



Editorial Introduction

Climate change is a key impediment to meeting global sustainability goals but global efforts are insufficient to ensure successful mitigation and adaptation. Climate and disaster (in)justice applies a justice perspective to identify and address social inequalities and inequities related to exposure and protection from climate hazards as well as access to resources, information and participation in decision-making processes. It advances the fair and equitable treatment of all individuals and communities in the face of climate-induced disasters and emphasizes the need to safeguard the rights and wellbeing of populations who are disproportionately affected by climate-induced disasters. Reflecting on prior research in the Solomon Islands this briefing paper advances a human rights-based approach connecting existing frameworks for disability justice and climate justice to reduce climate-induced disaster injustices for people with disability.

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Promoting disability justice to reduce climate-induced disaster injustices

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Climate change has accelerated the range, prevalence, and severity of climate-related disasters globally and had a significant impact on most aspects of human health and wellbeing. Climate change is a crisis multiplier and cannot be isolated from the compounding negative consequences created by other vulnerabilities (Levy et al., 2024). The impacts of climate-induced disaster are therefore more severe and complex for people with disability for whom the impacts are compounded by poverty, discrimination and stigma (Spurway & Griffiths, 2016). People with disability are more likely to die due to a disaster (Villeneuve, 2022) and experience higher levels of post-event mortality due to health complications arising from insufficient recovery resources (Pledl, 2021). However, the tendency to attribute vulnerability solely to disability overlooks the complex structural contribution of sociopolitical factors such as education, employment status, and poverty to disadvantage and create vulnerability (Lindsay et al., 2022).

This briefing paper reflects on prior research in the Solomon Islands (King et al., 2019) to explore how disability justice and climate justice can be integrated to reduce climate-induced disaster injustices.

Connecting disability, disaster and climate justice in the Solomon Islands

The Solomon Islands is a Pacific Island nation with a population of almost 820,000. It is at extreme risk from the impacts of climate change. There have been some efforts to mitigate this risk, however, the invisibility of people with disability in the Solomon Islands in disasters was linked to stigma, discrimination and the hidden nature of some disabilities (King et al., 2019). King et al. (2019) explored the impact of disasters on people with disability in the Solomon Islands through interviews.

They found that government and aid organisations working in the Solomon Islands have a poor understanding of disability-specific needs in disasters and people with disability receive little information on how to manage during or post disasters. Furthermore, negative societal views of people with disability perpetuated exclusion based on notions that they were unable to actively and their vulnerability was heightened by unequal access to resources and infrastructural issues associated with maladaptation of the built environment and poor housing. They conclude that raising awareness, combatting negative attitudes, and addressing discrimination could reduce vulnerability and result in better outcomes during disasters for all people in the Solomon Islands, inclusive of people with disability.

These findings are reinterpreted through the lenses of disaster, climate and disability justice. We argue Berne et al.'s (2018) ten principles for disability justice can be expanded to explicitly connect with climate justice to provide a framework for reducing climate-induced disaster injustices for people with disability (Figure 1).

