



GLOBAL DISABILITY SUMMIT

# WHITE PAPER



# CONTENTS

## 1 STRATEGIC PURPOSE AND POLITICAL POSITIONING... 4

<b>1.1 The Problem the Global Disability Summit Addresses.....</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>1.2 What Global Disability Summit Is – and Is Not.....</b>	<b>9</b>
What this Means in Practice.....	12
<b>1.3 Foundational Principles of the Global Disability Summit.....</b>	<b>13</b>
What this Means in Practice.....	15
<b>1.4 How the GDS Drives Change.....</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>1.5 Why Does the GDS Matter Now?.....</b>	<b>21</b>

## 2 FROM COMMITMENT TO SUSTAINED IMPACT.....23

What this Means in Practice.....	24
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# i Strategic Purpose and Political Positioning

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Disability inclusion and the rights of persons with disabilities are widely recognized in global commitments and policy frameworks, including the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN CRPD). Yet recognition alone does not ensure sustained political attention, coordinated implementation, or adequate financing across systems. The challenge is not the absence of norms or evidence, but a mechanism that sustains political prioritization, alignment and accountability over time. These challenges are particularly visible in contexts where development cooperation, humanitarian response and financial constraints intersect, particularly in low and low-middle income countries.

The Global Disability Summit (GDS) was established to address this challenge, not by creating new legal obligations, but by strengthening political alignment, accountability and implementation of rights of persons with disabilities. The GDS aims to enhance the lives of persons with disabilities and its defining characteristic is its cyclical design. Operating across multi-year cycles, the GDS links regional consultations, high-level political convening, strategic commitments, and structured follow-up, thereby converting legal recognition into coordinated political action and practical implementation. The Summit itself is a milestone within this cycle, and not its endpoint.

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***Recognition alone does not ensure sustained political attention, coordinated implementation, or adequate financing across systems.***



The GDS does not create new legal obligations, the GDS reinforces existing frameworks by acting as a financing catalyst and alignment platform. It strengthens coherence between national priorities, international cooperation, and development financing, ensuring that disability inclusion remains politically visible and practically embedded across systems.

This White Paper sets out the strategic purpose, governing logic and core principles of the GDS. It explains the problem GDS is designed to solve, how it drives change as compared to existing mechanisms, why it matters in the current global context and how it uniquely contributes to advancing disability inclusion beyond what existing legal, technical, or programmatic approaches can achieve.

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*The GDS keeps disability inclusion politically prioritized in times of global pressure*



# What Makes the GDS Unique?



## 01

### Leadership by Persons with Disabilities

- Organizations of Persons with Disabilities (OPDs) lead agenda setting, monitoring and accountability.
- Prevents tokenistic participation and symbolic inclusion.
- Anchors priorities in person-centered approach and rights.

## 02

### Commitments as Political Instruments

- Used to signal priorities, enable cooperation and create leverage.
- Fewer, clearer commitments with follow-up.
- Serve as advocacy and accountability tools for OPDs.



## 03

### Cycles, not Events

- GDS operates across time, not summits.
- What happens between summits is as important as the summit itself.
- Prevents disability inclusion from being sidelined as political attention shifts.

