

DISABILITY-INCLUSIVE DISASTER RISK REDUCTION

Status brief on Pakistan



Source: STEP-DiDRR Project 2014

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Summary

The document titled "Disability-Inclusive Disaster Risk Reduction: Status Brief on Pakistan" delves into the critical need for integrating disability considerations into disaster risk reduction (DRR) strategies in Pakistan. It highlights that 1.3 billion people globally face significant disabilities, with a majority lacking individual disaster preparedness plans. In Pakistan, where natural hazards are compounded by socio-economic vulnerabilities, the paper emphasizes the disproportionate impact of disasters on persons with disabilities, who are often excluded from preparedness and response efforts.

The policy paper reviews the legal framework and past efforts towards disability inclusion, criticizing the fragmented approach and lack of effective implementation. It discusses the evolution of policies and legislation for disability rights and inclusion, pointing out gaps in DRR frameworks. The document advocates for a comprehensive approach towards Disability-Inclusive Disaster Risk Reduction (DIDRR), aligning with international frameworks like the Sendai Framework, and calls for active engagement of persons with disabilities in DRR planning and implementation to enhance resilience and ensure equitable disaster management practices.

Abbreviations

[ADDTF]	[Ageing, Disability and Diversity Taskforce]
[DDMA]	[District Disaster Management Authority]
[DIDRR]	[Disability Inclusive Disaster Risk Reduction]
[DMC]	[Disaster Management Cycle]
[DRR]	[Disaster Risk Reduction]
[NADRA]	[National Database and Registration Authority]
[NDMA]	[National Disaster Management Authority]
[NDMC]	[National Disaster Management Commission]
[NDMP]	[National Disaster Management Plan]
[NPA]	[National Plan of Action]
[PDMA]	[Provincial Disaster Management Authority]
[PDMC]	[Provincial Disaster Management Commission]
[PSLM]	[Pakistan Social and Living Standards Measurement]
[SFDRR]	[Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction]
[UNCRPD]	[United Nations Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities]

Introduction

According to estimates, 1.3 billion people – or 1 in 6 people worldwide – experience significant disability,¹ and the majority (almost 71%) of them do not have an individual preparedness plan for disasters.² In developing countries of the Asian Pacific region, persons with disabilities depend on their families and different types of mobility or communication support every day. Access to these supports can be compromised during and after a disaster,³ and they are up to four times more likely to be affected during a disaster in addition to facing multiple disadvantages resulting from the interplay of poverty and discrimination on the basis of disability, such as social exclusion and lack of basic services and information,⁴ as it has been experienced during recent devastating floods in Pakistan. Despite living with heightened risks, persons with disability have not been included in community-level disaster preparedness, which further increases their vulnerability.

Pakistan, as a State Party to the UNCRPD, demonstrated its commitment to improving conditions for around 20 million persons with disabilities living in the country to access and exercise their full rights as equal members of society and enacted legislation harmonized with the Convention. While efforts are being made to implement these legislations and policies for the mainstreaming of people with disability, it is high time to address disability inclusion in DRR plans aligned with the Sendai Framework, which features the inclusion of people with disabilities as rightful stakeholders and actors in the design and implementation of national disaster risk reduction policies. It can be achieved

¹ <https://www.who.int/teams/noncommunicable-diseases/sensory-functions-disability-and-rehabilitation/world-report-on-disability>

² <https://www.undrr.org/disability-inclusion-disaster-risk-reduction>

³ <https://knowledge.aidr.org.au/resources/ajem-october-2019-increasing-involvement-of-people-with-disability/>

⁴ <https://reliefweb.int/report/world/disability-inclusive-disaster-risk-reduction-asia-pacific>

if persons with disabilities are consulted and fully engaged in the development and implementation of national and local strategies

I. Need for Disability-inclusive DRR

Home to an estimated 241 million people, Pakistan becomes world's 5th most populous country with diverse geographical and physical features, encompassing mountains, fertile plains, plateaus, and deserts. The eastern part comprises the flat Indus Plain, while the west features the Balochistan Plateau. In the north and northwest, Pakistan is home to one of the world's highest mountain ranges, the Karakoram Range. Notably, the world's second-highest mountain, K2, is located in Gilgit-Baltistan Pakistan, along with the impressive 63 Km -long Baltoro Glacier, one of the longest glaciers outside Earth's Polar Regions. The country's major river, the mighty Indus, spans a total length of 3,180 Km, and is regarded as the lifeline of Pakistan.

