

Disability Inclusive Climate Change Adaptation (DiCCA) POLICY BRIEF

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Persons with disabilities in the context of Climate Change Adaptation in Bangladesh

Persons with disabilities are a diverse group with different kinds of impairments and their needs also differ depending on individual circumstances and capacities. During climate-induced disasters, persons with disabilities experience the same impacts as other community people, but they are far less able to cope with these changes. In this context, climate change disproportionately affects them and their organisations.

Bangladesh is already facing multiple impacts of climate change, and is cited as one of the most climate vulnerable countries in the world¹. The country's coastal region, inhabiting approximately 40 million people, is especially vulnerable because of its geo-physical characteristics and disadvantaged socio-political conditions that often limit people's access to resources^{2,3}. Research also shows that the country's people have remarkable ability to cope with natural disasters^{4,5}. However, regardless of their abilities, poor and vulnerable populations like persons with disabilities bear the most severe brunt of climate change and are also often excluded from being included in adaptation measures.

Highlights of the study

- Dependence on natural resources coupled with lack of skills, knowledge and limited alternative livelihood opportunities threaten livelihoods of coastal communities including persons with disabilities.
- Existing adaptation strategies are largely inadequate for protecting the livelihoods of persons with disabilities against worsening climate-induced disasters.
- Promotion of alternative climate resilient livelihood and trainings in climate smart agricultural methods are essential to reduce loss of livelihood.
- Awareness campaigns and policy advocacy needs to be done for making disability-inclusive law and policies while ensuring effective implementation.
- Strengthening institutional capacities and capacity building of community people is needed on CCA and the rights of persons with disabilities for ensuring their equal participation, empowerment and inclusion in CCA measures.

"As the floodwaters started coming in during Sidr, I had to save my children. So I left my paralyzed mother in law behind and went to the shelter. This was the most difficult choice I made and only I know the guilt and mental trauma I live with now because my mother in law survived the event. On the next day, we found her still lying in bed with waters up to her bed." - Saleha Khanom, Rayenda

Centre for Climate Change and Environmental research (C3ER), BRAC University was selected by Centre for Disability in Development (CDD), in partnership with CBM to conduct a short study on Disability Inclusive Climate Change Adaptation (DiCCA). The study aimed to identify the impact of climate change on the coastal community including persons with disabilities in Southkhali Union, Sarankhola Upazila, Bagerhat District.

The study used a mixed-method approach combining both quantitative and qualitative data collection methods and used both primary (670 HH survey, 17 FGD and 30 KII) and secondary (literature review) data sources.

This policy brief highlights the key findings of the DiCCA study which covers the major impacts of climate change on the coastal community including persons with disabilities. Additionally, this brief presents some of the gaps and barriers identified considering inclusion of persons with disabilities in Climate Change Adaptation (CCA). Lastly, this brief proposes some specific recommendations for Disability Inclusive Climate Change Adaptation.

“I am a person with partial visual impairment and used to drive an auto-rickshaw for a living. My wife was injured during a cyclone and needed surgery. I had to sell my auto-rickshaw due to financial crisis and pay for her treatment and I have no source of income left anymore now. I need monetary support and training to be able to do other kinds of work.”- Ruhul Chaprashy, Gaptala Bazar

Impacts of Climate Change on Persons with Disabilities and their Organisations

The adverse impacts of climate change is evident in Southkhali Union as people are experiencing more frequent and intensified climate change-induced disasters such as cyclone, storm surge, flood, rise in temperature, heavy rainfall, salinity intrusion and riverbank erosion, etc.

These climatic events jeopardize the already fragile agricultural sector (crops, fisheries & livestock) in coastal regions as mentioned by around 98% of persons with disabilities. Increased salinity in the soil and water, low rainfall, heavy fog, increased temperatures, etc. have resulted in the loss of crops, decreased productivity, and damaged fruits and vegetables and overall cause loss of work. This ultimately affects their **food security and nutrition** as both availability of food and their purchasing ability decrease during and after disasters.

The **health** of persons with disabilities is also adversely impacted. Increase in water-borne diseases, maternal health care problems and increased birth of children with disabilities are prevalent in the area. Increased use and intake of saline water is also linked to skin diseases and diarrhea. Furthermore, medical specialists (Orthopedic, Physiotherapist, Nutritionist, and Psychosocial Counsellor) for proper treatment of persons with disabilities after disasters are not available in their locality.

Water scarcity is one of the most significant problems prevailing in Southkhali Union, consequently affecting the accessibility of persons

with disabilities to **WASH**. Lack of drinking water and decreased water availability due to low rainfall lead to poor hygiene maintenance, especially causing health issues for women with disabilities and pregnant women with disabilities.

Shelters play a key role in reducing vulnerability. The study's findings indicate that most persons with disabilities live in lower-quality housing. It often means their houses have weak infrastructure, are inaccessible, and are not resilient during disasters. In addition to the above issues, the study has found that floods and cyclones hamper **education** for one to two months in each and every year.

