3. Disability-inclusive disaster risk reduction for a resilient society

“In the face of increasing humanitarian needs and avoidable losses, the EU will continue to prioritise, persuade and help others to act - so resilience and risk management becomes a normative developmental process and more assistance is provided to vulnerable sections of society”

Christos Stylianides, Commissioner for Humanitarian Aid and Crisis Management European Commission

Disaster risk reduction from a European civil protection perspective
Alfonso Lozano Basanta

The European Union is increasingly investing in supporting Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) programmes and capacity building, within and outside Europe. The Directorate General for Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection (ECHO) of the European Commission considers DRR to be a key element of humanitarian action while Disaster Risk Management has traditionally been a core function within the field of civil protection. With the entry into force in January 2014 of the Union Civil Protection Mechanism, a culture on prevention and preparedness has also gained relevance within the civil protection sector. In both cases, what ECHO promotes is a culture of resilience and safety at all levels, based on a person-centred approach and the institutionalisation of DRR.

ECHO’s approach to DRR projects is two-fold. The ECHO Programme on Disaster Preparedness (DIPECHO) funds targeted DRR initiatives implemented by its partners (UN agencies, Red Cross/Red Crescent movement, international NGOs). This programme has been leading the support and funding for community based DRR for the last 20 years. More recently, the programme has evolved to include a wide array of activities to build capacities at every level, from community to national and even regional. In parallel, ECHO funding criteria require a sound assessment of risk and the promotion of reduction of future risks in all interventions. This integrated DRR approach covers every sector of humanitarian assistance.

The Council Conclusions adopted at the end of 2014, during the Italian Presidency of the EU, encourage further collaboration between humanitarian aid and civil protection in disaster response operations as well as in prevention and preparedness missions. The new framework of the DIPECHO programme promotes the inclusion and strengthening of civil protection to institutionalise


DRR as a complement to the wider community based approach in order to create more synergies and enhance resilience building.

Once the links between the local and national disaster risk management authorities have been created, strengthening disaster risk governance is one way to connect isolated community based DRR initiatives and the existence of national emergency plans or frameworks. Here, the Union Civil Protection Mechanism may facilitate the involvement of civil protection experts from the EU Member States in advisory or risk assessment missions, capacity building or peer reviews and create useful exchanges oriented to both risk management and risk mitigation. The newer institutional based component of the DIPECHO programme, together with a wider community based DRR, may prove in the near future to be more sustainable, linking relief to development.

ECHO’s continuous commitment to support DRR is now reinforced with the combination of the humanitarian aid and civil protection fields under the same Directorate-General of the European Commission.

In January 2014 the European Commission introduced a Gender-Age Marker to ensure that relief assistance is better targeted and adapted to the needs of all people affected by disasters, conflicts and protracted emergencies. At the beginning of 2015 the Latvian Presidency of the EU went further and proposed Council Conclusions on disability-inclusive disaster management, which were adopted in March 155. These Conclusions resonate strongly with the recently adopted Sendai Framework for DRR 2015-2030 in which disability, accessibility and inclusion are an integral part of principles and the key actions.  

“The world must find solutions by reaching agreements on disaster risk management, long-term sustainable development goals and climate change”

Ban Ki-moon at the launch of the 2015 Global Assessment Report on DRR 156

The Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 157 and the 2015 Global Assessment Report on Disaster Risk Reduction 158 both suggest that disasters are increasing in frequency and intensity, and thus are important barriers on progress towards sustainable development. Evidence further indicates that exposure of persons and assets to disaster risks in all countries has increased faster compared to the decrease of social, economic and environmental

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156 http://www.unisdr.org/archive/42814 [back]


challenges. Recurring small-scale disasters and slow-onset disasters particularly affect communities, households and small and medium-sized enterprises and constitute a high percentage of all losses. All countries, especially developing countries where the mortality and economic losses from disasters are disproportionately higher, are seeing increasing challenges to meet financial and other obligations to prepare for and respond to disasters effectively.

While the predecessor to the Sendai Framework on DRR, the Hyogo Framework for Action, succeeded in raising awareness of the importance of strengthening DRR in many countries and resulted in some progress across all five priority areas\textsuperscript{159} a number of challenges remain, among them\textsuperscript{160}:

- Limited progress in reducing the underlying causes of risk.
- Limited connectivity with sustainable development policy and planning.
- An implementation gap between national DRR policy intent and local practices.

In addition to these shortcomings, disability was not given sufficient recognition in the Hyogo Framework for Action, despite the fact that persons with disabilities are at particularly high risk with respect to disasters caused by natural hazards and conflicts or by low-severity high-frequency disasters\textsuperscript{161}. Disasters disproportionately place persons with disabilities and their families in situations of risk and uncertainty and they experience increased problems due to separation from family, loss of assistive and mobility devices, and difficulties with accessing information. For example, research indicates that the mortality rate among persons with disabilities was twice that of the rest of the population during the 2011 Japan earthquake and tsunami\textsuperscript{162}.

