

Midterm Review of the Sendai Framework
for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030

Thematic Report on Disability Inclusion in Disaster Risk Reduction in the Pacific

July 2023



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For additional information, please contact:

United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR)

7bis Avenue de la Paix, CH1211 Geneva 2, Switzerland, Tel: +41 22 917 89 08

Cover: Welcoming staff member at the inclusive Resource Centre at Nauti Primary School in Tuvalu, which caters to a diverse range of learning needs within a disaster-resilient building. Photograph: Australia Pacific Climate Partnership.

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Abbreviations and acronyms

Term	Definition
ADDC	Australian Disability and Development Consortium
AUD	Australian Dollar
CRPD	Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
DFAT	Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade [Australia]
DRR	Disaster risk reduction
EOC	Emergency operations centre
EWS	Early warning systems
FRDP	Framework for Resilient Development in the Pacific
GEDSI	Gender equality, disability, and social inclusion
GESI	Gender equality and social inclusion
NDMO	National Disaster Management Office
NGO	Non-government organization
ODA	Overseas development assistance
OPD	Organization of persons with disabilities
PDF	Pacific Disability Forum
PFRPD	Pacific Framework on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
SADD	Sex, Age, and Disability Disaggregated Data
SFM	Sendai Framework Monitor
UNDRR	United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction
WIN	Women's International Network



1. Introduction



The *Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030* is the first global disaster risk reduction (DRR) framework to substantively reference disability and address disability inclusion. The Sendai Framework's Guiding Principles emphasize: all society engagement; inclusive, accessible, and non-discriminatory participation; and integration of a disability perspective in all policy and practice (Para III.19.d) (UNDRR, 2015). The Sendai Framework is unique among the 2015 development frameworks by including persons with disabilities as contributing stakeholders (UNDRR, 2015):¹

Persons with disabilities and their [representative] organizations are critical in the assessment of disaster risk and in designing and implementing plans tailored to specific requirements, taking into consideration, inter alia, the principles of universal design.

Para V.36.a.iii

Recognition of the contribution persons with disabilities can make to DRR reflects wider commitments to disability inclusion. This includes the *Incheon Strategy to "Make the Right Real" for Persons with Disabilities in Asia and the Pacific*, which addresses DRR under Goal 7 (UNESCAP, 2012). The Incheon Strategy provides a regional roadmap for implementing the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) (United Nations, 2006). The CRPD has been ratified by 186 United Nations member states, and is central to current understanding of disability inclusion (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, n.d. a). Article 11 of the CRPD concerns Situations of Risk and Humanitarian Emergencies and will be the subject of a new General Comment from the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. This General Comment will provide further detail and direction on the realization of Article 11 (International Disability Alliance, 2022).

Thirteen Pacific countries have ratified the CRPD and another two are signatories. Ratification requires member states to align legislation with the CRPD. As such, disability inclusion is no longer only an ethical and moral consideration; disability inclusion is increasingly required under law.

States Parties shall take, in accordance with their obligations under international law, including international humanitarian law and international human rights law, all necessary measures to ensure the protection and safety of persons with disabilities in situations of risk, including situations of armed conflict, humanitarian emergencies and the occurrence of natural disasters.

CRPD Article 11

This review identifies where progress on disability inclusion in DRR in the Pacific has been made since 2015 and where gaps persist. The review also outlines future directions and priorities for ensuring commitments to disability inclusion made in Sendai can be met by 2030. This is a high-level review and is not an in-depth evaluation or academic study. The review has gathered information from key informant interviews, document review, and the lived experiences of persons with disabilities over the first half of the Sendai Framework. The review is organized around the Sendai Framework's four Priorities for Action.

This review has been produced by the Pacific Disability Forum (PDF) and reflects the views of PDF as the peak representative organization of persons with disabilities (OPD) in the Pacific.

¹ The Sendai Framework was the first of the United Nations development frameworks released in 2015, and was followed by: *Transforming our world: The 2030 agenda for sustainable development* available at <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/21252030%20Agenda%20for%20Sustainable%20Development%20web.pdf> and the Paris Agreement available at https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/english_paris_agreement.pdf



Background to Midterm Review of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030

Adopted by the United Nations in 2015, the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction provides a blueprint for an all-of-society and all-of-state institutions engagement in preventing and reducing disaster risks. It advocates for the substantial reduction of disaster risk and losses in lives, livelihoods and health, and aims to achieve significant reduction of disaster risk across the economic, physical, social, cultural and environmental assets of persons, businesses, communities and countries.

In advance of the Sendai Framework reaching its midpoint in 2023, a midterm review was conducted in 2022 by the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR). In collaboration with countries and stakeholders, the review examined the progress and challenges experienced since 2015 and explored efforts to integrate disaster risk reduction into decision-making, investment, and behaviour.

