

Submission to International Development Committee on 'Climate change, development and COP26'

May 2021

About Sightsavers

1. Sightsavers is an international development organisation which works with partners to eliminate avoidable blindness and promote equality of opportunity for people with disabilities in over thirty low- and middle-income countries. Our programmes also include working to ensure quality inclusive education, strengthen health systems and eliminate neglected tropical diseases (NTDs).
2. We welcome the opportunity to contribute to the International Development Committee's inquiry on 'climate change, development and COP26'.
3. Our submission will focus on people with disabilities and the relationship with climate change and development.

Disability and climate

Increased risk and vulnerability.

4. **Poverty, minority status, gender, age, disability and other factors make some people less resilient to climate change than others.** This is recognised in a number of places, including in the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Changes' Fifth Assessment Report¹.
5. **People with disabilities face increased exposure to risk** due to the overall societal context, inaccessibility and discrimination. Environmental hazards, conflict and crisis expose and increase inequality and discrimination, exacerbating the barriers people with disabilities face in accessing healthcare, education and employment. This context means people with disabilities tend to have low levels of resilience to the impacts of crises when they occur.
6. **Poverty, inequality and discrimination** are key factors that affect the exposure of people to the impacts of climate change. People with disabilities are also more likely to live in poverty than their non-disabled peers.
7. It is critical to note that risk is **compounded by intersecting factors**, such as gender, age and minority status. For example, expected gender roles in some contexts can make women more vulnerable to climate hazards. Reduced social mobility in comparison to men can also impact vulnerability. Men may be able to evacuate independently, move freely and stay with neighbours during climate crises, but this may not be considered culturally appropriate for women. In some contexts, men with

¹ IPCC (2014) **Fifth Report**

disabilities may be physically carried by anyone in an evacuation, but this may not be considered possible for women with disabilities².

8. During emergencies, people with disabilities, in particular women and girls, are often targeted with **violence, exploitation and sexual abuse** which is common at shelters and in the community. Women with disabilities also fear abuse in their homes during climate crises, as men from neighbouring areas impacted by climate change move into their communities³. Understanding how different factors intersect to shape the lived experience is crucial for more effective decision making.

Evidence based responses.

9. Disability tends to be **under-represented in the data** used to plan, mitigate, respond and adapt to climate risk. The result is often inaccessible interventions that exclude people with disabilities from accessing vital information and services. The tools used to undertake vulnerability assessments often do not consider disability, gender or ensure the participation of women with disabilities that is vital for informing appropriate gender-sensitive and disability-inclusive interventions. This results in inaccessible climate change adaptation, early warning systems, evacuation plans, shelters, and relief distribution⁴.
10. Climate change can also dramatically change the physical environment, making effective planning involving people with disabilities all the more crucial⁵
11. A **human-rights based approach** requires informed and evidence-based decision-making which relies on the availability of good quality, disaggregated data. **Better data on marginalised groups** is essential for ensuring more effective, inclusive and targeted interventions to respond to climate impacts and build long term resilience.

Access to information and education

12. People with disabilities need to have access to relevant information, skills and knowledge to deal with the adverse impacts of climate change. Emergency information, education and services must be accessible to all, including people with disabilities.
13. In addition, climate impact is undermining education, which in itself can be a great tool to promote resilience in the face of climate change. The UK government has committed to 12 years of quality education for all girls, but climate change is a major threat to this and progress towards SDG 4. Education can be as part of the solution to climate crisis.
14. This should include **efforts to ensure schools are resilient and accessible** to people with disabilities and that **initiatives to foster sustainable development and**

² Reid, P. (2013) **Climate & Environment Assessment: Business Case for Support for the Disability Rights Fund.**

³ Smith, F. Jolley, E. & Schmidt, E. (2012) **Disability and disasters: The importance of an inclusive approach to vulnerability and social capital**

⁴ CBM (2012) **Technical brief for the post-2015 consultation process. Disability, sustainable development and climate change**

⁵ Sightsavers (2015) **Disability, disasters and empowerment.**

climate education are inclusive of people with disabilities. This is key to building resilience and ensuring people with disabilities can adapt to climate change impacts.

