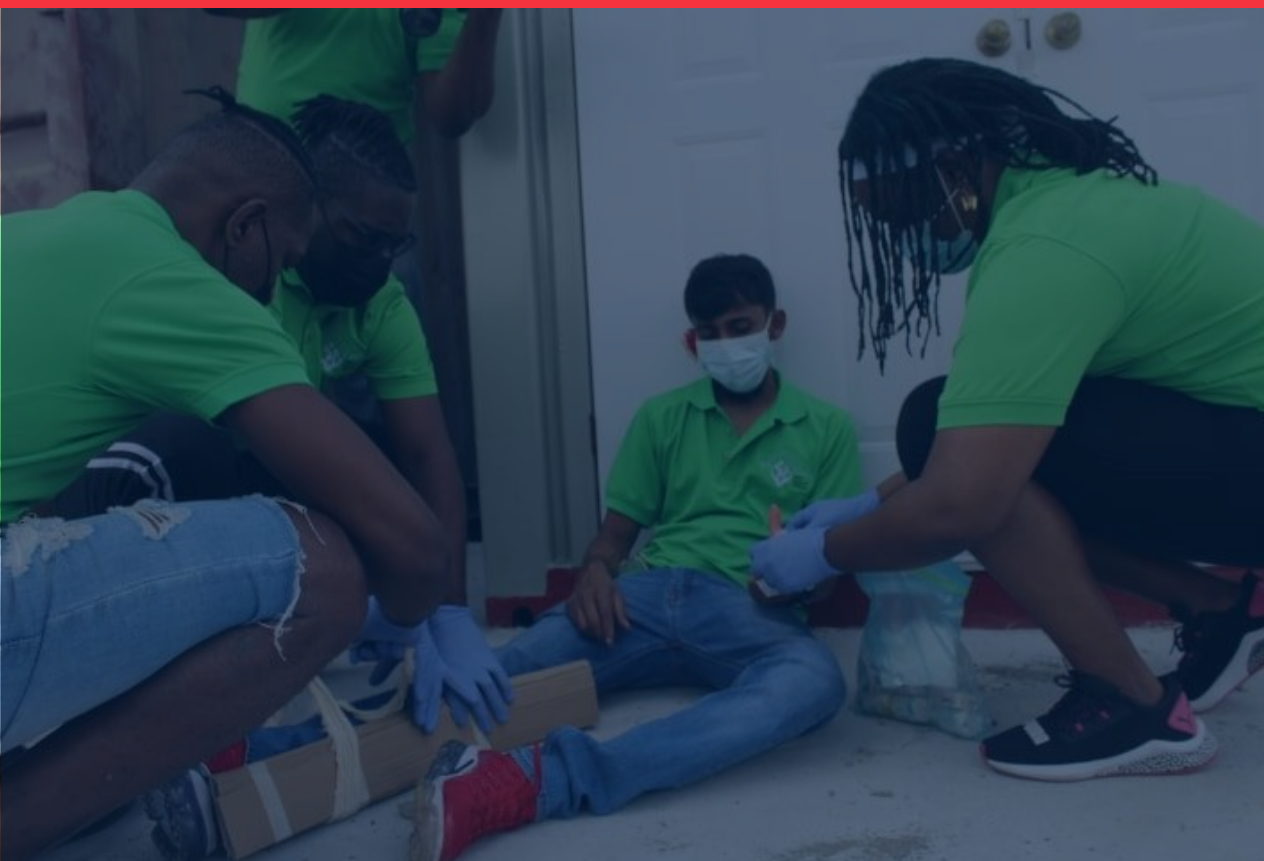


CASE STUDY: INTEGRATING PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES IN CDRT/CERT TRAININGS

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1.0 Introduction

Approximately 15% or 1 billion of the world population lives with a form of disability, with an estimated 1 million living in the Caribbean¹. The United Nations defines disability as, “those who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others”².

Persons with disabilities (PWDs) often face discrimination and exclusion. In Latin America and the Caribbean approximately 195 million people who live in households with persons with disabilities are affected by the lack of robust disability-inclusive policies and thus are unable to “fully participate in social, cultural, economic, and political spaces”³. The COVID-19 pandemic worsened the inequalities faced by PWDs as, “the wider digital divide has made learning difficult for those with disabilities, especially those already living below the poverty line”⁴.

During the period of 2020 and 2022, the Latin America and Caribbean region experienced 175 disasters, 88% of which originated from the weather, climate, or the water⁵. However, persons with vulnerable and marginalized groups, which includes persons with disabilities are oftentimes disproportionately affected by these emergencies⁶.

