



Tanzania Red Cross

## How to ensure inclusive early warning early action?

Good practices and local innovations from Eastern Nepal that leave no one behind.

Finnish Red Cross, in collaboration with Nepal Red Cross Society

# How to ensure inclusive early warning early action?

Good practices and local innovations from Eastern Nepal that leave no one behind.

## Contents

<b>Executive Summary .....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>1. Introduction .....</b>	<b>6</b>
Going beyond technology to reach all people.....	6
Persons in vulnerable situations should not be overlooked.....	7
<b>2. Country context: Overlapping factors that increase people's risk and exclusion .....</b>	<b>9</b>
Physical, economic and social conditions shape vulnerability .....	9
Women as catalysts for resilience.....	11
Persons with disabilities are often invisible .....	12
Recognising cultural beliefs and practices strengthens resilience.....	13
<b>3. Country context: Implementing policies through multistakeholder collaboration.....</b>	<b>14</b>
Collaborating with a wide network of actors .....	14
<b>4. Good practices in mainstreaming inclusion .....</b>	<b>17</b>
Investments to transform plans into action.....	17
Enhancing the Local Emergency Operation Centres.....	18
Creating an inclusive communication channel.....	18
Early Warning Communication Channel : Jahada Rural Municipality .....	19
Awareness raising, training and simulation exercises.....	21
Targeted action to reach ultra-poor communities.....	25
Strengthening disability inclusion in community preparedness .....	26
Ensuring participation of all groups.....	28
<b>5. Recommendations .....</b>	<b>30</b>
<b>References.....</b>	<b>33</b>

## Executive Summary

When a warning is issued—whether through sirens, radio, mobile alerts, or community networks—everyone should have the chance to receive it, understand it, and to act accordingly. Yet too often, those most at risk remain excluded from these life-saving systems. Early warning and early action are most effective when they are people-centred and inclusive, ensuring that no one is left behind in the face of growing climate and disaster risks. Inclusion is not optional—it is a fundamental requirement for resilience and risk reduction, enabling all individuals to act on warnings safely and with dignity. Achieving this requires systems designed with multiple communication channels and shaped by the perspectives and agency of those most at risk.

This policy paper focuses on making early warning and early action more inclusive, with a specific focus on persons with disabilities and women in Eastern Nepal. Although women and persons with disabilities are prioritised in this analysis, the barriers identified reflect broader dynamics that affect many groups in vulnerable situations. The recommendations are therefore applicable across diverse populations with varying risks and capacities.

There are several paths to increased inclusivity. In the experience of the Red Cross Red Crescent Movement, it is clear that there is room for early warning systems to be more people-centred and inclusive. Disability inclusion, gender equality, and accessibility are integral and essential parts of the Red Cross commitments to equity, non-discrimination, and effective programmes and operations. **Early warning systems must be designed with the active participation of those most at risk, ensuring that every individual and community can act early and effectively to protect lives and livelihoods.**

Women often bear greater risks and burdens emanating from climate change due to poverty, limited access to healthcare, and the impact of traditional roles and cultural norms. They are among the groups most affected by disasters, yet their roles and contributions often remain under-recognised. In many communities in Nepal, women's workloads, intensified by male out-migration, often leave them carrying the primary responsibility for caregiving, household tasks, and farming. This significantly limits their time, mobility, and opportunities to participate in community preparedness activities. In addition, prevailing social norms and limited decision-making power often restrict women's ability to engage in community planning or influence preparedness initiatives, resulting in their perspectives being overlooked and their voices under-represented in disaster risk reduction efforts. **Addressing these gendered barriers is essential to ensure that early warning and early action systems are equitable, effective, and responsive to the needs and capacities of women.**

Persons with disabilities are also among the groups most often overlooked in disaster preparedness and response. Disability inclusion continues to be under-resourced and under-prioritised, with insufficient initiatives to meaningfully increase participation and access. In Nepal, persons with disabilities face widespread social stigma and cultural barriers that limit their participation in community life in general and preparedness in particular. They are often not recognised as active partners or contributors in early warning and early action processes. These challenges are intensified by rugged terrain, inadequate infrastructure, inaccessible public transport, and limited access to timely information, which further isolate persons with disabilities and hinder their participation. Consequently, their lived experience and knowledge remain largely untapped. **Removing accessibility barriers and enabling the meaningful participation of persons with disabilities are essential for making early warning and early action systems truly inclusive and effective.**



In this policy paper, the Red Cross shows how effectiveness in disaster preparedness depends on the meaningful participation of groups in the most vulnerable situations.

**Strengthening the representation of women and persons with disabilities in the planning, implementation and monitoring of early warning systems not only leads to better outcomes but also fosters ownership, accountability, and sustainability.**

Several locally-relevant innovations were pioneered by the project in Eastern Nepal with significant learning and replication potential. These include **integrating early warning, early action and disaster preparedness activities with community-defined resilience priorities**. The locally-led model, grounded in community-led priorities and inclusion, presents a replicable approach to anticipatory action. Another successful local innovation is the approach to engage ultra-poor households. They are interested in and committed to disaster preparedness but have to focus on dealing with daily issues and meeting their basic needs. **Providing small-scale livelihood support and income-generating activities for persons in vulnerable situations, including persons with disabilities and women-headed households, was considered a game-changing solution in the project.**

Furthermore, a series of awareness-raising and training sessions was organised, with the aim of increasing community understanding of various hazards and educating participants on preventive measures. Such training and awareness-raising initiatives strengthen local capacities and ensure that communities are well prepared for disasters.

Continued investment in municipal-level capacity strengthening, peer learning, and practical implementation is essential to empower local governments to lead inclusive preparedness and anticipatory action. The goal is not only to produce inclusive plans but to ensure they are implemented in ways that genuinely leave no one behind.

A third local innovation is the development of an inclusive multichannel communication strategy to bridge the observed information divide. This multichannel communication approach was adopted in Nepal to strengthen inclusivity and accessibility of warning messages, particularly for hard-to-reach groups and those in the most vulnerable situations. In rural and remote areas, opportunities to learn sign language or Braille are limited, and specialised education services are largely unavailable. **It is therefore essential to use diverse, locally adapted communication methods that do not rely solely on reading or hearing abilities.**

Experiences from Nepal also highlight that formal early warning systems often fail to reach those in vulnerable situations, especially in remote areas. Linking local, participatory communication approaches with formal systems helps ensure that information flows both ways and is locally relevant. For instance, local self-help groups play a vital role in spreading messages within their networks, ensuring their members are informed and able to act. **Using multiple communication methods and community meetings among women and girls also helps overcome gendered barriers to information.**

In a relatively short time frame since its launch in 2023, the Reducing Disaster Impact through Inclusive Preparedness and Anticipatory Action (REDI) project has contributed to a **significant shift from a reactive disaster response approach to a forward-looking, proactive resilience, preparedness and anticipatory action model among communities and local actors in Nepal.**

Local stakeholders have embraced this evolution, voicing strong support for the anticipatory approach and integrating early warning and early action into municipal and community frameworks for lasting resilience. The project demonstrated that inclusion can be strengthened by leveraging supportive federal and local policies and by working with schools and community organisations to embed inclusive disaster preparedness within their own initiatives.

With this policy paper, **the Red Cross aims to deepen knowledge about inclusive early warning and early action for all stakeholders involved in community resilience, preparedness, and early warning systems.**

As the momentum to build early warning systems and anticipatory actions is growing globally, the recommendations on how inclusivity can be ensured are of relevance to a wide range of actors.

**Based on the experiences and findings in the target areas in Nepal, this policy paper provides the following policy-level recommendations:**

- **Ensure inclusion is at the heart of developing and implementing early warning early action strategies and early warning systems.** Inclusion increases their effectiveness, while exclusion of marginalised groups leads to preventable deaths and losses.
- **Integrate accessibility and universal design across all stages of early warning early action system development, implementation, and monitoring.** This guarantees that everyone can receive, understand, and act on warnings safely and with dignity.
- **Engage the most at-risk groups as real-life experts in disaster risk management.** Their agency, perspectives and lived experiences are essential for shaping strategies that reflect local realities and needs.
- **Making inclusivity commitments a reality requires specific efforts in many areas.** Successful locally relevant innovations exist on how inclusion can be implemented in practice. These demonstrate how small, context-driven adjustments can transform participation and reach.

**The policy paper also provides detailed guidance on how to strengthen community resilience and people-centred early warning systems through inclusion:**

1. **Strengthen foundations for inclusion**
2. **Promote broad and meaningful participation**
3. **Address gender and disability dynamics explicitly**
4. **Build on and scale inclusive, locally-led practices**
5. **Foster collaborative, integrated approaches**
6. **Enhance accountability and sustainability.**

## 1. Introduction

Everyone is affected differently by shocks and crises. Gender, age, disability, mobility, language, and culture influence people's vulnerabilities and capacities. Societal structures, institutions, power-relations, and distribution of resources impact people's roles and responsibilities, access to resources, decision-making, assistance, and protection. In this policy paper, vulnerability is understood as a contextual and structural condition rather than an inherent characteristic of individuals.

