



Baseline Report

Enhancing Inclusive Disaster Preparedness: Understanding the Intersection of Disability, SOGIESC, and Climate Change in Mbale and Kasese Districts

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Table of Contents

Acronyms.....	4
Executive Summary.....	5
1.0 Introduction.....	7
1.1 Background.....	7
1.1.1 Climate Change and Vulnerable Populations in Uganda.....	8
1.1.2 Disability, Disaster Preparedness and Response in Uganda.....	8
1.1.3 LGBTQ+ Rights and Social Stigma in Uganda.....	10
1.1.4 The Intersection of Disability, LGBTQ+ Identities, and Climate Change... 10	
1.1.5 Project Significance.....	10
1.1.6 The Role of the Diverse Empowerment Foundation (DEF).....	11
1.2 Problem Statement.....	11
1.3 Main Objectives.....	12
1.4 Specific Objectives.....	12
1.5 Research Questions.....	13
2.0 METHODOLOGY.....	13
2.1 Assessment Procedure.....	13
2.2 Study Design.....	13

2.3 Study sites.....	13
2.4 Study Population.....	14
2.5 Sample Selection and Size.....	14
2.6 Data Collection Tools.....	14
2.7 Data Analysis.....	14
2.8 Ethical considerations.....	14
2.9 Risk and Mitigation.....	15
3.0 FINDINGS.....	16
3.1 Study Respondent.....	16
3.2 Major Disasters Experienced.....	16
3.4 Gaps in Current Disaster Preparedness and Response Plans.....	20
3.5 Accessibility and inclusiveness of evacuation centers, shelters, and safe spaces:.....	22
4.0 DISCUSSION.....	25
5.0 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS.....	27
5.1 Conclusion.....	27
5.2 Recommendations.....	28

References.....	30
Appendix: Data Collection Tool.....	32
Appendix I: Consent Form.....	32
Appendix II: In-Depth Interview Guide.....	34
Appendix III: Key Informant Interview Guide.....	35

Acronyms

DEF	Diverse Empowerment Foundation
IDIs	In-Depth Interviews
KII	Key Informant Interviews
LGBT	Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, and other sexual and gender minorities
Q+	
NDP	National Development Plan III
III	
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
SOGI	sexual orientation, gender identity, expression, sex characteristics
ES	
UN	United Nations

Executive Summary

Background: This study investigates the intersectional challenges faced by people with disabilities who identify as LGBTQ+ in Uganda during natural disasters like floods, landslides, and droughts. Uganda's disaster response system does not address the specific needs of marginalized groups, including people with disabilities and LGBTQ+ individuals. These groups often face discrimination, exclusion from planning efforts, and limited access to essential services such as safe shelters and healthcare. Although Uganda has laws protecting the rights of people with disabilities, their implementation is weak, and the intersection of disability and LGBTQ+ identities is largely overlooked.

Methods: Conducted in Mbale and Kasese districts by the Diverse Empowerment Foundation (DEF), the research aimed to identify the unique vulnerabilities of people with disabilities who identify as LGBTQ+ and improve disaster preparedness. Interviews with 30 people with disabilities and 10 key informants, including community leaders and emergency responders, highlighted major gaps in Uganda's disaster response framework.

Findings: The study underscores the intersectional challenges faced by individuals with disabilities who identify as LGBTQ+ during disasters in Kasese and Mbale, Uganda. LGBTQ+ persons with disabilities face intersecting barriers due to ableism and heteronormativity, resulting in heightened discrimination and exclusion. They encounter barriers such as inaccessible infrastructure, unsafe evacuation centers, and limited access to essential services like healthcare and aid. Moreover, communication channels remain inaccessible for those with sensory disabilities, further isolating them. The participants emphasized the urgent need for inclusive communication, disability-friendly infrastructure, and active inclusion of marginalized voices in disaster planning to address these intersecting vulnerabilities.

Conclusion: LGBTQ+ persons with and without disabilities in Uganda face compounded vulnerabilities during disasters like floods, landslides, and droughts, as revealed by participants from Kasese and Mbale. They experience systemic discrimination, inaccessible infrastructure, poor sanitation, limited healthcare access, and exclusion from relief efforts and decision-making processes. Despite Uganda's progressive legal frameworks, implementation remains weak, especially regarding intersectional needs. Evacuation shelters

often lack ramps, adapted toilets, and protection from abuse, while disaster communication is rarely accessible to those with sensory disabilities. LGBTQ+ individuals face double stigma due to both identity and disability.

Recommendations: Adopt an inclusive approach that centers the voices and needs of affected communities, particularly LGBTQ+ persons with and without disabilities. This requires meaningful involvement of marginalized groups in disaster planning, enforcement of anti-discrimination laws, and training for emergency responders to address intersectional vulnerabilities. Key priorities include improving the physical accessibility of evacuation centers, constructing resilient and strategically located shelters, and ensuring access to inclusive relocation, healthcare, and psychosocial support services. Equally important is the use of accessible communication methods such as local radio, sign language, and visual alerts to reach all individuals, including those with sensory disabilities. Economic empowerment, vocational training, and educational opportunities tailored to marginalized populations are also vital for building long-term resilience. Combating stigma and fostering community sensitization are necessary to uphold dignity and safety for all. Strengthening institutional coordination, collecting disaggregated

data, and mainstreaming inclusion into national disaster frameworks will help build a system that truly leaves no one behind. In the face of increasing climate-related disasters, inclusive and responsive action is not just necessary it is urgent.

1.0 Introduction

Disaster preparedness and response is a critical aspect of climate resilience, yet it often fails to account for the unique vulnerabilities of marginalized groups. In Uganda, where climate-induced disasters such as floods, landslides, and droughts are becoming more frequent, the need for more inclusive disaster preparedness and response strategies is becoming more important (Seglah & Blanchard, 2024). Among the most at-risk populations are LGBTQ+ persons with and without disabilities, whose experiences during disasters are shaped by both social stigma and structural barriers (Grech & Weber, 2025a; McKinney & Wright, 2021).