The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, Articles 11 and 32, requires that States ensure that persons with disabilities benefit from and participate in disaster relief, emergency response and DRR strategies.

The Sendai Framework on Disaster Risk Reduction, adopted at the World Conference on DRR in March 2015 aims to achieve: "The substantial reduction of disaster risk and losses in lives, livelihoods and health and in the economic, physical, social, cultural and environmental assets of persons, businesses and communities and countries"\textsuperscript{163}. For the first time ever, a key international framework has adopted an inclusive language and includes several references to persons with disabilities. One of the guiding principles states: "Disaster risk reduction requires an all-of-society engagement and partnership. It also requires empowerment and inclusive, accessible and non-discriminatory participation,


\textsuperscript{163} UNISDR. Sendai Framework on Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030.
paying special attention to people disproportionately affected by disasters, especially the poorest. A gender, age, disability and cultural perspective in all policies and practices; and the promotion of women and youth leadership; in this context, special attention should be paid to the improvement of organised voluntary work of citizens.”

Rajendra in front of his hut. © CBM/Ashok Shah

Rajendra lives with his family in a makeshift mud hut in Rajbiraj, the headquarters of Saptari district – about 450 kilometres from Kathmandu. Rajendra is unable to walk, having never received treatment for polio. He shares his experience during the Nepal earthquake in May 2015.

“As I heard others shouting, I tried my best to get out of the house. But I couldn’t leave the house immediately. It took me twenty minutes to crawl and reach an open field where I felt I was safe... while others had reached there within a minute.”

When asked about the biggest difficulties for persons with disabilities during such an emergency situation, he said:

“I think the biggest challenge is our difficulty with mobility... For a moment that day, I thought I would not survive to see the next day. The other thing is the lack of awareness about safety measures during such a disaster.”

Understanding disaster risks and addressing their causes

The impact of disasters and the effect of climate change depend not only on the magnitude of the hazard but also on the choices we make for our lives and our environment. How we grow our food, where and how we build our homes and businesses, how the wealth is distributed, to what is taught in schools. And, more importantly, how we make sure that everyone has equal access to information and opportunities to make such choices.

Disaster Risk Reduction policies and programmes are increasingly recognising that there has to be more investment in understanding disaster risks in all its dimensions of vulnerability, capacity and exposure of persons and assets as well as types of hazards and the environment. This knowledge is crucial not only for pre-disaster risk assessment and for prevention and mitigation, but also for developing inclusive and effective responses to disasters.

Understanding the impact of disaster risks and its causes on persons with disabilities is important and active engagement of persons with disabilities in comprehensive disaster risk analysis is crucial. Policies and practices for disaster risk reduction management therefore need to involve the knowledge and experiences of persons with disabilities through making sure of their active participation in research around disaster risks. This is also reiterated in the new DRR framework, where persons with disabilities are explicitly defined as stakeholders who are “critical in the assessment of disaster risk and in designing and implementing plans...taking into consideration, inter alia, the principles of universal design.”

There are several examples illustrating how the involvement of persons with disabilities in DRR programmes have led directly to a more inclusive response and better community preparedness.

Example 9: Contributing to disaster risk management

“I benefitted a lot from this project but what I liked most is the change of community attitude. The way they treat me has totally changed, it is dignifying and respectful.”

Mr Bore participated in cash-for-work activities and could plant drought resistant seeds in a project supported jointly by Intermon Oxfam and CBM in Ethiopia.

Read more about persons with disabilities’ contribution to disaster risk management on CBM website: www.cbm.org/publication-on-didrm

165 Ibid. [back]
Investing in disability-inclusive disaster risk reduction

The vulnerabilities of communities at risk and high-risk population groups are often rooted in power imbalances and inequalities. Even if there is no robust data it is widely recognised that poverty and disability are closely associated, with some estimates suggesting that 80% of persons with disabilities live in developing countries\textsuperscript{166,167}. Research also shows that one in five of the world’s poorest people have some kind of disability\textsuperscript{168}.

Persons with disabilities are often overlooked throughout the disaster risk management cycle and they are seldom considered as important actors in disaster mitigation or preparedness planning, even though they are more vulnerable during disasters, conflicts and displacements\textsuperscript{169}. The 2013 global UN International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (UNISDR) survey found that 71% of persons with disabilities said that they had no personal preparedness plan; only 17% knew about any disaster management plan in their community and only about 14% had ever been consulted on it\textsuperscript{170}.