This policy paper focuses on the experiences of inclusive early warning early action strategies and practices on persons in the most vulnerable situations, with a specific emphasis on persons with disabilities and women in some of the most remote areas of Morang and Panchthar districts, in Eastern Nepal. While women and persons with disabilities are prioritised in this analysis, the barriers identified are not unique to these groups. They reflect broader patterns of exclusion affecting many people in vulnerable situations, including older persons, ultra-poor households, marginalised ethnic groups, and those living in remote or hazard-prone areas. The recommendations presented in this paper are therefore applicable across diverse populations with varying risks and capacities.

The findings are intended to inform the scaling-up of inclusive methodologies by the Finnish Red Cross, its partners, and other key stakeholders.

### Going beyond technology to reach all people

Despite the proven effectiveness of early warning early action in reducing disaster impacts and saving lives, global progress is uneven. More than 60% of all countries have reported the existence of multi-hazard early warning systems but persistent gaps remain (UNDRR & WMO, 2025).

***Building on the knowledge and leadership of those most at risk is vital for ensuring systems are truly inclusive.***

Regardless of advances in technology, especially in mobile communication, some communities remain hard to reach. Even when information reaches at-risk communities, it is often not properly perceived or acted upon due to communication barriers, social and cultural stigma, lack of accessible infrastructure, and ineffective social safety nets. These obstacles disproportionately affect groups in vulnerable situations, making it harder for them to access and act on early warning information.

Applying universal design principles in communication, infrastructure, and early warning delivery can help ensure that systems work for everyone from the start—regardless of disability, age, literacy, or location. Universal design complements accessibility by embedding inclusion in how systems are conceived, designed and implemented, rather than being added later as adaptations.

In the experience of the Red Cross, early warning systems should be more people-centred and the effectiveness of early warning systems hinges on their inclusivity. Their true value lies in saving lives, which can only be achieved if warnings reach every individual at risk, they are trusted and actionable, and lead to timely action, regardless of language, literacy, gender, disability, location, or other factors. Populations in vulnerable situations are often the hardest to reach and most likely to be overlooked. Yet, these groups are precisely those who need timely alerts the most.

Designing early warning systems with an inclusive approach ensures that no one is left behind, thereby maximising their life-saving potential and strengthening community

resilience. This means that the systems must go beyond technical or technological solutions to actively engage all members of the community, ensuring that individuals and groups at risk can take timely and appropriate action to protect themselves and their surroundings. This requires the active engagement and influence of those most affected, including persons with disabilities and their representative organisations. Building on the knowledge and leadership of those most at risk is vital for ensuring systems are truly inclusive.

While several guides, tools, and materials have been published by development and humanitarian actors on inclusive early warning and early action in the past years, gaps still exist in putting them concretely into practice.

### Persons in vulnerable situations should not be overlooked

This policy paper focuses on persons in vulnerable situations. Their social, economic, physical, or environmental circumstances increase their exposure and susceptibility to hazards, and reduce their capacity to prepare for, respond to, and recover from disasters. Recognising and meaningfully engaging persons in vulnerable situations in disaster risk reduction, early warning, and preparedness activities is essential for ensuring inclusive, equitable, and effective outcomes. In Nepal, disaster risk reduction policies and national action plans emphasise the importance of recognising and addressing the specific needs of vulnerable groups. This includes persons with disabilities, older persons, women and girls, children, Indigenous Peoples, migrants, and those living in remote or disadvantaged areas.

In Eastern Nepal, two main groups of persons in vulnerable situations stand out. Due to gender-based discrimination, many women lack formal education and opportunities for growth, and face socio-cultural barriers. Women are often left out of leadership roles and even of participation in community resilience and preparedness strategies, including early warning systems. For example, women's workloads often leave them carrying the full responsibility for caregiving, farming, and household tasks. This limits their time, mobility, and opportunity to participate in preparedness activities. The other overlooked group is persons with disabilities. In Nepalese society, deep-rooted social taboos surrounding disability remain a major barrier to participation and inclusion, compounded by accessibility challenges such as physical, communication, and information obstacles. Disability inclusion continues to be under-resourced and under-prioritised, with limited initiatives to increase inclusion. Despite some improvement in supportive policies and legislation for disability-inclusive disaster risk reduction, implementation remains slow and uneven, often driven by non-state actors with short-term and limited funding.

### The following two key questions guided the policy paper:

1. What practical factors and approaches enable the meaningful inclusion of persons with disabilities and other groups in vulnerable situations in anticipatory action and early warning systems, across risk analysis, planning, implementation, and monitoring?
2. What are the key barriers to inclusion and what local solutions to challenges provide insights into how inclusive approaches can be institutionalised and sustained?

By answering these questions, the Red Cross aims to deepen knowledge about inclusive early warning and early action systems.



### **Nepal Red Cross' paradigm shift from response to anticipatory action**

The Red Cross Red Crescent Movement has a long-standing commitment to working with and for persons in vulnerable situations. This focus means not only responding to immediate needs but also addressing the underlying factors that put people at risk of being left behind and the causes, risks and consequences of violence, discrimination, and exclusion. It focuses on keeping people safe from harm, understanding people's different needs, risks and capacities, and involving and engaging excluded people.

The Nepal Red Cross Society (NRCS) has shifted from reactive disaster response to anticipatory action, building on decades of experience in early warning and early action. What began as community-based disaster preparedness has evolved into a sophisticated anticipatory system that blends modern science with local wisdom. By promoting inclusive policies, a whole-of-society approach, and addressing structural inequalities, the NRCS is helping to create a proactive disaster risk management framework that strengthens resilience at the grassroots level.

This policy paper draws from the NRCS' long experience, learnings and the Reducing Disaster Impact through Inclusive Preparedness and Anticipatory Action (REDI) project implemented by the Nepal Red Cross Society with support from the Finnish Red Cross. The project aims to enhance community resilience to climate and weather-related disasters in Morang and Panchthar districts of Eastern Nepal. Running since January 2023, the project focuses on improving inclusive early warning and early action mechanisms at the local level and on enhancing the institutional capacities of the Nepal Red Cross Society provincial and district chapters to deliver effective humanitarian aid, as well as to leverage climate and weather data to implement anticipatory actions, early warning, and disaster preparedness. Persons in vulnerable situations, particularly women and persons with disabilities, are at the core of the project.



## 2. Country context: Overlapping factors that increase people's risk and exclusion

Nepal is one of the most disaster-prone countries in the world due to its complex topography, active tectonics, monsoon-dependent climate, and socio-economic vulnerabilities. It is also highly vulnerable to the impacts of climate change due to a combination of political, geographic and social factors. Climate change is expected to bring several changes to the weather: temperatures will continue to rise, rainfall may be more erratic, and extreme events will be more frequent and severe.

**Disasters disproportionately impact groups in vulnerable situations.**

Vulnerability to disasters is shaped by overlapping social, economic and cultural factors, including caste, ethnicity, gender, and disability. Structural inequalities intersect with poverty, remoteness, and limited access to services, compounding risks for groups already in vulnerable situations. Disasters disproportionately impact these at-risk groups, not only due to exposure to hazards but also because of entrenched socio-economic and structural inequalities that limit their resilience, access to resources, and participation in decision-making. Poverty, remoteness, disability, and social exclusion amplify vulnerability. If early warning systems do not address these factors, and understand the local contexts, they reinforce inequalities and fail to protect those most at risk.

### Physical, economic and social conditions shape vulnerability

Phalelung Rural Municipality, in the mountain and hill districts, faces significant challenges due to geographic remoteness, which limits timely access to information and basic services, and hampers reaching people. Communities are dispersed across rugged terrain, with limited road access, weak telecommunications, and inadequate health infrastructure.



Complex topography in Eastern Nepal.



*Hilly terrain in Phalelung limits access to information and services.*

During disasters, such conditions slow down emergency response. These barriers are further compounded by chronic water insecurity, particularly affecting women, who walk long distances to fetch water—reducing availability for preparedness and resilience-building activities.

In contrast, Jahada Rural Municipality, situated in the plains region, presents a different but equally complex set of vulnerabilities. While the terrain is more accessible, Jahada is highly exposed to climate-related hazards such as riverine floods, heatwaves, and fires. Many households are ultra-poor and rely on daily wage labour, which limits their ability to invest in preparedness. Jahada also suffers from weak social safety nets and limited services and infrastructure.

Both areas face vulnerabilities to multiple hazards, necessitating a comprehensive understanding of the multi-hazard context and strengthening of resilience. The project's baseline survey revealed that most people are unaware or unsure of the risk factors and their communities' capacities in terms of disaster preparedness and management.

