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National Indigenous Disabled Women's Association Nepal (NIDWAN)

Women with disabilities leading inclusive climate adaptation

Persons with disabilities are among the [hardest hit by the climate crisis](#) and face [disproportionate impacts](#) on their livelihoods, greater exposure to disaster risks, food insecurity, and displacement. The risks are heightened in disasters and emergencies, where persons with disabilities are often [excluded from critical COVID-19 national responses](#) to climate disasters, due to compounding issues of [limited mobility](#), [communication barriers](#), and [dependence on caregivers](#) during emergencies which make it harder to escape unsafe

environments or seek assistance. Despite this, disability justice, and particularly the rights and needs of women and girls with disabilities, [remain largely invisible in climate policy and finance](#). Feminist organisations are addressing these intersecting injustices through effective and efficient [interventions to adapt to rapidly intensifying climate impacts](#). Rooted in community realities, these organisations bridge local knowledge with international advocacy, providing scalable solutions for inclusive [adaptation action](#).

Specific risks facing women and girls with disabilities

A [study led by Nepali organisations of persons with disabilities](#) identified the following risks:

- Early-warning systems and evacuation routes are often inaccessible, which heightens exposure to floods, landslides, heatwaves, and other climate hazards.
- Water scarcity raises the burden of household labour and hygiene management for women and girls with disabilities and their caregivers, while mobility restrictions make it harder to reach safe water sources during climate-induced shortages.
- Gaps in official data collection, planning, and recovery mechanisms further hinder equitable access to relief, compensation, and long-term recovery after disasters, leaving many women, girls, and LGBTIQ+ persons with disabilities unseen and unsupported in climate crisis contexts.
- Forced displacement, breakdowns in community protection structures, inaccessible shelters, and lack of safe, confidential reporting mechanisms expose Indigenous women and girls with disabilities to heightened risks of violence, exploitation, and abuse.

To address these specific risks, feminist environmental justice organisations are centring [Indigenous women with disabilities](#) in climate policy and governance and redefining what climate leadership looks like. The following sections of this brief explain the work of Mama Cash grantee- partner, the National Indigenous Disabled Women's Association Nepal (NIDWAN) in Nepal, and its work and impact at this crucial intersection.



Building inclusive climate governance from community to international level

NIDWAN ensures national and international climate policies recognise the specific rights, needs, and participation of Indigenous women and women with disabilities. In 2015, it influenced the [Paris Agreement](#) negotiations to [ensure inclusion of the terms “women”, “Indigenous peoples”, and “persons with disabilities”](#) through participation in Indigenous and feminist advocacy networks (including the [UNFCCC Women and Gender Constituency](#)). Its efforts resulted in formal recognition of the multiple forms of exclusion Indigenous women with disabilities face in climate policy-making and access to finance. To guarantee meaningful participation in climate and SRHR policy-making spaces, NIDWAN co-published [research on the nexus of climate change, disability, and sexual and reproductive health and rights \(SRHR\)](#). This has been used to position Indigenous women with disabilities for leadership roles in climate policy and to

facilitate advocacy to ensure their rights are upheld, and reasonable accommodation, in accordance with CRPD Article 29.

By connecting community realities to international decision-making, in line with CRPD and UNFCCC agreements, NIDWAN holds states accountable on their commitments [to recognise and address the differential impacts of climate change on persons with disabilities](#) through evidence-based, rights-based approaches. NIDWAN's advocacy makes the case for climate governance systems that embed equity and accessibility and that are reflective of the lived realities of those most affected by climate change, thereby strengthening the effectiveness of climate governance and ensuring decision-making spaces include Indigenous women with disabilities rather than reproducing their exclusion.

Leading effective and disability-inclusive Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR)

NIDWAN's 2022 [Community-Based Participatory Action Research \(PAR\)](#) documented how increased floods, landslides, untimely rainfall, and water scarcity in Sindhupalchowk District directly endangers Indigenous women and girls with disabilities. The research found that development projects such as hydropower, dams, and road expansion exacerbate displacement, erode cultural and

medicinal forest resources, and intensify loss and damage, leaving Indigenous women with disabilities with limited access to safe shelter, food, water, and SRHR and family planning services during disasters. In situations of emergency and forced displacement, Indigenous women with disabilities are often driven to live in unsafe open spaces or informal urban settlements.

NIDWAN identified the need to strengthen the connection between the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) and Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) frameworks, including the [Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction](#), which obligates States to guarantee inclusive, accessible, and non-discriminatory disaster preparedness and response systems with specific attention to persons with disabilities. Together with the Asia Indigenous Peoples Pact, NIDWAN presented a [position paper](#) assessing the unique position and rights of indigenous peoples in relation to DRR, ahead of the Asia-Pacific Ministerial Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction (APMCDRR) 2022. Their work plays a critical role in visibilising the risks and lived realities of women with disabilities and the protections and services needed in climate emergencies.

At the community level, NIDWAN leads disability-inclusive DRR initiatives by working with local authorities to make early-warning systems, evacuation routes, and shelters accessible to Indigenous women with disabilities. They train community leaders and DRR committees to recognise and respond to heightened risks of violence, displacement, and loss of SRHR services during disasters, ensuring that protection measures are integrated into preparedness and response plans. NIDWAN also advocates for disability- and Indigenous-inclusive DRR policies at municipal and national levels, ensuring that relief, recovery, and reconstruction efforts reflect the lived realities of Indigenous women and girls with disabilities. Through this multi-level approach, NIDWAN directly addresses structural DRR gaps and helps build safer, more equitable disaster governance systems. NIDWAN's collaborations with governmental authorities secure protections for persons with disabilities in disasters, climate emergencies, and humanitarian crises per Article 11 of the CPRD.

Inclusive climate governance is possible when those most affected shape the solutions.

The work of NIDWAN demonstrates how a disability-inclusive approach to climate governance leads to more effective and equitable adaptation outcomes. They operationalise the commitments set out in the CRPD, UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), Paris Agreement adaptation principles, [Sendai Disaster Risk Reduction Commitments](#), and COP Gender Action Plan. They challenge the [sidelining of structurally excluded communities from](#)

[decision-making](#) and ensuring that [adaptation and mitigation frameworks reflect lived realities](#). The preamble to the Paris Agreement affirms that climate action must respect and promote human rights, including the rights of persons with disabilities. NIDWAN actualises this through ensuring accessible information, building long-term climate resilience and inclusive infrastructure, SRHR policies, early warning systems and adaptation plans, building long-term resilience and inclusive governance.