Overview and Outline for GDS 2025

The Global Disability Summit (GDS) is a unique global mechanism that improves the lives of persons with disabilities, especially from the Global South. It was created in 2017 to convene global, regional, and national stakeholders that share the same goal and vision for disability inclusive development and humanitarian action. The summits aim to bridge the gap between two arenas that are still separate: disability inclusion and development cooperation. The Global Disability Summit is a mechanism that goes beyond a two-day summit every three years. It is a mechanism that entails continuous advocacy with global disability development stakeholders and mobilization of the disability rights movement and its allies. Importantly, it is a partnership between member states and Organizations of Persons with Disabilities (OPDs), embodied in the way that co-hosting arrangements are made.

The first Global Disability Summit 2018, co-hosted by the United Kingdom's Department for International Development (now FCDO), the Government of Kenya, and the International Disability Alliance (IDA), was held in London. It was a major event for disability inclusion with approximately 1.200 delegates, gathering unprecedented attention from leaders and decision makers.

The second Global Disability Summit 2022, co-hosted by the Governments of Norway and Ghana, together with IDA, was held in Oslo. The summit resulted in even stronger participation from high-level representatives mainly due to its digital format. Over 7.000 participants attended the virtual summit in February 2022.

The third Global Disability Summit 2025 builds upon the achievements of the two previous summits and is co-hosted by the Governments of Germany and Jordan, alongside the permanent co-host IDA. The summit is planned as an in-person event (with the possibility for virtual attendance) on 2nd-3rd April 2025 in Berlin.

Outline for GDS 2025

The objective of the next summit is to build and expand the momentum of the previous two GDS, by amplifying its impact in advancing the rights and inclusion of all persons with disabilities through international cooperation. To do this, several key messages have been identified by the co-hosts to determine the most cutting-edge and innovative approach for the GDS 2025:

1. Nothing about us without us

Persons with disabilities are at the centre of the GDS process and event. The often-quoted phrase "Nothing about us without us" will be translated into concrete action by:

a. Strengthening Organizations of Persons with Disabilities to have a say on the GDS commitments. Commitments will be based on consultations with OPDs, they should respond to the priorities expressed by persons with disabilities.

b. Persons with disabilities will have a stage in Berlin to present their priorities and views directly to the

world audience. We will not only have a sequence of political speeches, that talk “about us”, but rather an exchange between stakeholders including persons with disabilities.

The GDS Secretariat and IDA will implement a global consultation process with the OPDs and other relevant stakeholders to select priorities to be tackled during the next summit.
Most important for us is that we need to learn directly from and with persons with disabilities, and that we engage with governments, civil society, and the private sector to the benefit of persons with disabilities and their communities. No single actor alone can deliver the needed transformation. Well-structured partnerships and cross-sector collaborations are the essential catalysts of change.

2. Focus on implementation

GDS 2025 will be an eye-opener for decision-makers by displaying in a creative and surprising manner:

a. smart, inspiring best practices that can easily be adopted and scaled up; as well as

b. the reality of discrimination and deprivation of human rights and the consequences this has for the life and rights of more than one billion human beings.

The GDS 2025 will use creative and interactive methods to showcase practical examples from around the globe. We will not only present good practices but also failures, gaps, and the lived reality of persons with disabilities. This will challenge stereotypes and myths of disability and allow us to learn from each other.

Germany, Jordan, and IDA clearly want to accelerate the momentum created by the previous two GDS and expand the global efforts for disability equality and meaningful engagement of persons with disabilities. At the same time, we feel the need to create even more opportunities for multiple stakeholders to come together to align for real change, given we are increasingly confronted with the fact that well-intended commitments and policies are either not implemented, or not resulting in systemic impact. Therefore, we need a bold mechanism to translate international obligations into practical policies.

3. Focus on rights

GDS 2025 will make clear that the ongoing discrimination of persons with disabilities is a violation of human rights that State Parties are obliged to respect, promote, and fulfil. It will do so by systematically taking the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN CRPD) – its content and the identified gaps of its implementation – as the starting point for all processes and discussions in the GDS context.

The co-hosts would like to use the GDS 2025 to re-ensure that persons with disabilities have the right to meaningful engagement and concrete improvements in their spheres of life. The implementation of the UN CRPD is not a voluntary act, but a result of binding obligations. This clearly must be reflected in international policies and mechanisms of development cooperation. Therefore, the co-hosts are eager to enter a political negotiation process that results in more impactful commitments of various stakeholders which are needed to implement the UN CRPD and strengthen the rights of persons with disabilities in the global South.