One-fifth of Nepal's population lives below the national poverty line. The country's heavy reliance on agriculture, employing 61% of the labour force (ILO, 2025), increases vulnerability to climate-induced shocks. According to the 2025 Global Hunger Index, just over one-quarter (26%) of children under five are stunted, reflecting persistent challenges in nutrition and child health. Poor infrastructure compounds disaster risks: for example, in Jahada Rural Municipality over 90% of homes lack private toilets, piped water is limited, and most houses are constructed from wood or bamboo—conditions that increase vulnerability during floods. The high prevalence of landless households further undermines resilience.

In Phalelung Rural Municipality, communities suffer from severe water insecurity. The region also experiences high underemployment and increasing youth out-migration, reflecting persistent economic challenges. Both municipalities lack resilient housing, sanitation, and water systems—critical gaps in flood-prone and climate-vulnerable areas.



Young men across rural Nepal are increasingly migrating—both domestically and internationally—for work, driven by limited local employment opportunities. This out-migration further depletes the local labour pool and places disproportionate burdens on those who remain and must sustain both agricultural production and household responsibilities.

### **Women as catalysts for resilience**

Women often bear greater risks and burdens emanating from climate change due to poverty, limited access to healthcare, and the impact of traditional roles and cultural norms. In Nepal's patriarchal society, women face unequal power relations and gender-based barriers.

These inequalities are compounded for women from groups in vulnerable situations, particularly in rural municipalities like Jahada and Phalelung, where poverty, illiteracy, and limited access to health and education services intersect with caste, ethnicity, and geography. Women often walk up to five kilometres each day to collect water, leaving them with little time for education, disaster preparedness, community, or livelihood activities.

Findings from the REDI 2023 baseline revealed that men dominate community leadership and decision-making in both project sites:

- **84%** of respondents reported that men mostly occupy leadership positions,
- **82%** said that only men participate in decision-making at the community level,
- and **70%** observed that only men speak during community meetings.

These figures point to persistent gender norms that silence women's voices and hinder their participation in disaster preparedness and community governance.



*River landscape in Jahada.*

Women's workloads, intensified by male out-migration, often leave them carrying the full responsibility for caregiving, farming, and household tasks. Consequently, women often lack the time, mobility, and opportunity to participate in preparedness activities. In Jahada and Phalelung, for instance, only 15% of women respondents reported taking part in disaster simulations or drills. Such exclusion not only reinforces gender inequality but also poses a risk to community resilience, as vital knowledge and skills remains concentrated among only part of the population.

**Women often lack the time, mobility, and opportunity to participate in preparedness activities.**

Women face multiple barriers to disaster preparedness. Low literacy levels and limited ownership of mobile phones restrict access to information, while the absence of formal community support structures limits their ability to raise concerns or use redress mechanisms, while exclusion from household and community decision-making further reduces their influence. Even when services such as healthcare exist, they are often located far from villages, making access particularly difficult for women and women-led groups.

While women are active in many community-level activities, their representation in leadership and governance structures remains limited. The Constitution of Nepal mandates 33% representation of women in government and local bodies, offering a strong legal basis for inclusion. However, practical influence over leadership decisions remains unclear and under-realised. Women's active engagement is essential to making preparedness systems more inclusive, context-specific, and effective. Without women's voices—critical needs such as sexual and reproductive health, privacy and safety concerns, and childcare responsibilities during evacuation—are often overlooked in preparedness planning.

Protection risks, particularly those related to gender-based violence, are a concern. Entrenched patriarchal norms and caste-based discrimination contribute to the persistence of domestic and sexual violence. Underreporting is common due to fear, stigma, and a lack of accessible reporting mechanisms. Survivors are often unaware of how or where to report incidents, though female community health volunteers have played a critical role in supporting survivors and facilitating access to services. Increasing awareness of reporting mechanisms and ensuring confidentiality are vital to improving protection outcomes.

Evacuation centres and shelters must be safe, accessible and inclusive spaces where women, children, persons with disabilities, and other groups in vulnerable situations can seek refuge without fear of violence or discrimination.

### **Persons with disabilities are often invisible**

In Nepal, persons with disabilities often face widespread social stigma and cultural barriers that limit their participation in community life. Disability is frequently seen as the result of past wrongdoing or divine punishment, which can lead families to hide members with disabilities and restrict access to education, healthcare, and livelihoods. Institutional barriers further compound these challenges, including laws, policies, strategies, and practices that, due to structural and systemic shortcomings, continue to disadvantage persons with disabilities and limit their full participation in society. It is therefore essential to systematically identify and remove these barriers.

Access to education is generally difficult for persons with disabilities, and particularly challenging for those with sensory impairments, as teaching in sign language or Braille is largely unavailable. Inclusive early warning systems must take these systemic barriers into account, using multiple communication channels and community-based approaches to ensure warnings reach all individuals, enabling timely and life-saving action.

In rural and remote areas, these challenges are intensified by inadequate infrastructure, rugged terrain, and limited transport, which further marginalises persons with disabilities.

In Phalelung, for example, the mountainous landscape and poor road access impede service delivery and make it difficult for persons with disabilities to reach healthcare, schools, and other essential facilities. In addition, the absence of organisations of persons with disabilities and self-help groups can further reduce opportunities for social support, advocacy, and meaningful participation in community development.

Because of these multifaceted constraints, persons with disabilities are often excluded from early warning systems, evacuation planning, and emergency response due to physical, communication, and attitudinal barriers. These barriers can prevent people from reaching shelters or escaping danger zones—for example, when evacuation routes are inaccessible, information is not provided in accessible formats, or assistance is unavailable. Persons with disabilities may also be unable to use shelters safely if the environment, communication systems, or facilities are not accessible. The challenge is therefore not only reaching safety but ensuring that shelters and evacuation systems are designed and operated in ways that everyone can access and use.

According to the REDI baseline, 85% of respondents believed that persons with disabilities are not valued contributors to community affairs or planning. Yet their inclusion is not only a matter of rights but also a strategic necessity. Persons with disabilities bring lived experience and adaptive strategies that can strengthen the accessibility, relevance and impact of early warning systems, evacuation protocols, and preparedness efforts.



### Disability Sector in Nepal

Nepal's disability sector has evolved significantly in recent decades, shaped by a growing recognition of the rights of persons with disabilities and the country's commitments to international frameworks. According to the 2021 national census, approximately 2% of Nepal's population identifies as having a disability, well below the global estimate of 16%. This figure is widely considered an underestimation due to stigma, inconsistent definitions, and data limitations. Despite increasing visibility and progress, persons with disabilities in Nepal continue to face barriers to education, employment, healthcare, and political participation, particularly in rural and remote areas.

Organisations of persons with disabilities have been instrumental in advancing disability rights, service delivery, and policy influence across the country. The National Federation of the Disabled Nepal, a cross-disability umbrella organisation representing over 400 organisations of persons with disabilities in nearly all districts, plays a pivotal role in advocacy, networking, and capacity-building. The organisation links grassroots voices to national policy through its federal advisory structures and provincial committees. It has also actively promoted disability-inclusive disaster risk reduction and climate adaptation, including through technical guidance development and engagement with local governments.

### Recognising cultural beliefs and practices strengthens resilience

Cultural beliefs, values, and traditional knowledge shape how communities understand hazards and respond to early warning messages. Engaging respected local leaders and influencers is essential to building trust, promoting uptake of warnings, and supporting behaviour change. Exclusion and discrimination affect people differently depending on their social identities and circumstances. Social factors such as age, caste, ethnicity, gender, and disability influence who participates in disaster preparedness and who is left at risk. Marginalised and excluded groups are often concentrated in hazard-prone areas, and patriarchal norms can limit women's visibility and voice in decision-making. Discrimination is frequently intersectional: individuals may face multiple, overlapping barriers. For example, a woman with a disability from a minority community has many overlapping limits to her access to resources, services and protection. Recognising and addressing these dynamics is critical in ensuring inclusive and effective disaster resilience.



### 3. Country context: Implementing policies through multistakeholder collaboration

Nepal has made significant progress in strengthening its policy and legal frameworks for disaster risk reduction, climate adaptation, and social inclusion, particularly following the 2015 Gorkha earthquake.

When enhancing the inclusiveness of early warning and early action systems, it is vital to build on the key policies in the country. Partnerships with disability organisations and the appointment of institutional focal points reinforce inclusive approaches.

The 2015 Constitution of Nepal guarantees equal rights for women, persons with disabilities, Indigenous Peoples, Dalits, and other marginalised groups, supported by sectoral policies such as the National Gender Equality Policy and social protection frameworks. The Act Relating to the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2017) and updated disability policies provide legal backing and align with the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD).

