HPG
Humanitarian Policy Group

Roundtable learning note

Implementing the IASC Guidelines on inclusion of persons with disabilities in humanitarian action

London roundtable, 4 March 2020

Veronique Barbelet and Tom Palmer

Key messages

- For too long the risks faced by people with disabilities in crisis settings have been exacerbated by their exclusion from humanitarian preparedness, response and recovery.

- The new IASC *Guidelines on inclusion of persons with disabilities in humanitarian action* provide an opportunity for humanitarian actors to deliver on their commitment to 'leave no one behind'. These are the first humanitarian guidelines to be developed with and by people with disabilities and their representative organisations alongside traditional humanitarian stakeholders.

- Implementing the guidelines demands genuine partnership with organisations of persons with disabilities (OPDs); integrated and intersectional approaches to capacity-building; and mobilising resources for the development of practical tools

- The new Reference Group on inclusion of persons with disabilities in humanitarian action will serve as a platform for fostering long-term cooperation between the UN, international agencies, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and OPDs in promoting disability-inclusive humanitarian response.

Veronique Barbelet is a Senior Research Fellow with the Humanitarian Policy Group (HPG) at ODI.

Tom Palmer is Protection and Inclusion Advisor at Islamic Relief Worldwide.

Introduction

On 12 November 2019 the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) *Guidelines on inclusion of persons with disabilities in humanitarian action* were launched. Developed through an extensive process of consultations led by a multi-stakeholder IASC Task Team, and building on existing frameworks, the Guidelines set out essential actions that humanitarian actors must take to effectively identify and respond to the needs and rights of people with disabilities who are most at risk of being left behind in humanitarian settings. These are the first humanitarian guidelines to be developed with and by people with disabilities and their representative organisations in association with traditional humanitarian stakeholders.

The launch marks the beginning of a new phase of action to promote uptake and implementation of the Guidelines. This will be led by the newly established Reference Group on inclusion of persons with disabilities in humanitarian action. Implementing the IASC Guidelines will require humanitarian actors to significantly change how they plan, design, implement and monitor their interventions. Recognising this, a small group of UK-based international non-governmental organisations (INGOs), coordinated by Islamic Relief Worldwide (IRW) in conjunction with HPG, hosted a roundtable discussion on 4 March 2020 in London.

The roundtable brought together individuals with strong technical backgrounds and those responsible for driving quality and accountability in mainstream humanitarian organisations alongside OPDs. The objectives of the roundtable included:

- To identify strategies for using the IASC Guidelines, alongside other resources, to mainstream disability inclusion within the key components of all humanitarian interventions.
- To share challenges, opportunities and effective approaches for mainstream humanitarian actors to systematically build their internal capacities on inclusion of people with disabilities.

- To discuss opportunities for further collaboration to promote innovation and learning.

Session 1: Overview of the IASC Guidelines

The new IASC Guidelines represent a shift by the humanitarian sector to a rights-based approach to disability, recognising that people with disabilities are not just another 'vulnerable group' but have resources, capacities and agency. The Guidelines also represent acceptance of the shared responsibility of humanitarian actors in all sectors to remove barriers to participation of people with disabilities. They should be involved in decision-making, essential assistance and protection, including during the acute phase of a crisis response.

The Guidelines build on quality and accountability frameworks for good programming such as the Core Humanitarian Standard (CHS) and the Humanitarian Inclusion Standards for Older People and People with Disabilities (HIS) (HI, 2018) as well as IASC products, such as guidelines on mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) (IASC, 2007) and gender-based violence (GBV) (IASC, 2015), and sector-specific guidance, such as on disability-inclusive shelter (IFRC, 2015).

The opening chapters of the Guidelines are essential reading for all humanitarian actors as they provide a clear explanation of a rights-based approach to the inclusion of people with disabilities. Users can then navigate to the most relevant chapters for specific guidance for their sector or role.

There is collective acknowledgement that additional resources are required to support the operationalisation of the Guidelines. For example, context-specific guidance and advice on organisational change is needed, as well as tools for capacity-building, monitoring and accountability at different levels.

The Guidelines will not answer every question in real-time but will be a vital reference point and a useful reminder for agencies to recognise the key capacities they need to develop to ensure they are prepared to respond inclusively.

Session 2: Strategies, challenges and opportunities for mainstreaming disability inclusion in humanitarian action

Promoting disability inclusion in programme approaches that cut across all countries and sectors

- The International Rescue Committee (IRC) is seeking to engage all programme staff by integrating disability inclusion into its *Client-responsive programming framework* (2015). This will avoid the side-lining of disability inclusion under one sector, such as protection. It will also allow for practical ways of integrating content from the IASC Guidelines into consultation, feedback and complaints methods, as well as tools used across the whole organisation. By utilising inclusive and accessible client-responsive programming and feedback mechanisms, the IRC aims to address the barriers faced by people with disabilities and advance their access to humanitarian services on an equal basis with other clients across all sectors.

