be considered duty-bearers.

EDF: European Disability Forum, the regional DPO umbrella for Europe.

GDS: Stands for Global Disability Summit. The first two Summits took place in 2018 and 2022 and brought together global leaders to galvanize the efforts to address disability inclusion in development, through new international and national commitments.

Gender: Gender refers to differences in social roles and relations, while "sex" refers to biologically determined differences.

IDA: International Disability Alliance. Created in 1999, this umbrella organization of DPOs focuses on improving awareness and rights for individuals with disabilities around the globe.

NGOs: Non-Governmental Organizations.

NMFA: Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Norad: The Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation.

OPDs: Organizations of Persons with Disabilities. OPDs and DPOs are used interchangeably, but those who use 'OPD' see this as the more legitimate term, placing 'person' before the disability part of their identity. As a rule of thumb, any person should be able to choose what others should refer to them as. DPO and OPD mean the same.

Policy: A course of action adopted or proposed by an organization or individual. It can include a plan, strategy, program, human rights instrument, budget decision, piece of legislation, or set of regulations/protocols issued by a government, multinational entity, or institution.

**Policymakers:** Typically, government officials or people with formal political power (e.g., parliamentarians, ministers, local council personnel, etc.).

**Rights holders:** Unlike duty bearers (who have obligations to fulfill the right), rights holders are those who actually own the said rights.

**PWDs:** Persons with Disabilities. You might encounter this abbreviation; however, we do not use abbreviations when speaking or writing about human beings.

**SDGs:** Sustainable Development Goals. They are a collection of 17 interlinked global goals designed to be a "blueprint for achieving a better and more sustainable future for all." The SDGs were set up in 2015 by the United Nations General Assembly and should be achieved by 2030. The SDGs are underpinned by the principle "Leave no one behind", which has long been a popular slogan for the disability rights movement as well.

**SMART:** Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time-bound.

**SRHR:** Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights.

**Stigma:** This is a multi-faceted process of devaluation that considerably demeans an individual in the eyes of others. Within cultures or settings, specific attributes are viewed and defined by others as discreditable or unworthy. The consequence of stigma is often discrimination and exclusion. Discrimination is a form of human rights violation against, for example, persons with disabilities.

**TOFI:** Together for Inclusion. This is a ground-breaking partnership where 15 Norwegian DPOs and NGOs have joined forces to implement an innovative program with their local partners in six African countries. The overarching goal of the program is that the rights of persons with disabilities in the project countries are fulfilled. TOFI is a direct result of the advocacy work coming out of the 2018 GDS, as well as continued policy work from Norwegian DPOs and NGOs. TOFI is funded by Norad and started operating in late 2019, with the Atlas Alliance as the consortium lead.

**UN:** United Nations. The UN has 193 Member States.

**UN CRPD:** UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. It is an international human rights instrument to promote, protect, and ensure the full and equal enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms by all persons with disabilities and promote respect for their inherent dignity.

# Introduction

## What is the GDS Mobilization Manual?

This document, the GDS Mobilization Manual, is a guide for the DPOs in the host countries of the GDS 2025 (and coming summits). It takes you through the Atlas Alliance's experience of mobilizing DPOs and CSOs to advocate for commitments at the Global Disability Summit and raising awareness of disability rights on the national level.

The manual can also be useful for any civil society organizations working on disability rights, and wanting to mobilize DPOs, or the broader civil society, ahead of any event that is conducive to moving the UN CRPD and the SDG's agendas ahead.

This manual is what the GDS Team at the Norwegian DPO umbrella, the Atlas Alliance, wishes we'd had from the beginning of the GDS 2022 mobilization process. The hope is that the manual will contribute to making the mobilization even more effective and seamless for those involved in the next GDS, and in other future happenings.

## Why mobilize?

The term "mobilization" means: *"The action of making something movable or capable of movement"*. In the context of the Global Disability Summit the mobilization is the attempt to make the importance of the GDS known to, and understood by, first and foremost, the DPOs. The Atlas Alliance wants the DPOs to see the opportunities the GDS provides for them and their individual mandates to promote disability rights, if used properly.

Mobilizing is important because a better-informed disability rights movement in the global South - and North - can do even more impactful advocacy going forward. Advocacy can change national and international policies, and policies directly impact lives when implemented.

Persons with disabilities are the largest minority in the world. At least 15 % of the world's population live with disabilities and the number is likely to be higher in poor and conflict affected countries. However, persons with disabilities often remain excluded and forgotten, and are rarely mentioned in laws, policies, and development plans that affect them.

Therefore – mobilizing DPOs and civil society to use the GDS to advocate for disability rights is important! The DPOs and the disabled persons we represent cannot afford to miss any opportunity to improve their situation. The GDS is one such opportunity!

## Historical background

The GDS 2022 was the second in history, after the GDS 2018 which took place in London, hosted by the UK's development office (then "DFID"), the Kenyan Government and the International Disability Alliance (IDA).

Among the main outcomes in 2018 were more than 900 commitments and the [Charter for Change](#), which summed up the collective ambitions of all stakeholders and



participants in the first summit. More than 300 organizations and governments signed the GDS 2018 Charter for Change, encouraging targeted implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

The first Global Disability Summit represented a historic moment in the efforts to promote disability inclusion and the rights of persons with disabilities in development cooperation and humanitarian response. GDS 2018 generated a new level of focus on, and commitment to, disability inclusive development.

### **From London to Oslo**

The GDS 2022 took place during the COVID-19 pandemic and was therefore an online event, aired from a studio in Oslo, Norway. The fact that participation would be digital meant that no visas, invitations or plane tickets were needed to participate. This lowered the bar for attendance and contributed to significant online activity and engagement on disability issues in the run-up to the GDS.

As a result, GDS 2022 enjoyed very high attendance, both in the high-level meeting, the 91 side-events, the Civil Society Forum that preceded the high-level meeting and the 24-hour Youth summit that was organized by youth with disabilities in conjunction with the GDS. More than 11 700 individuals registered for the four days the GDS virtually unfolded on screens around the world (3029 for the Youth summit, 1463 for the Civil Society Forum and 7112 for the high-level meeting).

Hosted by the Norwegian MFA (NMFA), the Government of Ghana, and IDA (as the permanent host representing DPOs globally), this summit gathered speakers from more than 50 countries and generated a total of 1420 commitments. Both summits shared the aim to call on donors, countries, and stakeholders to make all ongoing and new development and humanitarian initiatives rights-based and inclusive of persons with disabilities.

During the preparations for GDS 2022 the NMFA sought advice from the Atlas Alliance and invited Atlas into the Steering Committee as an observer. The Ghanaian DPO umbrella GFD eventually played an equal role, but they were involved much later, as it was only made official in December 2021 that Ghana would be co-hosting the summit.

This manual presents recommendations for the coordinating DPO mobilizers in the host countries of the GDS 2025, and future summits.

### **Objectives**

The question of what the GDS is and is not, has been a frequent topic of discussion between the parties involved, since it resembles other international events, such as the annual conference of state parties to the UN CRPD (COSP).

As we see it, the Global Disability Summit is:

*A top-level international meeting focusing on disability inclusive development and humanitarian action, anchored in article 11 and 32<sup>1</sup> of the UN CRPD, and hosted by one Northern and one Southern country, in partnership with IDA.*

It serves the following three important functions:

- 1) That of a state party meeting, similar to the COSP, in the sense that it provides an incentive for states to move their CRPD implementation plans forward, to show the progress made “at home” to the world during GDS;
- 2) That of a fundraiser, as many of the commitments include promises of specific funds to be put towards specific issues, i.e. USAID’s commitment from GDS 2022 to leverage the work of ATscale with 25 million USD (although the wording is vague and only states that they *anticipate* leveraging the mentioned amount);
- 3) That of a pledging conference on international development and humanitarian action, as stakeholders’ intentions to work on specific priorities are pledged – be it commitments to increase funding, conduct activities or change policy.

At the GDS donors, countries, and stakeholders are encouraged to make all development- and humanitarian efforts, bot new and ongoing, rights-based and inclusive of persons with disabilities. Governments and other influential stakeholders are called upon to make policy changes, for the benefit of persons with disabilities, on the national and international levels.

Another crucial function of the GDS is that it contributes to raising awareness of disability rights and the work of DPOs in society at large. DPOs and civil society have a great opportunity as well as an important role in both spreading the word and advocating towards governments and other stakeholders for the commitments they want to see.

Moreover, after the commitments are pledged civil society has very powerful arguments to catalyze change. As the Norwegian Minister of International Development Anne Beathe Tvinnereim put it in her closing speech at GDS 2022: *London and Oslo and the next summit are important events, but the real change happens at country level, at community level, and at the individual level.*

### **What makes the GDS different from other global top-level meetings?**

The GDS is founded on volunteerism rather than obligations in international law, i.e. UN conventions and treaties. The governments and stakeholders are motivated to commit to improvement, nationally or internationally, because it is the “right thing to do”, not by deadlines to implement their obligations under UN CRPD. The progress in implementation of commitments is only reported on by the stakeholders themselves. Thus, political will is of essence.

Moreover, the Conference of State Parties to the CRPD (COSP) monitors the implementation of the CRPD on country level. The GDS is about disability in development and the implementation of articles 11 and 32<sup>2</sup>. Yet, the agendas are

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<sup>1</sup> UNCRPD articles 11 and 32:

[Article 11 – Situations of risk and humanitarian emergencies | United Nations Enable](#)  
[Article 32 – International cooperation | United Nations Enable](#)

linked, as development for some Northern governments means CRPD implementation in the South (but of course the Northern countries also have a long way to go to realize the aim of the CRPD).

