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DISABILITY INCLUSIVE DISASTER RISK REDUCTION (DIDRR) IN SOUTH ASIA: STATUS, PROSPECTS, AND CHALLENGES

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Abstract

The need for disaster risk management efforts to be inclusive is more pronounced than ever before. Persons with disabilities remain one of the most disproportionately affected groups during disasters. The concept of Disability Inclusive Disaster Risk Reduction (DiDRR) has therefore received increased attention in the existing scholarship and practical measures related to disability and disaster. This chapter focuses specifically on South Asia, with particular attention to Bangladesh, India, Nepal and Sri Lanka. These South Asian countries share common challenges in disaster risk reduction measures, especially concerning persons with disabilities. This chapter prioritizes understanding regional dynamics for effective solutions and advancements applicable in settings globally. It examines how each South Asian country approaches disability-inclusive disaster policies, programs, and capabilities, considering their shared issues in this area. Looking at the DRR programs in South Asia broadly, this chapter finds that deficient policy frameworks and insufficient data availability hinder the implementation of DiDRR strategies. Additionally, the inadequate involvement of disability communities in Disaster Risk Management (DRM) programming and planning further hinders the goal

of helping people with disabilities during disasters. Several factors contribute to the difficulty of collecting accurate disability statistics, including inadequate data collection tools, challenges in obtaining disability registration information, and the lack of prioritization for collecting such data, all further compounded by social stigma surrounding disability. The book chapter attempts to highlight some of the factors that facilitate or impede the involvement of persons with disabilities by demographic categories of women, men, adolescents, and children. This chapter also offers scholarly and practical implications for researchers and practitioners by encouraging them to thoroughly investigate and revisit the existing measures and interventions to advance disability inclusion within disaster risk reduction planning and implementation efforts in emergency management.

Introduction

Disability Inclusive Disaster Risk Reduction (DiDRR) initiatives can play a central role in emergency management by preventing a disproportionate impact of disasters on vulnerable populations, especially persons with disabilities (Twigg et al., 2018). DiDRR is predicated on the increased vulnerability that individuals with disabilities encounter in all phases, i.e., before, during, and in the aftermath of disasters. Individuals in this population may experience limitations in their mobility, encounter challenges in accessing information, or become more reliant on diverse support systems—such as personal caregivers, assistive devices, and community networks—all of which are susceptible to compromise in times of emergencies (Stough & Kang, 2015; Bennett, 2020). Existing research indicates that the implementation of inclusive disaster risk reduction strategies not only safeguards persons with disabilities but also strengthens the overall resilience of the community (Alexander et al., 2012).

This chapter defines persons with disabilities according to Article 1 of the United Nations (UN) Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) which states, “Persons with disabilities include those who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which when interacting with various barriers, may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others”. The convention, which was ratified by 164 signatories as of March 2024, including those in South Asia, imposes on states the accountability of safeguarding and protecting persons with disabilities in perilous circumstances (United Nations, 2006). In numerous DRR strategies and policies, the incorporation of disability-specific considerations has been prompted by this international mandate. Notwithstanding the increasing acknowledgment it receives on a global and domestic scale, the incorporation of DiDRR into operational procedures frequently encounters obstacles stemming from deficient policy frameworks, insufficient data availability, and inadequate involvement with disability communities. Consequently, there is a significant need for further investigation and advancement of evidence-based methodologies that can function as a blueprint for policymakers and practitioners to proficiently incorporate DiDRR into risk reduction endeavors (Alexander et al., 2017; Twigg et al., 2018).

In addition to being recognized by the UN CRPD, DiDRR is also embedded in the principles of the UN Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction (SFDRR) and the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), aiming to bridge the gap between standard disaster risk reduction (DRR) measures and the unique requirements of individuals with disabilities on a global scale (UNDRR, 2015; United Nations, 2006). Although these global frameworks are frequently modified to fit local conditions and cultural contexts, they have found resonance within the South Asian regional context. A comprehensive analysis of the commitment of Bangladesh, India, Nepal, and Sri Lanka to the above

global standard frameworks demonstrates progress in incorporating DiDRR into national policies as well as various discrepancies and shortcomings in implementation.

The importance of DiDRR is heightened in the South Asian context on account of the region's vulnerability to natural hazards and the substantial presence of persons with disabilities within its populations (Craig et al., 2019). Additionally, prevalent social stigma surrounding disability further complicates disaster preparedness and response efforts. High population density combined with socioeconomic challenges like limited access to education, employment, and healthcare, creates a complex environment, underlining the necessity for inclusive DRR initiatives (Mendis et al., 2020). For example, in line with CRPD directives, India's Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act has impacted the country's approach to DiDRR (Thattai et al., 2017). Following the catastrophic 2015 earthquake, which brought into sharp focus the critical need for disability-inclusive practices, Nepal's disaster management initiatives have progressively evolved to become more inclusive (Hemingway & Priestley, 2016). The Colombo Declaration, which Sri Lanka adopted in 2016, highlights DiDRR as a regional Asian priority and reflects the country's progress. However, implementation challenges persist due to insufficient resources, limited awareness, institutional bias, and the exclusion of persons with disabilities from decision-making (Twigg et al., 2011). To address these gaps, various non-governmental organizations (NGOs) play a critical role in promoting DiDRR through advocacy, grassroots initiatives, and collaboration with governments (Lassa, 2018).

This chapter explores the implementation status of the proposed DiDRR measures in four South Asian countries, Bangladesh, India, Nepal, and Sri Lanka, since they share common challenges in disaster preparedness, especially concerning persons with disabilities. We acknowledge that our work is indicative of the South Asian region, but it does not include all the countries within the region. We purposively leave out countries such as Bhutan and Pakistan due to our scoping of the chapter. Additionally, Pakistan is not very different from India and Bangladesh geographically, demographically, and culturally. So, we take two countries out of three from a region which was known as Indian sub-continent previously. Furthermore, as we depend very much on the secondary sources of information, government reports in Pakistan are not always available and accessible (Saxena & Muhammad, 2018). We chose Nepal over Bhutan, two countries that have similar geographical and demographic settings, over the fact that disasters in Nepal are more frequent and severe than in Bhutan. Also, Nepal has significant NGO presence, one of the areas that we focus on while drafting this book chapter. We therefore narrow down our analysis within four countries considering the frequency and severity of disasters, availability of government and non-government reports and NGO/INGO presence. However, we acknowledge that Pakistan and Bhutan as country case studies have the merit to be discussed, analyzed, and compared in the future studies. This chapter therefore prioritizes understanding regional dynamics for effective solutions that may be applicable. It examines and compares how different countries in South Asia approaches disability-inclusive disaster policies, programs, and capabilities, considering their shared issues in this area. By narrowing down the geographic focus to South Asian countries, this chapter provides an in-depth analysis of how these countries address these issues, identifies trends, and highlights lessons learned from governmental (GO), non-governmental (NGO), and international non-governmental (INGO) interventions. Finally, it also provides a framework for future DiDRR research agendas.

