



Situation Analysis Report: Impact of the Earthquake on Organizations of Persons with Disabilities in Mandalay and Sagaing Regions, Myanmar

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Executive Summary

This report presents a rapid assessment of the profound impact of the 28 March 2025 earthquake on Organizations of Persons with Disabilities (OPDs) and persons with disabilities in the Mandalay and Sagaing regions of Myanmar. The earthquake, a significant humanitarian event affecting over 17 million people across central Myanmar and resulting in substantial casualties [1], has disproportionately impacted persons with disabilities (PWDs). Conducted through a collaborative effort between UNFPA Myanmar and the Myanmar Independent Living Initiative (MILI), this rapid survey utilized Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) with 15 OPDs and special schools (including 2 organizations focused on women with disabilities), in-depth interviews with 61 individual survivors with disabilities (30 of whom were women with disabilities), and a comprehensive desk review of publicly available information. The findings underscore the critical challenges faced by OPDs in supporting their constituents amidst widespread infrastructure damage, loss of essential resources, and significant barriers to accessing humanitarian assistance. This report details the scope of the impact on OPDs and their members, assesses the multifaceted damage incurred, outlines the immediate and long-term needs identified, analyzes the current response landscape, and concludes with key recommendations for ensuring inclusive and targeted humanitarian action. The direct testimonies of affected individuals and OPD representatives, integrated throughout this report, serve to amplify their voices and underscore the urgent imperative for a disability-inclusive response.

1. Introduction and Methodology

1.1 Background of the Disaster

On 28 March 2025, a powerful earthquake struck Myanmar, triggering a large-scale humanitarian crisis. Publicly available data indicates a devastating toll, with over 3,000 reported fatalities, 5,000 injuries, 370 missing persons, and an estimated 17 million individuals affected across the country, particularly in central Myanmar [1].

1.2 Rationale for the Assessment

Recognizing the heightened vulnerabilities and specific needs of persons with disabilities (PWDs) in the context of natural disasters, UNFPA Myanmar partnered with the Myanmar Independent Living Initiative (MILI) to conduct a rapid assessment focused on the impact on Organizations of Persons with Disabilities (OPDs) in the severely affected Mandalay and Sagaing regions. This assessment aims to provide timely and relevant information to inform targeted and inclusive humanitarian response efforts.

1.3 Assessment Methodology

This rapid survey employed a mixed-methods approach, conducted between 1 April to 3rd April 2025]:

- **Focus Group Discussions (FGDs):** Fifteen FGDs were conducted with representatives from OPDs and special schools operating within the Mandalay and Sagaing regions. The participating organizations represented a diverse spectrum of disabilities, including physical, visual, hearing, and intellectual impairments. Notably, two of the participating organizations specifically focused on the needs of women with disabilities.
- **Individual Interviews:** Sixty-one in-depth interviews were conducted with individual survivors with various types of disabilities residing in the affected regions. This included 30 women with disabilities, ensuring a specific focus on their experiences and challenges.
- **Desk Review:** A thorough review of publicly available updates and reports from humanitarian agencies, and media coverage related to the earthquake was undertaken to provide context and corroborate findings.

The active participation of OPDs in this assessment proved instrumental in its swift and effective data collection, enabling identification of the needs and real situation of PWDs and amplifying their voices in the context of the earthquake.

2. Impact on Organizations of Persons with Disabilities and Their Members

2.1 Number of Affected OPDs

This rapid assessment engaged with 15 OPDs and special schools actively serving the Mandalay and Sagaing regions. Of these, 11 OPDs and special schools reported direct negative impacts as a result of the earthquake. Furthermore, the disaster has led to an increase in the number of individuals acquiring disabilities within the affected population, placing additional demands on the resources and capacity of OPDs.

2.2 Impact on persons with disabilities

Preliminary reports from the surveyed OPDs and special schools indicate that approximately 330 persons with disabilities (PWDs) in the Mandalay and Sagaing regions have been directly affected by the earthquake. These figures are still being consolidated by the OPDs. Tragically, this includes the death of one woman with a visual impairment. Most affected individuals have experienced a range of devastating impacts, including physical injuries, the complete or partial collapse of their homes, significant damage to property (such as roofs, walls, and sanitation facilities), loss of essential household goods, and the disruption or complete loss of livelihoods, notably impacting sectors such as blind massage businesses and family-based employment. Compounding these challenges, many individuals are experiencing significant psychological distress as a result of the trauma.

2.3 Displacement and Fear of Aftershocks

Fear of recurring aftershocks has compelled a significant number of affected individuals, including those whose homes remained structurally intact, to seek temporary shelter in public spaces or open fields, often lacking adequate protection from the elements.