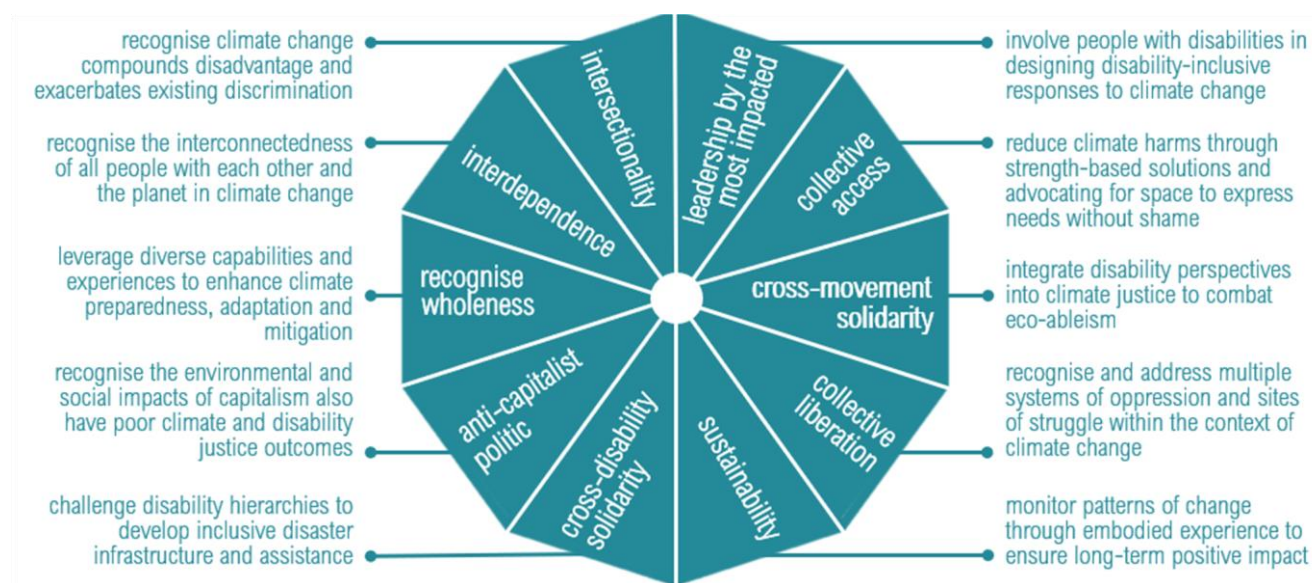


Figure 1. Principles for Climate–Disability Justice

Facilitating meaningful inclusion and collective access

People with disability in the Solomon Islands experience stigma and discrimination bound by sociocultural norms. As a result, there is a societal expectation that they should stay at home and not be involved in matters of public life, making many of them invisible. Consequently, the participants in King et al.'s (2019) research reported that people with disability had been excluded from disaster planning and were not consulted about how they could reduce their risk.

Recognising the wholeness of people with a disability, including their life and internal experiences, shifts the focus from individual deficits to acknowledging that attitudinal, institutional, and environmental systems exclude or disadvantage people with disability. In the realm of climate justice, it also emphasizes leveraging the capabilities, knowledge, and experiences of people with disability to enhance climate-related preparedness, adaptation, and mitigation efforts (Pacific Disability Forum, 2022). By recognising the entirety of people with disability, they are seen as valued contributors rather than solely as members of a vulnerable group (Abbott & Porter, 2013). This approach acknowledges the capacities of people with disability to effectively contribute as active participants in decision-making processes regarding climate adaptation, rather than passive recipients of such programs.

Vulnerability during climate-related events for people with disability is exacerbated by inadequate support from governments and non-governmental organisations (Gaskin et al., 2017, King et al, 2019), however, people with disability continue to be poorly represented in climate adaptation and mitigation strategies (Perry, 2023). This was illustrated in the Solomon Island study (King et al, 2019). Disability justice is premised on the meaningful inclusion, participation, and leadership of people with disability because they possess unique insights into, and the right to shape, the systems influencing their lives. Because climate change exacerbates existing vulnerabilities and creates new challenges for people with disability involving them in climate policy development and implementation is also crucial for climate justice (Lewis & Ballard, 2016) and informed decision-making (IDA, 2021). People with disability and their representative organisations must be given the opportunity to play a leading role in designing a disability-inclusive response to climate change, including in budgetary decisions (Grant & Keogh, 2023) and disaster planning, response and recovery efforts (Pertiwi et al., 2019). For this to occur it is vital that expressing access needs is not experienced as shameful, and that autonomy and strengths are respected (Berne et al., 2018). Collective access entails ensuring access to public events and social movements (Jampel, 2018) and empowering individuals as active decision-makers and technical experts based on their lived experience (Grant, 2022). By meeting the preconditions for inclusion in climate adaptation—including accessibility, assistive devices, and non-discrimination—a wide range of people with disability can be included, ensuring climate and disaster decisions avoid unintended harms.

Cross-movement and cross-disability solidarity

In the Solomon Islands it is taken for granted that people with disability will become the responsibility of their family and therefore family speak on their behalf which results in a lack of voice and agency and little interaction with other people with disability. King et al. (2019) found that without participation in or representation by a movement that can advocate for their needs, people with disability are essentially invisible in disaster planning.

