



13 October

INTERNATIONAL DAY FOR DISASTER REDUCTION 2013



Disability Inclusive Disaster Risk Reduction: Addressing the Need of One Tenth Population of Bangladesh

Policy Brief

Summary

A disaster is a serious disruption to the community which requires response from government and other entities to recover and go back to the previous status. Every disaster affects different segments of people differently. Support must be extended to people based on their need. With the paradigm shift from relief and response to preparedness and risk reduction oriented disaster management, it is of foremost importance to include all the actors of disaster management in the risk reduction period described in the Standing Orders on Disaster (SoD) in Bangladesh. People with disability covers one tenth of country's population, their contribution and active presence in the local level disaster management committees (DMC) will uphold their right and dignity during, pre and post disaster situation.

Recommendation

- They should be actively engaged in family life, the community and society, and to be as independent as possible;
- Disaster risk reduction actions should be made accessible to persons with disability such as guaranteeing ease of access to buildings, and overcoming visual, auditory and psychological obstacles to communication;
- The provisions provided by the SoD to include maximum three persons in the local level can be used by accommodating people with disability representative in the disaster management committees to address their need and right to be protected.
- The conditions necessary for persons with disability to raise their issues & and to ensure in any event the proper representation of their interests and needs ;
- Promote every effort aimed at helping and standing by and improving awareness of the problems of disabled people

Introduction

Bangladesh is one of the most disaster prone countries of the world. Flood, cyclone, river bank erosion, drought, storm and tidal surge are some of the dominant natural hazards of this country. The man-made hazards like fire, building collapse, road accidents are on increase due to high growth in urbanization. Though, there has not been any severe earthquake since 1897, seismic tremors are felt occasionally along the fault lines though there has not been any severe earthquake since 1897. Therefore, Bangladesh has a long history of combating disasters. The World Risk Report 2102 ranks Bangladesh 5th among 15th countries with the highest risk worldwide considering the disastrous combination of extreme exposure and high vulnerability. The phenomenon of climate change is real and there is now evidence that global warming is occurring. According to Bangladesh Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan 2009, the vulnerability of Bangladesh will become even more as a result of climate change. Very briefly, the challenge now facing Bangladesh is to build the resilience of the people to disasters and changing climate.

In spite all the challenges and complexities, the holistic disaster management system of Bangladesh is highly appreciated and praiseworthy. The adoption of Standing Orders on Disaster, the Disaster management Act and the National Plan for Disaster Management are some of the milestones of Bangladesh's disaster management. Among the regulatory frameworks, the Standing Orders of Disaster Management was formulated making the concerned persons understand and perform their duties and responsibilities regarding disaster management at all levels. Therefore, the participation of all the actors should be ensured for effective disaster management.

According to World Disasters Report Focus on Discrimination (Geneva, Switzerland, the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, 2007), in situations of disasters, persons with disabilities are doubly vulnerable on account of impairments and poverty, yet, they are often ignored or excluded at all levels of disaster preparedness, mitigation and intervention. Common experience reveals that due to lack of planning, limited access to services and facilities, transportation system, people with disabilities are left behind. In the event of disasters, the care givers of the disabled people strive to provide assistance for the abovementioned reasons. Again, there is also a possibility of discrimination when the resource is scarce.

Living with Disability and Disasters

The Household Income Expenditure Survey 2011 of the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics reported that people with disability at 9.07 per cent. The estimated 16 million people are with disability are living with little or sometimes no assistance across the country. The risk and vulnerability of the people with disability is higher due to physical, psychosocial, communication and institutional barriers. During disasters, their life becomes more challenging though Article 11 of the Convention on Rights of Persons with Disabilities affirms that all necessary measures should be taken to ensure the protection and safety of persons with disabilities in occurrence of natural disasters.

According to all the regulatory frameworks of Bangladesh disaster management, the need of people with disability must be taken into consideration as they are one of the vulnerable groups of people to disasters. Identifying and giving support to the people of disabilities during, pre and post disaster situation have been given to others. People with disabilities do not get the opportunity to make decision for their own. During the risk reduction phase, their absence fails to mainstream disability into preparedness, mitigation and emergency response.