The global midterm review included stakeholder consultations, regional forums, and written submissions. It resulted in a comprehensive collection of regional reports, national reports, thematic reports and literature reviews.

For the Pacific, the regional midterm review was led by the UNDRR Pacific Office and formed part of the broader Asia-Pacific review. The UNDRR Pacific Office supported Pacific island countries to undertake their own reviews as part of the National Voluntary Review process. The Pacific Office also coordinated reviews into key thematic areas of Gender Equality and Social Inclusion; Disability Inclusion; Climate and Disaster-Resilient Infrastructure; and Local, Indigenous and Traditional Knowledge.

To best understand these themes, the UNDRR Pacific Office worked with regional partners through the Pacific Resilience Partnership, and engaged a wide range of stakeholders including national and local governments, civil society organizations, development partners and financial institutions.

The findings and recommendations of these thematic reviews are designed to be practical and grounded in the real-world experiences of those living in the Pacific. They seek to provide a clear basis for discussion of the future of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction with a view to maximizing its effectiveness to 2030.



A person using braille to read. Photograph: Dr.Dan/Shutterstock.com.



2. Priority 1: Understanding disaster risk

The Sendai Framework describes the importance of understanding disaster risk at national, local, global, and regional levels, as follows (UNDRR, 2015):

Policies and practices for disaster risk management should be based on an understanding of disaster risk in all its dimensions of vulnerability, capacity, exposure of persons and assets, hazard characteristics and the environment. Such knowledge can be leveraged for the purpose of pre-disaster risk assessment, for prevention and mitigation and for the development and purpose of appropriate preparedness and effective response to disasters.

Para IV.23

2.1 Vulnerability and disproportionate risk

The Sendai Framework refers to the definition of vulnerability (UNDRR, 2015, p.10) used in its predecessor, the Hyogo Framework for Action, as:

The conditions determined by physical, social, economic and environmental factors or processes, which increase the susceptibility of a community to the impact of hazards.

Unlike the Hyogo Framework, the Sendai Framework makes no reference to “vulnerable groups” or individuals and instead emphasizes “vulnerable situations”. This shift was advocated by disability stakeholders in the run-up to the Third United Nations World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction in Sendai, and reflects a strengths-based approach that recognizes the contributions of persons with disabilities to DRR.² The emphasis on vulnerable situations also serves as a reminder that barriers to participation in DRR increase disaster risk for persons with disabilities.

Disability is a cross-cutting risk multiplier that increases disaster risk across all identity groups. Central to understanding disaster risk is recognizing that dominant “physical, social, economic and environmental factors or processes” create barriers and disproportionate risk for persons with disabilities (UNDRR, 2015). Across the board, women, children, and men with disabilities experience higher rates of disaster risk than women, children, and men without disabilities. In short, if you are a person with disability, you are more likely to be injured or die in a disaster than a person without disability (Fujii, 2015).

Deficit-based terminology, such as “vulnerable”, continues to be used to refer to persons with disabilities in DRR in the Pacific and more broadly. This shapes attitudes, policies, and practice. Deficit-based language contradicts the Sendai Framework’s recognition of the contributing role of persons with disabilities to DRR.

2.2 Disability data and measurement

The collection and use of standardized disability data allows differences in opportunities and participation between persons with and without disabilities to be measured. Disaggregated disability data should also allow the measurement of differences by impairment type, gender, and age.

² “Vulnerable” suggests vulnerability is an inherent characteristic of an individual or group. “Marginalized” better aligns with the CRPD understanding of disability; that is, persons with disabilities are marginalized by wider society.

Under Article 31 of the CRPD, State Parties commit to “collect appropriate information, including statistical and research data, to enable them to formulate and implement policies” (United Nations, 2006).

Sendai Framework Monitor (SFM) guidance on sex, age, and disability disaggregated data recommends the collection of disability data on people who have an “existing ‘pre-event’ disability” only (UNDRR, 2021; UNDRR, 2017). While the guidance states one purpose of collecting data is to understand impacts, mortality, and morbidity, the guidance specifically does not address “people who develop a disability from a hazardous event or disaster” (UNDRR, 2017). To understand disaster risk, and its impacts, disaggregated data on pre- and post-event disability is needed.

Since 2015, four out of 12 Pacific SFM reports have addressed disability data (UNDRR Suva, personal communication, September 2022). However, most simply confirm no data is available. Nauru reported the livelihoods of 15 persons with disabilities had been disrupted or destroyed by disasters (UNDRR Suva, personal communication, September 2022). Double disaggregation is not possible in the SFM. For example, from those 15 persons with disabilities impacted, it is not possible to say how many were women.