Disability justice scholars have also noted the problematic ways that disability is constructed within climate change discourses and activist spaces (Cram et al., 2022), effectively marginalising people with disability in disaster contexts and excluding them from decision-making (Bretz, 2020; Gartrell et al., 2020). To achieve improved access and disability justice in the context of climate-induced disasters a paradigm shift in how disability is perceived within broader social justice movements is required. Cross-movement solidarity emphasises the importance of integrating disability perspectives into climate and disaster justice movements to combat eco-ableism. Eco-ableism marginalises people with disability, excluding them from activist spaces and inducing guilt or shame over resource needs (Fenny, 2017). Eco-ableism manifests in exclusionary environmental design and disaster planning by neglecting the voices and needs of people with disability (King et al., 2019). To avoid eco-ableist outcomes, climate stakeholders must prioritise disability inclusion in climate action, ensuring representation and accessibility (Butler et al., 2022) and the proactive engagement of people with disability in climate justice initiatives through the provision of inclusive spaces and information (GLAD Network, 2021).

Cross-disability solidarity and inclusivity is achieved by valuing the insights and participation of people across disability types and challenging disability hierarchies and prejudices that can lead to exclusion and marginalisation (Gombos & Dhanda, 2024) and privileging certain types of disabilities over others, including in climate strategies (Aistle et al., 2023). Tackling stigma, harmful norms, and discrimination is crucial for recognising all people with disability as active participants in climate action by respecting their knowledge, experiences, and rights (Grant, 2022). An 'all disabilities' approach supports the development of disaster response infrastructure, including inclusive shelters, alert systems, information provision and assistance efforts.

Embracing an anti-capitalistic politic

King et al. (2019) found that in the aftermath of disasters in the Solomon Islands such as tsunami and floods, people with disability had much less access to water and more constrained mobility options than people without disability, as emergency and recovery efforts focused on meeting the basic needs of the majority. This form of utilitarianism is characteristic of capitalism in its neglect of the right to a basic level of social support which is experienced by people with disability not just in the Solomon Islands but globally.

Capitalism is inherently gendered, racialised, and ableist, perpetuating inequality and climate change (Jampel, 2018). Berne et al. (2018) propose an anti-capitalist politic is essential for disability justice as it rejects the notion that human worth is solely determined by productivity and wealth accumulation and instead recognises the inherent value and worth of all people. Moreover, capitalism's environmental impact aligns with poor climate justice outcomes, suggesting that embracing anti-capitalist principles could support both disability and climate justice goals (McKane et al., 2024). Combining disaster, disability and environmental justice provides the foundation required to recognise and address multiple systems of oppression and sites of struggle within the context of climate change (Jampel, 2018), creating collective liberation. Just as universal design, initially aimed at accommodating people with disability, yields broader societal benefits, achieving collective liberation requires equitable

human-rights-based climate action that respects disability rights. This can be accomplished through a twin-track approach which integrates disability-specific initiatives with mainstream development efforts to ensure comprehensive and inclusive strategies (Beavor et al., 2023).

A focus on both independence and interdependence is integral to this shift. Interdependence recognises the interconnectedness of individuals with each other and the planet. However, this cannot come at the expense of a commitment to liberatory independence which limits unwarranted control over the lives of people with disability (Berne et al., 2018). The United Nations *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* encapsulates this principle in the maxim 'nothing about us, without us.' In addressing climate change, it is vital to ensure the voices and agency of people with disability are central and that they are included in climate adaptation discussions from the outset, rather than as an afterthought. Climate and disaster action must recognise how social, political, and economic systems contribute to the disadvantages and discrimination experienced by people with disability, which in turn may worsen or alleviate the impacts of climate change (Beavor et al., 2023). Collecting disaggregated data on climate change impacts, considering factors such as geography, gender, age, ethnicity, and disability, is essential to avoid homogenising experiences or erasing difference.

Conclusion

Factors such as age, ethnicity, historic caste, race, gender, disability, and wealth, intersect to shape experiences of climate-induced disaster (Levy et al., 2024) creating unique challenges which are often overlooked in climate agendas (Ngcamu, 2023). For instance, women in the Global South face compounded disadvantages due to patriarchal norms, resulting in poor access to resources and healthcare compared to men with disability (Fong, 2022) and increased exposure to violence (Alston et al., 2023). This would suggest that an intersectional approach is required and which recognises the intersections of disaster, climate and disability but which also accommodates additional difference. Berne et al's 2018 framework is a good place to start.

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