

Case Study

Climate Change and its Humanitarian Consequences

The impact on persons with disabilities in Southern
Madagascar



Introduction

Reflecting on experiences from Organisations of Persons with Disabilities (OPDs) partner, the Plateforme des Fédérations des Personnes Handicapées de Madagascar (PFPH-MAD) funded by the Global Greengrants Fund and the humanitarian response initiated by CBM Global, this study shares learnings on the impact of the climate crisis in Madagascar, the on-going food crisis and the challenges faced by persons with disabilities and their representative organisations in accessing humanitarian assistance.¹

"With the effects of climate change making seasonal disasters more frequent and more intense, it's clear that humanitarian response alone is not enough to break the cycle of chronic vulnerability. These communities require long-term investment in reconstruction efforts, early warning systems and climate-resilience infrastructure"

- Clémentine André, Monitoring Expert for West and Southern Africa at the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC).

Overview

Despite being a country that produces less than 0.01% of all the carbon dioxide generated in the world, Madagascar was revealed in 2021 to be one of the most affected countries by climate change.² Recent studies by [World Weather Attribution](#) have shown that their rainfall level was extremely low over the past three years, partly due to climatic changes and mostly to meteorological fluctuations. Alongside the unprecedented low level of rain experienced over the past three years, the World Bank estimates that "...poor land practices and increasing deforestation, can lead to significant and damaging floods across the country (...) Shoreline erosion caused by sea level rise is already a significant problem to the coastal ports and beaches of Madagascar. In 1997 coastal erosion was measured between 5.71 and 6.54 meters, and this is projected to increase exponentially by 2100."³

During the last four years, the combined effects of climate change, environmental degradation, deforestation, and soil exhaustion, the COVID 19 pandemic and the already severe poverty levels, has resulted in one of the worst food insecurity emergencies in forty years.⁴ According to the [Climate Change Knowledge Portal](#), Madagascar's levels of poverty directly influence the impact of natural events: about 90% of the Malagasy live on less than two dollars per day, and the country does not have the resources to manage exposure to droughts, cyclones, earthquakes, plagues and epidemics. Furthermore, the COVID-19 pandemic prevented many people from moving to other areas, due to travel restrictions imposed on the population. Developing ways to sustain their livelihoods has also become extremely difficult for people living in certain regions of Madagascar: while the main source

¹ Authors: Yolanda Muñoz (Global Greengrants Fund), Lila Ratsifandrihamanana (former CBMG Madagascar Country Director) with input from Mary Keogh, CBMG Advocacy Director, and Christian Modino Hok, CBMG Humanitarian Director.

² Subramanian, S. (September 2021). "The Future of Hunger. Madagascar is suffering from a climate change famine." Quartz Africa. Last retrieved on April 26, 2022, at <https://qz.com/africa/2054501/the-worlds-only-climate-change-famine-has-hit-madagascar/>

³ World Bank. Climate Knowledge Portal - Madagascar. Last consulted on July 12, 2022.

<https://climateknowledgeportal.worldbank.org/country/madagascar/vulnerability>

⁴ Madagascar is the 3rd poorest country in the world with a poverty rate of 70%: [Poverty Rate by Country 2022 \(worldpopulationreview.com\)](#)

of income is livestock - which accounted for over 56% of cash expenditures - travel restrictions have impacted any real economic return. Remittances represent the second most important source of income in rural areas. Madagascar has experienced a "...contraction of GDP by 7.1% and of income per capita by 9.8%. As a result, an additional 1.8 million people are estimated to have fallen below the international poverty line in 2020, bringing the poverty rate to an all-time high of 80.7%."⁵

In 2021, the drought impacting Madagascar has reduced many parts of the Grand Sud to famine like conditions and extreme long term food insecurity. Results of the [Integrated Food Security Phase \(IPC\)](#) assessment in May 2022 reveal a dramatic situation: "Around 1.68 million people out of the 5.25 million people of the Grand Sud and Grand Sud-Est regions of Madagascar analysed are experiencing high levels of acute food insecurity between April and August 2022."⁶ Over the first months of 2022, an unusual number of cyclones have hit the region, which translated into new emergencies in an already critical situation, marked not only by food insecurity but also by forced internal displacement accompanied by loss of lives and material assets.

