

Disability inclusion and disaster risk:

Policy brief for risk-sensitive and inclusive development



NAD - The Norwegian
Association of Disabled



Disability inclusion in development post 2015

Prior to 2015, persons with disabilities received little, or no, attention in development policy and practice. This applied equally to disaster risk reduction (DRR). The contribution of persons with disabilities was overlooked. This has now changed.

In March, 2015 governments met in Sendai, Japan to finalise and commit to the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030 (SFDRR).¹⁾ The SFDRR sets forth a rights-based, inclusive, and whole-society framework to guide DRR policy and practice into the future. Persons with disabilities are recognised as key contributing stakeholders within the SFDRR.

Later in September 2015, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, or Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) were agreed.²⁾ Again, disability inclusion is emphasised. This commitment is underpinned by the SDG principle of ensuring that we no longer leave anyone behind.

2015 saw the alignment of development and DRR with the United Nations (UN) Convention

on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), which was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly almost 10 years previously.³⁾ At the end of 2016, the CRPD had been ratified by 172 countries.⁴⁾ Article 11 of the CRPD concerns situations of risk.

As we look to the future, disability inclusion is no longer an option. Governments have committed to disability inclusion as both a global and national priority. As such, disability inclusion is an integral part of all our work moving forward. The question now is: how do we ensure disability inclusion in practice?

Managing disaster risk for sustainable development

The predecessor to the SFDRR, the Hyogo Framework for Action 2005-2015 (HFA), built awareness of the importance of a preventative approach to addressing disaster risk.⁵⁾ This was accompanied by the institutionalisation of DRR at national and local levels. The SFDRR builds on the achievements of governments under the HFA and turns our attention to the 'how-to' of DRR. That is, how to translate policy into action.

DRR has, in the past, been viewed as separate from development. Post-2015, this thinking has changed. We now know that DRR is inseparable from development.⁶⁾ Reducing and preventing disaster risk protect development gains and ensure benefits are sustained into the future. DRR, like disability inclusion, is the responsibility of all.

These understandings urge greater coordination and collaboration. A cross-sectoral and multi-stakeholder approach

is required under the SFDRR. Importantly, the status of DRR has been elevated. DRR is understood to lie at the heart of all development policy and practice. We also know that inclusive development is good development. These understandings present opportunities. By better ensuring disability inclusion within DRR we are building the foundation for risk-sensitive and inclusive development as a whole.

Disability globally

Figures concerning the number of persons with disabilities vary within and between countries. This concerns what and how we count. What is counted also reflects the priorities and responsibilities of different government agencies. In 2011, the first World Report on Disability was published.⁷⁾ One of the aims of the World Report was to provide an evidence-based picture of disability globally. The findings show that 15% of the world's population are persons with disabilities. Previous estimates were significantly lower. Persons with disabilities are the world's largest minority.

The World Report also notes that 80% of persons with disabilities globally live in lower-income countries. Having a disability is more likely to lead to a life in poverty. Living in poverty is more likely to lead to having a disability. Both disability and poverty lead to less opportunities, increased exclusion, and disproportionate risk.

We also know that persons with disabilities face multiple barriers in their daily lives. These barriers may be physical, attitudinal, or societal.

Barriers further increase risk. As such, persons with disabilities are all too familiar with risk. Persons with disabilities manage risk on a daily basis. Persons with disabilities, therefore, have much to contribute to DRR.

In terms of post-2015

commitments to disability inclusion, the above understandings have important policy implications:

- If we are not including persons with disabilities in DRR, we are not truly addressing those most at-risk. That is, we are not doing DRR right.
- The expertise, and experience, that we need to ensure a disability-perspective in DRR is close to hand. That is, from persons with disabilities themselves.
- Persons with disabilities, as a rule, have more direct experience of managing risk than persons without disabilities. Persons with disabilities have expertise that can be drawn on to contribute to reducing and preventing risk for all.