Persons with disabilities are perhaps the most socially excluded and marginalized group in Pakistan – unseen, unheard and unaccounted population of the country. They face a multitude of social, economic, physical, and political barriers that hamper their mainstreaming in society. These barriers include stigmatization and a misunderstanding of the abilities and aspirations of persons with disabilities. Furthermore, disability work in Pakistan is fragmented, and the prevalent development discourse does not include a robust knowledge of a rights-based approach to working for persons with disabilities. This reduces the voices, participation and their recognition under sustainable development issues and concerns. Presently, in Pakistan, very few organizations understand the issues of disability from the human rights perspective and instead rely on a charity or social welfare model.

According to the World Report on Disability, 2023, about 16% of the world's population lives with some form of disability⁵ which fits the above definition with a mild, moderate, or severe nature. In Pakistan, the 5th Population and Housing Census conducted in 1998 identified the population of Persons with Disabilities in Pakistan to be 2.49% of the entire population. Moreover, in 2011, the Pakistan Poverty Alleviation Fund undertook a comprehensive survey (carpet survey of all individuals in all households) of 23 union councils in seven districts of Pakistan, comprising about 80,000 households with 430,000 individuals, and found that the prevalence of people who are disabled was 8%, and the prevalence of disabilities was 12% (10% mild-moderate disabilities and 2% severe disabilities)⁶ – the difference is because a person who is disabled may have more than one disability.

However, as per the 6th Population and Housing Census of 2017, the percentage has erroneously gone down to less than 0.9%. There were operational issues with the census data, which was not based on the Washington Group Set of Questions and, in many instances, even the question about disability was not asked at all. This data should be discounted. The Pakistan Bureau of Statistics included disability data collection in another national-level survey known as the Pakistan Social and Living Standards Measurement (PSLM) survey in 2020.⁷ This district-level survey is conducted every two years. It is population-based and, according to this survey, there are more than 27.0 million persons with disabilities in Pakistan.⁸

⁵ <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/disability-and-health#:~:text=Key%20facts,1%20in%206%20of%20us>.

⁶ Documentation of Disability Data, 2011. Pakistan Poverty Alleviation Fund. https://www.ppaf.org.pk/doc/Disability/50-DOCUMENTATION_OF_DISABILITY_DATA.pdf Accessed on 17th January 2023

⁷ Disability from Surveys. Pakistan Bureau of Statistics. <https://www.pbs.gov.pk/content/disability-statistics> Accessed on 17th January 2023

⁸ Key Finding Report of PSLM District Level Survey 2019-20. Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, Government of Pakistan. <https://www.pbs.gov.pk/publication/key-finding-report-pslm-district-level-survey-2019-20> Accessed on 17th January 2023

Only 20% of persons with disability are capable of evacuating immediately in the event of a sudden disaster.⁹ The failure to include persons with disabilities in the efforts to reduce the risks of disasters has fatal consequences. Due to inaccessible disaster preparedness plans, systemic discrimination, and widespread poverty, persons with disabilities are often left behind in relief and response efforts.

⁹ <https://www.who.int/teams/noncommunicable-diseases/sensory-functions-disability-and-rehabilitation/world-report-on-disability>

II. Legal Frameworks on Disability

When the UN declared 1981 as the International Year of Disabled People, the Government of Pakistan at that time enacted an Employment and Rehabilitation Ordinance. This was an affirmation of the importance of inclusion and providing support for persons with disabilities seeking employment and rehabilitation. The ordinance provided legal cover to all persons with disabilities and moved to recognize persons with disabilities through a Disability Registration Certificate, allowing them to avail special provisions for medical rehabilitation and treatment, employment, and education. Therefore, laws and regulations on disability-related sectors other than simply employment and rehabilitation are required.

