

Disability Inclusion Helpdesk, October 2021

Evidence digest focus issue: Climate Change and Disability Inclusion

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Guest blog: prioritising disability inclusion in climate action

The climate crisis is the most pressing issue of the 21st Century, and the most recent **IPCC report** warns that significant and immediate reductions in carbon emissions are needed to mitigate the worst effects of climate change. People with disabilities are at **increased risk** of experiencing the worst consequences of climate change as they face additional challenges and barriers accessing adaptation and mitigation initiatives. However, their voices have been largely absent from discourses around climate. The forthcoming **COP26** in November is an opportunity for global leaders to come to Glasgow and commit to actions to combat climate change that are inclusive of people with disabilities. The inclusion and voices of disability activists and OPDs are crucial in finding inclusive solutions to the climate crisis.



In Zimbabwe CBM supported farmers with disabilities during the food crisis.
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To discuss these issues, Ellie Cole (Honorary Research Associate, UCL) spoke with Dr Maria Kett (Associate Professor in Humanitarianism and Disability, UCL) and Dr Mary Keogh (Advocacy Director for CBM Global).

Ellie: How should people with disabilities be included in climate action?



CBM provided farmers with seeds and livestock and equipped them with knowledge on how to improve yields.
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Maria: The issue now is not just to ensure that people with disabilities are present at COP26, but also making sure that disability issues stay on the agenda. At the COP23 in Bonn in 2017, we presented **our research** for FCDO on disability and climate resilience at a side event. We need to keep the momentum going and ensure that disability is more than just a side event. I know colleagues in IDA are **working to address this**.

Mary: Yes, it is important to get the stories out there and get people to understand the impact climate has on people with disabilities. There's a lot that those of us who work as allies in the disability sector interested to work with the disability movement on this. That's why the **research** we did at CBM engaged organisations of people with disabilities (OPDs) in the research activities. It was a small-scale project which included OPDs and disability activists who were impacted by climate events and who were also engaged in solutions. There is momentum, but there's still a long way to go in terms of how to bring the change and identify what change that is. It should be led by OPDs, and we should be listening to them and working in partnership to build capacity over the coming years. The recent IPCC report highlights the urgency of this.

Maria: I completely agree about capacity building. The research we did included OPDs, but we also included climate research centres, and this was the first time that some of them had considered disability issues. They were really open to those discussions and recognised that they hadn't really considered that perspective. But it's how you keep the conversations going, for me that was the challenge. Part of a piece of research on climate justice for people with disabilities we did for Open Society Foundation was around the role of funders. For example, we have seen that when FCDO ask funded programmes to report on disability disaggregated data, it does change the discourse.

Ellie: What role can funders have in creating disability-inclusive climate action?

Mary: There are a number of discussions happening at the moment and one of the key funders is **Global Green Grants**, who are funding very grassroots organisations at the intersection of disability and climate. Because a lot of the time we tend to naturally default to silos, so we don't think of the intersection of disability and climate or the intersection of disability, climate and gender because we're traditionally thinking of them as separate groupings or separate thematic areas. It's about how to start making those connections. Donors and funders have a real role to support that. I think we're sometimes impatient with

change, change takes time. It also takes trust and working together in coalitions to make that change happen.

Maria: When talking about how funders can ensure that people with disabilities are included, it's always a dilemma making disability inclusion a mandatory requirement, but if we don't say it, it doesn't happen. There are some big funders out there and if their grants are not inclusive of everybody, inclusive of people with disabilities, then they're not doing what they set out to do.

Ellie: COP26 will be happening in November, what can States do to improve the inclusion of people with disabilities in climate actions?

Maria: There are legal requirements for countries to include people with disabilities, which should include in their climate action plans. States are reviewing their climate action plans at COP. Very few mention people with disabilities. We know there's work happening on the ground, we know there's work happening at the international level, but it always comes back to the same point: what are States actually doing to implement this? Now's the chance to review the agreements that States have made. If they haven't put disability in their action plans, they really have to start thinking about this to ensure that everyone affected is included and try to address the impact on all members of communities.

