



SAFEGUARDING DISABILITY RIGHTS AMID SOUTH SUDAN'S CATASTROPHIC HUMANITARIAN CRISES: A CALL TO ACTION FOR INCLUSIVE HUMANITARIAN RESPONSE

Protecting the rights of Persons with Disabilities (PWD) is not only a duty under the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) but also essential to effective humanitarian response, social stability, cost-effective service delivery, and inclusive recovery. This brief summarizes the evidence, explains why it matters, and offers prioritized, actionable recommendations for government, donors and humanitarian actors [1, 2].

The exact population of PWD remains unknown in South Sudan, however national estimates indicated that 1.2 million people, or 16% of the population are PWD [1]. Rapid assessments using the Washington Group Short Set in PoCs and displacement sites reported higher disability prevalence rates of approximately 19%. This figure is consistent with evidence that disability prevalence in crisis-affected populations is higher than in stable settings due to injury, disease, and mental-health sequelae [3, 4].

PWD face unique challenges compared with the general population in South Sudan.

Unique challenges facing PWD in South Sudan	
Domain	Challenges
Infrastructure	Inaccessible buildings and transport, poor road access
Education	Non-inclusive environment, untrained teachers, unsafe facilities
Social & Discrimination	Stigma, exclusion, violence, especially against women
Employment	High unemployment, discriminatory hiring practices
Healthcare	Lack of assistive devices, inequitable service access
Conflict Impact	Disability from conflict, limited trauma/mental healthcare

Humanitarian/Disaster Response	Poor eviction planning, inaccessible camps, vulnerability
Nodding Syndrome	Disease-related disability, stigma, lack of care and education access

Table 1: Unique Challenges facing PWD in South Sudan.

The ongoing-armed conflict, inter-communal violence, economic crisis, the war in Sudan and climate-related shocks, has resulted into a catastrophic humanitarian crisis in South Sudan. An estimated 9.3 million people (70% of the population) in South Sudan need humanitarian assistance in the year 2025. Extreme poverty and food insecurity is rising, with reports from the Human Capital Index and World Bank analyses showing severe welfare deficits - conditions that intersect with disability to multiply disadvantage [5-7]. The current hyperinflation, and public-finance shocks in South Sudan are weakening household purchasing power and services, while violence and access restrictions hinder aid delivery—heightening PWDs' risks of exclusion, livelihood loss, disrupted assistive care, protection violations, and denial of education and health [8-10].

South Sudan has ratified the UN Convention of the Rights of the People with Disabilities and made normative progress in disability inclusion in humanitarian Systems Cluster Plans and national government commitments including development of National Disability and Inclusion Policy 2013, and the National Disability Action Plan 2020 [10, 11]. However operationalization of the CRPD principles remains limited due to weak data systems, enforcement mechanisms and resourcing [1, 12]. The country has significant gaps in disability-specific legal frameworks and institutional capacity for enforcing disability rights. These gaps exacerbates structural exclusion [13, 14].

How the Current Economic, & Security Crises is affecting Persons with Disabilities

How the Current Economic, & Insecurity Crises is Affecting Persons With Disability in South Sudan		
Impact Area	Effects on PWDs	Evidence/Notes
Loss of purchasing power	Inflation and currency depreciation make medicines, prosthetics, wheelchair parts, and hearing-aid batteries unaffordable. Extra “disability costs” (caregivers, transport, assistive tech maintenance) deepen household poverty.	[8]
Interrupted health & rehabilitation services	Limited rehab and prosthetics services (mostly urban); supply-chain disruptions and funding cuts reduce assistive devices and follow-up care—worsening functional outcomes and dependence.	[2]
Heightened protection risks	In camps, transit sites, and flood-affected areas, PWDs face neglect, SGBV, separation, and exclusion from aid when delivery is inaccessible. Reporting and case management barriers persist.	[1]
Education exclusion	School closures, teacher shortages, and lack of accessible materials disproportionately exclude children with disabilities—reducing future earning potential and social inclusion.	[15, 16]
Operational constraints	Violence against aid workers, bureaucracy, and reduced funding limit programme reach, forcing scale-back of inclusive components (e.g., mobile rehab teams, Organizations of Persons with Disabilities sub-grants).	[9]