After the Ordinance of 1981, no further laws or policies were developed to work in the international support for the implementation of the social model of disability until 2002 (Table 1). With the growing international support for the implementation of the social model of disability, the National Policy for Persons with Disabilities, 2002 was developed with a comprehensive focus on the empowerment of persons with disabilities at the socio-economic and political level, as well as their inclusion and mainstreaming in society.

Table 1: Chronology of key legislations

1981 Ordinance for the Rehabilitation and Employment of the Disabled
2002 National Policy for Persons with Disabilities
2006 National Plan of Action for Policy for Persons with Disabilities
2018 Sindh Empowerment of Persons with Disability Act
2019 Punjab Rights of Persons with Disabilities Rules
2019 Balochistan Disability Act
2019 Gilgit-Baltistan Persons with Disabilities Act
2019 Higher Education Commission Policy for Students with Disabilities
2020 ICT Rights of Persons with Disability Act
2020 Digital Pakistan Policy
2020 State Bank Policy for Persons with Disabilities

However, the policy did not set realistic and quantifiable targets. For these reasons, the implementation of this policy followed previous trends in that it was ineffective and inconsistently applied. After four years of the National Policy for Persons with Disabilities, 2002, the National Plan of Action (NPA) was developed in 2006 for implementation of the policy. The NPA identified 17 critical intervention areas, into short-term steps to be implemented by 2009 and long-term measures to be completed by 2025. In 2009, the National Database and Registration Authority (NADRA) introduced the Special Computerised National Identity Card (Special CNIC) to address this issue of identification and recognition of persons with disabilities, and the Government of Pakistan even associated various benefits for persons with disabilities in the areas of health, education, employment, housing, access to finance, assistive devices, travelling, postal services and import of automobiles, with the Special CNIC. Moreover, financial remunerations, discounts and waivers presented in the policies and government schemes were made applicable to persons with disabilities with the Special CNIC.

Pakistan, being a State Party to the UNCRPD, demonstrated its commitment to creating conditions for persons with disabilities to access and exercise their full rights as equal members of society by signing the Convention in 2008 and subsequently ratifying it in 2011. Since then, the process of development of rights-based legislation has started, and laws harmonized with UNCRPD were enacted, as shown chronologically in Table I above. Pakistan is also included in 187 states in the world who have agreed with the SfDRR (Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction) 2015–2030 which features the inclusion of people with disabilities as rightful stakeholders and actors in the design and implementation of national disaster risk reduction policies.

