

On CRDPs and CRPD: why the rights of people with disabilities are crucial for understanding climate-resilient development pathways

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In this Personal View, we examine how the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and lived experiences of disability can deepen understanding of four key features of climate-resilient development: social justice and equity as normative goals; the ethical underpinnings of social choices; the inequitable relations that drive marginalisation; and the ways in which society navigates uncertainty through inclusive and contestatory politics. A disability lens not only helps to understand how marginalisation generates vulnerability; it also helps to elaborate the ethic of solidarity as underpinning social choices and steering development towards climate-resilient pathways. Social justice concerns non-discrimination and equitable participation in everyday informal arenas, as well as formal decision making processes. The resilience knowledges of disabled people help to rethink sustainable development by expounding human interdependence and everyday problem solving in the face of uncertainties. They also contribute to opening up climate change decision making and knowledge processes in ways crucial to engendering transformative change. Embracing human diversity by recognising dignity and capacity is required to counter othering and marginalisation, ensure human wellbeing and planetary health, and achieve socially just development. As such, solidarity is not just a normative goal, but also a means of building climate-resilient development.

Introduction

Remarkably little has been written about climate change and disability in academic literature. The 2014 Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) Fifth Assessment Report only mentions disability briefly, for example.^{1,2} This paucity of attention is puzzling given that the focus of climate change research and policy has increasingly shifted towards addressing how sociopolitical marginalisation produces vulnerability in the face of environmental change. People with disabilities are often disproportionately impacted by disasters, including climate-related events, and are implicitly considered as helpless victims and “the least worth saving”,³ rather than active contributors in disaster preparedness.⁴⁻⁶

The linkages between climate change and disability go beyond the risks posed by climate change to health, to encompass how we build wellbeing and healthy communities through sociopolitical relations and processes.^{7,8} Indeed, the COVID-19 pandemic measures over the past year and a half brought home the importance of what people often take for granted: the role of social interaction, sense of belonging, solidarity, and equity for our everyday quality of life. In addition to meeting standards of living, health, physical safety, work, and leisure needs, wellbeing includes multiple intangible dimensions, such as affective bonds, interpersonal relations to friends and family, pleasure, satisfaction, growth, purpose, mastery, self-actualisation, meaning, harmony, awareness, self-efficacy, social position, and influence on one's life and surroundings.^{9,10} By contrast, the social injustices are both distributional and procedural: not only is the wellbeing of already marginalised groups, such as children and people with disabilities, impacted harshly by climate change and COVID-19, but these groups are also often grossly

under-represented, or outright excluded, in decision making processes addressing such challenges.¹¹⁻¹³ Faced with such societal challenges, scholars increasingly call for a public questioning of the high-consumption development models that are currently producing the climate change problem as well as social inequality, marginalisation, and polarisation.¹⁴⁻¹⁶

People with disabilities have probably been ignored in climate change research and policy for precisely the same reasons that they are often vulnerable: processes of marginalisation that leave them out of decision making and climate change knowledge production processes.¹⁷ In this Personal View, we highlight how this tendency has undermined the collective understanding of how society needs to act in the face of climate change. In short, by taking the rights, vulnerability, and capacity of people with disabilities as a starting point, one can begin to understand what climate-resilient development needs to be in much more concrete, political, and humane ways than has so far been the case.

Climate-resilient development is a term that speaks to the need for a fundamentally different development that ensures human and planetary health. Broadly, it constitutes forms of development that combine climate change adaptation, vulnerability reduction, and mitigation of greenhouse gas emissions with the pursuit of sustainable development.¹⁸ It has become a central term in the IPCC assessment process to provide a scientific basis for international climate policy. The globally agreed normative Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) often represent proxy guiding pathways for climate-resilient development. In short, climate-resilient development pathways (CRDPs) are concerned with directing development towards better ensuring social justice, wellbeing, and human and planetary health.

