

Policy Brief:

Involving people with disabilities in humanitarian response

The need to improve the extent to which people with disabilities are included in humanitarian response is increasingly documented and broadly recognised by humanitarian actors, including governments, donors, United Nations agencies, local and international non-governmental organisations (NGOs), and Organisations of Persons with Disabilities (OPDs).

In 2018, the UK Government Department for International Development (DFID) commissioned CBM and Nigeria's Joint National Association of Persons with Disabilities to review disability inclusion in four humanitarian projects funded by the North East Nigeria Transition to Development (NENTAD) programme¹ - the first time such a review has been conducted of DFID's humanitarian programmes.

This policy brief shares key findings and recommendations from the review.

Key findings

1. A **complex humanitarian context** and **security situation** contributes to the challenges for disability inclusion in humanitarian programming.
2. **Disability inclusion** must become the **norm for humanitarian action**.
3. Inclusion should be taken into account at **all stages of the project cycle**, including the initial needs assessment and subsequent design and planning of humanitarian response.
4. **Improvements in the participation** of men and women with disabilities are needed across the entire project cycle management; to achieve this, budgets need to incorporate necessary adaptations and accessibility measures.
5. **Collecting and disaggregating data** about people with disabilities is key to effective inclusion in humanitarian operations.
6. **Technical capacity building** for staff in inclusion and ongoing support to adopt inclusive practices is needed.
7. Applying a **twin track approach** to humanitarian programming empowers people with disabilities and meets their specific needs, whilst also working to ensure inclusion is mainstreamed.
8. Humanitarian actors should take every opportunity to **build awareness** about disability inclusion.

1. Inclusion is challenging in a complex humanitarian context

A complex and highly volatile security situation, such as in North East Nigeria, makes day-to-day operations challenging and requires quick adaptation. The additional considerations for operating in such environments can overshadow other critical actions necessary for ensuring social inclusion – gender, disability inclusion, and vulnerability targeting as well as engaging and empowering communities to participate and drive social accountability. Disability inclusion in particular, is challenging as people with disabilities continue to remain largely invisible in humanitarian programmes.

¹ More details of this DFID-funded humanitarian response programme can be found [here](#).

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.

United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), Article 11 – Situations of Risk and Humanitarian Emergencies

While providing some examples of good inclusive practices, NENTAD partners acknowledged shortcomings in systematically ensuring the inclusion of people with disabilities during the past 18 months of operations. As well as the complex situation on the ground, there was rapid scale-up of the response in North East Nigeria, with none of the humanitarian organisations reviewed present in the area prior to the outbreak of the crisis.

Acculturation to humanitarian principles occurs over time, and many implementing partner staff are relatively new to the humanitarian field.² In addition, most staff have had little exposure to disability inclusion or to the relevant international policy frameworks on inclusion, such as the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), Disability Inclusion Charter, Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, or the Humanitarian Inclusion Standards.

2. Making disability inclusion the norm for humanitarian response

The review highlights the growing attention to disability issues in humanitarian contexts amongst international donors. UN agencies and funders have an obligation to respect the core principles of the CRPD and Article 11, in

addition to all other humanitarian principles and standards. DFID is committed to ensuring that humanitarian action leaves no one behind and is fully inclusive, as described in the fourth pillar of the recently published disability inclusion strategy³. Other funding agencies are following suit, increasing their commitments to disability inclusion by producing guidelines for their implementing partners⁴.

However more action is needed. After a fruitful period for international humanitarian bodies and disability organisations, developing key policies and tools on inclusion for use in the humanitarian sector⁵, it is now time to invest significantly in the promotion and dissemination of these tools so that they are used by field teams. To ensure engagement with and commitment to inclusion, humanitarian field staff need to have access to guidance that is clear and practical, free from jargon, and feasible to apply in complex situations. There is a considerable need to develop knowledge and understanding on disability inclusion amongst staff in humanitarian organisations, in communities and amongst government workers.