2.4 Damage to Infrastructure and Resources

- **Infrastructure Damage:** Extensive damage to the physical infrastructure of OPD facilities and the personal properties of their members has been reported. The full extent of this damage is still being assessed due to ongoing communication and transportation constraints. Affected OPDs and special schools reported the collapse of buildings, damage to dormitories and dining areas, loss of critical office equipment and documentation, and the disruption or cessation of ongoing projects and activities.
- **Damage to Assistive Devices and Equipment:** Pre-existing shortages of essential assistive devices for PWDs have been significantly exacerbated by the earthquake. Many existing devices have been damaged or destroyed, and the emergence of new disabilities has generated an increased and urgent demand for mobility and communication aids.
- **Damage to Communication and Information Resources:** The widespread disruption of telecommunication and internet services has disproportionately affected PWDs, particularly those with visual and hearing impairments. This has severely hampered their ability to seek emergency assistance, access crucial earthquake-related information, and obtain necessary support for their disabilities and immediate survival needs. As a person with a hearing disability from KDN poignantly stated,

"Don't leave us behind during natural disasters. We are human beings who feel and suffer just like everyone else."

3. Needs Assessment

3.1 Access to Essential Services

PWDs and their OPDs face significantly greater challenges in accessing essential services compared to the general population in the aftermath of the earthquake. Pre-existing barriers to community and emergency services have been amplified by the disaster. Damage to critical infrastructure, including hospitals, clinics, and pharmacies, has severely limited healthcare provision. While temporary health centers have been established, inaccessible public transportation renders them extremely difficult for PWDs to reach. Information and communication services remain largely inaccessible. The severe impact on public toilets and

WASH facilities has forced many, particularly women and girls with disabilities, to resort to unsafe and unsanitary alternatives, as highlighted by one woman with a disability:

"I am even afraid to use the toilet, fearing that another earthquake might strike while I'm inside. As a person with a disability, I constantly worry—what if another earthquake happens while I'm inside a damaged house? The fear and anxiety never go away."

3.2 Immediate Humanitarian Needs

Priority immediate needs identified through this assessment include:

- Provision of adequate food and nutrition packages.
- Access to safe and clean drinking water.
- Supply of essential medicines and first-aid materials.
- Distribution of solar lighting solutions.
- Provision of temporary shelter options, such as tents or tarpaulins.
- Distribution of mosquito nets to prevent disease.
- Supply of basic kitchen and cooking materials.
- Facilitation of access to electricity and power banks for charging essential communication devices.
- Targeted health interventions, including cholera vaccines and snake venom antidote where relevant.
- Distribution of personal hygiene kits.
- Urgent provision of assistive devices, including wheelchairs, crutches, and hearing aids.
- Critical need for mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) and the establishment of peer support networks for PWDs.
- Establishment of safe spaces and the provision of dignity kits specifically for women and girls with disabilities.
- Urgent need for accessible and safe sanitation facilities.

As a person with physical disability from the Myanmar Physically Handicapped Association emphasized,

"People with disabilities need immediate assistance with food, medicine, and shelter, as well as long-term rehabilitation. Those who have lost their families face additional emotional trauma and survival challenges."

3.3 Barriers and Accessibility Challenges

PWDs face numerous barriers in accessing humanitarian assistance, including:

- Inaccessible transportation options prevent them from reaching food and aid distribution points.

- Long queues at distribution sites posing significant physical challenges for individuals with mobility impairments.
- A prevailing charity-based approach to aid distribution that can undermine the dignity and equitable access of PWDs.
- A significant lack of accessible information regarding earthquake response efforts, including distribution schedules and locations.
- The concerning non-inclusion of OPDs in rapid needs assessments conducted by various humanitarian actors.
- Insufficient representation of OPDs in emergency response coordination bodies and a general lack of consultation with disability groups.
- Inadequate disability awareness and understanding among humanitarian aid workers.
- High prices of essential goods and financial constraints limiting access to critical services such as healthcare, WASH facilities, and opportunities for income generation.

3.4 Long-Term Recovery and Rehabilitation Needs

Long-term recovery efforts must embed disability inclusion across all stages of disaster preparedness, policies, and programs. Key long-term needs identified include:

- Development and dissemination of Information, Education, and Communication (IEC) materials in accessible formats tailored to diverse types of disabilities.
- Establishment of accessible emergency hotlines and feedback mechanisms to ensure PWDs can effectively communicate their needs and concerns.
- Provision of comprehensive disaster awareness and preparedness training programs specifically designed for OPDs and their members. As a mother of a child with intellectual disability from the Myanmar Down Syndrome Association requested,

"Please provide disaster management training and support to our OPDs, as we need capacity in this area."
- Ongoing provision of comprehensive support services for PWDs, including counseling, MHPSS, peer parental support programs, provision of appropriate assistive devices, financial assistance to rebuild livelihoods, and access to inclusive job opportunities.
- Prioritization of the renovation and reconstruction of damaged housing and community facilities, ensuring full accessibility standards are integrated into the design and construction.
- Establishment of designated inclusive and accessible evacuation centers that meet the specific needs of PWDs.
- Formal and meaningful inclusion of OPDs in all relevant emergency response coordination bodies at local, regional, and national levels.