Key disaster laws include the Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Act (2017), which established a multi-level system shifting from reactive to proactive risk reduction, and the National Policy for Disaster Risk Reduction (2018), which emphasises risk-informed development and community engagement. The Local Government Operation Act (2017) further empowers municipalities for local preparedness and response. Nepal is also developing a multi-hazard early warning system to coordinate responses to floods, landslides, and heatwaves under a whole-of-society approach.

Nepal's latest climate commitments strengthen gender equality and social inclusion by embedding Gender Equality, Disability, and Social Inclusion (GEDSI) and Leave No One Behind principles across national climate strategies. GEDSI principles ensure that all individuals have equal access to resources, services, and decision-making processes, and that their diverse perspectives and needs are considered. Building on the National Adaptation Plan (2021–2050), the strategy explicitly recognises women, persons with disabilities, and other marginalised groups as key stakeholders in adaptation measures, including climate-resilient livelihoods and disaster risk reduction. It also acknowledges the capacity of persons with disabilities to engage in climate action.

Overall, Nepal's frameworks demonstrate strong integration of climate resilience, disaster risk reduction, and inclusion, consistent with global commitments like the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, the UN CRPD and the Paris Agreement. Ongoing coordination, capacity building, and implementation—particularly at the municipal level—will be critical to realising the full potential of these inclusive frameworks.

#### Collaborating with a wide network of actors

The REDI project has brought together multiple partners, with each stakeholder playing a distinct yet interconnected role in building a more inclusive and anticipatory disaster preparedness system. Evidence from target areas shows that a multistakeholder approach, with strong ownership by local authorities, actors, and people ensures better functioning of a multi-hazard early warning system.

This was possible due to existing relationships and willingness of all stakeholders to strengthen collaboration and use the collective capacities of all local stakeholders optimally.

This is also a smart approach, necessary due to the remote location, where only locally-led action can be effective in saving lives and livelihoods.

### The main stakeholders in the project area are as follows:

- **Local governments** have strong constitutional authority and financial autonomy. Local governments conduct risk assessments, coordinate emergency preparedness, and integrate disaster risk reduction into development planning. Their proximity to communities positions them well to identify people at higher risk and embed inclusive measures in contingency planning, risk communication, and early action. However, challenges such as limited technical capacity for inclusive approaches, funding gaps, lack of disaggregated data, and barriers to participation of persons in vulnerable situations persist. Strengthening local capacities, particularly around social inclusion and intersectional risk, is essential to achieving equitable, community-driven early warning early action.
- **Nepal Red Cross Society (NRCS)** plays a critical bridging role between national systems and local communities. The Nepal Red Cross Society is the largest humanitarian organisation in Nepal, with a nationwide network that extends across all 77 districts through its chapters and volunteer base. The NRCS engages actively with government agencies, the Department of Hydrology and Meteorology, and other partners in developing early warning systems, community-based disaster risk reduction, preparedness, and climate change related actions. It supports communities to lead with their own voices, skills, and knowledge and ensures that the needs of the persons in the most vulnerable situations and locally-led actions are prioritised.
- **Youth Actors:** The Junior Youth Red Cross (JYRC) has been instrumental in advancing community resilience and mobilising young persons to take action. The establishment of Climate Learning Corners in schools provides students with essential knowledge on climate change and environmental sustainability. These spaces empower students to adopt sustainable behaviours and advocate for climate risk reduction. The project also provides students and JYRC members training in child protection, and equips them to recognise, prevent and respond to violence, exploitation, and abuse. This child-to-community approach encourages students to disseminate messages within their communities.



*Samikshya Gurung is the chair of the Red Cross junior club at her school. The club shares information with students and communities about climate change and how to prepare for its impacts.*



*Birkha Bahadur Tamang climbs to his village's rain gauge station every morning to check the amount of rainfall. He records the amount and sends the data via mobile phone to the meteorological department.*

- Collaboration with **self-help groups and organisations of persons with disabilities** is prioritised to advance disability inclusion. This is an important step towards more inclusive implementation. The project has worked with self-help groups, the Municipal Disability Network, and the National Federation of Disabled Nepal (NFDN). This approach significantly facilitates the engagement of persons with disabilities in the development of an inclusive early warning communication channel, addressing a major gap in existing formal early warning systems in terms of inclusive reach. Meaningful participation of persons with disabilities and their organisations is essential for designing inclusive and effective early warning and early action systems that address diverse community needs and strengthen overall resilience.
- **The Department of Hydrology and Meteorology (DHM)** monitors hydrological and meteorological activities in Nepal, including the monitoring of river hydrology, water quality, sediment, limnology, snow hydrology, glaciology, weather, climate, agro-meteorology, air quality, and solar energy. It collects hydrological and meteorological data throughout Nepal, and processes, publishes and disseminates it to various users for the verification of extreme hydrological and meteorological events required for different purposes. The Finnish Meteorological Institute has had long-term collaboration with the DHM to strengthen weather observation networks and forecasting capacity, alongside the enhancement of service delivery and products with improved skill and lead time. The REDI project has contributed to their work with end-user perspectives and local monitoring of water level and rainfall data.

Although establishing these partnerships requires time, trust, and investment, they are producing tangible results. Strengthening and expanding these partnerships, and more, will be essential as the project matures and future replication is considered. Such networking efforts are highly recommendable for other humanitarian and development actors.

## 4. Good practices in mainstreaming inclusion

In a relatively short time frame the project has contributed to a significant shift from a reactive disaster response approach to a forward-looking, proactive preparedness and disaster risk reduction model among communities and local actors.

This transformation was not only acknowledged but embraced by local stakeholders, who have expressed enthusiasm for the anticipatory approach and early warning early action and a strong desire to institutionalise it further at both municipal and community levels. Based on interactions with the community members and their feedback, it is evident that people's mindset had shifted towards acting ahead of disasters on the basis of trusted, localised information and increased confidence in their own ability to act.

The following concrete examples highlight opportunities that other actors and governments can draw on to make their early warning and early action systems more inclusive.

### Investments to transform plans into action

Nepal benefits from a relatively strong and evolving policy and institutional framework in the fields of disaster risk reduction, climate adaptation, and social inclusion. A range of national-level instruments, such as laws, policies, guidelines, standard operating procedures and frameworks, provide a solid foundation for inclusive early warning and anticipatory action. These frameworks increasingly recognise the rights and needs of persons in vulnerable situations, including persons with disabilities, and create space for multistakeholder collaboration.

***The goal is not only to produce inclusive plans but to ensure they are implemented in ways that genuinely leave no one behind.***

However, translating these commitments into consistent local-level implementation remains a work in progress—not just in Nepal but also globally. While many municipalities have shown willingness to adopt inclusive approaches and work in partnership with organisations of persons with disabilities, civil society, and technical actors, they continue to face challenges related to technical capacity, financial and human resources, and the practical application of inclusion principles in disaster risk reduction planning and preparedness.

The experiences of the REDI project show that continued investment in municipal-level capacity strengthening, peer learning, and practical tools is essential to empower local governments to lead inclusive preparedness and anticipatory action. The goal is not only to produce inclusive plans but to ensure they are implemented in ways that genuinely leave no one behind.

Inclusive early warning and early action systems depend on governance structures that represent the whole community. Municipal coordination mechanisms—such as Local Emergency Operation Centres—should include women's groups, organisations of persons with disabilities, youth, and other community actors as equal partners in planning, simulation exercises, and decision-making. Such inclusive governance models ensure that early warning systems reflect the realities and needs of diverse community members and strengthen public accountability.

Developing people-centred and inclusive early warning systems requires integrating multi-hazard thinking and ensuring these systems are accessible, trusted, and tailored to reach all individuals equitably. While inclusion is strongly stressed at policy level, its implementation is not yet evident in early warning systems. Previously, in the target areas in Nepal, early



warnings were disseminated primarily via phone calls to a few designated individuals who then had to relay the message within the community. This method was not always effective or inclusive.

The Nepal experiences show that formal systems do not always reach groups in vulnerable situations, especially in remote areas. One solution is to connect bottom-up approaches and a participatory and inclusive process to the formal system. This requires a fundamental shift from top-down alerts to systems that reflect the priorities, capacities, and lived experiences of those most at risk. While traditional early warning early action systems often rely heavily on scientific and technical risk modelling, REDI complemented these with local knowledge gathered through baselines and Enhanced Vulnerability and Capacity Assessments.

In communities such as Jahada and Phalelung, these assessments brought together representatives from marginalised groups to map barriers to safety and preparedness. Informal community networks and groups—such as inclusion self-help groups and women's groups—play a crucial role in enabling remote and poor communities to function.

This approach ensured that early actions were locally grounded and responsive to diverse needs. The Nepal experiences make it evident that involving a diverse range of local actors and communities is crucial in strengthening early warning early action with a focus on their perspectives and needs.