Disability inclusive approaches

15. Inclusive, people-centred approaches to climate change, that consider which individuals in societies are likely to experience contextual marginalisation and ensure their engagement in the design of effective climate interventions that enhance their resilience, are required.
16. **It is crucial that disability inclusion is mainstreamed through a twin-track approach** that embeds inclusion into all climate-related interventions and provides targeted interventions where require. For example, an effective food security programme would consider how people with disabilities, women, older people and other groups would access its services, to ensure they are not further excluded. A targeted intervention may also be appropriate in some contexts, for example, a food security programme that focuses on enhancing the resilience of households that include people with disabilities.
17. The most effective long-term interventions **build the resilience of marginalised groups**, through effective empowerment, participation, systems strengthening, and developing the capacity of institutions to ensure rights are embedded and respected, recognising non-discrimination as a fundamental principle.

The extent to which the Government's work to date on climate change and development has taken the SDGs and the needs of low-and-middle income countries and vulnerable groups into account.

18. The UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) brought together the three pillars of sustainable development – social, economic, environmental – and showed that these dimensions are interconnected and action on all fronts is required to end poverty and promote sustainable development.
 19. Climate change is setting back global development progress on the SDGs, increasing the number of people in poverty or in a situation of vulnerability. Ensuring climate action that takes into account the rights of most vulnerable groups, including people with disabilities, is key to fulfilling the Agenda 2030 promise to leave no one behind.
 20. The SDGs recognise the need for building resilience (Goal 1.5 and 13.1) and improving climate change-related planning for marginalised communities (Goal 13.8).
 21. The importance of ensuring an inclusive approach to addressing the risks posed by climatic change is also acknowledged in the Paris Agreement which implores all member states to respect their obligations on human rights, including the rights of people with disabilities.
 22. **DFID's Strategy for Disability Inclusive development** included **very little consideration of the impact of climate change on people with disabilities** and lacked specific action and commitment around climate and disability.
 23. The Strategy did acknowledge **the challenges around collecting quality disaggregated data on climate affected populations**. The Strategy identified that by 2021 all individual level data generated by core delivery partners should be
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disaggregated by disability wherever possible. **The extent to which data is being disaggregated in the context of climate affected communities could be an area for the Committee to explore.**

24. DFID funded **important research on climate and disability** which has advanced understanding about the intersection of disability and climate. However, as the research identified this is an area where significant further research is needed. It is critical that similar research is funded in the future and that disability is mainstreamed across climate research.

Recommendations:

- As the FCDO have committed to updating DFID's Strategy for Disability Inclusive Development, the **revised strategy should ensure that the intersection between climate and disability is more prominent** and that **specific commitments and actions** are set out;
- The FCDO should **retain and build upon DFID's 'Minimum Standards'** on disability inclusion and these should be applied and monitored across all of the FCDO's climate work;
- The FCDO should ensure that it **builds upon previously funded research on the intersection between disability and climate** and uses the findings to support the mainstreaming of disability across all of its climate work;
- The FCDO should **identify key processes to progress a disability-inclusive climate response in its international work, beyond COP26**. For example, the UK should highlight the need for the World Bank's IDA20 process to consider disability inclusion as part of the Special Theme of Climate Change.

The potential of COP26 to address these remaining challenges effectively and the steps the Government needs to take if COP26 is to succeed in tackling them.

25. There are a number of significant challenges remaining to ensure people with disabilities are not adversely affected by the climate crises. COP26 offers opportunities to address these challenges.