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Simultaneously, the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD)¹⁹ has rushed to the forefront in policy debates in the past few years, as a process to ensure the rights of people often marginalised in societal processes. Although sharing an orientation towards social justice in development, the similarity between the two acronyms is their main point of intersection so far. The two themes have remained almost completely separate in research and policy; yet, disability studies have much to contribute to understandings of societal resilience.²⁰ This Personal View examines how the principles of the CRPD intersect with the conceptual underpinnings of climate-resilient development, contextualising this analysis with findings from a targeted workshop with researchers, activists, and civil society, as well as relevant disability and climate change vulnerability literature.^{19,21} Taking people with disabilities as a starting point helps to transform questions of what climate-resilient development looks like by defining them from the vantage point of those in vulnerable situations and by identifying processes of discrimination and exclusion that more socially just forms of development must address. We ask what the rights and lived experiences of people with disabilities tell us about the marginalisation processes that drive social vulnerability, in the context of various social and environmental challenges, including climate change. In particular, we consider how these rights and struggles to ensure wellbeing can help us to understand social justice as a crucial aspect of climate-resilient development.

This examination of the rights of people with disabilities illustrates that embracing diversity is a crucial aspect of social justice. Ethics that underpin social justice in development decision making imply valuing all people equally in terms of their rights to wellbeing and their ability to contribute in decision making. In this way, solidarity is not just a normative goal of climate-resilient development; it is crucial to achieving such development for all.

Exploring the intersection between the rights of people with disabilities and the key features of climate-resilient development

Addressing social marginalisation and vulnerability relations (ie, the sociopolitical relations that produce vulnerability for some and relative security for others²²) is central to both CRDPs and the CRPD. People with disabilities form the world's largest minority, constituting about 15% of the world's population.²³ The globally negotiated rights enshrined in the CRPD concern a group often rendered invisible in decision making and the public sphere in general. These rights are therefore a particularly appropriate entry point to understanding the processes through which people are marginalised within society and the forms of recognition that are sought to overturn such processes, thereby supporting wellbeing, equity, and justice. Our focus departs from human

rights-based climate change approaches, which study how human rights can be ensured through emissions reductions and addressing climate change impacts,²⁴ by focusing specifically on how climate change interventions can address vulnerability and inequity.²² A focus on the rights of people with disabilities specifically interrogates how marginalisation processes render some people invisible and vulnerable, and can help to substantiate climate-resilient development to address its current shortcomings in recognising social and political forces.²⁵

CRDPs can be thought of as unpredictable and emergent, yet politically governed and contested futures.¹⁶ The term climate-resilient development encompasses how societal choices regarding adaptation and mitigation action, along with other everyday actions and deliberate planning, lead to the emergence of particular development pathways. This research field explores what societal choices look like—normatively and in practice—that lead to social equity, reduced risk and vulnerability, and environmental integrity.¹⁸ Schipper and colleagues explain development pathways as being “characterised by dialectical tensions between ‘progress’, social–ecological disruptions, social contingencies and emergent contestations”.¹⁶ Hence, climate-resilient development is turbulent rather than neatly planned and predictable; it emerges through disruptions such as COVID-19 and struggles over meanings, rights, values, and interests.

We examine the rights of people with disabilities across four key features that are highlighted in literature on climate-resilient development: social justice and equity as normative goals; the ethical underpinnings of social choices; the inequitable relations that drive marginalisation; and the ways in which society navigates uncertainty through inclusive and contestatory politics. We draw on three sources of information in our examination: a document analysis of the CRPD; insights from a targeted workshop; and disability literature. The CRPD was adopted in 2006 after active participation by organisations of people with disabilities and other civil society organisations.^{19,26} It currently has 182 ratified parties.²⁷ People with disabilities are more exposed to severe human rights violations in general; in addition, human rights violations against people with disabilities have traditionally not been understood sufficiently as rights violations but rather as a natural and legitimate differentiated treatment. The CRPD was a response to the inability of existing international provisions to address these shortcomings, and builds on the Universal Declaration and previous human rights conventions such as the UN Convention on Civil and Political Rights and the UN Convention on Economic Social and Cultural Rights.²⁸

