

Disability Voices Inform International Preparedness

Dawn Skaggs – World Institute on Disability, September 2024

Disaster risk reduction, climate justice, early warnings for all, and other important global efforts have at their core improving our ability to preserve lives and property in every community. As critical as this work is, all disaster preparedness, response, recovery, and mitigation programs are impacted by individual emergency preparedness. In all events, of all types, the one certainty is that each individual will have to make decisions. Important decisions in incredible moments rely on previous knowledge, skills and resources that can be acquired through individual preparedness planning.

In most communities, the disability-led organization can play an important role in preparedness planning for people with disabilities, their families and their communities. GADRA has activated in support of multiple disability-led organizations working in regions that experience chronic crises or repetitive and seasonal natural disasters. For these organizations, preparedness for the next disaster is integral to current disaster response.

The World Institute on Disability (WID), a lead organization in GADRA, has been researching the perspectives of preparedness and the lived experience of people with disabilities and disability-led organizations. Among WID's findings are that preparedness has core universal components; is not always well understood; must be agile, individualized, and operationalizable.

People with disabilities had varying understandings of what constituted 'prepared' and a general perception of preparedness

being an elusive state that required knowledge and resources beyond their reach. Few people felt confident in their personal preparedness and even fewer felt confident that they knew everything they would need to do and have to get their disability needs met in a disaster. We learned that preparedness planning must be intentionally integrated into community living and part of people's thought processes.

For people with disabilities who had experienced a disaster, many people had planned and felt confident that they were able to communicate their needs effectively but were not able to operationalize the communication plans when the disaster occurred. We learned that preparedness planning must explore communication methods that can be effective in disasters, and disability-led organizations working with local organizations and agencies to build expertise.

In all communities, preparedness plans rarely included practicing, updating, evaluating or exercising plans for people with disabilities, minimizing the applicability and increasing the risk of error and inefficiency in a disaster.

Humanitarian aid and disaster response systems and mechanisms are not inherently inclusive so for the 1.3 billion people in the world, personal preparedness is of utmost importance.

Preparedness, preparedness training and preparing responders has been an important topic for many of the disability-led organizations engaged with GADRA in our activations, and we realize that this is a key component of disability inclusive disaster risk reduction and community resilience.

Look for more information on how GADRA is supporting disability-led organizations in disaster preparedness and building a community of practice in our upcoming newsletter!