



Inclusive Humanitarian Action

Briefing Paper



“Even the best early warning systems and preparedness efforts to evacuate populations in danger do not address fully the diversity of disabilities that we have in our societies. The only way to address this is to ensure that persons with disabilities are involved in the design and planning of the systems that are designed to protect the safety of the population in all countries.”ⁱ

Margareta Wahlström, Special Representative for UNISDR at the Conference of State Parties to the CRPD in June 2013.

Cover image:

Mario F. Abaygar was Coordinator of ‘Ageing and Disability Focal Points’ (ADFPs), part of CBM and partners’ response to Typhoon Haiyan, which struck the Philippines in 2013. Here, he is seen organising relief distributions. © CBM

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Maximum effectiveness of humanitarian response will not be achieved without including all of society, at all levels of activity. Yet, when it comes to preparing for and responding to the increasing number of natural and man-made disasters happening on a global scale, the capacities, rights and needs of women, men, girls and boys with disabilities are not yet fully addressed by the international humanitarian community.ⁱⁱ Studies and commentary on disability and the impact of disaster have found that – in the face of climate change and in times of conflict – the relative poverty of persons with disabilities, combined with inaccessibility of relief services and low prioritisation of women, men, girls and boys with disabilities, places persons with disabilities at greater likelihood of facing hardship, illness and death.ⁱⁱⁱ

Disability and Disasters: Key Facts ^{iv}

- It is estimated there will be at least 200 million people displaced by climatic events by 2050, of whom at least 30 million are likely to be persons with disabilities.
- Women, men, girls and boys with disabilities can be often left behind in times of emergency. For example, observations from the Philippines claim that only 10 per cent of persons with disabilities found shelter in the evacuation centres, and those who got there were often pushed aside by the crowd.
- Disability inclusive humanitarian funding remains limited; both the UN and the EU have low levels of funding targeting persons with disabilities.
- Persons with disabilities are not prepared for disasters: 70% of persons with disabilities said that they had no personal preparedness plan and only 17% knew about any disaster management plan in their community.



Ahlam (who is deaf) being told what happened to her house (Gaza 2014). Communication during emergency response – including warning messages & relief information – must be accessible to everyone. © ASDC

This short briefing paper sets out key areas to guide stakeholders towards fully inclusive humanitarian action as an integral part of the new global agenda.

Obligations, responsibilities and accountability

Women, men, girls and boys with disabilities, while not explicitly referenced in international humanitarian law, are afforded protection. Human rights treaties such as the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (Article 11) further clarify these rights to ensure that State Parties are aware of their responsibilities to be inclusive of persons with disabilities in times of humanitarian action. In addition, progress has been made with the inclusion of persons with disabilities in international frameworks – the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction has set a precedent.^v

Holding State Parties and governments accountable to their commitments on inclusive humanitarian action is a key factor in ensuring that women, men, girls and boys with disabilities

have the same access to aid as the rest of their communities in times of crisis. The following three areas are vital for increasing accountability of States:

- Evidence of systems that disaggregate data by sex, age and disability.
- Evidence of support specific to persons with disabilities and access to mainstream services for all in acute times of need through e.g. emergency response; and longer term e.g. rebuild and reconstruction.
- Evidence of the inclusion and participation of persons with disabilities in the development and implementation of national and local plans in the disaster management cycle.

DPO leads emergency response to Haiyan

CBM partner ADPI is a Disabled People's Organisation (DPO). After typhoon Haiyan, ADPI planned, coordinated and conducted emergency relief distributions and mainstreaming in early recovery. Their actions targeted the whole community but included the most disproportionately affected people, providing good evidence that persons with disabilities should not be restricted to passive roles in times of emergency response.



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Linking DRR and humanitarian action: the role of international humanitarian organisations and persons with disabilities

Humanitarian action involves a large variety of stakeholders that all need to coordinate their efforts to ensure that disability is included in their projects as a core-crosscutting theme. Research and case studies have shown that many of the barriers to inclusion of persons with disabilities in both preparation and response to disaster are due to lack of awareness and a lack of proper planning for including persons with disabilities by the organisations mounting



Disability-inclusive outreach camp after Nepal earthquake 2015. © CBM

the responses.^{vi} Parallels should be drawn from the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, which states 'Disaster risk reduction practices need to be multi-hazard and multisectoral based, inclusive and accessible in order to be efficient and effective' International humanitarian organisations must recognise that the inclusion of persons with disabilities is essential to their work and also that partnerships and coordination with disability specific organisations can help ensure this.

- Humanitarian organisations should ensure persons with disabilities are innately included in all initiatives by, where feasible, utilising the skills and knowledge of local/national/ international DPOs and disability-specific NGOs.
- As synergies between DRR and humanitarian action increase, through DRR at community level, persons with disabilities and DPOs can become involved. It is becoming increasingly recognised that resilience starts with making people aware of and prepared to prevent and/or cope with a possible disaster. Involving persons with disabilities and DPOs in this awareness and capacity building helps build resilience among persons with disabilities and that of the whole community. Disability inclusive preparedness plans will help elicit disability inclusive emergency response. Exclusion of persons with disabilities from

humanitarian action is a breach of the principle of impartiality and undermines the efficiency and effectiveness of the action.

