



Disability and sustainable development

Issues of disability, poverty and environmental sustainability are inextricably linked. There are an estimated one billion people with disabilities worldwide¹.

People with disabilities are particularly at risk to the effects of climate change, such as natural disasters and food insecurity. In order to be effective, any discussions or framework in relation to sustainable development must incorporate disability-inclusive development principles.

Key recommendations

1. All programming for climate change financing, mitigation, or adaptation must be required to specifically address those particularly at risk due to environment changes, including women, people with disabilities, children and older people.
2. The Sustainable Development Goals and their associated indicators, targets and reports must explicitly address people with disabilities.
3. Data regarding climate change and environment sustainability must be disaggregated in relation to disability.
4. Humanitarian responses to the effects of climate change (including natural disasters and food insecurity) must include people with disabilities.

Climate change, poverty and disability

- **Fifteen per cent of the world's population are people with disabilities** – over one billion people². Over one in five of the world's poorest people have disabilities³.
- **Disability is both a cause and consequence of poverty**, yet international policy-makers and stakeholders have not recognised or prioritised this issue within international development efforts such as the agreements at the World Earth Summits.
- The impacts of climate change (extreme weather, sea level changes and agriculture productivity changes, leading to food insecurity) will affect the world's poorest people⁴. They are some of the most **vulnerable to environmental degradation** and changes.
- Climate related reports such as the IPCC and the Human Development Report 2007-08 do not identify people with disabilities as **a group requiring particular focus or empowerment** in adapting to the changing environment⁵.
- Most of the world's poor (800 million) live in ten countries, six of which are listed in the top 20 **countries**⁶ **most at risk of extreme** weather in 2015: China, India, the Philippines, Vietnam (middle-income countries) and Bangladesh and Ethiopia (low income-countries).
- It is estimated there will be at least 200 million people (**18 million people with disabilities**) **displaced by climatic events** by 2050. There are many others who are left behind to struggle for a livelihood in degraded environments⁷.
- The health status of millions of people, including people with disabilities and the **prevalence of disability** are projected to be affected by climate change through increases in malnutrition; increased deaths, diseases and injury due to extreme weather events; increased burden of diarrhoeal diseases; and the altered distribution of some infectious diseases⁸.



Sustainable agriculture, food and water security

- **People with disabilities living in poverty are facing reduced access** to: clean water; fertile soils and suitable growing conditions for cropping and livestock; to fuel-wood and other energy sources; to wild foods, medicinal plants and other natural products related to their livelihoods⁹.
- **Food insecurity and malnutrition** can lead to long term and/or permanent impairments. There are strong links between childhood malnutrition and acquiring impairments. 15·9 per cent of Disability Adjusted Life Years (DALYs) worldwide are attributable to childhood malnutrition¹⁰ and malnutrition is estimated to cause about 20 per cent of impairments¹¹. **People with disabilities face real barriers in accessing food.**
- 6·8 per cent of DALYs worldwide are attributable to poor water, and sanitation and personal and domestic hygiene¹².
- **Conflict is a leading cause of physical and psychological disability**, and as food and water resources become increasingly insecure, it is

anticipated that conflict attributable to climate change will increase¹³.

- Adopting a **rights-based approach**, including towards people with disabilities, to food security, water rights and sustainable agriculture would assist in improving food quality; ensuring appropriate utilisation of food; and involving crisis prevention, preparedness and management.
- **Mechanisms for the assessment and monitoring of malnutrition and food crisis** need to be established that include indicators related to the capacities of the affected population to participate in food selection, processing and production—including particularly vulnerable sub-groups, such as people with disabilities.

Risk reduction, adaptation and climate-resilient development

- **People with disabilities are differently affected—and often at higher risk—in all phases of a disaster**, from exposure to risk and risk perception; to preparedness behaviour, warning communication and response; physical, psychological, social and economic impacts; emergency response; and ultimately to recovery and reconstruction¹⁴.