“Persons with disabilities need to know how to help themselves. In terms of warning communication, government should make sure that warning message would accommodate all types of disabilities...It is universal right for all people to have access and make use of available services, especially in disaster situations”

\textit{Mr Chaiporn, Director of the Council of Persons with Disabilities, Thailand}\textsuperscript{171}

There are now a number of examples of disability-inclusive practices across high-risk communities covering the entire disaster management cycle:

- **Preparedness** – e.g. ensuring accessible early warning systems and the construction of emergency shelters, which persons with disabilities can access.
- **Response** – e.g. evacuation assistance that is adapted to persons with disabilities and rescuers that have been trained in how to reach and get persons with disabilities out of danger or ensuring information is produced in audio language, easy to read format, or provided in sign language.
- **Recovery** – e.g. rebuilding accessible infrastructure and basic services based on universal design principles or implementing inclusive food security projects after droughts or famines.

\textsuperscript{166} Braithwaite, J., and Mont, D. (2008); \[back\]
\textsuperscript{167} DFID (2000). “Disability, Poverty and Development”, Department for International Development, United Kingdom. \[back\]
\textsuperscript{168} Banks, L.M., and Polack, S. (2014). \[back\]
\textsuperscript{169} Women’s Commission for Refugee Women and Children (2008). \[back\]
\textsuperscript{170} http://www.unisdr.org/2013/iddr/#survey \[back\]
\textsuperscript{171} CBM (2013). “Disability-Inclusive Disaster Risk Management. Voices from the field”, CBM Emergency Response Unit, Brussels. \[back\]
Towards empowerment and resilience

The Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030 is ambitious and aspirational and goes beyond measuring disaster loss and damage, and strives for building resilient and empowered communities. This means that communities and nations have the ability to understand the disaster risks they may face, to mitigate those risks, and to respond to disasters that may occur thus minimising loss of, or damage to, life, livelihoods, property infrastructure, economic activity and the environment. It also includes the ability to adapt to underlying risks and invest sufficient resources to ‘bounce forward’, which requires a fiscal system, supported by international cooperation funding, that invests in risk financing, such as insurance and a social protection system.

Building resilient and strong communities requires that other post-2015 development frameworks that aim to improve governance, eradicate poverty and fight inequalities equally incorporate disaster risk reduction under sustainable development goals, where resilience provides the capacity for communities and authorities to sustain development even when endangered by extreme disasters and emergencies.

Investing in safer and more resilient communities also requires building the capacities of local authorities and community groups. Key aspects will be accountability and strengthening local governance, and the public, private and civil society sectors working together. This also requires sufficient financial and technical resources.

In the face of climate change and in times of environmental or humanitarian disaster, the relative poverty of persons with disabilities, combined with inaccessible relief services and low prioritisation of disabled populations, may place persons with disabilities at greater likelihood of facing hardship, illness and death during a disaster and with limited resources and means to rebuild their lives. Disability-inclusive efforts to increase resilience are therefore necessary. Such examples include:

**Health structures** – health systems at national and community level need to be prepared to respond in emergencies but also be resilient to disasters and major epidemics of disease. Not only should they be accessible to people using mobility aids but also to people with sensory impairments; providing information in sign language and by audio material, being sensitive to the needs of persons with disabilities as well as interacting with them respectfully is crucial.

**Education** – schools and child care need to be resilient to disasters, which includes teaching children how to take care of the environment, how to live peacefully and respect human rights; children need to be made aware of their social responsibilities as well as to be prepared in the event of disasters. Children with disabilities must be included; unfortunately many are still not included in the

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172 UNISDR. Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030. [back]
education system and thus need to be reached by other means, in their homes or in the institutions that care for them.

**Livelihood and social protection** – poor communities and at-risk groups, among them persons with disabilities are more vulnerable to the impact of disasters as their livelihoods are often linked to small farming, fishing or cattle breeding. Social protection mechanisms and building capacities for additional livelihood means are important as leverages for at-risk and marginalised populations to help them both face disasters and re-start during the recovery and development phase. They also enhance equality and social cohesion, which makes communities more resilient.

**Gender equality and women’s rights** – gender equality is one important pillar in a resilient society. Empowering women and ensuring their rights are respected, as well as eradicating violence against women and children are drivers for sustainable development. Women and girls with disabilities often face double discrimination and therefore need to be specifically supported in participating in planning and implementing risk reduction and thus contributing to making their communities more resilient.