- Development of local DRR mechanisms such as committees, action plans etc. must be inclusive of women, men, girls and boys with disabilities.
- DRR plans should be closely linked to response and recovery activities and there should be greater cooperation among various humanitarian and development actors prior to, during and after the disaster. Without this obvious linkage, humanitarian action is unlikely to be effective and efficient.

Kazol is a woman with a disability from Bangladesh and she is very involved in her local community in disaster risk reduction initiatives. She holds a number of leadership positions related to DRR and emergency planning. Kazol is responsible for ensuring health and safety during floods, and helping with preparation for evacuations of community members, including other persons with disabilities. Before her training and involvement in DRR and emergency planning, Kazol was afraid of floods, but now because of her role in the community she feels she can face it and also teach others how to cope. Read Kazol's full story at: www.endthecycle.org.au



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Financing humanitarian action

Financing humanitarian action is important for ensuring that urgent assistance is provided to countries when they need it. The different types of assistance can include supporting and filling the gaps with humanitarian actions and providing basic life necessities such as tents, blankets, food and water for people struggling to survive in many of the world's forgotten emergencies.

Although some donors have taken positive steps to ensure better inclusion of marginalised groups – including persons with

disabilities – through collection of disaggregated data by sex, age and disability as well as specifically financing tailored response to the needs of marginalised groups within the overall disaster affected community, financing for disability-inclusive humanitarian action remains limited. Currently the evidence base showing how humanitarian finance reaches projects and programmes that are inclusive of persons with disabilities is inadequate.^{vii} For example, while persons with disabilities represent 15% of the world population and are disproportionately affected by disaster, in 2010 and 2011, only 0.7% of the projects funded through UN emergency funds (CAP, Flash Appeals) included at least one activity targeting persons with disabilities.^{viii} The following three areas are important for ensuring inclusive financing for humanitarian action:

- Develop guidelines on disability inclusion in programmes financed by humanitarian donors.
- Develop specific target indicators on disability inclusion in humanitarian action.
- Document good practice of disability in inclusive financing, with a view to sharing among humanitarian donors.

During a disaster or conflict, people are more at risk of sustaining injuries which can lead to disability



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Adaptability to new crises

It is widely recognised that the world faces crises on a number of different fronts, including climate change and natural disasters, conflicts and wars and terrorist activity. Climate change in particular creates many challenges to humanitarian actors in responding to events that may occur without warning or in areas which up until now have remained free of disaster. Humanitarian actions need to be responsive to adapt to these new crises and ensure that that response is inclusive of everyone. Similarly, sudden onset conflicts also pose multiple challenges to humanitarian actors and the affected population. Persons with disabilities are often left behind due to societal barriers and are often perceived as a burden when families have to flee the conflict situation.

- Ensure new and developing areas of humanitarian action include persons with disabilities. New technology, especially ICT, when developed accessibly, provides an opportunity for inclusion. In addition mobile technology including social media is helpful for data collection and feedback mechanisms and improving speed and efficiency. At local level, communities (including persons with disabilities) need to be part of these developments – their inputs are needed to make these initiatives contextually appropriate as well as accessible for all.



Rajendra evacuated during the 2015 Nepal earthquake, but was one of the last people to reach a safe area. © CBM

Key recommendations towards fully inclusive humanitarian action

GOVERNMENTS SHOULD disaggregate data by sex, age and disabilities and provide evidence of support specific to persons with disabilities in times of emergency and rebuild phases. They should also ensure that the voices of persons with disabilities are included in the development and implementation of national and local plans in the disaster management cycle.

HUMANITARIAN ORGANISATIONS SHOULD ensure persons with disabilities are included in all initiatives, by, where feasible, utilising the skills and knowledge of local/national/international DPOs and disability-specific NGOs.

DRR AND PREPAREDNESS MEASURES FOR DISASTERS MUST ensure the development of local DRR mechanisms such as committees and action plans are inclusive of women, men, girls and boys with disabilities. They also must ensure there is a direct link between emergency response and these development initiatives so that the risk of any affected population falling back into poverty can be minimised.

AGENCIES RESPONSIBLE FOR HUMANITARIAN FINANCING MUST develop specific target indicators on disability inclusion in humanitarian action and document good practice of disability inclusive financing with a view to sharing among humanitarian donors.

ALL HUMANITARIAN ACTORS MUST ensure that persons with disabilities are included in responses to new and emerging crises.

References

- ⁱ Margareta Wahlström, Special Representative for UNISDR at the Conference of State Parties to the CRPD in June 2013.
- ⁱⁱ Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children (2008), "Disabilities among refugees and conflict affected populations", Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children, New York.
- ⁱⁱⁱ UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (2011) "Disability and the Millennium Development Goals. A Review of the MDG Process and Strategies for Inclusion of Disability Issues in Millennium, pg.8; Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children (2008) 'Disability among refugees and conflict affected populations'; Research presented at UN side event indicated that the mortality rate among persons with disabilities was twice that then the rest of the population during the 2011 Japanese tsunami (UN 2013).
- ^{iv} See UNOCHA at <http://www.unocha.org/top-stories/all-stories/humanitarian-issues-safeguarding-people-disabilities-during-emergencies>; *CBM (2013) Thematic brief on Sustainable Development*.
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improving the quality of life
of people with disabilities in
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