A global study conducted in 2013 in 137 countries on PWDs revealed some alarming statistics. The study showed after the 2004 Indian Ocean Tsunami, there were many examples of PWDs who were unable to escape the waves and who drowned. In Sambodhi Residential Home in Galle, Sri Lanka, only 41 of its 102 residents living with disabilities survived as many of those who died were unable to leave their beds or failed to comprehend in time the need to escape. The same report showed that 72% of PWDs surveyed had no personal preparedness plan for disasters; 31% always have someone to help them evacuate, however, 13% did not have anyone to assist them⁷. Therefore, raising awareness and empowering

¹ <https://en.unesco.org/persons-with-disabilities-caribbean#:~:text=In%20the%20Caribbean%2C%20there%20are,disabilities%20face%20discrimination%20and%20exclusion.>

² [United Nations Article 1](#)

³ <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/entities/publication/f8ea3c9d-ca67-5ddd-a4c7-d1721665f982>

⁴ <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/feature/2020/12/01/a-more-accessible-and-sustainable-world-a-disability-inclusive-response-to-covid-19>

⁵ https://library.wmo.int/doc_num.php?explnum_id=11270

⁶ <https://www.gfdr.org/pt-br/icr?page=28>

⁷ https://www.unisdr.org/2014/iddr/documents/2013DisabilitySurveyReport_030714.pdf

PWDs and supporting their inclusion and participation in community disaster resilience building activities and community plans can lead to better development outcomes and sustainable solutions.

2.0 Inclusivity Within The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC)

The IFRC, a large advocate for inclusion, purports that all projects and programmes should take into consideration the needs of vulnerable and marginalized persons. Furthermore, the states that “inclusion in emergency programming focuses on using the analysis of how people are excluded to actively reduce that exclusion by creating an environment where differences are embraced and promoted as strengths. Providing inclusive services means giving equitable access to resources for all. In the longer term, inclusion also focuses on facilitating access to opportunities and rights for all by addressing, reducing and ending exclusion, stigma and discrimination”⁸.

In 2022, the IFRC published its addendum to the final process report on its Strategic Framework on Disability Inclusion by the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement. The report outlined work done by the Movement during the period 2019- 2020 in alignment with the strategic objectives outlined in the framework. The three (3) strategic objectives are as follows:

- 1) All components of the Movement adopt a disability-inclusive approach.
- 2) Persons with disabilities have equal access to the services and programmes the Movement provides, thereby enabling their inclusion and full participation.
- 3) All components of the Movement endeavour to change mindsets and behaviour in order to promote respect for diversity, including disability inclusion.

The report included information on the number of disability inclusion related interventions undertaken by National Societies in 2019 and 2020 within the five (5) regions (see Table 1).

Region	2019	2020
Africa	12	14
Americas	9	5
Asia Pacific	37	13

⁸ <https://www.ifrc.org/sites/default/files/Minimum-standards-for-protection-gender-and-inclusion-in-emergencies-LR.pdf>

Europe	50	96
MENA	3	-

Table 1: Number of disability inclusion related interventions in National Societies annual reports⁹

The table shows that within the Americas region, nine (9) interventions were reported in 2019 and even less in 2020, with only five (5) being reported. During the period 2019- 2020, the number of national societies globally reporting any kind of inclusion work (during 2019-2020) were 58.

The worrisome statistics from the global survey report and the IFRC addendum report show that more must be done to build resilience within these groups. Including PWDs in discussions is not enough as persons may not be properly prepared to deal with a disaster. Training PWDs in basic disaster risk reduction will help them to better understand their risks, early actions and effective methods and resources they can utilize to decrease their level of vulnerability and increase their coping capacity. It will also enable them to better plan and prepare to deal with hazards.

A great example of conducting training aimed at increasing the awareness of PWDs was a Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) Training conducted by the Trinidad and Tobago Red Cross Society (TTRCS) in February 2022 for persons hard of hearing. This case study will highlight the success factors, challenges and lessons learned in implementing such a training so that other National Societies within the region can implement similar type trainings.

3.0 Methodology

3.1 Primary Research

A focus group was held with five (5) of the participants of the CERT training. During the session sign language was provided by the head of the WeCare Deaf Support Network. Questions regarding the training were posed to the participants who gave their honest feedback about their experience and changes made to their individual level of disaster preparedness after the training.

⁹ https://rcrcconference.org/app/uploads/2022/05/23_COD22-disability-inclusion-progress-report-FINAL-EN.pdf

A semi-structured interview was also held with the lead facilitator of the CERT training to ascertain key success factors and considerations made during the planning and implementation phases of the training. Information was also obtained from a webinar¹⁰ conducted by the TTRCS on November 2022, by the lead facilitator and one of the participants.

3.2 Secondary Research

A desk research was conducted on the need for additional engagement with PWDs to assist them with increasing their level of personal preparedness to better cope with disaster impacts.

