

**Panel Discussion on Disaster Resilience and Disability:
Ensuring Equality and Inclusion**

Report

**Co-organized by: UNDESA, UNISDR in collaboration with Indonesia and
Norway and the Nippon Foundation**

**10 October, 2013
ECOSOC Chamber, UN Headquarters, New York**

An unedited report. The views expressed in this document are those of the experts and do not necessarily represent the views of the United Nations, nor co-sponsoring Governments or organizations.

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1. Introduction

The multi-stakeholder Panel Discussion on “Disaster Resilience and Disability: Ensuring Equality and Inclusion”, co-organized by the UNISDR and DESA (SCRPD/DSPD), in collaboration with Norway and Indonesia co-chairs of the Group for Friends of Disaster Risk Reduction and the Nippon Foundation, was held on 10 October 2013, at the United Nations Headquarters in New York, in observance of the 2013 International Day of Disaster Reduction (IDRR).

The Panel was the highlight of a series of events held to mark the 2013 International Day for Disaster Reduction, with the aim to: 1) Advocate for disability-inclusive policies that will provide persons with disabilities the same level of safety and choices afforded to all, involving persons with disabilities in all planning processes; 2) Facilitate a discussion on how disaster risk reduction processes can best include the perspectives of people living with disabilities, especially with a view to a disability-inclusive post-2015 framework for disaster risk reduction (HFA2) and the post-2015 development agenda; 3) Provide a forum for persons with disabilities to highlight their concerns and hear their reformations for a more disaster-resilient world; 4) Raise awareness on how disasters can impact persons with disabilities and how they can be actively involved in building resilience.

Mr. Thomas Gass, Assistant Secretary-General of made opening remarks along with the representatives of the two co-sponsors, Indonesia and Norway, co-chairs of the Group of Friends for Disaster Risk Reduction who co-chaired the panel discussion.

The Panel was moderated by Ms. Margareta Wahlström, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Disaster Risk Reduction with the participation of panellists. Panellists included: Ms. Kerryann F Ifill, President of Senate, Barbados; Mr. Alex Robinson, ASB Indonesia on behalf of Asian Disaster Reduction and Response Network; Mr. Mitsuji Hisamitsu, General Secretary and Chief of Headquarters, Japanese Federation of the Deaf; and Ms. Stephanie Kusuma Rahardja, Member of Deaf Art Community, Yogyakarta, Indonesia.

Outcomes of the Panel discussion served as an input to inform the development of the post-2015 framework for disaster risk reduction (HFA2) as well as other post-2015 processes.

It was also intended that discussion would lead to further collaboration including in the organization of future expert group meetings on the same issues amongst the broad network of scholars, practitioners, experts and advocates in order to ensure disability-inclusive development toward 2015 and beyond.

2. Key Findings and Recommendations

2.1. Include disability perspectives and concerns in the global development agenda and frameworks, including the emerging post-2015 framework for disaster risk reduction (HFA2)

The Hyogo Framework for Action 2010-2015 is the current international policy instrument to guide global efforts in disaster reduction. With ongoing discussions on the post-2015 development agenda, preparatory and consultative processes are also underway to develop its successor the Hyogo Framework for Action 2 (HFA2). There was an increasing call to strengthen the emphasis of this new framework on a targeted approach to recognize the cross-cutting issue of disability-inclusion, the significance of investing in disability-inclusive disaster reduction to minimize human and economic loss, safe guard development gains and promote sustainable solutions that benefit all, while also ensuring the full and effective participation of persons with disabilities and all other stakeholders. Accordingly, a call was made for disability inclusion in ongoing work on the post-2015 disaster risk reduction framework (Hyogo Framework for action 2005-2015, HFA2) to be transformational in its quest to build disaster resilient nations and communities, and attainable through the inclusion and fuller participation by all members of communities.

2.2. Take immediate action to include persons with disabilities in disaster risk reduction and resilience building

Persons with disabilities are disproportionately affected by disasters. They are at higher risk of death, injury and secondary impairments, as a result of exclusion from disaster risk reduction policies, plans and programmes. For example, the mortality rate of the 2011 earthquake in Japan was twice as high for persons with disabilities than the general population. In situations of risk persons with disabilities may lack the information on the choices or action to take. There is therefore need to focus on the information content and also its timely delivery to those who need it. This is in addition to overcoming barriers and improving

accessibility in the physical environments.

Disaster risk reduction strategies and efforts should be inclusive of persons with disabilities in order to reduce their vulnerability, mitigate the impact of disasters and loss of life, reduce risk and build up resilience by enhancing the capacities of individuals, communities and institutions.