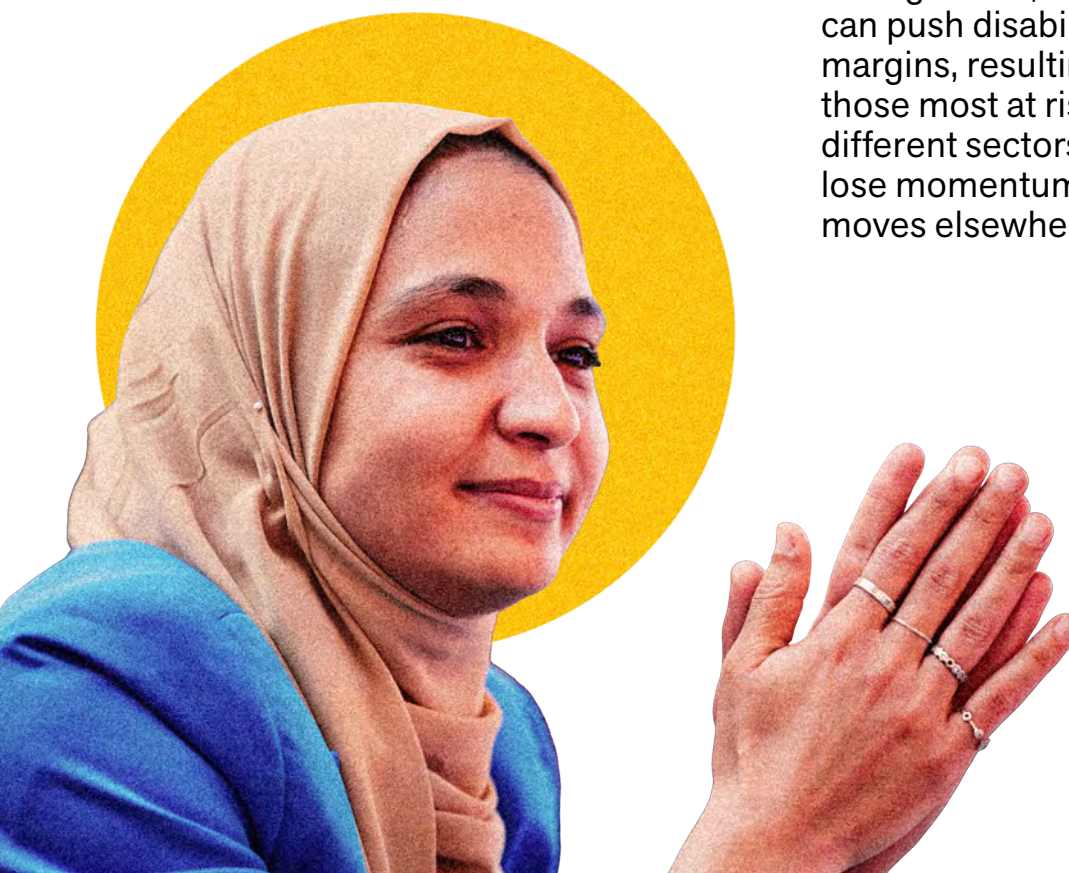
## 1.1

# The Problem the Global Disability Summit Addresses

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Although there are established laws and agreements supporting the rights of persons with disabilities, these rights are not yet consistently translated into coordinated policy action, financing decisions, or implementation across systems. Many countries officially recognize disability rights and have ratified the UN CRPD, but challenges persist in translating recognition into coordinated political action, adequate funding, and effective implementation.

Multiple underlying factors contribute to the gap between recognizing disability rights and putting them into practice. Often, disability inclusion is viewed as a cross-cutting issue without clear ownership. This leads to disjointed efforts among ministries, agencies, and funding sources. In the realm of international cooperation, while disability inclusion is frequently acknowledged, it is not consistently integrated into program design, financing requirements, or accountability systems. In humanitarian emergencies, the urgency of response can push disability inclusion to the margins, resulting in the exclusion of those most at risk. Furthermore, across different sectors, implementation tends to lose momentum once political attention moves elsewhere.



While current mechanisms address certain aspects of this challenge, they do not provide a comprehensive solution. The UN CRPD sets out binding responsibilities and requires reporting, but it does not ensure ongoing political prioritization of disability inclusion within development and financing systems. Development and humanitarian organizations operate within their own governance and incentive frameworks, where disability inclusion often competes with other priorities or is simply overlooked. Consequently, progress tends to be slow, fragmented, and easily reversed.

The GDS was established to help bridge the gap between recognition of the rights of persons with disabilities and effective realization in policy, financing and practice. Its purpose is to strengthen political will, encourage collaboration, and enhance accountability for disability inclusion, especially in areas where international cooperation and crisis response overlap with disability rights. By operating as a recurring political mechanism, the GDS ensures ongoing political focus and alignment, maintaining pressure for coordinated action across systems over time.

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***The GDS was established to help bridge the gap between recognition of the rights of persons with disabilities and effective realization in policy, financing and practice.***



## 1.2

# What Global Disability Summit Is - and Is Not

The Global Disability Summit (GDS) was created to address the ongoing challenges of integrating disability inclusion in policy, practice, development cooperation, and humanitarian aid (Article 32 and 11, CRPD). Unlike legal obligations and technical guidelines, which often fall short in generating sustained political commitment, the GDS is specifically designed to strengthen implementation of rights as articulated in the UN CRPD, particularly where coordinated political prioritization and cooperation are needed.

### **GDS as a continuous multi-year cycle**

GDS functions as a continuous cycle, maintaining focus, coordination, and accountability for disability inclusion across development, humanitarian, and financial systems. Instead of being a single event, the GDS works in ongoing cycles that connect agenda-setting, high-level political engagement, concrete commitments, and follow-up actions between summits. This approach ensures that disability inclusion stays prominent and prioritized, even as international priorities evolve.