It does feel like COP26 is an opportunity and we need to think about how we can really support OPDs to ensure that what happens at COP is something they can build on. In our research it was very much around the conversations and the capacity building of those networks, not just OPDs around climate change, but also the climate groups about disability. More research on the specific impacts of climate change on people with disabilities is needed. There needs to be more collaboration, peer-to-peer exchanges and building of networks. COP26 is an opportunity to do this, and we need to act now to ensure it does.

The latest evidence and guidance on climate change and disability inclusion

Research

An issue paper on [Promoting Disability-Inclusive Climate Change Action](#) produced by the Global Action on Disability (GLAD) Network, outlines key issues including the disproportionate impact of climate change on persons with disabilities and the serious consequences of failing to include persons with disabilities in efforts to combat the climate crisis. In a survey of its members, GLAD found that whilst most respondents have a climate change action plan, only a few of these plans address persons with disabilities. Furthermore, they found that funding on climate change rarely addresses disability inclusion, and where GLAD members undertake climate change related events or produce materials, there are usually not inclusive of or accessible to persons with disabilities.

In April 2020, an analytical study on the **promotion and protection of the rights of persons with disabilities in the context of climate change** was presented to the UNHCR. It examines the impacts of climate change on persons with disabilities and the related human rights obligations and responsibilities of States and other actors, It provides examples of good practice and concludes with recommendations for fulfilling human rights obligations.

CBM produced a working paper **Climate Change: This Century's Defining Issue** that outlines '4Ps' for inclusion of persons with disabilities within climate change plans: Personal implications such as access to information, displacement/migration, and health and wellbeing); Programme implications such as DPO capacity strengthening and leadership, inclusive programme development and design, ensuring programmes are inclusive of diversity, and working in partnerships; Policy implications, from global policy to national and local action; and Political implications such as the need for political leaders to consider disability inclusion in climate change responses and the inclusion of people with disabilities in social movements for climate justice. The paper draws on a survey and key informant interviews with persons with disabilities representing organisations of persons with disabilities, or representatives or mainstream organisations that are all engaged in climate change and disability inclusion-related activities.

The Disability Inclusion Helpdesk's 2020 **mapping and rapid evidence review of climate resilience and disability inclusion** found that despite limited data and evidence, there are a number of key links between disability and climate change. For instance, people with disabilities are more likely to be negatively affected by climate change as 80% live in low and middle-income countries, which are disproportionately affected. A mapping of 45 climate resilience programmes that sought to include people with disabilities in some way, found that most programmes take a mainstreaming approach to disability inclusion rather than including disability-specific components.

UN Women and the Stockholm Environment Institute conducted a review of **gender-responsiveness and disability-inclusion in disaster risk reduction in Asia and the Pacific**. The review of national DRR strategies and action plans included 26 countries in Asia and the Pacific and captured how they translate international commitments, including the Sendai Framework and Sustainable Development Goals, and recommendations into national DRR frameworks. The review found insufficient capacity to mainstream gender equality and social inclusion due to a lack of understanding of the root causes of vulnerability. They also identified a lack of sustainable funding for inclusive DRR, and a lack of coordination between stakeholders working on DRR.

Research on **disability-transformative early warning systems** (EWS) found that very little had been done to create inclusive and comprehensive EWS that meet the needs of individuals with physical or mental impairments. This report from London School of Economics and Practical Action highlights how systemic barriers and challenges faced by persons with disabilities not only exclude them from decision-making in DRR practices, but also from crucial information and services. A report from Handicap International identifies

good practice from South and South-East Asia in disability inclusive disaster risk management, with a focus on empowerment and participation.

The linkages between **disability, displacement and climate change** are explored in factsheet produced by UNHCR, IDMC and the International Disability Alliance. Climate change may lead to a higher risk of forced displacement through an increased frequency and intensity of extreme weather events. The risks for persons with disabilities before and after displacement are presented. Examples of promising practice are identified, such as a village early warning system in the Philippines that incorporates bells and flags to provide residents with both sound and visual signals to evacuate.