The DesInventar Sendai database includes options for reporting against disability, including in relation to deaths, people missing, and injured persons with disabilities. Currently, only Samoa has included data for persons with disabilities. This is for three persons with disabilities whose livelihoods were impacted by disaster (UNDRR, n.d. a).

The recent country DRR status reports of the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction include disability prevalence figures from secondary sources. Tuvalu (UNDRR, 2022d) reports a disability prevalence figure of 4.5%, and Papua New Guinea (UNDRR, 2019), Marshall Islands (UNDRR, 2022c), and Federated States of Micronesia (UNDRR, 2022b) report prevalence rates of around 11%. Global burden of disease data suggests the current best estimate of global disability prevalence is 16% (World Health Organization, 2022). Other country DRR reports reference disability, including in relation to disproportionate risk (Vanuatu, 2022) and “vulnerable” groups (Kiribati, 2019; New Zealand, 2020; Palau, 2022), but provide no data. The report for Fiji (2019) limits reference to the *Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act 2018*. No country report indicates any clear application of disability disaggregated data to inform practice or formulate policy.³

Between 2015 and 2021, 11 Pacific countries included the Washington Group Short Set on Functioning questions in their census (Pacific Disability Forum, internal monitoring, November 2022). The Short Set of questions allows disaggregation of census and survey data by disability and these are recommended for use in Sustainable Development Goal reporting (Washington Group on Disability Statistics, 2022; International Disability Alliance, 2017). Six countries have produced Disability Monographs based on census data. In 2020, the Pacific Group on Disability Statistics was established as a Washington Group regional group, chaired by the Samoan Bureau of Statistics (Washington Group on Disability Statistics, 2020).

The Short Set, and related question sets, are increasingly used in a wide range of programme applications in the Pacific and have the potential to further understanding on differences in participation and opportunities between persons with and without disabilities. However, they are no panacea. The topic of disability data is broader than the disaggregation of population data. With increasing interest in the Short Set, it is important to note what the questions do not do (Robinson et al., 2021). Alone, the Short Set provides no information on needs, barriers, or impairments. To understand disaster risk, information is also needed on these and related disability data issues.

There is recognition of the importance of disability data. However, disability data is not consistently included in Sendai Framework reporting and there are few examples of disability data being applied to improve understanding of disaster risk. Disability data is not only prevalence data. It is also necessary to understand barriers and quantify efforts to remove them.

³ UNDRR reports for these countries are available from https://www.undrr.org/publications?field_hazard_target_id=All&field_publication_type_value=All&field_theme_target_id=All&field_undrr_publication_types_target_id=All&tid_op=73&page=0



2.3 Intersectionalities and horizontal inequalities

Increasingly, disability is viewed as one component of social inclusion. A gender equality and social inclusion (GESI) approach is, for example, emphasized in Australian Aid programming in the Pacific (DFAT, 2021). Concerns that GESI does not adequately capture and emphasize disability inclusion have resulted in the promotion of gender equality, disability, and social inclusion (GEDSI) as the preferred approach by disability stakeholders in the region (ADDC, 2020).

A GEDSI approach recognizes and responds to inequity and marginalization based on identity characteristics; for example, gender identity, age, sexual orientation, language, ethnicity, and disability. An effective GEDSI approach looks beyond individual identity characteristics and considers how different characteristics interact. This intersectional approach is essential to understanding disaster risk. For example, how an older man with a visual impairment is impacted by a disaster may be very different from how a female youth with autism may be impacted. Equally, these individuals' needs in preparing for, and responding to, disaster events may be quite different.

Recognizing horizontal inequalities is also important. Horizontal inequalities are the differences in participation, opportunities, or disaster risk between different groups of people with a shared identity characteristic (Stewart, 2016). As noted, efforts to improve disability data disaggregation have largely focused on understanding differences between persons with and without disabilities. There have been few efforts to understand the impacts of disaster risk between sub-groups of persons with disabilities; for example, between people with a mobility functioning difficulty and people with a psychosocial disability.

Understanding disaster risk requires understanding the disproportionate risk that persons with disabilities experience in comparison with persons without disabilities. At the same time, it must be recognized that persons with disabilities are not a homogenous group. Increased attention needs to be paid to highly marginalized groups within the disability community; for example, people with cognitive and psychosocial disabilities.