Traditionally, disaster preparedness and response frameworks do not fully consider the overlapping challenges faced by individuals at the intersection of disability and sexual orientation, gender identity, expression, and sex characteristics (SOGIES). This exclusion limits access to safe spaces, healthcare, and other critical relief services (Kisira et al.,

2023)). Persons with disabilities often encounter stigma and discrimination, inaccessible

emergency shelters, and inadequate support systems during crises, exacerbating their risks and limiting their ability to recover, this marginality more than doubles if they identify as LGBTQ+.

This study explores how disaster preparedness and response efforts in Mbale and Kasese districts can be made more inclusive by integrating the specific needs of persons living with disabilities and those intersecting as LGBTQ+. Through an intersectional approach, it aims to highlight gaps in existing policies and practices while identifying opportunities to create more equitable, accessible, and community-centered disaster management strategies. By addressing these challenges, this research sought to inform policy and practice, ensuring that disaster preparedness efforts leave no one behind.

1.1 Background

Uganda faces growing climate-related challenges, with increasing occurrences of natural disasters such as floods, droughts, and landslides. These disasters disproportionately impact marginalized communities, particularly persons with disabilities, who face social, economic, and physical barriers in disaster preparedness and response (Ssenoga et al., 2022). The situation is even more severe for individuals who are both living with disabilities and identify as LGBTQ+,

as they experience multiple layers of exclusion, stigma, and discrimination. Existing disaster management policies often fail to address the intersectionality of disability and SOGIES (Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity, and Expression), leaving this group particularly vulnerable. The lack of inclusive planning means that persons with disabilities and identify as LGBTQ+ more than struggle to access critical resources such as evacuation shelters, healthcare, and emergency support. This study highlights the urgent need for disaster preparedness frameworks that recognize and address these overlapping vulnerabilities to ensure that no one is left behind in crises (Seglah & Blanchard, 2024).

1.1.1 Climate Change and Vulnerable Populations in Uganda

Uganda is increasingly facing serious challenges due to climate change. The country is experiencing unpredictable rainfall, extreme weather, and rising temperatures. The government has recognized the need to address climate change, but most efforts focus on national responses and do not consider how certain vulnerable groups are affected (Heikkinen, 2024). Uganda's National Climate Change Act of 2021 highlights how climate change impacts key areas like farming, water supply, health, and infrastructure. However, it is not articulate and

specific on how to handle groups, such as those living with disabilities, and those with multiple vulnerabilities such as those who identify as LGBTQ+.

Climate change affects poor, rural, and marginalized people the most because they have fewer resources and limited access to healthcare. Disabled LGBTQ+ individuals experience heightened exclusion due to the combined effects of ableism and social stigma against diverse sexual orientations and gender identities. They experience discrimination due to both their sexual orientation and disability (McKinney & Wright, 2021). This makes them more vulnerable during disasters, as they are often ignored in emergency response plans. Many disaster preparedness programs do not consider their needs, meaning they may not have access to safe shelters, medical care, or evacuation plans during climate-related crises.

1.1.2 Disability, Disaster Preparedness, and Response in Uganda

Uganda has made important strides in recognizing the rights of persons living with disabilities through various laws and policies. The country has committed to disability inclusion, aiming to ensure that people with disabilities fully participate in society. However, despite these legal

frameworks, their application in critical areas like disaster preparedness and response remains a challenge.

The Persons with Disabilities Act, 2020 is a key law that promotes equal opportunities for disabled persons by ensuring access to public spaces, education, employment, and healthcare. This Act is aligned with international human rights agreements, including the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD), which Uganda ratified. The Equal Opportunities Act, 2007, aims to eliminate discrimination and ensure fair treatment for all, including people with disabilities. While these laws advocate for inclusivity, they don't fully address the needs of disabled persons during disasters.

Uganda's National Policy on Disability (2006) acknowledged that disabled persons face increased risks during emergencies due to mobility challenges, communication barriers, and inadequate infrastructure. The policy suggested mainstreaming disability issues in all sectors, including disaster risk management, but disaster preparedness and response strategies still fail to implement fully inclusive measures. Many evacuation centers and emergency facilities remain physically inaccessible, and communication systems are not adapted for people with visual or hearing impairments.

The Disaster Preparedness and Management Policy (2010) provides a framework for responding to disasters, but while it recognizes the vulnerability of disabled persons, it lacks concrete steps to ensure their inclusion in emergency planning. Disaster response mechanisms are generally designed for the broader population, overlooking the specific needs of disabled persons, which can leave individuals stranded and unable to access shelters, early warning systems, or essential medical services. Many shelters lack facilities like ramps, accessible toilets, and safe sleeping spaces, which puts individuals with mobility impairments at greater risk. Emergency responders and healthcare workers also often lack training to meet the needs of LGBTQ+ persons with and without disabilities, which can lead to mistreatment during crises.

Uganda has signed international agreements promoting inclusion, such as the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, but these commitments are not always reflected in disaster response policies. Furthermore, there is little research on the specific challenges faced by LGBTQ+ individuals with disabilities, making it difficult to create effective and inclusive disaster plans.

1.1.3 LGBTQ+ Rights and Social Stigma in Uganda

Uganda has strict laws against homosexuality, and the LGBTQ+ community faces discrimination, stigma, and even violence. Laws like the Anti-Homosexuality Act have been widely criticized but still contribute to the exclusion of LGBTQ+ individuals from society. Many LGBTQ+ people live in fear, facing threats, emotional abuse, and limited access to essential services like healthcare, education, and jobs (Mandolini, 2023).

For people living with disabilities who identify as LGBTQ+, the challenges are even greater. People with disabilities in Uganda already struggle to access healthcare, education, and employment. When combined with the stigma against LGBTQ+ people, this results in extreme exclusion and hardship (Heikkinen, 2024; Ssenoga et al., 2022). During disasters, these individuals are often overlooked, making it difficult for them to find safe spaces, medical care, or assistance.

1.1.4 The Intersection of Disability, LGBTQ+ Identities, and Climate Change

The concept of intersectionality helps explain how different forms of discrimination overlap. People living with disabilities and identifying as LGBTQ+ experience multiple challenges at the same time. They face

discrimination for having a disability, for being LGBTQ+, and for being part of a marginalized group in Uganda (Grech & Weber, 2025a; McKinney & Wright, 2021).

During disasters, these challenges increase. Many evacuation centers are not accessible, and emergency services are not designed to accommodate LGBTQ+ individuals or people with disabilities. This means that they often struggle to find safe shelter, medical care, and support. If Uganda's disaster preparedness plans do not include these communities, they will continue to be at a high risk of harm during climate-related disasters.

