



# Disability inclusion in UK climate action

Bond Disability and Development Group & Climate Action Network UK

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## About Bond

Bond is the civil society network for global change. We bring people together to make the international development sector more effective. [www.bond.org.uk](http://www.bond.org.uk)

## About the Bond Disability and Development Group

The Bond Disability and Development Group (DDG) is a consortium of UK-based mainstream and disability-specific organisations. Organisations within the DDG represent a large body of experience based on direct work with people with disabilities and the disability movement in lower and middle income countries, as well as advocacy and policy engagement with service providers and policymakers.

## About CAN-UK

Climate Action Network UK (CAN-UK) is the UK node of the world's largest climate network made up of over 1,500 civil society organisations in over 130 countries. CAN-UK is formerly the Bond Development and Environment Group (DEG), and continues to work closely with Bond and its members on policy coordination and expertise on the people-nature-climate agenda.

## Acknowledgements

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***“The effects of climate change were socially distributed and followed the exact same pattern of pre-existing inequalities in societies that discriminated against persons with disabilities in multiple and intersectional ways. Solutions to climate change must address the root causes of social injustice, discrimination and inequality affecting persons with disabilities”<sup>i</sup>***

Deborah Iyute Oyuu, Programme Officer at the National Union of Disabled Persons of Uganda

## Introduction

This paper has been developed by the Bond Disability and Development Group (DDG), a collection of over forty UK-based mainstream and disability-focused organisations, in collaboration with Climate Action Network UK (CAN-UK). Our vision is a world where persons with disabilities are fully included and meaningfully engaged in international development and humanitarian action. A world where they can exercise their rights in line with the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD).

**This briefing is addressed to the constituent parts of the UK Government (including the FCDO) in the lead up to COP26 and as it starts the year of COP Presidency.** At a time critical to climate action, this paper suggests why the UK Government should continue the leadership it has provided for the inclusion of persons with disabilities, and their representative organisations, in its Disability Inclusion Strategy. Taking into account the commitments it has made as a state party to the Paris Agreement, the UK Government must ensure that this leadership is reflected in its responsibility as COP26 President and beyond the Glasgow meeting.

Persons with disabilities, living in Low-Middle Income Countries, along with other marginalised groups, are among those most impacted by climate change, despite contributing the least to its causes<sup>ii</sup>. The UK has an opportunity to ensure and facilitate transformative global change for all persons, including those with disabilities, through the COP26 Presidency year, and beyond it. The human rights of persons with disabilities must be respected, protected, ensured and fulfilled. To that end, we urge the UK Government to implement the following recommendations, and encourage all State Parties of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) to do the same.

## 1. Key messages and recommendations

As COP26 President and an effective custodian of the Paris Agreement, the UK Government and its relevant entities can lead by example by breaking down barriers and implementing a disability-inclusive rights-based approach to climate action. Recommendations to this effect, and their implications, are summarised below and detailed in section 5.

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 the meaningful participation of persons 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, persons with disabilities.
5. Integrate the full inclusion of the rights of persons with disabilities into domestic climate change action plans, communications and commitments.
6. Ensure all UK climate change-focused communications, events/multilateral fora (both in-person and online) are accessible.
7. Catalyse a just transition to a future of work that contributes to sustainable development.

## 2. The impacts of climate change for persons with disabilities

Climate change is the ‘defining issue’ of our century. Persons with disabilities form the world’s largest minority, constituting 15%<sup>iii</sup> of the global population. Consequently, the DDG and CAN-UK believe that the active inclusion of persons with disabilities in domestic and international climate action and financing should be integral to, and of the highest priority for, the UK Government.