The co-hosts have the ambition to come up with a powerful GDS 2025 closing document to strengthen the relationship between donor countries and partner countries.

4. National Ownership

The Articles of the UN CRPD will only be truly fulfilled if all countries take responsibility for the issue of disability inclusion. The idea being that sustainable success will only be achieved if countries adopt a serious approach and make disability rights a political priority. In this regard the emphasis should be on the necessity that:

a. the problem is understood at all political levels;

b. state entities are given the necessary mandate and resources;

c. cross-cutting and mainstreamed national plans are made to address the challenges, including legislation and financial commitments;

d. OPDs are meaningfully and systematically included in all decision-making processes.

With regard to the GDS 2025, we expect that the national ownership will be translated into ambitious and concrete commitments, as well as the implementation of the commitments and of the entire UN CRPD.

Demonstrated national ownership also plays an important role in international cooperation. It is a precondition for partnerships at eye level, and for achievements that last even after the cooperation or funding has ended. This is as true for the field of disability inclusion as for any other field of international cooperation.

5. Disability inclusive development

GDS 2025 will bridge the gap between two arenas that are still separate: disability inclusion and development cooperation.
It will do so by:

a. Adopting a closing document that highlights the importance of development cooperation and humanitarian action according to Art. 32 and Art. 11 of the UN CRPD and that spells out in concrete terms the obligations this entails for mainstreaming the convention in every aspect of development cooperation and humanitarian action.

b. Ensuring that disability inclusion will be adequately considered for the current and post-2030-Agenda discussion.

Our aim is to generate strong political traction: establishing the next GDS as a key step towards a significant impetus for the implementation of the SDGs as well as securing significant space for disability inclusion in the post-2030 Agenda. When we look at the 2030 Agenda in its current state, we are far from the goal of leaving no one behind (LNOB). Recent crises like the Covid-19 pandemic, the war in Ukraine and the earthquakes in Syria and Turkey have again demonstrated the need to take action on a global level for and with persons with disabilities, who are at higher risk.

Our ambition is to encourage donor countries to ensure that all their development assistance (bilateral and multilateral) is disability inclusive so that disability inclusion is effectively mainstreamed in development cooperation.

6. Bridging the gap

GDS 2025 will bridge the gap between the haves and have-nots by:

a. Promoting commitments that foster international cooperation. If a state needs support for the implementation of the UN CRPD, the GDS mechanism aims to bring stakeholders together and facilitate development cooperation in this area.

b. Pointing out the funding gaps. The available funds dedicated for fighting against discrimination based on disabilities represent a tiny share of those means available for fighting against discrimination based on other criteria (such as gender or age). The GDS will therefore make it clear that existing development funds need to be mainstreamed in the sense of the UN CRPD and that additional, specific funding is needed.

We need to attract new financial resources and allocate more of the available resources for disability inclusion globally. We want to do things differently and must encourage innovative system change, creative thinking, and new ideas to ensure that disability inclusion is implemented in a twin-track approach of mainstreaming and targeted interventions. An initial idea that needs further work before being possibly included on the GDS agenda is a new mechanism for financial pledging to a future “Global Disability Fund”, which could give more leverage to national governments and civil society organizations to work together with other important stakeholders. Not only governments but also the private sector should be important allies in our endeavour to close the gap between the global North and the global South.

7. Focus on data and evidence

To change the living conditions of persons with disabilities and foster their full participation, data disaggregated by disabilities is a prerequisite. It is necessary to foster a disability-inclusive development culture where we learn from each other and use evidence for our interventions. For this, we need good practices and data from persons with disabilities.

To focus on impact, evidence and learning requires a proper analysis of the gaps in implementing the UN CRPD in the global South, and how to address them. We need to know where investment in disability inclusion is needed most urgently. This analysis will come from a Global Disability Inclusion Report (which is currently being prepared by IDA and UNICEF in cooperation with a consortium and with funding from Germany) and the Disability Data Hub that the World Bank will launch at the GDS 2025. With these tools, inequalities, and discrimination as well as the needs of persons with disabilities will be more visible and adequate disability-inclusive policies can be developed.

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