At local the level, the district, upazila, pourasava, union and city corporation disaster management committees are responsible to conduct the activities of prevention, mitigation, preparedness, response and relief. Their responsibilities are subject to risk reduction and emergency response. It is their responsibility to take decisions regarding what should be done in different phases. Due to having no involvement in the committee, people with disability cannot take part in the decision making process. The contribution of potential actor of society is thus misplaced. The gaps remain in the areas where the rights have been violated and where there are scopes for improvement.

Living with Disability and Disasters

The active participation of the people with disability should be ensured in Disaster risk reduction,. By participating in the committee, people with disability representatives will be informed about their risks and capable of taking practical measures for the reduction of risk at the household and community level. It will be the responsibility of the representative to disseminate the acquired knowledge among people with disability. The care giver can play an important role in this regard by accompanying the person and disseminating messages along with or on behalf of him/her. With the active participation of the representative, risk reduction action plan can be prepared and implemented ensuring the accessibility of people with disability. S/he can also help the other committee members to identify the most vulnerable people at risk by physical ability. The income of people can also be increased by taking part during the preparation of the Comprehensive Disaster Management Plan which is supposed to be prepared at all local levels by the disaster management committees. Raising funds at local level, updating the progress of implementation plan, preparing relevant plans for rescue, primary relief operation etc are some of the activities of the local level DMCs. Therefore, the representative of people with disability can play a key role to establish their right by taking part in all the activities to be performed by his/her committee.

The Fact Sheet on Persons with Disability by United Nations is given below (Key Points):

- Around 10 per cent of the world's population, or 650 million people, live with a disability. They are the world's largest minority
- Eighty per cent of persons with disabilities live in developing countries, according to the UN Development Programme (UNDP).
- Ninety per cent of children with disabilities in developing countries do not attend school, says UNESCO.
- The World Bank estimates that 20 per cent of the world's poorest people have some kind of disability, and tend to be regarded in their own communities as the most disadvantaged.
- Women with disabilities are recognized to be multiply disadvantaged, experiencing exclusion on account of their gender and their disability.

Note: UN launches first-ever survey of people living with disabilities in disaster zones. The results of the online survey will be announced on October 13, 2013 – the International Day for Disaster Risk Reduction.

Given the paradigm shift in country's disaster management from conventional response and relief application to more disaster risk reduction and preparedness approach, the presence of people with disability representatives in the local level DMCs will ensure that their requirements are considered in risk reduction and preparedness planning. It is not only their active participation but also their decision making competency that can make actions and activities people with disability friendly.

Considering the special necessity of elderly and people with disability, Islamic Relief, Bangladesh (IR,B) implements its disaster risk reduction programs. Raising plinth of the household, installing tube-well and constructing latrine are some of the activities implemented by IR,B reflecting the need of elderly and people with disability. It has also provided assistive devices to its right holders to help them increase their mobility. It also assures the participation of people with disability in its programs so that their right is protected and needs is met.

Policy implications

As people with disability are disproportionately affected by disaster and they are double vulnerable in disaster, giving them a voice and extending support based on equity and capacity building can be considered as solution. The aforementioned applications can be achieved by including the representative of people with disability in the DMCs. The provision of co-opting three members by the chairperson of the DMC will be then utilized addressing right of almost ten percent of the country's total population.

Case Study: Advocating Support for All

60 years old Toyen Uddin lives in Char Ratonpur at Gaibandha where he supports his family by working as a shopkeeper. Nine years ago after a short illness Toyen was forced to have his left leg amputated. This has restricted his ability to work and prevented him growing crops, and during the rainy season it is very difficult for him to move around. In addition, many people in the community have shunned Toyen as many believe that disability is caused after the individual has done something bad.

Most of the time Toyen is house-bound and he has few people to help him move around. This experience has been isolating and made him afraid of what will happen if there is another disaster.

However, Toyen has strong desire to be involved in community activities and after engaging with Islamic Relief, Bangladesh, he volunteered to become a member of the newly formed Village Development Committee, advocating for the rights of people living with disabilities to ensure their needs were met during all the phases of disaster. Toyen now leads a group of other villages teaching them about disasters and how they can keep themselves and their family safe.

In addition, Toyen has been provided assistance to adapt his home and sanitation facilities so that they are suitable for his needs and has been provided new equipment by Islamic Relief, Bangladesh to help him with his mobility so that he can attend other disaster risk reduction meetings further away, allowing him to be an active voice for people living with disabilities in the char.