### **The Vision**

The vision for the GDS was defined in planning documents by the Steering committee, consisting of IDA and the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (before Ghana became an official co-host):

*“A truly inclusive, engaging and game changing summit, uniting all stakeholders for new commitments and partnerships to promote disability rights and equal opportunities for persons with disabilities.”*

This was the overall goal of the Global Disability Summit in 2022:

*“To promote the implementation of the CRPD and the SDGs at all levels, as well as increasing the engagement from bilateral actors, international development agencies, the UN, INGOs and other development partners, building on the principle of “Leaving no one behind”.*

### **Going forward: “The GDS has become an institution”**

The above-mentioned vision and mission should be decided upon by the co-host governments together – however Norway and Ghana were established as the co-hosts for GDS 2022 rather late. The fact that the hosts of the next GDS were announced already during the GDS 2022, is an important step in the right direction. It will no doubt be positive for the collaboration of the co-hosts that the group is defined three years ahead of the event, enabling them to embark on the planning calmly and united.

As the Norwegian Prime Minister put it during the celebration of the GDS on May 30<sup>th</sup> 2022, “the GDS has become an institution”. The fact that this institution lives on and is being repeatedly organized is good news for the disability movement.

### **Methodology**

The recommendations in this manual are based on the experiences of the Atlas Alliance and partners, and backed by the following data sources:

- Two regional evaluations where interviews are conducted and data collected in 12 sample countries in two continents (Africa and Asia);
- Reports from grantees in nine countries in Latin America, Asia and Africa;
- Continuous feedback documented by meeting notes from 18 meetings with 14 Norwegian organizations (seven DPOs and seven NGOs) in a GDS-focused civil society reference group;
- Data collected from a questionnaire shared with all CSOs in the various Atlas Alliance networks;
- The data set from the GDS participant survey distributed by the GDS Secretariat (IDA);
- Notes from various meetings between June 2021 and September 2022.

# Mobilization for the GDS 2022

## Rationale

The Atlas Alliance (Atlas) conducted activities to mobilize civil society, mostly DPOs, in the run-up to the Global Disability Summit 2022. The rationale was two-fold:

- 1) To get the civil society actors to advocate towards their governments, influencing them to submit GDS commitments that could make the most needed difference in their national contexts.
- 2) To get the civil society actors to raise awareness at national level about the Global Disability Summit and its potential for the disability rights movement to advance the causes of the many differently focused DPOs.

By these initiatives the Atlas Alliance wanted to contribute to a global advocacy movement of DPOs voicing their rights and calling for the implementation of the CRPD and the SDG slogan: Leave no one behind.

This chapter takes you through the mobilization activities conducted, discusses how useful they were for the overall purpose, and concludes with corresponding recommendations: What would we have done differently, what would we have scaled up or down or dropped completely, knowing what we know now?

## Strategy

For the Atlas Alliance the first step in the mobilization work was to write a strategy and discuss it with the Board. The strategy laid out the goals and objectives for Atlas in its efforts to mobilize for the GDS. This is what the Atlas strategy stated that we wanted to achieve with its GDS mobilization:

- Spreading of knowledge about and establish a common understanding of what GDS is and what GDS can contribute to, as well as defining the difference between GDS and Conference of State Parties (COSP).
- Ensuring clear, concrete and ambitious political goals for GDS that promote equality and participation, and that respond to the great challenges the disabled in the Global South face.
- Broad and representative participation from both the authorities and disabled people's organizations (DPOs), as well as from groups of disabled people who are particularly marginalized, both in the preparation and implementation of GDS.
- Supporting active advocacy work from DPOs in the preparation, implementation and follow-up of GDS, both in countries where we already have a presence and in other countries where we can promote the cooperation model from Together for Inclusion (TOFI).
- Development and distribution of relevant information and advocacy materials and using mobile technology and social media to support advocacy work and spread knowledge and engagement.
- Promoting gender equality and contributing to the best possible representation of all genders.
- Mobilizing and cooperating closely with networks and international organizations such as IDA, IDDC, TOFI international networks / partners.

All these points were intended to contribute to the overall goal of the GDS, which was defined as such by the Steering Committee of hosts:

*To promote the implementation of the CRPD and the SDGs at all levels, as well as increasing the engagement from bilateral actors, international development agencies, the UN, INGOs and other development partners, building on the principle of “Leaving no one behind”.*

Recommendations for future organizers:

- Start, in each DPO, by deciding what you want to achieve with the Global Disability Summit and how you want to go about obtaining it.
- Then go through the commitments from GDS 2022 given by the stakeholders that matter the most to your organization, and take the short comings into account in the drafting of priority areas for your strategy.
- Invite network of DPOs and civil society organizations involved in disability rights to a strategy meeting. Encourage invitees to conduct a screening of the given commitments, as outlined above, and provide the meeting with their priorities.
- Meet with the national level network of DPOs and civil society organizations involved in disability rights to agree on a common strategy and approach to advocacy. A tip: The SAFOD and Atlas Alliance Advocacy Toolkit outlines several different advocacy approaches, as well as tools and templates.
- A DPO that has the necessary capacity and human resources should ideally take on the coordination responsibility. This DPO can be elected at the first meeting.
- Start planning as early as possible. The first network meeting / workshop should take place at least 1,5 years before the GDS. If a date for the GDS is not yet announced by mid-2023, the advocacy preparations should commence.

## **Mobilization Activities**

The Atlas Alliance's first step towards executing the strategy was to hire a coordinator / project advisor. Then the following steps were taken:

- A mapping of DPOs in the Global South where Atlas' partners are not present, specifically Africa and Asia.
- Raising awareness of the upcoming GDS through email, newsletters, podcasts, in all available DPO- and partner networks.
- Establishment of a GDS Reference Group of Norwegian DPOs and NGOs with DPO partners in Africa and Asia, which shared updates about the preparations for the GDS and worked on advocacy in partner countries.
- Development of an Advocacy and Information Campaign Toolkit in close cooperation with SAFOD, which was shared with the mapped DPOs and existing networks, and made available online for anyone to use.
- An online training workshop on Human Rights Advocacy, a hearing session bringing Norad (the main Norwegian governmental donor to long-term development aid) and Southern partners together in dialogue about priority areas on national level, as well as five additional workshops where GDS was a central theme.

- Advertisement and distribution of advocacy grants to four Norwegian organizations working with partners (mostly DPOs) in 12 countries across Africa, Asia, Middle East and South America;

Descriptions of each of these activities and recommendations for how to improve them, are provided below.

### **Mapping**

Our mapping consisted, in practice, of searching for and listing contact information of DPO umbrellas and what appeared to be central DPOs in countries of interest. Identifying target DPOs is crucially important for the umbrella DPO in one of the host countries. The exercise should be among the very first steps and needs time, dedication and focus, however, only from the umbrella DPOs in one of the host countries. If many CSOs send information to vast networks, it will likely be too much.

The Atlas Alliance identified DPOs in the 84 countries in the global South, however only DPOs in 58 countries turned out to have functional contact information available online. These 58 DPOs were contacted several times with group e-mails and some also bilaterally through Facebook when e-mail addresses were not available. Still, many more could have been reached, had the list contained more (or preferably only) functional contact details.

Recommendations:

- The mapping is the foundation for all communication that follows (beyond the national network). Thus, make sure it is done properly and systematically with updated contact information.
- If / when e-mails bounce back, take the time to remove the e-mail address from the list and research functional contact details. Then replace the old address with one that works.

### **Awareness Raising through E-mail**

Everyone on the contact list produced by the mapping exercise received twelve e-mails with information about the upcoming summit, reminders to register for the different GDS events, prompts for the need to advocate for conducive commitments, and advice on how to participate in consultations that were taking place etc.

In addition, a newsletter was set up in November and shared with the identified DPOs on the same list in the 58 countries, as well as all other contacts in the Atlas networks. The newsletters aimed to create enthusiasm for the GDS and understanding for its value and potential, show how different examples of ongoing advocacy were playing out and starting to bring about results, where to find the Advocacy Toolkit, why the GDS Youth and the Civil Society Forum were important, upcoming pre-summits etc.

Most of these emails did not get many replies. Some recipients responded with requests for funding. After a brief response to these the exchange tended to stop, as the DPOs understood there was no extra funding available, except the Advocacy Grants to Norad partners (see below) which were advertised in August 2021.

However, the DPOs continued to receive information. Some of the recipients later appeared in lists of responders to a nomination exercise organized by IDA in January 2022 to decide on speakers for the panels at the GDS high-level meeting and the Civil

Society Forum. Thus, there are good reasons to believe these DPOs did read the information and updates that ticked into their inboxes.

Among the in total 267 individuals who received the newsletter, there was a 40 % opening rate, meaning the newsletters were read by more than is often expected of newsletter subscribers and recipients.

A podcast series, “Road to Inclusion”, was also initiated in October 2022, making the upcoming summit one of many themes in every episode. The link to the podcasts was shared in newsletters and information e-mails to the mapped DPOs and existing networks.

The podcasts gave the Atlas Alliance the opportunity to invite profiled guests to discuss the potential of the GDS among other important topics. One of the advantages of this communication channel is that the episodes remain available on the internet. The episodes are all on YouTube, have English language and English captioning for hearing-impaired audience. They should ideally also have had sign language interpretation.

Experience shows that simply using e-mail as a means of communication is a very cost-effective way of getting important messages across. The e-mails could however have been better tailored. E.g. some recipients may not have been the right ones, considering the relatively short time and limited resources that was dedicated to the initial mapping.

Despite the many e-mails with varied means of communicating the content, it seems clear that national and local DPOs only to a limited extent understood the potential of the GDS for them and their work. In Atlas’ evaluation of our mobilization efforts, 50 % of the respondents report that they found the GDS concepts and mechanisms easy to understand, whereas 25 % found it somewhat difficult and 25 % neither easy nor difficult. In meetings with organizations throughout the mobilization period, it was often expressed that many did not fully grasp the opportunity to influence governments and multilaterals in their countries. Thus, what and how we communicate needs closer consideration ahead of the coming summits.