## **Mobilizing and aligning financing for disability inclusion**

To convert political commitments into meaningful structural change, it is essential to ensure sufficient and coordinated resource allocation. The GDS serves as a mechanism for financing and resource alignment, connecting political pledges with national budgeting processes, development cooperation strategies, and international financial instruments.

While the GDS does not act as an independent funding entity, it enhances the harmonization between national objectives and international collaboration by promoting the alignment of donor, multilateral, and humanitarian funding with its commitments.

Beginning in 2025, and further through 2028 and beyond, resource mobilization, financial monitoring, and coherence in funding will be systematically integrated within the GDS cycle as a core strategic function.

## **A multi-stakeholder partnership model**

The GDS operates through a partnership model that brings together governments, OPDs, development partners, multilaterals, humanitarian organizations, and the private sector. Within this model, governments retain the primary responsibility for implementation, while international partners align support with nationally identified priorities. OPDs play a central role in shaping priorities and reinforcing accountability. This shared architecture distinguishes the GDS from mechanisms centered on state reporting or project delivery.



## Complimenting and strengthening existing systems

The GDS's role is complementary. It supports and adds value to existing systems but does not take over the monitoring responsibilities of the CRPD. Its main strength is bringing together political leaders and organizations that do not usually work closely, helping everyone focus on common goals and shared accountability. By regularly drawing attention to disability inclusion and following up between summits, the GDS helps turn promises into real, lasting action. In this way, it transforms scattered efforts into a coordinated political priority.

Together, these features position the GDS as a practical mechanism for advancing the implementation of disability rights across systems.

## The GDS is:

**NOT** a treaty body or monitoring mechanism under the CRPD

**NOT** a project implementation platform

**NOT** stand alone funding institution

**NOT** a one-off global conference



## What this Means in Practice

### OPD-LED AGENDA SETTING

GDS cycles begin before the Summit and continue between cycles, sustaining attention on implementation of disability rights over time.

### STRATEGIC COMMITMENTS

Commitments are designed with purpose, scope and follow-up expectations, enabling stakeholders to use them as reference points for implementation and accountability.

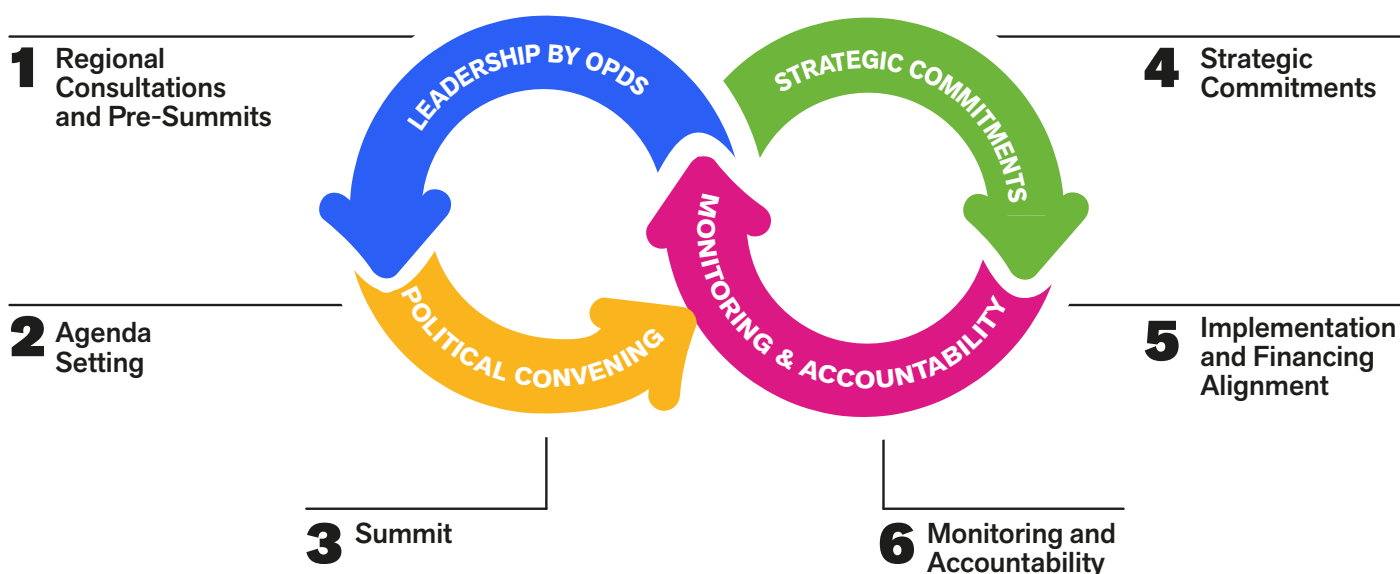
### POLITICAL CONVENING

International cooperation can align with nationally identified priorities, strengthening long-term implementation capacity.