Perceived challenges of disability inclusion

Disability inclusion has suffered from the perception that it requires particular expertise or significant resources. It is true that government, and other DRR actors, may consider they have limited experience of, or expertise concerning, disability. However, this should not cause undue concern. Expertise is readily available from persons with disabilities themselves. Under the SFDRR, our objectives are shared. Collaborations between government, and non-government DRR actors, and disabled people's organisation (DPOs) are increasingly shown to be effective, practical, and achievable.

The costs of disability inclusion are frequently over-stated. For example, studies show that if accessibility is designed into infrastructure projects from the start, the costs are less than 0.5% of the total cost of construction. Integrating accessibility later into the design process results in marginally higher costs of around 1%.⁸⁾ In terms of national income, ensuring accessibility amounts to

around 0.01% of a country's gross domestic income. In contrast, the costs of exclusion are very high. World Bank estimates place the economic cost of not including persons with disabilities between USD 1.71 trillion and USD 2.23 trillion globally per year.⁹⁾

It is also, at times, claimed that we do not have enough data on disability and disasters. This can be an excuse not to act. However, we now know that around 15% of any country's population are persons with disabilities. We also know from the Japanese experience that persons with disabilities are four times more likely to die in a disaster.¹⁰⁾ We may expect this figure to be higher in lower-income countries. Further, we know that disability and poverty are closely linked. We know poverty and exclusion increases risk for men, women, and children around the world. We have sufficient knowledge. We have awareness and commitment under the SFDRR and SDGs. We now need to act.

Expectations of government under the Sendai Framework

The SFDRR is clear that ultimate responsibility for its implementation lies with governments. This includes working to ensure the inclusion of highly at-risk members of society and ensuring a disability perspective within all DRR policy and practice. However, the SFDRR is also realistic. The SFDRR emphasises the importance of partnerships and a collaborative approach. Towards this end, the SFDRR includes the roles of key SFDRR stakeholders. These include persons with disabilities and DPOs.

Key expectations of government under the SFDRR are summarised as follows:

- Consult with persons with disabilities at all stages of DRR planning and delivery to ensure a disability perspective is included.
- Take steps to remove barriers to the active participation of persons with disabilities in DRR, including within DRR platforms, forums, and committees, or similar, at all levels.

- Ensure persons with disabilities are able to meaningfully contribute to DRR policy and practice in the communities and societies we share.

The SFDRR also commits governments to apply the principles of universal design within DRR. Universal design may be thought of as design-for-all. The idea of design-for-all is that services, goods, and solutions should be accessible to, and usable by, all on an equal basis. This applies to the development of new DRR services, goods, and solutions. For those that already exist, they should be adapted to ensure accessibility is improved. This adaptation is known as reasonable accommodation.

Improving access in DRR benefits everyone. For example, accessible early warning systems, evacuation routes, and relief distribution points enable more efficient service delivery and ease of use for all concerned. Again, advice on improving access is close to hand.

Expectations of other stakeholders

The SFDRR emphasises that DRR is everyone's business. DRR under the SFDRR is inclusive DRR. The SFDRR includes roles for key non-government stakeholders. These stakeholders include women, children and youth, older persons, and, as we have noted, persons with disabilities. Migrants and indigenous peoples also receive specific mention. In fact, all of civil society is noted as having a stake, or vested interest, in DRR.

The SFDRR also commits to ensuring people from highly at-risk groups become leaders within, and proponents for, DRR. If we are working with women, women with disabilities must be represented. If we are working with children, children with disabilities must be able to participate. If we are working with migrants, the perspectives of migrants with disabilities must be included. In short, we all need to take more active measures to ensure our work in DRR truly includes those most at-risk. Further, those most at-risk must have the opportunity to contribute and to lead.

Other key stakeholders are highlighted within the SFDRR. These include the science, technology, and academic community; the media; and the private sector. All stakeholders have a vital role to play in reducing and preventing risk. All stakeholders have a critical role to play in removing barriers, ensuring access, and promoting inclusion. By way of example, the SFDRR commits the media, in collaboration with government, to provide DRR information in accessible formats and easy to understand language. This is sound advice for us all. Accessible DRR information not only benefits persons with disabilities, it reduces disaster risk for all.