2.3. Utilize community-wide approaches that involve all stakeholders in the design and implementation of resilient societies to ensure equal access

Natural disasters, when they occur, affect everyone. As a concept, “Whole Community”¹ encompasses residents, emergency management practitioners, organizational and community leaders, and government officials to collectively understand and assess the needs of their respective communities and determine the best ways to organize and strengthen their assets, capacities, and interests and thereby establishing a more effective path to societal security and resilience is built.

The entire community is integrated in the preparedness, response, recovery and mitigation with the goal of preparing all stakeholders during emergency response and recovery. Benefits for this approach for emergency management include: 1) Shared understanding of community needs and capabilities; 2) greater empowerment and integration of resources from across the community; 3) stronger social infrastructure; 4) establishment of relationships that facilitate more effective prevention, protection, mitigation, response, and recovery activities; 5) increased individual and collective preparedness; and 6) greater resiliency at both the community and national levels.

A successful pilot project through partnerships shows that people with severe psycho-social disabilities became champions of evacuations through their ability to help themselves, during the 2011 Tsunami in Japan, after being trained in drills, was a discussant. Persons with disabilities when equipped with the right tools can empower themselves and contribute to life-saving community-wide efforts during natural disasters.

¹ An illustrative approach that is promoted by the US is at: Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). 2011. “A Whole Community Approach to Emergency Management: Principles, Themes, and Pathways for Action”. Available at http://www.fema.gov/media-library-data/20130726-1813-25045-3330/whole_community_dec2011_2_.pdf

2.4. Make use of targeted and disability-sensitive and responsive actions and plans to build and support resilience for persons with disabilities

Persons with disabilities often carry additional disadvantages due to their conditions and especially during crisis conditions such as natural disasters. In order to prevent their invisibility, focus needs to be placed on recognizing the reality they have to face, and also addressing their needs and priorities in a targeted fashion during all phases of disaster management through prevention, mitigation and preparedness. Response teams could be trained to be disability-sensitive and relief items should be checked for their appropriateness to fulfill the needs of persons with disabilities. At the same time, disaster recovery can offer an opportunity to incorporate disability concerns in disaster management.

2.5. Strengthen evidence-based information and data on the situation of persons with disabilities in the planning and implementation of disaster-resilient strategies

Risk management similar to other policy concerns, relies on having the appropriate information and knowledge to make decisions and take appropriate action. Information also helps disaster risk managers apply best practices before, during and after extreme events and therefore improve future programming. An understanding of needs and trends is also dependent on the availability of data. Disaggregated data can be collected according to the diversity of persons with disabilities along the lines of age and gender. For successful undertaking of this task, capacity-building and institutional arrangements need to be reinforced for the collection of reliable and standardized data in both areas of disability and also disaster risk reduction for the planning and implementation of disaster-resilient strategies.

2.6. Promote education and awareness raising to benefits for all

Natural disasters often occur beyond the control of entire societies. However, all can be better prepared to face their dangers through education and training. Such tools can target information such as appropriate behaviour and strategies and rules to apply before, during and after natural disasters in order to minimise risk. Awareness campaigns can be launched on communication channels including radio and television. Informational materials such as brochures and leaflets can also be passed around communities to disseminate information coping strategies when disaster occur and trainings can also occur in schools or local communities. The International Day for Natural Disaster Reduction and the International Day

of Persons with Disabilities, which are observed annually, could be venues through which to raise awareness on the intersection between disability and disaster risk and reduction.

3. Summary of Proceedings

3.1 Opening

The Panel Discussion was called to order during the afternoon of 19 July by H.E. Ambassador Geir O. Pedersen, Permanent Representative of Norway to the United Nations, who formally opened the meeting. Immediately following was a statement by H.E. Yusra Khan, Deputy Permanent Representative of the Republic of Indonesia, both co-chairs of the Group of Friends for Disaster Risk Reduction, Chaired the Panel.

