**The Indubitable Link Between the Well-Being of People with Disabilities and the Environment: An Evaluation of Policies, Necessary Changes, and Concerns**

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**The Indubitable Link Between the Rights of People with Disabilities and the Environment: An Evaluation of Policies, Necessary Changes, and Concerns**

**Introduction**

The World Health Organization estimates that over 1.3 billion people – 1 in 6 people across the world – experience a significant disability.[[1]](#footnote-0) The well-being of people with disabilities could not be more stark when compared to those without disabilities given that people with disabilities face significantly higher rates of incidence of depression, asthma, diabetes, stroke, and obesity.[[2]](#footnote-1) Health inequity is just one way that these individuals have their well-being limited; accessibility concerns extend to almost every area whether that be facing stigma in academia, domestic abuse in household environments, or employment discrimination in the workplace. The environment and climate change too play an important role in the well-being of people with disabilities. The environment can certainly help and hinder the overall well-being and experience of people with disabilities. Today, the United Nations and world leaders have repeatedly expressed that climate change is the defining issue of the twenty-first century, impacting the experience of all people through changes in weather limiting food production or rising sea levels that have already impacted millions.[[3]](#footnote-2) An extensively established, unfortunate circumstance is the ways in which environmental well-being and climate change hinder the lives of those with disabilities; it is thus of utmost importance that actions are taken to specifically target and reverse concerns presented by climate change to truly achieve equity for people with disabilities, given that some of the largest acute concerns impacting people with disabilities are directly related to climate change.

**Natural Disasters and Emergencies**

As climate changes continue to impact the planet, droughts occur at higher rates and the severity of storms get significantly worse. During natural disasters and other emergencies, some of the most vulnerable populations are people with disabilities. Physical, mental, learning, and emotional disabilities can all play a role in limited one’s response to these natural disasters which can lead to staggering consequences for people with disabilities. Historical evidence proves that people with disabilities face significant challenges in getting safe during times of disasters and accessing relief after and during these disasters.[[4]](#footnote-3) In fact, some reports indicate that in 2011 following the Japanese earthquake and tsunami people with disabilities faced fatality rates between two and four times higher than the average person.[[5]](#footnote-4) Moreover, this is especially significant given that accessibility is a concern that is given significantly less concern than others during these urgent disasters.

To continue, accessibility concerns are especially prevalent in emergency planning and in dissemination of materials related to emergent circumstances. For people with disabilities, it can be incredibly difficult to receive accurate information surrounding emergency planning and receive information surrounding these circumstances given that information is released quickly without considering the needs of people with disabilities. As a result, people with disabilities are left without pertinent and necessary information for their survival, leading to ignorance.

1. "Disability - World Health Organization (WHO)." 2 Dec. 2022, <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/disability-and-health>. Accessed 15 Feb. 2023. [↑](#footnote-ref-0)
2. "Health inequities lead to early death in many persons with disabilities." 2 Dec. 2022, <https://www.who.int/news/item/02-12-2022-health-inequities-lead-to-early-death-in-many-persons-with-disabilities>. Accessed 15 Feb. 2023. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
3. "Climate Change - the United Nations." <https://www.un.org/en/global-issues/climate-change>. Accessed 15 Feb. 2023. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
4. "How can climate change affect natural disasters? - USGS.gov." <https://www.usgs.gov/faqs/how-can-climate-change-affect-natural-disasters>. Accessed 15 Feb. 2023. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
5. "People with Disabilities - Center for Disaster Philanthropy." <https://disasterphilanthropy.org/resources/people-with-disabilities/>. Accessed 15 Feb. 2023. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)