

Case study

Nepal

Nepal's changing climate and its impact on communities including people with disabilities



Nepal's changing climate

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) 2022 Report on Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability highlights how changing climate impacts are far reaching, disrupting economies, systems such as health, transport, causing displacement of many millions of people and impacting physical and mental health of many of the world's population.¹ Climate change impacts are not felt equally among all countries or among all the world's people. A 2014 IPCC report highlighted people most acutely affected by climate change are those who experience other types of marginalisation owing to factors such as geography, poverty, gender, age, indigenous or minority status and disability."²

Nepal – facing constant risk of climate change

Nepal's temperature has been increasing in the past few decades and this has been documented by the Government of Nepal's 2019 climate report and also by multilateral organisations such as the World Bank. Key facts on Nepal's changing climate are highlighted below³:

- Climate change is already having significant impacts on the environment in Nepal; species' ranges are shifting to higher altitudes, glaciers are melting, and the frequency of precipitation extremes is increasing.
- Natural hazards such as drought, heatwaves, river floodings, and glacial lake outburst flooding are all projected to intensify over the 21st century, potentially exacerbating disaster risk levels and putting human life at risk.
- Modelling has suggested that the number of people annually affected by river flooding could more than double by 2030 as a result of climate change. At the same time the economic impact of river flooding could triple.
- The vulnerability of Nepal's communities, particularly those living in poverty, in remote areas, and operating on subsistence agriculture, increases the risk posed by climate change.

"Nepal's agriculture and livelihood is deeply connected. When the monsoon gets tougher and more unpredictable due to climate change, the livelihood and lives of the most marginalised families, including people with disabilities suffers the most. I see no connection between the farmers living in the mountains with the cause of changing climate. And yet they are paying the biggest price. I urge all to be accountable towards climate change and do justice to families and people with disabilities" – Suraj Sidgel, Country Director, CBM Global Nepal

¹ IPCC (2022) *Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability*

² IPCC (2014). *Climate Change 2013: The Physical Science Basis*. Cambridge University Press.

³ World Bank (2021); Climate Risk Country Profile, World Bank publications.

Why this case study?

CBM Global works in a number of countries where the changing climate is impacting negatively on the lives and livelihoods of the poorest communities, including people with disabilities. The case study has been developed by CBM Global Nepal Country Team (CBMG Nepal). The purpose of the case study is to highlight the impact of climate induced disasters on people living in poverty who have much less adaptive capacity to respond to the negative and sometimes devastating impacts of climate change. Despite cursory recognition of the impact of climate change on people with disabilities, very little evidence is available about how they are impacted. Even less is available on how organisations of people with disabilities have been engaged in climate change negotiations, policy-making, and programme implementation to-date. Our hope is that this case study on a climate induced disaster that happened in 2021 can make some contribution to this under-researched area by highlighting some of the key issues and recommendations we have identified.

The 2021 Melamchi flash-flood and Landslide

Sindhupalchowk is a district with low socio-economic capacity to adaptation, along with high vulnerability to landslide risk. It has been facing frequent landslides and floods in the last decade. On 15 June 2021, the Melamchi Bazaar in Sindhupalchowk was hit by a heavy flash flood from two tributaries- the Melamchi and Indrawati rivers. This resulted in five deaths and 20 missing people along with heavy damage to the Melamchi water supply project while also cutting off road access to several villages. The flash-flood was unprecedented in the Melamchi valley, and caught residents, trout farms, and shops along the riverbanks by surprise.

The impact on people with disabilities

CBMG Nepal has a community based inclusive development programme based in Sindhupalchowk, focused on increasing accessibility for people with disabilities and improving socio-economic well-being. When the flood and landslides happened in 2021, CBM Global carried out a survey among people with disabilities and their families, and found that:

- 53% of household shelters fully collapsed,
- 72% of households lost their agriculture land,
- 73% of households lost their food stock, and
- 19% households lost their livestock and livestock sheds along with damage to their shelters.

Overall, it was found that people with disabilities had been affected as water and sanitation infrastructure was damaged, shelters were completely damaged or washed away and the routes to markets and schools wiped out.

