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

Your support helps us towards achieving our goal of a world where disaster response programs address the needs of people with disabilities, ensuring that no one is left behind.

WHAT IS A DISASTER?
A disaster is a severe disruption to a community, where the response required goes beyond what the affected community can cope with. There are mainly two types of disasters:

Natural disasters: such as earthquakes, typhoons, floods, landslides.
Manmade disasters: for example, war, chemical leaks, bomb blasts.

And these can occur suddenly in time (a quick onset), or they may develop over a period of time (a slow onset). A lot of disasters occur suddenly and perhaps unexpectedly, however some events develop gradually, including some floods and famines related to drought. Sadly, developing countries suffer the greatest costs when a disaster strikes and that is where the work of CBM and other agencies and governments can assist with response, rebuilding and disaster readiness.

HOW DOES DISABILITY RELATE TO DISASTERS?
Disasters lead to disability.
Lots of people acquire an impairment during a disaster due to injuries caused by the situation, such as building collapsing or being swept away by water. Disaster that involve food shortages can also cause impairments in children and adults 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.
BARRIERS
PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES FACE DURING A DISASTER

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 disaster might destroy roads and pathways, making it hard for people who use wheelchairs or who are blind to navigate their way to safety.

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 and these policies are implemented and prioritised.
Some people with disabilities may not even receive messages alerting them that a disaster 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

**COMMUNICATION BARRIERS:**

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 potential flooding sites without clear roadways for evacuation options.

- In disasters people with disabilities may get separated from their carers or family members who would usually help with them communicate or get around. Negative attitudes may mean other community members do not want to step in to assist them.

**NEGATIVE ATTITUDES:**
CBM’S WORK IN DISASTERS
With your support, CBM works to help communities before, during and after disasters.

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.

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 disaster if needed.
- Assisting with storing safe supplies such as food and fuel when disaster are occurring.
CBM International 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.** 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.** We work to ensure the rebuilding is made disability-accessible, meaning that the community becomes more inclusive of people with disabilities than it was before the disaster.
EARTHQUAKE NEPAL, 2015

When the earthquake hit Nepal in April 2015, our Emergency Response Team based in Kathmandu was functioning within the first hours, and with partners we have been responding to the needs of injured people since day two.

In the first 6 months after the earthquake, CBM and our partners had reached over 21,000 people. Our work in this time included:

- rehabilitation services to over 3,450 people
- over 878 medical interventions/surgeries
- psychological counselling to over 2,780 people
- Psychological First Aid training to 337 staff and partners
- over 900 referrals through our Ageing and Disability Focal Points.

Read more here.

TYPHOON HAIYAN PHILIPPINES, 2013

Typhoon Haiyan completely devastated communities—many people lost not only loved ones but also their houses and livelihoods as fishing boats, equipment and crops were destroyed.

With our local partners, CBM initially distributed relief to villages including food and important items such as heavy plastic roof tarpaulins, mosquito nets, blankets and torch lamps. Along with our international partners we also established Ageing and Disability Focal Points which ensure that people with disabilities are given the opportunities they need to equally benefit from the relief and aid services and to receive the specialist support they require to rebuild their lives.

Read more here.

MORE STORIES

Journey with our CBM staff as they share their experiences working in disasters zones. CLICK TO WATCH

The Director of CBM’s Emergency Response Unit is Valerie Scherrer. Originally an occupational therapist, Valerie brings more than 15 years’ experience in disability in both on development and emergency programs, including in refugee camps and conflict and disasters zones. Hear Valerie talking more about her work. CLICK TO WATCH
AGEING AND DISABILITY FOCAL POINTS

CBM and our international partners are 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 DISASTERS

Poor people are often more vulnerable to the devastating effects of disasters, 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 disaster strikes.

People with disabilities often face many barriers in accessing safety and provisions during and after disasters. This means they are often excluded from emergency response efforts, putting them at higher risk of marginalisation and the many dimensions of poverty.
HOW CAN YOU HELP?

☐ Talk to your friends and family about how CBM assists people with disabilities in disasters.

☐ Pray for CBM’s Emergency Response Unit and our work 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.

Thank you for the part you play in our work. Everything we do is possible because of you, our supporters.

References
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