In his opening and welcome statement, on behalf of the co-chairs of the Group of Friends for Disaster Risk Reduction, Ambassador Pedersen, recalled the historical nature of the first High-level Meeting on Disability and Development, held on 23 September 23 at the United Nations Headquarters, whose outcome document included commitment to disaster preparedness and disaster-risk reduction. He noted that the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities gives the framework and the direction needed to collectively work for a disability inclusive world. Norway in 2011, hosted the first international conference on disaster risk reduction and persons with disabilities together with disabled persons' organizations and humanitarian actors. It provided a platform for the exchange of experiences and information, including on further work in the field. He stressed the need to develop good and practical solutions that include persons with disabilities in the building of resilience. Ambassador Pedersen stressed the need to intensify efforts to lessen the impact of disasters on persons with disabilities, especially through national capacity building. He highlighted the special situation of women and girls with disabilities, stating that they have an even harder time than most; they must be involved, listened to, and protected in disaster situations as well as in work on resilience. Norway is fully behind including persons with disabilities in humanitarian and development efforts and in the post-2015 agenda.

H.E. Ambassador Khan, in his statement, reinforced the reality of disasters today and emphasized that through steadfast commitment and action, a global culture of disaster reduction had been born. A concrete foundation for disaster reduction to be mainstreamed

into all aspects of economic and social development had been collectively set, onto which efforts on disaster risk will be built. All premises to integrate comprehensive, effective, and inclusive disaster reduction measures in the development framework are thus necessary and more must be done to ensure that Disaster Risk Reduction translates into meaningful benefit for all layers of society. Despite progress in mainstreaming DRR, the inclusion and participation of certain segments in society, particularly young people, women, persons with disabilities, and senior citizens remain lacking. This year's focus on persons with disabilities is to ensure their equal opportunity and inclusive participation in disaster risk reduction related discourses and decision making. Disability increases vulnerability but disability is not inability. In disasters, increased vulnerabilities lead to decreased resilience of an entire community. Engaging persons with disabilities will increase resilience. It is important to identify possible solutions based on the needs of persons with disabilities and their families, based on experience, in order to increase the resilience of the community. Effective participation and inclusion of persons with disabilities and their caregivers should have special focus. The social inclusion of the most vulnerable groups within society is important; thus, DRR plans need to take into account the inputs, needs and requirements of persons with disabilities and their caregivers. In Indonesia, more than 70% of persons with disabilities reside in highly disaster-prone provinces. To further strengthen frameworks, regulation on the protection on persons with disabilities in disaster management is now being finalized. More work needs to be done to ensure that Member States and UN entities collaborate to ensure that the next global development framework addresses the inclusion of disability in the Post-2015 framework for Disaster Risk Reduction.

Mr. Thomas Gass, Assistant Secretary-General, Department of Economic & Social Affairs, in his opening remarks, highlighted that disability has too long been largely invisible in internationally agreed development goals, including the Millennium Development Goals. There is a growing consensus that incorporating climate change and disaster risk reduction will advance sustainable and resilient development, providing an opportunity to achieve an inclusive agenda for all. DESA has implemented a number of initiatives with a view to raise global awareness, strengthen the knowledge-base and build national capacity for disability inclusion in disaster risk reduction: An Expert Group Meeting had been organised by UN DESA in close collaboration with the United Nations Information Center in Tokyo and The Nippon Foundation on the theme of “Building Inclusive Society and Development through Promoting Accessibility in Information and Communication and Technologies (ICTs)”; The

inaugural DESA Forum held in July 2013 in cooperation with the President of the General Assembly, included discussions on disability and disaster risk reduction; and analytical studies have been prepared and side events organized related to disability inclusion in disaster risk reduction.

Reflecting on the General Assembly's High-level Meeting on Disability and Development (HLMDD), held at its sixty-eighth session, Mr. Gass highlighted that the Outcome Documentⁱ underlines the importance of including disability in the post-2015 development agenda and calls for urgent action, including in the area of strengthening preparedness and disaster risk reduction. The challenge now is to ensure its full implementation on the ground. A shared objective is to fully implement the provisions of the document as guided by the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. This is important for three reasons. It is the responsibility of Member-States to integrate language from the document into other relevant resolutions and then set instructions for its operationalization. The disability dimension must be mainstreamed in Disaster Risk Reduction at all stages from the planning and design, implementation and monitoring. A world inclusive of persons with disabilities will benefit us all. DESA is committed to promoting sustainable and inclusive development for all. We stand ready to work with Member-States, the UN and civil society partners in pursuit of our initiatives. It is vital that disaster resilience initiatives involve persons with disabilities.

