

**Disability in the context of Resilience and Mitigation of the effects of Climate Change**

**Global Greengrants Fund**

**Overview of the links between disability and the environment - GGF’s experience**

Since 1993, the mission of Global Greengrants Fund (GGF) has been to promote the leadership of grassroots organizations all over the world in the protection of the environment and their right to make decisions on the management of local natural resources. Although it did not initially focus on the connection between disability and the environment, in 2018, GGF started a conscious effort to incorporate anti-ableist practices into its grantmaking as an indispensable part of achieving social and environmental justice for all.

Our contribution to this effort is from our perspective as donors, but also reflects the expertise of the persons with disabilities who have participated in this endeavour, both as grantees or as part of our staff.

Our field of action focuses on environmental justice and climate action. It does not address other emergency situations covered in Article 11 of the UNCRPD. This submission will cover the areas of Article 11 where we see an intersection with situations of risk and emergencies related to environmental degradation and climate change.

1. **Introduction**
2. Persons with disabilities experience many challenges in environmental justice work, particularly isolation from collective efforts to counter the effects of environmental degradation, soil depletion, deforestation, drought, and overexploitation of natural resources, and from initiatives towards mitigation.
3. Most persons with disabilities do not know their rights or, if they know them, they are not aware of the connection between their rights and responsibilities as citizens to tackle environmental degradation, coping strategies for climate change, and the need for [disability-inclusive](https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/iasc-guidelines-on-inclusion-of-persons-with-disabilities-in-humanitarian-action-2019) [humanitarian responses](https://www.google.com/url?q=https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/iasc-guidelines-on-inclusion-of-persons-with-disabilities-in-humanitarian-action-2019&sa=D&source=docs&ust=1676491512383601&usg=AOvVaw3QyOa8qYyw1EN20aUyn6mP) to climate weather events.
4. NGOs in the field can include and consult persons with disabilities and their organizations in their efforts, in order to receive support and technical assistance on how to equitably include persons with disabilities in their projects.
5. Many OPDs have difficulties creating project proposals because they do not know the existing environmental legislation and policies in their countries, which often mention them among particularly vulnerable populations.
6. Most persons with disabilities and their organizations have not included in their agenda the impact of environmental disasters to defend their right to clean water, housing and nutritious food, as stated in Article 28 of the CRPD - Adequate standard of living and social protection. These include, among others, oil spills, water and air pollution, soil depletion and deforestation.
7. Intersectional approaches can be an effective way to make some persons with disabilities feel comfortable interacting with environmental justice NGOs.
8. There is an urgent need to build bridges between disability rights and environmental justice and climate action initiatives at every level.
9. Most OPDs at every level need support to learn more about environmental justice and climate change from a disability rights perspective to improve the impact of their advocacy efforts.
10. Environmental justice and climate action promoters can benefit from learning more about ableism and how to avoid it. They need support to feel confident and well-equipped to launch inclusive projects.
11. Persons with disabilities are rarely consulted and included in the design of environmental degradation and climate-related mitigation strategies and responses.
12. Most OPDs are not aware of the existence of in-country environmental initiatives and disaster response plans, and have limited capacity to advocate for the meaningful inclusion of persons with disabilities in those initiatives. It is crucial to involve persons with disabilities and their organizations in the creation of environmental policies and initiatives from the beginning, and to encourage them to work with other members of the community to develop and implement sustainable solutions to environmental degradation and coping mechanisms related to climate change.
13. According to recent research,[[1]](#footnote-1) most State parties to the Paris Agreement do not have policies that include persons with disabilities, or specific strategies to address their needs in emergency preparedness and response programs and policies.
14. Education and technical support to environmental NGOs have given them the tools to promote inclusive projects that are not based on pity, but on a sincere commitment to reach social justice for everyone. Capacity building on ableism at the intersection of other forms of oppression and exploitation enriches environmental NGOs’ understanding of the social dimension of the climate crisis and environmental degradation.

**II. Normative Content**

[Under the following relevant subparagraphs, please develop narrative on the scope and meaning of the following terminology of article 11 of UNCRP, from the point of view of your organization and field of expertise]

a) *"States parties shall take measures, in accordance with their obligations under international law, including international humanitarian law and international human rights law.”*

States parties must meaningfully include persons with disabilities in national laws, policies, and programs aimed at coping with the effects of environmental degradation and climate change. The Paris Agreement mentions persons with disabilities in its preamble.

b) *"All necessary measures to ensure the protection and safety of persons with disabilities"*

Persons with disabilities and their organizations must be consulted and their opinion must be taken into consideration when designing policies and programs to mitigate the effects of climate change and environmental degradation. Ensuring the protection and safety of persons with disabilities is an indispensable part of disaster planning and climate change mitigation.

c) *"Persons with disabilities in situations of risk, including situations of armed conflict, humanitarian emergencies and the occurrence of natural disasters"*

Persons with disabilities are particularly at risk during natural disasters. These include not only weather-related events, but also human-made disasters caused by overexploitation of natural resources, soil depletion, deforestation, water pollution, extractivism, and every form of destruction of vital resources.