➤ Organisations focused on disability, including (I)NGOs, need to continue their efforts to ensure that the standards and frameworks for humanitarian inclusion are made accessible to, and embraced by, everyone working in the sector. This includes empowering OPDs to utilise these. Efforts should also be made to strengthen links between mainstream humanitarian agencies and both disability-focused (I)NGOs and OPDs, and between inclusion experts and field practitioners, for peer learning.

² This is a “first mission” for many of the large number of field team members recruited during a rapid scale-up of the humanitarian response, and due to high levels of staff turnover.

³ As well as the recent strategy (downloaded [here](#)) on disability inclusion, the NENTAD Business Case mentions two commitments on disability. See also DFID’s Humanitarian Guidance Note: Ageing and Disability in Humanitarian response (November 2015).

⁴ See for instance the Austrian Development Agency, the Spanish Agency for International Development Cooperation (in Spanish only), Italian Agency for Development Cooperation (in Italian only), and the European Union (ECHO).

⁵ There is also ongoing work on the IASC Guidelines on Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities in Humanitarian Action (to be published in 2019).

- The cluster system and key humanitarian coordination agencies should engage OPDs and disability-focused (I)NGOs in the response. Inter-agency coordination mechanisms and cluster systems must also ensure their processes safeguard the inclusion of people with disabilities. For example, by setting up an "inclusion" sub-working group within the protection cluster.
- To improve the inclusion of people with disabilities in humanitarian response, it is fundamental to ensure that disaster preparedness is inclusive, with disability inclusion built into preparedness plans. The Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction should be widely disseminated amongst the humanitarian community.

3. Adopt an inclusive project cycle management approach

Taking into account people with disabilities across all phases of project cycle management supports delivery of inclusive humanitarian programmes, including budgeting⁶. Disability inclusion does not need to be overly costly if planned during the early stages of programme development⁷, and some inexpensive changes could be incorporated into budgets for existing projects to increase inclusion of people with disabilities. However, often additional funding is vital to assist humanitarian actors and communities affected by conflicts, natural disasters and other humanitarian emergencies to coordinate, plan, implement, monitor and evaluate essential actions for disability-inclusion across all sectors. This should be considered a standard programme cost, in line with the humanitarian principles and Article 11 of the CRPD.

- There is a need to review where people with disabilities are not currently being engaged in the project cycle, and to review budgets to ensure additional funding is made available where this is necessary.

4. "He who lives in the attic knows where the roof leaks"⁸: engage people with disabilities as active participants in the response



Figure 1 Focus Group Discussion with men during fieldwork for the review

In Nigeria, the limited experience of OPDs and their members to interact and engage with INGOs led in some cases to mutual misunderstandings. Current initiatives to strengthen the representative organisations of people with disabilities, so that they can empower their members to participate effectively in humanitarian action, do not go far enough.

- Consulting and working with men and women, girls and boys with disabilities amongst affected populations is essential, including during the emergency phase of a response. This includes opportunities for people with a range of different impairments to assume leadership roles during both preparedness and response phases.
- Participation needs to be organised through regular liaison and engagement with representative organisations, OPDs, or where these are not present, with self-help groups, so that people with disabilities are part of all consultation and coordination mechanisms.

⁶Find more guidance in the publication by Light For The World. 2017. [Resource Book On Disability Inclusion](#)

⁷ World Health Organisation, 2011. [World Report on Disability 2011](#).

⁸ Nigerian proverb

➤ The Bridge Training Module on Article 11 of the CRPD, situations of risk and humanitarian emergencies for OPD members,⁹ is a step towards addressing gaps. This should be considered for all countries at risk of humanitarian crisis.

Organisations working more specifically with people with disabilities have a longer tradition of providing aid to people with disabilities and engaging with OPDs, but they cannot on their own cover all the needs of people with disabilities.

➤ All humanitarian partners need to adopt a rights-based approach to their work, informed by the human rights principles and standards codified in the UN CRPD¹⁰. Several introductory leaflets have been published about the rights of persons with disabilities and the principles of the CRPD to guide partners¹¹.

➤ Strengthening the collaboration between mainstream INGOs and disability specific agencies, along with OPDs, could bring a mutual learning exchange and contribute to a more effective and inclusive aid delivery.

