



DISABILITY-INCLUSIVE DISASTER RISK REDUCTION

TRANSFORMATIVE JOURNEY TOWARDS A DISABILITY-INCLUSIVE SOCIETY



REFORMS THAT TRANSFORMED



NATIONAL DISASTER MANAGEMENT AUTHORITY
MINISTRY OF HOME AFFAIRS, GOVERNMENT OF INDIA



TRANSFORMATIVE JOURNEY TOWARDS A DISABILITY-INCLUSIVE SOCIETY

Overview

Systemic gaps and challenges

Persons with disabilities (PWDs) experience the impact of disasters and climate change disproportionately. They are more adversely impacted than the general population because their condition exposes them to various additional risks. It is thus important that the Indian disaster management system takes into account the needs of Persons with Disabilities during the time of disasters.

In this context, it has been observed that the stakeholders and service providers, including the government line departments and organizations working in the field of disability, have often been confronted with innumerable gaps and challenges in the ecosystem that worked as barriers to their optimal functioning. These impediments included:

- ✧ Near absence of appropriate disability-sensitive and disability-responsive policies
- ✧ Inadequate planning
- ✧ Limited disability-inclusive organizational system

Social stigma against the disabled

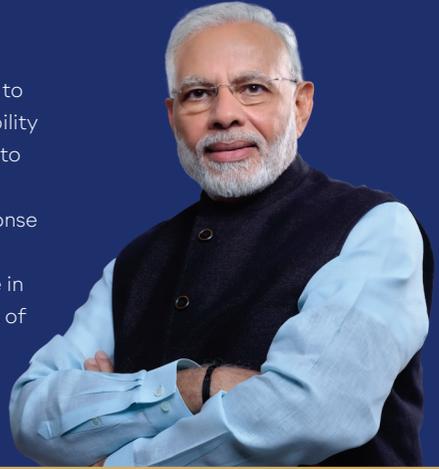
It may also be highlighted that among persons with disability, different sections are affected differently during disasters, owing to their economic, sociocultural, religious and other features of their background. Accessibility to service is particularly limited for the more vulnerable groups of disabled persons, such as women, the elderly, children, transgenders, and SC/ST communities. The factors



Persons with disabilities are particularly prone to the rigours of disasters. It is our social responsibility to acknowledge and comprehend their needs to update our preparedness, integrate their requirements into policymaking and make response mechanisms adequate and inclusive. These guidelines will serve as an important milestone in safeguarding the divyangjan from the vagaries of natural disasters.



- **Shri Narendra Modi**, Prime Minister
Release of Guidelines (20 Aug 2019)



responsible for discrimination against Persons with Disabilities get further magnified during disasters owing to many myths and blind beliefs associated with disability. Many in the country believe that disability is the outcome of a past curse or punishment for karma. Persons with Disabilities are also projected as a burden on the community, and this further reinforces society's negative image of them.

Vision

A holistic approach

Keeping the above concerns in mind, the needs of the disabled can be fulfilled if seen from a holistic perspective. The government has taken up a number of meaningful steps to address the issue of disability in a comprehensive manner, acknowledging their rights and entitlements as equal citizens of the country.

There was very limited evidence of disability-inclusive policies and programmes in the country until recently, but a welcome change has been noticed post-2014, with the introduction of a number of disability-inclusive policies. This has enhanced awareness of issues

related to Persons with Disabilities. The government's commitment is reflected in various efforts that have been undertaken to empower Persons with Disabilities and bring them into the mainstream of society by providing them support in various spheres of activity.

Disability-inclusive approach of the government post-2014 – a brief sketch

The first acknowledgement of the need to view disabled persons from a new perspective surfaced in the Prime Minister's Mann Ki Baat speech in 2015, when he wished to term persons with disability as 'divyangjan' replacing the derogatory terms of 'viklang' or 'apang'.



“ The National Disaster Management Guidelines on Disability-Inclusive Disaster Risk Reduction are an essential and practical tool that signifies the Government of India's commitment to ensure an “all-of-society” approach towards disaster risk reduction. The guidelines provide clear advice on what actions have to be taken for a disability-inclusive DRR. They take into consideration the fact that promoting disability inclusion is an ongoing process and hence recommend a phase-wise implementation. They also recognize the importance of a multi-disciplinary approach and explain the role of different actors in disability-inclusive DRR. Handicap International (also known as Humanity & Inclusion) has been using these important guidelines for its DRR initiatives in India to help ensure that people with disabilities fully and effectively participate in preparedness and response activities.”

