

How to make sure disaster risk management includes persons with disabilities?

Recommendations for the Dutch government, humanitarian agencies and disability organisations for the World Humanitarian Summit¹

¹ These recommendations were developed during the Expert meeting 'Making disaster risk management work for people with disabilities', organized by Liliane Foundation, the Dutch Coalition on Disability and Development, Light for the World, Karuna Foundation and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 17 March 2016.

² The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child stipulates that 'in all actions concerning children the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration'. The interests of children with disabilities are explicitly mentioned in both the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

³ There is a strong link between ageing and disability, with almost half of people over 60 having a disability. See: World Health Organization, World Report on Disability, 2011 (Geneva, 2011).

⁴ Persons with mental illness are particularly vulnerable in times of disaster, once more as their health is rarely seen as a priority in fragile states and in development programmes.

⁵ Restoring humanity, global voices calling for action: Synthesis of the consultation process for the World Humanitarian Summit (2015)

⁶ Article 11 CRPD: "States Parties shall take, in accordance with their obligations under international law, including international humanitarian law and international human rights law, all necessary measures to ensure the protection and safety of persons with disabilities in situations of risk, including situations of armed conflict, humanitarian emergencies and the occurrence of natural disasters."

⁷ See: Sendai Framework.

⁸ See: Dhaka Declaration.

⁹ The Charter will be published on 25 April, 2016.

According to the World Health Organization and the World Bank, 15 percent of the global population are persons with disabilities. Recent consultations (in preparation of the World Humanitarian Summit) have revealed that persons with disabilities are among the most disproportionately affected by disaster and conflict situations. Especially at risk among them are children², elderly³ and persons with mental disabilities⁴.

Children and adults with disabilities are often excluded from disaster preparedness or disaster risk reduction (DRR) interventions, as well as of the assessment and planning or design of humanitarian relief. They face barriers to accessing humanitarian assistance programs. They are overrepresented among those living in poverty, who are at higher risk. Furthermore, the collapse of support structures and social protection networks exacerbates the impact of the situation on those most at risk.

It is important to emphasize that when we speak of 'persons with disabilities', this includes their families as well. Apart from the fact that they are often 'co-excluded', it is also true that they have to represent the interests of family members with disabilities, if these are young children or persons with such severe disabilities that they cannot speak up for themselves.

The World Humanitarian Summit consultation process has taken stock of the current situation and recognized the need to 'correct the neglect of persons with disabilities; ensure their specific needs are met; and enable them to participate in decision-making'⁵.

We, humanitarian organisations and organisations working for and with persons with disabilities, recall that all humanitarian actions should be inclusive of persons with disabilities, as included in International Humanitarian Law and outlined in article 11 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD)⁶, and confirmed in the Sendai Framework⁷ (March 2015) and Dhaka Declaration⁸ (December 2015).

We stress that fully-inclusive implementation of all new international, national and local agendas will not happen automatically. It requires the active participation of persons with disabilities of all ages and their families. Therefore, we urge that their voices will be well represented in the processes leading up to, during and after the World Humanitarian Summit.

We strongly recommend that the Dutch government and the European Union will show high-level political commitment to address disability inclusion in humanitarian action, as well in natural and man made disasters. Therefore, we recommend the Dutch government:

Presence at World Humanitarian Summit

- 1 To be represented at the highest level (preferably PM) at the World Humanitarian Summit.
- 2 As current EU-Presidency, promote disability inclusion in the EU position on the World Humanitarian Summit (Council Conclusions).
- 3 To get actively involved in the current discussion led by Australia and Finland to prepare the Special Session on Inclusion of Disability in Humanitarian Actions, and to support and endorse the Charter and Action Plan for disability inclusion in humanitarian actions⁹.
- 4 To participate in the Special Session about Inclusion of Disability in Humanitarian Actions.