In order to gain insights into how the issues that these rights aim to address are manifested in the lived experiences and knowledges of disabled people, in September, 2020, we conducted a workshop of eight researchers, civil society activists, practitioners, students, and activist–practitioners engaged in securing the rights

of people with disabilities. The group was selected through targeted invitations to people engaged in research, practical projects, or activism in disability rights in the interface with public health and climate change. Two of the activist participants had different lived experiences of disability. The workshop formed part of a series of three workshops supported by the Norwegian University of Life Sciences (NMBU) seed funding to explore means through which we can reimagine climate-resilient development. The discussion was summarised in a workshop report published with the consent of all participants.²¹ The workshop explored how the rights, daily lived experiences and struggles, and wellbeing of people with disabilities might help deepen understanding of what constitutes climate-resilient development. The meeting used techniques for deep inquiry, based on transformational meeting methods,²⁹ with targeted questions to solicit the perspectives and lived experiences of people with disabilities. The size of the workshop was kept small to enable in-depth discussion while ensuring a balance of participants of different backgrounds and expertise. The discussion nevertheless only represents a snapshot of the wide range of lived experiences and knowledges of people with disabilities. We therefore also contextualise our findings in disability literature to ground the examination of formal rights with insights regarding the lived experience of disability, processes of marginalisation, and actions to promote rights.

Key feature 1: social justice and equity as normative goals

Social justice and equity, as normative goals of climate-resilient development, are the first key feature that we examine here. Social justice concerns both distributional and procedural issues, meaning both the socially (in) equitable distribution of outcomes and the nature of decision making processes. More equitable societies are often found to be more resilient in the face of shocks and change.¹⁵ Despite an expanding literature on social justice in resilience, adaptation, and climate action, understanding how to ensure socially just resilience, and in particular how to engage so-called vulnerable groups in decision making processes, remains a challenge.^{30,31}

The rights of people with disabilities help deepen our understanding of social justice and equity in two main ways: first, by shifting the focus from the individual's disability to society's responsibilities regarding the condition of disability; and second, by identifying a lack of facilitation for people with disabilities to ensure wellbeing and meaningful participation in societal activities as a violation of human rights. The CRPD builds on the social model for understanding disability, first coined by Oliver³² and the related human rights model of disability.^{33,34} The social model views disability as "a socially produced injustice which it is possible to challenge and eliminate through radical social change".³⁴ This contrasts with previous models that located the problem within the individual and the medical

characteristics of a non-norm-conforming body.^{32,35} For example, the medical model of disability located the cause of social exclusion in an individual's impairment, such as being deaf or blind, whereas the social model sees disability as the outcome of how society responds to impairment and other forms of human variation, that is, a result of discrimination and oppression.³⁶

The CRPD is regarded as representing a paradigm shift from a medical to a social model of disability through its focus on the need for social change and society's responsibility to ensure rights and remove barriers to participation by people with disabilities.²⁸ It represents an understanding of disability as a social condition generated by cultural, social, personal, and political processes, drawing attention to the principles of equal opportunity and non-discrimination as part of social justice.^{33,37} Participation in societal activities is also a matter of wellbeing. A persistent equating of disability with inability in public discourse contributes to perpetuating physical and social barriers to participation in societal activities, mobility, and experiencing feelings of freedom in nature.⁷

The CRPD aims to rectify problems of exclusion by emphasising various rights to involvement, representation, and participation. Lawson and Beckett³⁴ argue that the CRPD and the rights enshrined in it are a means of achieving social change in line with the social model of disability. Others regard the convention as a codification of a separate human rights model of disability that also addresses shortcomings in the social model.³⁶ The social model has been criticised for disregarding personal differences in the lived experience of disability, such as type of impairment,^{38,39} gender, age, other social characteristics, and past experiences, including exposure to negative attitudes.^{4,33} The CRPD, however, pays attention both to impairment and to disability as socially generated. It defines disability in the following way: "Persons with disabilities include those who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others."¹⁹