Over the course of 2022 international and national humanitarian actors in collaboration with the government have been working relentlessly to support the most affected communities meeting the needs of 1.1 million people in the Grand Sud.⁷ However, the situation remains extremely precarious. These efforts will not only need to be sustained over 2023, whilst working on longer term solutions, but must ensure they are inclusive of persons with disabilities who are amongst the most marginalised and at-risk communities and most often left behind.

⁵ The World Bank (June 2022) "Madagascar Economic Update: Navigating Through the Storm, A New Drive for Reforms in Madagascar is Crucial." Retrieved from <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/madagascar/publication/madagascar-economic-update-navigating-through-the-storm-a-new-drive-for-reforms-in-madagascar-is-crucial>. Last consulted on July 19, 2022.

⁶ OCHA Relief Web. (May 30, 2022 "Madagascar [Grand South & Grand South-east]: IPC Food Insecurity Snapshot, April - August 2022. Retrieved on July 13 2022 from: https://www.ipcinfo.org/fileadmin/user_upload/ipcinfo/docs/IPC_Madagascar_AcuteFoodSecur_22Apr23Mar_Snaps_hot_English.pdf

⁷ [Madagascar: Grand Sud humanitarian response dashboard \(January - March 2022\) - Madagascar | ReliefWeb](#)

The Malagasy Situation



Image: Mosa, a person with disability from Madagascar, goes to his field to cultivate the land. He uses his spade as a walking stick to get around. © CBM/Viviane Rakotoarivony

Nowhere to be Found: The situation of Malagasy with disabilities in the region

Malagasy people with disabilities are not very visible in the current crisis that is hitting the Southern region of the Island. Evidence on the gaps gathered by the OPD, the Plateforme des Fédérations des Personnes Handicapées de Madagascar (PFPH-MAD) are highlighted later in the paper. According to their findings, their right to be included in emergency situations through participation in decision making processes, and accessing emergency response services such as clean water, adequate nutritious food or cash assistance adapted to their needs has been generally overlooked by the humanitarian sector. This, despite the fact that Madagascar ratified [the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities \(CRPD\)](#) in 2015 and has obligations to ensure that humanitarian responses are inclusive of persons with disabilities. In addition, these obligations while not binding, should guide the efforts of many of the UN agencies and INGOs working in responding to emergencies. In addition, as a signatory country of the Paris Agreement since 2016, the Government of Madagascar adopted a [National Plan for Adaptation to Climate Change](#). Although the plan makes several references to persons with disabilities, the current crisis in the Southern region of the country demonstrates that there are still significant gaps to achieve full inclusion.

Supporting persons with disabilities to hold humanitarian actors to account

As part of the efforts to adopt disability-inclusive grant-making practices, the Global Greengrants Fund provided a grant to Plateforme des Fédérations des Personnes Handicapées de Madagascar (PFPH-MAD) to travel to the zone and gather testimonies and evidence about the obstacles that people with disabilities are facing during the famine and in accessing humanitarian aid. The Plateforme is also an OPD partner with CBM Global Madagascar.

The Plateforme members travelled to the area three times between August 2021 and March 2022,⁸ together with personnel from the National Agency of Disaster and Risks Management (BNGRC by its acronym in French) to conduct a rapid assessment of the situation of persons with disabilities in the context of the current food crisis in the region. The resultant report highlighted that most individuals are extremely isolated and there are only two OPDs in the Anôsy region.⁹ These organisations have little information about the impact climate change has on their current situation and how it disproportionately affects them. To address this, training activities were conducted, which included the participation of local authorities, who also mentioned that they did not know about the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the existing policies to include persons with disabilities in humanitarian response. The Plateforme also mentioned structural inequities related to accessing agriculture and farming, the main source of income for the population, which are very much dependent on rainfall - alongside fishing, the most important source of income for those who are living in the coastal areas.

Parallel to this evidence gathering from the Plateforme, CBM Global launched an inclusive humanitarian response to support the populations most affected by the famine crisis. Below are the key barriers and obstacles that the Plateforme, GGF and CBM Global found from their efforts.

Key barriers and obstacles:

- **Lack of data on disability:** Data is fundamental to identify the population of persons with disabilities, analyse the risks that persons with disabilities face and the factors that contribute to those risks, identify barriers that impede persons with disabilities from accessing humanitarian assistance, and understanding the roles and capacities of persons with disabilities in the humanitarian response. There is no reliable data about how many people with and without disabilities have died because of the famine. This gap in data persists even though the region is used to receiving aid due to the constant emergency situations that it finds itself in.