Prior to GDS 2022 IDA had consultations in 26 countries, and the Atlas Alliance informed and mobilized through available channels. Still, the level of engagement was not very high - until a few weeks before. That is when the interest started to rise and requests for clarifications and specific information began flowing in.

#### Recommendations:

- There is a need to communicate clearly:

1) What the GDS is,

2) How DPOs and NGOs at country level can contribute, namely by campaigning and advocating, and

3) Why they should do that, namely for the GDS to become a much-needed gamechanger for international development (making it inclusive of persons with disabilities).

- In all communications the mobilizing DPOs should make sure the content is clear, understandable and quick to read and comprehend. Short sentences with concise practical information are preferable.
- Define your “elevator pitch” early and use this consistently - how to explain the GDS briefly to someone outside the disability rights movement.

- Information must be widespread and easily available about how to submit commitments. The earlier the hosts can share this information the better. DPOs and civil society can remind the hosts of this need if delayed.
- Read the Atlas Alliance report “Nothing without us”<sup>3</sup> for input to a minimum standard for commitments. There is a need to establish such standards, for these to be followed, and for mobilizing organizations to keep them in mind when urging governments to place commitments. I.e. commitments should be “SMART” (see definition in glossary).
- There should be a focus on quality of commitments in the next GDS, rather than quantity. Make sure to communicate this in your advocacy – many weak commitments are unlikely to make a difference, but few strong commitments could (and many strong ones certainly would).
- The DPOs working to mobilize should choose their most highly prioritized areas and encourage campaigns for commitments around these. A pressing example is the very few stakeholders that chose the overarching commitment on ‘tracking inclusion’ in the GDS 2022. Only ten actors committed to track the inclusivity of their development funds, of which three were the OECD-DAC countries. This was a priority for the Atlas Alliance, and we learned from the lack of attention to this commitment, that more emphasis must be placed on its importance, next time.

### **The GDS Reference Group in Norway**

The GDS Reference Group<sup>i</sup> of Norwegian Civil Society Organizations was set up in August 2021 and became an active and important forum. The members (seven DPOs and seven NGOs) passed information and updates to their partners in the Global South, after meetings with the group.

Most importantly the group members also channeled the partners’ thoughts and opinions about the GDS planning and preparations back to the Atlas Alliance. Atlas then passed these concerns from the grassroot level over to the GDS Steering Committee. The group also discussed partners’ ongoing advocacy on country level and exchanged input, advice and experiences.

The Reference Group met 18 times online in both the preparation and follow-up phase (before and after the GDS). This was an easy and effective way to generate enthusiasm, share information and obtain feedback.

#### **Recommendations:**

- Start the recruitment for such a forum early to allow even more organizations to attend, preferably both large and small CSOs, including both NGOs and DPOs.
- Jointly develop a clear Terms of Reference for the group.
- Encourage the coordinating DPOs in all partner countries in the Global South to set up such fora.
- Encourage the coordinating DPOs in all OECD-DAC countries to set up similar fora.

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<sup>3</sup> [Reports - The Atlas Alliance \(atlas-alliansen.no\)](https://atlas-alliansen.no/reports)



- Encourage the coordinating DPOs in all countries that have EDF members to set up similar fora, and report regularly to the EDF. The EDF could then share summaries with the co-hosts and the Civil Society Reference Group<sup>4</sup> (or whichever body that takes over for this advisory structure in the work on future summits).
- If there is no coordinating DPO, any DPO that has the capacity could take the initiative and summon relevant civil society organizations to get started. Then democratically elect a coordinating organization at the first meeting or decide on a structure that works for all, e.g. alternating responsibilities.
- Invite individuals from IDA and DPOs in the host countries to join one of the initial meetings, to further elevate the levels of excitement and allowing for members to ask questions or influence directly.
- From the very beginning, ensure that group members have ownership of the process and understand what opportunities the GDS has to offer.

### **The Advocacy Toolkit**

The seven Norwegian DPOs under the Atlas Alliance and their partners in the global South on several occasions stressed a need for advocacy tools and training. As human rights advocacy is at the core of the Atlas Alliance's mandate and mission, the development of such a toolkit seemed very appropriate.

The Atlas secretariat engaged SAFOD, the regional DPO in Southern Africa, to produce the toolkit. SAFOD is a longtime partner of one of the Atlas organizations (FFO). The toolkit they produced is practical, easy to navigate and understand, and comes with a Power Point Presentation that the CSOs can use for trainings.

The toolkit refers to the commitments from GDS 2018 and the potential commitments of the GDS 2022, when presenting the many methods, templates and examples of efficient advocacy. The toolkit can easily be adapted to other contexts and thereby used in advocacy more generally.

#### **Recommendations:**

- The development of the GDS Advocacy Toolkit, like many elements of the mobilization process, could have benefitted from more time, focus and attention to detail. Thus, if new, contextually adapted toolkits are to be developed, make sure to begin well in advance and take your time.
- The GDS Advocacy Toolkit by SAFOD and the Atlas Alliance is now updated, as of September 2022, and can be used for advocacy and communication campaigns ahead of GDS 2025 (and other events and important moments for disability rights).
- Consider making use of this updated Advocacy Toolkit instead of developing a new one – if useful to your organization, feel free to distribute widely and encourage others to use it.
- The Atlas Alliance's distribution of the toolkit targeted the mapped DPOs as well as previously existing networks but would perhaps have reached even further

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<sup>4</sup> [Global Disability Summit - Civil Society Reference Group](#)

and been used by larger numbers of civil society actors if more systematically shared, and if followed up with specific trainings on its use.

- Trainings on how to use the toolkit should have been held in connection with its launch. If your organization has the capacity feel free to offer advocacy trainings when you familiarized yourself with the content. Atlas dedicated only five minutes to the use of the toolkit in a webinar on human rights advocacy but many DPOs, particularly in Africa, reported that this was insufficient.

### **Online Workshops**

The following hybrid- and online events were conducted by the Atlas Alliance prior to the GDS 2022, as part of its mobilization efforts:

- What is Human Rights Advocacy?
- Global Disability Summit: From Commitments to Outcomes
- Youth with Disabilities as Agents of Change
- Time's now for Disability Inclusion: Building a Grassroots Disability Rights Movement together
- Global Disability Summit: Changing the Narrative on Disability

The webinars were organized with funding from the Inclusion project at the Atlas Alliance. Each of the webinars were attended by almost 100 participants and all received positive feedback. These events were an essential part of the awareness raising for the GDS in the Atlas networks.

A crucial learning point is that more than one human resource are needed for the organizing, promotion, and hosting of such events on top of the continuous and growing pressure of coordinating the preparations for GDS, the Civil Society Forum and the GDS Youth.

One extra webinar could have been organized in addition, directly aligned with the GDS Advocacy Toolkit. This webinar should have targeted the recipients of the toolkit specifically (see last recommendation in the previous chapter).

### **The Advocacy Grants**

The GDS Advocacy Grants were announced through the Atlas networks as well as the email-list from the mapping exercise. The response was better than expected (based on previous experience with distributing small grants). The surprising number of applications meant that Atlas had insufficient funding available to grant all the interesting projects proposed.

Only organizations that already had agreements with Norad could apply, but they were encouraged to apply on behalf of, or in cooperation with, grassroots DPOs in the Global South. Limiting the pool of applicants to those who already had agreements with Norad saved time that would have otherwise had to be spent on quality assurance.

It should be noted that the funds for the grants were made available after lengthy dialogues between Norad and Atlas about the GDS and Atlas' role as mobilizer. Funds for grants may not be available for the DPO umbrellas in the different GDS host countries of the future, but as it will be in the interest of the country's Foreign Ministry / International Development Office to get mobilization support from its DPOs, it is certainly worth testing the appetite for such a project.

The Advocacy Grants funded, among other impressive results, the following highlights:

- More than 1000 civil society workers and persons with disabilities trained in disability inclusion, SRHR, life skills, and human rights advocacy across Sri Lanka, Kenya, and Zambia.
- 148 children with disabilities included in governmental Social Cash Transfer programs, and 145 traditional leaders, school management and teachers trained in inclusive physical education across three districts of Zambia. 25 children with disabilities were identified and enrolled in school in the same areas of Zambia.
- A national level disability summit in Sri Lanka summoning 18 CSOs, who jointly came up with a Civil Society Action Plan for Disability Inclusion.
- Democratic processes put in place ensuring representation in Punjab province, Pakistan. Punjab holds 36 district assemblies of which up to two seats in each assembly are now assigned as 'special seats for persons with disabilities'.
- Radio programs, TV talk shows and theatre plays drawing attention to disability inclusion, in Sri Lanka, Palestine, Indonesia, Zambia, Kenya, Zimbabwe and Pakistan.
- 167 DPO workers and duty bearers consulted and sensitized on the situation of children and young people with disabilities in Zimbabwe.
- Identity cards obtained for 55 persons with disabilities in rural Indonesia, ensuring access to support services and entitlements.
- 15 DPOs in Barranquilla district, Colombia, attracted thousands of local people at the Capacity Visibility Fair in the city of Barranquilla.
- Staff from 66 CSO trained in advocacy for disability rights in Kenya.
- In Yemen where civil war and famine have caused tragedy for eight years, the human rights organization Mwatana documented war incidents that lead to people becoming disabled. Mwatana also advocated for disability inclusion in humanitarian aid through workshops presenting their findings, a social media campaign and blog writing, as well as sensitization of journalists.
- More than 100 000 people reached with the online and radio advocacy campaign in the Occupied Palestinian Territories between January and April 2022. The first part of the campaign addressed the right to health services and health insurance for persons with disabilities, while the second part addressed the new Disability Draft Law.