The **impacts of climate change on mental health and emotional wellbeing** are explored in a briefing paper from the Grantham Institute. It presents current evidence and implications for policy and practice. The paper found that climate change is negatively affecting the mental health of people around the world, and that people with mental health conditions are more vulnerable to the effects of climate change on physical and mental health.

CBM Global's report on **climate change, mental health and wellbeing** provides case studies from Nigeria, Zimbabwe, Burkina Faso, Bangladesh and Sierra Leone. It highlights that climate change interventions need to address the core basic needs that have been disrupted in order to reduce sources of stress; mental health and psychosocial services (MHPSS) are essential to a comprehensive response; advance preparation of mental health systems is essential; and participation of people affected, including people with disabilities and their representative organisations is essential.

The **Disability-Inclusive Climate Action Research Program** at McGill University generates, co-produces, shares, and translates knowledge on disability inclusion and climate change. Its **resources page** has a compilation of reports on disability inclusion and climate change.

The Work and Opportunities for Women (WOW) helpdesk produced a **report on the economic empowerment of excluded groups in the COP26 energy campaign**. They found that there is little published evidence around people with disabilities and the energy transition, despite the fact that it offers many opportunities for economic empowerment of people with disabilities. One key finding was that the inclusion of women and people with disabilities in apprenticeships and skills training for environmentally sustainable jobs is essential for overcoming skills shortages in certain occupations. The report includes a checklist for Disability Inclusion in Applications to the Rapid Response Facility to assess whether applications account for the situation of women, persons with disabilities and other excluded social groups..

Guidance and Case Studies

The Bond Disability and Development Group and Climate Action Network UK released a **position paper on disability inclusion in UK climate action**. It recommends that the UK Government and its relevant entities: 1. Promote a disability-inclusive rights-based approach to climate action; 2. Apply an intersectional lens to domestic and international climate action;

3. Ensure there are mechanisms in place for meaningful participation of people with disabilities; 4. Ensure that the UK's International Climate Finance is directed towards mitigation and adaptation actions that are inclusive of and accessible to people with disabilities; 5. Integrate disability rights into domestic climate change action plans, communications and commitments; 6. Ensure all UK climate change-focused communications and events are accessible; and 7. Catalyse a just transition to a future of work that contributes to sustainable development.

The GLAD Network's Disability-Inclusive Climate Action Working Group produced a **three step guide toward disability-inclusive climate action**. To make COP26 disability-inclusive, the guide suggests that events, information and campaigns should be disability-inclusive and accessible, organisations of persons with disabilities should be involved as stakeholders in negotiations, data should be collected on the impact of persons with disabilities, and climate funding should be disability-inclusive.

The just transition to a low-carbon economy has the potential to generate sustainable and inclusive jobs for persons with disabilities. The International Labour Organization (ILO) produced a policy brief on **persons with disabilities in a just transition to a low-carbon economy**. It provides an overview of the future of the world of work, existing frameworks that can guide action, examples of promising practice, and recommendations.

The ILO also held a webinar on the **inclusion of persons with disabilities in a just transition towards a sustainable and low-carbon economy**. The event covered examples of good practice, the inclusion of persons with disabilities, and what measures need to be taken by public authorities and other stakeholders to ensure persons with disabilities have access to the jobs generated by the transition to a low-carbon economy as part of build back better recovery plans.

In 2019, CBM International, Humanity and Inclusion and the International Disability Alliance compiled 39 examples of field practices and learnings from 20 countries on the **inclusion of persons with disabilities in humanitarian action**. Second one focuses on inclusive DRR and preparedness, including a case study partnering with local communities to enable persons with disabilities and their communities in Bangladesh to cope with the effects of flooding and climate change.

The European Disability Forum (EDF) and CBM Global launched a **video on disability inclusive climate justice** at the European Development Days. The video brought participants from across the world together to share their insights on the impact of climate change on persons with disabilities, and the contributions people with disabilities can make to climate action. The video, available in **long** and **short** form, also highlights that persons with disabilities are invisible in climate policy at national level and within international frameworks on climate adaptation and mitigation.

