



EMERGENCIES AND DISABILITY

Disasters can utterly devastate communities, especially in poor countries where there are less resources to prepare for and recover from emergencies. People with disabilities are amongst the most vulnerable when disaster strikes and often unable to access the relief efforts that follow.

CBM is working towards achieving our goal of a world where all humanitarian and disaster programs address the needs of people with disabilities, ensuring that no one is left behind.



HOW DOES DISABILITY RELATE TO EMERGENCIES?

Emergencies lead to disability.

Lots of people acquire an impairment during an emergency due to injuries caused by the situation, such as building collapsing or being swept away by water. Emergencies that involve food shortages can also cause impairments in children due to malnutrition.

In fact, it is estimated that **for every 1 person killed in a disaster, another 3 are injured or left with a permanent disability.** The trauma of emergencies also leads to people living with mental illness and psychosocial disabilities.

WHAT ARE EMERGENCIES AND DISASTERS?

Emergencies are a state where normal procedures are suspended and extraordinary measures are taken in response to an event such as an accident, fire or extreme weather.

Disasters are a type of emergency that occur where the response required goes beyond what the affected community can deal with locally—meaning that other agencies and governments need to be called upon for assistance with response and rebuilding.

PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES ARE AT HIGHER RISK DURING EMERGENCIES

They often face many barriers in accessing safety and response efforts after an emergency:



PHYSICAL BARRIERS:

- People with physical disabilities may be unable to flee or evacuate safely with the rest of their community. They also may not be able to get to distribution centres or shelters that are up stairs or long distances away.
- In the chaos, people with disabilities may be separated from devices and services that they need, such as wheelchairs and frames, or medications that people with mental illness or diabetes may need to manage their conditions.
- The emergency might destroy roads and pathways, making it hard for people who use wheelchairs or who are blind to navigate their way to safety.

NEGATIVE ATTITUDES:

- When resources are scarce, people with disabilities can be actively excluded from receiving food and water because they are not seen to be as important or valuable as those without disabilities. Children, women and especially older persons with disabilities may find themselves abandoned by family members who are unable to provide for all dependents.
- Even before disasters strike, people with disabilities are often amongst the poorest of the poor due to negative attitudes and stigma. This means that they are more likely to live in places that are at higher risk of devastation in times of emergency—such as in poor quality housing or in vulnerable locations near unsafe waters or without clear roadways and evacuation options.
- In emergencies people with disabilities may get separated from their carers or family members who would usually help them communicate or get around. Negative attitudes may mean other community members do not want to step in to assist them.



COMMUNICATION

BARRIERS:

Some people with disabilities may not even receive messages alerting them that an emergency is unfolding or advising where they should go for safety and provisions. This is particularly an issue for:

- Deaf people, as announcements are often made via radio or loudspeaker
- People with vision impairments, when signs are erected to give notices and directions
- People with intellectual disabilities who may require assistance in understanding information



INSTITUTIONAL BARRIERS:

People with disabilities are systemically marginalised in society in general, which means they will be marginalised from disaster relief programs unless the relevant governments and organisations ensure their policies actively address all barriers faced by people with disabilities.

CBM'S WORK IN DISASTERS

CBM works to help communities before, during and after disasters.

Before

Stronger communities are at less risk of disaster. An event which might be an emergency in robust, well-resourced communities can become a disaster in communities that have less strategies and means to respond.



This means that by helping build strong, inclusive communities that are prepared for emergencies, CBM is helping to reduce the risk of disasters. We are also there to help communities when disasters do strike.

We work with our partners to be disaster-ready in particularly risk-prone areas, such as areas in Bangladesh which are prone to frequent flooding. This involves supporting the local communities and Disabled People's Organisations to develop systems to help people with disabilities be safe during emergencies and be active participants in response and rebuilding efforts.

During

CBM's local partners in disaster-prone areas are developing strategies to maximise safety of people with disabilities during emergencies. These can include:

- Early warning systems that can be understood by people with speech and hearing impairments.
- Keeping a list of where people with disabilities live, so that they can be rescued during the emergency if needed.
- Assisting with storing safe supplies such as food and fuel when emergencies are occurring.