In Southkhali, climate change impacts the infrastructure, livelihoods and social networks, ultimately disrupting services, causing displacement, etc. These impacts are exacerbated by existing socio-economic barriers including poverty, which create increased risks for **protection** of persons with disabilities. Social conflicts, discrimination, barriers in accessing shelters and other facilities, all raise concerns for safety and security during climate-induced disasters, especially for women and children with disabilities.

Gaps in inclusion of persons with disabilities in Climate Change Adaptation (CCA)

The study identified some significant gaps in inclusion of persons with disabilities in CCA measures. These gaps were observed to stem from attitudinal, environmental and institutional barriers as also highlighted in the IASC Guideline on Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities in Humanitarian Action⁶.

- Lack of awareness of the rights of persons with disabilities among other community people creating discrimination and social stigma.
- Education and training on the inclusion of persons with disabilities in CCA and DRR is inadequate.
- Lack of the effective implementation of existing CCA related action plans and DRR related national laws and policies.
- Many still do not receive any humanitarian support after disasters.
- No systematic evacuation transportation support is available to move persons with disabilities to shelters before disasters.
- Lack of access to governmental and civil society platforms to voice their specific needs.
- Early warning messages are still not inclusive nor are they fully accessible.
- Adaptation options like buying large tanks and storing rainwater is not available to poverty stricken families with persons with disabilities.
- Not involved in decision-making processes during policy formulation or involved in CCA projects and/or governmental work related to climate change.
- Many workplaces and livelihoods are not made accessible to the specific requirements of persons with disabilities and lack of training on alternative income generating activities (AIGA).

“The persons with disabilities face many difficulties while going to the cyclone shelter before any disaster. As my husband cannot hear, it isn't easy to communicate quickly with him to move him to a shelter. During this sudden movement, often we would get severely injured while going to the shelter. At the shelters, there is a lack of proper treatment and barely anyone to take care of our injuries.” - Layli Begum, Southkhali village

Major Barriers for Persons with disabilities specific to Climate Change-induced Disaster Measures

- Persons with disabilities face challenges during every stage of **emergency preparedness and disaster management** (response, recovery) due to inaccessible early warnings signals, evacuation processes and infrastructural barriers.
- Persons with disabilities do not have **adequate knowledge of climate change**, tackling climate-induced disasters, or adopting changing climate behavior.
- **Lack of awareness** among the local government and community people about the specific needs and rights of persons with disabilities also act as barriers in inclusive climate change adaptation activities.
- Waterlogged roads due to heavy rainfall or flooded roads hamper the **movement** of persons with disabilities.
- In terms of **accessibility** to the cyclone and flood shelter, persons with disabilities face many problems as these shelters are not accessible, and are far from their houses.

Recommendations for Disability Inclusive Climate Change Adaptation (DiCCA)

Considering the climate change vulnerability of persons with disabilities, gaps in inclusion of persons with disabilities in CCA and the barriers they face, some specific recommendations have been provided below.

To **identify risks and vulnerability**, the following actions could be initiated:

- A comprehensive database could be developed in Southkhali by **segregating data by type of disability**, gender, age and climate vulnerability. The model could be replicated in other parts of the country.
- Compile **existing knowledge and best practices** of Southkhali Union in terms of combating climate-induced disasters.
- Increase the knowledge of persons with disabilities and local communities on the adverse impact of climate change through **accessible information dissemination, training and awareness campaigns**.

Community engagement is vital in preparedness actions, including climate change adaptation and disaster risk management measures. Some of the initiatives could therefore be:

- **Establish and coordinate with the community based organizations (CBOs) and self-help groups (SHGs)** so that they collectively can raise their voices in favor of their constitutional rights and entitlements.
- **Support CBOs and SHGs with the necessary knowledge and skills** so that they can make their initiatives climate-informed and resilient.
- **Strengthen disability-inclusive health facilities** such as providing training, information support to local health centers, and community clinics to combat climate-induced health hazards in Southkhali.

Lastly, to make a climate-resilient community, **strengthening institutional capacities and capacity building of community people is needed**, following these interventions:

- Policy advocacy needs to be done for making **disability-inclusive law and policies** in the context of climate change and **ensure effective implementation** of the relevant national policies and legal frameworks.
- Training needs to be provided to persons with disabilities who are farmers on **climate-smart agriculture** methods and techniques such as nutri-gardening, growing vegetables and crops in sacks, Sarjon cultivation, etc.
- An inclusive year-round **resilient aquaculture** system can be adopted for sustained income of the persons with disabilities involved in fisheries sector. For example:
 - Fish like Koi, Nilotika cultivation in homestead pond.
 - Fish like Bagda, bhetki, parse, pangas and tilapia can be cultivated in saline prone areas.
- Knowledge of alternative livelihood options needs to be disseminated, and support needs to be provided to persons with disabilities through various **trainings for Alternative Income Generating Activities (AIGA)**.

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