III. Moving towards DiDRR Policy Framework in Pakistan

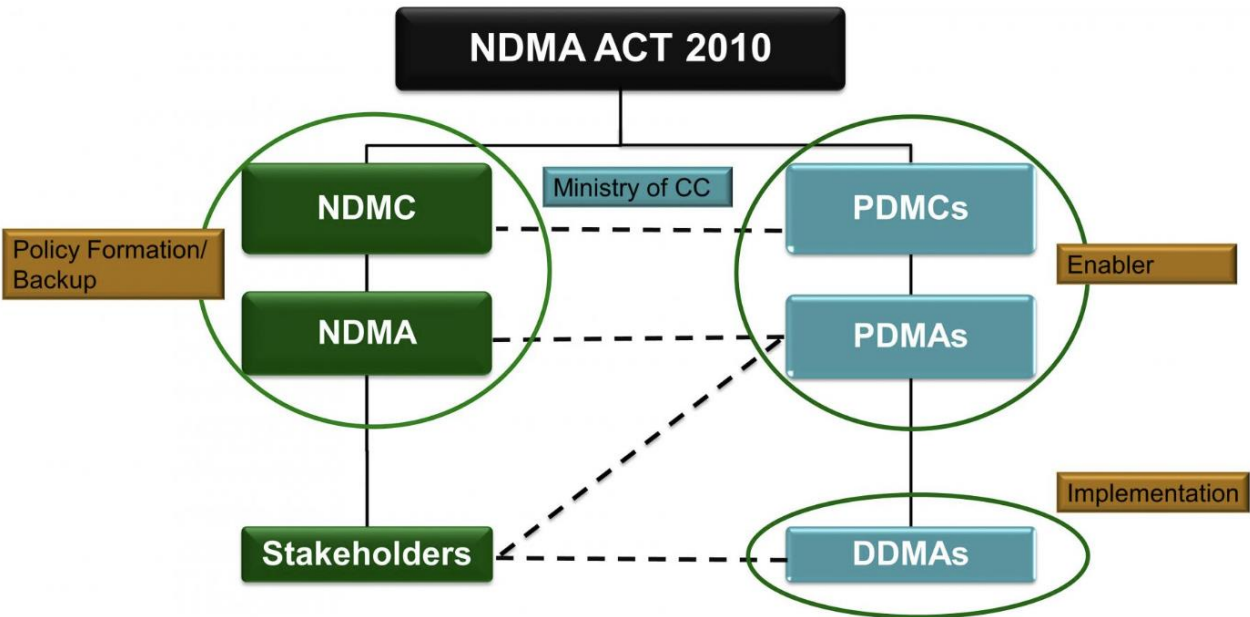
Pakistan encounters a range of natural and human-induced hazards, owing to its diverse geography and the impact of climate change. The country's vulnerability has heightened by factors such as population growth, unplanned urbanization, exposure to hazards in vulnerable areas, limited institutional capacities, and the impacts of climate change.¹⁰ In the last few decades, Pakistan has faced natural hazards such as flooding, earthquakes and landslides that have escalated into humanitarian disasters, with the loss of lives, homes and livelihood. Natural hazards in Pakistan are likely to increase as a result of climate change and environmental degradation. More extreme weather events, coupled with poor preparedness in communities, can only increase the risks of humanitarian disasters.

Human Loss from 2005-16		
	Deaths	Population Affected
Earthquake	73,894	129,305
Floods	4,205	3,900,000
Droughts	3,941	4,500,000

Source: NDMA

¹⁰ <https://cms.ndma.gov.pk/storage/app/public/plans/April2023/yW5ZgbKEjHY5TfX7GfYT.pdf>

Emergency response and disaster management are being taken care of by NDMA (National Disaster Management Authority), which is the lead agency at the Federal level to deal with the whole spectrum of Disaster Management activities. It is the executive arm of the National Disaster Management Commission (NDMC), which has been established under the Chairmanship of the Prime Minister as the apex policy-making body in the field of Disaster Management. In the event of a disaster, all stakeholders, including Government Ministries/Departments/Organizations, Armed Forces, INGOs, NGOs, and UN Agencies, work through and form part of the NDMA to conduct one window operations. It is established under the National Disaster Management Act – 2010 and functions under the supervision of the National Disaster Management Commission (NDMC), which is headed by the Prime Minister of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan. NDMA manages the whole Disaster Management Cycle (DMC), which includes Preparedness, Mitigation, Risk Reduction, Relief and Rehabilitation. A National Disaster Management Plan (NDMP) is prepared and is followed towards the provision of better services to the affected ones.



Source: NDMA

With a prime objective of continuing efforts in establishing a robust disaster risk management system with a focus on institutionalization at the grassroots levels the National Disaster Management Plan 2024, provides standardized guidelines for hazard mitigation and preparedness measures against various hazards and outlines emergency response procedures in an organized manner, involving government and non-government stakeholders at all levels. This National Disaster Management Plan serves as a successor to the National Disaster Management Plan 2012-2023 which acts as a comprehensive document, adopting a proactive approach to enable National and Provincial Disaster Management Authorities to prepare for and respond to emergencies in a coordinated manner. It delineates the roles and responsibilities of various stakeholders and outlines necessary actions at each level to manage disasters effectively.

