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SESSION SUMMARY

Session Title: Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities

Session Type: Plenary Session

Date and Time: Monday, May 13, 14:00-15:30 pm, Room 4

Key Speakers and Agencies:

Moderator:

- **Ms Rita Missal**, Crisis Bureau, UNDP

Speakers:

- **Mr Ian Christoplos**, Director Glemminge Development Research, Private Consultancy
- **Mr Md Shah Kamal**, Senior Secretary, Ministry of Disaster Management and Relief, Government of Bangladesh
- **Mr Khil Bahadur**, Community member Sindhupalchok, beneficiary of housing reconstruction programme, Nepal
- **Ms Alexandra Ocles**, Minister/Secretary, Disaster Risk Management, Government of Ecuador
- **Ms Midori Hirano**, Chairperson of Japan National Assembly of Disabled People's International

The session focused on how to include people with disabilities in the preparedness, response, recovery, and reconstruction programmes. It highlighted the importance of people with disabilities not being on the fringe, but rather at the center of recovery reconstruction programmes and development programs. It stressed the need for a more nuanced, disaggregated, and local approach to the specific needs of people with diverse disabilities, instead of playing the numbers game for apparent effectiveness in disaster response.



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Ian Christoplos surmised that one of the primary reasons for the exclusion of people with disabilities in disaster preparedness, recovery and reconstruction is the lack of prioritization due to an inbuilt systemic tendency in disaster response to move money and to achieve aggregate targets. People with disabilities have a diverse range of vulnerabilities, which makes it difficult to target them in the same way. There is a desire to keep it simple and instead of leaving no one behind, the goal effectively changes to leave no big target group behind. This signals the amount of granularity that the system can deal with. The people in the field are largely unaware of the charters, guidelines, new commitments to focus on disability, and have other priorities that take precedence. He also pointed out the institutional path dependency that keeps the focus on finding efficiencies that will move a lot of food or cash to a broad target group. The second challenge is that disabled people's organizations are generally small and local, and the system is not configured to support a large number of small local partners. The search for value for money and so-called efficiency is the root of the problem. There has been a tendency to work with big organizations and overlook the small initiatives that disabled people's organizations are good at. This is often aggravated by donors' harsh certification requirements to get funding. A small disabled people's organization doesn't have the resources to get certified, so they are left out. He emphasized that there needs to be a reconfiguration of how we understand localization in order to find a way to shift resources to disabled people's organizations.

Md Shah Kamal spoke about effective early warning and post disaster relief and response measures for people with disabilities in Bangladesh. There are standing orders on disasters for organizations at all levels. Inclusive early warning signals disseminate through various measures such as the flag, hand microphone, community radio, and other media, which can be interpreted using sign language. Four million volunteers have been trained to evacuate people with disabilities. People with disabilities can access cyclone shelters and their facilities. During cyclone Fani, 1.6 million people, including 100,000 with disabilities, were evacuated within eight hours. Volunteers, committees, central and local government organizations, and NGOs who work on post disaster recovery and reconstruction are all trained in how to handle people with disabilities, enabling them to benefit from better services.

Khil Bahadur shared how he lost his vision due to an accident at work in 2013. He was learning Braille with other visually impaired students inside the



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class when the earthquake struck. Teachers and their associates escorted him and his classmates outside. He returned home a year and a half after the earthquake to find his store and home destroyed by the earthquake, and began living with his aunt. In a community meeting, one of his neighbors learned that the UNDP was looking to support poor, vulnerable, senior, or people with disabilities in the community to build model houses. Local people and volunteers helped build his house with an earthquake-resistant GI wire frame. He shared his satisfaction that for a visually impaired person like him, the house is accessible and disabled-friendly. He closed by advising international agents like UNDP to work on solutions that best meet the needs of people with disabilities in post-disaster recovery situations. They could provide support to build a disabled friendly house, enhance the livelihood of disabled persons, or support the education of their children.

