

Disability inclusion in the Sendai Framework in the Pacific

Moving forward but still two steps behind

Where are we?

Awareness of disability inclusion and the importance of engaging with persons with disabilities is increasing. At the regional level, this includes in the Framework for Resilient Development (FRDP)¹ and the Pacific Framework on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (PFRPD):

- Goal 4. Include persons with disabilities in climate adaptation measures and disaster risk management plans and policies.²

The Pacific Disability Forum (PDF), as the Pacific's umbrella organisation of persons with disabilities (OPD), is a FRDP task force member and chairs the PFRPD reference group. This is contributing to alignment of disaster risk reduction (DRR) and disability objectives at the regional level. However, disability inclusion at national and local levels lags.

Approaching the mid-point of the Sendai Framework, we are playing catch up to increase the meaningful participation of persons with disabilities. In short, disability inclusion in DRR in the Pacific is two steps behind the broader implementation of the Sendai Framework.

- **The first step behind- institutionalising disability inclusion.** The Sendai Framework sets out to translate prior progress on institutionalising DRR into practice. In contrast, efforts to institutionalise disability inclusion in DRR only began after Sendai. Regional commitments need to be institutionalised and embedded at national and local levels. Policy revision and reform need to be accelerated. This requires specific policy actions to satisfy pre-conditions for inclusion (see below); designated responsibilities; and strengthened collaboration across government.
- **The second step behind- the amplifying impacts of climate change.** Climate change is already impacting persons with disabilities in the Pacific. This is happening in two ways.³ 1. Climate change is increasing the impacts of pre-existing exclusion for persons with disabilities. 2. Climate change is creating new risks and negative impacts for persons with disabilities. In contrast to risk reduction and prevention objectives, climate change is amplifying disaster risk for persons with disabilities in the Pacific.

What's working in the Pacific?

There are promising examples of collaboration between government and non-government DRR actors and OPDs and the expertise of persons with disabilities is better recognised. Examples include establishing and training DRR focal points in national OPDs. In Vanuatu, OPDs are participating in local disaster and climate change committees. A disability sub-cluster within the protection cluster has also been established to improve inclusion in response. In Samoa, the Cook Islands, and Timor-Leste, OPDs have provided guidance on revisions to national disaster management plans.

¹ Pacific Framework for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2016-2025. <https://www.forumsec.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/PFRPD.pdf>

² Framework for resilient development in the Pacific: An integrated approach to address climate change and disaster risk management 2017-2030. <https://www.resilientpacific.org/en/resources/framework-resilient-development-pacific>

³ Pacific Disability Forum. 2022. Disability and climate change in the Pacific: Findings from Kiribati, Solomon Islands, and Tuvalu. <https://pacificdisability.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/PDF-Final-Report-on-Climate-Change-and-Persons-with-Disabilities.pdf>

Fiji's National Council on Disability Affairs' emergency operations centre (EOC) has been run by volunteers with disabilities through five tropical cyclones. The EOC has collected data on needs and facilitated targeting of assistance with the national disaster management office (NDMO).

Non-traditional pathways are also being explored to respond to diverse needs. The piloting of cash top ups via existing social protection mechanisms, such as disability allowances or pensions, and the use of parametric insurance to reduce the impacts of hazard events on persons with disabilities show promise.⁴

What needs to be done?

All too frequently, examples of good practice are implemented in isolation, limited in scale, and dependent on short term project financing with minimal, or tokenistic, budget allocations.

The increase in consultations with OPDs is encouraging, but too often pay lip service to inclusion. Persons with disabilities must be meaningfully engaged in the design, implementation, and evaluation of DRR and climate related policy and implementation. Disability-inclusion requires addressing 6 pre-conditions: Accessibility, Assistive Devices, Community-based Inclusive Development, Non-discrimination, Support Services, and Social Protection.⁵

Efforts must move beyond the NDMO. For example, inclusive early warning systems for tropical cyclones are ineffective if not linked to information on evacuation centre locations and routes. Establishing accessible and durable end-to-end information systems requires effective collaboration across multiple government agencies.

Similarly, Pacific governments are better collecting standardised national disability data.⁶ This data is not being used in risk assessments or targeting of response. Local disability data collection remains inconsistent. Coordination on data across agencies is needed to better identify and respond to needs, allocate resources, and evaluate progress. The suboptimal use of available data is a concern.

Understanding disaster risk requires recognising intersectionalities and horizontal inequalities between groups. This includes responding to how younger and older age, gender, and ethnicity interact with disability to increase marginalisation. Greater attention to women, men, and children with cognitive and psychosocial disabilities is also needed. Women with diverse disabilities continue to face multiple jeopardies, including increased risk of violence during disasters. Women and girls with disabilities must be included in mainstream and targeted programmes to eliminate violence.

Processes of inclusion are only effective when they result in equitable change. This requires political will, prioritisation, and investment. Investments in disability inclusion are investments in whole society resilience and are critical to reaching commitments agreed in Sendai. Without these, persons with disabilities will be left further behind and disaster risk will increase for all.

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⁴ Parametric insurance is triggered by a pre-determined event in an area, such as rainfall levels or wind speed. See: https://corporatesolutions.swissre.com/insights/knowledge/what_is_parametric_insurance.html

⁵ See: <https://pacificdisability.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Guideline-on-pre-condition-to-inclusion-for-persons-with-disabilities-1.0.docx>

⁶ Using globally recommended Washington Group question sets. <https://www.washingtongroup-disability.com/>