In the Pacific, women with diverse disabilities continue to face multiple jeopardies. This includes increased risk of sexual and gender-based violence during disasters and response. Women and young people with disability also face barriers to access information on sexual and reproductive health services and are often not aware of their sexual and reproductive health rights (United Nations Population Fund, 2022). Barriers to access increase during disasters. The need for improving menstrual hygiene management for women with disabilities during disasters was also reported. Incidences of women with disabilities experiencing violence during disasters and humanitarian situations is a critical concern and is often reported to OPDs. Women and girls with disabilities must be included in mainstream and targeted DRR programmes directed to eliminate gender-based violence. Older women and men with disabilities face additional challenges accessing humanitarian support and services during or post-disaster.

Country reports indicate some consideration of impacts and needs of persons with disabilities in comparison with persons without disabilities; however, this is limited. To understand disaster risk and achieve the 2030 Agenda commitment to leave no one behind, better consideration of intersectionalities and differences between and within disability groups is needed.

2.4 Climate change and disability

That climate change is accelerating and amplifying disaster risk in the Pacific is evident. Recent research by PDF shows climate change is impacting persons with disabilities in two ways (PDF, 2022):

- Climate change is increasing the impacts of pre-existing exclusion for persons with disabilities.
- Climate change is creating new risks and negative impacts for persons with disabilities.



The above points are in direct contradiction to Sendai Framework objectives of reducing existing risk and preventing future risk. Various factors contribute to increased climate risk for persons with disabilities. These include: over-representation in the informal and subsistence economy; barriers to relocating agricultural practices when faced with decreasing yields and soil degradation; fewer opportunities to access loans to improve fishing equipment; higher levels of anxiety; and increased exposure to waterborne diseases for people with underlying health conditions.

The PDF report also highlights gender-based differences. Women with disability in Kiribati reported delays in food preparation and hygiene concerns during menstruation, due to a decrease in water availability. Disruptions to water supply infrastructure from flooding in Solomon Islands was reported as making persons with disabilities increasingly dependent on family members to access clean water. The report also notes that, when faced with food shortages, households prioritize persons without disabilities and persons with disabilities receive less food.

OPDs in the Pacific are taking lessons learned from engagement in DRR and applying these to climate change advocacy. Without proactive and accelerated measures to remove barriers to participation in DRR, including mitigation and adaptation to climate risks, disaster risk will continue to increase for persons with disabilities in the Pacific.

3. Priority 2: Strengthening disaster risk governance to manage disaster risk

Priority 2 of the Sendai Framework builds on progress made institutionalizing DRR at the national level under the Hyogo Framework (UNDRR, 2015).

Disaster risk governance at the national, regional and global levels is of great importance for an effective and efficient management of disaster risk. Clear vision, plans, competence, guidance and coordination within and across sectors, as well as participation of relevant stakeholders, are needed. Strengthening disaster risk governance for prevention, mitigation, preparedness, response, recovery and rehabilitation is therefore necessary and fosters collaboration and partnership across mechanisms and institutions for the implementation of instruments relevant to disaster risk reduction and sustainable development.

Para IV.26

3.1 Policy and CRPD compliance

The Sendai Framework sets out to translate earlier progress on institutionalizing DRR into practice. This includes extending progress from national to local levels. In contrast, efforts to institutionalize disability inclusion in DRR are relatively new and have only been a global priority since the World Conference in Sendai in 2015.

Awareness of disability inclusion and the importance of engaging with persons with disabilities is increasingly acknowledged in DRR policy in the Pacific. Similarly, DRR is being referenced in recent disability policies and action plans to implement the CRPD. At the regional level, this includes the Framework for Resilient Development in the Pacific (FRDP) and the Pacific Framework on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (PFRPD), which includes the following goal (Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat, 2016):



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

Implementation of the FRDP is overseen by the Pacific Resilience Partnership Taskforce. PDF, as the Pacific's peak OPD, is a taskforce member. PDF is also chairing the PFRPD reference group. This engagement is contributing to policy alignment on DRR and disability inclusion objectives at the regional level in the Pacific. Regional commitments are also reflected at national levels. For example, DRR and climate change are a "strategic priority area" in Vanuatu's *National Disability Inclusive Development Policy 2018–2025* (Ministry of Justice and Community Services, 2018).

National disability policies should reflect CRPD obligations; however, issues remain. The Marshall Islands *Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act 2015* notes alignment with Article 11. However, this is later qualified by the caveat "as far as reasonably practicable" (Para 23.4) (Republic of the Marshall Islands, 2015). This does not reflect the spirit of the CRPD or its foundational principle of reasonable accommodation (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, n.d. b).⁴ The Solomon Islands National Disaster Risk Management Plan (2009) included no mention of disability (National Disaster Council, 2009). The revised 2018 plan states a focus is "community inclusiveness" and makes one reference to "those with disabilities"; however, no further information is provided (National Disaster Council, 2018).