Programme learning on climate change and disability inclusion

The Africa Clean Energy (ACE) programme includes an off-grid solar challenge fund implemented by the Africa Enterprise Challenge Fund. It aims to increase access to affordable clean electricity in Africa. Around 600 million people in Africa do not have access to modern, clean electricity. This means households resort to buying paraffin and candles for lighting, as well as extra phone charging costs. Tasks like studying in the evening are also difficult without electricity. ACE recognised that people living with disabilities and women are amongst the at-risk group, as they are not always considered in the delivery chain for accessing clean energy. It commissioned a study to identify the best entry points. Findings indicated that it is critically important to foster partnerships between solar energy providers and microfinance institutes, village savings and loans associations, as well as cooperatives that serve marginalised groups. This approach is currently being implemented. Learning will be shared in due course.

Oxfam's resilient development portfolio has published evidence on [using climate and disaster risk information to build resilience](#). In Vanuatu a review found that communities that had gender and disability inclusive community disaster and climate committees were more likely to respond to early-warning messages, and support the evacuation of the most vulnerable community members. Research in Vanuatu found that adults with disabilities had less access to DRR efforts. Three out of every 10 adults with a disability had never attended school and 43% said they were unable to read a message on a mobile phone – a simple test of literacy particularly common for early-warning systems. This showed the impact of historical inequalities that must be addressed for resilience programming to be fully inclusive and effective.

CBM Global Zimbabwe's MHPSS Emergency Response to Cyclone Idai in 2019 aimed to build the capacity of nurses and key community stakeholders on MHPSS to support the wellbeing of individuals and communities affected by Cyclone Idai. The project sought to address issues of stigma and discrimination in relation to both mental health and disability; increase awareness of mental health challenges, and increase capacity for delivery of mental health services. Phase I of the MHPSS Emergency Response to Cyclone Idai project trained 50 primary health care workers and 253 community para-professionals, professionals, community influencers and leaders in MHPSS. Phase II worked with primary health care workers and communities to build capacity in MHPSS in communities and improve access to services through community awareness. The project has led to meaningful conversations within communities about mental health, however more system strengthening is needed considering the scale of the trauma experienced by cyclone-affected communities.

Disability inclusion policy news

1 Billion voices for disability inclusive and climate resilient WASH: The International Disability Alliance launched a call to action to ensure that:

1. All WASH actors identify organisations of persons with disabilities and organisations of older persons to partner with on inclusive WASH and climate change programmes.

2. Governments consider how older persons and persons with disabilities are disproportionately affected by natural disasters and climate events.
3. Governments and WASH actors identify barriers to inclusive WASH services and work with partner organisations to design and implement inclusive WASH interventions that leave no one behind, regardless of gender, age or disability status.

A call for action to **Protect the Right to Family Life & Prevent Institutionalisation for All Children** is open for endorsements. This call has been launched ahead of the upcoming day of General Discussion on Children's Rights and Alternative Care in September 2021 under the auspices of the Committee on the Rights of the Child.

The latest evidence and guidance on disability inclusion: Other topics

The impacts of COVID-19

As part of the Inclusion Works programme, quantitative studies of people with disabilities' experiences of the COVID-19 pandemic were undertaken in **Bangladesh, Nigeria, Kenya, Uganda**. 10 jobseekers in each country were invited to have two interviews with 1-2 month interval in between, to capture changes in their situation over time. Overall the findings show that the people with disabilities experienced very negative impacts during the pandemic times and there is some evidence that their pre-existing disadvantage and marginalisation has been exacerbated. Across all four countries, participants with disabilities and their families reported financial hardship as they lost their jobs, businesses or other sources of income due to lockdown restrictions. Participants reported reduced food consumption and increased hunger as they no longer had the money for regular food.

In partnership with OPDs and youth-serving civil society organisations, Leonard Cheshire produced a research report **to raise the global voice of youth with disabilities on the COVID-19 pandemic**. It found that youth with disabilities in India, Indonesia, Kenya, South Sudan and Zambia were often the first to lose their jobs or be furloughed. They had limited access to healthcare information, and reduced access to remote education opportunities in comparison to their peers without disabilities. The report also contains examples of the role youth with disabilities have played in leading the response to COVID-19 in their communities, including disseminating PPE and leading radio talk shows to educate others.

