Organizations of Persons with Disabilities (OPDs) in Humanitarian Coordination – What works, what's needed, and how do we proceed?

**Disability Reference Group (DRG) Community of Practice (CoP)
Learning Paper from Session #3 | December 2025**

This learning paper draws from presentations, discussions, and questions emerging from the third session of the DRG CoP on *OPDs in Humanitarian Coordination.*

Session three of the CoP focused on *what has worked well to ensure OPDs are represented and engaged in humanitarian coordination and decision-making; what is needed to improve participation, and the way forward*.

Presenters included colleagues from Light for the World (LFTW), OCHA Myanmar, and the Disability Inclusion Working Group (DIWG) in Afghanistan. Participants of the CoP include representatives from Organizations of Persons with Disabilities (OPDs), UN entities, and NGOs that are directly engaged in humanitarian coordination.

This document is aimed at decision-makers who may benefit from an in-depth look at the how OPDs can be better integrated into humanitarian coordination; the document provides key questions for discussion and consideration moving forward.

This learning paper is divided into three sections:

- **SECTION 1:**
  What has worked well so far to ensure persons with disabilities and their representative organizations are represented and engaged in humanitarian coordination and response?

- **SECTION 2:**
  What are the main gaps that prevent participation and representation?

- **SECTION 3:**
  Key questions for learning, discussion, and coordination between decision-makers, OPDs, local and international humanitarian actors and UN entities to maintain gains and address new gaps.

What has worked well to ensure OPDS are represented and engaged in humanitarian coordination and response?

- **Facilitating participation: disability working groups / task forces / technical advisory groups as entry points to humanitarian coordination for OPDs.**
  These platforms act as enablers as they provide OPDs with a clear entry point into the humanitarian coordination structure.

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EXAMPLE 1:
In Afghanistan, via the Disability Inclusion Working Group (DIWG), OPDs played a key role in the review of the proposals submitted for funding to the annual Afghanistan Humanitarian Fund to ensure needs assessments, monitoring, and project implementation guidelines were in line with good practice on disability inclusion. This Inter-Agency measure allowed OPDs to ensure accountability of humanitarian actors towards persons with disabilities. An OPD also became the co-lead of the DIWG and was invited to attend and input in the ICCG regularly, which contributed to a more comprehensive disability inclusive intersectional approach across clusters on gender, disability, and age.

Contact Afghanistan Disability Inclusion Working Group co-chair Mahpekay Sediqi (mahpekay.sidiqy@yahoo.com) for more information.

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EXAMPLE 2:
In Mozambique, the Forum of Mozambican Associations of Persons with Disabilities (FAMOD) is co-chair of the Disability working group - initially set-up with LFTW - within the Protection cluster. This allowed for OPD-led advocacy based on data collected and resulting evidence, leading to integration of findings in HNRP.

- **Focusing on co-creation: prioritizing equal partnerships.**
  While partnerships with OPDs are becoming more common than before, OPDs only now start playing a key role in shaping programming or the broader response.

In Mozambique, LFTW worked with its long-time partner OPD FAMOD to co-create a Survey for Inclusive Rapid Assessment (SIRA); data collection was led and implemented by OPD members. Equal partnership and participation in the data collection, analysis, and use enabled FAMOD to lead advocacy efforts at local, national, and international levels.

Contact Nadir Abu-samra-Spencer at LFTW (N.Abu-Samra-Spencer@light-for-the-world.org) or Clodoaldo Castiano at FAMOD (clodoaldo.castiano@famod.org) for more information.

- **Investing in capacity strengthening and facilitating access to coordination.**
  OPDs are not homogenous - each OPD has its own goals, capacities, and structure. It is therefore essential that capacity sharing partnerships be contextualized and shaped based on OPD priorities and capacities. It is also essential to engage both sides (OPDs and humanitarian actors) to ensure they understand each other's "language".

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In Burkina Faso, LFTW adopted a capacity sharing approach with its OPD partner, providing essential knowledge on humanitarian coordination systems, supporting the setting of an advocacy plan, and facilitating guided interactions with humanitarian actors.

Contact Philippe Compaore at LFTW (P.Compaore@light-for-the-world.org) for more information.

- **Setting priorities: persons with disabilities and their representative organizations take a lead in defining priorities for humanitarian response.**
  Meaningful engagement with OPDs and other local organizations can ensure the humanitarian response is systematically considering the unique requirements of men, women, boys, and girls with and without disabilities across all sectors of intervention.