### Enhancing the Local Emergency Operation Centres

Local Emergency Operation Centres in Jahada and Phalelung were strengthened to play a more effective role in disaster risk management. These Centres are critical for collecting, analysing, and disseminating disaster-related information, coordinating early warning systems, communication, search and rescue, and relief efforts. Essential training, equipment, and materials were provided to improve operational capacity, while local governments contributed office space, appointed focal persons, and procured additional resources.

Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) were developed to clarify responsibilities and processes for managing emergencies at the local level, including effective communications and evacuation protocols. Although based on a standard format, the annexes, such as the inclusive communication channel, were shaped through a consultative process.

The NRCS shared the findings of Enhanced Vulnerability and Capacity Assessments to inform the Centres about diverse vulnerabilities and strengthen local emergency management. In addition, efforts were made to ensure communities understood the contents of the SOPs.

### Creating an inclusive communication channel

The project led the way in developing an inclusive multichannel communication strategy to bridge the observed information divide. It identified protocols and responsibilities for rapid communication by the local government, the Department of Hydrology and Meteorology, and other key stakeholders at all levels, from local to national. The final product was formally endorsed by the municipalities and annexed to the Standard Operating Procedures.

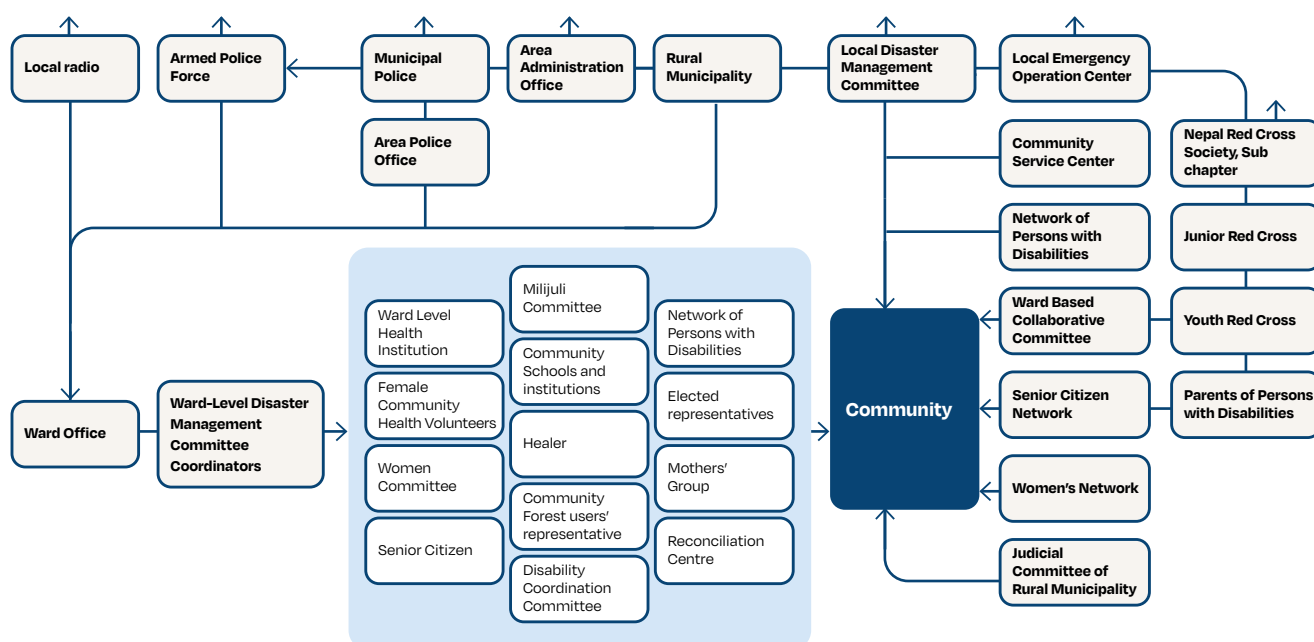


The process started with the mapping of existing channels and local informal networks, documenting local practices, and encouraging active engagement of key local stakeholders through a participatory process. Series of meetings were organised with community members. Stakeholders included Local Disaster Management Committees, Ward Disaster Management Committees, Community Disaster Management Committees, women's groups, mothers' groups, self-help groups of persons with disabilities, youth clubs, community organisations—all of which could be missed if only formal channels were engaged.

A multichannel communication approach was adopted to strengthen the accessibility of warning messages, particularly for hard-to-reach groups and persons in vulnerable situations. Local self-help groups played a vital role in disseminating messages within their networks, ensuring that members were informed and able to act. In many areas, relying on sign language or Braille was not feasible as knowledge of these communication methods was extremely limited or non-existent. Many persons with disabilities also had lower literacy levels, further limiting their ability to access written messages — a challenge that affected many women as well. This underlines the importance of context-specific and diverse communication strategies. Using multiple communication channels also helped overcome gendered barriers, such as limited access to mobile technology and restrictions on women's participation in public meetings, ensuring that women, girls, and persons with disabilities received timely warnings and could take appropriate action.

This approach reflects the principles of universal design—creating communication systems that are intuitive, simple and usable by all community members, regardless of ability, literacy, or location. In practice, this means designing a network of complementary channels (visual, auditory and interpersonal) so that everyone can receive and act on early warnings in ways that suit their needs.

### Early Warning Communication Channel : Jahada Rural Municipality



*Inclusive communication channel links households, community groups, wards, and municipalities through coordinated locally-led action. Multiple methods and two-way information flows ensure timely alerts and enable early action for all.*



*Nepal Red Cross volunteer describes how the early warning communication system works in Biratnagar. The system is illustrated on the wall of the village health centre.*

The communication channel has significantly improved both the reach and effectiveness of early warning systems. People-centred approaches and diverse communication methods help ensure that everyone receives timely warning messages, including those in vulnerable situations, enabling them to react appropriately.

The channel utilises community-based approaches such as public noticeboards and wall murals, public announcements and information sessions, alongside sirens placed in strategic locations. The siren system primarily relies on audible alarm tones and voice messages and is equipped with loudspeakers capable of broadcasting both pre-recorded and live announcements. Voice messages are recorded and disseminated in local languages to ensure alerts are accessible and understandable to the target communities. Messages are delivered through trusted local figures, including ward representatives, religious and political leaders, school teachers, Female Community Health Volunteers, and community leaders. Community members have also offered to share messages during existing events, such as religious rituals and gatherings at the mail collection centres.

In addition to traditional media, local radio broadcasts and television messages, digital platforms and social media channels, such as WhatsApp and Facebook, are used to reach different local community groups, for example farmers and mothers. Information sessions and door-to-door visits by local Red Cross volunteers reach those people who are inaccessible by SMS alerts or social media, or who prefer face-to-face communication. These methods remain effective even when network connections, social media or electricity are unavailable.

Community members are confident that all individuals are connected to at least one communication channel.

### Awareness raising, training and simulation exercises

Within the REDI project, a series of awareness-raising and training sessions was organised, with the aim of increasing community understanding of various hazards and educating participants on preventive measures.

These sessions were adapted to address seasonal hazards and specific community issues in local languages to enhance understanding. The venues of the sessions were close to the communities and schools. The sessions targeted diverse audiences, including groups in vulnerable situations. The district teams coordinated with local agencies to encourage greater participation from women, older people, persons with disabilities, and other persons in vulnerable situations, and ensure their active engagement in the learning process. Community sessions were complemented with household visits to those persons who could not attend, including older persons or persons with disabilities.

**The following examples describe key training activities:**

- **Early warning trainings** at ward level are necessary to enhance the knowledge and capacity of local government officials, security forces, volunteers, and communities on the early warning system (EWS). Participants are provided with information about the significance of EWS in disaster preparedness and anticipatory actions, as well as details about the existing government policies, plans, and provisions. The training uses participatory approaches, multiple methods, and real-life examples to achieve best possible learning outcomes. The training provides a foundation for the establishment of an inclusive early warning dissemination and communication.



Community members in Phalelung Rural Municipality actively participating in an awareness session conducted by the Nepal Red Cross.



- **Community Action for Disaster Response (CADRE) training** is crucial for developing skilled community responders. The four-day CADRE training aims to enhance preparedness, build local capacity, promote resilience, raise awareness, reduce risks, and foster teamwork. This training empowers communities to act quickly, reduces casualties and losses, strengthens social networks, and supports sustainable development through cost-effective, locally tailored disaster response strategies.
- **Establishment and training of task forces** was included in CADRE training. The REDI project established task forces, or “squads,” from community members in project-implementing wards. Task forces play a pivotal role in supporting communities before, during and after disasters. Sub-task forces take specialised roles in early warning and communication, first aid, search & rescue, initial rapid assessment, relief management, and rehabilitation.
- **Community-Based First Aid (CBFA) training** is fundamental for creating safer, healthier and more resilient communities. By equipping individuals with essential life-saving skills, such as administering CPR and treating injuries, CBFA training empowers community members to provide immediate care during emergencies. This training not only saves lives but also strengthens community resilience, fosters collaboration, and ensures crisis preparedness.
- **Simulation exercises** at strategic locations test the functionality of Community Disaster Risk Management Plans, promote a culture of safety and preparedness, boost confidence among community members, ensure organised emergency response, and strengthen collaboration. Simulations played a crucial role in community preparedness and served as an effective tool in identifying gaps and leading to concrete recommendations.

