

DISABILITY-INCLUSIVE DISASTER RISK MANAGEMENT AND CLIMATE RESILIENCE IN THE CARIBBEAN

Highlights from a desk review

CONTEXT

Around fifteen percent of the world's population live with some form of disability. This is the largest minority group on earth and it is growing as populations age. In disasters these people suffer loss and injury at a higher rate than the general population. Targeted support to build capability and enable preparation for response and recovery from geophysical-, weather- and climate-related disasters is essential to building resilience. People living with disabilities (PWD) are not a homogenous group. The range of individual capacities, strengths, capabilities and needs is not generally well understood or accommodated in DRM planning. PWD are frequently marginalised and are confronted with a range of barriers that exclude active engagement in disaster risk reduction activities.

The CRF is supporting disability-inclusive Disaster Risk Management (DRM) as an essential element in building societal Climate Resilience (CR) in nine CRF recipient Caribbean countries.

In 2020-2021 a desk study was undertaken to:

1. Better understand disability inclusion gaps in DRM and CR in Antigua and Barbuda; Belize; Dominica; Grenada; Guyana; Jamaica; St Lucia; St Vincent and the Grenadines; and Suriname;
2. Propose a series of recommendations to make disaster preparedness and recovery strategies more inclusive of PWD in Caribbean countries.

MAIN FINDINGS

There are more than a million PWD across the nine selected countries and a trend towards numbers and degree of disability increasing as the populations age is clear. A lack of quality and accessible disaggregated disability data limits a precise understanding of PWD demographics.

However, it is clear that:

- Visual impairment and limited mobility are the most prevalent physical disabilities.
- People living with intellectual, mental and psychological disabilities are poorly accounted for in official statistics
- Rates of disability across all impairments are generally higher among females



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- Disability most often coincides with other marginalising characteristics
- Most disability is acquired and increases with age – both in degree and as a proportion of the population

National governments are committed to disability-inclusive DRM. All have developed policy and national standards that support accessibility of information and public infrastructure for PWD. This, together with newer and emerging technologies, is certainly improving accessibility for PWD. However, poorly enforced laws and regulations allow barriers to access to persist.

- Internet-based communication devices within-built accessibility features are improving the availability of information for PWD.
- The use of the Common Alerting Protocol for weather warnings and information greatly supports both their accessibility and availability.



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WORKING TOWARDS DISABILITY INCLUSIVE DISASTER RISK MANAGEMENT AND CLIMATE RESILIENCE

Based on the findings the CRF will

- > Support national governments to address issues around the serious lack of disaggregated disability data that is available and/or accessible to the planning and implementation of preparedness and recovery activities.
- > Foster rigorous adherence to accessibility provisions in building codes and land use planning.
- > Raise awareness and build capacity for a more meaningful direct engagement of PWD and representatives in DRM “We are the ones wearing the boots—we know where they pinch”.
- > Promote a change in societal attitudes towards PWD that are based on acknowledging abilities and building capabilities rather than the predominant existing attitudes of pity and helplessness.

- Web content management standards – such as Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG 2.0) – are not commonly applied to content made available on official DRM websites. This means PWD who rely on accessibility software such as screen readers and translators cannot access the information.
- Building codes and public planning regulations designed to enable accessibility for PWD to buildings and public infrastructure are enshrined in public policy but are not well applied or enforced.

PWD are not well engaged in DRM and CR planning processes. Despite policy supporting inclusive practices DRM planning tends to be done for rather than with PWD and is based on their limitations rather than their strengths.

- PWD are invited to participate in DRM planning and policy forums but their active engagement is frequently not well facilitated.
- Well established umbrella disability support organisations that have a direct working relationship with PWD and respective national governments are under-resourced and under-utilised in DRM planning, particularly at the national level.
- There is little evidence of mainstreaming disability inclusion across societies or within DRM

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