Annie Patri,
Humanity & Inclusion
DID Coordinator, Disability-Inclusive Development Programme



Some of the important disability-inclusive initiatives post-2014

Comprehensive guidelines, a global first for India

In September 2019, the National Disaster Management Authority, under the guidance of its Chairman, the Hon'ble Prime Minister, came out with comprehensive guidelines under the title, 'National Disaster Management Guidelines on Disability-Inclusive Disaster Risk Reduction, 2019' (NDMA 2019). This was the first comprehensive set of guidelines issued by any country globally on disability-inclusive disaster risk reduction (DiDRR). The guidelines were important, as they were meant for the most marginalized of groups – the disabled – in the

country. They were also important as they marked the responsibilities of ministries/line departments from national to local level for carrying out work related to each dimension of the guidelines. Some of these dimensions are:

- ✧ Data and resource mapping
- ✧ Policies, planning and strategies
- ✧ Adoption of universal design principles, facilitation of accessibility and access to assistive technology
- ✧ Preparedness and mitigation strategies
- ✧ Early warning system
- ✧ Search, rescue and evacuation
- ✧ Access to relief
- ✧ Rehabilitation and reconstruction
- ✧ Addressing of needs of specific sections of persons with disability, such as women and girls with disabilities, children with disabilities, elderly persons, SC, ST, LGBT persons with disabilities, persons with psychosocial disabilities, etc.
- ✧ Decision making by persons with disabilities and their organizations
- ✧ Knowledge and capacity building for care-givers





“ ‘Since the last one year I have been always invited by GSDMA to talk about disability inclusion in their disaster management programme. While preparing my paper, I always refer to the NDMA guidelines for Disability-Inclusion in Disaster Risk Reduction. It is very useful for integration of persons with disabilities in DRR activities. Being a woman with disability, and always feeling motivated towards the cause, I advocate that disabled people’s organisations should be part of the DRR programme and build a resilient community.’ ”

- Nita Panchal

Disability activist, Gujarat

Action points

The National Disaster Management Plan (NDMP) has given special attention to the needs of Persons with Disabilities, considering their greater vulnerability during disasters. With its inclusive approach, the NDMP has placed them within the ‘more vulnerable’ group, dedicating an entire chapter on ‘social inclusion’ for such ‘more vulnerable’ sections of the population. According to the NDMP, DRR efforts must specifically address the vulnerabilities of Persons with Disabilities among the affected population rather than clubbing them with others. Special attention must be paid to ensure that no Person with Disabilities is abandoned during or after a disaster. The chapter on social inclusion also includes a matrix of roles and responsibilities for the concerned Central- and State-level agencies with regard to the more vulnerable groups of citizens, including Persons with Disabilities. Some of the important action points in the matrix pertaining to Persons with Disabilities are:

- ❖ Guidance and support to address the DRR needs of Persons with Disabilities as per global best practices
- ❖ Promotion of awareness of the DRR challenges for Persons with Disabilities
- ❖ Encouragement of technological support and innovations for the benefit of Persons with Disabilities in DRR

- ✧ Sensitization of local communities about Persons with Disabilities living among them, and their special needs, particularly during disasters
- ✧ Provision of special arrangements for disaster preparedness and safety of various institutions for Persons with Disabilities, such as schools for the blind, hostels for Persons with Disabilities and any other facilities dedicated to Persons with Disabilities
- ✧ Measures – in anticipation of a hazard or after early warnings – to ensure that all Persons with Disabilities are properly informed and prepared
- ✧ Involvement of Persons with Disabilities in disaster preparedness and planning as equal participants
- ✧ Special attention to the protection of property and assets of Persons with Disabilities after evacuation or in post-disaster situations.



“The National Disaster Management Guidelines on Disability-Inclusive Disaster Risk Reduction are a very important and guiding tool for disability inclusion in disaster risk management. The guidelines have evolved based entirely on the experiences of SMRC in the post-disaster scenarios of Odisha and India. I remember when we were drafting the guidelines, most of the people hesitated to accept them post the Super Cyclone in Odisha, but later, when Handicap International promoted and demonstrated the working of the guidelines in Odisha and other states of India, and good practices were shared at state and national forums, then people started believing that it is possible to include persons with disabilities in the DRR process. The guidelines are useful to persons with disabilities as well as to disaster management practitioners in the country. I am full of hope that the guidelines will support the inclusion of persons with disabilities at all levels of preparedness activities.”

Reena Mohanty,
 Programme Manager
 Shanta Memorial Rehabilitation Centre, Bhubaneswar



“ The DiDRR guidelines are very comprehensive for catering the needs of people with disabilities during disasters. The Government of Odisha needs to implement the guidelines to bring resilience among vulnerable communities.”

- **Meghanada Behera,**
Consultant to OSDMA

Other provisions for care of the disabled

- ✦ In addition to the exclusive chapter on Persons with Disabilities in the NDMP, the aspect of special focus on more vulnerable groups, including Persons with Disabilities, has also been included in the DRR mitigation and DRR matrix for all disasters, under the thematic area of ‘capacity development’. Special considerations for Persons with Disabilities have also been included in the Guidelines on Minimum Standards of Relief.
- ✦ In 2015, as its first initiative, the government rolled out the ‘Accessible India’ campaign (Sugamya Bharat Abhiyan), its objective being to make it convenient for Persons with Disabilities to access administrative buildings and transport, among other things. The campaign has been launched in seven states, including Delhi and Haryana.
- ✦ The Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act 2016 (RPWDA 2016) aligned with the UNCRPD, forming the overarching legal framework which identifies and protects disability rights in India. The Act refers to the Disaster Management Act 2005, clause (e) Section 2, for the safety and protection of persons with disabilities.
- ✦ The Rights of Persons with Disabilities Rules 2017 elaborate an implementable strategy, specifically in the matter of accessibility of infrastructure, transport, and information and communication technologies, which are important aspects in the context of DRR.
- ✦ Exemptions/concessions have been extended to persons with ‘benchmark disabilities’ for class X & XII examinations conducted by the Central Board of Secondary Education and in the Standard Operating Procedure (CBSE Instruction 2018).