**People are more aware of evacuation procedures, safe spaces, everyone's roles, and making sure that no one is left behind.**

The simulation exercises at communities and schools are intentionally designed to be inclusive, actively involving women, children, older persons, and persons with disabilities throughout both the planning and implementation phases. Scenarios reflect real-life challenges, such as mobility limitations and communication barriers.

Training and awareness-raising initiatives have strengthened local capacities, ensuring that communities are better prepared for disasters. Disability-specific sessions emphasised the need for tailored approaches, while involving self-help group members demonstrated the value of inclusive outreach.

As a result, community members now recognise the importance of preparedness and have adopted practical measures such as preparing emergency ‘go-bags’, storing reserve food, and identifying designated safe spaces like schools or elevated roadside areas. Real-life experiences as well as community drills have reinforced knowledge of evacuation procedures, roles and responsibilities, and the principle of leaving no one behind – particularly those in vulnerable situations.

Building local capacities, fostering collaboration, and ensuring active community engagement are essential for transforming the communities from reactive relief to anticipatory action and enhancing resilience in disaster-prone areas.



Nepal Red Cross facilitating a climate change awareness session in Jahada.

### Spotlight

#### From feeling invisible to being prepared

Community members shared that after the training sessions, they have started to feel that they are part of the community and feel more comfortable asking questions in a big group. It is clear that no one, especially those in vulnerable situations, is left behind.

**"Before the training, persons with disabilities felt invisible in the community. Now, they feel seen and recognised. They have developed a sense of identity and believe they can actively contribute to community life. Previously, many struggled with low self-worth, but now they feel more confident and prouder, knowing they are making a difference."**

- Chairperson of a Self-Help Group, male, Jahada

**"Before the collaboration with the Red Cross, the self-help group members had little awareness of disaster preparedness. Some individuals received weather-related SMS messages on their mobile phones, but overall understanding was limited. Now, weather forecasts are publicly displayed, they also receive messages via WhatsApp and people are more informed about how to prepare, for instance, by packing a go-bag and storing dry food."**

- A male Self-Help Group member, Jahada

**"I felt as if I was experiencing a real landslide. Last year, my community faced a similar situation, and recalling those days brings tears to my eyes. Many stakeholders did not perform well during that crisis, so we need to build the capacity of our local government and task teams for better preparedness."**

- A male training participant, Phalelung



The work does not stop when the trainings are completed and participants return home.

Partnerships with local disability organisations and Red Cross volunteers have further supported preparedness through home visits, inclusive training, and tailored risk communication. Embedding these plans into local government and municipal systems, while aligning them with community priorities, has been key to ensuring their sustainability and ownership. As a result, communities are now better equipped to lead inclusive, locally-led preparedness and response efforts.

***Integrating early warning, early action and disaster preparedness activities with community-defined resilience priorities was a locally relevant innovation.***

REDI continues to strengthen two local-level Protection, Gender and Inclusion (PGI) committees in Morang and Panchthar district chapters. These have begun holding regular meetings to discuss inclusive early warning early action agenda, advocating these issues to the district chapters.

Addressing capacity gaps and ensuring meaningful participation, especially of groups in vulnerable situations, are vital. By prioritising these concrete elements in translating inclusive principles into action, early warning systems can become more inclusive, ultimately saving lives and livelihoods. Inclusive, locally-led systems are stronger because people see themselves reflected in them. Local knowledge and existing communication methods form a powerful foundation.



*A rural village road in Jahada with small houses and thatched structures on both sides.*

## Targeted action to reach ultra-poor communities

Eastern Nepal, where REDI is implemented, is relatively new to anticipatory action, early warning, and disaster preparedness. Progress over just two years has surpassed expectations, thanks to a locally grounded, adaptive approach and strong commitment to collaboration.

However, challenges remain in reaching the groups in the most vulnerable situations, including ultra-poor households. Although ultra-poor communities expressed interest and verbal commitment to disaster preparedness, their unmet basic needs and daily risks required their immediate attention. Similarly, social norms and taboos surrounding disability led families to hesitation in disclosing family members with disabilities or involving them in activities.

To address these barriers, small-scale livelihood support and income-generating activities were introduced for persons in vulnerable situations, including persons with disabilities and women-headed households. The support included training and financial support, which the recipients were able to use according to their priorities, constructing a shed for livestock and buying chicken, piglets, or sheep.

**The small livelihood support targeting ultra-poor groups has been considered a game changer.**

Meeting urgent needs, such as strengthening irrigation channels and constructing retaining walls, proved crucial for building trust within communities. Access to safe drinking water and school safety were also prioritised and implemented as small-scale climate change resilience projects. These included flood embankments, retaining walls for erosion control and landslide prevention in school premises, drinking water schemes, and irrigation channel repair and maintenance. Local governments contributed funds and technical support, while communities provided labour.

Efforts were made to ensure the resilience works were child, gender and disability sensitive, as well as environmentally friendly to enhance sustainability, applying nature-based solutions and bio-engineering techniques. Locally available materials were promoted, and community-based approaches were used to ensure their full participation.

Integrating early warning, early action, and disaster preparedness activities with community-defined resilience priorities was a locally relevant innovation. The initiatives have yielded a range of positive effects—not only economically but also in terms of increased self-reliance, confidence, and access to preparedness measures, while enhancing overall community resilience. Livelihood support targeting ultra-poor groups has been considered a game changer, creating an enabling environment for the early warning early action activities.

This locally led model—grounded in community-defined priorities and inclusion—presents a replicable approach to anticipatory action. Community ownership, inclusive partnerships, and flexible programming have proven essential for both sustainability and scale.



### Empowered and Prepared: A Story of Resilience in Jahada

“My name is Karan Bayalkoti. I live in Jahada Rural Municipality, Morang District. We are a landless family, and for years, my father supported us through daily wage labour. I was the only son among six sisters, and my parents had high hopes for my education and future. However, while studying in Class 8, I experienced a sudden medical issue that led to a physical disability at the age of 16. My schooling was interrupted, and I became dependent on others for daily needs. It was a painful time, both physically and emotionally. My family did not know how to cope, and I often faced criticism for not being able to work or contribute”, Karan explains.



*Karan Bayalkoti in his small grocery store, established with the support of the Nepal Red Cross.*



Everything changed when he was issued an “A” category disability card by the Jahada Rural Municipality and later selected to receive livelihood support through the REDI project implemented by the Nepal Red Cross Society. With the support of the ward office, he developed a business plan and attended an orientation on running a small shop. He received a cash grant of 30,000 Nepalese rupee (around 180 euros) and started a grocery store, which he now runs with help from his wife and mother.

“The shop runs well, bringing in a steady daily income and a small monthly profit. This income has eased my daily struggles and I feel happy, capable, and respected again. The opportunity given to me by the Red Cross has brought back my dignity.”

Karan’s story is also one of preparedness. With income from the shop, he bought a mobile phone and joined a WhatsApp group run by a local self-help group of persons with disabilities, where flood warnings are shared. Now, he receives timely alerts, knows the evacuation route via a raised road, and has a ‘go-bag’ ready with essential documents and supplies.

His journey shows how inclusive livelihood support, paired with a functioning early warning system, can empower individuals with disabilities to be active contributors to community resilience.

## Strengthening disability inclusion in community preparedness

REDI began by mapping and partnering with local disability organisations to build connections with self-help groups, municipal disability networks, and the National Federation of the Disabled. These collaborations increased the participation of persons with disabilities in the project, enabled the co-creation of accessible early warning messages, and marked a major step forward in expanding inclusion within formal early warning systems.

The project’s baseline data revealed both potential and limitations in community leadership. While 60–65% of respondents said their communities were active in local improvement efforts, only 17% belonged to community groups such as disaster management or forest user groups. At the same time, evidence highlighted a major gap in disability inclusion: 91% reported no organised group for persons with disabilities in their community, and 85% felt persons with disabilities were not recognised as valued contributors to local planning. These findings underscored the need to strengthen inclusive governance and the meaningful participation of persons with disabilities.

In response, the project established or strengthened six Ward Disaster Management Committees, which are the lowest government-recognised authorities for disaster risk management. These committees include at least 33% representation of Dalits and other groups in vulnerable situations, such as persons with disabilities, ethnic minorities, women, and older people, ensuring their crucial role in community decision-making. REDI has further reinforced this by challenging norms that view persons with disabilities as passive recipients, recognising them instead as active contributors to disaster preparedness.



