“Accountability- Experiences in Responding to Specific Needs of Women & Girls with Disabilities in Disasters & Humanitarian Crises: A Human Rights Based Approach”

Expert Group Meeting
Advancing the Rights & Perspectives of Women & Girls with Disabilities in Development & Society
UN DESA/DPSD in Collaboration with UN ECLAC
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Human Rights & Intersectionality

Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities- CRPD

- Preamble.
- M- Value of Contributions of Persons with Disabilities.
- Q- Women with Disabilities & Greater Risk of Violence.
- S- Gender Perspective.
- U- Conflicts & Foreign Occupation, Article 3 General Principles.
- G- Equality between Men & Women.
- Article 6 Women with Disabilities.
- Article 11 Situations of Risk & Humanitarian Emergencies.
- CRPD Recommendation No.3 on Women with Disabilities, Address Discrimination by Fostering their Participation in Public & Political Life.
Human Rights & Intersectionality
Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women - CEDAW

- Preamble.
- Principles of Equality of Rights & Respect for Human Dignity.
- General & Complete Disarmament.
- Self-Determination & Independence.
- Full Equality Between Men & Women.
- Article 2 Eliminating Discrimination & Ensuring Inclusion in Development Activities.
- Article 7 Eliminating Discrimination against Women in Political & Public Life.
- Article 8 Ensuring to women, on equal terms with men & without any discrimination, opportunity to represent their Governments at the International Level & to Participate in the Work of International Organizations.
- CEDAW Recommendation No. 30, states “(a)ddress the specific risks & particular needs of different groups of internally displace & refugee women who are subjected to multiple & intersecting forms of discrimination, including women with disabilities…”
- CEDAW Recommendation No.35- Gender-Related Dimensions of Disaster Risk Reduction in a Changing Climate (Forthcoming)
Sustainable Development Goals

- Goal 5 (Gender Equality).
- Goal 13 (Climate Change).
- Goal 16 (Peace, Justice & Strong Institutions).

? Do these SDGs ensure that women & girls with disabilities are counted & benefit?
Barriers

- Disability & Gender-Based Stereotypes.
- Disabled Women Cannot Make Decisions for Themselves.
- Disabled Women Incapable of Contributing to Discussions even when other Women Included.
- Disabled Women’s Issues Frequently Marginalized in Discussions Related to Disability Rights.
- Disabled Women Historically have Limited Opportunity to join or Form Organizations that Fully Represent their Needs.
“The goal of the book was that people should not think of us as aliens. I speak the words of many other people when I say we are trying really hard, & we are trying to adapt ourselves to the new style of everything. People have to understand, living as a refugee is not easy. I’m not eager to learn German grammar. To rebuild your life from the zero point is not an easy thing to do. When you end up sensing that people are skeptical, or are mean to you, after all you’ve been through, this is a really unpleasant feeling because you feel like a stranger, like an outcast. I’d like to reassure everyone that we are only guests – I hate the word “refugee” – & if we ever get the chance, we will gladly go back.”

Quote from author of “Nujeen: One Girl’s Incredible Journey from War-Torn Syria in a Wheelchair,” co-authored by Nujeen Mustafa & British journalist Christina Lamb
Situation of Women with Disabilities in Emergencies

- Greater risk for human rights violations that arise during conflict & natural disasters compared to men with disabilities or women without disabilities.
- Women & girls with disabilities more negatively impacted during emergencies, as such situations often exacerbate existing problems for disabled women, who may lack access to community or familial support, education, or health care.
- Difficulties accessing sexual & reproductive health care, largely due to “negative provider attitudes” & costs of care.
- Often forced to leave wheelchairs, medications, assistive aids & prosthetics behind when seeking safety.
- Limited disability-accessible transportation or infrastructure often breaks down during emergency.
- Disabled women generally “more vulnerable to physical, psychological, sexual or financial violence, &, vulnerable to neglect, entrapment, & degradation.
- Less able to flee conflict, less able to defend themselves, & less access to justice.
- Refugee camps often lack infrastructure for women with disabilities & seldom provide accommodations in toilets, shelters, or health care facilities.
- Because of such inaccessibility they may rely on others to get needed support, which increase gender-based violence & abuse.
- Mothers of disabled children frequently have increased caregiving responsibilities, making it harder to flee conflict & also to get access to humanitarian relief services during conflict situations.
Fostering Collaboration: Encouraging collaboration between humanitarian agencies & organizations of women with disabilities can elevate the voice of women in peacebuilding & conflict resolution activities.

