

IDA-IDDC statement on disability and disasters: Open Working Group, January 10, 2014

The social context faced by many persons with disabilities living in poverty in low- and middle-income countries means that many environmental hazards quickly become disasters for persons with disabilities. Furthermore, due to the nature of impairment, age, gender, geographical location, socio-economic and cultural background, many persons with disabilities experience significant levels of discrimination and disproportionately affected by hazards and particularly at risk to the adverse effects of climate change in a number of waysⁱ.

A lack of information and knowledge of disability among governments and relief organisations often results in poor information systems and knowledge of the location and requirements of persons with disabilities. This also leads to inaccurate national figures, leading to policymakers viewing implementing inclusive policies as a low priority or creating policies that do not account for the diversity and multi-faceted nature of disabilityⁱⁱ. Advance knowledge of how disability impacts the vulnerability and resilience to disasters of communities is also detrimental to ensure adequate risk reduction policies.

The lack of knowledge also results in the exclusion of persons with disabilities from disaster management and relief. Persons with disabilities and their organisations are rarely involved in disaster planning resulting in inaccessible and discriminatory preparedness measuresⁱⁱⁱ. For example, limited or inexistent participation of persons with disabilities in Vulnerability and Capacity Assessments will greatly reduce the information and knowledge on their needs and resources and contribute to their exclusion from the following Disaster Risks Management initiatives. By not meaningfully engaging with persons with disabilities and their organisations at any stage of the disaster management cycle their potential value in shaping effective policies is ignored. Before Typhoon Haiyan struck the Philippines, a Disabled People's Organisation (DPO) that participated in a local pre-emptive meeting at the provincial level on one of the affected Islands in Iloilo found that preparedness plans did not account for the needs of persons with disabilities^{iv}.

This exclusion of persons with disabilities leads to the creation of inaccessible physical environments, programmes and relief. Protective shelters are often completely inaccessible; that much relief is centred through such shelters further excludes persons with disabilities from accessing food, basic needs and health support^v. Even where shelters are built accessibly they can be located far from the community and are difficult for persons with disabilities to travel to. Damage to already inaccessible community infrastructure caused by environmental hazards can also make accessing and safe mobility to shelters or safe areas virtually impossible. All of these factors help to explain why persons with disabilities often do not use evacuation centres: a Rapid Needs Assessment in Iloilo confirmed very few persons with disabilities used the evacuation centres following Typhoon Haiyan^{vi}.

Persons with disabilities are also at high risk to the impacts of hazards due to inaccessible warning systems and information materials^{vii}. Evacuation plans and early warning systems often do not account for the needs of persons with disabilities or are communicated in an inaccessible way, particularly for those with sensory disabilities. Persons with disabilities face challenges accessing key information, and can lose vital assistive devices such as wheelchairs, crutches, prostheses, white canes and hearing aids during the hazard^{viii}. In addition, persons with disabilities can also lose their caregivers and an environment in which they had managed to develop a certain level of autonomy^{ix}. The significance of inaccessible information and a lack of inclusive warning systems is underlined by the first-ever UN global survey of persons living with disabilities and how they cope with disasters: the percentage of persons with disabilities who could evacuate if given sufficient time almost doubles^x.

Same challenges noted above apply in different stages of the disaster management cycle. For instance, vulnerability and capacity assessment, contingency planning, search and rescue system as well as household preparedness are key areas in which States policies should be strengthened to ensure adequate inclusion.

A further example of how persons with disabilities are disproportionately affected by hazards is the existing stigma and discrimination^{xi}. Negative attitudes and stigma can indeed present one of the greatest barriers to inclusion of persons with disabilities, whether held by authorities, other DRR stakeholders, facilitators, the community, family members or even by persons with disabilities themselves^{xii}. Stigma associated with disability can lead to the denial of basic human rights for persons with disabilities, especially in a context of scarce resources. This stigma is why many persons with disabilities can remain hidden in their societies and be reluctant to identify as disabled for fear of repercussions, increasing their vulnerability. They also face appalling human rights abuses, especially within inaccessible shelters and camps, due to high levels of discrimination^{xiii}.

Lastly, observation shows that limited funding are allocated to disability and ageing. While people with disabilities represent 15% of the world population, yet in 2010 and 2011, only 0.7% of the projects funded through UN emergency funding (CAP, Flash Appeals) included at least 1 activity targeting people with disabilities.^{xiv}

Recommendations

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) and recent Human Development Reports are yet to acknowledge the importance of an inclusive approach to climate change^{xv}. This is despite persons with disabilities being disproportionately affected by hazards due to the reasons stated above, and facing a number of challenging barriers as a result of climate change including: decreasing food security and resulting malnutrition; decreasing access to clean water, sanitation and hygiene; increasing frequency of hazards; reduced access to infrastructure, shelters and basic services; increased displacement and migration or challenges to necessary migration; and issues over increased human security and protection^{xvi}.

