



15. Monitor for accessibility and infuse build back better principles

Members of the community using a disability-inclusive natural disaster shelter in Ninh Binh Province, Vietnam, as part of a DIDRR project from CBM and the Aid for Social Protection Foundation. ©CBM

Community development and its close contact with communities, has a critical role in monitoring and also reporting, and in particular in ensuring vigilance so that past mistakes are not repeated. Notions and practices such as those of ‘build back better’ are important also as a philosophy, where mistakes of the past are learnt from, and where DIDRR is constantly kept in focus so that new systems and practices will not collapse again.

But what does this mean in practice? It means monitoring to ensure that old infrastructure is adapted and that there are accommodations in place to account for accessibility. When it comes to new infrastructure such as evacuation centres and shelters, new schools or hospitals, vigilance is needed to make sure that this infrastructure and anything included within is entirely accessible to persons with a range of disabilities, with no exceptions. Build back better is grounded in universal design²⁷ as the regulatory framework where comprehensive accessibility cross-cuts everything. This therefore necessitates key input by OPDs to monitor, assess and assist in design, alongside architects, engineers and others. CBID can provide an effective bridge for these contacts and collaborations²⁸.

There is ample information to be gathered, but much of this can be included alongside your regular community development work. Sometimes it is a question of starting to observe and document things that have always been there, but to which you may have not devoted much attention. Here are some areas to be on the lookout for. As you will see, much of this cannot be observed from a distance, so you will likely need someone to personally visit. So, get your diplomatic hat on and first ensure you get access by those controlling these facilities. If you do not manage, speak to people, especially persons with disabilities and their families who may have already seen or used them. They are, as always, excellent repositories of knowledge.

MONITORING ACCESS: ACTIVE OBSERVATION

Check if systems and resources are in place to be able to locate and quickly reach those who are most vulnerable and need assistance in a crisis, ideally when there is an indication that a disaster is going to happen. Some questions you may want to ask, include:

- Have persons with disabilities been mapped? (where they live, proximity to evacuation routes etc.- see below) Who stores this information? Is it updated? (see below for more on mapping)
- Is there a system in place to ensure that persons with disabilities are evacuated first?
- Do evacuation staff know where to locate them?
- Do they know how to handle them and have they been trained?

²⁷ For more, see [The Principles of Universal Design](#).

²⁸ For more on ‘build back better’, see GFDRR (n.d.) [Building Back Better in Post-Disaster Recovery](#). GFDRR.

MONITORING ACCESS: ACTIVE OBSERVATION

Monitor and ensure that mechanisms are inclusive and fully accessible when it comes to evacuation:

- Can any person enter a shelter, irrespective of dis/ability?
- Does everyone know where the closest evacuation routes are?
- Do shelters include safe access to water and toilets, ramps and rails to move around?
- Are plans and budgets in place to have assistive devices as well as medication (that may be lost or left behind in a disaster event) available in shelters?
- Are shelters fully accessible e.g. wider openings, doors that can easily be opened, clear signing (in all languages), a WASH section that is disability accessible?
- Do evacuation facilities as well as shelters allow for service animals (e.g. guide dogs)?
- Visit the roads and infrastructure used for evacuation: are they cleared, maintained and accessible so that people can reach shelters with minimal stress and obstacles in the eventuality of a disaster?
- Are there any obstacles to early warning systems and preparedness plans and measures, so that these do not exclude anyone?
- Are dietary requirements noted, and will measures be taken to provide adequate food?
- Are livestock, personal belongings as well as business assets such as tools and productive materials accounted for in evacuation plans, as part of a strategy to protect livelihoods? Are the means to do so (e.g. accessible boats that can carry animals) in place?

Check that plans for relief and water distribution are fully accessible to and usable by all persons with disabilities.

Revise whether reasonable adjustments are made to older structures that cannot be rebuilt, and that a minimum level of universal design criteria are met e.g. for clinics and hospitals in towns and regionally.

Are measures and also budgets in place to have medication (including specialised ones) readily available in shelters and elsewhere during and immediately after evacuation? Are these plans informed by consultation with persons with disabilities and their organisations?

Have needs assessments been conducted at community and household levels?

Assess whether there are plans for assistive devices to be in place in order to be able to reach meeting and distribution points and to reduce stress and risk of injury.

Investigate whether effective and quick access to health services, including specialised health care following a disaster has been prioritised. Have these services been clearly marked and are they known by persons with disabilities and their families?

Assess whether information has been developed that is accessible, timely, cost-effective and usable by everyone, including deaf people and those with visual impairments.