

2021 Economic and Social Committee
Humanitarian Affairs Segment
Side-event report

Our voices count: young people with disabilities and climate action

Organized by UNICEF and the International Disability Alliance

Thursday 24 June 8:30 to 10:00am CET

Objective:

Persons with disabilities are disproportionately impacted by climate change and these impacts are multiplied in humanitarian contexts. However, while the preamble to the 2015 *Paris Agreement* includes persons with disabilities as one of the groups most acutely affected by climate change, they have nevertheless been largely excluded from decision-making processes and outcomes under the *UN Framework Convention on Climate Change* (UNFCCC), as well as from States' climate change policies and plans at the domestic level.

Persons with disabilities, as local actors, have an important role in climate action. Persons with disabilities and their representative organizations have valuable knowledge on how climate change impacts the most marginalized and effective measures to mitigate the impacts at a local level. Further, youth with disabilities are a powerful voice for climate action but are often excluded from opportunities to participate in climate movements.

This side event, organized by UNICEF and the International Disability Alliance, provided a forum for exchange of learning and experience on how persons with disabilities and their representative organizations can be engaged in climate action at a local level. In particular, this event engaged young persons with disabilities to identify effective strategies to strengthen their engagement. This discussion built on the substantial gains that have been made in recent years in terms of strengthening participation by persons with disabilities as actors in humanitarian response (including in public health emergencies), and identified learning from this to be applied to climate action.

Panel Members:

Moderator: Yolanda Muñoz, PhD, Co-Investigator, Disability-Inclusive Climate Action Research Programme (DICARP), McGill University (<https://www.disabilityinclusiveclimate.org/>)

Opening remarks: Ambassador, Permanent Representative of Finland to the UN in Geneva, Ms. Kirsti Kauppi

Closing remarks: Gautam Narasimhan, Senior Adviser, Climate, Energy, Environment and DRR, UNICEF

Panelists:

- Karina Chupina, International Federation of Hard of Hearing people, former President of the International Federation of Hard of Hearing Young People (2004-2014), disability inclusion advocate and consultant

- Ruci Senikula, Youth with Disabilities Engagement Program Officer, Pacific Disability Forum
- David Nangosi, National Union of Disabled Persons of Uganda
- Erika Isabel Yague, young humanitarian practitioner
- Leku Sylvie Nakou, part of the Country(Cameroon) Coordinator team of the SDG Corps, member of the Commonwealth Children and Youth Disability Network, Humanitarian(protection specialist)/Gender officer at Centre for Human Rights and Democracy in Africa, and Gender/Sexuality Health Education facilitator at Women for a Change Cameroon

Main points:

- Coordination needs to be strengthened between humanitarian actors, climate actors and youth with disabilities (including their representative organizations). There are also important opportunities to learn from the experience of engaging young people in humanitarian action at a local, national and global level, such as in the development of the IASC Guidelines on Working with and for Young People in Humanitarian and Protracted Crises
- Participation by young people with disabilities must be representative of diversity, including women and girls with disabilities, refugees and indigenous people.
- In order for participation by young people with disabilities to be realized in practice, budgetary provisions must be made in climate action processes for accessibility and reasonable accommodation.
- More research is needed on the impact of climate change on youth with disabilities. This should include work with youth with disabilities to identify the barriers they face to participating in climate action

Key messages of the side event:

- Climate actors must focus on participation, not impairment. Recognize the voice and experience of young people with disabilities. But this needs to go beyond just listening, to taking action. Implement projects WITH young people with disabilities, rather than FOR them.
- In order to strengthen engagement by young people with disabilities in climate action, we need to raise knowledge of the rights of persons with disabilities among climate actors; and build capacity of young people with disabilities on climate action and self- advocacy. The experience from the Pacific Disability Forum provides a good example of this.
- Organizations of persons with disabilities (OPDs), including those led by young people, have a vital role in climate action. The experience of the National Union of Disabled Persons of Uganda highlighted how OPDs can engage in review of disaster management plans, policy change, and national and global dialogue.

Outcomes of the side event:

UNICEF and the International Disability Alliance will continue to collaborate in strengthen engagement of young people with disabilities in climate action, including by documenting and sharing learning and creating linkages between disability, climate action and humanitarian actors.