#### Recommendations:

- Apply for funding from donors to award mobilization / advocacy grants to keen CSOs around the world. This approach has significant potential, and could, as in the case of the Atlas Alliance, have achieved even more with more funds.
- Develop a results framework which sets up clear and useful indicators that all grantees should base their projects on, while at the same time ensuring enough flexibility to allow for innovation and contextual variety. Reporting templates for grantees should reflect the required aggregation of results, be shared with grantees at the signing of grant agreements and make it easy to gather all the needed data for the final reporting.

## Advocacy targeting South and North

The Atlas Alliance's mobilization focus was mostly on DPOs in the global South, leaving high-level advocacy towards donor governments / OECD-DAC countries largely up to the permanent host (IDA). However, some activities were conducted also northward, such as requesting the Nordic DPO umbrellas to address their governments to ensure valuable commitments.

Experience showed that even more focus should be given to this, as some of the Nordic countries delivered unambitious and ambiguous commitments, resembling reports on

what the country is already doing. In fact, the vast majority of commitments placed by Northern governments for the GDS 2022 are weak and vague. This indicates a need for more advocacy towards the North, and more guidance on how to commit. If this is not initiated by the co-hosts the DPOs can assume their role as monitoring "watch-dogs" and remind the organizers of the experience from GDS 2022.



Photo by: FAMOD

# Challenges

## encountered in the mobilization for GDS 2022

It was at times challenging to mobilize for GDS 2022. The most pressing challenges we faced are listed and explained below. Concrete suggestions for how to overcome them are given in the last chapter of this manual, the Summary of Recommendations.

### **Lack of Clear Information**

In the run-up to GDS 2022, the summit was difficult to define and hence to understand. Among the causes for confusion was the fact that the GDS is not UN initiated and that it had only been arranged once before, in 2018. The question of its importance in comparison to other events, and whether the commitments are binding or not, were long returning topics of discussion.

Moreover, there was a lack of clarity on expectations towards those committing. It appears that the mobilization for GDS 2022 focused more on looping in the highest numbers of commitments, and less on their content. It might have been a conscious choice not to be very clear or to set many requirements for the commitments to keep doors open and attract high numbers, but this approach certainly did not support quality.

The experience of the Atlas Alliance is that this ambiguity caused misunderstandings regarding the purpose of the GDS. The commitments and speeches from high-level stakeholders show a wide variety in understanding of the purpose, e.g. whether governments were meant to commit to improving conditions for persons with disabilities within their own borders, or in international development and humanitarian action.

Another unfortunate result of the lack of clarity around the GDS is that since youth had “their own” event, namely GDS Youth, it seems stakeholders disregarded this subgroup of persons with disabilities in their commitments. Only 7 % of the commitments submitted mention young people / youth – perhaps this could have been higher had there been clear instructions for how to give commitments during the GDS Youth.

Lastly, numerous partner organizations repeatedly requested more information about reporting requirements, as they did not want to submit commitments without knowing how much time and resources reporting would require. The same partners also found it hard to understand how the CRPD reporting differs from the GDS reporting. They recommend that this is clearly outlined in the beginning of the commitments process ahead of GDS 2025.

### **Voices of the Most Marginalized**

Both in the preparation process of consulting DPOs and seeking input, and during the GDS itself there was, in Atlas’ view, a shortage grassroots representation. The Civil Society Reference Group chaired by the GDS secretariat / IDA had members from the African Disability Forum, but they were not present for most of the meetings. DPOs

## Members of IDA

- [Down Syndrome International](#) (DSI)
- Inclusion International (II)
- [International Federation of Hard of Hearing People](#) (IFHOH)
- International Federation for Spina Bifida and Hydrocephalus (IF)
- [World Blind Union](#) (WBU)
- [World Federation of the Deaf](#) (WFD)
- World Federation of Deafblind (WFDB)
- [World Network of Users and Survivors of Psychiatry](#) (WNUSP)
- African Disability Forum (ADF)
- Arab Organization of Disabled People (AODP)
- European Disability Forum (EDF)
- The Latin American Network of Non-Governmental Organizations of Persons with

from extremely populous countries such as China were not included in any preparatory processes. The Arab countries were similarly left out of these conversations.

The disability groups often referred to as most marginalized, such as persons with deaf blindness and cognitive disabilities, were also largely left out, due to practical constraints such as limited time and availability of interpreters. These are examples of barriers met by these groups daily.

The COVID-19 pandemic also did not help in reaching DPOs in the least connected corners of the communities. The majority of preparations, as well as the GDS events themselves, were all digital, making DPOs dependent on stable internet connection to contribute the views of the groups they represent.

Along the same lines, two other responders wrote these suggestions:

- *Let's have a more direct engagement in the remote places like Africa so the PWDs unaccessed are accessible and empowerment.*
- *Involve more disabled people and less politicians, and make more interaction between those two possible.*

When analyzing the commitments given it also becomes apparent that very few stakeholders committed to empowering DPOs. This is problematic because it shows that donors and mainstream NGOs are not yet willing to allow DPOs ownership of their own agenda. Though partnerships with DPOs is visibly flagged in the joint policy documents, specific commitments still do not grant DPOs leading roles.

Only 18 OECD-DAC governments committed, mostly in vague terms, to meaningful engagement of DPOs. Three of these 18 committed to track their funding, ensuring that the initiatives funded are disability inclusive in practice.

None of the 18 committed to supporting DPO-led awareness raising, despite this being an explicit option in the menu of commitments. This is also surprising as it contrasts sharply the Civil Society Statement and the Co-Chairs' Summary, which both list DPO leadership as a top priority.

In the period between the GDS 2022 and GDS 2025 efforts must be made to ensure the active participation of grassroots DPOs and systematic documentation of their views and priorities.

## **The Menu of Commitments**

The menu of commitments had a few shortcomings:

- The process of developing the menu did not include DPOs from the Global South, except indirectly and in the very first stages. Thus, it was not sufficiently participatory.
- The process did not start early enough, and finalization was hasty.
- The wording was too uncommitting, and should, in Atlas' view, have been more assertive and demanding.
- The purpose of the menu, i.e. that the entries were intended as inspiration, and not as a set of limited alternatives, was not clear to committing stakeholders.
- Given that the commitments on the menu were only meant to function as inspiration they should have been formulated in much more concrete and implementable wording, to set an example.
- The maximum number of commitments was set at ten per thematic area – this made many of the commitments in the menu too broad, packing too much into each commitment, thus making them unrealistic.
- The information on the website and commitments portal was incomprehensive and no official information with guidance on how to commit was available.

## **Ambiguity and Show-off**

Most of the speakers at the GDS 2022 seemed to have view the event as an opportunity to showcase work they were already doing. This can be useful in the sense that it encourages governments to produce results before the GDS. However, numerous governments talked about what they were already doing without declaring any new steps towards disability inclusion internally or in foreign policy / international cooperation.

Another clear tendency among the verbal contributions is that of intangible promises and ambiguous visions. One government stated during their intervention that they would “promote social cohesion... and support inclusive education”.

Words like ‘promote’, ‘enhance’, ‘advance’, ‘reduce’, and ‘support’ ran as red thread throughout the speeches and commitments. Such words represent intentions, not actions. They were rarely followed by details explaining how to enhance or reduce.

The Government of Norway committed to making it a requirement for development partners to ‘increase’ reporting on and tracking of efforts to promote inclusion of persons with disabilities. Requirements for development partners are great and important, but to increase remains undefined and open to diverse interpretations. Norway also should have ensured their commitments reflected the content of the strategy they launched at the GDS (which was very good, and was followed by a detailed implementation plan).

The Government of Switzerland committed concretely in the sense that they want to develop an action plan before the end of 2024. However, the value of this commitment will be determined by the contents of the plan:

1. *Switzerland develops an action plan 2022-2024 for the inclusion of persons with disabilities in Switzerland's international cooperation.*

2. *Switzerland successfully implements the 2022-2024 Action Plan.*

3. *Switzerland commits to increased consultation and meaningful participation of persons with disabilities and organizations of persons with disabilities in the development, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of national policies and systems and in international cooperation.*

Similarly to commitments made by Norway and most other OECD-DAC countries and donor agencies, the third point of Switzerland's commitment promises an undefined increase.

UNICEF's commitments were numerous and covered significant ground in terms of themes of importance to children and young persons with disabilities. This one for example:

*UNICEF commits to reduce ableism, stigma, discrimination, and other forms of violence against children with disabilities and support their social inclusion. A) Support the implementation of global resource pack on effective Social and Behavior Change (SBC) measurable approaches to address ableism, stigma, and discrimination against persons with disabilities. B) Support national and sub national stakeholders to develop and implement integrated, evidence-based, multi-level and cross sectoral strategies to address negative attitudes, beliefs, norms, stigma, and discrimination against children with disabilities at individual, family, community and system level. C) Support effective measurement of strategies aimed at addressing negative attitudes, beliefs, norms, stigma and discrimination against children with disabilities.*

Nonetheless, also this commitment is permeated by intangible words like 'support' and 'reduce'.