➤ Humanitarian coordinators should consider investing in capacity development for OPDs to engage with humanitarian action, both with training and building institutional capacities.

5. Data collection and disaggregation is a key step to effective inclusion

Collecting data disaggregated by age and disability was part of the requirements for funding humanitarian proposals, according to the NENTAD business case. While some NENTAD implementing organisations have recently started to collect and disaggregate data and information on disability¹², data was not systematically used, for example to identify potential adaptations to address barriers that could exclude people with disabilities.

➤ More work is needed in this area to ensure high quality data is collected; for example, the quality of data collected on disability is likely to depend on work to raise awareness and engage communities on disability issues, and to develop effective tools and administration processes for data collection. This includes developing and testing translations into local language of standard questions on disability such as the Washington Group Questions, and thorough training materials for enumerators and programme staff. Involving OPDs in the process of designing tools or training is also likely to be valuable.

➤ It is also important that each organisation takes a strategic approach to using the data about disability collected through programming. This is not only to ensure a consistent approach to analysing data about disability is adopted, but also to provide an effective response to the barriers to accessing programmes, and/or any specific needs identified by people with disabilities.

➤ It is also important to ensure staff have the appropriate capacity and understand their specific responsibility for collecting, analysing and using data, whether in field operations, project management or monitoring and evaluation functions.

➤ In contexts and communities where stigma and other attitudinal, environmental and communication barriers often mean people with disabilities stay close to their homes, it is vital to include household-based surveys or assessments, which can provide more accurate

⁹ For more information about the BRIDGE training see IDA's [website](#).

¹⁰ See Article 3

¹¹ See for instance: [an easy-read presentation of the convention](#), or a [Handbook on the Human Rights of Persons with Disabilities, July 2010](#) (HI).

¹² The Washington Group Questions were part of some projects' assessment tools, in some cases contrary to Washington Group guidance, as the questions were modified or additional questions added. There was no documented decision regarding the cut off point for disability to be considered relevant for the project where the Washington Group Questions were used (for example, whether 'some difficulty' or 'a lot of difficulty' on any domain is the most relevant threshold).

information about the situations of people with disabilities, rather than assessing needs at service delivery points.

➤ Another way to improve access to data on people with disabilities is to encourage sharing of information across organisations (ensuring protection of personal information).

Good practice: Plan International's work to identify beneficiaries for their nutrition activities involved two different approaches to assessment of women's needs. Assessments carried out at household level were considered more likely to reach women with disabilities than requiring them to attend a health facility.

6. Build staff capacity in disability inclusion with ongoing support

In the delivery of humanitarian aid, organisations often struggle to find disability expertise at field level. This was particularly the case in North East Nigeria, where many staff were newly recruited with limited previous humanitarian experience. Locally engaged staff naturally often share locally prevailing views and understandings of disability, which may work against fully inclusive practices.

➤ Staff members need to be adequately equipped with a practical understanding of how to include people with disabilities, and encouraged to engage and consult with people with disabilities. Capacity development on disability inclusion for humanitarian practice should be part of organisations' induction training packages, particularly where staff turnover is high, and additional coaching, peer learning with good practice exchange, or other community of practice methods, can be put in place to support staff. This should include international frameworks and standards as noted above. Assigning a function of "inclusion advisor" at the early stages of emergency response to influence the design and implementation of the action, as well as providing technical expertise and support to staff, can be effective for donors, UN agencies and implementing agencies.

➤ Initiatives that have supported progress in gender mainstreaming since the 1990s can provide a source of inspiration for work towards disability inclusion; in particular, two previous capacity-building initiatives in the humanitarian sector, GenCap¹³ and ProCap¹⁴, proved efficient in raising awareness and increasing the understanding and acceptance of gender equality and protection issues amongst humanitarian actors.

7. Apply a twin track approach

A twin track approach to disability inclusion¹⁵ addresses the immediate, specific needs of people with disabilities (such as replacing assistive devices, or specific medical services), who are likely to be particularly severely affected by a crisis, at the same time as facilitating the participation of people with disabilities in mainstream humanitarian programmes, to ensure that these address their needs.