⁸ The Plateforme mentions in their report that they did their first visit to the amboasary du sud (Anôsy region), Bekily (Androy region), and Toliara (Atsimo Andrefana region) from August 9 - 16 2021; in December 14 - 20 they visited Fort-Dauphin (région Anôsy); and from March 07 - 15 they traveled to the Androy region and Anôsy. Activities report 2022.

⁹ The Plateforme reported the existence of two organisations in the Anôsy region: "Sembana Miray Hina" (Persons with Disabilities in Solidarity) that has 85 members. The second one is "Fikambanan'ny Sembana Amboasary Atsimo" (FISEA – Association of Persons with Disabilities of Amboasary Atsimo, which has 425 members, where 125 of them are women.

- **Behavioural barriers to disability inclusion:** Local targeting committees¹⁰ are not fully operational and those that are set up at the Fokontany level are in the administrative zone closest to the beneficiaries. The members are volunteers, and they are either notables or literate people from the communities. Prejudices against people with disabilities and systemic lack of access to education significantly reduce the opportunity for meaningful representation in these committees.
- **Intersectional barriers to inclusion:** These were also identified and included barriers to decision-making processes dominated by the elderly of the communities, leaving behind the voices of young individuals, with the opinion of women often being disregarded. It is noted that several NGOs are working towards improving this situation. The number of women with disabilities who benefit from these initiatives remains low, for example, according to Village Saving and Loans Associations (VSLA), 94 out of 156 beneficiaries are women. This figure includes 10 women with disabilities.
- **Administrative barriers:** The need for an identity card was problematic. Among the targeting criteria, beneficiaries must be at least 18 years old and have a national identity card. This is an obstacle for people with disabilities who have been hidden by their families, and whose births have not even been registered, as the distribution of relief resources is planned according to the registered population.
- **Structural barriers to income-generation activities:** Lack of access to resources was also found to be a barrier. People with disabilities do not have access to productive resources, including arable land, water, and other natural resources, which are becoming increasingly insufficient due to prolonged droughts. The best irrigated land is the scarcest and the physically strong or wealthy own the most land.
- **Experience of disability discrimination can differ:** The issue of persons with albinism was also mentioned as an increased concern in the Southern area. In addition to the grim situation caused by the drought, people with disabilities keep facing the additional barriers and effects of stigma and discrimination. People with albinism, for example, are prized as a talisman for those who work in mining activities, while persons with other disabilities experience systemic neglect. It is believed that having a person with albinism under one's roof is a source of blessings, especially for mining activities. Therefore, the community does not pay much attention to persons with other types of disabilities who are neglected and discriminated against.
- **Limited Opportunities for Advocacy:** In view of the situation, there are scarce possibilities in the region to directly advocate for accessible support to the population with disabilities. To address this, the Plateforme provided training sessions to their

¹⁰ The targeting committee was set-up within the project for the identification of persons with disabilities who will benefit the cash distribution: The committee includes the technicians from the project partner, the Chief of the village, community workers from the community, and OPDs if they already exist

peers in the local area to be able to better defend their right to have and access humanitarian support on equal terms with non-disabled people. This is important, as training and capacity building often take place in cities and require travel. In fact, getting to these remote zones requires careful planning and it might take several days to reach the zone, in view of the lack of safe roads and transportation.

Case study: Mosa Tsihitsify



Image: Mosa sits on a bench under a large tree. © CBM/Viviane Rakotoarivony

MOSA, a 45-year-old, lives with a physical and intellectual disability and has difficulty expressing himself. He lives in the Commune of Berano Ville, in the District of Amboasary. Because he does not have a crutch, he uses his spade for his daily commute. Given the lack of opportunities for independent living, Mosa lives with his mother. He helps the family by growing roots and tubers such as cassava and sweet potatoes. Due to the lack of rain because of climate change, their plantation can no longer yield enough crops to support their most basic needs. To survive, they had to sell their house and when there was nothing left to eat in the area, they sometimes had to travel to Amboasary, about 15 km away from their village, hoping to get some food for the day.

“We leave early in the morning and arrive late in the evening because I cannot walk fast,” says Mosa. For his mother, their living conditions are particularly challenging – “It’s difficult to support Mosa, do the chores and still find a way to get some money for us to survive.”

Recommendations to make disability inclusion a central concern

As mentioned above, the crisis in Madagascar has been ongoing for four years now, and the impact on persons with disabilities at the intersection of ableism, climate change, food security, and environmental injustice remains a quagmire that urgently needs to be addressed.