3.2 Presentations and Interventions

The Panel was moderated by Ms. Margareta Wahlström, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Disaster Risk Reduction. She emphasized that disability is not an issue solely for persons with a disability, or for disability organizations, but rather an issue for all. She underscored that the work of persons with disabilities on disaster risk reduction, including preparedness, inclusion and access, benefits all. Reflecting on the interim findings on a UN surveyⁱⁱ on disability and disasters, she highlighted that 70 per cent of respondents are not aware of emergency planning in their community. Some 50 per cent said they wanted to be involved in designing plans, 20 per cent did not know, and only a small percentage said they did not want to be involved. These figures suggest that many persons with disabilities feel isolated. This provides an entry point for an important conversation and mobilization opportunity.

Mr. Kerryann Ifill, President of the Senate of Barbados, noted that Article 11 of the CRPD obligates States Parties to take measures to include the needs and protections of persons with disability in disaster reduction efforts. In light of this provision, she called for the full participation and inclusion of persons with disabilities in its implementation. Barbados' approach has included the establishment of a 'vulnerable persons' committee, specific training for first responders and volunteers on how to interact with the disability community, and efforts by civil society to raise public awareness of persons with disabilities and disasters. She noted that all of this required a legislative framework and political will to ensure effective implementation of a number of strategies, including early warning, information dissemination, access to shelters and other services and participation in planning and execution. Integrating disability considerations at the design phase doesn't generally incur additional cost. However, retrofitting does. While there are limitations, the aim must be to reach everyone. Engaging the whole community is the only way to achieve resilient societies.

The General Secretary of the Japanese Federation of the Deaf, **Mitsuji Hisamatsu**, provided an overview of the Great East Japan earthquake and tsunami. He highlighted that the death rate for persons with disability was double that of the general population. In some places the rate was as high as five times, due to a lack of information or an accessible means to evacuate. To build a resilient society, he outlined three key lessons from Japan's experience: (1) the need for specific guidelines and measures to support persons with disabilities; (2) the need for accurate data and information on where and how persons with disability are living and what they need to reduce their risk; and (3) the need to raise awareness on the necessity of disaster risk reduction and to strengthen disaster preparedness. Learning from each other, both at the government and community level can support genuine change and action. Disaster risk reduction education provides long-term benefits, including transferring knowledge to parents. Mainstreaming disability consideration into education can support the entire community, and does not have an additional cost.

Alex Robinson, Country Director of Arbeiter-Samariter-Bund (ASB) in Indonesia and a co-founder of the Disability-Inclusive Disaster Risk Reduction Network for Asia and the Pacific,ⁱⁱⁱ expressed the view that the disaster risk reduction community, as a whole, has not engaged with disability and the disability movement has not engaged with disaster risk reduction. He attributed this lack of engagement, in part, to the widely held view that disability is a technical issue. He noted that over the years disability has been ring-fenced as

the preserve of the technical few and, effectively, as being someone else's problem. He outlined that disability is inherent to the human condition and is the concern of all. He stated that information on choices or action to take is often not available to persons with disability. To overcome this, focus should not be given to the content, which is often the same, but rather how to better deliver that information. He noted that improving information delivery does not require significantly increased investment, rather a little bit of creativity, imagination and willingness. Given that disasters have a disproportionate impact on persons with disabilities, this can only be addressed through a 'whole of community' approach. Moving away from the issue of vulnerability and looking at resilience is also important to supporting an inclusive approach. NGOs have a key role to play to bridge the gaps between disaster risk reduction and disability.

Interventions were made by participants from the floor. Youth representative and member of the Deaf Art Community, **Stephanie Rahardja**, shared her experience of the 2006 Yogyakarta earthquake. She reflected on the absence of information for persons with disabilities to save themselves. She highlighted her work with different forms of media to raise awareness and disseminate knowledge on managing disaster risks. She underscored that participation in disaster risk reduction was every person's right. Governments and civil society need to look at how to increase the potential of persons with disabilities to engage and contribute. Clear data and targeted education is needed, both for persons with disabilities but also for the wider community. Persons with disabilities can play an important role in increasing a community's resilience. Action needs to be taken now.

A number of Member States and civil society organisations took the floor. The **United Arab Emirates** called for greater engagement and support of persons with disabilities, and particularly of women. **Australia** highlighted the importance of bringing the disability and disaster risk reduction communities together, and urged Member States and others not to wait for the post-2015 development agenda, including the HFA2, to ensure the inclusion of persons with disabilities in all aspects of development, including disaster resilience. **New Zealand**, noting that disability as an issue has gained increasing attention in both the humanitarian and development spheres at the United Nations over the last year, sees an opportunity to further raise the profile of disaster risk reduction. The **United States** called for a 'whole of community' approach to disaster risk reduction, which includes persons with disabilities. Community participation means equal access, and support for this engagement.