Literature Review

The Disconnect Between the Global Frameworks & Ground-Level

Implementation

The paradigm of disaster risk reduction has experienced a significant shift globally due to the growing acknowledgment of the rights and requirements of persons with disabilities. DiDRR is not coincidental; instead, it is a strategic reaction to the disproportionate consequences of disasters on populations that are most susceptible (Stough & Kang, 2015). Three critical international frameworks from the United Nations comprise the core of this transition:

- The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), [Adopted in 2015]
- The Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction (SFDRR), [Adopted in 2015] and
- The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD). [Adopted in 2006]

The adoption of the SFDRR in 2015 represents a significant turning point, as it underlines the need for inclusive approaches by providing states with explicit directives on how to actively involve persons with disabilities in all aspects of DRR (UNDRR, 2015). Likewise, the SDGs have initiated a paradigm shift in the field of development, one that is dedicated to the attainment of inclusivity and equality. Sustainable Development Goal no. 11 (SDG 11), which seeks to “make cities and human settlements safe, inclusive, sustainable, and resilient” emphasizes the criticality of integrating disability-inclusive strategies into disaster risk management and urban planning (United Nations, 2018; UNDRR, 2015). The convergence of inclusivity and sustainability reflects a paradigm shift away from perceiving disability as an isolated concern and toward recognizing it as an intrinsic component of the shared human condition.

Similar to the SFDRR and SDGs, CRPD serves as a powerful driver for inclusive DiDRR. The convention establishes a robust international legal framework that guarantees the rights and dignity of persons with disabilities. This includes their explicit right to be included in all policies and programs, fostering a paradigm shift that recognizes disability as an integral aspect of society, not a separate concern. Since its inception, the CRPD has advocated for states to acknowledge the importance of incorporating persons with disability into all policies and programs, including those related to DRR (United Nations, 2006).

These frameworks serve as the fundamental basis for national policies and actions, furnishing countries with benchmarks and exemplary approaches to imitate. In practice, however, a significant gap exists between the adoption of these frameworks and their real-world application. While research suggests a high rate of policy adoption (Gaillard et al., 2019), implementation often lags due to challenges like insufficient funding, limited awareness, and inadequate training on inclusive approaches. This highlights the need for further research to understand the processes by which these international directives are translated into effective regional and national policies.

The number and reach of NGOs in South Asia have been also found to grow along with international frameworks (Thomas, Chhetri, Hussaini 2008). Therefore, there is a need to understand the dual role that NGOs play in DiDRR implementation. They mold the policy landscape by compelling states to prioritize disability inclusion. Additionally, they monitor, evaluate, and publicize benchmarks for national performance on DiDRR (Ton et al., 2021).

DiDRR in South Asia: Progress, Policies, and Partnerships

Disability-inclusive disaster risk reduction (DiDRR) has garnered considerable international interest. However, in South Asia, the application and acceptance of DiDRR principles have progressed slowly and encountered obstacles (Raikes

et al., 2021). The following is an examination of the policies, partnerships, and advancements that have emerged in Bangladesh, India, Nepal, and Sri Lanka with the intention of comprehending the present state of DiDRR.

The discussion begins with an assessment of the legislative progress that has been achieved by these nations in recent times. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), which requires the integration of persons with disabilities into all spheres of society, including endeavors to mitigate disaster risks, has been ratified by the national governments of Bangladesh, India, Nepal, and Sri Lanka (United Nations, 2006). Consistency between national DRR strategies and CRPD targets indicates that the significance of involving vulnerable populations in DRR planning and implementation is recognized. These commitments are further strengthened at the national level by the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030 (SFDRR) by providing concrete guidance for states to integrate disability considerations into their disaster risk reduction (DRR) strategies. The SFDRR explicitly emphasizes the importance of “persons with disabilities” throughout the framework document, outlining specific targets and actions that require states to consider their needs (UNDRR, 2015). Prior DRR frameworks, neglecting disability considerations, left entire communities vulnerable during disasters. This new emphasis on inclusion marks a crucial step towards a more equitable and effective approach to disaster risk reduction (Stough and Kang, 2015).

An additional crucial element in the promotion of the right of persons with disability in the region is the formation of partnerships, specifically among governments, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and organizations for persons with disability (OPD). This has played a crucial role in making strategies more effective and inclusive. NGOs have been instrumental in advocating for these rights and urging governments to embrace inclusive practices (Twigg et al., 2011). An illustration of this can be seen in the integration of DiDRR into the national policies of Nepal subsequent to the 2015 earthquake, which was formally initiated by a coalition of DPOs (IFRC, 2015).

National policy development in South Asia reflects a complex landscape of progress and challenges regarding DiDRR. India stands out as a promising example with its National Disaster Management Plan (NDMP) explicitly incorporating the principles of the SFDRR. The plan prioritizes accessibility for persons with disabilities by mandating the dissemination of disaster preparedness information in accessible formats and ensuring the physical accessibility of evacuation shelters and other critical facilities (NIDM, 2020). This policy shift demonstrates India’s commitment to inclusive DiDRR practices and serves as a potential model for other countries in the region.

However, the progress observed in India is not uniform across the other countries in South Asia we study in this chapter. While Sri Lanka has also made significant strides at the policy level, translating these policies into concrete actions remains a hurdle. The country’s endorsement of the Colombo Declaration on DiDRR signifies its recognition of the importance of disability inclusion (Colombo Declaration). However, research highlights a gap between policy pronouncements and implementation realities (Stough & Kang, 2015). The same study has identified deficiencies in areas such as training for disaster management personnel on disability inclusion and the allocation of adequate resources for accessible infrastructure development.

Nepal is another national context with both policy advancements and implementation challenges. Following the devastating 2015 earthquake, Nepal revised its national policies and legal frameworks to emphasize disability inclusion in disaster preparedness and response efforts. The revised policies encourage the active participation of organizations representing persons with disabilities in disaster risk reduction initiatives (Government of Nepal, 2017). However, similar to Sri Lanka, Nepal faces obstacles in translating these policies into action. A lack of funding and limited technical expertise in DiDRR practices specific to the needs of persons with disabilities continue to impede progress (Haque et al., 2018).

Identifying the Role and Influence of NGOs in Promoting DiDRR

NGOs have become increasingly indispensable in advancing the cause of DiDRR and ensuring its enactment. They frequently serve as intermediaries between the more extensive international frameworks and the practical challenges encountered by vulnerable communities, such as persons with disabilities. The significance of their function is heightened in disasters such as India, Nepal, and Sri Lanka, where accommodating diverse populations during times of catastrophe is of the utmost importance (Seediky et al., 2020).

NGO contributions in South Asia have played an instrumental role in mobilizing local interest towards local concerns and ensuring that actionable approaches grounded in international norms are implemented (IFRC, 2014). NGOs attempt to establish DiDRR agenda that safeguards the rights and well-being of persons with disabilities by advocating for policies and practices that align with the SFDRR, the CRPD, and with other relevant frameworks' goals (Sloman & Margaretha, 2018).

