

Notes on Climate Change in West Asia

Presented by Dr Bhushan Punani, President, ICEVI West Asia during the IDDC Climate and Disability

At the outset, I bring you greetings of our President, Dr Frances Gentle; our CEO, Dr. MNG Mani; and my colleague and Treasurer, Ms Nandini Rawal and our 2 Vice Presidents, Ms Praveena Sukhraj and Ms Rima Canawati. International Council for Education of People with Visual Impairment (ICEVI) is a membership organization with a mission to promote access to inclusive, equitable and quality education for all people with visual impairment. The ICEVI is actively involved in climate change issue and to give further impetus to this initiative, it has established the Climate Change Education Committee

Our Experience

Happy to be part of this panel discussion as I had the following exposures in respect of disastrous outcomes of Climate Change

1. The Blind People's Association where I provide my services as General Secretary worked closely with all disability development organizations during the devastating earthquake that took place on Kutch on 26th January, 2001. BPA was appointed the Disability Relief Organization by Provincial as well as National Government.
2. Our team worked closely with CBM, Merlin, WHO, UNICEF, International Red Cross, Die Johanniter, European Union, European Red Cross for providing relief to persons having disabilities and those who acquired temporary or permanent disabilities due to injuries.
3. BPA established a permanent Disaster Relief Centre at Bhuj with the support of Otto Bock, Handicap International, European Union, National Government, CBM and number of other support and relief organizations.
4. Worked on the Committee which developed Guidelines on Disaster Preparedness under the leadership of Handicap International.
5. Visiting faculty on Disaster Relief Management at National Disaster Management Institute, New Delhi
6. Presented a paper on Disaster Relief at International Conference on Disaster Relief and Disaster Preparedness at Bhubaneswar
7. Supported relief work during Tsunami in Sri Lanka and Earthquake in Kathmandu and Sri Nagar

8. Conducted a lecture in Tajikistan on disaster preparedness
9. Working actively to provide relief to Covid affected people for their survival support, PSO2 Support, managing an Oxygen Bank and providing transit quarantine support to persons with mild Covid.
10. ICEVI also developed newer techniques like Mobility and use of Human Guide Technique during Covid

Now, studying effect of Climate Change on persons with disabilities and disabling conditions resulting from climate change shall be area of great interest to ICEVI and our team which works on effect of disasters on disability.

A. Established facts on effect of Climate Change on Disabling conditions

It is a universal fact that climate change affects persons with disabilities very adversely due to following factors:

1. There is high correlation between poverty and disability – as climate change affects poor people very adversely, thus people with disabilities are bound to suffer due to their poverty
2. The disasters resulting from Climate Change cause variety of disabling conditions like loss of limbs, spinal injuries, eye infections, psychological conditions and psychiatric manifestations
3. Biggest challenge is evacuation of persons with disabilities during disasters due to their restricted mobility and need for special lifting arrangements.
4. Delay in getting warning signals of disasters results into excessive damage and loss of life
5. Reaching relief services to such persons during such disasters is a big challenge
6. Many people with disabilities lose orthoses, prosthesis and rehabilitation and other assistive devices
7. These disasters cause adverse effect, many a time irreversible one on the health and wellbeing of people with disabilities

B. Classical effects of Climate Change in West Asia:

- Pollution in Delhi and North India

- Floods in Sri Lanka
- Tsunami in Andaman & Nicobar and South India
- Floods in Kathmandu
- Assam, Bihar, Kerala, Karnataka Floods
- Floods in Pakistan and Sri Nagar
- Frequent Floods in Tajikistan
- Frequent Sliding of Rocks in Himalaya region
- Glacier Bursts in Uttrakhand on 7th February, 2021
- Number of cyclones like Fani, Nisarga, Bulbul, Nilofar and recent one Tauktae – As Sea Surface Temperature has increased rapidly in the last century and that is over the threshold values, which leads to active convection, torrential rainfall and intense cyclones

While floods, Tsunami, sliding rocks and draughts are common in many countries, pollution in Delhi, Glacier Burst in Himalayas and disastrous cyclones are most disastrous outcome of Climate Change.

D. Pollution in Delhi – a Warning Signal of Climate Change:

A research study shows that ¹

- Air pollution might not seem to be an immediate concern with the only issues being a cough and perhaps burning eyes.
- But what most of us fail to realize is that effects of air pollution range from losing your mental faculties to even increasing your chances of getting diabetes, one of the biggest killers in India.
- From our mental faculties and the reproductive cycle to even hiking chances of diabetes, air pollution has a head-to-toe negative effect on human health.
- In children and adults, both short- and long-term exposure to ambient air pollution can lead to reduced lung function, respiratory infections and aggravated asthma

¹ <https://www.indiatoday.in/education-today/gk-current-affairs/story/how-does-air-pollution-affect-health-these-9-studies-show-the-horrifying-reality-1614883-2019-11-01>

All these conditions have adverse effect on people with disabilities and result into disabling conditions.

