



19. Work with communities and strengthen their disaster-readiness

Staff of CBM Partner Inclusive Emergency Response Project in Cameroon, speaking to members of the community during an outreach campaign. ©CBM

Communities are the most powerful local force apart from families, and have a direct influence on persons with disabilities. Communities are the central point of focus and intervention in community development because they are a strong repository of grounded resources. They are also critical in DIDRR as a site and partner for key strategies and practices.

Strengthening communities in disaster-awareness and readiness not only helps provide them with the means to protect themselves in the face of disasters. It also intensifies the demand for DRR and consequently the call for its mainstreaming in your work. To put it simply, the more families and communities feel safe as a result of your DIDRR work, the stronger will be the requirement to ensure that your community development work and that of your local partners is planned and executed with DIDRR at its core.

Work with families and communities is critical in ensuring preparedness as well as ability to react after a disaster, and hence no one must be left out. There is ample support that can be provided via your regular activities or an expansion of these. You can also act as a connector between formal DRR and communities as you seek to reorient towards Community Based Inclusive Disaster Risk Reduction. So what work can you do with communities? Here are a few pointers on the process.

WORKING WITH COMMUNITIES

Inform yourself about any upcoming information sharing or training on DRR provided by authorities. If there isn't anything planned, try and understand why it isn't reaching communities you work in and act as a connector.

Work with communities, using practical examples to understand how disasters affect whole communities and not only persons with disabilities, and how we are collectively responsible for climate change - so make advocacy a community endeavour! It is important to engage village leaders and other respected figures to obtain legitimacy for DRR.

Use community discussions to include and discuss the situations and vulnerabilities of persons with disabilities while you collectively assess risk. Assessments are crucial in understanding how different parts of the community are exposed to disasters but also how resilient people are.

Explain the role communities can play in DRR and also disaster response, for example by collaborating with local authorities to distribute relief items and operating accessible warning systems such as flags. And try to work out a system together.

Invite OPDs to join meetings and contribute to risk mapping and action plans with the local government and community representatives.

Use public events as platforms to reach large groups.

Use mock drills, for example in schools, to allow for evacuation planning using simulated disasters. It is very important to include persons with disabilities in these drills so as to teach both about disasters and disability.



WORKING WITH COMMUNITIES

Use culturally relevant approaches such as song and highly visible posters to raise awareness.

Engage in discussion with communities on how to prepare for a disaster, for example by putting aside non-perishable foods, some items of clothing, medication, water purifying tablets and emergency contacts among other items.

Train on contingency plans at the household level, for example the need to stockpile food early when there are early signs of drought.

Set up community records that map those who are most vulnerable and need help, to allow for easy tracking and evacuation (see above). Designate leaders to kick into action.

Use schools as an effective platform to educate about DRR and disability from a young age. Also train schools to monitor information and signals, while teachers can then impart key information on how to react during and after crises.

Work to ensure schools become disaster resilient too and protect children with disabilities.

Teach how to monitor news and other alerts before and after disasters and how to do this consistently and systematically.

Educate on the signals used in early warning systems, what each signal means, and how to react.

Share key information from mapping, for example where vulnerable households, including persons with disabilities are located and which evacuation routes are accessible and which are not.

Devise a plan with community officials for early evacuation of persons with disabilities and persons who may be vulnerable, and who need immediate attention and help with getting out.

Where possible, conduct drills with authorities to check how efficient the early warning system is, and importantly to identify gaps, including in universal design.

Train and encourage communities to assess the accessibility of key structures and services and how to ensure this accessibility can be maintained throughout the disaster cycle.