The appeal of Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030 (SFDRR) for inclusive policies that comprise the most vulnerable members of society has served as a signal to NGOs to promote the integration of disability considerations into policies and practices related to disaster risk reduction (UNISDR, 2015). NGO-led projects in training program development, awareness-raising, and pilot project execution have served as tangible demonstrations of the effectiveness of inclusive disaster risk management programs. Frequently, their advocacy roles encompass policy interventions—advising governments on how to amend legal frameworks to integrate disability perspectives into disaster risk planning and response (Gaillard et al., 2019).

Capacity building is an essential area in which NGOs have made a unique and significant contribution. They facilitate training for other non-governmental organizations, emergency responders, and local communities on how to address the unique challenges that persons with disabilities face during disasters (Twiggy et al., 2018). This encompasses activities designed to foster an awareness of the diverse requirements for evacuation, shelter, and relief. For example, Disability Inclusive Disaster Risk Reduction Network (DiDRRN) is a key driver of progress in DiDRR across South Asia. Established in 2012, DiDRRN is a consortium of Organizations of Persons with Disabilities (OPDs) and other disability-focused and mainstream development and relief organizations. The network operates regionally, fostering collaboration among national stakeholders to champion inclusive disaster management practices (Fuchs et al., 2024; UNDRR, 2014).

DiDRRN's impactful activities directly address the challenges of implementing DiDRR at the local level. They work collaboratively with local communities, including persons with disabilities, to develop disaster management plans that are tailored to their specific needs and vulnerabilities. This ensures that people with disability are actively involved in the planning process, leading to more inclusive and effective responses during disasters. For instance, these plans might consider evacuation procedures that take into account the mobility limitations of some residents or identify accessible shelters that can accommodate those with specific needs. DiDRRN also recognizes the importance of knowledge sharing and capacity building. They facilitate the exchange of knowledge and best practices related to DiDRR throughout South Asia. This can involve organizing workshops, conferences, and online platforms where stakeholders can share experiences, challenges, and successful strategies for promoting disability inclusion in disaster risk reduction efforts. By fostering collaboration and disseminating knowledge, DiDRRN empowers persons with disability, strengthens regional collaboration, and ultimately builds more resilient communities in South Asia (Fuchs et al., 2024; Albuero-Cañete et al., 2023; Kusumowardoyo & Tamtomo, 2021; Sloman & Margaretha, 2018).

NGOs have also been effective in conducting research that informs policymakers and practitioners by collecting data on the differential impacts of disasters on disabled people. This information is crucial for informing practices based on evidence that addresses the intersecting needs of persons with disability during the process of disaster risk reduction (Stough & Kang, 2015). Despite progressive initiatives, however, persistent gaps remain. Difficulties in coordination among the various government agencies and NGOs may impede the establishment of a unified DiDRR strategy (Craig et al., 2019). In this context, being one of the most disaster-hit and vulnerable nations, in Bangladesh, some NGOs have been highly contributory in advancing DiDRR efforts, collaborating with governmental agencies to develop inclusive policies and frameworks (Twigg et al., 2018). Organizations like the Centre for Disability in Development (CDD) and Handicap International have pioneered inclusive practices, emphasizing community partnerships and policy advocacy (Islam & Walkerden, 2015). By promoting a shift from a medical to a social model of disability, NGOs facilitate community education and capacity building for inclusive disaster preparedness and response (Lord et al., 2016). Despite challenges such as data limitations and resource constraints, continuous advocacy is crucial for embedding DiDRR into national strategies and ensuring effective implementation beyond NGO initiatives (Seddiky et al., 2018).

Furthermore, the challenge persists in expanding successful pilot projects to a national scale, owing to limitations in resources and challenging socio-political environments. A lack of political support to prioritize and invest in DiDRR measures is also evident. The authors' experiences from several field studies suggest that not only political leaders but also public administrators are not sensitized enough in the areas such as social inclusion making it a least prioritized agenda or even worse – keeping the agenda off the table. Therefore, in South Asia, NGOs serve as vital allies in the promotion and implementation of DiDRR initiatives. They also bridge siloes of DRR programs by ensuring the inclusion of persons with disabilities across the stages of disaster management. In short, they promote the localization of international frameworks by adapting programs serving persons with disabilities to regional dynamics i.e., socio-cultural norms and sensitivity. (Seddiky et al., 2020).

Evaluating Government Initiatives for DiDRR in South Asia

Governments play a key role in integrating persons with disabilities into wider socio-political frameworks for managing disasters. NGOs due to their nature and scope of work can influence government mandates and advocate for changes, however, they are unable to act on their own. (Pertiwi et al., 2020; Bennett, 2020).

The impact of government-led DiDRR initiatives in the countries under consideration differed considerably due to variations in scope and effectiveness. The implementation of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act in 2016 represented a notable advancement in India, as it brought its policies into closer alignment with the principles outlined in the CRPD and the SFDRR (Twigg et al., 2018). The Act contains provisions for the protection and safety of persons with disabilities, including provisions for disability-targeted disaster response and risk reduction. Nevertheless, the conversion of policy into actionable and impactful programs remains far less common than general statements about disability due to policy-implementation mismatch. (Thattai et al., 2017).

The Bangladesh government has made significant progress in recognizing the importance of DiDRR through legislative efforts such as the Bangladesh Disaster Management Act of 2012 and alignment with international standards like the Sendai Framework (Islam et al., 2020; Mahmud & Prowse, 2012). Two consecutive conferences on Disability and Disaster Risk Management in 2015 and 2018 respectively in Dhaka reflect the impact of the global frameworks

in regional settings. The conference in 2018, through the participation of representatives from 32 different countries, proposed a policy framework for enabling DiDRR practices all around the world. That policy guide is often referred to as Dhaka Declaration or Dhaka Declaration 2015⁺ as some of the recommendations from 2015 were refined, modified, and made more specific. However, challenges persist in translating these policies into effective ground-level actions. Reports indicate a gap between policy aspirations and the actual provision of DiDRR services for people with disabilities (Seddiky et al., 2020). Several critical issues hinder progress. One concerns the inadequate provision of essential services like early warnings and accessible shelters. Early warning systems often lack accessibility features, leaving persons with disability vulnerable due to a lack of timely and understandable disaster alerts. For instance, visual alerts may not be effective for people with visual impairments, and audio alerts might not be clear for those with hearing difficulties (Ahmed & Neelormi, 2008). Similarly, many existing evacuation shelters are not physically accessible for persons with disability using wheelchairs or crutches. These shelters also lack essential features like accessible toilets and braille signage, further marginalizing disabled people during disasters (Mahmud & Prowse, 2012; Farid and Nasreen, 2023).

Another challenge is the limited data on disability demographics. A lack of comprehensive data on the specific needs and vulnerabilities of different disability groups within Bangladesh hinders the development of targeted DiDRR strategies. This data gap makes it difficult to allocate resources effectively and ensure inclusive disaster preparedness plans at the community level (Stough & Kang, 2015). Addressing these gaps is crucial for the successful implementation of inclusive DiDRR practices in Bangladesh.