The Pacific has seen improvements in, and alignment of, disability and DRR related policy. The challenge is to translate what is often generic policy guidance into specific governance actions, including at local and community levels.



At the Pacific Disability Forum launch in August 2022 for a report on Disability and Climate Change in the Pacific. Photograph: Australian High Commission.

⁴ Reasonable accommodation "means necessary and appropriate modification and adjustments not imposing a disproportionate or undue burden, where needed in a particular case, to ensure to persons with disabilities the enjoyment or exercise on an equal basis with others of all human rights and fundamental freedoms".



3.2 Enabling environments for disability inclusion

Since 2015, the Pacific has seen policy improvements addressing the rights of persons with disabilities in DRR, but gaps and inconsistencies remain. There is an emerging concern that growing awareness is leading to “box ticking” without substantive policy direction or implementation. Increasing references to disability in DRR policy are needed and should be welcomed; however, policy revisions alone are insufficient to establish an enabling environment for disability inclusion.

Reflecting Priority 2, creating strategies for developing an enabling environment for DRR requires a multi-stakeholder approach across all levels. This includes facilitating dialogue on people’s “risk landscape”, recognizing power relations between stakeholders, and the avoidance of risk reduction for one group at the expense of increased risk for another (Combaz, 2014). These considerations are equally central, if not more pertinent, to disability-inclusive DRR.

National OPD representatives reported more opportunities for engagement with government and other DRR stakeholders since 2015. A representative of Fiji’s Meteorological Service reported its first engagement with the Fiji Deaf Association had been a “real eye opener” in terms of the need to build internal capacity to ensure everyone can understand the information the service provides. Fiji’s Department of Mineral Resources plays a lead role in coastal preparedness and tsunami early warning. The department noted that it, and the Tsunami Working Group that includes all major government agencies under the coordination of the National Disaster Management Office (NDMO), were yet to involve OPDs.

An OPD representative from Vanuatu reported that OPD engagement in local DRR processes is contributing to growing respect for persons with disabilities and improved understanding among persons without disabilities. OPDs from Timor-Leste, Samoa, and Solomon Islands noted much still needed to be done to raise awareness at the national level. When OPDs had been involved by NDMOs in policy reviews, that involvement was minimal. An OPD representative from Tonga noted connecting with government continued to be challenging.

The quality of engagement with government and other DRR stakeholders was reported as a concern by national OPD representatives. This included officials attempting to “interpret” the needs of persons with disabilities without consultation. Officials were also reported as “consulting” but not implementing. Implementation gaps at local levels were a common concern. Reflecting on the ongoing lack of consultations, a senior OPD representative questioned whether OPDs are engaging enough themselves and whether OPDs are always providing accurate information to DRR stakeholders.

OPDs are increasingly engaging with, and being consulted by, government in the implementation of the Sendai Framework. However, consulting with OPDs is often treated as a box to tick. More substantive engagement with OPDs and persons with disabilities is needed from design to the delivery and evaluation of DRR programmes and initiatives.

3.3 Equity as policy outcome

The purpose of implementing inclusive policy and creating an enabling environment for inclusion leads to a single point. That point is equity between persons with and without disabilities.⁵ As the mid-point of the Sendai Framework approaches, it is possible to note isolated, or partially integrated, examples of progress towards disability inclusion and these provide a basis to build on. However, equity is not currently being achieved.

Positive outcomes for persons with disabilities from DRR interventions remain largely anecdotal or are imagined. This lack of clarity is compounded by a lack and limited use of data. Disaggregated disability data is not being routinely collected and is not being applied to monitor and evaluate impact. To achieve

⁵ The focus on equity recognizes the individual needs of persons with disabilities differ. These individual needs must be met if equality between persons with and without disabilities is to be achieved. This also relates to the CRPD’s foundational principle of reasonable accommodation (Article 2).



equity, it is necessary to understand differences between how people with and without disability benefit from disability-inclusive DRR interventions. While some DRR programmes are making progress in measuring what percentage of beneficiaries are persons with disabilities, this tells us little about quality, comparative impact, or equity.

PDF identifies six pre-conditions for disability inclusion. Directing policy and practice towards achieving these pre-conditions is central to achieving equity for persons with disabilities in comparison with persons without disabilities. The six pre-conditions for disability inclusion relate to: Accessibility, Assistive Devices, Community-based Inclusive Development, Non-discrimination, Support Services, and Social Protection (PDF, 2020).

Examples of inclusive DRR practice are not clearly resulting in positive outcomes or equity for persons with disabilities. Monitoring and evaluation of disability inclusion in DRR programming needs to improve. Addressing the six pre-conditions of disability inclusion is a fundamental step towards realizing equity.