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- Disaster risk reduction strategies need to include assessing the **capacity of people with disabilities in preparedness** strategies and measures protecting existing assets (seeds, cattle, tools, etc.) in order to facilitate the recovery of their own food production level.
- Critical factors shaping the adaptive capacity of individuals (including people with disabilities), households and communities are their **access to and control over natural, human, social, physical, and financial resources**.
- People with disabilities are typically amongst the **most ‘resource poor’** within a community as a result of a lack of income, poor education, social exclusion and exclusion from decision-making authorities or structures. They will therefore have little access to, or control over, the resources that would facilitate adaptation.
- Poor communities, including people with disabilities can be especially vulnerable, in particular those concentrated in high-risk areas. They tend to have more **limited adaptive capacities** and are more dependent on climate-sensitive resources such as local water and food supplies¹⁵.
- People with disabilities living in poverty have limited ability to adapt to change thereby increasing their vulnerability to the impacts of climate change.
- People with disabilities (as well as other marginalised groups) often have **less access to information, resources** (or control over resources), and services. Their ability to adapt to change is therefore reduced, and their resilience to climate change diminished¹⁶.

Urbanisation and climate change

- Large numbers of environmental refugees move to **urban low-income settlements** with very poor basic services.
- Worldwide, approximately 900 million people live in **low-income settlements**, of which approximately **135 million could be people with disabilities**¹⁷.
- Higher food prices due to climate change combined with urbanisation trends will lead to more households being **net food consumers**; this too will affect (urban) poor people more¹⁸.
- Those living in urban low-income settlements **lack improved water, sanitation, and durable housing**, all three are harder to access for people with disabilities.
- 884 million people worldwide do not have **access to safe drinking water**, of which **133 million could be people with disabilities**¹⁹.
- Around 390 million people with disabilities worldwide lack **access to basic sanitation services, such as toilets and latrines**²⁰.
- Existing sanitation services in the poorest communities are seldom accessible to people with disabilities and the elderly.

International Disability and Development Consortium (IDDC) is a network of 23 international NGOs supporting the inclusion of persons with disabilities in development efforts in over 100 countries. IDDC promotes **inclusive development**, i.e. respecting the full human rights of every person, acknowledging diversity, eradicating poverty and ensuring that all people are fully included and can actively participate in development processes.



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² World Health Organization and World Bank (2011) World Report on Disability. Geneva: WHO Press.

³ World Health Organization and World Bank (2011) World Report on Disability. Geneva: WHO Press, p 28.

⁴ Eighty per cent of the 300 million people who live within 5 meters of sea level are in developing countries. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change Debate on Sea-Level Rise: Critical Stakes for Poor Countries: February 2, 2007. <http://blogs.cgdev.org/globaldevelopment/2007/02/the-ipcc-debate-on-sea-level-r.php> (accessed 13 February 2012).

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- ¹⁶ CARE International (2009) *Climate Vulnerability and Capacity Analysis*.
- ¹⁷ <http://www.unmillenniumproject.org/documents/Slumdweller-complete.pdf> quotes 900 million people, of which up to fifteen per cent could be people with disabilities (see World Health Organization and World Bank (2011) World Report on Disability. Geneva: WHO Press).
- ¹⁸ Skoufias, E., Rabassa, M. & Olivieri, O. (2011) The Poverty Impacts of Climate Change: A Review of the Evidence, Policy Research Working Paper 5622, The World Bank.
- ¹⁹ http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/pdf/MDG_FS_7_EN.pdf quotes 884 million people, of which up to fifteen per cent could be people with disabilities (see World Health Organization and World Bank (2011) World Report on Disability. Geneva: WHO Press).
- ²⁰ http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/pdf/MDG_FS_7_EN.pdf quotes 2 billion people, of which up to fifteen per cent could be people with disabilities (see World Health Organization and World Bank (2011) World Report on Disability. Geneva: WHO Press).



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