1.1.5 Project Significance

Climate change makes disasters like floods and droughts more frequent and severe in Uganda. Marginalized groups, such as people living with disabilities who identify as LGBTQ+, are often left behind in disaster response efforts. Current disaster management systems often fail to address the specific rights and lived experiences of LGBTQ+ persons with and without disabilities, leading to systemic exclusion. Recent efforts to advocate for disability and LGBTQ+ rights provide an opportunity to push for more inclusive disaster preparedness strategies. This project aims to ensure that people living with

disabilities and identify as LGBTQ+ are included in disaster response planning. By recognizing their needs, Uganda can develop fairer and more effective emergency plans that protect all citizens.

1.1.6 The Role of the Diverse Empowerment Foundation (DEF)

The Diverse Empowerment Foundation (DEF) is leading this project because of its experience working with marginalized communities in Uganda. DEF has strong connections with government agencies, healthcare providers, and community leaders. It works to integrate disability and LGBTQ+ rights into climate change and disaster preparedness and response policies.

DEF focuses on empowering disabilities and identifying as LGBTQ+ by providing training and resources. It teaches them disaster preparedness and response skills and helps them advocate for their needs. Through research and workshops, DEF gathers evidence on the challenges they face and uses this information to push for better policies. The goal is to make Uganda's disaster response system more inclusive, ensuring that no one is left behind during emergencies.

1.2 Problem Statement

Uganda faces increasing climate-related disasters such as floods, landslides, and droughts, disproportionately impacting marginalized groups, particularly individuals with disabilities (Nseka et al., 2021). Despite their heightened vulnerability, disaster preparedness plans fail to address their specific needs. The intersection of disability and sexual orientation, gender identity, and expression (SOGIES) exacerbates their exclusion, leaving them without adequate protection during emergencies.

LGBTQ+ individuals in Uganda face systemic stigma and discrimination, severely limiting their access to resources, healthcare, and social services. When coupled with a disability, their exclusion worsens (Grech & Weber, 2025b; Nakiyemba et al., 2025). Uganda's disaster response infrastructure lacks accessible shelters, inclusive healthcare, and gender-sensitive emergency spaces. Many evacuation centers lack ramps, accessible toilets, and mobility support, while LGBTQ+ individuals often face harassment, violence, or denial of aid in these settings. Healthcare and emergency services are similarly inadequate. A lack of training among service providers results in mistreatment, neglect, and barriers to care.

Additionally, insufficient data on the intersectionality of disability and SOGIES hampers the development of targeted disaster preparedness strategies.

This baseline study and project directly contribute to Uganda's National Development Plan III (NDP III) by promoting inclusive development and social protection for marginalized groups. It aligns with NDP III's goals of reducing vulnerability, enhancing disaster risk reduction, and improving access to essential services. It also supports Uganda's commitment to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities), SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities), and SDG 13 (Climate Action), by advocating for inclusive disaster preparedness. Additionally, Uganda has ratified key international frameworks such as the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), yet implementation remains inadequate. This project sought to bridge that gap by ensuring no one is left behind in disaster response efforts.

1.3 Main Objectives

This study aimed to generate evidence-based data on the intersection of disability, SOGIES, and climate change, aimed at informing inclusive

policies and programs that enhance disaster preparedness and resilience for persons living with disabilities and identifying as LGBTQ+ in Mbale and Kasese districts.

1.4 Specific Objectives

The baseline study specifically sought to:

- i. Analyze the experiences of persons living with disabilities and identifying as LGBTQ+ in disaster situations to understand their unique vulnerabilities and challenges.
- ii. Identify gaps in existing disaster preparedness plans and response plans regarding the needs of persons living with disabilities and identifying as LGBTQ+.
- iii. Evaluate the accessibility and inclusivity of evacuation centers, shelters, and safe spaces for persons living with disabilities and identifying as LGBTQ+.

1.5 Research Questions

- i. What are the experiences of persons living with disabilities and identifying as LGBTQ+ in disaster situations, and what specific challenges do they face?

- ii. What gaps exist in current disaster preparedness and response plans regarding the needs of persons living with disabilities and identifying as LGBTQ+?
- iii. How accessible and inclusive are evacuation centers, shelters, and safe spaces for persons living with disabilities and identifying as LGBTQ+?

2.0 METHODOLOGY

2.1 Assessment Procedure

This baseline study adopted a Qualitative approach to capture data providing a comprehensive understanding of the challenges and opportunities for inclusive disaster preparedness, particularly at the intersection of SOGIES (Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity, Expression, and Sex Characteristics) and disability in the context of climate change. The methodology will be implemented in two districts, Mbale and Kasese, with a significant focus on marginalized LGBTQ+ individuals with disabilities.

2.2 Study Design

The study used a hypo-deductive qualitative research study design, using in-depth, semi-structured interviews to understand the

intersectionality of SOGIES, disability, and climate change, a baseline study was conducted.

2.3 Study sites

We recruited respondents from the Kasese and Mbale districts.

2.4 Study Population

This study included two populations. The first study population consisted of adults 18 years of age or older who have identified as LGBTQ+ individuals with disabilities. These should have lived in Kasese or Mbale for at least twelve months. The second population category was community leaders, those responsible for disaster preparedness and response, healthcare workers, and other important stakeholders.

2.5 Sample Selection and Size

The study used purposive sampling to select LGBTQ+ individuals with disabilities, local leaders, healthcare providers, and emergency responders in the target districts. Approximately 30 LGBTQ+ individuals with disabilities (15 from each district) were interviewed, alongside 10 key stakeholders such as local leaders and emergency responders (5 per district).

2.6 Data Collection Tools

In-depth interviews (**IDIs**) using semi-structured questions explored the experiences, challenges, and unmet needs of LGBTQ+ individuals with disabilities during disasters.

Key informant interviews (**KIIS**) with local leaders, emergency responders, and facility staff assessed prevailing disaster preparedness measures, identified gaps, and evaluated the inclusivity of evacuation processes.

2.7 Data Analysis

Data was analyzed from IDIs and KIIs will be analyzed thematically with an inductive approach, using Nvivo 16.