The Government of Sweden submitted written commitments that are only listing ongoing activities. A telling extract:

*"Sida supports IDA and one of the key dialogue issues during the current agreement period is "underrepresented groups and intersectionality".*

A candid responder to the evaluation survey that was sent to all participants of the GDS, stated that:

*No new things were said, most of speeches and commitments were the usual stuff that is said every time, and not many people of the movement were really involved, rather than politicians and some disability leaders that are everywhere and didn't bring anything new. The youth summit was much more meaningful and interesting, however it was badly organized.*

### **The Donor Side**

The report "Nothing Without Us" by the Atlas Alliance was presented at a side-event of COSP 15 in mid-June 2022. It established that most commitments submitted by the



global North were too vague and lacked the level of ambition that can substantially change living conditions for persons with disabilities in the global South. If further states that:

*The big issue in international development and humanitarian assistance is the annual flow of funding that is not disability inclusive. Although still well below the agreed UN target of 0,7% of the countries' average GNI, the global development funding stream is approaching 2 000 billion USD annually. One could expect that the most marginalized groups would have their fair share.*

*The aim of the UN CRPD is that all societies are fully inclusive. The expectations to international development and humanitarian assistance are consequently that all interventions are fully inclusive – that there should be no interventions or programs without persons with disabilities.*

It seems donor countries did not “get this memo”. Too few OECD-DAC countries gave any commitments at all – only 86 of the 1420 commitments were from these governments. Most of the commitments that were pledged were, in reality, not committing.

What does this mean for DPOs? We suggest that they can demand higher levels of engagement, and more concrete and implementable commitments in line with their priorities. They themselves should share information in their networks as it comes out and spread clear messages about expectations to their governments.

### **The Recipient Side**

Governments in the Global South submitted numerous and substantial commitments in comparison to the Global North. 273 of the total 359 government commitments were submitted by countries outside the OECD-DAC.

An example of a commitment from a southern government is this one from Rwanda:

*By end 2023, all primary schools will have one trained “Inclusive Education Focal Teacher” (IEFT), and the position of IEFT will be institutionalized into the Rwanda education system (as per the ESSP 2018-2025) and the REB IEFT toolkit adopted as the official training manual for the position.*

Most Southern governments have limited financial ability to implement their commitments. Nonetheless their wording and ambition level represents a stark contrast to most of the OECD DAC countries.

The many detailed commitments pledged by the recipients of international development aid, such as Uganda, Sierra Leone, Somalia, Ghana, Mozambique, Panama etc. are equally, or arguably more, important to fulfill, than the Northern ones. Still, failure to fulfil them can be excusable as it all comes down to availability of funding.

## **Intersectionality**

At the Global Disability Summit 2022 many speeches were given about the importance of including intersectionally marginalized groups. By this we mean groups that are excluded based on several identities, such as gender, youth, belonging to ethnic and indigenous minorities etc. In fact, there was a spotlight session on gender during the first of the two high-level days.

To put this in context, it is estimated that 75 % of persons with disabilities in low-income countries are female. Approximately 22 % of all women and girls in these countries are living with one or more disabilities. This intersectionality has many serious consequences, e.g. it means that these women are three to ten times more likely to experience violence than their male counterparts.

As an example, the German Parliamentary State Secretary to the Federal Minister for Economic Cooperation and Development, spoke passionately about this in her speech to the GDS on Day 1. Yet Germany did not provide a single written commitment on this or any other topic.

Equally, combatting ableism, stigma and discrimination, was an agenda which “everyone” supported, but which received worryingly little attention in the commitments. Only six commitments were provided by donor countries on this topic, and seven by multilateral agencies. Most of these commitments are vague and hard to measure. We are therefore left with the impression that the donors are not “walking the talk”.

## **Lacking Pressure, Lacking Priority**

To create enthusiasm in the direct aftermath of the GDS and motivate the disability movement to make use of the momentum and the newly pledged commitments, was not an easy task. Although some CSOs were highly motivated and proactive, the majority quickly went back to “business as usual”, as is understandable when such a milestone passes and there is a long time until the next one.

Had the commitments from the donor community been more groundbreaking more attention and eagerness to use the outcomes to their benefit, would perhaps have been generated among the CSOs. The Atlas Alliance nevertheless wants to encourage more active use of the outcomes precisely because so many of them are weak and ambiguous – our movement needs and deserves more substantive commitments to change.

Analyzing the commitments in the online portal is time-consuming, but still the best place to start. Experience shows that as the GDS dates draw closer, more stakeholders will rekindle and start researching ways to utilize the GDS results. Still, it is important to start the planning early for the next GDS, as well as for any connected activities your organization wants to conduct.

# Outcomes

Despite the challenges mentioned, the Global Disability Summit 2022 was a big success. GDS 2022 delivered specific and tangible results on implementation of equal rights for all, based on the UN CRPD and focusing on disability in development and humanitarian assistance. The message from the high-level speakers is strong and clear, and it challenges all stakeholders.

In our continues advocacy work we, the civil society organizations, now have both verbal and written promises for which to hold persons and institutions to account. With a government or duty bearer pledging a commitment an opportunity is created. Most of the donors' commitments were less tangible than would have been optimal. Nevertheless, they do touch on ambitions and focus areas that civil society can request progress in, offer technical support to implement, and base future demands on.

## Summary of the most useful outcomes

The most significant outcomes of the GDS 2022 for the future work of DPOs and civil society, can be summed up as follows:

- **High-quality commitments**

Certain commitments have the potential to make a real difference post GDS. These commitments are clear and concise, yet ambitious and compelling. Now it remains to be seen how effectively they are followed up on and implemented.

### Examples of strong commitments

UN Women:

*Develop an Action Plan (2022-25) in 2022 to update and implement the UN-Women Global Strategy on Disability Inclusion for mainstreaming disability inclusion throughout its work in policy, program, normative and intergovernmental support based on lessons learned and new developments such as UN Women's Strategic Plan (2022-25), UN Disability Inclusion Strategy (UNDIS), UN's Common Agenda.*

The EU Commission:

*The Commission commits to take into account the specific needs of persons with disabilities to ensure their full participation in humanitarian action, including in emergency preparedness activities. It also commits to support capacity building of its humanitarian partners on disability inclusion.*

*The Commission commits to collect data on beneficiaries of humanitarian action disaggregated by disability, and to report on disability inclusive humanitarian action*

*with the OECD disability marker.*

*The EU will add inclusive health, CRPD principles and combatting discrimination as an integral part of its policy dialogue on Universal Health Coverage and Primary Health Care.*

*The Commission will track disability inclusive investments for a targeted monitoring of EU funding by systematically using the OECD Development Assistance Committee Disability Marker. The EU aims to a steady increase of the proportion of new international partnership actions that are disability inclusive, measured by OECD Development Assistance Committee disability marker.*

- **The new motto of the disability movement**

For several years, one of the most central slogans of the disability rights movement has been “Nothing about us without us”. In his opening speech to the Civil Society Forum of the GDS 2022, president of IDA, Mr. Yannis Vardakastanis, presented a more concise and compelling version, simply: “Nothing without us”.

As one of the responders to the GDS evaluation survey put it:

*“I am most happy about the change to Nothing Without Us! This underscores the need for decision maker to always ensure disability matters are incorporated into all they do”.*

This shortened and powerful new motto represents an important shift in the narrative about persons with disabilities. Persons with disabilities should not be left out of any societal conversation as we are part of all groups of all communities. This point was also made by many influential stakeholders throughout the course of the GDS 2022, such as the UN Secretary-General, the Norwegian prime minister and others.

- **Speeches by state representatives, donors, and multilateral agencies**

The verbal commitments are also commitments. All speeches and dialogues from the GDS were recorded and are available online. Thus, they can be quoted and used for advocacy. Many mentioned national plans and strategies that are being developed for the implementation of the CRPD, i.e. the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, the United Arab Emirates, Education Cannot Wait and more.

Samantha Power, Administrator of USAID stated the following: *“We are committing to disability inclusion as a requirement in all our humanitarian assistance. This means partnering with persons with disabilities’ organizations, who all already have the expertise and relationships to make our aid more accessible”.*

Antonio Guterres, UN Secretary-General listed the joint UN priorities as follows:

*“I see three priorities: – First, we need more disability-inclusive development. Persons with disabilities are often among the poorest and most disadvantaged members of the*

*community. They must be at the front and centre of our efforts. – Second, we need broader and deeper cooperation. We must take a whole-of-society approach to ensuring disability inclusion. Only by working together – across governments, international organizations, civil society, and the private sector – can we effectively implement the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and deliver on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development for persons with disabilities. – Third, we need the leadership of persons with disabilities, particularly women with disabilities and their representative organizations. The foundation of our cooperation must be based on active consultation with persons with disabilities in their full diversity and their full inclusion in decision-making-processes".*

These quotes and numerous more can be found here: [Global Disability Summit 2022 – 16.-17. februar - regjeringen.no](https://regjeringen.no/en/aktuelt/global-disability-summit-2022-16.-17-februar-2022/)

- **Strategies for equality in development**

In Norway the preparations for GDS 2022 drew attention to disability rights and resulted in a national strategy for disability inclusion in development. This is an important outcome for Norwegian development aid. Similar disability inclusion strategies or plans to develop such documents were announced by several countries and multilateral agencies, e.g. UNICEF, the United Arab Emirates, and Finland.

Commitment by the Government of Finland:

*Finland will champion disability inclusive and gender transformative policies, strategies and programmes as well as accountability mechanisms in its policy influencing in the EU and with bilateral and multilateral partners.*

- **High number of commitments**

The number of commitments increased by almost 50 % from 968 at the first GDS in 2018, to more than 1400 in 2022. This can be considered an important outcome in that it confirms the success of the mobilization and shows that the level of awareness has risen since the previous GDS.

- **High number of attendees**

More than 11 000 participants registered for the four days of the GDS (including the Youth Summit, the Civil Society Forum, and the high-level meeting). This shows an increasing level of engagement and interest in, the global disability movement – especially considering the non-mandatory nature of the event.

- **High-level presence and political clout**

Given that the GDS 2022 was a digital summit, it took very little effort to join the event. Many heads of state announced their attendance at the last minute. This was unfortunate for the predictability and communication around the GDS, but it made the final product a very positive surprise.