Following the catastrophic earthquake that struck Nepal in 2015, the government has adopted a progressive stance on DiDRR. By collaborating with international partners and receiving external assistance, the nation has revised its disaster management policies to be more inclusive. The establishment of the National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Authority (NDRRMA), which endeavors to integrate inclusivity into its strategies and operations, serves as an illustration (Chaiya et al., 2022). However, physical and social barriers continue to prevent the full integration of persons with disabilities into DiDRR programs, and actual practices frequently lag behind policy (Lord et al., 2016).

Sri Lanka has made a noteworthy effort to incorporate disability considerations into disaster management, particularly with its Strategic Plan for Disaster Management (2013-2017). Although the policy framework incorporated provisions for vulnerable populations during disasters, there is still a lack of consistent and observable systemic changes in processes and mechanisms across all regions of the nation (Fernando & Hillhorst, 2016). Attempts have been made to implement reforms; however, the efficacy and consistency of these initiatives continue to require additional scrutiny (Mendis et al., 2020).

Upon evaluation, these governmental initiatives unveil a multifaceted terrain in which, while policy intentions are generally in accordance with international obligations, their implementation displays inconsistency. Challenges such as insufficient financial resources, limited awareness, and inadequate professional training among personnel involved in disaster response become exposed. The importance of implementing rigorous monitoring and evaluation mechanisms cannot be overstated, as they are indispensable for determining the efficacy of DiDRR initiatives and pinpointing areas that require additional development (Alexander et al., 2012).

The recognition of the need for inclusive approaches to disaster risk reduction is evident in these efforts. However, the effectiveness and reach of these interventions highlight a larger challenge: how to incorporate disability inclusion considerations into both disaster-specific policies and the mainstream development agenda. In order to confront these intricacies, a multidimensional strategy is necessary (Villeneuve et al., 2017). This would involve strengthening legislative measures, allocating resources towards capacity development, integrating disability viewpoints into governance at all levels, encouraging the active involvement of OPDs, and establishing comprehensive accountability

frameworks to facilitate substantial progress (Twigg et al., 2018). Therefore, although progress has been made in the policies regarding DiDRR in South Asian nations, this must be accompanied by concrete measures. The existing governance structures have the capacity to substantially contribute to DiDRR; however, further reflection and revision are required to reconcile policy intentions with practical implications.

Methodology

This chapter has been drafted based on a comprehensive overview of the available literature. The first half of the chapter provides an overview of the global drivers that compels the nations and actors to adhere to certain standards to promote disability inclusion in DRR. It also summarizes the contemporary government and non-government initiatives to augment DiDRR measures. In that sense the first half of the book is more descriptive than analytical and therefore has been placed under the literature review section.

The second half of this book chapter deploys a more innovative and interpretive approach to explore the state of DiDRR in selected South Asian countries. This section interprets and contrasts the DiDRR policy and practice in the four countries of South Asia through analyzing the existing literature and other secondary sources, specifically drawing from peer-reviewed journal articles, credible newspaper articles, and relevant reports from non-profits which are but not limited to United Nations (UN) agencies, Red Cross and Red Crescent (RCRC) movements, International Non-Government Organizations (INGOs), Organizations for Persons with Disability (OPDs) as well as Government Organizations (GOs).

The secondary data was summarized manually by the researchers. The findings were summarized under two pre-identified themes – policy and practice related to DiDRR.. Next, literature related to DiDRR policy and practice was searched in different web search mediums i.e., google, google scholar, prevention web etc. Keywords such as DiDRR, Disability and Disaster, DiDRR policy, social inclusion in DRR, South Asia and specific country names were used to generate searches. The literatures were shortlisted based on their relevance and usefulness to serve the content of this paper by the authors. Then the findings from different countries were compared under different thematic areas mentioned in the tables in the findings section.

This book chapter adopts a descriptive and analytical approach with an attempt to provide a well-rounded view of the current situation and gaps in the arena of DiDRR. The relative strength of the methods and data sources used in this study is that it accumulates a good number of information related to DiDRR in the study area and provides reasonable interpretation and analysis. However, the main weakness of the study is that it does not provide any quantitative findings. The aim of this study, however, is not to quantify or measure anything specific, rather to offer the audience a synopsis of the inclusivity practiced in the initiatives and plans related to disaster management in a highly disaster affected region. But it is important to note that this research could be further expanded by using methods of systematic analysis such as meta-analysis or evidence-based synthesis. Furthermore, quantitative, and qualitative case studies can be conducted using primary and secondary sources of information.

Findings

Significant progress has been made in developing national policies and frameworks for Disability-Inclusive Disaster Risk Reduction (DiDRR) across South Asia. However, a critical gap exists between policy and practice. This section explores the strengths and weaknesses of current DiDRR approaches in India, Bangladesh, Nepal, and Sri Lanka. Analyses of successful case studies implemented by NGOs in each country highlight the importance of community engagement, capacity building, and accessible infrastructure. By identifying common challenges faced across the region, this chapter proposes practical solutions to bridge the policy-practice gap and build truly inclusive DiDRR strategies.

State of Government Policies and Programs for DiDRR in South Asia

India

The legal and policy framework pertaining to Disabled Persons with Rights (DiDRR) in India is shaped by international conventions, including the ratified United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) (UN, 2006). The nation's strategy has been substantially impacted by the implementation of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030 (SFDRR), which serves as a comprehensive national plan (UNDRR, 2015). Significantly, in the wake of the Sendai Framework, India undertook a revision of its National Disaster Management Plan to incorporate the essential component of disability inclusion. Notwithstanding these legal instruments, however, implementation is hindered by uneven resource allocation and lack of awareness at the state and local levels.

Despite the commitment to disability inclusion exhibited by the legal and policy framework for Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) in India, the situation remains inequitable in practice (Datta and Ghosh, 2016; Saurabh et al., 2015; Biggeri et al., 2013). For a thorough illustration of the intricacies associated with the implementation of DiDRR in India, this chapter examines the Community-Based Rehabilitation (CBR) initiative in Odisha following Cyclone Fani in detail.

In 2019, Odisha was profoundly affected by Cyclone Fani, which exposed the preexisting vulnerabilities of persons with disabilities and affected millions (Pradeep, 2023). In response, a CBR program was implemented in Puri district by the Odisha State Commission for Persons with Disabilities (OSCPWD) in collaboration with Action on Disability and Development (ADD). This program prioritized early warning and inclusive evacuation by involving this excluded group of people in the development of evacuation plans and the provision of accessible shelters (Datta and Ghosh, 2016). To facilitate communication, community volunteers underwent training in sign language and disability etiquette. Furthermore, accessibility was a consideration during the reconstruction process, as houses were reconstructed with wider doorways, ramps, and accessible toilets to accommodate persons with disability. Skills development and microfinance assistance were also extended to this group in an effort to assist them in reestablishing their means of subsistence (Iwasaki, 2016).