➤ Donors should apply the twin track approach to their funding, providing specific support to ensure people with disabilities are empowered, while ensuring that disability is mainstreamed in all humanitarian action.

➤ DFID and other donors could supplement mainstream humanitarian funding with a disability pool fund, designed to complement humanitarian partner activities and provide for adaptations and accessibility measures required to ensure equal access to the response.

¹³ The IASC Gender Standby Capacity Project: more details can be found [here](#).

¹⁴ The Inter-Agency Protection Standby Capacity Project: more details can be found [here](#).

¹⁵ See CBM's website on the [Twin Track approach](#).

Good practice: The Australian Humanitarian Partnership (AHP) is a five-year (2017-2020), \$50-million partnership between Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) and Australian NGOs aiming to save lives, alleviate suffering and enhance human dignity during and after conflicts, disasters and other humanitarian crises. CBM has partnered with three of the six consortia of Australian NGOs that implement the AHP and Disaster READY. Working with DPO partners, CBM provides support and evidence to mainstream inclusion and works with the regional disability movement in the Pacific to build capacity for effective engagement, both for disaster preparedness and humanitarian response.

8. Build awareness of disability inclusion

Building on the recent positive policy developments in Nigeria such as the signing into law of the Discrimination Against Persons with Disabilities (Prohibition) Act, 2018, there are opportunities to change attitudes and raise awareness on the rights of people with disabilities. This review revealed that stigma and exclusion remain a common experience for people with disabilities, and this is reinforced during conflict and emergency situations. It is not only the attitudes of family members, caregivers and members of the community that may contribute to the marginalisation of persons with disabilities but also the attitudes of humanitarian workers, as well as staff in public services such as schools and health centres¹⁶.

There is a need for major awareness-raising initiatives regarding the rights of persons with disabilities that are culturally appropriate. Humanitarian programmes can contribute to these efforts.

➤ When working with government bodies (ministries, departments and local government agencies), organisations can ensure that people with disabilities are always part of the agenda. By showing good examples of inclusion, they can build awareness amongst decision makers and civil servants regarding inclusive approaches, including the need for accessible public spaces.

Conclusion

Each member of the humanitarian community - donors, implementing agencies, coordination bodies, and government agencies - has a part to play, in partnership with people with disabilities and their representative organisations; working together to make humanitarian assistance inclusive and accessible, and as a result, impartial and effective at meeting the needs of everyone affected.

¹⁶ Many NENTAD partners were implementing programmes involving public sector workers and infrastructure.

Notes

Review approach and methodology



The review, funded by DFID, was undertaken in late 2018. It applied the *Humanitarian Inclusion Standards for older people and people with disabilities (2018)*¹⁷ as a tool and methodology to assess the level of inclusion of people with disabilities in DFID's NENTAD humanitarian response in Nigeria. The review team worked with international and local humanitarian organisations and DFID Nigeria staff. It included a

desk review of project documents, a self-assessment questionnaire, key informant interviews with programme staff and other humanitarian sector actors, observations of project sites and focus group discussions with community members, including people with disabilities. Data was analysed, findings validated with partners and initial action plans developed.

About JONAPWD and CBM

JONAPWD is an umbrella organisation of persons with disability established in Nigeria to promote the rights and development of Nigerians with disabilities, representing their interests at the local and international level. It is a full member of Disabled People's International (DPI). It serves as a link between Organisations of Persons with Disabilities (OPDs) in Nigeria and the international community.

CBM is an international Christian development organisation, committed to improving the quality of life of people with disabilities in the poorest communities of the world. CBM was one of the organisations that developed the Humanitarian Inclusion Standards for older people and persons with disabilities.

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Christian Blind Mission UK is registered with the Charity Commission of England and Wales (#1058162), and with the Office of the Scottish Charity Regulator (#SC041101).

¹⁷ The Key Inclusion Standards can be found in the Humanitarian Inclusion Standards [here](#).