A brief report from Bangladesh:
National Dialogue on
Disaster and Persons with Disabilities
Introduction

On October 6, 2009, the Bangladesh-based Centre for Disability in Development (CDD), with the support of CBM, organised a national dialogue on 'Disaster and Persons with Disabilities'. The two organisations announced the initiation of a pilot project on Disability Inclusive Disaster Risk Reduction in the flood-prone district of Gaibandha, Bangladesh as well as a solo exhibition of photographer Shumon Ahmed’s photographs from districts affected by Cyclone AILA that focused on the same theme of national dialogue. A photo-story publication edition was published to mark the occasion.

Honourable Minister Mr. Dr. Muhammad Abdur Razzaque, Ministry of Food & Disaster Management, Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh was present as the Chief Guest, Dr. M.S Akbar MP, Chairman of the Red Crescent Society, Bangladesh, Ms. Mahbub Ara Begum Gini, MP, and Md. Monowar Hossain Chowdhury, MP were special guests.

The event was chaired by Khandaker Jahurul Alam, vice chairman of the CDD and president of the National Forum of Organizations Working with the Disabled (NFOWD). The event was attended by persons with disabilities, their families, organisations working on disability and disaster issues, both national; international, Government and Non-government organisations, including civil society representatives and the media, participated in the event.

Nazmul Bari, Director of the CDD, in his welcome address, stated that persons with disabilities are most often excluded from disaster management programs such as risk and capacity assessment, identification, early warning, search, rescue, evacuation, shelters, emergency response, water & sanitation, healthcare, rehabilitation, etc. He mentioned that there are policies and acts that call for rights for persons with disabilities but that these are seldom put into force.

Mohammad Shahnawaz Qureshi, Programme Officer with CBM’s South Asia Regional Office, North (SARO-N), introduced the work of CBM in the region and in Bangladesh and emphasised the importance of disability-inclusive disaster risk reduction, highlighting that persons with disabilities need to be able to access information on disaster preparedness and to have their capacity strengthened.

Ahm Noman Khan, Executive Director of CDD, said that the dialogue would allow persons with disabilities to share their experiences on disasters in the cyclone and flood affected areas. He also said that through this dialogue CDD and CBM are expecting to generate concrete policy and programmatic recommendations for a stronger, more effective disability-inclusive disaster management in Bangladesh. A slide presentation was shown by photographer Shumon Ahmed. The presentation highlighted the situation of persons with disabilities in AILA-affected areas, their expectations and needs.
The floor was next opened for dialogue moderated by media personality Abdullah Zafar. Persons with disabilities from the affected regions started the discussion with reflections on the personal experiences. Manirul Islam, a person with disability from Amtali, Barguna shared his misery during cyclone AILA. "My entire family left without me when the water was rising as they had no way of carrying me. Somehow I climbed up onto the roof and saved my life," he said. "I also did not receive my share of the food relief as I could not stand in the queue like others," he added. Mosammat Halima, a woman with a disability from Barguna, said, "With the help of my sister I managed to reach the cyclone shelter in my area only to be neglected in a corner. Other people are not sensitive to our needs. Going to the toilet was the most awkward problem I had to face."

Based on the input of the persons with disabilities discussion continued leading to different recommendations. Recommendations were also collected through VIPP cards (listed at end).

Dr. M.S Akbar MP, Chairman of the Bangladesh Red Crescent Society, stated that disability issues will be included into the training courses of the Bangladesh Red Crescent Society. He emphasised the importance of identifying and ensuring that information on persons with disabilities is readily available at times of disasters. Ms. Mahbub Ara Begum Gini, MP, highlighted that persons with disabilities should be included into national development programs at all levels and sectors. Md. Monowar Hossain Chowdhury, MP, added that emphasis must be given to the needs of persons with disabilities, including the need to prepare volunteers trained to support persons with disabilities and their families at time of disaster, so that they can be safely evacuated and accommodated at safe locations.

Honourable Minister Mr. Dr. Muhammad Abdur Razzaque, Ministry of Food and Disaster Management, for the Government of the People’s Republic of Bangladesh told the audience that the government made a commitment and had positive intentions to ensure that needs of persons with disabilities were not neglected in national disaster management initiatives. He promised that disability issues would be adequately addressed in the country’s Standing Order on Disaster (SOD), the Disaster Management Act, etc. He also mentioned that the Government is taking different steps to increase opportunities and benefits for persons with disabilities within the 47 different state safety net programs.

Major recommendation and reflections

1. Standing Order on Disaster, Disaster Management Act, National Disaster Management Policy, National Plan for Disaster Management, and related policies should address disability issues adequately.

2. Disability issues should be incorporated in all training courses on disaster.

3. Gas and electricity management should be incorporated in disaster management training.

4. SPHERE guidelines should be followed.

5. Persons with disabilities and their representatives should be members of Disaster Management Committees at all levels.
6. Disability inclusive risk and capacity assessment should be undertaken.

7. The list of persons with disabilities should be readily available at sub-district and district level.

8. The capacity of community people, persons with disabilities and their families on disaster and disability issues should be developed.

9. Early Warning Signs need to be in accordance with the needs of different disability groups.

10. Mobile phone and messaging options should be investigated for early warning.

11. Persons with disabilities along with all vulnerable groups should get added attention at search, rescue and evacuation (SER). SER workers / volunteers should have adequate orientation on disability issues.

12. Special attention is required for children, elderly and women with disabilities. Their security and safety at shelters need to be assured.

13. Emergency response should be disability inclusive; all emergency agencies should focus on disability issues.

14. Accessibility options at existing and new shelters / structures, including reaching to the structure, installation of ramps, disability friendly latrines, and safe drinking water, should be guaranteed.

15. Accessibility options should consider all disability groups; physical, visual; speech & hearing, intellectual.

16. An accessible information bank on and for persons with disabilities should be included in telecasters and mass-communication centres.

17. Reconstruction and mitigation activities should be disability inclusive.

18. Greater networking among disability focused and disaster focused organizations is essential.

19. Rehabilitation and health care at emergency time should address the therapeutic and assistive device needs of persons with disabilities.

20. Support for persons with disabilities should be inclusive and comprehensive and not on a piecemeal basis.

21. Steps should be taken to involve the local media for sensitisation and promotion.
22. An emphasis on sustainable and appropriate livelihood options for persons with disabilities should be mandatory, with consideration of disaster risks.

23. There should be model projects on disability inclusive disaster management for reference, learning, improvement and dissemination.

Report compiled by CDD