

Disability and Disaster

More than 226 million people are affected by disaster each year. The most vulnerable in society – those living in poverty, in poor housing conditions, with minimal access to services, and who face social and political discrimination are at greatest risk of negative impacts of disaster including injury and death, and undermining of livelihoods leading to chronic poverty.¹

Disasters disproportionately place people with a disability in vulnerable situations and increase the rate of disability in a community: for every 1 person killed in a disaster, another 3 are injured or left with a permanent disability.² During disaster response, people with a disability are often invisible and excluded from accessing emergency support and essential services such as food distribution, medical care, shelter and water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) facilities. Information on disaster preparedness is often not in accessible formats so people with a disability are less aware and prepared for a disaster.

The theme for 2013 International Day for Disaster Reduction on 13 October was Disaster and Disability. Three key messages were shared at events around the world:

- A disaster resilient planet means **everyone** must be part of the solution.
- Decisions and policies to reduce disaster risks must **reflect the needs** of people living with disabilities
- **Investment** in disaster risk reduction must provide for the needs of people living with disabilities.

National and international laws and conventions recognize equal rights of people with disabilities during disaster including article 11 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities which states the right to safety and protection in the event of a disaster, the Hyogo Framework for Action on disaster risk reduction identifies people with disabilities as a priority group for support as do the Sphere Standards which identify minimum standards for good practice in disaster response. However environmental, social and attitudinal barriers often result in requirements of the 15% of the world's population with a disability not being met within disaster management responses and their unique contribution to helping communities prepare for and respond to disasters being overlooked.

¹ http://www.unisdr.org/files/20108_mediabook.pdf

² http://www.cbm.org/index/Default_245472.php

Findings from United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNISDR) worldwide study (2013)³ include:

- People with disabilities across the world are rarely consulted about their needs, 71% have no personal preparedness plan for disasters, only 31% always have someone to help them evacuate while 13% never have anyone to help them.
- Only 20% could evacuate immediately without difficulty in the event of a sudden disaster event BUT, given sufficient time, 38% could evacuate with no difficulty; 6% would not be able to evacuate even with early warning.
- Only 17% were aware of a disaster management plan in their city/town/ community and just 14% said they had been consulted on it.

Strategies to ensure disability inclusion in all phases of disaster management include:

Active participation of people with disabilities:

- People with disabilities should be given equal opportunity to participate in all disaster risk management activities and decision making from community to national level.
- Ensure the representation of people with disabilities at key decision making forums.
- Introduce policies to include people with disabilities in community level disaster management systems/ structures

Ensure disaster risk planning and management provides a safe and accessible environment:

- Ensure awareness and education programmes on disaster management addresses disability and are delivered in a way that is accessible for all the community to join.
- Include people with disabilities into disaster risk training to develop skills, knowledge and capacities to prepare and protect themselves from hazards, and to maximize their ability for survival and recovery following an emergency.
- Disaster Risk Management systems and services such as early warning systems, community shelters and rescue services should be safe and accessible for all. Specific services should be developed to address any additional needs e.g. transportation during evacuation, additional clothing or blankets for those who are vulnerable to the cold or unable to move.
- Stockpile mobility and assistive devices at community shelters to support mobility of people with disabilities in a disaster situation.

Monitor activities and collect evidence:

- The Implications/ progress of planned activities to promote active participation of people with disabilities and safe, responsive and accessible disaster management should be monitored and evaluated regularly.

³ <http://www.unisdr.org/archive/35032>

- Collect evidence on difficulties faced by people with disabilities as well as real actions that show how inclusive approaches can and do work.

Resources:

CBM Disability inclusive Disaster Risk Management manual. http://www.cbm.org/article/downloads/54741/Disability_Inclusive_Disaster_Risk_Management.pdf

CBM Disability Inclusion, Disaster Management. http://www.cbm.org/article/downloads/78851/CBM_Disability_Inclusion_-_Disaster_Management.pdf

Handicap International. Disability Inclusive Community Based Disaster Risk management. A toolkit for practice in South Asia <http://disabilityindrr.org/resourcespage/>

International Day for Disaster Reduction, 13 October 2013 theme Disaster and Disability. <http://www.unisdr.org/2013/iddr/#.Upolc02IrlU>

Sphere Handbook in Action e-learning course on the ICRC online learning platform: <http://www.sphereproject.org/sphere/en/learning/e-learning-course/>

Sphere film: <http://www.sphereproject.org/sphere/en/news/film-shows-humanitarian-standards-being-applied-in-the-field/>

WHO Guidance note on disability and emergency risk management for health. http://www.searo.who.int/entity/emergencies/disability_guidancenote.pdf