4. Priority 3: Investing in disaster risk reduction for resilience

Priority 3 of the Sendai Framework addresses the following (UNDRR, 2015):

Public and private investment in disaster risk prevention and reduction through structural and non-structural measures are essential to enhance the economic, social, health and cultural resilience of persons, communities, countries and their assets, as well as the environment. These can be drivers of innovation, growth and job creation. Such measures are cost-effective and instrumental to save lives, prevent and reduce losses and ensure effective recovery and rehabilitation.

Para IV.29

4.1 Budgets and resourcing

Target F of the Sendai Framework includes indicators on total overseas development assistance (ODA), and other financial flows, for DRR (UNDRR, n.d. b). There is no indicator on DRR budget allocations as a percentage of national income or expenditure. How ODA and national, or local, budget allocations are reported in country DRR reports is mixed. Specific DRR allocations, or how climate change and DRR investments intersect or differ, within wider development investments, are not immediately clear. Specific national budget allocations for disability inclusion in DRR were not identified in the preparation of this review.

Overall, budget allocations to disability are not well documented and can be hard to identify. A recent initiative to identify national budget allocations for meeting CRPD obligations suggests 0.22% of Fiji's national budget, 2020–2021, was allocated to persons with disabilities (Center for Inclusive Policy, n.d.). This is in relation to disability prevalence figures of 13.7%. The initiative is a work in progress and has no information on sectoral allocations to Article 11 of the CRPD.



Identifying precise budget allocations for disability in individual aid programmes is also not straightforward. An Australian investment of AUD 50 million in disaster preparedness in the Pacific has included several disability-focused interventions, including the establishment of DRR focal points within national OPDs, and access to technical assistance on disability for implementing partners funded from individual partner budgets. An external evaluation focusing on disability inclusion noted additional in-country budget allocations of between AUD 25,000 and AUD 35,000 were provided for “partners to plan and implement their work in a disability-inclusive way” (AHP, 2021). These allocations are low in absolute and percentage terms. A mid-term review noted that, during the first two years of implementation, 1.8% of the programme’s beneficiaries were persons with disabilities (Kelly & Roche, 2020).

Initiatives such as the establishment of DRR focal points in national OPDs indicate progress, but they are yet to be properly resourced. One DRR focal point noted they are expected to advise and support six non-government organization (NGO) implementing partners, as well as raise awareness within communities. This is outside of engagement with multiple government agencies. Support to national OPD DRR focal points also differs. OPD focal points supported by a New Zealand-based NGO reported more resources being available for their own capacity building in comparison to their Australian-supported colleagues (CBM New Zealand, personal communication, September 2022). The long-term sustainability of these externally-funded initiatives remains an open question.

Fiji’s National Council for Persons with Disabilities has established an emergency operations centre (EOC) focusing on persons with disabilities during disaster response. The EOC has been run by volunteers with disabilities through five tropical cyclone responses. There is no core funding for the EOC and volunteers were reported as bringing their own bedding and food and contributing as best they can for as long as they can. Although acting as a resource centre on disability during cyclone responses, EOC volunteers reported receiving no technical training. Suitable NDMO training activities were reported as available and provided to the districts but not to the EOC. Moving forward, the National Council noted the need to strengthen linkages between the EOC and the NDMO and other ministries.

4.2 Accessibility and the built environment

The Sendai Framework emphasizes the need for universal design in the construction of disaster-resilient infrastructure (Para IV.30.c). Universal design is one component of accessibility and refers to the “design of products, environments, programmes and services to be usable by all people, to the greatest extent possible, without the need for adaptation or specialized design” (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, n.d. b). Universal design is emphasized in the *Improving Accessibility in Transport Infrastructure Projects in the Pacific Islands* report (Pacific Region Infrastructure Facility, ca. 2016). The report includes findings from accessibility audits of air, sea, and road transportation in five Pacific countries. Few examples of accessible infrastructure were identified. Examples of budget allocations to universal design in resilient infrastructure initiatives in the Pacific were not identified in the preparation of this review.

OPDs reported that, while there had been little consultation with persons with disabilities on infrastructure initiatives in the past, this was now changing. It was noted that physical accessibility of health centres and hospitals remains particularly poor. Ensuring access to information communication technologies was reported as a priority by OPDs. The widening of mobile and internet coverage is bringing benefits to persons with disabilities in terms of improving access to information and strengthening personal and support networks. The need to ensure telecommunications infrastructure and services continue to function post-disaster was noted as a priority.

