

UN Commission for Social Development, 57th Session

High-Level Panel discussion: The empowerment of people affected by natural and human-made disasters to reduce inequality: Addressing the differential impact on persons with disabilities, older persons and youth

Wednesday, 13 February 2019, Conference Room 4, UNHQ

Speech of Mosharraf Hossain, Director of Global Policy Influencing and Research, ADD International.

Any Disaster Risk Reduction programme and Humanitarian action must be inclusive of all, including us – one billion people with disabilities in the world!

Because of global warming, the frequency and severity of natural disaster increased a lot. The world is also experiencing the highest level of inequality for climate change, technological innovation and the failure of globalization.

Those who are worst affected by the climate-related hazards and subsequent disasters are people with disabilities, older people, women, and youth.

However, the impact of a disaster can be reduced through the empowerment of marginalized people. I can assure you that they can work as change agents to address inequality.

On 3rd December last year, the United Nations published the Flagship Report on Disability and Development last December. According to this report, the impact of disasters is very high on people with disabilities as they have a less coping capacity. It becomes complicated when there is internationality of disability, age, and sex.

There are three main reasons for the negative impacts of natural and human-made disasters are:

- a. lack of preparedness; in a global survey, -72% of PWDs reported they didn't have personal preparedness plan.
- b. lack of capacity of implementing agency, and lack of cooperation between DPOs and disaster organizations.
- c. lack of participation of persons with disabilities in disaster preparedness, response, and recovery programme.

The challenge is how we can turn these “lacks” to “back” or to “have”.

Let me share the experience of Bangladesh, from where I came.

Case One:

Bangladesh is a disaster-prone country, where the cyclone, flood, and drought are a common phenomenon. In 2007, the Cyclone Sidre hit the coastal area of the country affecting 8.5 million people. People from all corners of the country moved to support the affected people. But no one thought about disabled people as they remained confined at home, and there was no data.

Disabled People Organisation from the neighboring districts moved to the affected place and identified them visiting home to home. I ensured they reached 6,000 affected families with emergency response.

Later, we also conducted research and provided concrete recommendations to the policy makers to address the disability issue in the Disaster Risk Reduction programme. The government responded positively.

In 2013, the Disability Rights and Protection Act 2013 ensured three things:

- a. security of people with disabilities during a disaster
- b. priority in early warning, response, shelter and recovery,
- c. representation in different level committees.

Now all newly built disaster shelters are accessible. DPOs representation is ensured.

Case two:

Now let me share another case of human-made disaster. Bangladesh is the second highest garments manufacturer in the world. More than 90% of 2.5 million workers in this industry are young girls and women. But the workplaces were under risk.

In April 2013, you might have watched on TV the biggest manmade disaster in the suburb of Dhaka City.

An eight storied factory, **Rana Plaza** collapsed in a few minutes taking lives of 1,100 garments workers and injuring 1400. Many of them became disabled and lost jobs. Although financial compensation was given, they did get rehabilitation services for their physical and mental trauma.

After the tragedy, the safety measures improved dramatically following the legally binding agreement between global brands and local companies on the Fire and Building Safety. It is the basic criteria to be met by Bangladeshi companies for sourcing. The industrial disaster is a big issue in the low- and middle-income countries where safety measures are inadequate.

In both cases, there was a severe lack of preparedness. Bangladesh has taken proactive actions to address the impact of disasters. But there is a long way to go to ensure the security of everyone by 2030.

Case three:

Last but not least, Bangladesh is implementing a large humanitarian programme for Rohingya Refugees. When the Myanmar Army initiated an ethnic cleansing operation, Bangladesh opened the door to protect the lives of one million Rohingyas.

Although there is no data yet, more than 15% of them must be with a disability. I would like to thank UNHCR and Bangladesh Government for giving priority to people with disabilities as a few NGOs are providing rehabilitation services.

Last week, UN Special Envoy, Angelina Jolly completed a five-day trip in the Refugee camp and Dhaka. She concludes that Rohingya refugees need long-term support until they go back home.

In this long-term process, can we empower Rohingyas with disabilities to ensure their meaningful participation in the humanitarian action and live with rights and dignity in the Refugee Camp.

I propose three actions to make disaster risk reduction (DRR) programme more inclusive:

Mobilize the community:

DRR should be a multi-stakeholders', rights-based and bottom-up approach that requires "an all-of-society engagement and partnership". I implemented the Community Managed Disaster Risk Reduction project in Bangladesh. So I can say it is an effective approach to use indigenous knowledge and empower the community to find solutions, which feed in formulating adaptive policy.

Ensure participation of marginalized people:

The 21st century's development should be led by people. The foundation of the disability movement is "nothing about us, without us." It is crucial to ensure the meaningful engagement of people with disabilities in decision making. It is critical as they play a significant role as an expert for disability inclusion.

Develop a policy for transformative changes, and long-term plan following CRPD and Sendai Frame for Disaster Risk Reduction to ensure response, recovery, and rehabilitation for all.

I have three recommendations to advance inclusion and social justice:

Address inequality: The only way we can reduce inequality is through the implementation of SDGs as Goal 10 targeted participation of marginalized people in economic, social and political activities to increase inclusion.

In the HLPF this year, all 51 countries volunteered to review SDGs, should report against disability specific targets and indicators of education, employment, inequality, and representations public institutions. Then we can see how much we have achieved, and what needs to be done. Financing is a big challenge for the implementation of SDGs. The member states should allocate resources for disability inclusion.

Make disability at the center of what the UN does:

United Nations initiated the UN system-wide review for disability inclusion. The review isn't completed, so we don't know the outcome yet.

But we know the UK's Department for International Development, DFID pledged to put disability at the heart of what DFID does. I firmly believe disability should be in the center of what the UN does. Not only that, it should be on the fast track.

In conclusion, I strongly recommend holding the institution, business, or the governments responsible for human-made disaster, death or and displacement. They must compensate for the damage they have made. And I urge to support those who are working for disabled people, displaced people, and distressed people. This earth is for everyone!