



Climate Change and Disability

Climate change not only increases rates of disabilities, it also disproportionately impacts people with disabilities. With an estimated 1.3 billion people with disabilities (16% of the global population) in the world, it is important for climate change planning to include them.¹ The challenges people with disabilities experience due to climate change include increased food insecurity, exposure to disease, lack of clean water, vulnerability in natural disasters, and lack of political engagement. The impact of climate change is even more severe for people living in low-income countries, where 80% of people with disabilities live.^{2,3}

Food Insecurity

Extreme weather conditions are known to decrease food production and security. This impacts people living in poverty more than anyone else. Since people with disabilities have a poverty rate more than double those without, they suffer more than others when food shortages occur.⁴ People also have increased difficulty accessing food relief programs when they have mobility, sensory, or other challenges that impact their ability to get to food distribution centers or even learn where they are located.⁵

Disease

With climate change and warmer temperatures, there is also an increased risk of bacterial and parasitic infections that disproportionately increase morbidity rates among people with disabilities and increase the number of people who become disabled in the first place. Some disabilities can even lead to a higher risk of infectious disease and can make people more susceptible to complications. For example, mosquito populations increase as temperatures rise. This results in higher rates of cerebral malaria, a leading cause of cerebral palsy. Additionally, children with cerebral palsy face added complications from malaria, such as pneumonia, due to existing respiratory issues.⁶

Vulnerability in Emergencies

When it comes to natural disasters, mortality rates for people with disabilities are 2 to 4 times higher than that of the general population.⁷ There is also diminished access to emergency information or support when gathering news, reaching safe areas, or being united with family and caretakers. Additionally, unsafe infrastructure in the aftermath of extreme weather events can cause a number of mobility challenges.

Lack of Political Engagement

Complicating matters, people with disabilities are often left without a voice in political discussions about climate change. This is often due to their inability to get to voting polls and stigma that prevents them from participating in voting and community events where they can interact with local officials. This leads to a lack of adequate representation of the people most impacted by these issues.



People with disabilities are more impacted by climate change than those without because they experience...

- 2x the poverty rate as those without disabilities
- Higher risks of complications or death from diseases
- Up to 4x higher mortality rates in natural disasters
- Underrepresentation in policy decisions about climate change

Kupenda's Disability Interventions

Kupenda mitigates the effects of climate change on people and families affected by disabilities by offering a series of initiatives designed to enhance safety, support, and quality of life.

Food Support

Food security and education are a vital part of Kupenda's efforts to support people with disabilities. Through nutritional counseling, meal support in schools, and food distribution during emergency situations, people with disabilities are able to lead stronger, healthier lives.

Medical Support

Kupenda provides enhanced health and wellness for people with disabilities in vulnerable situations through the provision of:

- Medical Referrals
- Medical Equipment
- Medical Care
- Medical Supplies
- Therapy
- Nutritional Support

Income Support

Kupenda assists children with disabilities and their caregivers in improving their income-generating capacity, providing better adaptability to changing markets and conditions. This is done through counseling, referrals, training programs, and parent support groups.

Policy Support

Kupenda works to ensure people with disabilities and their families are contributing to important policy development that impacts them. Kupenda has developed a *Disability Law Guide* for community members in low-income countries to better understand their legal rights. This is particularly useful in educating people with disabilities to advocate for themselves for future legislation that supports their needs, including in emergency situations and with the impacts of climate change.

Community Support

Kupenda educates community leaders (i.e., pastors, traditional healers, government officials, and families) about disability definitions, causes, interventions, and legal rights through its *Disability Training Program*. Staff then partner with leaders to establish action plans for identifying and addressing the needs of people with disabilities in their communities, including offering appropriate counseling and support as needed.

Results

The results of these efforts are that people with disabilities demonstrate better health, support outcomes, and higher levels of inclusion. Communities are equipped to embrace a wider range of abilities and perspectives and demonstrate compassion for others.

Osman



Osman is an 18-year-old man with cerebral palsy that originated from a case of malaria he experienced as a toddler. Due to a severe drought in his village, his father, a herdsman, struggled to provide support for his son's needs.

With Kupenda's assistance, however, Osman received medical care, nutritional support, a quality education, and counseling about his rights. He is working hard to achieve his dream of becoming a doctor one day.

As Osman explains, *"I have a right to education, shelter, clothing, and good nutrition. I have equal rights to other kids."*

For more information:

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Footnotes

- ¹ “Disability,” World Health Organization, last modified March 7, 2023, <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/disability-and-health> #:~:text=An%20estimated%201.3%20billion%20people%20%E2%80%93%20or%2016%25%20of%20the%20global,diseases%20and%20people%20living%20longer.
- ² “10 Facts about Climate Change and Poverty,” World Vision, last modified August 8, 2022, <https://www.wvi.org/stories/child-sponsorship/10-facts-about-climate-change-and-poverty#:~:text=The%20negative%20impacts%20of%20climate,the%20extremes%20climate%20change%20brings>.
- ³ “Challenges Facing Persons with Disabilities in Sub-Saharan Africa – in 5 Charts,” The World Bank, accessed October 25, 2023, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/poverty/brief/challenges-facing-people-with-disabilities-in-sub-saharan-africa-in-5-charts#:~:text=About%20one%20billion%20people%20globally,of%20them%20in%20developing%20countries>.
- ⁴ “Highlighting Disability/Poverty Connection, NCD Urges Congress to Alter Federal Policies that Disadvantage People with Disabilities,” National Council on Disability, last modified October 26, 2017, <https://ncd.gov/newsroom/2017/disability-poverty-connection-2017-progress-report-release>.
- ⁵ “Disability and Food Insecurity: Central African Republic – Findings from the 2020 ENSA disaggregated by disability,” World Food Programme, last modified August 2021, <https://docs.wfp.org/api/documents/WFP-0000130977/download/>.
- ⁶ M.S. Cooper et al., “Respiratory Health in Cerebral Palsy,” The American Academy for Cerebral Palsy and Developmental Medicine, accessed October 25, 2023, <https://www.aacpdm.org/publications/care-pathways/respiratory-health-in-cerebral-palsy#:~:text=Definitions,is%20commonly%20due%20to%20aspiration>.
- ⁷ “Disability in a Time of Climate Disaster,” Harvard University Center for the Environment, last modified January 19, 2023, <https://environment.harvard.edu/news/disability-time-climate-disaster#:~:text=Michael%20Ashley%20Stein%3A%20Persons%20with,%2C%20social%20isolation%2C%20and%20institutionalization>.

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