With the official agenda and speaker list only published in the eve of the summit, excitement levels were high when the secretary-general of the UN, the prime minister of Norway, the president of Ghana and the president of IDA opened the summit, followed by 50 government representatives.

The fact that so many dignitaries showed their support for disability rights and equality in development and on the national level, set an important precedence and added weight, clout and value to the GDS as a significant recurring global event.

- **The online Commitments Portal**

The transparent and accessible Commitments Portal on the GDS Secretariat's website is an important tool for advocacy and a legitimizing factor for the future of the GDS. It provides CSOs with easy access to advocacy opportunities, as responsible entities can be made to answer for the progress (or lack of such) of their commitments. The portal also provides easy reference to the ambition levels of the former GDS's, which can be built upon when setting the goals for future ones.

- **Host countries for GDS 2025 were announced**

Plans for the third Global Disability Summit were announced. This is a crucial outcome as it gives the next host countries, Jordan and Germany, and their DPO umbrellas the necessary time to prepare, and to mobilize and listen to the global disability rights movement.

- **The Co-Chairs' Summary**

The Co-Chairs' Summary, sums up the intentions of the Co-Chairs and the common agenda of all the participants. Like the Charter for Change from 2018, it is an important reference document for advocacy. The Co-Chairs start their list of priorities like this:

- *Participants are committed to a human rights-based approach to inclusive development with a particular focus on gender equality. An intersectional and holistic approach is necessary for moving forward.*
- *Participants are committed to promoting meaningful engagement of OPDs through leadership and diverse representation of all persons with disabilities at the front and centre of change, as leaders, partners, and advocates...*

The rest of the document can be found here: [Global Disability Summit - Home](#)

- **The Civil Society Statement**

The Civil Society Statement is founded on an online consultation, where more than 90 DPOs globally responded to a questionnaire regarding what they wanted civil society to collectively decide on during the Civil Society Forum.

The very first line reads as follows:

*“Promote the leadership of organizations of persons with disabilities in partnerships and actively seek such partnerships in order to accelerate commitments into change”.*

Read the full document here: [Global Disability Summit - Civil Society Forum 2022](#)

- **The GDS Youth**

The Youth Summit – the GDS Youth – lasted for 24 hours and attracted more than 3000 youth and world leaders from all corners of the world. The summit itself was an important achievement because it proved that youth with disabilities are able to:

1) mobilize large masses, and 2) create innovative and ambitious events and arenas to claim their rights.

The social media campaign called *30 Days of Youth* was particularly successful, in that it reached 7,5 million individuals and built up excitement in the weeks leading up to the event itself. Also, the Facebook account “GDS Youth” remains active and available, and ownership of the page will be transferred to the youth DPOs that will arrange the GDS Youth alongside IDA in 2025.

For recommendations connected to the Youth Summit, please see the chapter on GDS Youth.

- **The Youth Call for Action**

This valuable advocacy tool consists of 16 points summing up the input of 1000 youth with disabilities prior to the GDS Youth. The online process was accessible in seven different languages, and the response was striking. In the two weeks, a small window, that the survey was open, youth between 15 and 35 eagerly participated to influence the agenda of national and international decision makers. This is likely a result of the active social media mobilization conducted.

The Youth with Disabilities Call for Action – From holding rights to exercising them can be found here, [Global Disability Summit - Global Disability Youth Summit 2022](#) along with a video reading out all 16 points.

These were the five top priority issues to the youth:

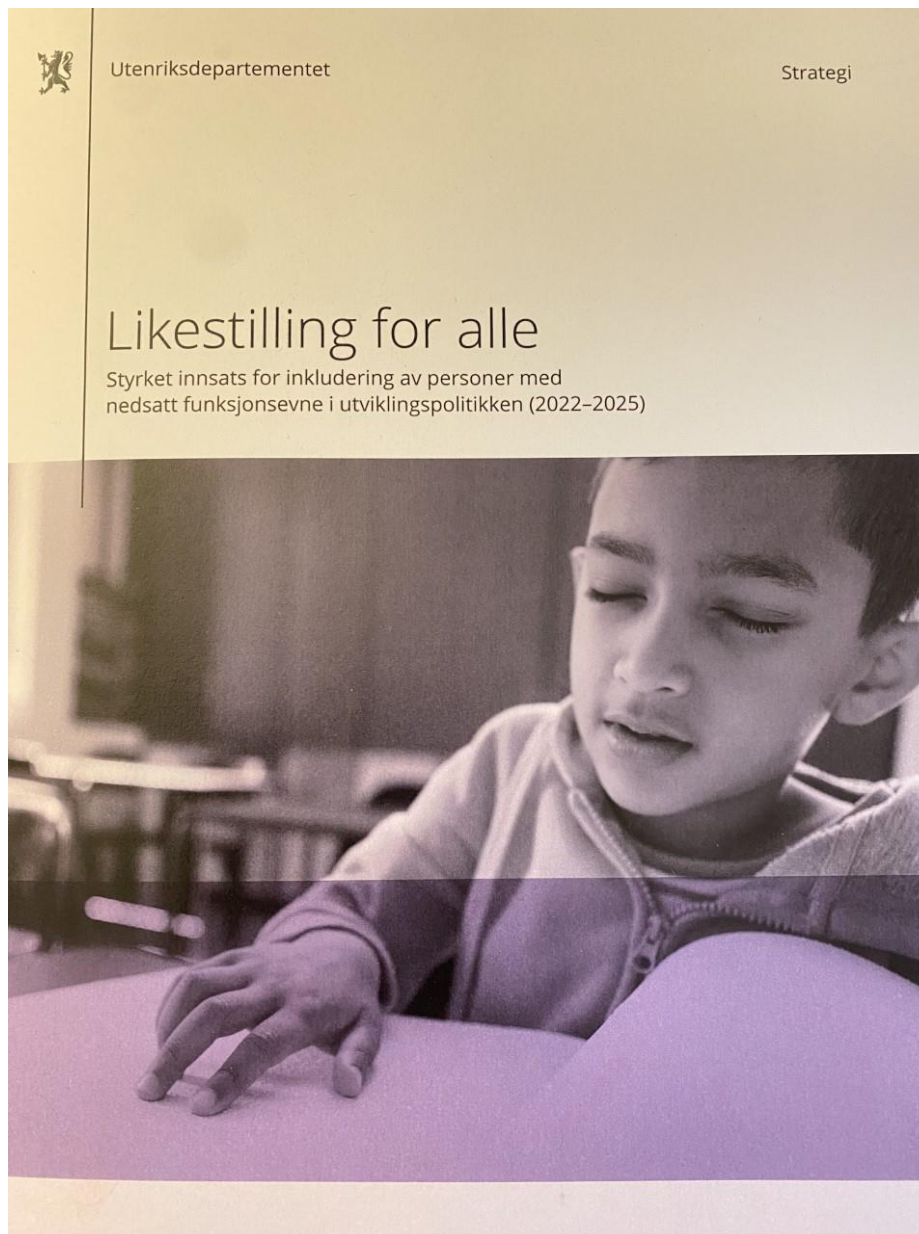
Action 1 - Increase decent work and easing employment opportunities

Action 2 - Make technology and assistive devices accessible, gender- and age-sensitive

Action 3 - Facilitate awareness-raising on disability rights, inclusion and human rights-based approaches to youth with disabilities

Action 4 - Ensure access to information, communications and services for all

Action 5 - Access the right to recreation and support sustainable friendships



*Photo: The Atlas Alliance*



# Key Lessons Learned

## Effectiveness of Atlas' mobilization

The Atlas Alliance shared an evaluation form with their networks, focusing on the effectiveness of their mobilization. The answers indicate that 75 % actively advocated or spread information about the GDS 2022 to civil society partners. The same evaluation shows that the Advocacy Toolkit was received by 50 % of the responders and used by 25 %. Of those who used it 38 % gave trainings based on it.

These results could be worse, but they could also be much better. 75 % responded that they first heard about the GDS from Atlas' communication, but of course this evaluation was only shared in our networks. From the GDS participant evaluation, which gives a more macro perspective, the figure is only 6,6 %. We had very few exchanges with the DPOs mapped, but this shows that many of them do have employees who open and read our e-mails. This all implies that our approach was effective, but that our network was too small.

In addition, the Atlas Alliance commissioned two qualitative regional evaluations, in twelve sample countries across Africa and Asia. These concluded that DPOs do not consider themselves sufficiently consulted and included, especially those representing the most marginalized groups. The organizers of the next GDS should make it a routine to always ensure that persons with disabilities and the organizations that represent them have had a say. The DPOs at the center of the GDS planning processes will need to repeatedly remind the co-hosts of this.

Moreover, these evaluations show that DPOs and CSOs in Africa and Asia want capacity building to maximize their use of the GDS. Explicitly they requested more trainings and tools, to better advocate for commitments and follow up on those given in 2022.

## Guided and Mandatory Commitments

75 % of the 705 GDS participants who filled in the evaluation questionnaire represented either civil society or governments. Only 5 % were from multilateral agencies. 42 % of the participants found the GDS very useful, empowering and positive. Yet, 79 % responded that they did not submit any commitments. This needs to be addressed from the onset of the planning for the GDS 2025 and beyond.

The co-hosts should consider making it mandatory for all speakers who present verbal commitments to also pledge commitments in writing via the online portal. A minimum standard could be that all commitments are in accordance with the SMART indicators, i.e. that they are specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time-bound.

The DPO umbrellas and mobilizing CSOs should support the co-hosts in developing official guidelines and communicating the message. The Atlas Alliance would encourage DPOs and civil society actors to suggest the use of the SMART indicators as a minimum standard to the co-hosts, if this is not already integrated in the official communication.