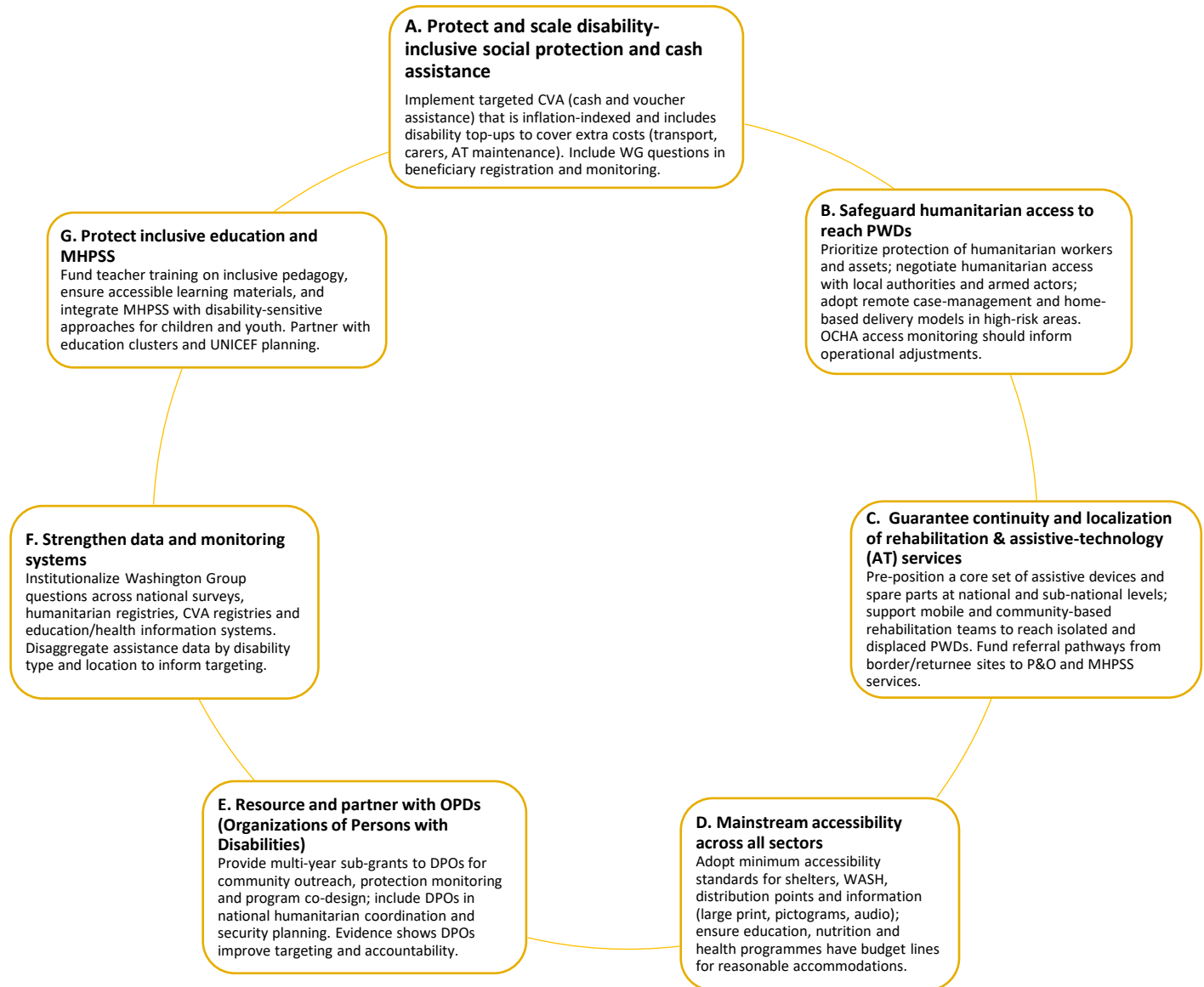
Table 2: How the current Economic and Insecurity Crises is Affecting PWD in South Sudan.

Why Protecting PWD Rights Matters — Practical, Legal and Moral Reasons

Why protecting PWD rights matters — practical, legal and moral reasons		
Dimension	Key Points	Sources
A. Legal & Human-Rights Obligation	South Sudan is bound by international law (CRPD principles of non-discrimination, accessibility, participation). Non-compliance creates legal and reputational risks, while denying dignity and justice to citizens.	globalprotectioncluster.org
B. Humanitarian Effectiveness & Value for Money	Inclusive programmes reach more people efficiently. Accessible distribution reduces exclusion errors, disability-sensitive cash limits diversion, and early rehabilitation cuts lifetime dependency and health costs. Inclusion is cost-saving long-term.	Relief Web; International Review of the Red Cross
C. Social Stability & Cohesion	Excluding PWDs from assistance and recovery fuels grievances, undermines social cohesion, and increases protection problems and conflict risks. Inclusive recovery strengthens stability.	globalprotectioncluster.org
D. Public Health & Economic Recovery	Effective inclusion (rehab, assistive tech, MHPSS) improves independence and economic participation, enhancing household resilience and national recovery. Critical in contexts where many are excluded from livelihoods.	World Bank; Humanity & Inclusion

Table 3: Why protecting PWD Rights – Practical, Legal, and Moral Reasons

Priority Policy & Operational Recommendations



Key Messages for Policymakers and Humanitarian Organizations

To Policy Makers (Government of South Sudan, line ministries, and parliament):

- Fulfil CRPD obligations now: convert commitments into enforceable accessibility regulations and budget lines—accessibility is not an optional expense.
- Protect inclusive social protection: extend inflation-indexed cash support with disability top-ups to prevent deepening dependency and exclusion.
- Support OPDs as essential partners: fund them directly and include them in planning, monitoring and security negotiations.

To donors and humanitarian agencies:

- Prioritize disability inclusion in all funding decisions and HRP allocations; maintain (not cut) inclusive components such as mobile rehab teams and OPD sub-grants.
- Insist on disability-disaggregated reporting and adopt Washington Group questions across all response pipelines.
- Invest in risk-tolerant funding (flexible, multi-year) that enables sustained AT supply chains, rehabilitation and OPD capacity building.
- Do not allow “access constraints” to become an excuse for excluding PWDs; adopt remote, home-based and community volunteer models where site access is limited, and validate decisions with OPD

Conclusion

The current economic and security crises in South Sudan magnify pre-existing disadvantages faced by persons with disabilities. Evidence shows that PWDs make up a substantial share of crisis-affected populations and that lack of inclusion creates avoidable harm and long-term costs to families and to society. Protecting PWD rights during shocks is legally required, operationally smart and socially stabilizing. Immediate, funded action—focused on inclusive cash assistance, resilient AT supply chains, OPD empowerment, and accessibility standards—will reduce suffering and strengthen national resilience.

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