

Reflections from the Post-GDS Workshop in Bangkok: A Personal Learning Journey Toward Inclusion

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The Post-GDS Workshop held in Bangkok on October 10–11 brought together disability advocates from across ASEAN to assess progress following the Global Disability Summit (GDS) and to strengthen the region's commitment to inclusive development. For the Spina Bifida Support Group Foundation (SBSGF), this event represented not only an opportunity to learn, but also a chance to broaden our understanding of the wider disability movement.

For me personally, the workshop marked an important milestone. Until now, my participation in disability-related events had been limited: I had attended only one such gathering in the Philippines, and my international involvement revolved solely around Spina Bifida. This workshop was my first experience engaging with a diverse international community of persons with different types of disabilities—and it was both eye-opening and transformative.

A Broader View of the Disability Movement

Participating in this workshop allowed me to learn far beyond the formal sessions. The conversations, shared experiences, and diverse perspectives helped me appreciate the complexity and breadth of the disability movement. It made me realize how much more there is to understand, and how important it is to approach inclusion with a mindset that embraces all disability groups, not only those within our own network.

This experience also reinforced the importance of strengthening SBSGF's collaboration with other organizations working to promote the rights and welfare of persons with disabilities. Inclusion is a collective effort, and meaningful progress requires active partnerships across sectors, regions, and communities.

Commitments Must Lead to Action

One of my key takeaways from the workshop is the importance of translating commitments into real, measurable change. The GDS has led to strong pledges from governments and organizations, but the true test lies in implementation. The workshop challenged us to reflect on how these commitments can be transformed into concrete actions that directly improve the lives of persons with disabilities.

For SBSGF, this means looking closely at how our local initiatives can support national and global goals. It also means encouraging our members to stay informed, involved, and engaged as part of a much larger movement for equal rights and inclusive development.

The Value of Regional Collaboration

Another significant lesson was the strength of regional collaboration. Listening to advocates from other ASEAN countries made it clear that many of our challenges are shared. Whether it is access to services, policy implementation, or public awareness, these issues resonate across borders. Collaboration, including shared strategies, mutual learning, and support for regional commitments, strengthens and unifies the disability community.

During the workshop, I also had the opportunity to meet Wardah from Spina Bifida Indonesia. Our exchange highlighted how connected our work is and how much we can gain by building relationships with counterparts in other countries. These personal connections make regional collaboration more meaningful and grounded.

Moving Forward with Clarity and Purpose

Overall, the Post-GDS Workshop provided me with both direction and motivation. It gave me a clearer sense of my role within the disability movement and encouraged me to continue learning so I can contribute more effectively to SBSGF's mission. The discussions on global frameworks, such as the Amman Berlin Declaration, reminded me that while there is much more to study, we are moving in the right direction.

As we continue our work in the Philippines, I hope to help strengthen our foundation's partnerships, encourage broader engagement among our members, and ensure that global commitments are meaningfully reflected in our local initiatives.

This workshop was not only an educational experience—it was a powerful reminder that inclusion requires continuous learning, collaboration, and action. And I am grateful to have been part of this important step forward.

I extend my sincere gratitude to IF for this meaningful opportunity and to all the people behind the workshop whose dedication made this experience both enriching and empowering. Your hard work created a space where advocates like me could learn, connect, and gain renewed hope for a more inclusive future.