Alexandra Ocles shared how they helped people with disabilities to get their rights, their benefits, and the assistance enshrined in the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD). The goal is to offer dignified, prioritized and sufficient support to disaster victims with disabilities. In the aftermath of the earthquake, specialized teams collected information about the immediate needs of disabled people to channel aid to various ministries. Medical teams, risk assessment teams, and aid workers offered emergency aid, and some people with disabilities needed to be relocated to shelters. The Action Plan covered universal access to temporary accessible housing close to emergency services and at least one accessible bathroom. It also included a technical proposal for the building of accessible homes following disasters. She pointed to the use of financing to reintegrate people with disabilities in affected areas, promoting community involvement, and offering psychological and medical support to those who were housed in shelters and refuges. She highlighted the promotion of inclusion using national initiatives, and the creation of a tool for assessing people's basic needs and establishing the minimum needs for people in vulnerable positions or suffering a disability. There is also a manual for those who have suffered violence and other guidelines for protecting children in emergency situations.

Midori Hirano highlighted her engagement in realizing the national law aimed at building and fostering an environment which initiates full accessibility for persons with disabilities, not only through building or transportation, but also into the social system and in daily life. Ideally, such an environment must be also realized before, during or after disaster, but this has



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not yet been achieved. To achieve this, DPI Japan and member organizations have been documenting cases of discrimination cases to urge the national government to enable the mechanisms of remedy for violations against people with disabilities and strengthen their rights and ensure each provision is aligned with the guidelines stated in the CRPD. Unfortunately, there are no independent mechanisms for such remedies. The Act itself is imperfect, as it aims to moderate discrimination rather than eliminate it. Despite urging from NGOs, the present ordinances do not include comprehensive and effective supports for people with disabilities.

Question from the floor: Sometimes people refuse to move to another place or refuse to acknowledge the support because they don't want to leave their house for fear of somebody stealing from their house. How do you deal with this?

Answer: **Md Shah Kamal** – In Bangladesh, we have allowed them to bring their valuables to the shelter, including their cattle. This is unique in the world. The shelter is constructed such that persons with disabilities are on one floor, the ladies or the women on another floor, and there are even some spaces reserved for the cattle. But it took more than a decade to motivate the people to come to the shelter if they wanted to save their lives.

Question from the floor: I am Christoph Delemo from IDT. My question is for the representatives of Bangladesh and Ecuador. Do you have any database for people with reduced mobility? Is this database managed locally or by the local authorities? Can these people be traced or tracked?

Answer: **Md Shah Kamal** - We have a dynamic database maintained by the government, but we are trying to improve its accuracy.

Answer: **Alexandra Ocles** - Ecuador has a database with a geo-reference system as well. Trained women in the community reach the homes of all people with disabilities to understand their needs, follow up on their health requirements, and keep track of disabled people throughout the country. In addition, the neighborhood doctor program ensures that disabled people don't have to leave their homes. This medical assistance is dynamic and ongoing.

Question from the Chair: How have disabled people's associations or representatives of disabled people's associations engaged with the Government of Japan?

Answer: **Midori Hirano** - Japanese Government doesn't have data for people with disabilities. Those who are certified disabled were able to access aid in



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the aftermath of the earthquake, but those with mild disability or mental disabilities could not get adequate assistance from the government. That is why people with disabilities and volunteers established the SOS Center for People with Disabilities in Kumamoto. We accepted every request or demand from persons with disabilities. Some people could go to the shelter, but many stayed at home because shelters were very crowded. The SOS center helped those who stayed at home. The SOS center had 24-hour service just after earthquake, and took requests for two years after the disaster. The Government needs to know about people with disabilities, and enact laws to deal with the specific, diverse needs of people with disabilities.

The session showed how tremendous impact has been achieved in Bangladesh and Ecuador because of Government intervention working hand-in-hand with rigorous follow-up on the part of local organizations and the community in situations of disaster to evacuate people with disabilities and make sure they have accessibility. It is also vital to ensure that their livelihoods as well as their assets are secured when they move to the evacuation center, which can be one of the biggest impediments to successful evacuation. It is vital to have a nuanced approach to the diverse categories of disabilities, rather than treating them collectively as one large, soft, and easy target. This change of perspective is needed from all stakeholders and they need to recommit themselves. We have the plans, guidelines, and frameworks, but enforcement and implementation continue to remain quite a distant dream in many countries.