PDF has developed an access audit toolkit with accompanying training. Use of the toolkit, including in evacuation centres, is contributing to raising awareness on the need for accessible infrastructure. In the absence of building codes in the region, PDF is developing further tools, standards, and guidelines that will form a regional blueprint for accessibility. One OPD reported being asked to “audit” accessibility improvements an NGO had made at an evacuation centre. However, this was only after the NGO had made the changes without consultation with the OPD or persons with disabilities. An OPD representative from Tonga reflected: “Even when we are ‘included’, we are still left behind”.



There are indications that investments in disability inclusion in DRR are increasing. However, these remain limited and are hard to identify. Overall, disability inclusion is seriously under-resourced and the true costs of ensuring DRR for all remain underestimated in programme budgets.

5. Priority 4: Enhancing disaster preparedness for effective response and to “Build Back Better” in recovery, rehabilitation and reconstruction

The Sendai Framework’s fourth priority area concerns the following (UNDRR, 2015):

The steady growth of disaster risk, including the increase of people and assets exposure, combined with the lessons learned from past disasters, indicates the need to further strengthen disaster preparedness for response, take action in anticipation of events, integrate disaster risk reduction in response preparedness and ensure that capacities are in place for effective response and recovery at all levels. Empowering women and persons with disabilities to publicly lead and promote gender equitable and universally accessible response, recovery, rehabilitation and reconstruction approaches is key. Disasters have demonstrated that the recovery, rehabilitation and reconstruction phase, which needs to be prepared ahead of a disaster, is a critical opportunity to “Build Back Better”, including through integrating disaster risk reduction into development measures, making nations and communities resilient to disasters.

Para VI.32

5.1 Preparedness and response

The most visible efforts to increase disability inclusion in DRR remain focused on response. This reflects major bilateral aid investments addressing preparedness for response, such as in the case of Australia, alongside OPD-driven interventions. COVID-19 and the pivoting of existing aid programmes towards COVID-19 response and recovery is also notable. While visible, disability-inclusive preparedness and response initiatives remain small and suffer from limited integration into broader programmes, with limited measurement of effective impact.

Examples of initiatives include, as noted, establishing DRR focal points within national OPDs and Fiji’s disability-focused EOC. Despite challenges, the EOC has filled gaps in response efforts, including ensuring information reaches persons with disabilities at the community level. The EOC’s capacity to rapidly identify needs of person with disabilities during response was reported as improving over time. However, identifying how best to coordinate and share information between the EOC and NDMO was considered to need more work. In Vanuatu, OPDs and disability stakeholders have worked to include persons with disabilities in community-level disaster and climate change committees alongside provincial area councils. A disability sub-cluster is now well-established within the gender cluster of Vanuatu’s national response coordination structure. However, it was noted that disability can become overshadowed within gender discussions and that incorporation of disability within protection clusters may be a better fit.



OPDs have been advocating for accessible early warning systems (EWS) across the Pacific, including the importance of universal mobile phone coverage for persons with disabilities in outer islands and end-to-end solutions. For example, inclusive EWS need to be linked to accessible information on evacuation centre locations and routes. Attitudinal and institutional barriers persist as major barriers to inclusion. One official noted that once triggered an EWS can go through 10 separate approvals before a warning is issued. It was suggested that there could be further delays if the “additional needs” of persons with disabilities were taken into account.

Evidence from COVID-19 responses indicate many of the lessons from disability-inclusive DRR have either not been learned or were not prioritized and acted upon (Hillgrove et al., 2021). Evidence, including from the Pacific, shows persons with disabilities were again disproportionately impacted by both the virus and the response. Examples include: less access to information than persons without disabilities; a lack of involvement in response planning; and the creation of further barriers when designing response solutions, such as barriers to accessing remote learning by children and youths with disabilities.

Efforts to include persons with disabilities in preparedness and response in the Pacific have increased. There are examples of practice that can be built on and replicated. However, too frequently, practice examples are implemented in isolation, limited in scale, and dependent on short-term financing with minimal, or tokenistic, budget allocations. Increased prioritization and investment are needed if initiatives are to be taken to scale.

5.2 Anticipatory action and social protection

Growing interest in anticipatory action and cash-based assistance was reported by government and OPDs. The benefit of providing cash-based assistance following Tropical Cyclone Yasa in 2020 was reported as allowing assistance to be provided when the individual needs and circumstances of persons with disabilities were not known. The benefits of giving families the “power to decide” were also noted. Officials in Fiji reported establishing a working group in response to what was considered poor coordination of cash assistance by NGOs.