Article 1 of the Convention states that "The purpose of the Convention is to promote, protect and ensure the full and equal enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms by all persons with disabilities and promote respect for their inherent dignity."¹⁹ Importantly, the CRPD uses this disability discourse for formal recognition of rights as well as to ensure them through re-stating existing human rights and creating subsidiary rights that provide disability advocates and scholars with a tool to hold actors accountable. Based on the notion that there should be nothing about us without us, the CRPD emphasises that people with disabilities and their organisations should actively participate in the processes that lead to policy and programme decisions, requiring the UN and individual states to allow them a voice in public affairs.⁴⁰

However, CRPD framings have also been criticised for potentially supporting practices of inclusion and accommodation at the individual rather than the structural level, its normative goals insufficiently accounting for the structural and systemic causes of disability.⁴¹ Such practices risk inclusive marginalisation, that is, partial inclusion without genuine equality of opportunity. In this Personal View, we seek to add nuance to any such seemingly individualised perspectives by the CRPD by suggesting that directing attention to universal access and the structural level is essential for equitable sustainable development. Furthermore, we argue for ensuring genuine inclusion based on solidarity.

Participation is not just about ensuring procedural and distributional justice, such as the right of people with disabilities to be protected from disasters; participation can also represent recognition of people with disabilities as people with the knowledge and ability to strengthen decision making and knowledge production processes for the benefit of society as a whole, if only they were less excluded.⁵ In fact, the knowledge of disabled people can be regarded as crucial for deepening our understanding of sustainability, vulnerability, and resilience in the face of climate change.^{3,20,42} The CRPD stresses the importance of shifting from viewing people with disability as objects of charity to “respecting persons with disabilities as ‘subjects’ with rights, who are capable of claiming those rights and making decisions for their lives based on their free and informed consent as well as being active members of society”.²⁷ People with disabilities are not a homogeneous group; social differentiation intersects along dimensions such as gender, sexuality, ableness, and race. What would be required by more climate-resilient development, therefore, is to implement different practical measures to ensure equal human rights.

The implications of such an understanding of the right to participate in society is not limited to people with disabilities. According to a “parity of participation”³⁵ understanding of social justice, society is just only when it enables all of its members to interact with each other as peers. Mladenov uses economic redistribution, cultural recognition, and political representation to argue that disability-informed strategies for social transformation bear the potential to improve parity of participation not only for disabled people, but for everyone else as well.³⁵ Conversely, disregarding disability risks exacerbating injustice for all. Barriers to participation are experienced in the everyday; researcher and civil society participants at the NMBU workshop emphasised that short deadlines limit the inclusion of people with disabilities into knowledge production as well as decision making processes. In addition, ableist or academic language often excludes people with disabilities. The participants suggested that one way to ensure participation and address social justice aspects of vulnerability is to make knowledge production and decision making processes accessible, such as by booking sign language interpreters

in meetings or ensuring that text-to-speech software is available, so that the rights and knowledges of people with disabilities are made a natural part of all contexts.²¹ Such practical means of opening up knowledge production and decision making processes might be useful for enhancing democratisation and plural ontologies in climate change policy, increasingly argued as crucial to engendering transformative change.^{16,43,44}

The CRPD identifies several facets of how to ensure participation. For example, Article 21 concerns the right of people with disabilities to freedom of expression and opinion, including to seek and receive information on an equal basis with others through forms of communication of their choice. Article 29 concerns the opportunity of people with disabilities to enjoy political rights on an equal basis with others, including safe and accessible voting procedures and participation in organisations at international, national, regional, and local levels.¹⁹ These public and political spaces are to be free from discrimination; yet, decision making and knowledge processes within these arenas are never neutral, and are often shaped by inequitable power relations, entrenching the exclusion of the already marginalised.^{45,46} The NMBU workshop highlighted how everyday barriers like medical appointments, bureaucracies, and lack of physical access contribute to a person’s struggle to be included in the public sphere, which is often time and energy consuming. Climate-resilient development therefore needs to engage with how everyday participation is embedded in sociopolitical dynamics and through what means it does (or does not) lead to meaningful inclusion in different contexts.