A coalition of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in Pakistan—including a national civil society organization, a humanitarian service provision group, & a women with disabilities organization—came together to host a forum on women with disabilities in Baluchistan, the poorest state in Pakistan & one frequently beset by crises. This forum brought together different perspectives on crises & supported organizations working on crises in Baluchistan to expand their networks for future collaborations.

Similar partnerships in Uganda & throughout Africa have also had a positive effect on the ability of humanitarian organizations to include women with disabilities in their planning & implementation efforts & on organizations of women with disabilities, who are able to develop better expertise in humanitarian response efforts & become better self-advocates in those arenas.
Existing Good Practices & Lessons Learned Continued

- **Supporting Leadership:** Additionally, ensuring that women with disabilities serve in leadership roles within organizations & planning efforts can help raise the profile of issues affecting women with disabilities in conflict situations & peacebuilding efforts.

  - In response to a survey conducted by the Women’s Refugee Commission, a UN agency representative in the Central African Republic highlighted the importance of “having an implementing partner agency focused on women with disabilities, & also led by a woman with disabilities” towards ensuring that women & girls with disabilities were included in agency efforts & recognized in the wider community.

  - Because a woman with a disability representing UNICEF in its Haiti earthquake response efforts had a seat at the table at important stakeholder meetings throughout the planning & implementation of those efforts, she was able to break down stereotypes about women with disabilities, change the attitudes of officials working on earthquake response, & ensure that organizations of persons with disabilities were included in the response.
Providing Targeted Funding: Supporting the work of organizations of women with disabilities—including through specific funding sources for the work of these organizations—also helps raise the profile of issues affecting women & girls with disabilities in conflict situations & ensures their participation in humanitarian assistance & peacebuilding efforts.

- With adequate funding an organization of women with disabilities in Malawi was able to undertake site visits to refugee camps & highlight some of the issues specifically facing women with disabilities—including that they were selling sex in order to obtain access to humanitarian relief—to local & international authorities working on protection issues in that country.

- Once an organization of women with disabilities working in the Democratic Republic of Congo was able to get on the internet & publicize some of the statistics & stories it had gathered from women & girls with disabilities during the conflict in that country, it was able to tap into a “whole new audience” & connect women with disabilities to other humanitarian stakeholders.
Ensuring Accountability: Finally, helping to ensure pathways for women & girls with disabilities to access justice during conflict situations can help raise their voices & highlight gaps in service provision & inclusion.

A program by Equality Now in Uganda, #JusticeForGirls, is trying to help tackle an epidemic of sexual violence in the country, including in conflict areas, that has particularly affected women & girls with disabilities by raising the national & international profile of specific instances of sexual violence, calling for changes to legal procedures & for increased protections for women with disabilities, & working through local channels to achieve justice.
Why Inclusion is Important

- 19.2% of the world’s women are women with disabilities.
- Most effective emergency programs include unique perspectives of women with disabilities in planning, design & implementation.
- Adapt to evolving understanding of needs of women & girls with disabilities.
- Women with disabilities not just in need of ‘special protections’ but can meaningfully contribute to society post emergency.
Recommendations

- **Establish internal disability rights liaisons/experts** involved in the design, planning, & implementation of humanitarian programs who can provide effective guidance with respect to women with disabilities.

- **Ensure the participation of women & girls with disabilities** in humanitarian programs by:
  - Creating a specific fund for supporting organizations of women & girls with disabilities in emergency situations;
  - Establishing spaces for on-the-ground collaboration between humanitarian assistance organizations & organizations of women & girls with disabilities; &
  - Ensuring that spaces where humanitarian efforts take place are physically & informationally accessible to persons with disabilities.

- Ensure that health care, including sexual & reproductive health care, & anti-gender-based violence supports, are accessible to & usable by women & girls with disabilities. Institute trainings for health care providers that specifically target stereotypes about women & girls with disabilities- including about their sexuality & legal capacity & train these individuals to provide reasonable accommodations when seeking health care.

- **Promote accessible accountability mechanisms** to ensure access to justice for women & girls with disabilities who experience rights violations, including gender-based violence, as a result of emergency situations. Institute trainings for justice system actors that specifically target stereotypes about women & girls with disabilities-including about their sexuality & capability of giving evidence- & train these individuals to provide reasonable accommodations when seeking justice.

- **Facilitate the involvement of local women & girls with disabilities** in the planning & design of humanitarian relief programs. Emphasize that humanitarian response services & social supports should be accessible to all women & girls, including women & girls with disabilities, & outline efforts to ensure disability accessibility, including by ensuring that buildings & sites are physically accessible, that information is provided in multiple formats including Braille & easy-to-read, & that sign language interpretation is available.
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