

Finding and assisting survivors with disabilities



formerly **cbm**
forever **Christian**

Cyclone Idai Emergency Rapid Assessment by Hope and Healing International and its partners

BACKGROUND:

Cyclone Idai slammed into the coast of Mozambique on March 15, 2019. Torrential rains, winds, mudslides killed more than 1,000 people, and wiped out huge tracts of farmland and hundreds of thousands of homes in Mozambique, Zimbabwe and Malawi. In the days and weeks following, the UN estimated some 1.85 million people urgently in need of emergency humanitarian assistance.

We know from decades of experience that those who can't see the way to safety, who can't move their wheelchairs through floodwaters, who can't hear the warning signs around them, are most vulnerable in natural disasters.

We also know that those with disability, together with the very young and the very old, are often overlooked in the stampede of relief efforts following the disaster. Many can't get to the food and water distribution points at all. Those who do reach the distribution points are less able to vie for limited essential supplies and services in the crushing, desperate crowds.

Food, shelter, clean water, medicines – without these essentials, the most vulnerable starve. Thousands fall sick from deadly water-borne diseases. People survive disasters like Cyclone Idai only to die in the aftermath.

THE NEED:

In the days following Cyclone Idai, Hope and Healing International and our partners noted with concern the dearth of information about the effects of the cyclone on people with disabilities. Reports from our partners warned of the systematic exclusion of people with disabilities in the relief programs by both state and non-state actors.

Hope and Healing International worked with two trusted partners – Jairos Jiri Association in Zimbabwe and MACOHA in Malawi – to conduct emergency rapid assessments across 4 wards in eastern Zimbabwe and 14 districts in southern Malawi. The populations in these areas were severely affected by mudslides and floods, triggered by Cyclone Idai.

THE GOAL:

The goal was to identify survivors with disabilities and their families, to determine the scale of the need and to gather information about how these families were affected by

Cyclone Idai. The research was meant to ascertain the vulnerability of these families to food insecurity and disease in the days and weeks to come. The findings were to cover the gap on the information available on public domain which is usually silent about people with disabilities in this tragic situation; and to direct subsequent programming to meet the real and unique needs of this population.

THE METHODOLOGY:

In both Zimbabwe and Malawi, rapid assessment teams used a mixed method approach, including:

- Household questionnaires
- Interviews with community leaders, school leaders, committee leaders of displaced persons' camps
- Interviews and focus groups with people with disabilities and caregivers – with a focus on children with disabilities
- Site visits to homes
- Site visits to displaced persons' camps
- Desk studies to establish background and secondary data.

The mixed method approach was designed to increase the validity, reliability and integrity of collected data. The study was permission-based and participatory.

FINDINGS:

The assessment exercise identified 4,831 children and adults with disabilities in the surveyed wards and districts in Zimbabwe and Malawi. Data indicated that many of these people are not being captured in broader government and non-government surveys and records. Many are not able to access relief aid.

As a result, the rapid assessment found an urgent need for essential assistance for those with disabilities in the weeks following the cyclone, including: food, water, clothes, beddings, soap, domestic utensils and shelter recovery for survivors with disabilities.

Data supports our past experience – that the general devastation wrought by Cyclone Idai to lives, shelter and WASH (Water and Sanitation for Health) infrastructure, is felt doubly hard by families living in deepened poverty due to disability. These families are at heightened risk of waterborne diseases due to damaged and contaminated water points. They are even more food insecure than they were, given looming drought and increasingly unpredictable weather patterns.

Damage to road infrastructure, communication systems and education infrastructure,

worsens the dire situation of people with disabilities.

- Persons with disabilities reported others being left behind during initial rescue and evacuations
- 66% of families with a disabled member in Zimbabwe reported damage to shelter that can be repaired, 18% reported destruction beyond repair
- 77.7% reported that their crops were destroyed and arable land destroyed as well
- 56.7% people with disabilities reported losing their livelihoods to the cyclone – with only 21.8% who said they had a consistent source of income
- Many reported that the cyclone destroyed their assistive devices
- Persons with albinism bemoaned lack of security in the camps as they are living in fear within the open spaces provided by the government

IN THEIR OWN WORDS:

“We are experiencing so many challenges at this camp – food shortage, clothes, blankets, wheelchairs.” – Survivor of Cyclone Idai, with a disability, in Malawi

“We have been here for some days but we are being accommodated in open spaces. Moreover, we are hardly given food. For instance, yesterday, we were given a cup of rice each and some of our colleagues with disabilities went away with nothing and slept on an empty stomach.” – White Baisoni, survivor of Cyclone Idai with a disability at one of the displaced persons’ camps

CONCLUSION:

In the days and weeks following Cyclone Idai, government, humanitarian non-government organizations and mainstream media have overlooked the dire plight of thousands of families living with the added challenge of disability.

There is an urgent need to address the unique needs of these families, in cooperation with all those delivering humanitarian relief, to help them re-build their lives and to begin to lay disaster preparedness plans that include this sizable and poorest segment of the population.

Hope and Healing’s Rapid Assessment report gives important and compelling evidence upon which to build these collaborative conversations and partnerships, so families caught in the cycle of poverty and disability are not forgotten in disasters.