In response to the on-going crisis in Madagascar and planning forward for a “Build-Back-Better” scenario, the following actions are recommended to different stakeholders:

Government, UN agencies and other Humanitarian actors:

- In line with Article 11, ensure that persons with disabilities are included in the humanitarian response to the on-going crisis. Ensure also that support is provided to OPDs to engage and actively contribute to the humanitarian response.
- It is crucial to gather data about the real number of persons with disabilities living in the area, and not relying solely on birth registers to determine their distribution strategies.
- Ensure that people with disabilities are included in a reorientation of the national vision for REDD+ to fully embed it into the national and rural development strategy. This is in line with the recommendation of UN REDD to “[provide] important inputs to upgrade the strategy design process with strengthened intersectoral and policy-level dialogue.”¹¹
- Include people with disabilities in the monitoring and evaluation of strategies and policies to address internal displacement due to the interactions of climate change, environmental degradation, and poverty.
- Ensure that concrete measures are taken to implement Madagascar’s existing adaptation and mitigation policies that mention persons with disabilities, but which are currently not enforced accordingly. Set up mechanisms for systemic consultation and inclusion in decision-making processes regarding mitigation efforts and emergency response.

Organisations working on disability, environmental and climate issues:

- Creating disability-inclusive partnerships with OPDs and disability organisations to work together on environmental justice and climate change, where OPDs are consulted and enabled to contribute to reforestation efforts, to promote better use of the agricultural lands, as well as other strategies to mitigate the impact of erratic weather behaviour.
- Include disability as a key component of their activities and projects, and work together with OPDs towards the development of efficient mitigation plans, especially relating to soil depletion and degradation, as well as reforestation.

¹¹ UN-REDD Programme. “Progress - Madagascar” <https://www.un-redd.org/partner-country/madagascar-2021>

Donors:

- Provide funding and technical support to strengthen the capacity of people with disabilities in the region to form organisations with a human rights and advocacy perspective, to meaningfully participate and influence policies and strategies for disaster risk mitigation.
- To foster agency of OPDs in the country and in the region to advocate for inclusion in climate mitigation strategies and emergency response.



Image: Water scarcity in the south remains a challenge in the area. A family, standing behind containers, had to walk miles to get water.

About PFPH-MAD and Global Greengrants Fund support:

In 2021, the Global Greengrants Fund provided a \$5,000 USD grant to the Plateforme de Fédérations des Personnes Handicapées du Madagascar (PFPH-MAD) to travel to the Southern region and make a rapid assessment of the situation of persons with disabilities in the context of the famine that has been hitting the region over the past years. As a result of this grant, the members of the Plateforme visited three cities and produced an extensive report that underlines:

- Limited presence of OPDs in the area.
- Exclusion and isolation are rife.
- Local authorities do not know their obligations towards persons with disabilities according to the CRPD and the existing mitigations policies issued by the government of Madagascar but are eager to learn.

- Persons with disabilities working in organisations consider that the drought and the food crisis are not related to the patterns of weather behaviour, and do not have information about these topics.
- The famine has increased theft of cattle and social unrest among the population.
- The depletion of soil and deforestation are important factors to consider, and these should not be as important to the interests of persons with disabilities as it is for everyone else.

Their report mentions that:

“Thanks to this grant, we were able to acquire first-hand knowledge about the situation in persons with disabilities in Southern Madagascar. We learned about their specific obstacles and the extreme poverty in which they live. Furthermore, we were able to better understand how climate change is exacerbating drought, famine, floods and the locust plague.

Before this grant, we were focused on inclusive education, labour integration, professional training, as well as access to basic services. Now we are aware of the importance of making climate change and environmental justice a priority that is related to other areas of our work.”

Concluding thoughts

We know that the current global warming that is rapidly accelerating climate change and its impact on the biosphere people are dependent on is caused by human activity. Responding to the humanitarian crisis it creates and its impact on the poorer and most excluded communities such as persons with disabilities, requires genuine concerted efforts among OPDs, donors, and mainstream humanitarian and development actors to improve the chances of successful actions and learning opportunities. At the same time, structural changes to address the impact of climate change must recognise the agency of people with disabilities and other at risk communities and groups to determine the best strategies to reduce social inequalities and ensure their full inclusion in all decision-making processes, and programme activities. The concerns of Malagasy persons with disabilities must be central to every effort to cope with the effects of environmental degradation and climate change.

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