- The Catholic Agency for Overseas Development (CAFOD) and IRW are both pursuing an integrated and intersectional approach that addresses disability within a broader framework for protection mainstreaming and inclusion. CAFOD has developed its 'safe, accessible, dignified and inclusive' (SADI) programming approach, which brings together nine elements including safeguarding. IRW's framework (6As) (IRW, 2018) has six components and emphasises intersectional analysis to inform measures that are sensitive and responsive to gender, age and disability. Both approaches capitalise on the momentum for organisational change incentivised by broader accountability mechanisms such as the CHS audit. This integrated approach avoids siloing efforts to promote disability inclusion, gender equality, protection mainstreaming and safeguarding,

which would risk overwhelming staff with multiple toolkits and learning initiatives. A potential downside is that it takes longer to achieve the required depth of understanding in specific topics, such as the rights of people with disabilities, due to the breadth of material. As such, it is important to retain disability-focused training and partnerships as part of an integrated approach to capacity-building.

Using the Guidelines to mobilise more resources for capacity-building and transforming guidance into practical tools

- Donor expectations, that implementing agencies meet higher standards on disability inclusion and implement the IASC Guidelines, should be matched by increased funding for the development of tools and resources.

- IRC has received flexible funding from the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA) to develop and pilot tools to ensure disability-inclusive client responsiveness (i.e. community consultation, feedback and complaints). IRC has established an advisory group of more than 20 OPDs, as well as NGOs and other humanitarian actors, and has set indicators to track the level of participation in the tool development process. IRC has also used the IASC Guidelines to develop a standard operating procedure for providing reasonable accommodations[1] during surveys and community consultation.

Partnerships with specialist organisations and organisations of persons with disabilities

- CBM and Humanity & Inclusion (HI) regularly provide support to non-specialist organisations to build the capacity of their staff and advise on organisational change, both at headquarters and field levels.

- As more OPDs receive support to build their organisational capacity, there will be more opportunities to partner and learn from the lived experiences of their members.

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1   According to the IASC Guidelines, 'reasonable accommodation requires individuals and institutions to modify their procedures or services (accommodate), where this is necessary and appropriate, either to avoid imposing a disproportionate or undue burden on persons with disabilities or to enable them to exercise their human rights and fundamental freedoms on an equal basis with others'.

In Gaibandha, Bangladesh, self-help groups of people with disabilities, established with support from CBM and their national NGO partner, are leading a range of disaster risk reduction activities at the community level. These include household risk assessments and preparedness plans, participation in disaster management committees and advocacy with local authorities to ensure people with disabilities are included in disaster preparedness planning and response. The self-help groups received training on their rights and how to claim them through organising, peer support and advocacy.

- However, there continues to be a lack of engagement with OPDs beyond consultation. They should fully participate in programme implementation, monitoring and evaluation.

Recognising the importance of the 'human factor' for achieving disability inclusion

- The human factor – i.e. the attitudes and behaviours of staff at the frontline and throughout an organisation – is key to achieving disability inclusion.
- IRC is exploring methods for mitigating conscious and unconscious bias. This includes borrowing ideas from training modules on gender and on sexual harassment in order to address disability-related stigma and discrimination by humanitarian actors.
- This highlights the importance of including people with disabilities in training. The Bridge training initiative (IDA, n.d.) brings humanitarian workers together with OPD representatives to strengthen understanding and relationships between them.

Addressing the challenge of inclusion of people with intellectual and psychosocial disabilities

- There is a clear need for more guidance and resources on inclusion of individuals and groups who face particularly high levels of risk and discrimination. This includes engaging with clinicians and other specialists to challenge the assumption that persons with long-term impairments relating to

mental health should not be considered as people with disabilities. This assumption makes it very difficult to involve them in initiatives to implement the IASC Guidelines.

Session 3: Strategies, challenges and opportunities for building organisational capacities for disability inclusion

Building capacity and knowledge for disability inclusion in emergency response requires investment in training, early action and support for more technical advisory resources

- A recent audit of disability inclusion in the UK Department for International Development (DFID)'s humanitarian programme in northern Nigeria (CBM, 2019) found that a key challenge is humanitarian staff's lack of basic understanding of disability inclusion, which leads to negative assumptions about the needs and capacities of people with disabilities.
- This is compounded by high staff turnover, particularly related to temporary emergency surge deployments, and by the need to rapidly increase the number of local staff. Preparedness is essential. This means investing in the capacities of humanitarian staff and OPDs before a crisis occurs.
- It is critical to ensure that donors support technical advisory resources within both mainstream and specialist agencies. Specialist organisations will not be able to meet the demand for advisory services from mainstream humanitarian organisations. In recent years IRW has received resources from SIDA to fund technical positions in headquarters and some country offices with responsibility for cross-cutting issues such as disability inclusion. This support has now ended; however, senior leadership recognises the value of these positions and most will be retained through a combination of core funding and cross-charging across multiple projects.
- Investing ahead of time in disability inclusion will help with the challenge of limited capacity and knowledge.