### FOLLOW-UP & ACCOUNTABILITY

Monitoring and learning between summits inform political dialogue, advocacy and course correction, ensuring that momentum generated at the summit leads to sustained action.

## The GDS is a Continuous Political Mechanism



## 1.3

# Foundational Principles of the Global Disability Summit

For the GDS to function credibly and effectively across cycles, certain foundational principles guide its design and implementation. These principles are not thematic add-ons but are non-negotiables that shape what the GDS stands for and how it operates.

### **Leadership by persons with disabilities**

Leadership by persons with disabilities, through their representative organizations, is foundational to the design of the GDS. This engagement is not consultative; it is structural. OPDs play a central role in setting priorities, inform agenda-setting, influence the design of commitments, participate in monitoring, and follow-up across cycles. Political outcomes serve as accountability instruments that can be used to sustain engagement between summits.

By embedding this leadership throughout the GDS cycle, disability inclusion moves beyond symbolic participation towards shared governance that strengthens realization of rights of persons with disabilities across diverse contexts, but especially in low and low-middle income countries. Regional pre-summits and thematic workshops operationalize this leadership but do not define its limits.



## **Alignment with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities**

The UN CRPD provides the normative foundation for the GDS. The GDS is grounded in the recognition that disability inclusion is fundamentally a matter of human rights. State Parties are obligated under the Convention to respect, protect, and fulfil the rights of persons with disabilities.

The GDS does not operate as a treaty body nor does it create new obligations. Rather, it serves as a political mechanism that supports implementation of the UN CRPD by strengthening political prioritization, coordination and accountability. In this sense, GDS functions as a practical tool that helps translate existing human rights commitments into sustained policy attention, institutional reform and resource alignment.

Through its multi-year cycles, the GDS reinforces the understanding that persons with disabilities are rights-holders with agency and voice in decisions affecting their lives.

OPDs contribute to shaping priorities, informing commitments, and reinforcing accountability processes that support implementation of CRPD obligations in practice.

Acting as a political catalyst, the GDS is particularly relevant in areas where international cooperation plays an important role in enabling implementation, including humanitarian action and financing alignment. In this regard, political outcomes emerging from the GDS process – such as the Amman-Berlin Declaration – illustrate how the Summit contributes to strengthening coherence and shared direction among stakeholders, consistent with the spirit of Article 32 of the CRPD on international cooperation.

By supporting alignment between political processes and binding human rights obligations, the GDS contributes to advancing realization of the rights of persons with disabilities across diverse national contexts, including in settings where structural barriers to implementation persist.



# What this Means in Practice

## Global Disability Summit



### sustains

political prioritization across systems



### drives

visibility, coordination and alignment



### creates

political commitments and follow-up across cycles



### reinforces

implementation where it is most fragile: international cooperation, development financing and crisis response

## UN CRPD



### establishes

legal rights and state obligations



### defines

normative standards



### provides

treaty monitoring mechanisms



### anchors

disability rights in laws



**National ownership within international cooperation.**

Sustainable progress on disability inclusion depends on national leadership. Governments retain primary responsibility for implementing disability rights through policy, budgeting, and institutional reform.

In many low and low-middle income economies, implementation is shaped by international cooperation, financing frameworks, and multilateral governance systems. The GDS reinforces shared accountability by connecting domestic priorities with international partnerships, donors and multilateral institutions under a coherent political framework.

The effectiveness of the GDS cycle (agenda-setting, political convening, commitments, and follow-up) depends on strong guiding principles. Without these clear non-negotiable principles, the GDS risks dilution or merely symbolic engagement. The Global Disability Summit therefore, rests on foundational principles that maintain its integrity, ensuring that political action leads to real progress.