An additional exemplary instance of government intervention that effectively demonstrates the capabilities of inclusive DRR is the State Disaster Management Authority (SDMA) initiative of the Maharashtra state of India, which was initiated in 2017. The explicit objective of this program was to provide persons with disabilities with the means to participate actively in all stages of disaster management. Public shelters and evacuation centers underwent retrofitting

with accessible toilets, ramps, and wider doorways in response to accessibility audits. Capacity building instructed volunteers, government officials, and persons with disabilities in needs assessment and disability-sensitive communication. Persons with disability played a crucial role in the formulation of localized risk reduction strategies that were specifically designed to address their unique vulnerabilities. Early warning systems employed a variety of communication channels, including sign language broadcasts and SMS with accessibility features, to ensure that all citizens received timely and comprehensible alerts. Finally, specific provisions for people with disabilities in evacuation, food distribution, and medical assistance were incorporated into contingency plans to ensure that their needs were not neglected in times of emergency. Despite persistent obstacles pertaining to resource allocation and implementation, the Maharashtra initiative signifies a noteworthy progression towards inclusive disaster risk reduction (DRR), thereby setting the stage for a society that is more equitable and adequately equipped to confront calamities for all its members (Government of Maharashtra, 2023; Andharia et al., 2023).

Bangladesh

Recognizing the heightened vulnerability of persons with disabilities during disasters, the Government of Bangladesh has taken significant steps towards disability-inclusive disaster risk reduction (DiDRR) on the ground (Ministry of Disaster Management and Relief, 2020; UNDRR, 2020). One notable example of such dedication is the Cyclone Preparedness Programme (CPP), which has been praised for its inclusive approach by ensuring that community volunteers are trained to assist persons with disabilities during evacuations (Farid & Nasreen, 2023; Afroz et al., 2018). Another initiative is the Comprehensive Disaster Management Programme (CDMP), which has worked to mainstream disability in national disaster management plans (Quader et al., 2023). Importantly, the CDMP has sought to collaborate with organizations representing persons with disabilities, encouraging a more inclusive framework for disaster risk reduction (Seddiky, 2020).

An example from the flood-prone district of Sirajganj situated in the northern part of Bangladesh highlights the government's proactive measures. The design of raised platforms known as 'flood shelters' has been altered to include ramps and other accessibility features. These structural modifications, while still limited in number, demonstrate an awareness of the need for physical access for all individuals during a disaster situation (Haque et al., 2011).

In Dhaka, the Fire Service and Civil Defense Department are developing protocols to effectively rescue persons with disabilities in the event of a fire or other emergency. This includes specialized training for responders in areas like disability awareness, communication techniques, safe evacuation procedures for various disabilities, and search and rescue strategies for locating individuals who may be unable to call for help (Mondal, 2019).

Despite these examples, the overall framework for DiDRR in Bangladesh has some implementation inconsistencies. Significant gaps exist between policy and practice, often due to a lack of resources, insufficient data on disability, and low awareness of disability policy and practice among disaster management personnel (Stough & Kang, 2015; UNDRR, 2020). While there has been progress at the policy level, case studies show that these policies must continue to be institutionalized at all levels of government in order to translate into actionable and consistent ground-level interventions.

Nepal

Nepal, the world's fourth most severely impacted country by climate change and disasters, faces rising risks such as flooding, landslides, and drought. The risks are heightened by the region's social vulnerabilities and diverse topography (M'Vuouama et al., 2022; Pokhrel, 2020). Following 2015, Nepal adopted DiDRR principles in accordance with

international patterns. The 2015 Nepal earthquakes served as a catalyst for change, highlighting the vulnerability of persons with disabilities in the face of disasters. As a result, the 2018 Nepal National Disaster Risk Reduction Policy recognized the importance of incorporating disability perspectives into disaster management (IDA, 2022; Government of Nepal, 2018). Furthermore, despite the commendable Local Adaptation Plans for Action (LAPA) framework in Nepal that advocates for community-driven climate adaptation, a critical deficiency remains in the incorporation of persons with disabilities into DIDRR (Darjee et al., 2021).

Despite LAPA's commendable adaptability, bottom-up methodology, and prioritization of vulnerable populations, empirical evidence of disabled persons' participation is limited. The significant impediments posed by societal stigma, discrimination, and accessibility barriers hinder their capacity to engage meaningfully and obtain resources (Rathnayake et al., 2020; UNDP Nepal, 2023). Even with policies in place, their practical implementation can be hindered by several challenges. These include deficiencies in accessibility, inadequate infrastructure, limited capacity building, and persistent socio-cultural barriers such as negative societal beliefs or practices that can affect how people with disabilities or certain genders are included in disaster preparedness and response efforts (Darjee et al., 2021).

Sri Lanka

Sri Lanka faces a complex disaster landscape influenced by both natural hazards such as landslides, floods, and droughts, as well as anthropogenic events such as the devastating Indian Ocean tsunami of 2004 and the protracted civil war that ended in 2009. (Wickramaratne et al. 2012). A comprehensive disaster risk reduction (DRR) strategy is required to effectively address the needs of marginalized groups and physical vulnerabilities in the context of ongoing reconciliation efforts. With the Disaster Management Act (2005), National Policy on Disaster Management (2010), and National Disaster Management Plan, the nation has established a solid policy framework for disaster risk reduction (2013-2017). In particular, these frameworks recognize the significance of inclusion for women and persons with disabilities. National action plans and documents, such as the National Adaptation Plan for Climate Change Impacts and the Roadmap for Disaster Risk Management, demonstrate this commitment (Mendis et al., 2020).

Although these policies demonstrate a commendable commitment to inclusive disaster risk reduction, their practical implementation remains a daunting task. The ongoing process of reconciliation adds another layer of complexity, necessitating tactful strategies to ensure that every community is adequately engaged and empowered (Ministry of Disaster Management & Ministry of National Policy and Economic Affairs, 2017). Furthermore, targeted interventions that address physical, communication, and social barriers are required to ensure accessibility for persons with disabilities during disaster preparation, response, and recovery (Mendis et al., 2020; Ali & Mannakkara. 2023).

Ultimately, all the countries are advancing the implementation of DiDRR by gradually integrating disability inclusion into national disaster management frameworks. Nevertheless, despite these nations' endeavors to align their efforts with the objectives of international drivers and pursue the targets outlined in global frameworks such as the SFDRR, they persistently face practical obstacles. Therefore, continuous research, policy improvement, and capacity development are needed.

Table 1 below provides a comparative overview of the DiDRR status quo across four South Asian countries: India, Bangladesh, Nepal, and Sri Lanka. It examines key features like policy frameworks, implementation strengths and weaknesses, areas for improvement, focus areas, funding mechanisms, and challenges faced. This comparison aims to identify both progress and gaps in ensuring inclusive disaster risk reduction strategies that consider the specific needs of persons with disabilities.