Challenges identified by people with disabilities included:

A woman with a physical disability named Pemba, lost her single storeyed house, a small plot of land (around 0.13 hectare) and a livestock shed. She also faced difficulty in reaching reach temporary shelter due to a lack of accessibility, and could not receive the assistance provided by the government due to inaccessible roads and information systems.

Two neighbours Sanja and Cheypey highlighted how they had been impacted and how they both lost their homes. Sanja's home was swept away by the flood. All that was left was broken walls and piles of bricks lying around. He commented:

"The god is angry. They used to say there are gods in the Helabmu river. They must have got angry. It was catastrophic. Initially, we thought it was a normal flood. Small floods during the rainy season were common. Initially, we thought it was like that. But the river started to swell up and just like that, the whole village got swept away. I have never seen anything like that in my whole life. The whole earth was shaking. Other people went uphill as the flood started to rise. Later, I went up with the support of my son-in-law too. I came here looking for better access to the market and other facilities. But I lost everything. I am an old man with a physical disability, it is very difficult for me now". – Sanja



Cheypey is a deaf woman and has a daughter with a physical disability. She described through sign language how she escaped the flood and lost her home.

"I carried my daughter, and we ran uphill to save our lives. But we couldn't save our house, it is gone now...everything is gone... My neighbours were by the riverside fishing. They came rushing back and told me that there is a flood, and we needed to run. It was getting dark, I started to get panicked. I carried my daughter Urmila on my back, it was so much panic for me because I was saving the life of my daughter, but at the same time, I could not listen to what people were saying and what was happening around. When I came back next day, the house was gone. I was not even able to retrieve food or clothes from my house". Cheypey



As of January 2022, all the people surveyed remain in temporary shelters provided by the government and non-government organisations. While having shelter, they have been facing the problem of open defecation and non-clean drinking water. Meanwhile some face difficulties reaching schools. With this disaster, people with disabilities are further isolated from services, access to the market and their overall socio-economic condition has been affected severely.

Key issues and recommendations

"For people with disabilities, their exclusion from climate adaptation planning can be a matter of life and death. The impacts of climate change disproportionately impact people with disabilities and undermine their rights, including the rights to food and nutrition, safe drinking water and sanitation, health-care services and medicines, education and training, adequate housing and access to decent work"⁴

Making plans for adapting to the impact of climate change is a national priority for all countries under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) framework. National Adaptation Plans (NAPs) are a means of identifying medium- and long-term adaptation needs and developing and implementing strategies and programmes to address those needs. They are designed to follow a country-driven, gender-sensitive, participatory and fully transparent approach. However, for the most part, people with disabilities and their representative organisations are not involved in the development of national adaptation plans, meaning their perspective and expertise is not present.⁵ Recent research highlights how 45 countries have references to people with disabilities. Nepal's adaptation plan highlights people with disabilities from the perspective of their vulnerability to risks and hazards from climate change rather than viewed as active contributors to adaptation.⁶

NAPs are high level documents, and important to highlight measures and actions at a government level. At a programmatic level, many NGOs and civil society organisation are often dealing with adaptation in their programmes, so there is a need to understand how an adaptative approach needs to happen on a number of different levels. Presented below are **three key issues we have identified and related recommendations**, these draw on learnings from across our humanitarian, disaster risk reduction programmes and our emerging focus on climate adaptation.

Key Issue 1: Increasing climate induced disasters

The recent IPCC report highlights that approximately 3.4 billion people globally live in rural areas around the world, and many are highly vulnerable to climate change. The report comments on how disasters can increasingly be regarded as "the public face of climate change". It recognises that climate induced disasters will also continue to rise.

Disasters caused by climate expose inequalities in natural and managed systems and human systems as they disproportionately affect poor and marginalised communities like ethnic minorities, people of colour, indigenous peoples, women and children. Therefore, disaster risk reduction is fundamental for climate justice and climate-resilient development (UNISDR.

⁴ Disability Inclusive Climate Action Research Program & International Disability Alliance, Disability Rights in National Climate Policies: Status Report (June 2022).

⁵ OHCHR (2020). Analytical study on the promotion and protection of the rights of persons with disabilities in the context of climate change. Geneva

⁶ Government of Nepal (2021 – 2050), National Adaptation Plan, Summary for Policy Makers.

