

## The Rapid Assessment Report on the Situation of Persons with Disabilities in Flood-Affected Communities in the Lower Volta Basin.



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## **Introduction:**

On September 15<sup>th</sup>, 2023, the Volta River Authority announced the commencement of controlled spilling of excess water in the Akosombo and Kpong dams<sup>i</sup>. In the days following this announcement, several media reports indicated that communities and economic activities along the banks of the lower part of the Volta River had been submerged, resulting in the displacement of approximately 26,000 people<sup>ii</sup> including persons with disabilities. In view of this development, the leadership of the Ghana Federation of Disability Organisations (GFD) discussed the matter and conducted a rapid field assessment of the situation and the condition of persons with disabilities living in the affected communities.

To this end, on 20<sup>th</sup> October 2023, a joint team comprising representatives from the national and the volta regional branch of the GFD embarked on a field trip to the affected areas to assess the situation and get first-hand information for further actions. Under the leadership of the national Representative with responsibilities for Gender issues, who is a Board member of the GFD, the team visited affected communities in the South Tongu, Central Tongu, and North Tongu districts, where they interacted with persons with disabilities affected by the floods.

The team from GFD comprised:

- i. Madam Martha Coffie, national Representative for Gender issues in the GFD
- ii. Mr Moses Fordjour, Monitoring, Evaluation and Knowledge Management Lead
- iii. Mr Mohammed Lansah, Learning and Documentation Officer
- iv. Ms. Klu Elikplim, GFD Volta Regional President
- v. Jokeman Azetefe, GSPD Volta Regional President
- vi. Alex Kosi Akpo, Member of Volta Regional Branch

The scope of the assessment was to cover all persons with disabilities in the districts which were visited without much attention to affiliation to GFD member organisations. Therefore, the engagements during the visit involved other persons who are not registered with any disability association in the communities.

## **Purpose and objective:**

The purpose of this visit was to conduct a rapid assessment and fact-finding mission to understand the current conditions of Persons with Disabilities affected by the floods.

The key objectives were to:

- (i) Understand the extent to which persons with disabilities were affected by the floods and the priority support needed.
- (ii) Assess the inclusion of persons with disabilities in ongoing disaster relief and humanitarian efforts by government and non-governmental organizations in the affected areas, and evaluate their access to aid and support.
- (iii) Gather evidence to facilitate effective advocacy and resource mobilization for affected persons with disabilities in the communities.
- (iv) Convey a message of solidarity and sympathy from the GFD national leadership to assure affected individuals with disability of our support.
- (v) Document any additional issues and make recommendations for further decisions and actions.

## **Methodology:**

The assessment team employed a multi-faceted approach to gather data on disability in the affected communities:

- a. Conducted focus group meetings with leaders of GFD member organisations in the affected communities.
- b. Conducted interviews with affected individuals to capture their first-hand accounts and lived experiences pertaining to the situation.
- c. Conducted key informant interviews targeting community and opinion leaders.
- d. Engaged in observation and onsite visits, documenting the situation through photos and videos.

With regards to the focus group sessions, our team convened three inclusive groups consisting of men, women, youth, and children with disabilities. These gatherings took place in Adidome within the Central Tongu District, Sogakope in the South Tongu Municipality, and Mepe in the North Tongu District. In each of the three locations, the team met with over 15 persons with disabilities comprising leaders and members from the various disability groups. It is worth noting that persons who are Deaf and or Hard of Hearing, persons with psychosocial disabilities and persons with albinism were conspicuously missing. The reason given for this was that they could not be contacted.



*Photograph description: Community members with disability and GFD team sitting in a meeting at a shelter at Mepe*

After each focus group meeting, some individual persons with disabilities were identified for one-on-one interviews to delve deeper into their experiences, as discussed within the group meetings. In each of the three locations, a minimum of two of such interviews were conducted.



*Photograph description: The GFD team standing together with Chiefs and elders at Mepe*

Key informants interviewed by the team included two divisional chiefs at Sogakope and Mepe who provided comprehensive briefings on the overall situation and the extent to which persons with disabilities were being factored into relief efforts. Additionally, two Assembly Members representing the central and south Tongu districts were also interviewed.

Subsequently, the team conducted site visits to the shelters where persons with disabilities were accommodated. Here, the team observed their living conditions and engaged in conversations with selected individuals. After obtaining consent from the groups, the GFD captured visual documentation through photographs and recorded videos to effectively document the situation.

## **Key Findings:**

The team reports the following key findings:

- (i) The flood has had a significant impact on a substantial portion of the population in the three districts visited. This includes persons with disabilities, as widely reported in both local and international media following the spillage of the Dam by the Volta River Authority. During interviews in all three districts, individuals consistently emphasized the dire need for support for persons with disabilities who have been affected.

- (ii) According to data collected by district representatives of GFD member organisations, the table below presents a breakdown of the number of persons with disabilities affected in the three districts visited:

District/Municipality	Number of communities <sup>iii</sup> affected	Number of persons with disabilities affected	Number of persons with disabilities severely affected <sup>iv</sup>
Central Tongu	32	321	71
South Tongu	27	313	61
North Tongu	26	370	103
<b>Total</b>	<b>85</b>	<b>1,004</b>	<b>235</b>

The report from leadership and representatives of organisations of persons with disabilities, who were interviewed, indicates that a total of 1,004 individuals with disabilities across 85 communities were affected. Additionally, over 300 others are believed to have been impacted in certain areas of Ketu South Municipality.