The mobilizing organizations should also encourage the co-hosts to start strategizing in mid-2023 at the very latest.

### **Funding for the South to Deliver**

Atlas focused its attention on mobilizing DPOs in countries in the Global South. The governments in the Southern countries generally provided much more substantial and comprehensive commitments than their counterparts in the Global North. The Southern governments have much to gain from these commitments (besides the obvious positive effects of becoming a more inclusive society), e.g. better funding opportunities from donor governments and agencies.

However, to achieve change on the ground major donors too need to deliver substantial commitments. The ultimate reason to mobilize organizations anywhere to advocate for change is that we eventually want to obtain this change. To get there, we need funding – and consequently advocacy towards the Northern donors (OECD-DAC countries) is essential.

Whilst civil society in the South should be encouraged to continue and scale up their advocacy towards their governments, the host countries' DPO umbrellas should also work to generate political will in the North.

Many important donors submitted commitments in GDS 2022, but for the future we need these commitments to be guided by the SMART criteria. The GDS is about disability in development, thus getting the OECD-DAC governments to commit meaningfully is a challenge that needs to be tackled for the next GDS.

### **DPOs in the Driver's Seat**

The advocacy phase / build-up to the next GDS is the time to promote the driver's seat for DPOs. It is still the norm that "mainstream" NGOs lead partnerships and consortia with DPOs. The GDS is a perfect occasion to demand change, e.g. to lobby for direct funding to DPOs and for leadership positions for DPOs in partnership cooperations.

This manual recommends that DPOs, both in the South and in the North, guide their national governments and, if possible, multilateral agencies on the wording of the commitments. Dialogue between civil society and authorities, and explicit guidance from DPOs, can bring about more ambitious, impactful, measurable, and realistic commitments by central decision makers in GDS 2025 (and future ones). Proactive human rights advocacy by DPOs also contributes to proving the value of these organizations, as they take the lead and claim their rightful place as go-to experts on disability inclusion in any society.

## Local Representation

As a founder, IDA has strong ownership of the Global Disability Summit. The alliance will continue as permanent host and will have a core position as leader of most of the processes that shape the GDS and the communication around it. IDA represents 1100 organizations through the 14 regional and national DPO umbrellas that also encompass DPOs on the ground. Yet the experience of the Atlas Alliance is that the views of the grassroots DPOs were barely heard in the discussions taking place, both leading up to, and during the GDS 2022. Moreover, DPOs in certain populous countries, such as China and Russia, are not represented through the IDA structure.

In Atlas' view the GDS would benefit from more direct involvement of grassroots DPOs in the Civil Society Reference Group (CSRG), which ultimately advised the Steering Committee on most thematic issues. Consultations were carried out in 26 countries between October 2020 and April 2021 involving some 800 individuals representing national and local level DPOs. According to the report available on the IDA website, the consultations took the 2018 commitments as a point of departure and discussed implementation status as well as priority areas for the disabled populations. The results from these consultations were rarely referred to by the CSRG, and the DPOs who had been consulted were not provided an opportunity to answer questions that came up in the planning process.

An opportunity to attend a single meeting does not, in Atlas' view, provide organizations with sufficient influence on the shaping of the thematic areas, the menu of commitments, or the official communication around the GDS. It is better than nothing and the initiative is commendable, but Atlas recommends that several physical consultations as well as online meetings be held with the DPOs. This will help ensure that the target group whose lives the GDS aims to change, can take active part in the process.

## Summary of Main Recommendations to Mobilizers (CSOs):

- There is an obvious need for clearer definitions of GDS and its vision, mission and goal – an “elevator pitch”! The purpose of the GDS needs to be clearly and simply communicated to the DPOs as the very first step in the mobilization.
- Download and analyze the commitments made in 2022, to better understand which of your organization's main priorities were not common priorities in the last GDS. These should be focus areas to promote collectively in your network's joint advocacy efforts going forward.
- An example is Meaningful engagement of DPOs – one of the five thematic areas intended as a pillar of and a red thread through the GDS 2022. Of the 1420 commitments only 267 were about meaningful engagement of DPOs, and none of the commitments under this heading from donor countries encourages leadership by DPOs. For DPOs to claim their rightful place in development cooperation, humanitarian action and country level policy making, commitments to consult them and promote their leadership are essential.

- Mobilizing DPOs could divide the communications work into two work streams – one southward and one northward. The southward workstream should focus on communication to DPOs to create enthusiasm and underline the value of the GDS as an advocacy opportunity. It should also offer trainings on advocacy. The northward communication should focus on donor governments' commitments, their level of ambition and their achievability (according to the SMART indicators).
- Set up a group of national likeminded organizations with international DPO / CSO partners through which information and input can be channeled.
- Strategize both as an individual organization and as part of a larger group of likeminded organizations – agree on common goals and how each member will work towards them.
- Depending on your access to the co-hosts and their decision-making body / steering committee, advise the Civil Society Reference Group to start early. One of the first steps should be to decide how the summit should be constructed. At the GDS 2022 the regional satellite summits and thematic roundtables were organized very late and as a consequence attendance was limited. Another important issue that should be handled early is how to ensure that commitments are also given in support of youth with disabilities. Since youth have “their own GDS”, this was unclear at GDS 2022.
- Share information and updates with DPOs in the South and development oriented DPOs in the North, and always encourage all to pass it on;
- Get your fellow DPOs / CSOs on board by helping them understand the value on the Commitments portal to their human rights advocacy. Simple and powerful messages could be something along these lines: *Is your government committed to ensuring that the human rights of disabled persons are fulfilled? Check the commitments portal here. If they are – how are they working to fulfill their promises? If they are not, what do you think they should prioritize? Start building your case well in advance.*
- The preparatory processes and related documents as well as the policy documents published in connection with the GDS, all need to be available in local languages and accessible formats. Establish who has the responsibility to carry this out, and make sure it is done.
- Make use of the updated Advocacy Toolkit co-produced by SAFOD and the Atlas Alliance. This is available for anyone free of charge on the Atlas website. Feel free to provide advocacy training to other DPOs / CSOs on advocacy based on this.
- While it is the responsibility of the hosts to set the agenda and decide on the official ambitions of coming summits, the role of civil society is to influence this direction, as well as the priorities of committing governments and other stakeholders. The DPOs should focus on the content and quality – not the quantity – of the commitments and the expectations for their implementation.

- Online workshops have potential to catch the interest of large audiences. Such tools can be used very effectively if planned and targeted well.
  - DPO umbrellas could apply for funding to distribute grants for smaller DPOs in the Global South to do national advocacy and / or information campaigns.
  - Donors, global and multilateral actors, DPOs and grassroots movements alike must all commit to participate and to promote inclusive development. National DPOs must push their own agenda of change and appreciate how they can use the GDS as an opportunity to promote their most pressing issues.
- *“With disabled communities leading the way, a more equitable, inclusive world for everyone is within reach”.*

From his letter to the Atlas Alliance and the organizers of the Global disability Summit 2022, former US president Barack Obama.



Photo by: Atlas Alliance

# Mobilizing for GDS Youth

The GDS Youth in 2022, organized by IDA, Youth Mental Health Norway, the Atlas Alliance and UNICEF as the committee of co-hosts, was an historic event in the disability movement. With its 24 hours of awareness raising, debate, and cultural content, moderated and presented by youth with disabilities from all over the world, the journey across time zones attracted more than 3000 people and created high expectations for the youth summit at the next GDS. However, getting there was neither easy nor straight forward.

This chapter will provide the civil society actors involved in the preparations / hosting of GDS Youth 2025 with some useful advice. The recommendations are also useful to other youth DPOs / CSOs who want to mobilize youth DPOs for attendance and advocacy ahead of the next GDS Youth.

An important role for these CSOs is to hold the GDS Youth organizers to account and remind them of the experiences listed here and the learning points for an even better GDS Youth in 2025. Youth with disabilities deserve better platforms to communicate their reality and messages to the world leaders, and they deserve to have their human rights fulfilled and equal opportunities in education, work and life.

## Communication

The co-hosts of the GDS Youth 2022 had their first online meeting in August of 2021 and then held weekly meetings until the youth summit commenced on 14<sup>th</sup> February 2022. In the weekly meetings the concept of the GDS Youth was discussed and tasks were divided. Youth Mental Health Norway was responsible for the Facebook and Instagram accounts, through which they worked strategically to build a follower base and raise awareness of the upcoming 24-hour online youth summit.

UNICEF was brought into the co-host committee in late October. All co-hosts agreed to raise awareness for the GDS Youth in their respective networks, but how specifically and to what target groups, was never decided. Thus, the first advice is to establish a clear communication plan and strategy, to achieve the desired awareness for GDS Youth 2025. The strategy should also open for assigning tasks to other organizations who want to contribute. Transparency from all co-hosts on who their networks consist of is crucial to ensure complementarity.

The communication for GDS Youth 2022 had a clear focus on organizations of youth with disabilities, but the communication efforts also focused on individuals. It is, however, unknown how many of the targeted individuals that attended the GDS Youth and the tools to obtain this information are lacking. We therefore recommend gathering this information in future GDS Youth events, by adding a question in the registration platform about how the respondent came to know about the summit.

What we can say with certainty is that close to 7,5 million individuals have seen some form of content about the GDS youth and this gives reason to assume the efforts contributed to raising awareness. We also see a clear pattern of individuals being reached on social media and engaging (with comments, likes and shares). For future youth summits we recommend using Twitter in addition, if resources allow for it.

## **Sufficient time**

Communication through the GDS Youth social media channels started late December 2021. Within a very short time, there was an 50 % increase in registrations – at the start of December, there were just under 200 people registered for the GDS Youth, by the end of December the number had increased to 400 people.