Key feature 2: ethical underpinnings of social choices

The ethics of how social choices are made are a second key feature of climate-resilient development pathways,¹⁸ including what is deemed desirable, what are deemed acceptable negative outcomes for whom and at what time scales, and who should decide.¹⁶ Schipper and colleagues argue that solidarity, or “the ethical call to action to support others in the face of adversity” underpins the way that social choices are made within climate resilient development.¹⁶ As they also state, an implication of the leave no one behind principle of the globally agreed SDGs, is that “development pathways that are climate resilient are those that foster wellbeing—even in the face of COVID-19—for people and the planet, by means of solidarity”.¹⁶ Governmental and non-governmental development actors have often considered people with disabilities as a separate focus area from general social development, signalling that development for the general population—at the expense of the inclusion of people with disabilities—is acceptable.^{47,48} In essence, the ethics underpinning decisions determine who will be sacrificed and who will be kept alive,¹⁶ exemplified by the fate of many people with disabilities during climate events.⁴⁹

Article 18 of the CRPD technically ensures the right of disabled people to international mobility. However, disability is often perceived as a burden rather than a source of knowledge or social enrichment. It is not uncommon for disabled people who want to migrate to be denied access to countries on the grounds of health.^{50,51} Thus, although policies are in place, the ethics underpinning practical decisions testify to contradicting priorities and values. In the same manner, drawing on evidence from Kenya and Bangladesh, Kett and Cole report that although progress has been made regarding the inclusion and rights of people with disabilities and enhancing resilience to environmental change on the policy level, there are many gaps concerning funding, implementation, monitoring, and reducing impacts in practice.⁵² Kett and Cole argue that tougher measures to enforce rights and challenge social norms are required: when disability inclusion is not understood from a rights-based perspective, disabled people are excluded from discussions about climate-related policy and practice.⁵²

What do ethics such as solidarity mean in the context of the rights of people with disabilities? First, as mentioned, a main focus within the CRPD has been on participation as a way to ensure ethical decision making processes with equitable outcomes. Indeed, participation not just in formal processes but also in everyday social interactions and knowledge processes might provide a means to ensuring diversity of perspectives regarding what is deemed desirable or acceptable negative outcomes from social development, a critical aspect of climate-resilient development. The CRPD as a means for social change has more focus on the need for participation and accessibility than the sociopolitical struggles inherent in any participation process, including how uneven power relations play out over which ethics come to underpin decision making. The eight general principles (Article 3) to be followed in the implementation of the different individual rights point to particular ethical underpinnings of what are seen as desirable societal outcomes, such as respect, non-discrimination, dignity, and inclusion for all people regardless of gender, ability, or social difference.¹⁹ Climate decision making that leads to unequal opportunities, the discrimination of people with disabilities, or poorer wellbeing outcomes for disabled people would contradict this ethic of equity.