2.8 Ethical considerations

This baseline study adhered to internationally acceptable ethics of scientific research. To honor participant autonomy, written informed consent was obtained before each survey and interview. At the start of each interview, the research assistant reinforced that participation is voluntary and anonymous. Participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any point without any consequences.

To ensure privacy and confidentiality, transcripts of the key informant interviews and data were de-identified, and pseudonyms were assigned to each participant. Data were stored in an encrypted computer with access being restricted to the assessment team where necessary.

2.9 Risk and Mitigation

Risk	Mitigation Measures
1. Unavailability of respondents Delay	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Use of community structures for mobilization of respondents ● Transport reimbursement for participants
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Working with SRHR existing structures and relations in the communities

<p>2. Safety of the respondents</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Snow-ball method to identify respondents● Finding a safe space for engaging with respondents
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3.0 FINDINGS

3.1 Study Respondent

The participants in this study represented a range of age groups, with 6 individuals aged 20–25 years, 1 individual aged 26–30 years, 16 individuals aged 30–40 years, and 5 individuals aged 40 years and above. Regarding disability status, 8 participants identified as persons with disabilities (including conditions such as physical disabilities, epilepsy, bipolar disorder, and injuries like rib fractures after accidents), 1 participant was a personal assistant or caretaker, 14 reported no disabilities, and 1 did not specify but stated, "I am not a person with a disability" (IDI-MB-01). In terms of gender identity, 11 participants identified as female (either cisgender or general identification), 7 as male, and 6 participants identified within the LGBTQ+ community, including 1 lesbian woman, 1 bisexual woman, 2 queer women/persons, 1 young queer person, and 1 transman. Geographically, most respondents from Kasese District were based in areas such as Nyamwamba Division,

Bwera, and Mpondwe-Lhubiriha, while most respondents from Mbale City came from locations including Maluku, Muyenga, Majanga, Bunduda, and St. Andrews Cathedral Bududa.

3.2 Major Disasters Experienced

Participants reported experiencing a range of major disasters, with floods being the most commonly mentioned across all groups.

Landslides and mudslides were also frequent, especially in mountainous areas where deforestation and heavy rains have worsened the situation. Droughts were noted as a serious concern, impacting farming activities and food security.

Windstorms and strong winds caused significant damage to homes and crops, while water shortages and extreme heat were common during periods of drought. Accidents increased due to poor transport access after disasters, and environmental pollution worsened, with factories dumping waste into wetlands during floods. Transport challenges were severe, with destroyed bridges, inaccessible roads, and rising transport costs affecting daily life. Participants also highlighted the devastating loss of life and widespread hunger, particularly among vulnerable groups like persons with disabilities (PWDs), following landslides and floods.

3.3 Experiences and Challenges Faced by Persons Living with Disabilities and Identifying as LGBTQ+ in Disaster Situations

Persons living with disabilities and those identifying as LGBTQ+ face multiple challenges during disaster situations, including discrimination, inaccessibility, and social stigma. Discrimination is widespread, with disabled persons, particularly those with conditions like cerebral palsy or visual impairments, often neglected and not prioritized during resource distribution or evacuations. As one respondent explained, "disabled persons are isolated and only those close to you can give me information that is friends and family. Even then, they are shared as a passing conversation 'by the way' information." (IDI-MB-04).

Access to information during disasters is also limited. Communication methods are often inaccessible to people with hearing or visual impairments, creating a major barrier. One participant shared, "No, it is not accessible because most of it is in print and English, making it difficult for the blind and the illiterate to read. The other information is sent out on radio stations, and the deaf are unable to hear that." (IDI-KS-06). Mobility barriers further compound the risks, especially during emergencies like floods, as highlighted: "Disabled

persons, especially those with a visual impairment, might not see that there's a disaster happening, especially for floods, so if someone does not guide them, they might end up falling into the flooding water." (KII-KS-05).

LGBTQ+ persons with disabilities experience double layers of discrimination, facing stigma both for their disability and sexual orientation. As one key informant put it, "When it comes to queer persons with disabilities, it's double stigma and discrimination for them, and most often, they are left out." (KII-KS-01). Responders often neglect the needs of LGBTQ+ persons with and without disabilities during disasters, sometimes dismissing their requests for help altogether: "Yes, responders do not give attention to expressing and talking about yourself and your needs. 'Try somewhere else' is what they say always." (IDI-MB-06).

Beyond discrimination, disasters cause broader impacts such as health risks, economic hardships, and restricted access to essential services. In many cases, access to farms and markets is limited, further worsening vulnerabilities. As one woman explained, "These disasters have affected us as women especially in terms of health because health and water are relative aspects so in terms of drought there's

water scarcity and also in terms of floods there's an outbreak of diseases... limited access to farms as most women in this community are farmers." (IDI-KS-01). Support, when provided, is inconsistent and inadequate, as another participant stated: "Very little, sherry supported, there is no constant support." (IDI-MB-02).

LGBTQ+ persons with and without disabilities identified urgent needs including food, shelter, and accessible information. One participant stressed the need for inclusive communication materials: "Lack of food, lack of shelter, lack of information... providing IEC materials that are accommodative to persons with disabilities eg. braille and sign language interpretation." (KII-MB-04).

Disabled persons with physical disabilities, such as mobility challenges or visual impairments, are particularly vulnerable in disasters. Inaccessible infrastructure such as the absence of ramps, adapted restrooms, and suitable transportation increases health risks. One participant emphasized this risk: "For a person with physical disabilities who crawls and has no wheelchair, it increases their vulnerability to contracting diseases." Those with albinism face specific challenges during droughts, such as sun glare, while limited access to disability-inclusive education further restricts opportunities

for recovery: "There are very few schools that have disability-inclusive learning and teaching." (KII-KS-03).

Moreover, Evacuation centers and IDP camps often lack safeguards to protect the rights and dignity of persons with disabilities, leading to increased risks of harassment and abuse, where safety is often compromised. As one participant reported, sexual harassment remains a significant risk (IDI-KS-03). Inadequate infrastructure also affects disabled persons' evacuation prospects, as one participant pointed out: "We only have one center/camp for Internally Displaced Persons in the entire district; however, it doesn't have persons with disabilities." (KII-KS-03).