Ads for social media were posted on the two selected platforms. These ads had a wide range of content. At an average cost of 300 NOK each, the ads reached on average 89 514 people. A total of 26 ads were posted in this timeframe, but roughly 70 % of the budget set aside for social media ads was not used. This was largely due to Facebook analyzing some of the ads to be about social issues, elections or politics and thus blocking the ads.

This was a major setback in the communication effort. Creating content that is not linked to social issues, elections or politics will be difficult considering the thematic area. It is therefore advised to start early on communication efforts since creating a platform organically (without using paid ads) takes more time and effort.

Setting up regional working groups consisting of youth with disabilities from the five regions the GDS Youth covered, also proved challenging, as identifying the youth members only started in December 2021, with the first meetings being held in January 2022. These groups were meant to ensure representation of youth with disabilities and that the most pressing topics for the region were placed on the program for each regional session. These groups should be established much earlier in the preparations for GDS Youth 2025, and the selection process needs to be clearly defined.

## **Accessibility**

Accessible communication, i.e., making communication content accessible to the widest range of recipients possible, was early on chosen as one of the highest priorities within the entire process of planning of and sharing communication concerning the GDS youth. This is a strenuous task which requires pre-existing knowledge, or time to acquire this knowledge.

For the GDS Youth 2022 this proved to be a larger task than expected and a lesson worth mentioning. A lack of human resources is perhaps the most important factor, but it is also crucial to ensure clarity from the beginning (in the co-host committee) on division of tasks with regards to making content and materials accessible.

Creating accessible content is time-consuming, and for the GDS Youth 2022 it took too long because of the need for much internal consultation. Despite these hurdles no feedback was received concerning communication efforts lacking accessibility.

Tappin, the company that had the technical responsibility for the Civil Society Forum and the GDS, was used for registration for the GDS Youth for the first couple of months that registration was open. After internal discussion, it was decided to move both the registration facility and video conference platform to Zoom for better accessibility.



This change had the unfortunate side effect that monitoring registrations in relation to communication efforts became difficult.

Thus, it is recommended to appoint communication staff with expertise in accessibility and decide on a platform before registration starts to ensure continuity and ease data collection.

### **The 30 Days of Youth Campaign**

The campaign provided youth with an opportunity to:

- have their voices, opinions, ideas, and experiences amplified
- join a conversation on social media on the impact of stigma and discrimination, the barriers they perpetuate, and what opportunities they have and wish for
- register for the GDS Youth.

This campaign addressed how to combat stigma and discrimination towards youth with disabilities along with several other topics since participants were free to talk about any matter of importance to them. The youth used the videos to discuss policy and decision making. The goal was to receive advice and suggestions on how to break down attitudinal barriers to inclusion directly from youth themselves, thereby also raising awareness of this important issue.

The African continent was heavily represented in the campaign, and most videos were from Kenya and Uganda. However, videos were received and published from all continents. The campaign was a success and was praised for its many compelling stories, full of beauty and authenticity. It is still available on the GDS Youth Facebook and Instagram accounts.

The most important advice for an even better GDS Youth 2025 is to start developing guidelines, consent forms, and other materials early. These should be available in all the languages of your target groups. Information about the event and opportunities linked to it should be shared widely. Then make sure to have editing staff with accessibility knowledge and sufficient human resources to communicate with all interested youth. All videos need sign language interpretation and text / captioning. All of this takes time.

### **The Youth Charter / Call for Action**

An Advocacy Working Group was set up to develop the Youth Charter (later “the Youth Call for Action: From holding Rights to Exercising Them”). The group consisted of co-host committee representatives and selected youth with disabilities. A recommendation for next time is to have more youth representation in this working group. The Call for Action, however, might not need reworking, unless the youth’s priorities have changed in the course of the three years between 2022 and 2025.

The working group’s modus operandi was that they developed a survey which was distributed to youth with disabilities in seven languages all across the globe. The goal was to collect topics that matter to the respondents (youth with disabilities between ages 15 and 35).



This survey was distributed late January 2022 and received over 1000 answers in two weeks. The exercise would have benefitted from being available to youth much longer than this. The survey should also have been transferred to an «easy-to-read version», but time was too short, and we missed out on the views of many important young rights holders.

### **Youth Specific GDS Commitments**

Clearly defining the GDS Youth was not given priority. Therefore, there was a lack of understanding on how one could submit commitments through the GDS Youth. The Youth Call for Action was developed shortly before the youth summit. The quick and numerous responses to the survey for the Youth Call for Action showed that the level of expectations from youth was high. However, since the Call for Action did not provide guidance on how to support it, youth-specific commitments should be included in the menu of commitments for GDS 2025.

Specific commitments on youth with disabilities should be proposed by the co-hosts as part of the menu of commitments for GDS 2025. Practically, this means that someone from the GDS Youth co-host committee should be in the working groups for developing overall commitments. This will ensure that the concerns of youth are covered and explicitly mentioned in the overall GDS commitments.

### **Norwegian Reference Group**

The Norwegian Youth Organizations' Reference Group was originally set up as a mechanism to ensure ownership from the Norwegian side. Setting up this group was natural given Norway's role as host country, and the group was a useful body to consult along the way.

The group consisted of the following Norwegian organizations:

- The Norwegian Association of Youth with Disabilities,
- The Norwegian Olympic and Paralympic Committee and Confederation of Sports
- PRESS (the youth organization in Save the Children Norway)
- The Norwegian Association of Disabled Youth (NHFU)
- Y-Global

It was imperative to also include voices from the global South from the start. The Reference Group had representation from Rwanda (Uwezo Youth Empowerment), Mozambique (Forum of Disabled Persons Organizations of Mozambique - FAMOD) and Malawi (Parents Association for Spina Bifida and Hydrocephalus). The organizations from the global South were identified through Youth Mental Health Norway's network.

The purpose of this group was to include several experienced organizations in a collaboration on how GDS Youth can achieve its primary objectives as stated in the GDS Youth concept note. The Reference Group shared information and provided concrete input on the design of the GDS Youth. Another important role of such a

reference group is to help our partners in the South hold their respective authorities accountable to their human rights obligations.

## **Conclusion**

The communication efforts were successful, especially when considering that the communication work only started in December 2021. Given the number of people we were able to reach in a time frame we believe was too short, it is promising to think how many one can reach if efforts are started earlier.

The preparation work for communication started late August 2021, but internal discussion and planning, as well as limited human resources, delayed the start of the communication work to late December 2021. Active use of social media commenced late December 2021, which left only seven weeks until the big day.

The time restrictions also led to difficulty engaging youth in a truly meaningful conversation on social media, which was one of the goals of the communication work. Building an online community and establishing trust between the organizations and the community takes time.

We recommend starting to prepare for GDS Youth 2025 already in 2023, to ensure all the content is accessible and CRPD compliant.

## **Summary of key lessons learned**

- The co-hosts' networks should be transparent, and these should be utilized in promoting the GDS Youth and making it a successful concept.
- Creating accessible content is a tremendous task. Therefore, using actors that have this specific experience is paramount.
- Decide upon the platform before starting the registration process. Include questions about where participants learned about the GDS Youth in the registration form.
- Start early to anchor the GDS Youth with disabled youth globally, to inform donors, and to prepare the regional working groups. Issues like how to maximize the impact of the event, how to follow up effectively, and how to hold stakeholders to account, were not given enough focus in the planning of GDS Youth 2022. Information campaigns and publicity should start already in 2023, allowing for a better understanding of the concept and purpose of the GDS, the GDS Youth and how the GDS Youth fits into the larger GDS frame. Create a clear communication plan and strategy to increase awareness and build an understanding of the GDS Youth concept.
- Decide collectively with GDS co-hosts and clearly communicate ways of contributing to the GDS Youth, e.g. signing the youth charter (transparency around this process), delivering youth-specific commitments according to a separate portal and menu of commitments, or weaving youth into the overall commitments.
- Use social media to communicate with youth with disabilities and youth in general. Youth are heavily engaged on social media platforms.
- Consider creating an advocacy package that can be sent out to all relevant actors. Communication regarding GDS Youth 2022 was sent out

late, and the organizing of a separate youth summit should have been announced sooner.

- If running ads on social media, remember that a lot of the content will be flagged by Facebook due to restrictions regarding social issues, elections, or politics. You might need to grow a follower base organically, which takes time. We recommend starting no later than 6 months in advance.
- Create a platform that can serve as an easy platform for youth to raise their concerns and opinions (e.g. the 30 Days of Youth campaign)
- The social media channels (Facebook and Instagram) received far more attention than expected. Over 7,5 million unique persons saw content from these two channels. However, consider including Twitter in the mix of social media channels for 2025. For the high-level part of GDS 2022 Twitter was used with success.
- The youth charter was developed based on over a thousand youths' voices. We recommend building on the momentum from this Call for Action and creating a process where you can hold signatories responsible.
- Specific commitments on youth with disabilities should be proposed by the co-hosts as part of the menu of commitments for GDS 2025. In practice, this means that someone from the GDS Youth co-host committee should be on the working groups for developing overall commitments ensuring that the concerns of youth are covered and explicitly mentioned in the overall commitments.
- The decision-making body for the GDS Youth 2022, the committee of co-hosts, was made up of four organizations. To ensure wider participation as well as firmer representation and legitimacy, the co-hosts could organize sub-committees of youth with disabilities and their organizations in the preparations for 2025. These sub-committees could provide advice and input to the decision-making body, thus making young voices heard.

When this is written it is October 2022. There is now sufficient time available to anchor the GDS Youth more properly with disabled youth globally, to inform donors, and prepare for a real game changing GDS Youth in 2025.



Photo by: IDA