Recent research has highlighted that the individuals most acutely and disproportionately affected by climate change are those who experience multiple forms of marginalisation<sup>iv</sup>. Factors such as disability, gender, age, race, and geography contribute to the severity and intensity of climate impacts felt by individuals and their communities<sup>v</sup>. Persons with disabilities, including those with learning and psychosocial disabilities, are among those most impacted by, and at risk from, the accelerating impacts of climate change.<sup>vi</sup>

Globally, persons with disabilities are more likely to live in disaster-prone areas. They are frequently excluded from emergency preparedness plans<sup>vii</sup>; experience disproportionately higher rates of morbidity and mortality<sup>viii</sup>; are vulnerable to gender-based violence and abuse, particularly during humanitarian crises<sup>ix</sup>; and are two to four times more likely to die in a natural disaster than persons without disabilities<sup>x</sup>. Moreover, persons with disabilities experience poverty at more than twice the rate of persons without disabilities - a risk factor that the Intergovernmental Panel for Climate Change (IPCC) strongly associates with greater climate change vulnerability<sup>xi</sup>. The climate emergency also threatens to disrupt social protection systems, essential healthcare services and the education of children<sup>xii</sup>, which can have grave consequences for all persons, including those with disabilities. Incidentally, the impacts of climate change are likely to increase the need for such services<sup>xiii</sup>.

***Climate change impacts pose a significant threat to the enjoyment by persons with disabilities of a number of human rights. These include the rights to life, self-determination, freedom of movement, health, education, housing, livelihood, food, water, sanitation, culture, and property. Climate change may also affect the rights of persons with disabilities to accessibility, personal mobility, independent living and inclusion in the community.<sup>xiv</sup>***

To address these vulnerabilities, it is vital to ensure the active and meaningful participation of persons with disabilities, and their representative organisations, in the decision-making processes and plans that address climate change. This is a key principle of a disability-inclusive human rights-based approach to addressing climate change.<sup>xv</sup> Furthermore, persons with disabilities can make a significant contribution. They possess skills, knowledge and experience which can benefit the processes of identifying, planning and implementing contextualised climate change risk reduction and adaptation measures, to guarantee better outcomes for all.

## 3. Ensuring the rights of persons with disabilities

The obligation to respect, protect, and fulfil the human rights of persons with disabilities is not just a moral obligation. It is enshrined in international laws and frameworks:

### I. United Nations Convention on Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD)

- **Article 4 (3) and General Comment 7**, by the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, obliges all State Parties to actively involve and consult with persons with disabilities, through their representative organisations, in decision-making on matters that affect their lives (including climate change)<sup>xvi</sup>.

- **Article 9** obliges State parties to take measures to ensure that persons with disabilities have access, on an equal basis with others, to the following:
  - the physical environment;
  - transportation;
  - information and communications, including information and communications technologies and systems;
  - all other facilities and services, open or provided to the public, both in urban and in rural areas.
- **Article 10** obliges State Parties to “take all necessary measures” to ensure the inherent right to life of persons with disabilities on an equal basis with others.
- **Article 11** obliges all State Parties to take “all necessary measures to ensure the protection and safety of persons with disabilities in situations of risk, including humanitarian emergencies and the occurrence of natural disasters.”
- **Article 21** obliges all State Parties to provide information intended for the general public to persons with disabilities in accessible formats.
- **Article 32** obliges all State Parties to ensure that international cooperation and development programming, including international cooperation on climate action, is inclusive of and accessible to persons with disabilities. As outlined in the Article, appropriate technical and economic assistance must be provided to enable this.

## II. **United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)**

The preamble to the [Paris Agreement](#) obliges State Parties to “respect, promote and consider their respective obligations on human rights, the right to health, the rights of indigenous peoples, local communities, migrants, children, persons with disabilities and people in vulnerable situations” (2015:2).

## III. **2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development**

The obligation for member states to protect the rights of persons with disabilities is referenced throughout the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The Goals are interdependent, interconnected, and designed to be reached in unison. As such, Goal 13: Climate Action cannot be achieved without ensuring that the rights of persons with disabilities are respected, protected, and fulfilled.

## IV. **The Sendai Framework on Disaster Risk Reduction (2015-2030)**

Working ‘hand in hand’ with other 2030 Agreements, the framework requires Member States to ensure gender, age, disability, women and youth leadership are integrated in all disaster risk reduction (DRR) policies and practices. They must simultaneously ensure that information is accessible, and that data is disaggregated, including by sex, age and disability.