2015). In this case study the focus was on Nepal, but across other program countries of CBM Global, climate induced disasters are happening.

Recommendations for responding to extreme climatic events:

- Work in partnership with OPDs for disaster planning and response at community level to be able to best prepare for a natural disaster such as a flash flood.
- Support partnership building between OPDs and climate organisations in the local community. OPDs can learn about climate change and its impact on the environment around them and climate organisations active in the community can learn about disability inclusion.

Key issue 2: Intersection of Climate Change and Humanitarian response

The stories highlighted in this case study from Pemba, Sanja and Kamala highlight how when a disaster such as a flash-flood hits, people with disabilities are significantly impacted, through loss of sense of security and through lack of access to relief efforts and challenges to access social protection. The IPCC report highlights how disasters caused by climate catastrophes provide important rallying points for discussions around climate change, equity, and vulnerability. This is particularly true in the case of people with disabilities who due to attitudinal and structural barriers are not able to access emergency response as a result of a climate weather event and have little or no access to social protection to ensure some level of income for basics.

Recommendations:

- Implement Article 11: advocate with national and local government for the full implementation of Article 11 on situations of risk and humanitarian emergencies. The CRPD committee in their Concluding Observations on Nepal (2018) recommended that all public services should develop individual and local plans for the safe evacuation of persons with disabilities, in consultation with them through their representative organisations.
- Use the IASC guidelines: Promote the use of the IASC guidelines on the inclusive of people with disabilities, - the guidelines developed in 2019, provide guidance actions that humanitarian actors must take in order to effectively identify and respond to the needs and rights of persons with disabilities who are most at risk of being left behind in humanitarian settings
- Prepare for further disruption: due to climate impact by taking anticipatory actions, building back with an inclusive approach is important, but building back must include investing in forecasting and anticipatory planning, for example, an early warning system.
- Provide disaster/shock responsive social protection: as climate induced disasters continue to increase the impact on people living with low level of resources is felt the most. People with disabilities in Nepal are acknowledged as the 'most vulnerable and deprived sectors of the population'.⁷ The IPCC report highlights the importance of adaptative social protection, a strategic tool to integrate poverty reduction, disaster

⁷ Inclusive Futures and Institute of Development Studies (2020), Disability Inclusive Development Nepal Situational Analysis June 2020 update.

risk reduction and humanitarian development into adaptation to climate change. Within this approach, make sure to include the needs of people with disabilities.

Key Issue 3: Inclusive locally led adaptation

The IPCC report highlights that it is becoming more evident that inclusive adaptation interventions and transformative solutions that focus on the reduction of poverty and inequality are now seen as vital to minimise loss and damage from climate change. Many countries and different communities/groups such as people with disabilities are most threatened by climate change and yet have contributed the least to the problem. This become even further compounded with the intersection of gender, age, and disability where discrimination can reduce access to resources thereby reducing adaptive capacity. Developing inclusive adaptation plans and programs are critical ensure the skills and expertise of people with disabilities become part of the solutions needed for an inclusive sustainable future.

Recommendations:

- Use local indigenous knowledge from communities and recognise people with disabilities as technical experts and active decision-makers, with lived experience of changing environmental conditions and the knowledge to offer practical solutions, including nature-based mitigation solutions.
- Champion locally-led adaptation plans that are responsive and accessible to people with disabilities, see example below.
- Underpin all new national-level adaptation infrastructure investments (across economic, transport and social sectors) with accessibility considerations and universal design principles.

Working in partnership to adapt to changing climate

CBM Global Nepal in partnership with the [Support for Poor Producers](#) (SAPPROS) Nepal is implementing the project "SAMMUNNATI- Prosperity through Livelihood for People with Disabilities in Helambu and Indrawoti Rural Municipalities", which are the flood affected municipalities. As of December 2021, the three-year (2020-2022) project has reached 579 (273 female) people with disabilities (245 in Helambu and 334 in Indrawati) with knowledge and technological support to carry out needs-based livelihood activities and set up linkages with markets.

Considering the climate change priorities, the project gives support on climate friendly technologies and climate smart agricultural practices. Together with the skills, knowledge and resources, the project supports the capacity building of people with disabilities to advocate and engage with the local government for in the local development process and social security schemes.