## 1.4

# How the GDS Drives Change

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The overarching objective of the GDS cycle is to improve the lives of persons with disabilities by ensuring that rights commitments translate into practical changes in policy, systems, and resource allocation. To drive this change, the main challenge is not a lack of standards, but rather the need for ongoing prioritization, commitment and coordination. The GDS addresses this by establishing a structured process that connects leadership, commitments, and accountability throughout each Summit cycle.

### **OPD-led agenda setting and structural prioritization**

Each GDS cycle starts regional consultations, pre-summits and thematic workshops where stakeholders, particularly OPDs identify practical gaps in implementation, strategic priorities, emerging risks, and systemic barriers across different regions and thematic sectors. These regional processes shape the global agenda by anchoring priorities in real-world experiences and addressing actual obstacles. Through this process, the GDS ensures that disability inclusion remains practical and meaningful, rather than abstract or symbolic.

This agenda-setting function plays a vital role in reducing fragmentation and making sure that global discussions take national and regional priorities into account.

### **Political visibility and alignment**

The Summit provides a moment of high-level political visibility. By bringing together governments, international organizations, development actors, and other stakeholders, the GDS creates a shared platform where disability inclusion is emphasized within broader development and humanitarian agendas.

Political convening alone does not drive change. Political convening functions within the GDS cycle to align actors around shared priorities and create a platform for coordinated commitments.



## Strategic commitments and advancing implementation

Commitments within the GDS cycle are not an end in themselves. Commitments are strategic political instruments with defined scope, timeframes, and implementation pathways that signal clear priorities, enable cooperation, and create publicly articulated reference points for accountability. They are designed to link political intent with policy reform, budgeting decisions, institutional change and financing alignment, ensuring that declarations are translated into implementation pathways.

Within the GDS cycle, commitments help translate recognition of disability rights into policy reform, budgeting decisions, institutional change and program design.

By aligning national priorities with international cooperation and financing frameworks, the GDS strengthens the conditions under which implementation can advance in a structured and sustained manner. Effective implementation depends not only on political commitment but on aligned financing and sustained institutional reform.

Monitoring and follow-up across cycles helps identify gaps, support course correction, and maintain momentum towards measurable outcomes. Experience has demonstrated that a small number of well-defined and strategically aligned commitments combined with follow-up are more effective than large volumes of loosely defined promises. In this way, by integrating commitments into the broader GDS cycle, the mechanism shifts from volume-based pledging towards quality, coherence and accountability.



## **Follow-up and accountability across cycles**

A key aspect of the GDS is that it is a continuous process which operates across time. Monitoring progress, sharing lessons learned and engagement between summits ensures that disability inclusion does not lose momentum once global attention shifts.

Political outcomes and commitments serve as reference points that can be revisited, assessed, and used by governments, OPDs, and civil society partners to reinforce accountability. This continuity helps turn moments of visibility into sustained political pressure.



## 1.5

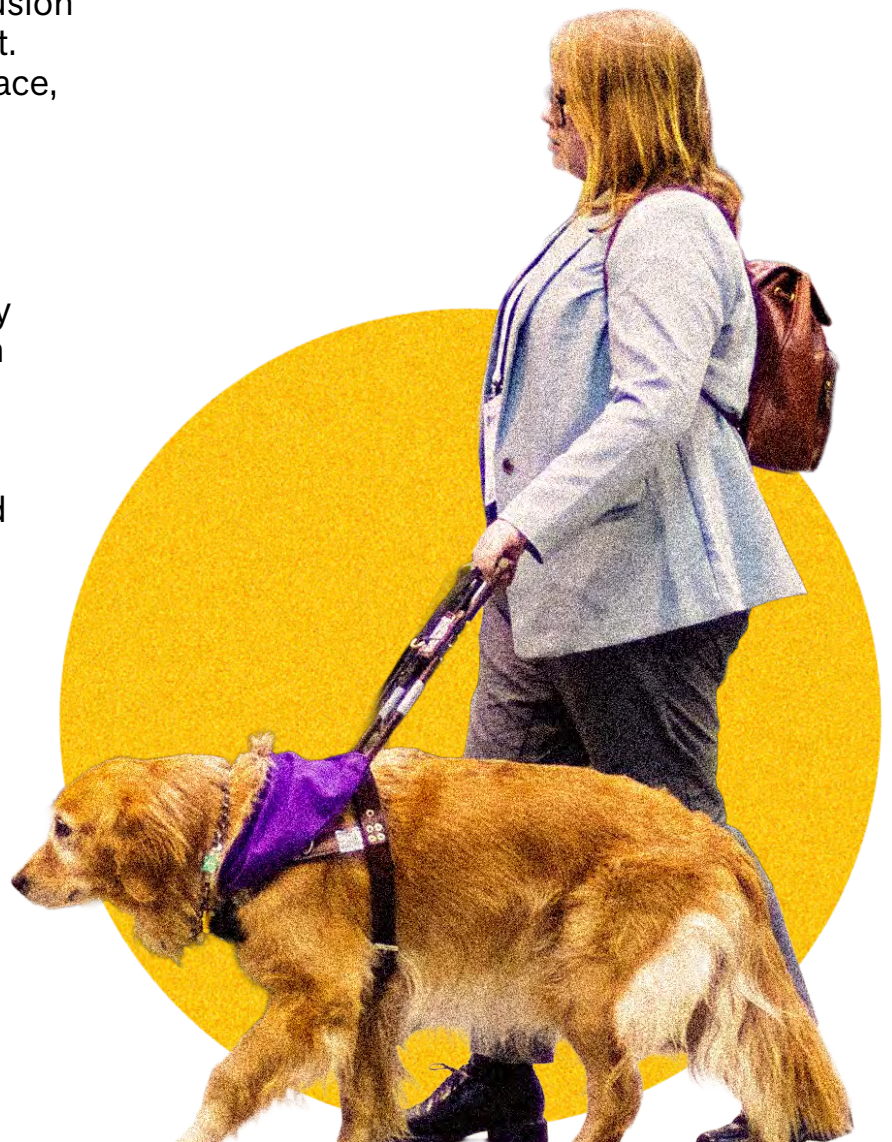
# Why Does the GDS Matter Now?