The above conventions provide both legal obligations and practical frameworks for State Parties to protect, respect and fulfil the rights of all persons, including those with disabilities. Other conventions and covenants which do the same, include the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights; the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights; the Convention on the Rights of the Child; and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.

## 4. The UK Government must be more ambitious in action to address climate change and disability inclusion

The recent IPCC report (2021) demonstrates that all countries, including the UK, must take faster, more ambitious and effective action to address climate change. The UK has historically shown leadership, for example by implementing the world's first Climate Change Act in 2008, and is one of many countries to commit in law to net zero by 2050. Moreover, DFID (now FCDO) has been a leading voice in disability inclusion, as evidenced by their *Strategy for Disability Inclusive Development 2018-23*, as well as their co-hosting of the 2018 Global Disability Summit. The 2020 DFID/FCDO *Approach and Theory of Change to Mental Health and Psychosocial Support* lays out the importance of recognising the impacts of emergencies, including the climate crisis, on the wellbeing of populations, including people with disabilities, and those with psychosocial disabilities in particular.

We are at a critical juncture for the global implementation of disability-inclusive climate action. At this time, all countries need to act faster and go further in order to ensure the goal of limiting the global temperature rise to 1.5°C is kept in reach. The recently published *Nationally Determined Contributions (NDC) Synthesis Report*, highlighted that current levels of global climate ambition are not sufficient to meet the commitments of the Paris Agreement. Moreover, whilst the UK has made a commitment this year to reduce carbon emissions by 78% by 2035, as noted by the *UK Climate Change Committee*, we have yet to see firm policy change to reflect this.

The Bond DDG and CAN-UK support the FCDO's commitments to align all Official Development Assistance (ODA) with the goals of the Paris Agreement. Within the context of COP26, we support the FCDO's commitments to "engage with the disability community ... for an event and outcomes that are inclusive of people with disabilities". However, the UNFCCC provision to provide "new and additional" climate finance<sup>xvii</sup> is undermined by the reduction of the percentage of GNI to the ODA budget (from 0.7 to 0.5%), as well as the sourcing of climate finance from the same (now reduced) budget. Both factors also exacerbate the interdependent relationship between poverty, disability and climate change vulnerability.

## 5. Recommendations

The UK Government must **lead by example in disability-inclusive climate action and be an effective custodian of the Paris Agreement**, using every diplomatic effort to limit global temperature rise to 1.5°C, enable adaptation, and address loss and damage. We call for the UK government to:

### 5.1 Promote a disability-inclusive rights-based approach to climate action

In particular, the UK must:

- Take a twin-track approach to addressing climate change, simultaneously providing targeted support for persons with disabilities and mainstreaming disability inclusion;
- Demand disability-inclusive language during COP26 negotiations and throughout the duration of the Presidency year as well as in subsequent outcomes. For example, action on adaptation and

addressing loss and damage (including disaster preparedness, risk reduction and response) must incorporate principles of accessibility and [universal design](#);

- Ensure targeted data on climate and persons with disabilities, which is both disaggregated and specifically collates experiences of persons with disabilities, including women, children and older people with disabilities.

## **5.2 Apply an intersectional lens to domestic and international climate action**

This means:

- Acknowledging that protected characteristics (e.g. disability, age, race, gender, sexual orientation) are overlapping and compounding which make some people more vulnerable to the impacts of climate change than others;
- Ensuring that climate action targets and includes those made most vulnerable to climate change, due to these intersectional factors, and does not inadvertently exacerbate marginalisation and vulnerability.

## **5.3 Ensure there are mechanisms in place for the meaningful participation of persons with disabilities**

This means ensuring the diversity of the disability movement. In particular, making sure that persons with disabilities who have been traditionally left behind (including those with learning and psychosocial disabilities) are consulted with and engaged in the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of all climate change policies, initiatives and deliverables. To that end, we call for:

- The voices of all those who have been impacted by climate change to be included in COP26 and throughout the Presidency year, including the voices of persons with disabilities and their representative organisations;
- The forthcoming External Disability Board to have a clearly-defined focus on climate change, with representation from persons with disabilities;
- The prioritisation of locally-led disability inclusive climate action, both in the UK and internationally. In all countries and regions impacted by climate change policies, initiatives and deliverables, there must be direct input from civil society, with local and national organisational engagement, including local and national OPDs;
- The FCDO's update of the DFID Strategy for Disability Inclusive Development to address the intersection between climate change and disability. This update must also make specific commitments to improve disability inclusion, building on DFID's 'Minimum Standards', with a clearly defined focus on national and locally led engagement;
- Recruitment of staffing roles at all levels within the UK Government to be fully inclusive and commit to the promotion, retention and reasonable accommodation of people with disabilities.