LGBTQ+ individuals continue to face severe exclusion and discrimination, compounded by cultural and self-stigma, which reduces their ability to seek help or participate in preparedness activities (KII-MB-02). Disasters like floods particularly affect access to inclusive services. One participant explained, "Floods have impacted me as a lesbian woman, leading to displacement, which makes it difficult to access non-homophobic health services." (IDI-KS-05).

Physical terrain also creates barriers for persons with disabilities in hard-to-reach areas during disasters, hindering movement and access to services. As noted, "In hard-to-reach areas, you'll also find problems and challenges related to movements due to the topography of the areas which might not be favorable for some persons with disabilities." (KII-KS-05). LGBTQ+ persons sometimes end up homeless and working informal jobs for survival. As one individual shared, "I had to live on the streets, wash and laundry services to the community to get money to provide and share with my family and friends." (IDI-MB-09).

Discrimination during evacuation efforts remains a serious concern. Disabled persons are often overlooked, with responders focusing attention elsewhere: "During evacuation, responders always focus on other people and pretend persons with disabilities, mostly physically disabled persons, are overlooked." (IDI-KS-03). Similarly, disabled persons face challenges accessing distribution points and health services due to their conditions. As one participant with bipolar disorder shared, "Yes, as a person with bipolar, I am chased away from these distribution points. I am called names and often refused access." (IDI-MB-06).

Queer individuals also report being excluded from government programs, such as the Parish Development Model (PDM), based on their sexual orientation. One participant recounted, "'I give you for what'... I have tried several times but my name is removed and they boldly state that they have removed you because you are queer." (IDI-MB-09). LGBTQ+ persons frequently experience interpersonal discrimination such as name-calling and social exclusion: "Name-calling and using my sexual orientation so that you do not fit." (IDI-MB-09).

Psychological distress among persons with disabilities is widespread during disasters, exacerbated by stigma and marginalization. "Psychological distress: during disasters, disabled persons face a lot of psychological distress because of the various effects that disasters have on them." (KII-KS-04). Both groups also contend with self-stigma, which undermines their ability to engage in disaster response and recovery. As one key informant noted, "Self-stigma also affects them as they tend to shy away from communication modes that discriminate against the deaf and blind." (KII-KS-02).

Finally, access to essential services remains a significant issue for disabled persons during disasters. Their ability to evacuate is

hindered during events like floods: "For instance, during floods, the physically disabled are unable to quickly evacuate to safe areas." (IDI-KS-06). Emergency responders often lack training in how to engage respectfully and inclusively with LGBTQ+ persons, worsening the discrimination: "I've faced stigma and discrimination when trying to access gender-inclusive services, especially when dealing with new emergency responders who lack the knowledge or training." (IDI-KS-05).

3.4 Gaps in Current Disaster Preparedness and Response Plans

Current disaster preparedness and response plans show significant gaps, especially regarding inclusivity and accessibility for persons with disabilities and LGBTQ+ individuals. One major issue is the lack of inclusive communication. Information shared during disaster preparedness efforts often fails to reach all individuals, particularly those with disabilities. As one participant explained, "The biggest gap is in using inclusive means of communication, using the display of written, drawn, or other forms of IEC materials and adaptation of sign language interpretation in all community meetings" (IDI-KS-07). Without accessible communication strategies, vital information is missed by many, heightening their vulnerability during disasters.

Another critical gap lies in evacuation planning. Many evacuation centers are not accessible to disabled persons, and organizations that attempt to support marginalized groups often lack the necessary funding. As noted, "There are evacuation centers, but the inclusive ones don't have funds, like Eastern region women empowerment organizations but lack funds to support the queer persons" (KII-MB-03). This inadequacy leaves many LGBTQ+ individuals and persons with disabilities at heightened risk during emergencies.

Discrimination also plays a significant role in limiting access to disaster response resources. Marginalized groups often encounter stigma when attempting to access aid. One respondent shared their experience: "Many times, I've faced discrimination when trying to access disaster preparedness resources, there's a common assumption that the LBQ community receives a lot of financial support, so we are seen as not needing assistance, which is far from the truth" (IDI-KS-05).

The exclusion of LGBTQ+ persons with and without disabilities from disaster planning and decision-making further compounds these gaps. Participants emphasized the need for representation and

participation: "Include a disabled persons representative on the District Disaster Preparedness committee" (KII-KS-03) and "Inclusion of persons with disabilities during planning and training on emergency response as this can be easily guided in case there's a loophole, it can be easily detected" (IDI-KS-05).

Accessibility of communication remains a critical barrier. Despite some efforts, such as using local radio broadcasts, many disabled persons still do not receive timely or understandable information.

"Government tries to disseminate information through local radios even though this is limited to a section of disabled persons" (KII-KS-03). Others called for consistent inclusion of sign language interpreters in public engagements: "Improvement should be done on means of communication. For all engagements and activities that involve persons with disabilities, we should always have a sign language interpreter" (IDI-KS-07).

While NGOs and Organizations of Persons with Disabilities (OPDs) like NUDIPU and KADIWODI provide some support, it is not sufficient to meet the needs. As one participant acknowledged, "Through partnerships with NGOs working with OPDs like NUDIPU and KADIWODI"

(IDI-KS-03).

Accessibility challenges also extend to emergency health services and evacuation processes. Participants stressed that evacuation centers must be adapted for disability access: "Evacuation centers should be made easily accessible for Persons with disabilities." Even where health services are technically available, delivery remains inconsistent and often inaccessible for persons with disabilities: "Health services are accessible for everyone including disabled persons, even at the local level through VHTs, Health Centers, and Hospitals" (KII-KS-05).

Furthermore, there are concerns about training and preparedness among emergency responders. The training often does not address how to appropriately assist persons with disabilities during evacuations, leaving many behind. "Lack of enough emergency responders to assist in evacuating the disabled since the few that are available... are always focusing on evacuating children" (IDI-KS-06). Similarly, communication strategies continue to fall short for the deaf and blind: "Communication modes used tend to discriminate the deaf and blind" (KII-KS-02).

There is a clear gap in disaster management team capacity. Many leaders and responders lack proper training on how to engage with persons with disabilities during emergencies: "Lack of training on how to handle persons with disabilities during disasters and critical moments by the leaders and responsible teams" (KII-KS-05).