Strengthening disability inclusion in community preparedness ultimately means ensuring that persons with disabilities are recognised, resourced and supported as equal actors in local decision-making. As community structures become more inclusive, preparedness efforts grow more representative, trusted and effective. Together, these efforts show how disability inclusion can be embedded in everyday preparedness structures, creating a stronger foundation for community resilience.

**Spotlight**



*Dropati Devi Rajbhar is actively involved in strengthening the resilience of her community.*

**Informed, included and resilient**

Dropati Devi Rajbhar, a mother of three, whose husband works as an unskilled electrician, plays an active role in strengthening her community's resilience in Jahada. Despite her mobility-related disability, she stays connected through her household's mobile phone and regularly receives early warning messages via social media. As a member of the ward-level self-help group, she also accesses timely updates through its WhatsApp network.

In case of flooding, she knows to evacuate to a nearby school or roadside area. Through the project's income generating activities, she received three goats—now five—which she raises to support her household. She has also participated in Red Cross trainings on dengue, fire safety, and flood preparedness, and shares this knowledge within her community.

Despite her domestic responsibilities, she prioritises these trainings, recognising their value for her family and neighbours. Her family now plans to take a small self-help group loan to further improve their livelihood.

## **Ensuring participation of all groups**

The Red Cross assessment identified specific groups within the communities that face heightened risks and require tailored support. These include:

- Women and girls, particularly those who are single, pregnant, breastfeeding, or adolescents or who face physical dependency, limited access to information and mobile technology, and increased risk of sexual and gender-based violence.
- Persons with disabilities, who often experience exclusion due to inaccessible infrastructure, social stigma, and reliance on others for mobility and communication.
- Children, who are dependent on adults for care and protection, lack access to child-friendly information and spaces, and are vulnerable to exploitation.
- Older people, who similarly rely on younger family members and have limited preparedness awareness and access to age-appropriate services.
- Families in ultra-poor or hazard-prone areas, such as those at risk of landslides, have reduced access to early warning systems and preparedness resources, heightening their exposure to disaster-related harm and harmful coping strategies such as early marriage.

Equity and effectiveness in disaster preparedness depend on the meaningful participation and leadership of groups in vulnerable situations. Strengthening the representation of women and persons with disabilities in planning, response, and monitoring not only leads to better outcomes but also fosters ownership and accountability. Inclusive communication, tailored to different levels of literacy, disability, and language, is crucial to ensuring timely access to early warning and preparedness information.

Establishing and supporting grassroots structures, such as self-help groups, women's committees and youth networks, can build local capacity and sustainability. Coordinated outreach efforts must intentionally engage marginalised voices to ensure that preparedness systems are truly people-centred, accountable, and equitable.



*A hillside community in rural Nepal, with terraced fields and scattered homes along the slopes.*



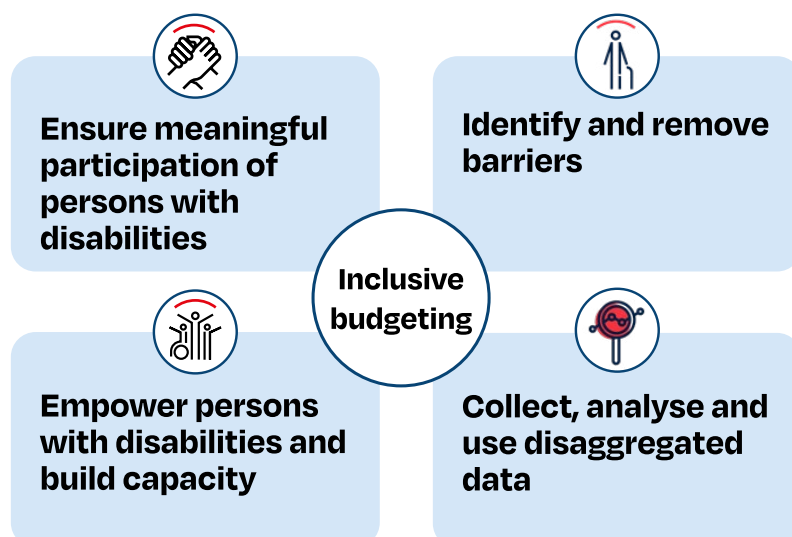


### Community Engagement and Accountability achievements in REDI

Guided by the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement's Community Engagement and Accountability approach, the REDI project placed communities at the heart of planning, delivery, and adaptation.

- **Inclusive Assessments:** Participatory assessments in Jahada and Phalelung identified protection risks, communication gaps, and gendered vulnerabilities. Local leaders and groups in vulnerable situations helped shape data collection.
- **Co-Design of Messages:** Communities co-created early warning messages and communication materials with the Red Cross and partners, ensuring local relevance and accessibility.
- **Feedback Loops:** Mechanisms such as suggestion boxes and trusted community intermediaries including RC volunteers enabled continuous feedback, allowing for real-time programme adjustments.
- **Youth and Volunteer Leadership:** Youth and volunteers played a pivotal role by leading creative awareness campaigns and establishing climate learning spaces in schools. Trained volunteers—fluent in local languages—ensured key messages reached even the most remote and vulnerable household members.
- **Impact:** The Community Engagement and Accountability approach strengthened mutual accountability and trust. Communities became not only better informed but also more empowered to engage with authorities and co-lead resilience efforts. Women, persons with disabilities, and other groups in vulnerable situations gained visibility and voice in disaster preparedness and early warning structures.

## "Must Do Actions" for Disability Inclusion



Tools such as the *IFRC–FRC Building Blocks for Disability-Inclusive Programmes (2024)* provide practical steps for integrating disability inclusion systematically across the programme cycle.

## 5. Recommendations

Based on the experiences and findings in the target areas in Nepal, this policy paper provides recommendations both for policy and practice:

### Policy-level

- Ensure inclusion is at the heart of developing and implementing early warning early action strategies and early warning systems. Inclusion increases their effectiveness, while exclusion of marginalised groups (e.g. women, persons with disabilities, remote communities) leads to preventable deaths and losses.
- Integrate accessibility and universal design across all stages of early warning early action system development, implementation, and monitoring. This guarantees that everyone can receive, understand and act on warnings safely and with dignity.
- Engage the most at-risk groups as real-life experts in disaster risk management. Their agency, perspectives and lived experiences are essential for shaping strategies that reflect local realities and needs.
- Making inclusivity commitments a reality requires specific efforts in many areas. Successful locally relevant innovations exist on how inclusion can be implemented in practice. These demonstrate how small, context-driven adjustments can transform participation and reach.

The following recommendations provide detailed guidance on strengthening community resilience and people-centred early warning systems through inclusion:

Core recommendations	Actions
<p><b>1. Strengthen foundations for inclusion</b></p> <p><b>Work to create an enabling environment for policies, frameworks, and plans of action ensuring they apply universal design principles and are effectively implemented.</b></p> <p><b>Establish inclusive institutional arrangements with well-defined roles and responsibilities that facilitate coordinated action and ensure the meaningful participation of diverse stakeholders.</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Acquire locally-grounded understanding of hazards, vulnerabilities, livelihoods and social inclusion, combining local, traditional, Indigenous, generational and scientific knowledge.</li><li>• Understand the different factors of disadvantage and discrimination (e.g. age, gender, caste, ethnicity, disability, and migration status).</li><li>• Map existing mechanisms and local communication channels for consultation with stakeholder groups.</li><li>• Promote inclusive governance of early warning and early action systems by ensuring that coordination structures include organisations of persons with disabilities, women’s groups, and other representative community actors as full members in decision-making and monitoring.</li><li>• Establish mechanisms for regular consultation with stakeholder groups and ensure their inputs shape decisions. Recognise people’s different roles, responsibilities, capacities, and contributions in policies and plans.</li><li>• Overcome barriers to the engagement of people in vulnerable situations by supporting their essential livelihood needs. This enables them to participate meaningfully in disaster preparedness and early action.</li><li>• Facilitate trainings and orientation sessions for local officials and stakeholders on inclusive planning and engagement.</li><li>• Apply universal design to ensure facilities, materials, communication, and services are accessible to diverse users.</li><li>• Invest in gender equality and social inclusion expertise and actively seek their guidance to ensure that early warning systems and community resilience initiatives are inclusive, equitable, and responsive to the needs of all groups.</li></ul>