4.0 Community Emergency Response Team Trainings

Regionally, National Societies employ various participatory methodologies to build community resilience. The Enhanced Vulnerability and Capacity Assessments (eVCA) is a major tool utilized to teach community members about their risks and vulnerabilities. Through the eVCA process, community disaster plans are developed, and community volunteers are trained as Community Disaster Response Teams (CDRTs), or Community Emergency Response Teams (CERTs). Trained CDRT/CERT members are equipped to conduct basic preparedness and response activities, in collaboration with the National Society or the National Disaster Office (NDO).

The TTRCS conducts CERT training approximately every two (2) years with community volunteers since the launch of the National CERT Programme in 2019. The training is conducted in collaboration with the Disaster Management Units (DMUs) of the Ministry of Rural Development & Local Government in Trinidad and Tobago. During the CERT training, participants are given hands-on training in nine (9) modules, one (1) day a week, over four (4) weeks. These modules include disaster preparedness, fire safety, disaster medical operations, team organisations, light search and rescue, disaster psychology, CERT & terrorism and a new module on becoming a community hydrological observer¹¹.

¹⁰ <https://www.cadrim.org/cdrt>

¹¹ <https://rdlg.gov.tt/community-emergency-response-team-cert/>

In February 2022, the TTRCS and their partners conducted the first ever CERT training for 12 persons, all of whom are either deaf or hard of hearing. The World Health Organisation (WHO) defines deaf people as mostly having profound hearing loss, which implies very little or no hearing. They often use sign language for communication. The organization defines hard of hearing as people with hearing loss ranging from mild to severe. People who are hard of hearing usually communicate through spoken language and can benefit from hearing aids, cochlear implants, and other assistive devices as well as captioning¹².

The participants received the full training in all the topics except for disaster psychology. The basics of disaster psychology were taught but in-depth information on how to administer psychosocial support to others was omitted. In order to facilitate this training, sufficient preparations had to be made.

5.0 Planning And Implementations Considerations

5.1 Identifying Appropriate Stakeholders

In the past, through its many community engagement projects, the TTRCS worked with PWDs and various longstanding local organisations that advocate for better inclusion of the vulnerable in all facets of life such as education. As it relates to the deaf and hard of hearing community, the TTRCS worked with the Trinidad and Tobago Association for the Hearing Impaired (TTAHI) and the WeCare Deaf Support Network and was therefore able to develop a good relationship with those leading these non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and the people they serve. TTAHI was founded in 1943¹³ while the WeCare Deaf Support Network was established in 2011¹⁴, both with a vision of providing support to the parents and families of deaf students in the areas of education and social life. The participants of the specialized CERT training were all members of the WeCare Deaf Support Network.

The buy-in and support from the WeCare Deaf Support Network for the CERT training was possible as staff of the organization, as well as TTAHI, were previously trained as CERTs. The staff of the organization therefore had an intimate understanding of the training materials and provided the TTRCS with valuable advice on appropriate methods of engaging with the

¹² <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/deafness-and-hearing-loss>

¹³ <http://www.dretchi.org.tt/aboutus.html>

¹⁴ <https://www.snap.tt/listing/wecare-deaf-support-network/>

hard of hearing in a classroom setting and during the practical activities. The CERT training for the hard of hearing was seen as a beneficial means of empowering a community that is usually seen as the one needing assistance in times of emergencies, rather than providing it.

Sign language was provided throughout the training including during outdoor practical activities. The TTRCS and its partnering stakeholders sought the aid of the Caribbean Sign Language Institute to provide sign language interpreters for each training session.

5.2 Appropriate Communication

Another consideration is that of communication and understanding the acceptable words and terms that are used in the national sign language. An example of this is the use of the word 'emergencies', instead of 'disasters' as there wasn't a sign for the word 'disaster'. It was important to have in-depth discussions with stakeholders such as the WeCare Deaf Support Network, as they can provide the guidance needed on matters that can otherwise be taken for granted, such as any barriers to having clear communication with the participants

As mentioned before, the Caribbean Sign Language Institute provided sufficient sign language interpreters per training session. The interpreters were given lectures on disaster preparedness in order to familiarize them with the content of the training, allowing them to sign the information clearly and accurately to the participants.

5.3 Review Training Materials

The CERT training is typically delivered one (1) day per week over a four (4) day period. It should be noted for the specialized CERT training, the length of the training remained the same.

In any training, the material must be reviewed and tweaked to suit the needs of the target audience. As mentioned previously, in-depth information on disaster psychology was not included in the specialized CERT training. Other changes included adjustments to some of the very technical information. The approach used was to focus on the development of core skills, while also making the content as hands-on as possible, so that participants would learn from doing.

A manual with over 200 pages of content is usually given to participants, but for this training a more visual handbook was created as a very text-heavy book will be overwhelming to the

participants. Because the participants would learn better through visual aids, links to appropriate videos with closed captions were also shared with participants so that they will have access to visual demonstrations during and after the training.