**III. States obligations under Article 11**

Article 11 of the CRPD was adopted in 2006. Since then, the world has gone through significant geo-political change and the environmental degradation of our planet has increased in its intensity. There have been a number of high impact disasters and significant loss of life as a result of the increasing instability of the world’s climate systems. This shines a spotlight on the **continuing gaps** that exist between theory and practice when ensuring the protection and safety of persons with disabilities in situations of risk and emergencies. As an example, the unprecedented health crisis of the COVID-19 pandemic and the looming threat of future disease outbreaks spurred by climate change highlight the need to expand our definition of risk and our understanding of how to create inclusive responses, and where concrete actions can address the needs of persons with disabilities. Recent concluding observations of the CRPD committee on Article 11 across a number of State Parties have highlighted the inaccessibility of information for persons with disabilities and the importance of including and consulting with persons with disabilities and their representative organisations in climate adaptation planning, adaptation to a low-carbon economy, and mitigation strategies through the responsible use of available natural resources.

**IV. Persons with disabilities who are disproportionately affected and who experience particular disadvantages in situations of risks include:**

* Persons with disabilities who belong to intersecting marginalized identities fall in the margins of specific action plans or are not considered at all. Policies and strategies oftentimes mention persons with disabilities as separate entities within the group of those who are considered in a vulnerable situation. Moreover, every person's identity will change over their life. The natural process of aging and losing the capacity to meet social ideals of autonomy are not taken into consideration as part of the natural life cycle. Thus, an Indigenous person might acquire a disability as part of their aging process, and this intersection of multiple factors of marginalization will reduce their chances of fleeing a disaster, an armed conflict, or participating in decision-making processes about mitigation strategies.
* Misogyny and ableism are two rife intersecting forms of discrimination that legitimate exclusion. However, from GGF’s experience, women’s groups working towards environmental protection have been quite receptive to incorporating anti-ableist practices in their projects. In some cases, women’s roles as caregivers and mothers, as well as their awareness of their own physical changes as a result of pregnancy and child rearing, make the topic of widening the scope of emergency response and climate mitigation more relatable to them.
* Persons with disabilities who live in rural areas have little or no access to information and alerts in accessible formats.
* Persons with disabilities experience significant barriers to have access to clean water and sanitation. This problem is exacerbated in the context of environmental degradation and erratic weather behavior.
* Persons living in institutions are isolated from every form of collective action and have little or no information about their rights. They are completely dependent on available able-bodied personnel to escape in case of emergency. Thus far, GGF has not been able to include this population in their activities.
* Elderly people with disabilities are particularly at risk in case of natural disasters, such as heat waves, flash floods, and other emergencies that require quick action to escape.
* At the intersection of ageism and ableism, children and youth with disabilities have been left behind in the global movement where young individuals from all countries and social backgrounds are organizing protests and actions to demand structural changes towards a low-carbon economy, responsible use of natural resources, and dialogue on potentially toxic solutions, such as the disposal of lithium batteries and challenges to produce clean energy sources. The use of inaccessible hashtags in social media, as well as barriers to participation in demonstrations, reinforce the invisibility of youth with disabilities’ concerns, which include, for example, ableist solutions like biking or walking, while neglecting investment in accessible public transportation.
* The digital divide needs to be addressed in all cases, as it creates a critical gap in the kind and quality of information available and in the opportunities to understand disability rights, its relationship with environmental justice and climate change, as well as opportunities to participate in social media campaigns when physical participation is not feasible.