Core recommendations	Actions
<p><b>2. Promote broad and meaningful participation</b></p> <p><b>Involve representative groups, including women, persons with disabilities, and other marginalised people, in local-level decision-making, upholding the principle of “nothing about us without us” to ensure safe and empowering participation.</b></p> <p><b>Address capacity and resource needs and gaps for stakeholder engagement.</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Map out different groups in the community (women, persons with disabilities, older people, youth, caste/ethnic caste minorities) and engage them from the start with a participatory approach.</li> <li>• Co-design early warning messages with end-users and ensure warnings are trusted, communicated through multiple channels and reach all groups in actionable formats to support decision-making.</li> <li>• Provide information using multiple, accessible formats and communication channels—visual, audio, simple language, local dialects, sirens, megaphones, flags, radio, and door-to-door alerts—ensuring warnings do not rely solely on reading or hearing abilities and are understood by all.</li> <li>• Hold meetings and trainings at accessible venues and at times suited to community needs (e.g. near villages for persons with mobility limitations, off-season for agricultural workers).</li> <li>• Establish feedback loops that are easy to use, accessible, culturally appropriate, and lead to timely adjustments.</li> </ul>
<p><b>3. Address gender and disability dynamics explicitly</b></p> <p><b>Recognise how gender and disability shape risk, access to information, and participation in decision-making.</b></p> <p><b>Integrate gender-based violence (GBV) risk mitigation into early warning, evacuation, and shelter arrangements.</b></p> <p><b>Ensure equitable representation and agency by addressing barriers that limit the participation and influence of women and persons with disabilities.</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conduct gender and disability analysis as part of risk assessments and contingency planning.</li> <li>• Disaggregate and analyse data by sex, age, and disability, ensuring disability data is collected consistently (e.g. using the Washington Group Questions), and use it to inform planning, monitoring, and evaluation.</li> <li>• Review early warning messages to ensure reach and comprehension across groups (e.g. women, people with hearing/visual/cognitive impairments).</li> <li>• Support community action plans that assign roles equitably and include women, persons with disabilities and other groups in vulnerable situations in leadership.</li> <li>• Ensure shelters and evacuation points are safe and accessible by providing adequate lighting, privacy, and WASH facilities that are both safe and accessible, and by training responders and volunteers on GBV prevention and survivor-centred support.</li> <li>• Enable women's agency and active engagement: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <b>Build capacity:</b> Organise training close to communities (e.g. community-level sessions), using local languages and accessible formats.</li> <li>- <b>Provide supportive measures:</b> Provide stipends, childcare, and transport to enable women's participation.</li> <li>- <b>Leverage community-based groups:</b> Position women's groups, mothers' associations, youth circles, and self-help groups as key actors in building inclusive preparedness and response systems.</li> <li>- <b>Promote leadership pathways:</b> Mentor and promote women and girls into decision-making roles within disaster committees and local governance structures.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Enable the influence and leadership of persons with disabilities: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <b>Address stigma and attitudinal barriers:</b> Implement awareness initiatives that counter stigma and highlight women and men with diverse disabilities as active contributors and decision-makers, rather than passive beneficiaries.</li> <li>- <b>Ensure accessibility and participation support:</b> Provide accessible venues, materials, and communication (e.g., multiple formats), along with practical assistance such as mobility or transport support, nearby meeting locations, and flexible scheduling to enable full participation of persons with disabilities, including in remote areas.</li> <li>- <b>Strengthen OPD engagement:</b> Build the capacity and sustained involvement of Organisations of Persons with Disabilities as technical advisors and community partners.</li> <li>- <b>Promote leadership pathways:</b> Enable persons with disabilities to take part in setting priorities, influencing plans, and guiding preparedness and early warning processes.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>



Core recommendations	Actions
<p><b>4. Build on and scale inclusive, locally-led practices</b></p> <p><b>Recognise existing inclusive practices and support their continuation and expansion.</b></p> <p><b>Ensure that local leadership and ownership remain central.</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Document and share successful inclusive practices with other municipalities and stakeholders.</li> <li>• Provide municipalities or local governments with flexible funding and technical support to continue inclusive measures after project completion.</li> <li>• Support and engage in peer learning between municipalities (exchange visits, community-to-community sharing).</li> <li>• Link inclusive community-based initiatives with municipal/district level/national frameworks to secure institutional recognition and sustainability.</li> </ul>
<p><b>5. Foster collaborative, integrated approaches</b></p> <p><b>Promote an inclusive all-of-society collaborative approach by strengthening multi-stakeholder partnerships.</b></p> <p><b>Advance multisectoral and integrated approaches linking early warning early action with resilience, disaster risk reduction, and livelihoods.</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Establish or strengthen inclusive coordination platforms at local level with government, civil society, organisations of persons with disabilities, humanitarian actors, and private sector representatives.</li> <li>• Develop joint plans that link early warning early action with livelihood support, climate adaptation, and social protection.</li> <li>• Organise regular multistakeholder cross-sectoral simulations and preparedness drills that test accessibility and inclusivity in practice.</li> <li>• Promote trust-building and shared accountability by ensuring that groups in vulnerable situations have equal voice in local forums.</li> <li>• Localise national disaster risk reduction, climate resilience and inclusion policies at municipal level, with capacity building to implement them.</li> <li>• Contribute funds for locally prioritised small-scale resilience measures (with community labour where appropriate), ensuring that measures are accessible and benefit all affected groups.</li> </ul>
<p><b>6. Enhance accountability and sustainability</b></p> <p><b>Establish inclusive accountability mechanisms that allow communities to influence, monitor, and assess early warning and early action systems.</b></p> <p><b>Secure long-term sustainability of inclusive practices through institutionalisation and resourcing.</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Promote inclusion into municipal budgets, contingency plans, and national and local frameworks. Earmark budget lines for inclusion consisting of accessibility and universal design (e.g. accessible shelters, multi-format warning devices, participation of organisations of persons with disabilities/women's groups) to introduce and/or sustain inclusive early warning systems.</li> <li>• Establish PGI/GEDSI focal points within municipalities and disaster committees with authority and resources.</li> <li>• Provide regular capacity building for officials, first responders, and volunteers to sustain inclusive practices.</li> <li>• Embed inclusive practices into governance structures and community leadership mechanisms to ensure long-term ownership.</li> <li>• Establish safe, confidential, and accessible complaints, feedback, and participatory monitoring mechanisms (e.g. hotlines, suggestion boxes) to ensure warnings and services are received, understood, and acted upon by all groups.</li> </ul>

## References

- Government of Nepal. (2015). *Constitution of Nepal*.
- Government of Nepal. (2017). *Local Government Operation Act*. National Assembly of Nepal; House of Representatives of Nepal.
- Government of Nepal. (2018). *National Policy for Disaster Risk Reduction and Management*. Kathmandu. Ministry of Home Affairs.
- Government of Nepal. (2023). *12th National Population and Housing Census 2021: National report*. Kathmandu. National Statistics Office.
- Government of Nepal. (2017). *The Act Relating to the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, 2074 (2017)*. Kathmandu. Ministry of Women, Children and Social Welfare.
- Government of Nepal. (2025). *Third Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC3)*. United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).
- International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC). (2023). *Community Engagement and Accountability (CEA) Guide*.
- International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC). (2023). *PGI in Anticipatory Action: Snapshot from Nepal*.
- International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC). (2022). *Policy on Protection, Gender and Inclusion*.
- International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) and Finnish Red Cross. (2024). *Building Blocks for Disability-Inclusive Programmes: Guidance Note*.
- International Labour Organization (ILO). (2025). *Employment in agriculture*. ILO Modelled Estimates database (ILOEST). ILOSTAT.
- Kafle, S. (2023). *Localising Disaster Preparedness in Nepal: Lessons for Inclusive Community-Based Action*.
- Kharel, P., & Sugden, F. (2023). *Gendered Vulnerabilities in Nepal's Disaster Risk Management*. Kathmandu: Institute for Social and Environmental Transition-Nepal (ISET-N).
- National Federation of the Disabled Nepal (NFDN). (2022). *Status Report on Disability Inclusion in Nepal*.
- Red Cross Red Crescent Climate Centre. (2025). *Climate Change Impacts on Health: Nepal Assessment*.
- Simkhada, P. et al. (2023). *Climate Change, Migration and Health in Nepal: Intersecting Risks and Adaptation Strategies*. *Journal of Climate and Health*, 15(2), 45–60.
- United Nations. (2006). *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD)*.
- United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR) and World Meteorological Organization (WMO). (2025). *Global Status of Multi-Hazard Early Warning Systems*.
- United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). (2023). *Adaptation Communications of Nepal: Summary Report*. UNFCCC Secretariat.
- Washington Group on Disability Statistics. (2016). *Washington Group Short Set of Questions on Disability*.
- Welthungerhilfe & Concern Worldwide. (2025). *Global Hunger Index 2025: 20 years of tracking progress – time to recommit to Zero Hunger*. Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung.

**Finnish Red Cross International Aid  
International Knowledge Development and Advocacy Unit**

**Photos: Finnish Red Cross**

**November 2025**

**ISBN 978-951-658-230-9**



With support from  
Finland's development  
cooperation