In Myanmar, OPDs highlighted the need for accessible WaSH infrastructure, inclusive early warning systems and preparedness actions that reach people with different types of disabilities. OPDs participated from the beginning – not only in consultations but also in decision-making, enabling the response to be more grounded in lived experience, more relevant to diverse needs, and more accountable to affected communities. OPD involvement guided clusters to better integrate accessibility features into WaSH designs, incorporate disability inclusive messaging into early-warning dissemination, and continued strengthening of preparedness plans to ensure persons with disabilities are represented and their unique needs and requirements addressed.

Contact Myo Thida Swe at OCHA (myo.thidaswe@un.org) for more information.

- **Inter-Agency resource mobilization: Dedicated budget lines in response planning.** Depending on level of disability inclusiveness, ensuring budget lines dedicated to disability inclusion in Inter-Agency data analysis and collection efforts, and inter-cluster coordination (for reasonable accommodation) are key requirements that demonstrate willingness to uphold commitments to disability inclusive humanitarian coordination. Planning for engagement of OPDs in cluster, inter-sectorial working groups etc. without dedicated resources simply does not work.

In Myanmar, the 2025/2026 Humanitarian Program Cycle included a dedicated budget line for disability inclusion under the Coordination and Common Services (CCS) sector. The purpose of this dedicated funding is to enable systematic engagement with OPDs in HPC consultations; support the stabilization of the Technical Advisory Group on Disability Inclusion (TAG-DI) through coordination and facilitation support; and ensure accessibility features—such as interpretation, reasonable accommodation, and adapted materials—are consistently integrated across Inter-Agency processes. In 2026, this will allow the TAG-DI to fundraise and operationalize its prioritized workplan through the consortium proposal, which focuses on strengthening OPD leadership, building technical capacity, and advancing disability-inclusive approaches across clusters.

Contact Myo Thida Swe at OCHA (myo.thidaswe@un.org) for more information.

In Mozambique, LFTW allocated budget for RA to ensure OPD members could play an active role in collecting, analysis and using data. This enabled evidence-based advocacy by the OPD through available coordination mechanisms and shaping of Mozambique's HNRP to better identify and remove existing barriers for persons with disabilities.

Contact Nadir Abu-samra Spencer at LFTW (N.Abu-Samra-Spencer@light-for-the-world.org) for more information.

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What are the identified gaps that prevent participation and representation in humanitarian coordination?

- **Limited OPD access to sustained funding.**
  OPDs typically receive funding as local partners of international organizations; very seldom do OPDs benefit from direct and stable funding aligned with their advocacy goals and priorities. This has resulted in OPDs relying on unpaid volunteers, many of whom are persons with disabilities with lived experience. However, reliance on unpaid volunteers is simply not sustainable, preventing the continued and meaningful involvement and representation of disability in humanitarian coordination spaces.

- **Lack of recognition as equal stakeholders to be engaged in humanitarian coordination and Inter-Agency level.**
  OPDs are often seen as beneficiaries rather than technical partners with lived experiences. It is also very common to see OPDs as "local partners" or "service providers" in partnerships, not as equal technical partners with lived experiences who bring added value to decision-making. Finally, OPDs are often "consulted" by humanitarian actors, but seldom supported technically or financially to ensure sustained involvement beyond consultation.

- **Absence of consistent Inter-Agency resource mobilization.**
  Inviting OPDs to engage is often insufficient: while the significant gaps in disability inclusion are widely acknowledged at all levels within humanitarian coordination structures, there remains a key gap in budgeting. RA budget lines are required to ensure meaningful participation.

- **Lack of joint targets that are in line with prevalence and need.**
  Setting of joint targets based on accurate PIN estimations of men, women, girls, and boys with disabilities in the HNPR is essential to ensure humanitarian actors are obliged to uphold commitments to disability inclusion in programming. This also provides the space for OPDs to guide humanitarian actors in inclusive programming in order to meet set targets. Experience indicates that without clear targets, there is little motivation to systematically consider disability or OPD engagement across the Project Cycle.

Key questions for learning, discussion, and coordination between decision-makers, OPDs, humanitarian actors, local actors, and un entities to address gaps

- What are some ways OPDs can directly access funding opportunities? How can humanitarian actors facilitate their access?

- The setting of targets for gender have worked very well over the past decades to ensure women and girls are considered in humanitarian programming and response. With age and gender disaggregated data already firmly imbedded into humanitarian systems, what are the reasons for not securing resources to ensure disability is similarly entrenched in our work?

- How can we best ensure partnerships between international organizations and OPDs are driven by an alignment of goals, approach, and priorities rather than by conditions that may come with funding?

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