## **5.4 Ensure that the UK's International Climate Finance is directed towards mitigation and adaptation actions that are inclusive of, and accessible to, persons with disabilities**

This must include:

- Ensuring disability is mainstreamed through all delivery channels of ICF, including bilateral programmes and country partnerships, multilateral institutions and challenge funds;
- Requiring robust monitoring, evaluation and learning from all organisations and institutions managing UK climate finance. All reports must mandate data disaggregated by 'protected characteristics', including disability, sex and age. There is limited evidence available on what works to strengthen the climate change resilience of persons with disabilities. Therefore,

improving data collection, analysis and learning from programmes will help in the development and planning of more effective and inclusive climate action;

- Maintaining the UK's commitment to provide 50% of its climate finance for adaptation, and calling on all countries to do the same.

### 5.5 Integrate the full inclusion of the rights of persons with disabilities into domestic climate change action plans, communications and commitments#

- This includes Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), Adaptation Communications, Biennial Finance Communications, Long Term Strategies, and the Net Zero Strategy. It should encourage all other State Parties to do the same.

### 5.6 Ensure all UK climate change-focused communications, events/multilateral fora (both in-person and online) are accessible

- The UK must ensure calls for evidence are fully accessible, and active participation is enabled for people with disabilities and their representative organisations, including at COPs.

### 5.7 Catalyse a just transition to a future of work that contributes to sustainable development

- In particular, the UK must facilitate the inclusion of persons with disabilities in just transition strategies and plans, through consultation and engagement with persons with disabilities and their representative organisations.

<sup>i</sup> Statement made by Deborah Iyute Oyuu, Programme Officer at the National Union of Disabled Persons of Uganda at Human Rights Council 2020 meeting on Climate and Disability, <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=26055>

<sup>ii</sup> FROM THE FIELD: Poor and vulnerable bear brunt of climate change | | UN News

<sup>iii</sup> Factsheet on Persons with Disabilities | United Nations Enable

<sup>iv</sup> CBM-Global-Climate-Change-Report.pdf

<sup>v</sup> IPCC (2014) Assessment Report WG2 Summary for Policymakers (ipcc.ch)

<sup>vi</sup> Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, "Analytical study on the promotion and protection of the rights of persons with disabilities in the context of climate change," July 2020. See also: Sébastien Jodoin, Nilani Ananthamoorthy & Katherine Lofts, "A Disability Rights Approach to Climate Governance," Ecology Law Quarterly, vol. 47 no. 1 (2020): 1-44 at 3.

<sup>vii</sup> UNESCAP (2015) Disability-inclusive disaster risk reduction (unescap.org)

<sup>viii</sup> UNHCR (2020) A/HRC/44/30 - E - A/HRC/44/30 -Desktop (undocs.org)

<sup>ix</sup> 032-Women\_and\_girls\_with\_disabilities\_in\_crisis\_and\_conflict.pdf (publishing.service.gov.uk)

<sup>x</sup> Disability-inclusive Humanitarian Action | United Nations Enable

<sup>xi</sup> IPCC (2018) SR15\_Chapter5\_Low\_Res.pdf (ipcc.ch)

<sup>xii</sup> UNICEF-climate-crisis-child-rights-crisis.pdf

<sup>xiii</sup> A/HRC/44/30 (un.org)

<sup>xiv</sup> Copenhagen Accord (2009) untitled (unfccc.int)

<sup>xv</sup> UNHCR (2020) <https://undocs.org/A/HRC/44/30>

<sup>xvi</sup> OHCHR (2018), General Comment no 7

<sup>xvii</sup> untitled (unfccc.int)

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