Finally, the absence of localized leadership structures inclusive of marginalized groups exacerbates the problem. One participant suggested that "Local leaders should be given information to disseminate to the local communities and put committees to handle emergencies with different categories of people to represent the marginalized groups" (IDI-KS-01). Even where training exists, it is inconsistently applied, especially when it comes to disability-focused practices (KII-KS-05).

Overall, the gaps in disaster preparedness and response plans are rooted in systemic exclusion, inaccessible communication, inadequate infrastructure, and a lack of targeted training, all of which urgently need to be addressed to ensure no one is left behind.

3.5 Accessibility and inclusiveness of evacuation centers, shelters, and safe spaces:

Evacuation centers, shelters, and safe spaces remain largely inaccessible and non-inclusive for LGBTQ+ persons with and without disabilities. Physical accessibility remains a major challenge. Many evacuation centers are not designed to accommodate the needs of disabled persons, making it difficult for them to access food, shelter, and other essential services. As one participant shared, "The evacuation center in Muhokya is inaccessible, especially without help since it is located some distance out of town, and the roads are usually cut off by floodwaters" (IDI-KS-06). Others emphasized that facilities often lack basic accommodations such as ramps and accessible restrooms, noting that "The facilities are not user-friendly to disabled persons, mostly the small restrooms are not easily accessed" (IDI-KS-03). Although there have been some infrastructure improvements, challenges remain: "Government has improved accessibility of movement for disabled persons in different infrastructures such as on roads, heating centers, and schools" (KII-KS-03).

Beyond physical barriers, there is a significant lack of safety and inclusion for LGBTQ+ persons within shelters. Many face the risk of being outed, discriminated against, or even subjected to violence. As

one participant reported, "Queer persons are always outed in IDP camps, which hinders them from accessing services" (IDI-KS-04). Others described facing harassment, with one noting, "Yes, as a queer person, harassment was always targeted at me in IDP camps" (IDI-KS-04). In addition, discrimination is not limited to LGBTQ+ individuals; disabled persons who manage to reach shelters also experience various forms of abuse. One key informant explained, "disabled persons who manage to get to the camps are violated against, i.e., GBV, sexual violence in the camps" (KII-KS-01).

Safe spaces and evacuation centers often fail to meet even the most basic needs of marginalized groups. Many disabled persons face serious risks due to the poor living conditions in shelters, including exposure to waterborne diseases. As one respondent put it, "Waterborne diseases like cholera, no access to clean water, most toilets are washed away, and even accessing good facilities in the camps is hard for persons with disabilities" (KII-KS-01). LGBTQ+ individuals also struggle to access vital services during emergencies, particularly those related to healthcare. One person shared, "I have been forced to move from my native home to another place, my neighborhood, where I would get my medication; I am unable to get it" (IDI-MB-06).

Efforts to create more inclusive evacuation processes are still insufficient. Emergency responders and community leaders rarely engage directly with marginalized individuals to understand their needs. Participants stressed the importance of leadership involvement and community outreach: "Leaders and emergency responders must meet them one-on-one in their communities and speak with them" (IDI-MB-03), and "Through involving them in different kinds of activities in the communities" (KII-KS-02). Advocacy and mindset change at the community level are also essential. One respondent recommended, "Advocate for the needs of the person with a disability. Sensitization of communities on disability inclusiveness and a mindset change" (KII-KS-03).

There is a clear need to prioritize inclusive response mechanisms, as highlighted by one participant: "Priority should be given to disabled persons' inclusive response mechanisms which will enable emergency responders to better handle persons with disabilities during emergencies" (IDI-KS-07). Additionally, greater involvement of marginalized groups in planning and decision-making could help ensure that shelters and evacuation centers are better equipped to

meet their specific needs. As suggested by another respondent, having representatives at shelters is key: "A representative at these shelters" (IDI-MB-04).

Ultimately, while some infrastructure improvements have been noted, the broader environment of evacuation centers and safe spaces remains largely exclusionary. Without significant reforms to address both physical accessibility and social discrimination, LGBTQ+ persons with and without disabilities will continue to face disproportionate risks during disasters.

4.0 DISCUSSION

The results clearly show that disasters such as floods, landslides, droughts, and strong winds are increasingly devastating communities in Kasese and Mbale, aligning with broader patterns of climate change in Uganda. These disasters are not just environmental events; they have cascading effects, destroying infrastructure, worsening food insecurity, and heightening social inequalities. For marginalized groups, particularly LGBTQ+ persons

with and without disabilities, the impact is significantly harsher due to already existing layers of exclusion and discrimination.

While all community members suffer during disasters, LGBTQ+ persons with and without disabilities experience "double" or even "triple" marginalization. For example, disabled persons face physical barriers to evacuation and accessible communication, while LGBTQ+ individuals are further stigmatized or excluded from aid efforts. As the findings show, persons with disabilities who also identify as LGBTQ+ endure "double discrimination," facing neglect not only due to their disability but also their sexual orientation. This reality is compounded during emergencies, highlighting the critical need for an intersectional approach to disaster response, as Grech & Weber (2025a) and McKinney & Wright (2021) emphasized.

Despite Uganda's strong legal frameworks, such as the Persons with Disabilities Act, 2020 and the Equal Opportunities Act, 2007, practical disaster response remains non-inclusive. Current plans often assume a "one-size-fits-all" approach, failing to adapt infrastructure, communication strategies, and emergency services to meet the needs of marginalized groups. Evacuation centers are largely inaccessible, and communication about emergencies often

excludes the deaf and visually impaired communities, echoing the gaps identified in Uganda's Disaster Preparedness and Management Policy (2010).

Climate change has intensified these risks. Unpredictable rainfall, more frequent droughts, and temperature extremes place extra pressure on already strained systems. Vulnerable groups—particularly poor, rural, disabled, and LGBTQ+ persons—are disproportionately affected because they have fewer resources to cope and recover (Heikkinen, 2024). For instance, people with albinism faced heightened risks during droughts due to harsh sun exposure, while persons who crawled without wheelchairs were exposed to disease risks in disaster shelters.