E. Glacier Bursts in Utrakhand on 7th February, 2021

- A flood was caused by a portion of glacier being torn away due to climate change and causing a landslide.
- Several scientists believe that the change occurring in the mountain ecosystems may provide an early glimpse of what could come to pass in a lowland environment.
- As the earth heats up, mountains glaciers melt at unprecedented rates, while rare plants and animals struggle to survive over ever diminishing areas. As a result, people living in the mountains face a great deal of hardship.
- Melting of Himalayan glaciers has doubled since the start of the 21st century due to rising temperature, losing over vertical foot-and-half or ice each year and potentially threatening water supply for hundreds of millions of people in counties, including India.
- An analysis spanning 40 years of satellite observations across India, China, Nepal, and Bhutan indicated that climate change is eating the Himalayan glaciers, according to a study published in 2019².

The people downstream the glacier burst had no scope to escape the disaster, many got buried in debris, many more people washed away in floods and many of them who survived may acquire disabilities. Most people with disabilities would find it difficult to cope up or survive during devastating avalanche resulting due to Glacier Slide

How big of a priority is work on climate adaptation in India

India is committed to all initiative at national and global level for reducing disastrous effect of climate change. It has taken following initiatives in this regard:

² <https://www.downtoearth.org.in/blog/climate-change/chamoli-glacier-burst-it-is-time-to-learn-from-our-mistakes-75419>

- It has established National Disaster Management Agency. It has established State Level Organizations on Disaster Management and Climate Change.
- It has prepared guidelines on Disaster preparedness
- It has promoted a strategic agency that works towards awareness creation and low carbon development
- It has established a national network on reporting level of pollution and monitoring other indicators of climate change.
- It has evolved and implemented a number of legislations pertaining to climate change.

When it comes to effect of climate change and disasters on persons with disabilities, India is one of the few countries which has included a Section in its National Legislation on Disability which reads as:

“Section 8. (1) The persons with disabilities shall have equal protection and safety in situations of risk, armed conflict, humanitarian emergencies and natural disasters.

(2) The National Disaster Management Authority and the State Disaster Management Authority shall take appropriate measures to ensure inclusion of persons with disabilities in its disaster management activities as defined under clause (e) of section 2 of the Disaster Management Act, 2005 for the safety and protection of persons with disabilities.

(3) The District Disaster Management Authority constituted under section 25 of the Disaster Management Act, 2005 shall maintain record of details of persons with disabilities in the district and take suitable measures to inform such persons of any situations of risk so as to enhance disaster preparedness.

(4) The authorities engaged in reconstruction activities subsequent to any situation of risk, armed conflict or natural disasters shall undertake such activities, in consultation with the concerned State Commissioner, in accordance with the accessibility requirements of persons with disabilities.

Thus India has followed an inclusive approach in respect of disaster preparedness and disaster management for persons with disabilities. While the legislation is well drafted and ensures consideration of various aspects of climate change relevant to persons with disabilities, the stumbling block is

level of implementation of the same. We need to do lot of advocacy to ensure that such legislative and administrative provisions are implemented effectively

Capacity Building: Yes, India has taken lead in imparting training to people, organizations and State Machineries from across India and other developing countries in respect of handling climate change and disaster management. The National Disaster Management Institute, New Delhi as well Gujarat State Disaster Management Institutes have been imparting training in aspects to participants from Asia Pacific and Africa region. Both these institutes have developed world class facilities for imparting such training. Both these institutes and many such other institutes follow inclusive policy as regard specific needs of people with disabilities.

In respect of Climate Change, India has taken the following specific initiatives:

- Master of Science Course on Climate Change Impact Management by Management Education Centre on Climate Change
- Teachers Training Program on Climate Change – already trained 500 teachers
- Centre for Climate Research, Ministry of Earth Sciences
- Divecha Centre for Climate Change, Indian Institute of Science
- Post Graduate Program in Climate Change
- Post Graduate Diploma in Climate Change

The ICEVI shall be pleased to extend its support to any initiative on climate change as well as disaster management. In the coming years, ICEVI shall also be pleased to share its thoughts on Climate Change Education