The global pandemic and the issue of disability – Proactive Response to COVID-19

The year 2020 witnessed the outbreak of the COVID-19 global pandemic, disturbing the entire world order. However, well equipped with disability-inclusive disaster management guidelines, the Government of India was not only prompt in recognizing the pandemic as a disaster, but in a strategic move it also came up with a number of proactive disability-inclusive interventions. Some of them are:

- ✧ Issue of ‘Comprehensive Disability-Inclusive Guidelines for the Protection and Safety of Persons with Disabilities (Divyangjan) during COVID-19’ in March 2020 under the National Disaster Management Act 2005 by the Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities. The guidelines instructed the chief secretaries to instruct the health and publicity departments of the state governments and union territories to ‘make all COVID-19-related information available in Braille and audio format for persons with visual impairment, videos with sub-titles and sign language for those with hearing impairment, and information on all websites and social media’.

While COVID-19 is impacting the entire population, Persons with Disabilities are more vulnerable to the disease because of their physical, sensory and cognitive limitations. As such, there is a need to understand their disability-specific requirements in the context of



their daily activities and take appropriate and timely measures to ensure their protection and safety during situations of risk. It is with this intention that the sets of guidelines described earlier have laid down extensive norms to help Persons with Disabilities.

Conclusion

All the constructive steps initiated by the present government are stepping stones in India's journey towards becoming a disability-inclusive society. These measures also open up possibilities to take the movement forward, introducing more need-based and disability-sensitive strategies by including the stakeholders and care-givers in the decision-making process.

This is the first time that government response to a disaster has been elaborated and expanded to include persons with disabilities, and a systematic approach adopted for distribution of cash benefits and food grains to the vulnerable, including Persons with Disabilities, to prevent starvation, death and morbidity among them. The governance system was very effective, and improvements were noticed in service delivery. The COVID-19 management system was based on the Disaster Management Act 2005 and ensured equal participation of the various tiers of administration, starting from the Central government to the local gram panchayat systems. Quick response in the matter of delegation of responsibilities was also observed.

The inclusion of vulnerability-reduction for Persons with Disabilities in the National Disaster Management Plan and the separate set of guidelines for disability-inclusive DRR will also help the Central ministries, State governments and District authorities to prepare their own DM plans for disability-inclusive DRR. This will help to eventually erase all forms of discrimination, deprivation and denial suffered by Persons with Disabilities when it comes to their rights and entitlements during disasters. The hazard-wise mitigation and DRR matrix in the NDMP have focused on capacity building for Persons with Disabilities along with other 'more vulnerable' groups.

A little support can take us a long way – snippets from the COVID-19 lockdown

VarshaMelaji Thakur, a 34-year-old woman with physical disability resides in Bilasiya village in Daskoi, Gujarat. She runs a small grocery outlet in the village. Government orders required that grocery outlets selling essential items be kept open during the COVID-19 lockdown in Gujarat, and Varsha ran her store for a period of time after the directive was issued, maintaining the recommended social distancing and sanitation norms. However, she soon ran out of stocks, and due to lack of transportation she had to close down her outlet for five days. But the advance pension money received as a government lockdown measure came to her rescue during this time of dire need. She says, 'Adding my savings to the pension, I bought a bike customized for persons with physical disability, which helped me regain physical mobility. I received additional support from the local police to commute, considering my disability and financial need. I managed to get supplies from a nearby wholesale market to my store and resume my business. I have been able to earn approximately Rs. 800 to Rs. 1,000 per day, and have been successful in sustaining my livelihood during this trying time.'





Asha Prahladbhai Nai, 33 years of age, is severely disabled physically. She lives in Laxmipura, Khedbramha, in Sabarkantha district of Gujarat, and sustains herself by making rice papad at home and selling it at a nominal price. She depends on others for her physical mobility. She says, 'In spite of the pandemic I am working hard to ensure that I make some papad and am able to fulfil the demands of the local retailer. This is my source of survival. I have not lost my earnings.' She received a three month pension and free ration.

Doddi Venkatamma, a physically disabled 34-year-old woman from Nagole, Saroornagar Mandal, in Ranga Reddy district of Telangana, says, 'I could buy food and medicines and did not face food insecurity during the lockdown as I received Rs 1,000 ex gratia, and cash from JanaDhan.'

Saraswati Pradhan, a twenty-four-year-old disabled woman from Batulipada, Satyabadi, in Puri district of Odisha, says, 'I contributed my share of household expenses during the lockdown as I received pension, Jan Dhan and exgratia payments.'



“India's motto is
'Reform, Perform, Transform'.”

Prime Minister **Shri Narendra Modi**