The findings also reveal how disasters exacerbate social stigma and psychological distress. LGBTQ+ persons with and without disabilities face verbal abuse, sexual violence, and social rejection even within supposed "safe spaces" like IDP camps. This not only puts their immediate physical safety at risk but also has long-term impacts on their mental health and well-being. As noted by Mandolini (2023), Uganda's harsh legal environment against LGBTQ+ persons adds

another layer of vulnerability, making it harder for queer persons to seek help or protection during emergencies.

Participants strongly called for disability- and LGBTQ+-inclusive disaster planning. Their recommendations—including accessible evacuation centers, communication in multiple formats (e.g., Braille, sign language), sensitization campaigns, and mandatory representation of marginalized groups on disaster committees—mirror the broader need to operationalize Uganda’s legal commitments. Without such actions, disaster responses will continue to leave behind the very groups most in need of protection.

Given the increasing severity of climate-related disasters, the significance of inclusive planning cannot be overstated. Recognizing and responding to the intersecting vulnerabilities of disability and LGBTQ+ identities is essential for building a disaster response system that is equitable, effective, and resilient. This project is therefore both timely and necessary. It can contribute to shifting Uganda’s disaster management from reactive, exclusionary models toward proactive, inclusive strategies that safeguard all citizens, as emphasized in Uganda’s National Climate Change Act of 2021 and international human rights commitments.

5.0 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Conclusion

The experiences of persons living with disabilities and identifying as LGBTQ+ in disaster situations in Uganda reveal severe, layered vulnerabilities. Participants from Kasese and Mbale districts reported facing floods, landslides, drought, and other climate-related disasters, but their ability to respond was sharply limited by discrimination, inaccessible evacuation centers, communication barriers, and a lack of inclusive planning. LGBTQ+ persons with and without disabilities are frequently denied equitable access to humanitarian aid, safe shelter, and essential services, reinforcing structural discrimination in emergency contexts. Their challenges were compounded by systemic neglect, poverty, stigma, and mobility barriers, especially in hard-to-reach rural areas.

Gaps in current disaster preparedness and response frameworks are profound. While Uganda has strong legal commitments to disability rights and climate change adaptation at the national level, implementation remains weak, especially concerning intersectional vulnerabilities. Disaster communication is rarely accessible to

persons with sensory disabilities; evacuation centers are often physically inaccessible; and LGBTQ+ persons face double discrimination, both for their disability and their sexual identity. Crucially, marginalized groups are excluded from decision-making processes that could otherwise ensure their specific needs are met during emergencies.

The accessibility and inclusiveness of evacuation shelters and safe spaces remain critically poor. Physical, social, and systemic barriers prevent LGBTQ+ persons with and without disabilities from accessing basic services and protection during disasters. Shelters often lack ramps, adapted sanitation facilities, and protection from violence or harassment. Some improvements exist, but they are not widespread.

Uganda's vulnerability to climate change manifesting through floods, droughts, and extreme weather—demands urgent reform in disaster preparedness. If marginalized populations, particularly those living with disabilities and identifying as LGBTQ+, are not explicitly included, national efforts will remain unjust and ineffective.

Integrating their voices into emergency planning, improving physical and communication accessibility, training responders, and

combating stigma are essential steps toward building a disaster response system that leaves no one behind.

5.2 Recommendations

Improve Accessibility of Evacuation Centers and Public Facilities. There is an urgent need to make evacuation centers and public infrastructure accessible to persons with disabilities (PWDs). This includes building ramps, inclusive restrooms, wide entrances, and equipping facilities with essential appliances and mobility aids to ensure easy movement and comfort for all disabled persons during emergencies.

Strengthen Disaster-Resilient Infrastructure and Shelter

Expansion. Participants emphasized constructing stronger, flood-resistant structures to ensure safety during disasters. Expanding the number of evacuation centers and strategically locating them near schools and health facilities would improve accessibility for disabled persons and ensure better delivery of services like healthcare, food, and water during emergencies.

Ensure Inclusive Relocation, Health Services, and Psychosocial Support.

Relocation efforts must prioritize disabled persons, ensuring they

have access to mobility assistance, therapy, and health services.

Psychosocial support programs are also essential to address mental health needs following disasters, with particular attention to those with physical disabilities and other vulnerabilities.

Make Communication Inclusive and Disability-Sensitive. Effective

disaster communication must be made accessible by using disability-friendly channels such as local radios, sign language, visual alerts, and trained interpreters. This would ensure that all persons with disabilities, including those who are Deaf or blind, can receive critical information during emergencies and reduce the risk of exclusion.

Expand Economic Empowerment and Educational

Opportunities. Participants stressed the need for stronger support in education, vocational training, and access to start-up capital for disabled persons. Empowering individuals economically and educationally would enhance their resilience and ability to recover from the impacts of disasters, particularly in hard-to-reach areas.

Combat Stigma, Discrimination, and Strengthen Legal Protections.

Addressing the stigma and discrimination faced by LGBTQ+ persons with and without disabilities is crucial. This includes enforcing anti-

discrimination laws, sensitizing communities on inclusion, and ensuring equitable access to all services without bias. Programs must intentionally cater to intersectional vulnerabilities to promote dignity and protection for all.

Strengthen Leadership, Community Engagement, and

Institutional Support. Disaster response must actively involve disabled persons in planning and leadership roles. Strengthening collaboration between government bodies, NGOs, and community networks can ensure a more inclusive and coordinated response. Empowering local leaders and organizations to advocate for disability rights is vital for sustainable change.

Improve Data Systems and Mainstream Inclusion in Disaster Planning.

Collecting and using disaggregated data on disability, gender, and sexual orientation is essential for informed planning and resource allocation. National disaster preparedness strategies must explicitly mainstream the needs of marginalized groups to ensure that no one is left behind during emergencies.

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Appendix: Data Collection Tool

Appendix I: Consent Form

Title of Study: Enhancing Inclusive Disaster Preparedness: The Intersectionality of Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity, Expression, Sex Characteristics (SOGIES), Disability, and Climate Change Impacts in Mbale and Kasese Districts.

My name is

You are being invited to participate in a research study that aims to explore the intersectionality of sexual orientation, gender identity, expression, sex characteristics (SOGIES), disability, and climate change impacts in Uganda. The study focuses on how these factors affect disaster preparedness, specifically in the Mbale and Kasese districts. This research is being conducted by the Diverse Empowerment Foundation (DEF), in collaboration with local stakeholders.