The report from leadership and representatives of organizations focused on persons with disabilities, who were interviewed, indicates that a total of 1,004 individuals with disabilities across 85 communities were affected. Out of this number, 235 persons are categorized as severely impacted, signifying that they have lost all their possessions as a result of the floods, including livelihoods, personal belongings, assistive devices, homes, identity cards, and more. In addition, over 300 others are reported to have been affected in some parts of Ketu South Municipality.

- (iii) Fortunately, there have been no reported deaths of persons with disabilities in the affected area. However, district leaders of organizations of persons with disabilities informed the GFD team that there are still members/persons with disabilities who have not been contacted due to a loss of communication. Therefore, their situation at the time of the visit could not be confirmed. All age groups of persons with disabilities were affected by the flood.
- (iv) From the interactions, it became apparent that most of the persons with disabilities in the affected communities are experiencing trauma, with some reporting symptoms of panic attacks, experiencing sleeplessness, etc. These will need immediate counselling services and support. Immediate counselling services and support will be crucial.
- (v) The district representatives of organisations of persons with disabilities reported that some members have lost their assistive or mobility aids rendering them unable to move around to access relief support.
- (vi) The affected individuals are currently being housed in temporary facilities like classrooms, and a few are staying with relatives who were not affected. At Mepe, the affected persons are sheltered in a local primary school building with inadequate sanitation facilities, no lighting, and no access to safe drinking water. Some reported not having bathed for nearly a week. They have no means of cooking even when they received foodstuff from the chief's palace.
- (vii) In terms of access to relief efforts organized by other agencies and organisations, the team observed a lack of systems in place to prioritize persons with disabilities. Urgent action is needed, especially in addressing the immediate to medium-term needs of persons with disabilities who are affected. One district leader at Mepe recounted an instance where they were instructed to "join the queue" when seeking assistance.

- (viii) The team noted the presence of numerous agencies operating in the area. However, according to leaders representing Persons with Disabilities, none have proactively addressed their specific needs.
- (ix) Other communities including Ketu South and Keta Municipality have also been affected by the floods and there is need for visits to be paid to these places to ascertain the situation of persons with disabilities.

## Donations to the affected persons:



*Photograph description: GFD Volta regional President on the left and GFD national Gender representative in the middle of the photo making a presentation of the donation which is being received by a community leader of GFD who is on the right side of the photo.*

The GFD team made a donation of GHC6,000.00 to the affected persons with disabilities through their leadership in the presence of the chiefs and opinion leaders from some of the affected communities. Each of the three (3) districts was presented with a cash amount of Two thousand Ghana Cedis (GHc2,000.00) to cater for their petty expenses as the situation may call for.

## Recommendations:

Based on findings from the field, the GFD team proposes the following recommendations:

- a) In the immediate term, appeal is being made to agencies capable of providing assistance for critical items such as food, sanitation materials, drinking water, clothing, mosquito nets, tents, cooking utensils, stoves, mattresses, medical screening and care, as well as counselling and psychological support to prioritize persons with disabilities in their relief efforts.
- b) Assistive devices which were lost to the floods are urgently needed for persons with disabilities. From the reports of the district leaders of organisations of persons with disabilities, the data so far shows the following items will be needed immediately:
  - 18 wheelchairs for children
  - 206 adult wheelchairs
  - 309 adult elbow crutches
  - 19 children elbow crutches
  - 213 adult and 15 children's callipers
  - 225 adult white canes
  - 10 children's white canes
- c) Persons with disabilities and their stakeholders in the communities are appealing to the Districts Assemblies to immediately release the disability component of the District Assemblies Common Fund to support the needs of the affected persons with disabilities.
- d) The team recommends a collaboration that involves GFD, partners, and organisations of persons with disabilities in the affected communities to undertake comprehensive disaggregated data collection, extending beyond what has already been gathered in this preliminary assessment. The data gathering efforts will need to consider issues of intersectionality as well as cover other communities in the districts which were not visited by the GFD team.
- e) To garner the necessary support for the affected persons, there should be increase in public awareness regarding the situation of persons with disabilities in the affected communities.

- f) There should be a point of coordination of the support for persons with disabilities in order to promote synergy and maximum impact.
- g) Inclusive emergency relief efforts should also prioritize post-flood interventions that promote fundamental human rights and access to services, restore livelihoods, and encourage representation and effective participation of affected persons with disabilities in their communities.

## **Conclusion:**

The impact of the floods has been devastating for persons with disabilities in the three areas visited. While relief efforts were underway, there was a notable oversight in deliberately addressing the specific needs of persons with disabilities, in accordance with the State's obligations under Article 11 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities on Humanitarian Emergencies and situations of risk including provision of reasonable accommodation for affected persons with disabilities.

There is an urgent need for coordination and inclusion of persons with disabilities, their representative organisations, and disability inclusion experts in all efforts currently ongoing at the affected locations.

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<sup>i</sup> <https://www.vra.com/media/2023/Update-on-Controlled-Spilling-at-Akosombo-and-Kpong-Dams.php>

<sup>ii</sup> <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-67147541>

<sup>iii</sup> These are communities where persons with disabilities are known to be resident which have been affected. This does not include communities affected but do not have persons with disabilities recorded as affected there

<sup>iv</sup> Severely affected means that the victims have lost everything from homes, means of livelihoods, personal effects, and assistive devices like wheelchairs, crutches, calipers, etc.