Following Tropical Cyclone Harold in 2020, top-ups were provided through Fiji’s social protection system in collaboration with the World Food Programme. This was an additional one-off payment to recipients of government social protection schemes, including the Disability Allowance, which covers a reported 10,294 persons with disabilities. Government representatives reported there had not been an assessment of impact, but the top-ups had been straightforward to administer and distribute. Changes to measuring eligibility for the Disability Allowance made in 2017 widened participation in the scheme.

Fiji’s Ministry of Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation is working with the United Nations Capital Development Fund to deliver parametric insurance solutions. Parametric insurance refers to payments that are triggered by a pre-determined event in an area, such as a certain level of rainfall or wind speed velocity. The ministry plans to target 2,000 people, including persons with disabilities. An earlier pilot targeted 274 people, including 22 persons with disabilities. Working with private insurance providers, PDF has registered 770 persons with disabilities for onboarding to a separate parametric insurance initiative. PDF aims to extend this initiative from Fiji to Tonga and then other Pacific countries.

Anticipatory action and the use of existing social protection mechanisms are emerging areas. Initial signs are that these approaches hold potential for targeting persons with disabilities and accelerating the delivery of humanitarian assistance. Impact and reach will be dependent on the coverage of social protection systems targeting persons with disabilities.



5.3 Leadership of persons with disabilities

There are promising examples of collaboration between government and non-government DRR stakeholders and OPDs, which indicate the expertise of persons with disabilities is better recognized. OPDs are also filling implementation gaps. In the years preceding the World Conference in Sendai in 2015, DRR was not a priority for many in the disability community. This is changing and the impacts of climate change on persons with disabilities in the Pacific are accelerating the urgency. OPDs in the Pacific are emerging as global leaders in disability-inclusive DRR and climate action.

The leadership and prioritization demonstrated by OPDs is not yet fully reflected or embraced in the work of other DRR stakeholders. Regional commitments to disability inclusion in DRR still need to be institutionalized and embedded at national and local levels. Policy revision and reform to fully align with CRPD obligations need to be accelerated. This requires satisfying the pre-conditions for inclusion, clear designation of responsibilities, and strengthened collaboration across government and between stakeholders. The full leadership potential of persons with disabilities to contribute to processes of change remains untapped.

OPD representatives expressed concerns that government consultations with OPDs often amount to little more than “lip-service”. It was noted that guidance and advice provided in consultations was often not reflected in later implementation. A representative from Tonga noted that venues for consultations with DRR stakeholders remained physically inaccessible. It was also noted that OPDs are “not always easy to get hold of” and need to be more proactive in ensuring they are visible to, and contactable by, DRR stakeholders.

In the 2019–2020 period, the Australian NGO Cooperation Program supported 66,698 women to assume leadership roles. From this total, 2.9%, or just under 2,000, of these women were women with disabilities (DFAT, 2021). This is a small step in the right direction. Women with disabilities in the Pacific are leading national OPDs and contributing to Sendai Framework objectives at all levels. The Women’s International Network (WIN) for DRR includes strong participation by women with disabilities, including a 2022 WIN DRR Leadership Award finalist (UNDRR, 2022).

Overall, the potential of women with disabilities to contribute to DRR is underused. There is also the danger of thinking that the leadership role of women with disabilities in DRR is restricted to OPD involvement or representing disability issues exclusively. Women, including young women, with disabilities should be empowered to lead across all aspects of DRR. Representing women in DRR is not the sole domain of women without disabilities.

The Pacific has good examples of leadership by persons with disabilities in DRR, including women with disabilities. This leadership needs to be better recognized, acknowledged, and built on. Increased attention needs to be paid to developing future leaders with disabilities, including realizing the potential of Pacific youth with disabilities.



Melvina Vua, Climate Change Officer, advocating for an inclusive climate justice process in the Solomon Islands. Photograph: Pacific Disability Forum.

6. Looking ahead to 2030

Processes of inclusion are only effective when they result in equitable change. This requires political will, prioritization, and investment. Investments in disability inclusion are investments in whole-of-society resilience and are critical to reaching commitments agreed in Sendai in 2015. Without these, persons with disabilities will be left further behind and disaster risk will increase for all. Looking ahead to 2030, the following are priorities for ensuring commitment to disability inclusion made in Sendai are reached:

- Ensure DRR policies and legislation are fully CRPD compliant.
- Widen and improve the use of disability data to better understand disaster risk, improve reporting and measurement of impact, and to facilitate evidence-informed decision-making.
- Increase investments in disability-inclusive DRR, including direct resourcing of OPDs in recognition of their leadership and contributions to achieving Sendai Framework outcomes.
- Move from isolated and stand-alone initiatives to the full integration of disability-inclusive DRR across programmes and practice.
- Avoid tokenism and box ticking and proactively ensure the full and meaningful participation of persons with disabilities in DRR decision-making.

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