Though the current and previous action plans of NDMA emphasizes community involvement in disaster management, delineating strategies outlined for building community resilience through public awareness campaigns, training, and capacity-building initiatives, disability inclusion is not addressed in the policy for emergency response and for the preparedness to reduce the risk of disasters. NDMA is willing to collaborate with stakeholders for the compliance of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction (SFDRR) endorsed by the Government of Pakistan in 2015. Though a status report in 2019 highlights Pakistan's progress on the SFDRR disability, it has not been addressed as factors contributing to the vulnerabilities in the National Disaster Mitigation Plan-2023. Though the Gender and Child Cell within NDMA prepared a National Policy Guidelines on Vulnerable Groups in Disasters in 2020, disability-inclusive DRR and emergency response are not elaborated in the guidelines.

A number of civil society organizations, including international NGOs, national NGOs, and organizations of persons with disabilities, have piloted some initiatives on disability inclusion in emergency responses during the 2005 earthquake and devastating floods of

2010 and 2022. At the same time, these organizations have introduced disability-inclusive DRR practices, leading to discussions on the subject at the national level. Consistent advocacy by OPDs and leading disability stakeholders has resulted in the establishment of the Ageing, Disability and Diversity Taskforce (ADTF) after the devastating flood in 2010. with the purpose of raising the issue of disability at UN Clusters working on emergency response, recovery and rehabilitation.

After the endorsement of SfDRR in 2015 by the Government of Pakistan and the adoption of rights-based legislation harmonized with CRPD in 2018-2020, the need for DiDRR is being felt at and among humanitarian organizations. NDMA has initiated to engage persons with disabilities even at the district level through ADDTF in almost all the meetings for preparedness to reduce the risk of disasters in expected calamities. NDMA has also expressed keen interest in having training on DiDRR for the entire staff and allied organizations and is soon going to sign an MOU with ADDTF.

The Islamabad Capital Territory Rights of Persons with Disability Act was passed in September 2020 through a joint session of parliament. This is the first-ever legislation that binds National Disaster Management Authorities to have disability-inclusive DRR planning in Part II, Article 20. The Act also covers areas like the political participation of persons living with disabilities, equity in education and employment, equality before the law, ease of access and mobility, and protection from violent, abusive, intolerant and discriminatory behavior.¹¹ According to the notification by the Government of Pakistan in August 2019, the Ministry of Human Rights has been made the custodian of the rights of persons with disabilities and responsible for the implementation of the ACT 2020 as well as international commitments, including UNCRPD and Incheon Strategy.

¹¹ ICT Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act 2020. The Gazette of Pakistan, September 24, 2020. https://www.mohr.gov.pk/SiteImage/Misc/files/1601028302_229.pdf Accessed on 17th January 2023

Conclusion

A community's ability to prepare for and cope with natural hazards can prevent disasters and save lives. But an unprepared community is unable to cope, resulting in massive loss of life and the undermining of decades of social and economic progress, especially for the people living at the margins of the society particularly persons with disabilities. In the absence of an effective social protection system in Pakistan, persons with disabilities rely on different levels and types of support every day, mostly provided by their families, and access to these supports can be compromised during and after a disaster.

This challenges self-reliance and the capacity of people with disability to take effective action during a disaster, increasing their risk and impacting recovery. Barriers that increase the vulnerability of people with disability to disasters include inaccessible early warning systems that they cannot hear, see or understand; buildings and footpaths that prevent escape for people with mobility impairments; natural hazard emergencies that separate them from their assistive technology and people who support them. The vulnerability of people with disability is further increased because people with disabilities have not been included in community-level disaster preparedness.

Since the legal framework to protect the right of people with disabilities in Pakistan is at the developmental stages, strategic plan of NDMA can be disability inclusive through enhancing coping capacities and leveraging past experiences by improving disaster preparedness and response mechanisms. In addition to this legislation at national and provincial level Pakistan is committed for the implementation of the UNCRPD, the SfDRR (Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction) 2015–2030 and global development agenda 2030 on sustainable development which features the inclusion of people with disabilities as rightful stakeholders and actors in the design and implementation of national disaster risk reduction policies.

As the successful implementation of these policies and legislation requires the collaboration and commitment of all stakeholders to effectively manage disasters and mitigate their impact on the population, economy, and environment, persons with disabilities shall be consulted at all stages of disaster management.

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