The **Huairou Commission** underscored that disaster risk reduction is primarily a community activity, hence the importance of inclusion, particularly for women. **Ribbon International** underscored that disaster risk reduction is not solely an issue for the Global South, and efforts must be taken across the world. Community awareness is central to addressing issues of isolation. **UNICEF** highlighted the mindset that prevents inclusion – that it costs too much, or that it’s too difficult – as being tantamount to saying that persons with disabilities are of less value than persons without disabilities. Given that half of persons with disabilities that die in a disaster are children, particular focus must be given to children. **WHO** recognised that the most effective way to achieve public health outcomes, including as it relates to disaster risk reduction and disability, is through strong local and national capacities, including technical materials.

4. Organization of Work

4.1 Attendance

The Panel was attended by a diverse group of policy specialists and practitioners in the disability, disaster risk reduction and development fields including the United Nations system, government, private sector and civil society organizations, creating an instant venue for an energetic and robust exchange of experiences and ideas in the ensuring equality and inclusion in disaster risk reduction and disability.

4.2 Documentation

The reference documents and presentations are posted on the Enable Website at: <http://www.un.org/disabilities/default.asp?id=1611>

4.3 Adoption of the Agenda and programme

The Panel Discussion had an agenda and programme as presented in Annex I.

4.4 Adoption of Recommendations

During the closing of the Panel on 10 October, conclusions and recommendations were adopted.

4.5 Closing of the Meeting

The Panel Discussion was closed during the afternoon of 10 October 2013.

Annex I.

Draft Programme

Panel Discussion on Disaster Resilience and Disability: Ensuring Equality and Inclusion

In observance of the 2013 International Day of Disaster Reduction

10 October 2013, United Nations Headquarters New York

Panel Discussion on disaster resilience and disability

The Panel discussion will take stock of progress, share good practices and options in practicing disability-inclusive disaster risk reduction. The outcome of the panel will also serve to inform the consultations on the emerging priorities for the post-2015 framework for disaster risk reduction (HFA2) and other post-2015 development processes in the UN.

Date:

Thursday, 10 October 2013

Event title:

“Disaster resilience and disability: ensuring equality and inclusion”, a multi-stakeholder panel discussion on disaster resilience and disability.

Organizers:

UNISDR and DESA (SCRPD/DSPD)

In collaboration with the Group for Friends of Disaster Risk Reduction and the Nippon Foundation.

Event venue and time:

ECOSOC Chamber, 1:15 pm – 2:45 pm

Lunch:

A light lunch will be available prior to the event on level one of the Conference Building. The lunch is sponsored by the Permanent Mission of Norway.

Format:

The panel discussion will be moderated. Each panellist will be introduced and given 5-7 minutes to offer initial remarks after which a moderated discussion will follow.

Objectives:

The panel discussion will aim to highlight a variety of perspectives on disaster resilience and disability, in order to help all major stakeholders and partners, especially policy makers:

- 1) To take a stock of progress made so far in including disability in disaster risk reduction policy and practices,
- 2) To share experience and good practices in this regard,
- 3) To discuss how persons with disabilities can make contributions to disaster resilience, and

- 4) To discuss options and ways forward with reference to the post-2015 framework for disaster risk reduction (HFA2), to better incorporate the perspectives and needs of persons with disabilities.

Outcome:

The discussions will serve as an input to inform the development of the post-2015 framework for disaster risk reduction (HFA2) as well as other post-2015 processes.

Chairs:

Two Ambassadors/Permanent Representatives from the co-chairs of the Group of Friends for Disaster Risk Reduction

Moderator:

Ms. Margareta Wahlström, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Disaster Risk Reduction

Opening remarks:

Mr. Thomas Gass, Assistant Secretary-General, Department of Economic & Social Affairs

Panellists:

The following panellists will participate:

1. Ms. Marcie Roth, Director, Office of Disability Integration and Coordination, FEMA (USA)
2. Ms. Kerryann F Ifill, President of Senate, Barbados
3. Mr. Alex Robinson, ASB Indonesia on behalf of Asian Disaster Reduction and Response Network
4. Mr. Mitsuji Hisamitsu, General Secretary and Chief of Headquarters, Japanese Federation of the Deaf
5. Ms. Stephanie Kusuma Rahardja, Member of Deaf Art Community, Yogyakarta, Indonesia

ⁱ http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/68/L.1

ⁱⁱ <http://www.unisdr.org/archive/35032>

ⁱⁱⁱ <http://www.didrm.net/home/>