Responding to climate impacts

26. We welcome the UK Government's COP26 priority to deliver support, improve climate adaptation and resilience for the most vulnerable, including the appointment of the UK's International Champion on Adaptation and Resilience, Anne-Marie Trevelyan.
27. While we were pleased to see the challenges and solutions to climate impacts affecting the most vulnerable communities on the agenda of the recent Climate and Development Ministerial meeting⁶, we are **concerned that people with disabilities and the barriers they face are still not part of the COP26's agenda**. People with disabilities are not a homogenous group and individuals will have different degrees of resilience to climate shocks, many of which are not directly related to their

⁶ COP26 (2021) **Climate & Development Ministerial Chair's Summary**

impairment. Unless people with disabilities are meaningfully engaged in the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of climate policies and responses, people with disabilities may continue to be left behind.

28. It is critical that the COP26 focuses on the most marginalised and who are least able to adapt to climate change. It must scale up and champion locally led adaptation that is inclusive of the most at-risk people, including people with disabilities.

Recommendations:

- The UK must **ensure that people with disabilities and the barriers they face are on the agenda for COP26.**

Participation

29. For the Paris Agreement, Sendai Framework and Agenda 2030 to be realised in practice, the rights of people with disabilities must be embedded in climate change adaptation, mitigation and resilience building efforts. The effective participation, engagement, and empowerment of people with disabilities – and other people considered to be at high risk – will ultimately be critical to their success.
30. While the Sendai Framework and SDGs include processes to ensure the engagement of people with disabilities, UNFCCC processes do not have explicit inclusion mechanisms and need to do more to meaningfully engage people with disabilities and their representative organisations.
31. States must uphold the rights of people with disabilities when developing climate policies and to secure their meaningful, informed, and effective participation during the process. People with disabilities must be empowered to be agents for change in climate change responses.

Recommendations:

- The UK should support the **creation of a disability constituency** within the UNFCCC processes, to ensure that the voices of people with disabilities are adequately represented;
- The UK must ensure that **the outcomes of COP26 highlight that states must ensure the systematic inclusion of people with disabilities** in programmes and policies designed to address climate risk and build climate resilience and empower people with disabilities to play an active role in the decisions that impact how climate risk, disaster mitigation and poverty alleviation are planned for and implemented.⁷
- The UK has highlighted that COP26 is an important platform to continue to **prioritise girls' education**. The UK must ensure that this includes **girls with disabilities**. States must ensure persons with disabilities are provided with information and education on issues related to sustainable development, environmental degradation and climate change; ensure schools are accessible.

⁷ World Bank (2008) **Climate Change, Human Vulnerability, and Social Risk Management**.

Climate finance

32. For COP26 to succeed in addressing some of the most pressing climate challenges, it must **lead to an increase in finance for adaptation, with a focus on the most marginalised people**. While the UK fulfils its obligation to provide half of its finance to climate adaptation, it must go further and support the **UN secretary general's recent call** for all donors and multilateral development banks to provide at least half of climate finance for adaptation. Financing adaptation will be crucial to reach the most marginalised populations.
33. We welcome the UK Government's efforts to support gender-responsive approaches to climate finance as one of its COP26 priorities, recognising the disproportionate impacts of climate change on women and girls. The Government should go further to **recognise that risk can be compounded by intersecting factors, such as gender, age and disability**, which further impact an individual's ability to build resilience and adapt to climate change.

Recommendations:

- The UK should **support the call for at least half of climate finance to be spent on adaptation**, and ensure that **marginalised populations are prioritised** within this financing;
- The UK should ensure that as part of prioritising climate finance at COP26 it is highlighting that **climate finance should be made available to locally led, marginalised groups, including to people with disabilities**, who are most at risk from the adverse impacts of climate change. This will ensure marginalised groups can input to policy decisions, improving the quality of responses and ensuring everybody is included;
- The UK should **recognise that ODA is a critical element of climate finance and that poverty reduction and climate adaptation are closely linked**. The return to **spending 0.7% of GNI on ODA** will be critical to meeting the UK's ambition on climate change, **particularly in addressing its impacts on the poorest and most marginalised people**.