Table 1: Overview of DiDRR Status Quo based on Government Interventions in India, Bangladesh Nepal, and Sri Lanka

Features	India	Bangladesh	Nepal	Sri Lanka
Policy Framework	Strong legal and regulatory framework (National Disaster Management Plan with disability inclusion)	National Disaster Management Act 2012 recognizes disability inclusion; SFDRR; National Action Plan 2015-2030	Comprehensive policies (National Disaster Risk Reduction Policy recognizes disability inclusion)	Robust framework (Disaster Management Act, National Policy on Disaster Management, etc.)
Implementation	Uneven awareness and resource allocation at state/local levels	Gaps between policy and practice; resource limitations; insufficient data and low awareness	Local Adaptation Plan of Action (LAPA) framework promotes community participation, but inclusion of person with disabilities remains limited	Gaps in translating policy to action, reconciliation process adds complexity
Key Initiatives	National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) with specialized units for persons with disability	Cyclone Preparedness Programme (CPP) with trained volunteers for assisting persons with disability	Accessible public shelters and evacuation centers in some states (Maharashtra)	National Disaster Management Center (NDMC) with disability inclusion guidelines
Strengths	Strong commitment at national level	Policy framework recognizes DiDRR and inclusion of persons with disability; collaboration with OPD	Some innovative initiatives like accessible shelters	Established institutional structures
Weaknesses	Uneven implementation across states and regions	Implementation gaps; resource limitations; data and awareness gaps	Limited capacity building at local levels	Challenges in ensuring accessibility in all phases
Areas for Improvement	Strengthen monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to track progress on inclusion of persons with disability	Bridge policy-practice gap; strengthen resource allocation; improve data collection and awareness campaigns	Enhance capacity building for government officials and stakeholders at all levels	Ensure equitable resource allocation and accessibility across regions
Focus Areas	Early warning and communication (SMS with accessibility features)	Community-based disaster preparedness; mainstreaming disability in national plans	Community-based disaster preparedness (Local Adaptation Plans for Action framework)	Accessible WASH facilities in schools
Funding Mechanisms	National Disaster Response Fund (NDRF)	National Disaster Management Fund; international aid	Government budget allocations	International development assistance
Challenges Faced	Limited budget allocation for DiDRR, especially for inclusion of persons with disability	Limited budget allocation; resource constraints; lack of data and awareness	Lack of coordination between different government agencies	Political instability and bureaucracy
Areas to Explore	Public-private partnerships for innovative DiDRR solutions	Utilizing technology for inclusive early warning and communication	Integration of DiDRR with climate change adaptation strategies	South-South cooperation for knowledge sharing and capacity building

Implementation of DiDRR by NGOs: Case Studies from India, Bangladesh, Nepal, and Sri Lanka

A number of NGO-based disability-inclusive development interventions have been carried out in different regions of India. Given the aspect of DiDRR, several case studies have emerged as successful models as part of our larger research project. We report the most promising models here.

India

One model is a project in conflict-affected Jammu and Kashmir, India. It is particularly relevant because the state is a multi-hazard prone region with natural hazards like earthquakes, floods, landslides, avalanches, high velocity winds, and snowstorms (Patel et al., 2020). Handicap International, in collaboration with Hope Disability Centre and Help Foundation, carried out a project in Jammu and Kashmir, India, from 2015 until 2016. Over 10,000 people were reached through capacity-building, rehabilitation services, and awareness campaigns, including persons with disabilities and vulnerable populations in the disaster and conflict-prone region. The project prioritized physical rehabilitation, risk reduction with conventional methods, and community empowerment. With support from various stakeholders and extensive outreach in remote areas, the intervention significantly improved the quality of life and safety of the region's vulnerable groups (CBM, 2020).

Another distinctive initiative undertaken by the Emmanuel Hospital Association (EHA) in India was to bolster disaster preparedness and capacity development, with a specific emphasis on persons with disabilities. EHA trained over 3000 community volunteers and professionals in First Aid and Disaster Response through partnerships with local communities, healthcare institutions, and NGOs, ensuring that persons with disabilities are included in all aspects of disaster planning and relief efforts. Handicap International (2016) reported that key outcomes included developing disability-inclusive hospital preparedness plans, raising awareness of people with disabilities' needs, and increasing collaboration between disability organizations and emergency agencies.

Bangladesh

In Bangladesh, Christian Blind Mission (CBM), in partnership with the prominent disability-inclusion focused NGO—Centre for Disability in Development (CDD), and the local implementing partner Gana Unnayan Kendra (GUK), launched a DiDRR project in rural communities of Gaibandha, northern Bangladesh. This region faced high levels of poverty, discrimination, and social exclusion against persons with disability, who were often overlooked in disaster preparedness efforts. The project aimed to build resilient and inclusive communities through five key interventions, i.e.: strengthening groups with disability and their representation, advocating for inclusive disaster management with local governments, improving accessibility of infrastructure and community involvement in DRR, working with schools to raise awareness and preparedness, and promoting sustainable livelihoods for persons with disability. The project successfully established self-help groups, integrated people with single or multiple disability into disaster management committees, enhanced accessibility of shelters, and implemented school-based DRR programs, ultimately leading to increased participation of disabled people in DRR, improved accessibility, and enhanced disaster preparedness at all levels (Gvetadze & Pertiwi, 2022).

Another initiative named 'Strengthening Resilience in South and Southeast Asia by Integrating Risk Management, Social Inclusion and Socio-Economic Development' is a concerted effort to bolster the socio-economic development

and resilience of disaster-prone communities in Bangladesh has undertaken various initiatives. Funded by Arbeiter-Samariter-Bund (ASB) and led by the Centre for Disability in Development (CDD) in collaboration with development partners, with a primary focus on DiDRR, the project aims to empower women and persons with disability through targeted interventions (CDD, 2021). These include capacity-building programs, climate-smart livelihood development, risk awareness campaigns, and community-based disaster preparedness activities. Specifically, in the Rayenda Union of the Sarankola, Bagerhat District in Bangladesh, nine vulnerable population groups have been identified for comprehensive support. Through strategic partnerships and grassroots engagement, the project endeavors to foster sustainable change and build resilience at the local level. This collaborative approach aimed to addressing the multifaceted challenges faced by marginalized communities and promoting inclusive development practices for long-term impact (Khan et al., 2024).

Nepal

The challenges in Nepal faced by older adults and persons with disabilities during the recovery process were brought to light by the 2015 earthquake. These groups were further hindered by discrimination, disruptions in support networks, and restricted accessibility (M’Vouama et al., 2022). In light of this, CBM Nepal and the National Federation of the Disabled-Nepal (NFDN) collaborated to initiate a project that integrates disability and age considerations into humanitarian initiatives. The project achieved noteworthy outcomes by means of advocacy, capacity development for humanitarian organizations, community mobilization, and accessibility modifications: heightened communities’ empowerment to address their concerns, enhanced program accessibility, and increased awareness of their needs (NFDN, 2023). This case study demonstrates the efficacy of targeted interventions in promoting the participation of marginalized groups in the process of disaster recovery, thereby laying the groundwork for a future in which all individuals are empowered to actively reconstruct their communities and resume their lives, despite the persistence of obstacles.