If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to:

- i. Complete a survey or questionnaire about your experiences with climate change, disaster preparedness, and the intersection of your sexual orientation, gender identity, and/or disability. OR
- ii. Participate in an In-depth interview or a Key Informant Interview where you may be asked about your personal experiences with disaster response, accessibility, and support systems.

- iii. Participation in this baseline study is voluntary, and you can choose not to answer specific questions or withdraw from the study at any time without penalty.

Risks and Discomforts: While this study poses minimal risk to participants, you may experience some discomfort when discussing personal experiences related to your sexual orientation, gender identity, disability, or climate-related challenges. If you feel uncomfortable at any point, you may choose to stop participating in the interview or focus group and may skip any questions you do not wish to answer.

If you experience distress, the research team will provide you with information on local counseling or support services.

Benefits: By participating in this study, you will help improve disaster preparedness and response strategies for LGBTQ+ individuals with disabilities in Uganda. Your input will contribute to making disaster management systems more inclusive and accessible, which can benefit the entire community, particularly marginalized groups.

Confidentiality: All the information you provide will be kept confidential and used solely for the purposes of this research. Any personal information will be anonymized, and your identity will not be shared with anyone outside the research team. Only aggregated data will be published or presented in reports. Records related to the study will be stored securely and only accessible to authorized research personnel. Any publications or reports resulting from this study will not contain any personal identifying information.

Compensation: As a participant in this study, you will receive for your time and involvement. This may include transportation allowances or other incentives as agreed upon by the research team.

Contact Information: If you have any questions about the study or your participation, or if you would like to withdraw your consent, please contact the research team: [Principal Investigator Name], [Institution Name], [Phone Number], [Email Address]

Consent:

Consent ID: _____

1. Do you have any questions? YES NO

2. Do you want to take part in the group discussion? YES
NO

3. Do you understand that we will audio record when we talk?
 YES NO

Please let me know if you would like to keep a copy of this form so that you can review it later, contact someone about the study, or keep it for your records.

Participant's Name	Witness (if applicable):	Principal Investigator
_____	_____	Signature: _____
_____	_____	_____
Signature: _____	Signature: _____	Date: _____
_____	_____	_____
Date: _____	Date: _____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

Thank you for considering participating in this study. Your involvement will be invaluable in ensuring that disaster preparedness strategies are inclusive of all people, regardless of their sexual orientation, gender identity, or disability.

END

Appendix II: In-Depth Interview Guide

The **interviewer** reads: Good morning/afternoon/evening. Thank you for speaking with me today. I would like to talk to you about the intersectionality of sexual orientation, gender identity, expression, sex characteristics (SOGIES), disability, and climate change impacts in Uganda. The study focuses on how these factors affect disaster preparedness, specifically in the Mbale and Kasese districts. This research is being conducted by the Diverse Empowerment Foundation (DEF), in collaboration with local stakeholders.

1. Tell me about the major climate-related disasters in your community.
2. How have these climate-related disasters/emergencies impacted your daily life as an LGBTQ+ person with a disability?
3. What challenges do you face in preparing for or responding to disasters due to your disability?
4. Have you experienced barriers in accessing disaster preparedness resources because of your sexual orientation or gender identity?
5. Have you encountered discrimination or stigma from emergency responders during a disaster? If so, can you share an example?
6. What difficulties have you faced in accessing gender-inclusive or accessible evacuation centers during emergencies?
7. Do you feel that available disaster preparedness information is accessible (e.g., Braille, sign language, simple formats)? Why or why not?

8. What support networks or resources would help you feel safer and more prepared during disasters?
9. How can local leaders and emergency responders be better trained to address the needs of LGBTQ+ persons with disabilities during disasters?
10. Have you participated in any community-led disaster preparedness initiatives? If so, what was your role?
11. What are the biggest gaps in LGBTQ+ inclusion in disaster preparedness, and how can they be addressed?
12. How can communication and coordination between LGBTQ+ persons with disabilities and emergency responders be improved?
13. What changes would you suggest to make shelters and safe spaces more inclusive and accessible?
14. What specific improvements should be made to disaster preparedness plans to better support LGBTQ+ individuals with disabilities?

END

Appendix III: Key Informant Interview Guide

The **interviewer** reads: Good morning/afternoon/evening. Thank you for speaking with me today. I would like to talk to you about the intersectionality of sexual orientation, gender identity, expression, sex characteristics (SOGIES), disability, and climate change impacts in Uganda. The study focuses on how these factors affect disaster preparedness, specifically in the Mbale and Kasese districts. This research is being conducted by the Diverse Empowerment Foundation (DEF), in collaboration with local stakeholders.

1. Tell me about the major climate-related disasters in your community.
2. What are the main disaster-related challenges faced by LGBTQ+ individuals with disabilities in your district?
3. How does climate change exacerbate vulnerabilities for LGBTQ+ individuals with disabilities in your community?
4. What specific barriers do LGBTQ+ individuals with disabilities face when accessing disaster relief services or shelters?
5. Are there gender-neutral evacuation centers in your area, and how accessible are they for LGBTQ+ persons with disabilities?
6. How do local emergency responders currently address the needs of LGBTQ+ individuals with disabilities during disasters?
7. What kind of training do emergency responders receive regarding the inclusion of LGBTQ+ persons with disabilities?
8. How are LGBTQ+ individuals with disabilities involved in disaster preparedness planning in your district?

9. What policies or practices could improve the inclusivity of disaster preparedness for LGBTQ+ persons with disabilities?
10. What strategies have been effective in building trust with
LGBTQ+ persons with disabilities in disaster preparedness efforts?
11. How do cultural norms in your community impact the inclusion of LGBTQ+ individuals with disabilities in disaster planning?
12. What are the key challenges LGBTQ+ persons with disabilities face in accessing healthcare and support during emergencies?
13. How can disaster response authorities and organisations improve their strategies to better serve LGBTQ+ persons with disabilities?
14. What role do local leaders and community-based organizations play in addressing the needs of LGBTQ+ persons with disabilities in disasters?
15. How can public awareness campaigns effectively highlight the needs of LGBTQ+ persons with disabilities in disaster preparedness?
16. What are the most pressing needs of LGBTQ+ persons with disabilities in disaster preparedness, and how can they be met?

END