After

CBM has an Emergency Response Unit. If a disaster happens somewhere in the world where we have local partners working, we're ready to help our partners respond. When a disaster strikes, the first step is to assess what is needed and plan an appropriate response. Our follow up actions often include:



Immediate work to meet people's basic needs for food, water and shelter, including emergency survival kits to families when required. A priority here is to include any additional or modified items that may be needed by a person with disabilities; and ensure that vouchers, tools or instructions are accessible for people with disabilities.



Ensuring specialist services like surgery and rehabilitation are available for people with disabilities.



Longer term work for recovery, such as rebuilding infrastructure and systems so that the community can flourish. In some cases, we are able to ensure the rebuilding is made disability-accessible, meaning that the community becomes more inclusive of people with disabilities than it was before the emergency.



SNAPSHOTS OF CBM IN ACTION

CYCLONE IDAI SOUTHERN AFRICA, 2019

Cyclone Idai, one of the worst tropical cyclones to impact Southern Africa, smashed into Mozambique and Zimbabwe last March. More than 1.6 million people were affected (UN OCHA).

Working alongside our local partners, we provided emergency food packs to more than 800 families for six months. We provided new assistive devices to people with disabilities whose devices were destroyed by the cyclone and held rehabilitation clinics and door-to-door checks in remote areas.

We also lent our expertise to other responding agencies to ensure those with disabilities were not forgotten.

With the support of our donors, we were able to make a huge difference to those most affected by Cyclone Idai and continue to assist them as they rebuild their lives.



ROHINGYA MYANMAR, 2017

Since late August 2017, more than 671,000 Rohingya Muslims have fled Burma to escape the military's large-scale campaign of ethnic cleansing (Human Rights Watch). Alongside partner organisations, we have been working to help those most in need.

The first phase of our response enabled us to provide more than 8,440 people with services including ante-and post-natal care, rehabilitation services and assistive devices. Working alongside partner organisation we have also provided a safe space for children in refugee camps and psychological support for those in need.

David Brown, CBM Australia's Program Development Senior Advisor, visited the largest refugee camp in Bangladesh to monitor and evaluate CBMs response, you can read about his visit on our website.



MORE STORIES

Read more about CBM in action on our website.

GET SOCIAL!

Follow us on social media.



AGEING AND DISABILITY FOCAL POINTS

CBM is also leading the way by establishing Ageing and Disability Focal Points in areas affected by disasters. These ensure that people with disabilities and older people receive the services they need.

They do so by:

1. Identifying the services being provided by mainstream agencies in the area. This includes services for food, water and sanitation, health and shelter as well as disability services such as rehabilitation and assistive devices like wheelchairs.
2. Identifying people with disabilities and older persons, and their needs.
3. Acting as a specialised 'middle man', linking the individuals with services relevant to their particular needs.

This means that people with disabilities can access the services they would otherwise likely be excluded from, and also makes mainstream services more aware of the need to address disability.



THE CYCLE OF POVERTY AND DISABILITY IN EMERGENCIES:

POVERTY

Poor people are often more vulnerable to the devastating effects of emergencies, because they do not have the resources to properly prepare for these. This can include living and working in poorer quality buildings, not being linked in to emergency response networks, and living in vulnerable locations. This means that the **poorest people are at higher risk of acquiring injuries and disabilities when disasters strike.**

People with disabilities often face many barriers in accessing safety and provisions during and after emergencies. This means they are often excluded from disaster response efforts, putting them at higher risk of marginalisation and the many dimensions of poverty.

DISABILITY





HOW CAN YOU HELP?



- **Talk to your friends and family** about how people with disabilities are affected by disasters.
- **Pray** for CBM's Emergency Response Unit and our disaster relief work with people with disabilities.
- **Donate** to CBM's emergency appeals or become a regular donor to strengthen our resources to respond as soon as disaster strikes.
- **Sign up** to our advocacy list and join our community of change makers.

References

www.cbm.org/index/Default_245472.php; <http://apps.who.int/disasters/repo/7656.pdf>

www.cbm.org/article/downloads/71140/Fact_sheet_Disability_in_Conflict_and_Emergencies.pdf

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Free call
1800 678 069

cbm.org.au

CBM Australia
PO Box 348
Box Hill VIC 3128

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