Challenges and solutions relating to organisational capacity-building are linked to wider issues around disability inclusion and the humanitarian sector

- A recent review of training resources on inclusion of people with disabilities and older people (Hill et al., 2020) highlighted a number of challenges for building organisational capacity: lack of disaggregated data for analysis and programme design; the concentration of knowledge within specialist agencies; high staff turnover; few materials or guidance in the languages of crisis-affected communities; sparse engagement with local government; low levels of leadership; insufficient resources for training materials; and lack of coordination on developing them.
- Applying knowledge gained from training relies on other systematic capacities; for example, budgeting effectively to ensure programmatic costs relating to accessibility, reasonable accommodations and targeted activities are accounted for and sufficient resources are mobilised by donors.
- Donors also have a responsibility for mobilising resources for large-scale, coordinated capacity-building programmes. For example, the German Federal Foreign Office has been working with HI and CBM since 2016 on an initiative that builds the capacity of German humanitarian actors. This includes awareness raising, training, coaching and a support help desk.
- Expertise from practical experience and studies needs to be accompanied by academic and applied research to increase the evidence base for inclusive humanitarian action. For this purpose, the Institute for International Law of Peace and Armed Conflict (IFHV) of the Ruhr-University Bochum joined HI and CBM in their capacity-building projects in Germany in 2018 to collect evidence on what works to increase humanitarian actors' organisational capacity on inclusion of people with disabilities. The first field research phase took place in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh in January 2020. A second research phase is planned for late 2020.

Training that is integrated and cross-organisational will have more impact

- The same review also identified some promising practices, in particular from CAFOD (the SADI approach) and IRW (6As), and found that, while it may be more expensive to conduct broad-based training, it is important to include staff from all departments, given the cross-cutting nature of disability inclusion.
- Peer-to-peer support in the form of a community of practice (following training) can help staff apply their increased knowledge. Selecting champions in all departments is also effective to support learning, but only if they have sufficient authority and influence in decision-making as well as the resources to participate in and lead learning initiatives.
- A community of practice could also be effective in facilitating learning and knowledge management between organisations, as well promoting a coordinated approach to training.
- Technical support and training should be oriented towards the needs of the organisation and consider entry points for change processes to be effective and have a wider impact. Successful organisational change requires visible and consistent endorsement by senior management.

Training is more transformative when it involves people with disabilities

- With significant investment the Bridge training initiative (IDA, n.d.) has demonstrated the effectiveness of providing inclusive training for people with disabilities alongside humanitarian actors.
- OPDs tend to lack confidence to engage with the humanitarian sector. The Bridge training aims to be transformative in building their confidence and strengthening their leadership for effective partnership, collaboration and participation in humanitarian responses.

Supporting capacity at the inter-cluster level in humanitarian response through deploying Age and Disability Working Groups

- Cluster coordination mechanisms also have a role to play in building capacity for inclusive humanitarian action. In Cox's Bazar, a number of agencies have formed an Age and Disability Working Group to provide information and advice on disability inclusion to actors responding to the Rohingya refugee crisis. Such groups should be formed and supported in other contexts.
- Further lessons from disability-focused coordination mechanisms in Nepal, the Philippines, Jordan and Pakistan are documented in a collection of case studies by CBM, the International Disability Alliance (IDA) and HI (CBM et al., 2019: 51).

Building capacity incrementally with local partner organisations

- Knowledge and expertise on disability inclusion is often concentrated within specific individuals and so the capacity for disability inclusion can be easily lost when staff turnover is high.
- CAFOD has found that building capacity incrementally with local partner organisations over an extended period of time can address this challenge while supporting local partners who may struggle to keep up with the proliferation of technical standards and guidelines without an increase in investment. There is a danger that smaller organisations will be left behind as they lose staff to larger organisations who can invest in building their own capacity.
- Guidelines need to be adapted to people's realities and contexts. Training is critical in interpreting and adapting guidelines for different contexts. It is also important to look for opportunities to adopt a peer-to-peer approach to training and knowledge exchange on disability inclusion, rather than relying on short-term consultants or experts flying in from headquarters, potentially with a limited understanding of the operational context, to train national and local organisations.