**V. Interrelation with other articles of the Convention**

* Environmental degradation and the development of coping strategies for the effects of climate change intersect with:
	+ Article 4 – General obligations: “3. In the development and implementation of legislation and policies to implement the present Convention, and in other decision-making processes concerning issues relating to persons with disabilities, States Parties shall closely consult with and actively involve persons with disabilities, including children with disabilities, through their representative organizations.”
	+ Article 5 (Children with Disabilities), Article 6 (Women and Girls with Disabilities) – Social arrangements that discriminate on the basis of gender and age intersect with disability to create extreme forms of discrimination and isolation.
	+ Article 24 (Education) – Environmental justice and climate mitigation must become part of the regular curriculum for all children, including children with disabilities. Children with disabilities must participate in regular evacuation and emergency response drills on equal grounds with their non-disabled classmates, to identify efficient strategies.
	+ Article 27 (Work) – A just transition to a low carbon economy must address the structural barriers for equal employment and the opportunities to participate in green income-generation activities.[[2]](#footnote-2)
	+ Article 28 (Social Protection) – Environmental degradation and climate change can have an impact on the livelihood of persons with disabilities, who already experience lack of access to housing, drinking water, and nutritious food.

*Intersection with other areas of International Law*

In the field of environmental justice and climate action, international legislation that mentions persons with disabilities includes:

* The Paris Agreement mentions persons with disabilities in its preamble.
* The UNFCCC’s system of constituencies has not included disability as a priority area. In the framework of COP26, a Disability Caucus was created, and is currently in the process of determining its structure.
* The UN National Adaptation Plans Programme has supported the creation of in-country adaptation programmes in several countries.
* At the in-country level, there are several climate change adaptation programmes that, despite mentioning persons with disabilities, do not have concrete strategies to support the population in case of emergency.
* One of the main outcomes of COP27 was the creation of the Resilience Fund, with the objective of providing financial support to the countries that will be more affected by the effects of climate change. However, there are no special provisions to protect the human rights of those affected.
* The Human Rights Council established a mandate for the Independent Expert on human rights and the environment in 2012 (resolution 19/10). The current Special Rapporteur, David Boyd, has expressed his will to advance disability rights in his endeavours.
* For the first time in its history, the United Nations has recognized that everyone, everywhere, has the right to live in a clean, healthy, and sustainable environment. Resolutions from the Human Rights Council in 2021 ([**A/HRC/RES/48/13**](https://undocs.org/A/HRC/RES/48/13)) and the General Assembly in 2022 ([**A/RES/76/300**](https://undocs.org/A/RES/76/300)) add this fundamental human right to the library of internationally recognized rights. Persons with disabilities are mentioned among the populations that are at greater risk of experiencing the effects of unhealthy living conditions.

**VI. Comments and Recommendations**

1. The notion of “emergency” must include human-made disasters related to environmental degradation that, in turn, translate into humanitarian emergencies like famine, pollution of water sources with toxic chemicals, soil depletion, deforestation, and extractivism.
2. Persons with disabilities must have equal opportunities to provide input in dialogue on mitigation strategies related to climate change.
3. Building bridges between environmental justice defenders and OPDs is a key strategy to achieve justice across both of these sectors.
4. Persons with disabilities and their organizations must build their capacity and understanding about how disability rights are related to environmental degradation and climate change. They must also receive technical and financial support in order to have a proactive role in ensuring that their needs and their talents are taken into consideration in planning and decision-making processes.
5. Persons with disabilities and their organizations must be aware of their right to a healthy environment, and that they are mentioned as a group that deserves special attention. This is a very recent achievement, and most organizations are not aware of its meaning and how it can be used as an effective advocacy strategy at every level.
6. Persons with disabilities and their organizations must receive support to proactively participate in every initiative that is developing coping strategies and responses to environmental degradation and climate change.
7. Forced displacement and armed conflict[[3]](#footnote-3) can also become more frequent with the effects of climate change. It is crucial to keep in mind the complexities and the social inequalities inherent in multi-dimensional crises, as these might reinforce the invisibility of, and have adverse effects on, persons with disabilities.
1. Disability Inclusive Climate Action Research Program at McGill University and the International Disability Alliance (IDA) (2022) “Disability Inclusion in National Climate Commitments and Policies - Status Report. Retrieved from <https://www.disabilityinclusiveclimate.org/news/status-report-disability-rights-in-national-climate-policies-5c4ra>. See also: International Disability Alliance (2022) “States fail to include Persons with Disabilities in response to climate change.” Retrieved from <https://www.internationaldisabilityalliance.org/content/states-fail-include-persons-disabilities-response-climate-change> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Hasan, Maria (2019) “Persons with disabilities in a just transition to a low-carbon economy. Policy Brief.” International Labour Organisation [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Sova, Chase. “The First Climate Change Conflict.”UNPFA (First published in 2017, last updated in 2020). Retrieved from <https://www.wfpusa.org/articles/the-first-climate-change-conflict/> [↑](#footnote-ref-3)