



17. Disability inclusive community mapping

A community mapping exercise as part of CBID training in Cameroon. ©CBM

The need for timely, effective and inclusive community mapping is critical, especially in communities that are dispersed and in remote areas, and where persons with disabilities may be spread out. The implication is that information often needs to be intentionally sought out.

With your programmes and your closeness to communities, including that of your local partners, you may well have access to information that others including formal institutions do not have. This puts you in a very advantageous position to inform others. It also helps infuse DIDRR within your own work.

As the word ‘mapping’ suggests, it serves a very important basic and simple function - to record where things, people and services are, to update this list constantly, and to make this available to whomever can affect a difference using this information. In this case, these would be stakeholders responsible for DRM. So, for example, if we know where every person with a disability is in a community (including coordinates) and if this information is shared with first responders, this means that they can be evacuated on time. But mapping can include multiple pieces of information that can facilitate effective DIDRR. As you will see, collecting and collating this information can become a staple of your activities, and will be critical in mainstreaming DIDRR.

So what information is needed and what should we be mapping? Here is a list (not exhaustive) that can help you with this task:

GET MAPPING!
The location of potential risk areas (e.g. coasts or steep mountain sides).
The number and also specific location of households residing in high-risk areas who are hard to reach, and the best routes to reach them quickly.
Resources (natural, social, infrastructural etc.), where they are, who and what determines and/or conditions access to these.
Organisations, including authorities in the area who can support and collaborate.
Key landmarks, facilities and services in different areas, including hospitals, schools and health centres.
Evacuation routes and centres and transportation links to these.
Water points, sanitation, telecommunications and distances to these.
Functioning shelters, how equipped they are (e.g. medication and assistive devices) and ease of access.
Numbers of persons with disabilities in the community, where they reside, distance from main thoroughfares and distribution points in the eventuality of a disaster.
Persons with different types of disabilities, what medication they require, assistive devices they use, what restrictions they face in evacuation, accessing shelters and so on.
Poverty, livelihoods and levels of vulnerability, including access to assets by persons with disabilities, families and communities.
Availability of support to persons with disabilities, be they family or community members who can assist before or during a disaster.

But what happens once you have collected the information? Then, the actual mapping starts. You can lay out a large map of the area and attach it to a wall and you can use coloured pins to represent evacuation routes, houses of vulnerable people, including persons with disabilities, services (e.g. emergency health outposts, food supplies etc.) and other critical information in the box above.

Note: Mapping is a learning exercise and is dynamic and constantly changing in response to evolving demands for information as well as circumstances e.g. natural hazards shifting in areas. This means that it is not a one-off exercise.

So you have collected and mapped all this useful information. The next step is to ensure that whoever can make effective use of it gets it, understands it, and has constant access to it. These stakeholders include:

- Persons with disabilities and their families
- Communities
- Disaster management authorities
- Local and regional governments
- Humanitarian organisations working in emergency
- Organisations working in recovery
- Development organisations (so they can work with those who are most vulnerable and exposed by strengthening resilience)

So once you have identified all the relevant stakeholders who need to have access to this mapped information, it is then pivotal to share it with them and to ensure it is taken on board and learnt. It can and does save lives! Here are some tips as to how to go about doing this:

- Set up community meetings in a town hall or any other central space and explain the contents of the map and provide training to ensure it is understood.
- Consider using drills that make use of mapping information.
- Ensure persons with disabilities and their families are able to attend. Ideally, have OPDs run these meetings to support disability leadership and also infuse the idea that persons with disabilities may need extra assistance in an emergency situation.
- Outreach: this may be more effective with families that are living in more dispersed areas.
- Meet with authorities and organisations responsible for DRM. These are often operative regionally or nationally - incorporate synthesised disability information into these meetings so they understand the urgency of DIDRR.
- Meet with organisations operating in the same region or area.

SOME POINTS TO REMEMBER

Make sure that any information sharing is done in all languages, so that it is understood by everyone, including indigenous people.

Use locally recognisable symbols, colours, terminology and tools to map and explain.

Go the extra mile to reach those who are normally excluded from community activities, be it because of distance or discrimination.

Ensure these sessions do not interfere with people's livelihood activities or religious and cultural practices and that they do not incur any costs to attend, be it loss of time or transportation expenses. This calls for you to work effectively and in agreement with their time availability.

Establish a stable and consistent communication with authorities and other stakeholders working in DRM to ensure effective two-way communication.

Ensure authorities have access to mapping information.