Expectations of disabled people's organisations

To date, DRR has not been high on the agenda of most DPOs globally. In recent years, this has started to change. The majority of examples of DPOs contributing to DRR have come from the Asia Pacific where disaster risk is particularly high. However, since 2016 DPO networks in some African countries, including Malawi and Uganda, have increasingly taken responsibility for training their members in disaster risk reduction. African DPOs have also increasingly advised DRR actors on disability inclusion under the SFDRR.

Partnerships between government, and other DRR actors, and DPOs is a win-win. Government agencies and DRR actors can access disability expertise that can assist in better understanding disaster risk, as the SFDRR demands, to the benefit of all. DPOs gain experience of DRR and are better placed to ensure the perspectives of those they represent are included. To achieve this, DPOs should ensure the following:

- Engage with key government agencies and communicate what DPOs can contribute to better managing risk under the SFDRR. For example, advising on accessibility and assisting in identifying those most at-risk and with specific access or functioning needs.
- Ensure government, and other DRR actors, know who to contact for guidance and advice.
- Coordinate with members to ensure a range of disability perspectives are included in consultations and in order that practical solutions can be delivered.

An invitation to collaboration

In short, the way forward is collaboration. Collaboration is required to reduce and prevent disaster risk. Collaboration is required to ensure inclusion. Risk sensitivity and inclusion are central principles of development post-2015. By better managing risk we protect and sustain investments. By fostering inclusion, we widen access and ensure the benefits of our work reach all. Further, we maximise the resources and expertise we have available.

Being risk sensitive and inclusive need neither be technical nor expensive. However, a pro-active approach is needed. This applies to government, other DRR stakeholders, and DPOs. Ignoring risk, and excluding those who may contribute to DRR and development more broadly, is very high-cost. The starting point for inclusion is dialogue. Discussion enables us to better understand risk and to seek mutually beneficial solutions. Government, and other DRR actors, in partnership with DPOs

are well-placed to find these solutions. This is the challenge the SFDRR sets forth. It is now up to us to rise to this challenge. The solutions are well within our reach.

To get started on the road to ensuring DRR is disability inclusive, and for more information, please contact the following organisations. All of the following are committed to working constructively with government, and non-government, DRR actors to ensure a safer world for all:

Footnotes/endnotes

1) UN. 2015. Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030. New York, United Nations: www.unisdr.org/we/inform/publications/43291

2) UN. 2015. Transforming our world: The 2030 agenda for sustainable development. New York, United Nations: <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/post2015/transformingourworld/publication>

3) UN. 2006. Convention on the rights of persons with disabilities and optional protocol. New York, United Nations: www.un.org/disabilities/documents/convention/convoptprot-e.pdf

4) UN. 2016. 'Human rights: 15 Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.' New York, United Nations treaty collection website: https://treaties.un.org/Pages/ViewDetails.aspx?src=TREATY&mtdsg_no=IV-15&chapter=4&clang=_en

5) UN. 2005. Hyogo Framework for Action 2005-2015: Building the resilience of nations and communities to disasters. New York, United Nations: www.unisdr.org/files/1037_hyogoframeworkforactionenglish.pdf

6) UNISDR. 2015. Global Assessment Report on DRR 2015. Making development sustainable: The future of disaster risk management. Geneva, United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction: www.preventionweb.net/english/hyogo/gar/2015/en/home/GAR_2015/GAR_2015_1.html

7) WHO & World Bank. 2011. World Report on Disability. Geneva, World Health Organization: www.who.int/disabilities/world_report/2011/report.pdf

8) Metts R L. 2000. 'Disability issues, trends and recommendations for the World Bank.' Social Protection Discussion Paper Series No.7. World Bank: <http://siteresources.worldbank.org/SOCIALPROTECTION/Resources/SP-Discussion-papers/Disability-DP/0007.pdf>

9) Ibid.

10) UNESCAP. 2012. Disability at a glance 2012: Strengthening the evidence base in Asia and the Pacific. Bangkok, United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific: www.unescap.org/sites/default/files/SDD_PUB_Disability-Glance-2012.pdf

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(Published February 2017)