In response to the critical lack of accessible water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) facilities in Nepali schools, UNICEF Nepal and its partners launched the “Making Development Disability-Inclusive for All Children” initiative, which aimed to alter the inclusive landscape for children over the course of two years. This revolutionary intervention was built around the active involvement of persons with disabilities, granting them the capacity to not only advocate and participate, but also serve as crucial catalysts for change. By participating in policy formulation, audit execution, and guideline establishment, the project ensured that interventions were not only pertinent but also profoundly aligned with the community’s policies. In addition, through capacity building initiatives, stakeholders were endowed with the requisite knowledge and skills to ensure enduring sustainability, thereby cultivating a sense of proprietorship among local communities. Notable outcomes were produced by this multifaceted strategy: The accessibility of WASH facilities experienced a substantial improvement, stakeholders acquired indispensable expertise, and a replicable framework for wider influence surfaced (UNICEF, 2023; WaterAid, 2023).

Furthermore, an important stride in the direction of disaster preparedness that is inclusive of persons with disabilities in Nepal has been the development of easily accessible Information, Education, and Communication (IEC) resources. These materials, which are owned by the National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Authority (NDRRMA) and are specifically designed for people with visual and hearing impairments, are widely distributed via social media. The videos were produced in conjunction with important stakeholders including the Nepal Association of the Blind (NAB), the National Federation of Disabled Nepal (NFDN), and the National Federation of Deaf Nepal (NFDN). To ensure a broader audience’s comprehension, the videos have been enhanced with readable subtitles and sign language interpreters.

The aforementioned collective endeavor signifies a significant triumph in increasing disaster preparedness awareness and accessibility for the population with disabilities in Nepal (UNDP Nepal, 2023; M'Vouama et al., 2022).

Sri Lanka

Notably, Sri Lankan NGOs have demonstrated strong leadership in promoting DiDRR. To provide an example, Practical Action and Oxfam GB collaborated in the Eastern and Northern provinces of Sri Lanka to execute an all-encompassing Community Based Disaster Risk Reduction (CBDRR) initiative. Recognizing the unique vulnerabilities of these regions, the initiative executed an all-encompassing approach that placed emphasis on inclusive governance, sustainable livelihoods, and availability of essential resources. By actively involving underrepresented groups (women, persons with disabilities, and the elderly) in the project's risk assessment, decision-making, and implementation procedures, a sense of ownership was raised, and interventions were customized to suit the particular circumstances. Through the implementation of sustainable practices, income generation, and livelihood diversification, it became feasible to alleviate economic vulnerabilities, particularly among returnee communities. Furthermore, the overall community's readiness and welfare were enhanced through the integration of water, sanitation, and food security initiatives into the project's framework (Oxfam International, 2013).

Although the case studies from the three states demonstrate a consistent dedication to DiDRR, these nations encounter similar obstacles. The comprehension and application of DiDRR principles are primarily in their nascent stages, necessitating the establishment of a resilient monitoring and evaluation system. Nevertheless, promising avenues for expansion are exemplified by innovative practices such as the integration of technology into early warning systems and community engagement strategies. Furthermore, the implementation of regional cooperation frameworks, such as the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), which promote cross-border exchange of best practices, has the potential to greatly improve the implementation of DiDRR strategies in these nations. While these gaps indicate the magnitude of the effort required, they also underscore the possibility of utilizing established frameworks and approaches to promote disaster risk reduction that is more inclusive and efficient. In conjunction with culturally sensitive and locally tailored solutions, a heightened focus on the unique needs of persons with disabilities in times of crisis could significantly enhance the resilience of these communities.

Table 2 summarizes illustrative cases of NGO interventions in disability policy and programs across the four countries studied. The table presents a summary of the programs reviewed through the process described in the methodology section and shows similarities across the four national contexts.

Table 2: NGO-based Interventions on DiDRR in India, Bangladesh, Nepal, and Sri Lanka

Components	India	Bangladesh	Nepal	Sri Lanka
Focus Areas	Community-based rehabilitation & disaster preparedness training for persons with disability & community volunteers	Strengthen Self Help Groups (SHGs), promote representation & participation; advocacy for inclusive disaster management, improving accessibility; enhancing community-based DRR, promote livelihoods	Age and disability integration in relief efforts	Accessible Information, Education, and Communication (IEC) materials
Key Initiatives	Capacity building, rehabilitation, awareness campaigns for persons with disability & vulnerable populations, inclusive evacuation, accessible shelters, livelihood rehabilitation, training for volunteers & professionals in first aid & disaster response, focusing on inclusion of persons with disability	Established dedicated self-help groups; integrated persons with disability into disaster management committees; improved shelter accessibility; implemented school-based disaster preparedness programs; promoted capacity building, climate-smart livelihoods & risk awareness.	Increased awareness, improved program accessibility, empowered communities	Accessible Water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) facilities, stakeholder capacity building, replicable model
Strengths	Empowers marginalized communities through active participation and leadership; collaborative approach with stakeholders	Empowers persons with disability & communities (participation & leadership), addresses long-term needs (sustainability through livelihoods), collaborative approach with stakeholders.	Addresses long-term needs and promoting sustainability through livelihood development and capacity building	Collaborative approach with stakeholders, including persons with disability, local communities, and government agencies
Weaknesses	Limited reach and scalability, particularly in remote or resource-constrained areas; lack of long-term monitoring & evaluation	Limited reach & scalability, dependence on external funding, lack of long-term impact assessment.	Dependence on external funding, potentially impacting long-term sustainability	Lack of long-term monitoring and evaluation to assess the lasting impact of interventions
Areas for Improvement	Replication and scaling up of successful models through partnerships and knowledge sharing; strengthen data collection & impact monitoring	Replicate successful models & strengthen partnerships, enhance data collection & monitor impact.	Building stronger partnerships with local governments and communities to ensure ownership and sustainability	Strengthening data collection and monitoring of impact to measure progress and identify areas for improvement
Funding Mechanisms	International grants and donations from development agencies and private foundations	International grants & donations	International grants; private sector partnerships with corporations and social enterprises	International grants; community fundraising and crowd-sourcing initiatives

Components	India	Bangladesh	Nepal	Sri Lanka
Challenges Faced	Limited awareness and acceptance of disability inclusion among communities and stakeholders; lack of technical expertise & resources (accessibility & assistive technology); complexities of post-disaster contexts (logistical challenges & resource competition)	Limited reach in remote/ resource-constrained areas.	Lack of technical expertise and resources, particularly in areas like accessibility and assistive technology	Complexities of working in post-disaster contexts, including logistical challenges and competition for resources
Areas to Explore	Utilizing technology for inclusive early warning and communication, such as mobile apps with accessibility features; promote mental health & psychosocial support for persons with disability (before, during, & after disasters).	Promote mental health & psychosocial support for persons with disability before, during, & after disasters, introducing mobile apps with accessibility features for inclusive EWS. GO-NGO meaningful collaboration.	Promoting mental health and psychosocial support for persons with disability before, during, and after disasters	Integrating DiDRR with livelihood development initiatives to build resilience and economic opportunities

It is therefore evident that NGO interventions offer valuable models for collaborative DiDRR, strengthening community empowerment, accessible infrastructure, and sustainable livelihoods. However, scaling up successful approaches, strengthening data collection, and addressing unmet needs in areas like mental health support and technical expertise remain crucial for ensuring truly inclusive disaster risk reduction across South Asia.