3.5 Funding and Resource Requirements

Addressing the immediate and long-term needs of PWDs and OPDs effectively requires a dedicated and flexible allocation of financial and technical resources. Key considerations include:

- Prioritization of disability inclusion as a core component within all funding calls and humanitarian programs related to the earthquake response and recovery.
- Implementation of more flexible and accessible due diligence requirements for OPDs seeking funding, recognizing their crucial role and potential limitations in administrative capacity.
- Provision of dedicated technical and financial support to OPDs to enhance their capacity in disaster risk reduction and management.
- Incorporation of contingency funds within project budgets to enable rapid and flexible responses to the evolving and specific needs of PWDs.

4. Current Response Situation and Gaps

4.1 Current Aid and Support

While some general humanitarian assistance, such as food and drinking water, has reportedly reached households including persons with disabilities, there has been a significant and concerning lack of targeted and specific support tailored to the unique needs of PWDs and OPDs. Humanitarian and aid agencies have largely not adequately addressed these specific requirements. OPDs themselves are actively engaged in collecting detailed information on the situation of their members but face significant financial constraints that limit their ability to provide immediate and effective assistance. As a person with visual disability from Bawa Thit Blind School (Meiktila) described, **"Due to the earthquake, our members are experiencing symptoms such as headaches. Some are sleeping on the streets without shelter, which increases their risk of illness. We urgently need safe shelters and vaccines to protect them."**

4.2 Key Gaps in Response Efforts

Critical gaps identified in the current response include:

- A significant absence of comprehensive and disaggregated data on affected PWDs and the availability of emergency support services, resulting in many individuals being overlooked and left behind.
- A lack of systematic and meaningful engagement of OPDs in the needs assessment processes conducted by UN agencies and other humanitarian actors.
- A critical shortage of targeted and inclusive support programs specifically designed to address the diverse needs of PWDs and to bolster the capacity of OPDs to respond effectively.

4.3 OPD Involvement in Coordination Mechanisms

A notable absence of effective coordination mechanisms for disability inclusion within the broader emergency response efforts persists. OPDs are currently not adequately represented in key coordination bodies operating in the affected areas, hindering their ability to advocate for the needs of their constituents and contribute their valuable expertise.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

The 28 March 2025 earthquake has had a profound and disproportionate impact on persons with disabilities and the organizations that represent them in the Mandalay and Sagaing regions of Myanmar. This rapid assessment highlights the significant challenges they face, ranging from direct physical impact and loss of resources to systemic barriers in accessing essential humanitarian assistance. The urgent need for a disability-inclusive humanitarian response is clear.

Based on the findings of this assessment, the following key recommendations are directed to all relevant stakeholders, including humanitarian agencies, donors, and other actors involved in the earthquake response and recovery efforts:

- **Prioritize Meaningful Engagement of OPDs:** Actively involve OPDs as key partners from the outset of all disaster preparedness, assessment, response, and recovery efforts. Their direct participation is essential for ensuring that interventions are relevant, accessible, and effective for PWDs. As a person with disability from Thit Thit Aung (Mandalay) emphasized, *"In Amarapura, many persons with disabilities have been affected. They have numerous needs but do not know how to ask for help. It would be better if donors prioritized the persons with the disabilities and elderly for door-to-door support."*
- **Strengthen Coordination for Disability Inclusion:** Establish clear, consistent, and adequately resourced coordination mechanisms that specifically focus on disability inclusion within the broader humanitarian response framework. Ensure the active and meaningful representation of OPDs in all relevant coordination bodies.
- **Ensure Accessible Information and Communication:** Prioritize the provision of all relevant information regarding the disaster response in accessible formats, utilizing diverse communication channels to reach PWDs with different types of impairments.
- **Promote Universal Accessibility:** Integrate universal design principles and accessibility standards into all aspects of humanitarian assistance, including shelter, WASH facilities, transportation, and distribution points.
- **Provide Targeted and Inclusive Assistance:** Develop and implement specific programs and interventions that directly address the unique needs and vulnerabilities of PWDs, including the provision of assistive devices, MHPSS, accessible healthcare, and livelihood support.

- **Build Capacity of OPDs:** Provide dedicated technical and financial support to strengthen the capacity of OPDs to effectively participate in disaster preparedness, response, and advocacy efforts.
- **Collect Disaggregated Data:** Ensure the systematic collection of disaggregated data by disability type and other relevant factors to inform targeted interventions and monitor the impact of assistance.
- **Promote Disability Awareness:** Conduct comprehensive disability awareness training for all humanitarian actors to foster a better understanding of the rights and needs of PWDs.

By implementing these recommendations, humanitarian actors can ensure a more inclusive and effective response that upholds the dignity and rights of persons with disabilities affected by the 28 March 2025 earthquake in Myanmar.

Reference

1. Myanmar Earthquake Flesh Update # 3, OCHA, 3 April 2025