

## **The Rights of Internally Displaced Persons with Disabilities**

### **Mainstreaming in Action: A case study from Sri Lanka**

CBM Australia is an international Christian development organisation committed to improving the quality of life of persons with disabilities. This case study describes a project undertaken in 2009 by LEADS, a Sri Lankan Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO), with the support of CBM. It highlights some of the challenges and lessons learned in addressing issues surrounding the large number of displaced families which included members with disabilities.

#### **Background: Sri Lanka in 2009**

In 2009, in the final months of a 26 year civil war, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) reported that over 230,000 people were forced to flee their homes. These new internally displaced persons (IDPs) joined 65,000 other IDPs who had previously escaped from the Northern Vanni conflict area between the end of 2008 and mid-April 2009.

With such a huge influx of newly displaced people, the temporary camps were overwhelmed. Due to their long-standing relationship with the Government of Sri Lanka, LEADS were in a position to provide assistance to the IDPs.

#### **The Project**

CBM's partnership with LEADS sought to provide emergency humanitarian aid for IDP's in transit camps over a period of 3 months. In such a situation of displacement, people with disabilities and their families have the same basic rights as any other person. But because of invisibility, inaccessibility and marginalisation, they often slip through the cracks and are not part of the mainstream response.

The LEADS/CBM project provided suitable emergency shelter and facilities, sanitation units, meals, community cooking facilities and a common hall for people with disabilities and their families. LEADS managed the project on the ground, using local staff. CBM provided training on inclusion of persons with disabilities, technical and strategic input and financial support.

#### **Key Challenges**

LEADS faced pressure from the shelter cluster to build to the recommended minimum dimensions which clashed with accessible building requirements. Ultimately, through advocacy efforts with local

government, they received permission to build appropriate accommodation with some compromises.

### **Current Action**

CBM continues to advocate at the international level for the SPHERE standards to pay adequate attention to persons with disabilities. Article 11 of the *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* specifically speaks to situations of risk and humanitarian emergencies.

### **Epilogue**

LEADS is now working to resettle these displaced families and restore their livelihoods. The recently constructed shelters will soon be used as rehabilitation sites.

## **ANNEX**

### **Recommendations based on this case study:**

- **Identification of persons with disabilities** - disaggregating statistics, including disability in all data gathering.
- **Sensitisation and training for humanitarian stakeholders** - the World Health Organization estimates that 10% of people have a disability, therefore if conflict in Sri Lanka created 300,000 IDPs, at least 30,000 of them would have a disability, justifying the need for an inclusive emergency response.
- **Standards and guidelines for Disaster Risk Reduction** - humanitarian action at the international and national levels should factor in the rights of persons with disabilities.