Discussion of Implications

This chapter identifies three major aspects of DiDRR in the South Asian context. First, it presents the major global frameworks and their influence on the national disaster management policies and plans. Second, it provides an overview of GO and NGO measures to promote DiDRR in four countries in South Asia. Third, it finds that, while governments have drafted robust plans to include disability in their disaster risk reduction efforts, in many cases they are yet to translate those plans into meaningful actions. It is possible that global policies such as SFDRR or SDGs and their call for a more inclusive society have pushed countries to adopt plans and interventions that are inclusive in order to reflect participation in global frameworks. But the authors’ interpretation also suggests that the presence of a strong non-profit network (i.e., UN agencies, Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, international development organizations, national and local NGOs, civil society organizations, humanitarian organizations) has been pivotal in advocating for greater attention to disability in disaster contexts. This chapter finds evidence that governments have modified their plans, which in turn, has created an enabling environment for all the DiDRR actors, especially non-profits, to design and implement interventions to support governments who lack sufficient funds and resources to address disability in disaster.

Furthermore, the recurrent focusing events (small- and large-scale disasters) along with the continuous threat of climate changes may also have contributed to the agenda of protecting the most vulnerable and often excluded groups by reminding the policymakers the need for an inclusive policy given the apparent vulnerabilities (Birkland, 1998). The other interesting findings of the study is that DRR measures appear to last in the instances when GO and NGOs have collaborated at least to some extent. It was reported that many of the interventions of the NGOs are not

retained by the community due to issues such as lack of government support goodwill, resource constraints, absence of monitoring, and lack of effective and ethical leadership in the community. The four national contexts examined here also provide further support for an established finding in the literature that although policies may be established, their implementation and operationalization frequently prove insufficient, resulting in inadequate protection for numerous vulnerable populations, such as persons with disabilities, during catastrophic disasters (Aitsi-Selmi et al., 2015).

However, given the complex interplay between poverty, disability, and susceptibility to disasters, it is imperative to comprehend the socioeconomic determinants in South Asia that contribute to increased vulnerabilities for persons with disabilities. In particular in all of the national contexts studied, lack of access to employment and educational opportunities, and healthcare contributed to poor outcomes in general. The broader literature has found that socioeconomic disadvantages and structural inequalities increase the risk of persons with disabilities to disasters (Twigg et al., 2018). There is no easy remedy, but interventions that extend beyond policies and legislation to include community-driven initiatives and capacity building has been found to ameliorate some of these disadvantages, and this chapter provides further support for value in interaction between international, national, and local frameworks, along with NGO activity (Alexander et al., 2012).

Therefore, despite significant progress in policy development for DiDRR in South Asia, the implementation of these policies continues to be a formidable obstacle. This acknowledges the necessity for collaborative efforts that harness the knowledge and insights of various stakeholders for developing a comprehensive and all-encompassing DRR strategy. Therefore, a pathway for future research and action is suggested by the identified gaps in the literature, which ensures that not only are the perspectives of persons with disabilities heard, but they are also at the center of DRR efforts throughout the region.

This chapter therefore clearly offers both scholarly and practical implications contributing to the existing scholarship on DiDRR. There is a dearth of research on the DiDRR governance, regional governance, or even simply empirical study on DiDRR in the context of South Asia. While this chapter offers suggestive evidence, in future studies researchers can draw on theories of the policy process including the Advocacy Coalition Framework (ACF) and the Multiple Streams Framework (MSF) to analyze the dynamics of policy change surrounding DiDRR. The ACF can help understand the competition and collaboration between advocacy groups (like NGOs) and government actors with differing views on DiDRR strategies. The MSF, on the other hand, provides a broader lens by examining how separate streams of problems, solutions, and political considerations come together to influence policy decisions. This framework can also be valuable for scholars who want to compare DiDRR efforts in other regions with similar contexts. For instance, comparing approaches in neighboring countries within South Asia or geographically similar regions prone to similar disasters (e.g., Southeast Asia or other cyclone-prone areas) could reveal valuable insights. By analyzing these comparisons, researchers can identify successful strategies, common challenges, and emerging trends in DiDRR implementation specific to the South Asian context. This comparative analysis can inform the development of more effective and regionally relevant DiDRR policies and practices. However, it must be noted that the study does not include case studies from important countries such as Pakistan and Bhutan which are of important considerations and can be further studied.

The comparison of four countries shows how they face many of the same challenges including resource constraints, lack of available data, and lack of technical expertise in mental health support and other areas. But each country has made progress in incorporating persons with disabilities and arrived at creative solutions. One way to build on this observation would be for governments and NGOs in South Asia to engage in cooperation by organizing exchange programs for disaster management officials from different South Asian countries. This would allow for peer-to-peer learning and

sharing of best practices in DiDRR. By identifying gaps in both policy and practice, the chapter offers a roadmap for modifying existing plans, designing new plans, and implementing interventions that address these critical issues.

Conclusions

It is evident that, while South Asian countries have made progress in implementing DiDRR policies and establishing collaborations with NGOs, the path to achieving equitable DiDRR continues to be plagued with obstacles. The process of translating policy intentions into concrete results is impeded by financial constraints, a lack of informed participation from relevant parties, and insufficient preparation for those who will implement the policies. The vulnerability of persons with disability during disasters is further intensified by the intricate interaction between poverty and structural inequalities; this emphasizes the necessity for multisectoral strategies that surpass mere policy declarations. Besides the significant role that NGOs fulfill in cultivating inclusivity and bridging divides, they continue to face obstacles in coordinating their endeavors with governmental bodies and expanding prosperous pilot projects throughout diverse socio-political environments. Furthermore, the absence of comprehensive monitoring and evaluation systems poses challenges in determining the efficacy of current interventions and pinpointing potential areas that require enhancement.

In order to fully operationalize the concept of DiDRR in South Asia, prioritizing accessibility and equity must be integrated not only into policies specific to disasters, but also into the overarching agenda for development. This chapter provides suggestive evidence that international frameworks such as the Sendai Framework are associated with national-level action and NGO activity. Further development likely requires strengthened accountability frameworks, investments in capacity building, and the active engagement of DPOs in governance structures. Additionally, this requires the implementation of refined legislation. Finally, to promote an inclusive future where disaster risk reduction safeguards all residents, irrespective of their abilities, it will be imperative to consistently incorporate local data and research findings into policy development and acknowledge the intricacies of each South Asian context.

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