5.4 Start Small

Previous engagement with the target audience is key. The TTRCS was in a position to deliver the CERT training in a manner that was appropriate to the audience because of the work done previously with the deaf and hard of hearing community. It is advised to work with PWDs and start by working with key organisations to conduct short and simple lectures on disaster preparedness. It is important to build this foundation with stakeholder organizations and potential participants as this would aid in more effective assimilation of the training content and would lead to a better understanding of the needs of the community and the appropriate means to address those needs in a way that is meaningful.

It should be reiterated that the staff at WeCare Deaf Support Network were themselves CERT trained and the sign language interpreters at the Caribbean Sign Language Institute were given lectures on disaster preparedness so that they also understood the material being taught.

Twelve participants received the CERT training. These participants were hand selected by the WeCare Deaf Support Network with the understanding that the trained persons will form a community team at the end of the training.

5.6 Follow-up

Engagement with participants after the training, especially during more peaceful times is important to help participants remember the information learnt and to stay motivated to be a member of a community disaster team. This is usually done through simulations such as drills and tabletop exercises.

In 2023, the TTRCS in collaboration with stakeholders conducted their first ever CERT Games. The Games is a competition whereby CERT trained teams, consisting of 25 persons per team, participate in a number of simulations that showcases and tests their abilities to assist in times of disasters. In the preliminary stages, teams were asked to complete tasks which would test their proper use of personal protective equipment (PPE) and the techniques used in first aid and search and rescue such as blanket lifts for example. The teams progressing to the finals would demonstrate their skills during a full-scale simulation exercise.

The participants of the CERT training for the hard of hearing participated in the competition. Finding ways to ensure that engagement and learning continues to happen when the training is done is important.

6.0 Feedback from participants

A focus group was conducted with five (5) of the participants of the CERT training to obtain feedback on the most useful aspects of the training and the ways in which their individual level of disaster preparedness has changed after receiving the information.

6.1 Most Effective Training Methods

When asked which teaching methods most useful, all five (5) participants identified practical demonstrations and hands-on experience as the most effective, which reiterated the need for visual aids rather than text-heavy resources.

6.2 Changes To Their Individual Level Of Preparedness

The participants also stated that they increased their individual levels of disaster preparedness by ensuring that they have a disaster kit at home and items such as sandbags to mitigate against the negative impacts of hazards, which was not done previous to the training. The participants agreed that better planning is needed on an individual level.

6.3 Creation of Community Team

In Trinidad and Tobago, CERTs are called out to assist with disaster responses by the various Regional Disaster Management Units and therefore persons trained in CERT join community teams based on their geographical location. However, the twelve participants of the specialized CERT training falls under the purview of the Chaguanas Borough Corporation, regardless of where they live, in order to work with each other as a team in a disaster situation.

6.4 Role In Disaster Preparedness and Response

The participants stated that they will share disaster alerts with each other, family and friends before and during emergencies. They would also share information with community members, especially other PWDs as they might not receive the alerts/warnings. They would also share information with the responder agency that they report to and alert them to where

other PWDs live in the community so they can get the help that they need. They have also shared their telephone contact with PWDs in the community so that they can be reached whenever they need assistance.

The participants were also very willing to be on the field with persons from the Red Cross and the Chaguanas Borough Corporation to help those in need. They are all willing to participate in follow-up exercises such as community drills and be included in future community disaster management discussions.

6.5 Best Ways To Receive Information

Most information is received via social media. Alerts are also received from monitoring agencies through the national early warning system. Additional considerations should be made by responding agencies (national disaster office etc) such as having a sign language interpreter who is readily available to sign alerts on news programmes. Organizations should avoid text heavy alerts and issue alerts that are short and to the point. Alerts can also utilize images that show the actions to take as well as many persons may not know what to do in times of emergencies. Also consider sending alerts as voice recordings or as videos with sign language interpretation.

There was a short discussion on the colour coded system used in alerts to signify the severity of the impact. Some of the participants stated that they did not understand the meaning of the different colours prior to the training. It is important to educate persons on the type of alerts that are used nationally.

6.6 Additional Consideration For Future Trainings

Organisations should consider conducting training of trainers (ToT) for PWDs so that they can provide assistance during future CDRT and CERT trainings.

7.0 Conclusion

It can be seen from the feedback received from the participants of the specialized training that PWDs are ready and willing to play a role in building disaster resilience within their communities. Disaster awareness is very much needed as the feedback received also indicated that a lot of vulnerable persons are not sure of the proper actions that they can

take to become better prepared and the appropriate actions to take when an emergency happens. More partnerships are needed with organisations and NGOs geared towards helping vulnerable persons as they can provide the guidance and support needed to further reach a portion of the population that are sometimes overlooked.