Role at World Humanitarian Summit

- 5 To urge for:
 - a Active participation of persons with disabilities, their families and their representative organisations in all phases of Disaster Risk Management: from design to implementation and monitoring; and from disaster preparedness to humanitarian aid and rehabilitation.
 - b Ensuring - before, during and after disasters - that all services of governments and humanitarian agencies are accessible to persons with disabilities, by making communication accessible and supporting innovative approaches using new technologies.
 - c Ensuring compliance with accessibility standards and use of universal design in reconstruction programs; persons with disabilities should at least be assured of 'reasonable accommodation'.
 - d Investing in improving data on the whereabouts and needs of persons with disabilities, and requiring from all agencies that data are disaggregated and analyzed by age, gender and disability.
 - e A strong role of local actors (local government institutes, security forces, Disabled People's Organizations and NGOs), who know and can reach out to people (with disabilities) in the communities. This with the proviso that occurring prejudices and stigma of local actors regarding (types of) disability should be understood and addressed.
 - f An extension of existing well-known standards¹⁰, developing and endorsing global standards and practical guidelines on disability inclusion in humanitarian action, which will address coordination, implementation, monitoring and financing.
 - g Supporting capacity building, learning and networking among humanitarian actors to enable their inclusive practices in a way that structurally and permanently ensures sufficient attention to the needs of people with disabilities.
- 6 To form a group of like-minded States and draw as a group attention to successes in the field of disaggregated data and inclusion in humanitarian practice.

¹⁰ Like the Minimum Standards for Age and Disability Inclusion (ADCAP) and other relevant guidance.

Dutch policies for Humanitarian Aid and Disaster Risk Management

- 7 Stimulate the development of sex, age and disability disaggregated data in humanitarian actions by putting it on the dialogue agenda with partner countries, and by offering technical assistance to strengthen capacity and systems for data-disaggregation.
- 8 Prioritize inclusion and participation of all marginalized groups, including persons with disabilities, in funding mechanism of the Ministry (for NGOs as well as for multilateral organisations). This should count for the whole disaster risk management cycle: relief and rehabilitation, disaster risk reduction and disaster preparedness. Through dialogue with partners, as well as inclusion criteria or stimulants, data analysis and reporting on inclusion.
- 9 Evaluate the Dutch program for humanitarian assistance and disaster preparedness on inclusion of marginalized groups, including people with disabilities.
- 10 Encourage and reward innovative initiatives in inclusive Disaster Risk Management, like accessible early warning systems for people with disabilities, best practices in strengthening community structures in particular regarding disaster preparedness, inclusive response in camp settings, or new technologies for needs assessments.

Development of inclusive Disaster Risk Reduction practices on the ground is key. Therefore we encourage humanitarian NGOs (e.g. members of the Dutch Relief Alliance) to put inclusive policies into practice. Keep it simple, just do it, take first steps! To the practitioners, we recommend the following:

Involving and including persons with disabilities

- 1 Enhance the participation of persons with disabilities in the humanitarian and disaster risk management system from community level up to district, national and international level.
- 2 Trust in and use the experience, skills and knowledge of people with disabilities and their self help groups, as well as the families and communities around them. They often have crucial information about who is most at risk. By fully utilising capacities of the whole community, vulnerabilities can be reduced.
- 3 Include persons with disabilities in a meaningful way in disaster preparedness and risk management committees. Build their capacity and stimulate people with disabilities to share their knowledge and voice their own needs.

Data disaggregation

- 4 Work on disaggregated data to provide evidence, visibility and accountability. What kind of barriers exist and where they do occur? This needs to be part of disaster preparedness and is needed during the assessment phase when a disaster happens. This should be a joint responsibility of development committees and Disabled People's Organizations.

First steps

- 5 Cooperate and work hand in hand as NGOs, disability organizations, private sector and government. Make sure such collaboration exists before disasters happen.
- 6 Make sure that the protection and safeguarding measures in your DRM program are accessible and inclusive, to prevent abuse of children and women with disabilities.
- 7 Emphasize accessibility (physical, communication and information, attitude) in your programs and ensure your staff is adequately trained to put this in practice.
- 8 Work on implementing¹¹, developing and testing practical guidelines, as a practical elaboration of existing standards like Sphere and the Core Humanitarian Standard (CHS).
- 9 Implement pilots together (as humanitarian agencies and specialized disability organizations). Share positive and negative findings and learn together.

¹¹ For example the Minimum Standards for Age and Disability (ADCAP) and other existing relevant guidelines.

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Signed by:

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Enablement
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HelpAge
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Karuna Foundation Netherlands
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