Members of Inclusion International and CONFE have released a report on **the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on persons with intellectual disabilities and their families in Latin America**. It provides recommendations, for example to provide up-to-date information in easily accessible formats; ensure access to support groups, including in remote and low-income areas; and provide priority access to vaccination for people with intellectual disabilities. [Available in Spanish and Portuguese]

UNESCO launched a policy document and a toolkit to **promote disability-inclusive responses to COVID-19**. The toolkit includes analysis of the challenges persons with disabilities, including children with disabilities, faced during the COVID-19 pandemic, and a mapping of best practices across education, healthcare, employment and independent and safe living. A desk-based evidence review provides an overview of how **social protection responses to the COVID-19 pandemic integrated gender equality and social inclusion**.

Analysis of US census data revealed that people with disabilities were **less likely to receive at least one COVID-19 vaccination** than people without disabilities (79% compared to 84%). The IDA has produced **guidance on equitable access to COVID-19 vaccinations for persons with disabilities**, which contains recommendations for governments, UN agencies and private sector.

Stigma, discrimination, abuse and violence

For women with disabilities, gender-based violence is often compounded by disability-based discrimination. ADD International have published an action research paper on **preventing violence against women and girls with disabilities in Cambodia**. It contains lessons learned on using a community mobilisation model to address the root causes of gender-based violence. The model aims to strengthen women-led OPDs and disabled women's networks to lead primary prevention interventions targeting women and girls with disabilities.

The Human Rights Council held a panel discussion on **violence against women and girls with disabilities**. Whilst global data is limited, according to We Decide, a United Nations Population Fund-led initiative, between 40 and 68 per cent of young women with disabilities experienced sexual violence before the age of 18. The panel discussed the need to tackle social and environmental barriers that hindered the full, effective and equal participation and inclusion of women and girls with disabilities in all areas of life.

Finance for disability inclusion

During the Global Education Summit a side-event was held on **financing for inclusive education**. Featuring the voices of young persons with disabilities alongside education policy makers and education financing specialists from around the world, the event highlighted promising practices for inclusive financing, and discussed how countries can strengthen education policies, sector plans and budgets for inclusive education and address gaps in data systems.

Food Security

The World Food Programme **disaggregated data from the National Survey on Agriculture and Food Security (ENSA) by disability** to improve understanding of food security needs for persons with disabilities. The Washington Group Short Set of Questions were integrated into the survey. 10% of households reported at least one member with a disability. Overall, households with at least one member with a disability were less likely to be food secure (20% vs 24%) and twice as many were severely food insecure (11% vs 5%)

compared to households without disability. The brief provides recommendations for action for humanitarian assistance, livelihoods strengthening, data collection, hygiene access and participatory approaches.

Humanitarian Response

Recognising the lack of standard practice on the inclusion of people with disabilities and older people in humanitarian response, the International Rescue Committee has developed **Inclusive Client Responsiveness Guidance** and a **Toolbox** on Inclusive Client Responsiveness with a focus on people with disabilities and older people. It includes key concepts for designing inclusive feedback mechanisms such as accessibility and reasonable accommodation, and guidance on the selection, design and monitoring of inclusive feedback mechanisms.

CBM published lessons from practice in humanitarian response regarding **disability inclusive cash assistance**. One of the key learnings from the case studies is the need to work with OPDs to ensure the identification of persons with disabilities in affected communities, in order to communicate more effectively and ensure inclusive practice in assessments, targeting, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of cash programs.

About the Disability Inclusion Helpdesk:

The Disability Inclusion Helpdesk provides pre-paid rapid research and technical assistance on disability inclusion to the UK Foreign, Commonwealth, and Development Office as part of the Disability Inclusive Development Programme. All our published reports are available on [our website](#).

Contact us via: enquiries@disabilityinclusion.org.uk