“Previously I was afraid of the prospect of flooding, but now that we are prepared I know what to do and can face it. Now I am no longer a burden to my family and I am proud that I am a valuable and contributing member of my community”

Kazol Rekha a young woman from Bangladesh, tells her story of being the President of the Ward Committee on Disaster in her local community. Watch her story at End the Cycle http://bit.ly/1gdoQIF

**CBM’s recommendations**

- DRR policies and strategies must be designed to address the different capabilities of each socio-economic group and empower people to reduce disaster risk by **having access to the necessary information in accessible format, to resources, and to authority and decision-making processes.**

- Disasters also provide an opening to **build back better**; therefore recovery and reconstruction in all sectors must aim to build a safer and more resilient community. Building back better also means to think inclusive and ensure that **persons with disabilities become equally resilient**, as well as participate in the process.

- **Local authorities and community leaders are key actors in promoting change and strengthening their communities’ resilience** towards disasters; national policies and actions must be transferrable to building capacities at local level, where the risk burden falls.
The role of civil society, including representative organisations of persons with disabilities, must be recognised in widening the participation of citizens in the formulation and implementation of people-centred disaster risk management strategies.

Full accessibility of all disaster and emergency relief interventions in keeping with the needs of persons with disabilities must be ensured.

Targets and indicators on measuring resilience, such as effective governance, fiscal capacity, DRR plans and policies as well as disaster loss and damages, must be inclusive of data on disability.

Example 10: Disability-inclusive disaster risk reduction in rural Nepal – Mission East

Nepal is highly susceptible to natural hazards, such as earthquakes or floods and suffers the adverse effects of climate change. In remote and mountainous areas, such as in the Karnali region, disasters resulting from these hazards are usually of small scale, very frequent, hard to anticipate, and do not attract the attention of national level authorities, thus posing a serious threat to development initiatives and individual lives. The remotesness and extreme poverty of the region significantly increases the vulnerability of its population, especially for the most marginalised groups that already experience discrimination and exclusion, such as persons with disabilities, children, women, minorities, or people living with HIV/AIDS.

In this context, Mission East decided to initiate work on disaster risk reduction focusing on marginalised groups and to identify a Community-Based Disaster Risk Reduction framework that could be inclusive for all, with specific focus on remote regions. Together with other international NGOs implementing DIPECHO funded projects, Mission East formulated a pilot approach to address exclusion of most of the marginalised groups in DRR programmes.

This pilot proposed a framework called ACAP, which stands for Accessibility, Communication, Attitude and Participation. It embraces four principles initially used for inclusion of persons with disabilities and addresses the challenges related to the variety and complexity of existing tools that address inclusion of marginalised groups by using one single framework. The development of the ACAP framework also enabled the international organisations representing the DIPECHO group in Nepal to incorporate four outcome indicators into their monitoring frameworks:

Indicator 1: the number of marginalised people that have access to DRR services has increased through the baseline/end line survey.

Indicator 2: 100% of DRR, emergency and early warning communication messages are developed and disseminated.
Indicator 3: 50% of the marginalised people acknowledge a change of attitude from other people in the community towards them through appropriate media, which is accessible by the different marginalised groups.

Indicator 4: Proportionate representation of all groups (including the marginalised) is ensured across all processes of DRR activities including decision-making (meaningful participation).

What changed for persons with disabilities?

Accessibility: persons with disabilities had access to training on DRR and were particularly encouraged to participate, with the necessary adaptation and accommodation being provided. This means that their access to DRR information and therefore preparedness increased tremendously.

Communication: the two-way communication through simple, local, respectful language as well as the use of pictures was much appreciated and opened the door for persons with different abilities to participate in the activities.

Attitude: people felt welcome in the training sessions where facilitators created an enabling environment and where ethnicity, age and disability seemed to be forgotten: people felt as one unique group!

Participation: a participation of 8% of persons with disabilities was achieved, whereas the official statistics state that there are 5% of persons
with disabilities in the Karnali region. Community members realised that the participation of people from all parts of society made a difference in the outcome of the planning meetings: disaster planning had become more inclusive of, and participatory of persons with disabilities.

**Improved collaboration among national and international actors**

Forming an alliance of seven district NGOs (Alliance for Disaster and Climate Resilience) representing several marginalised groups, including persons with disabilities together with local development agencies, Mission East trained all members on inclusive DRR, and advocacy actions. This Alliance was a key group to advocate towards local government for better consideration of marginalised groups in Disaster Preparedness Planning processes and for the promotion of inclusive DRR.

A year after this action, while the impact on governmental DRR practices remains modest, the Alliance representatives now have a seat on the District Disaster Relief Committee that deals with disaster preparedness and response at community levels. Their efforts have led to district authorities now systematically mentioning marginalised people in meetings related to DRR. Tangible effects on increased resilience for these groups of the population are yet to be seen based on longer practices of such inclusive DRR framework.

“The project made a platform to keep the issues related to disability and DRR with stakeholders and helped to build the capacity of my organization as well”

Keshav Raj Devkota, member of the Alliance for Disaster and Climate Resilience.

*Source: Vera Van Ek, Mission East*