In 2018 the Disability Rights Fund and Disability Rights Advocacy Fund (DRF/DRAF) received a grant from the United Kingdom’s Department for International Development (DFID) to fund a limited re-granting initiative dedicated to supporting the actualization of government commitments made during the 2018 U.K. Global Disability Summit (GDS). Through the Commonwealth Leaves No One Behind project (the “CW Project”), DRAF/DRF are supporting national coalitions and special projects in select Commonwealth countries with grants and technical assistance for advocacy to government to actualize specific commitments. This grantmaking, with very limited exceptions, prioritizes support for country-level DPOs as another mechanism to increase participation of persons with disabilities in decision-making processes related to implementation of the CRPD and the SDGs. Increased visibility and participation of the disability community is critical to ensure that persons with disabilities are not left behind in society, in policy, or when resources are allocated. The CW grants are made by invitation only, utilizing DRF/DRAF knowledge of the disability community on the ground.

At the Global Disability Summit (GDS) held in London in July 2018, the government of Bangladesh formally identified eight commitments for actions. Because the commitments outline specific actions and timelines, they represent a new and potentially powerful point of leverage to advance CRPD domestication in Bangladesh.

In April 2019, the 11th pre-sessional working group of the United Nations CRPD Committee considered Bangladesh’s initial State report (as well as civil society reports, including an alternative report from a DPO-CSO Coalition funded by DRF) on national implementation of the CRPD.

This presented an opportunity to utilize the Bangladesh government commitments in the CRPD reporting process. The DRF/DRAF Commonwealth Project team made a grant to support a delegation of Bangladeshi DPO representatives to participate in the pre-sessional meeting.

Prior to traveling to Geneva, DRF staff started a dialogue with the delegation on the connections between CRPD advocacy and the GDS commitments. DRF staff worked with IDA to be included in the delegation’s Geneva schedule, both as they prepared for their private session with the Committee and as they debriefed and discussed next steps. DRF staff also reviewed the Bangladeshi Alternative Report to lift out examples where leveraging the GDS commitments could strengthen arguments for CRPD compliance.

In the debrief session, DRF staff worked with the delegation to think about how the obligations created by the GDS commitments could be leveraged to better spur to resolution the issues forthcoming in the Committee’s List of Issues (LoI) for the Bangladesh government.

LESSONS LEARNED

- The CW team quickly realized that many advocates had a superficial understanding of the Global Disability Summit and the commitments made by their government; and they had not been briefed about what to expect in Geneva or how to optimize the opportunity. Significant preparation was required in advance.
- There was not an immediate linkage for most between the GDS commitments made by the Bangladesh government and the CRPD review process. Coming to Geneva, the Commitments were seen as ‘stand alone’ targets to be advocated for by themselves.
- One of the most powerful moments was when advocates got that the CRPD commitments were really there as “means” to fuel their advocacy for CRPD domestication.

LESSONs LEARNED

- Skills and knowledge gained during the CRPD review of Rwanda have proved useful in holding the government of Rwanda accountable to the commitments made at the GDS and vice-versa. One key lesson for NUDOR in this process is the importance of building partnerships to support their advocacy agenda. They have built partnerships with mainstream civil society organizations such as Human Rights First Rwanda Association, the Rwandan Law Reform Commission, academia, and various UN agencies.