Inclusive approaches recognise the relationship between disability and disasters and should:

- Ensure full accessibility of all disaster and emergency relief interventions in keeping with the needs of persons with disabilities
- Target persons with disabilities in disaster relief and implement a minimum standard for inclusive approaches; provide training to relief workers and include disability audits in all evaluations. This will enable the disaggregation of data according to disability and ensure agencies report on the inclusive measures they have taken.
- Strengthen national information systems and use participatory methods to meaningfully engage with persons with disabilities and their organisations to collate information and identify risks and develop accessible preparedness measures.
- Strengthen the capacity and resources of persons with disabilities and their organisations and actively involve them in all stages of disaster management. Make DPOs partners in disaster preparedness and emergency response; including shaping preparedness measures, distributing relief, and planning accessible and inclusive reconstruction.
- Use participatory methods to design and implement accessible and inclusive warning systems, evacuation plans, information materials and physical infrastructure;
- Ensure that all funding allocated addresses the criteria of accessibility and disability inclusiveness, for example by placing adequate funding for constructing or re-fitting infrastructure in line with universal accessibility standards to ensure accessible reconstruction of the physical environment post-hazard; provide appropriate and adequate assistive devices
- Strengthen the evidence base on the relationship between persons with disabilities, environmental hazards and increasing resilience and raise awareness of disability issues within communities to address

discrimination and remove barriers to accessing information and services, including education, healthcare and livelihood recovery.

- Advocate for the rights of persons with disabilities at local, national and international levels. All governments, UN agencies and humanitarian relief organisations must commit to being inclusive and ensure all disaster risk reduction measures are inclusive, in line with Article 32 – on international cooperation – and Article 11 – situations of risk and humanitarian emergencies^{xvii}. Only through an inclusive approach can the challenges of climate change adaptation strategies ever be effective.

ⁱ Smith, F. Jolley, E. & Schmidt, E. (2012) *Disability and disasters: The importance of an inclusive approach to vulnerability and social capital*. UN Women / UNICEF Global Thematic Consultation Addressing Inequalities. Available at: <http://www.worldwewant2015.org/node/287097>

ⁱⁱ Kett, M., Stubbs, S., & Yeo, R. (2005). *Disability in Conflict and Emergency Situations: Focus on Tsunami-affected Areas*. Working: International Disability and Development Consortium. Available at: http://r4d.dfid.gov.uk/PDF/Outputs/Disability/thematic_conflict.pdf

ⁱⁱⁱ International Disability Rights Monitor (2005). *Disability and Early Tsunami Relief Efforts in India, Indonesia and Thailand*. Chicago: International Disability Network / Center for International Rehabilitation. Available at: <http://www.ideanet.org/cir/uploads/File/TsunamiReport.pdf>

^{iv} CBM, IDA, & IDDC (2012) *Call for Action for to include Persons with Disabilities in the Philippines emergency response and recovery programmes*

^v Naughton, C. (2012). *Technical brief for the post-2015 consultation process Disability, sustainable development and climate change*. CBM Technical Brief Available at: <http://www.cbm.org/After-the-MDGs,-then-what--344402.php>

^{vi} *ibid* ix

^{vii} Sullivan, H. T., & Hakkinen, M.T. (2011). Preparedness and Warning Systems for Populations with Special Needs: Ensuring Everyone Gets the Message (and Knows What To Do). *Journal of Geotechnical and Geological Engineering*, 29 (3), 225-236.

^{viii} *ibid* ix

^{ix} Handicap International (2012), *Disability Inclusive Community Based Disaster Risk Management: a toolkit for practice in South Asia*. <http://disabilityindrr.org/resourcespage/>

^x UNISDR. (2013, October 10). *UN Global Survey Explains Why So Many People Living with Disabilities Die in Disasters*. [Press release 2013/29]. Available at: http://www.unisdr.org/files/35032_2013no29.pdf

^{xi} UN Enable. (2013). *Disability, natural disasters and emergency situations: A need to include persons with disabilities*. Available at <http://www.un.org/disabilities/default.asp?id=1546>

^{xii} *ibid* xiv.

^{xiii} *ibid* vii

^{xiv} Helpage and Handicap International (2010-2011), *a study of humanitarian financing for older people and people with disabilities*. <http://www.helpage.org/what-we-do/emergencies/a-study-of-humanitarian-financing-for-older-people-and-people-with-disabilities/>

^{xv} Wolbring, G. (2009) *A Culture of Neglect: Climate Discourse and Disabled People*. M/C Journal, vol. 12, no.4 – 'climate'

^{xvi} CBM. (2012). *Inclusion Made Easy: A quick program guide to disability in development*. Available at: http://www.cbm.org/article/downloads/78851/CBM_Inclusion_Made_Easy_-_complete_guide.pdf

^{xvii} United Nations Convention on the Rights of People with disabilities (2006) Geneva: United Nations. Available at: <http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/enable/documents/tccconve.pdf>