Funding to ensure learning is applied in programming

- A well-resourced community of practice linked to the IASC Guidelines could facilitate learning and ensure coherence and quality control in the development of new training content. The Age and Disability Capacity Programme (ADCAP) could be a useful model to replicate.
- To support improved training impacts, donors should request all partners to account for costs associated with inclusion in their project budgets, such as improving accessibility and providing reasonable accommodations.

Session 4: Opportunities for further collaboration

Reference Group on on inclusion of persons with disabilities in humanitarian action

This new Reference Group was formed in January 2020, following the closure of the IASC Task Team that developed the IASC Guidelines. The Reference Group aims to be a platform for fostering long-term cooperation between the UN, international agencies, NGOs and OPDs in promoting disability-inclusive humanitarian response. This includes supporting coordination on dissemination and implementation of key guidance materials such as the IASC Guidelines.

The Reference Group will reinforce and amplify the efforts of individual member organisations and link with broader processes for strengthening the quality and accountability of humanitarian action inclusive of people with disabilities. An action plan will be developed in the next few months, led by the current co-chairs from CBM, IDA and the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF). For more information about the Reference Group, including about membership, email rg.disabilityinclusion@gmail.com.

Bond Disability and Development Group

Bond hosts the Disability and Development Group (DDG). The DDG offers a platform for mainstream and disability-focused organisations to collaborate. There are more than 400 individual

members with representatives from 40 agencies participating on a regular basis. Key objectives of the DDG include: promoting the rights of people with disabilities; increasing inclusion of people with disabilities in UK government; and facilitating learning and information-sharing between its members. The DDG is taking a lead in disability-inclusive safeguarding in the sector and is focusing on practical guidance for its members. For more information about the DDG, visit the BOND website.[2]

Other ideas

If you would be interested in joining such a community of practice, or if you have any other ideas for promoting collaboration for implementing the IASC Guidelines, please get in contact with the Reference Group or the BOND DDG using the links given.

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2   www.bond.org.uk/groups/disability-and-development

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IDA (n.d.) 'Bridge CRPD-SDGs training initiative' (www.internationaldisabilityalliance.org/content/bridge-crpd-sdgs-training-initiative).

IRC – International Rescue Committee (2017) *Client-responsive programming framework* (www.rescue.org/resource/client-responsive-programming-framework).

IRW – Islamic Relief Worldwide (2018) *Leave no one behind in humanitarian programming: an approach to understanding intersectional programming – age, gender and diversity analysis* (https://reliefweb.int/report/world/learning-paper-1-leave-no-one-behind-humanitarian-programming-approach-understanding).

Annex 1: Roundtable agenda

Wednesday 4 March
ODI, 203 Blackfriars Road, London, SE1 8NJ

09:00–09:30   Breakfast

09:30–09:45   Welcome and introduction
- Moderator: Wendy Fenton, Humanitarian Practice Network Coordinator, HPG at ODI

09:45–10:15   Overview of the IASC Guidelines
- Presentation and Q&A
- Sien Andries, Humanity & Inclusion/interim co-chair of the Reference Group (remotely)

10:15–11:15   Strategies, challenges and opportunities for mainstreaming disability inclusion in humanitarian action
- Short presentations and discussion
- Disability-inclusive client responsiveness for accountability: Ricardo Pla Cordero, IRC
- Intersectional analysis as part of SADI programming approach: Zoe Corden, CAFOD
- The role of community-based OPDs in humanitarian action: Kazol Rekha, Dakshin Sreepur Self-help Group, Gaibanda, Bangladesh (remotely)

11:15–11:30   Break

11:30–12:30   Strategies, challenges and opportunities for building organisational capacities for disability inclusion
- Short presentations and discussion
- Current practices on training on disability inclusion: Frances Hill, Partnership for International Development (P4ID) (remotely)
- Bridge Article 11 training: Fayel Achieng Odeny, Kenya Association of Intellectually Handicapped (KAIH) and Maureen Nderitu, Islamic Relief Kenya (remotely)
- Capacity-building of German humanitarian actors on mainstreaming disability: Haakon Spriewald, Humanity & Inclusion and Carolin Funke, IFHV at Ruhr-University Bochum
- Assessing disability inclusion – DFID Nigeria NENTAD programme: Kirsty Smith, CBM UK

12:30–13:00   Opportunities for further collaboration
- Short presentation and discussion
- Introduction to the Reference Group on inclusion of persons with disabilities in humanitarian action: Sien Andries, Humanity & Inclusion/interim co-chair of the Reference Group (remotely)
- Introduction to Bond DDG: Lauren Watters, AbleChildAfrica/co-chair Bond DDG
- Moderator wrap-up

13:00–14:00   Lunch