The global context in which disability inclusion operates is increasingly unstable. Climate-related disasters, conflict, economic shocks, and shrinking space for civil society and development finance are reshaping political and international priorities and compressing attention. In such geo-political context, cross-cutting issues risk being sidelined as governments and institutions focus on immediate crises. Disability inclusion is particularly vulnerable to this shift. While legal obligations remain in place, political attention and coordinated implementation can weaken when systems are under strain.

The Global Disability Summit plays a critical role in this environment. By anchoring disability inclusion within recurring global political cycles, it helps sustain attention, reinforce accountability, and promote coherence across development and humanitarian systems.

Without a mechanism like the GDS, disability inclusion risks being diluted across systems where no actor sustains political responsibility for implementation.

Its value lies in maintaining political focus and strengthening implementation, ensuring that disability inclusion remains embedded in decision-making rather than treated as secondary.





# 2 From Commitment to Sustained Impact

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The Global Disability Summit has evolved from a periodic global convening into a structured political mechanism for advancing disability inclusion across systems.

Through its recurring political cycles, the GDS brings together governments, Organizations of Persons with Disabilities, multilaterals, international partners, and other stakeholders to align priorities, mobilize collective action, and reinforce shared responsibility for implementation.

This White Paper clarifies the governing logic of that mechanism. At its core is leadership by persons with disabilities embedded across agenda setting, commitment design, monitoring and follow-up. National ownership anchors implementation within domestic policy, budgeting and institutional reform, while international cooperation strengthens coherence and resource alignment. Commitments function as strategic instruments linking political intent with practical action, financing alignment and measurable progress.

Together, these elements position the GDS as more than a summit for dialogue. It is a sustained political anchor that connects global visibility with regional and national realities, ensuring that momentum generated at each summit contributes to cumulative progress over time. The effectiveness of the GDS is ultimately measured by whether these processes contribute to tangible improvements in the daily lives of persons with disabilities.

As the GDS continues to evolve, its value lies in its capacity to maintain focus, reinforce accountability and drive implementation across changing political and economic landscapes. This White Paper serves as a shared reference point for all stakeholders engaged in the process, affirming a collective commitment to move from recognition to results, from isolated initiatives to coordinated systems and from commitment to sustained impact for persons with disabilities worldwide.

## What this Means in Practice

### 01

Governments embed disability inclusion across policies, and budgets, linking national commitments to implementation and OPD-supported accountability.

### 03

Development, multilateral and humanitarian partners align their commitments and support with nationally identified priorities, using the GDS to coordinate support.

### 02

The GDS helps governments signal priorities and identify where international cooperation, technical assistance, and financing can accelerate progress.

### 04

OPDs use commitments and agreed political outcomes to track progress, engage decision-makers, and sustain accountability between GDS cycles.



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