Second, the ethics of solidarity and equity foreground wellbeing as a central feature of climate-resilient development. The NMBU workshop discussions further elaborated how equity and participation—or discrimination and barriers to participation—are important aspects of the everyday lived experience of disability and vulnerability. It was highlighted that everyday interactions that normalise people with disability, as part of everyday settings in society, are at least as important as ensuring that disability is accommodated in specific formal processes. Not only are these interactions a matter of procedural and distributional justice; ensuring that dignity, respect, and

inclusion are inherent to interactions is a fundamental aspect of human wellbeing. Climate change discourses have been criticised for framing disabled people as victims, such as equating disability with immobility. This discourse dovetails into a climate migrant-as-victim understanding of vulnerability,⁵⁰ which positions people as inherently vulnerable and incapable and deserving charity, or alternatively even as a threat against which more privileged populations must protect themselves.⁵³ By contrast, a growing disability literature positions disabled people as valued experts.³ Leipoldt argues that the lived experience of disability reframes “the human condition as one of vulnerability and dependency while identifying those resources in human nature that may enable us to live a fulfilling life within inevitable limitations”.⁴² The disability experience of interdependence can offer a practical means through which to challenge the social values underpinning current unsustainable development patterns, including relations with ourselves, others, and the environment.⁴² In particular, focusing attention on inter-connectedness and our inevitable dependency highlights the need for development guided by a global ethics of solidarity, leveraging transformative pathways based on acts of care and environmental stewardship.⁵⁴

The third meaning of solidarity is that it is not merely a normative goal of climate-resilient development, but is also a crucial means of achieving such development for all. Point 13 in the CRPD Preamble demands recognition of the contributions made by people with disabilities to their communities and the way that these contributions advance the development of society as a whole.¹⁹ An implication of the parity of participation, as promoted by the CRPD, is the insight that social justice for one group—and especially one that is often invisible—is fundamental to generating and guiding societal transformations. Bell and colleagues conclude as follows: “By foregrounding the rights and knowledge of disabled people within global climate change discourses, we suggest that a critical disability lens could foster climate adaptation strategies that promote dignity and respect for embodied diversity, recognizing people’s capacities and skills rather than broadening existing health inequalities.”⁵⁰

Key feature 3: addressing the inequitable relations that drive marginalisation

Addressing the ethical underpinnings of social choices, such as solidarity and care, involves shifting development logics and paradigms. The inequitable relations that drive marginalisation and undermine wellbeing are a third key focus of climate-resilient development. The term climate-resilient development was coined in response to the need identified by the IPCC Fifth Assessment Report, among others, for a different form of development than the current trajectories, which are characterised by high emissions, poverty, and vulnerability.⁵⁵ Prevailing development trajectories discriminate and entrench systemic inequities, requiring transformative action.¹⁶

Early practical attempts at supporting climate-resilient development have been criticised for a depoliticisation and concealing of the various forms of marginalisation that drive vulnerability.²⁵

Understanding how ableism intersects with other relations of domination, along various dimensions of social difference, is important for supporting climate-resilient development. Ableism, along with racism, sexism, ageism, and adultism, and other factors, represents systematic discrimination and a prejudice towards particular social groups.^{29,56} Ableism is well documented as a mechanism of oppression and marginalisation, (re)producing the sociopolitical relations through which vulnerability is socially differentiated.^{7,57} Yet, little attention has been devoted to it in climate change literature.

Ableism refers to the beliefs, processes, and practices that produce an expectation of particular perfect or species-typical abilities in humans.^{17,49} It illustrates particularly well the mindsets and mechanisms of social differentiation that blame the individual and their social characteristics—such as their ableness or gender—for their predicament. People are thus defined as abnormal against a narrow set of assumptions of what constitutes the normal, such as adult, non-disabled, white males, thereby simultaneously privileging the group considered as normal. The denial of the human dependency and universal vulnerability that are implicit in ideals of humans as independent, unembodied subjects effectively excludes many of us as supposedly abnormal.⁵⁴ It also delegitimises our embodied and experiential knowledge, forms of resilience rooted in social relations of care, and our diverse wellbeing aspirations and imaginations of sustainable development. Hence, ableism exemplifies mindsets, development paradigms, and governance that reserve participation for the few and lead to daily practices of inaccessibility. Together, these factors constitute precisely the types of relations of domination that climate-resilient development seeks to transform.

Understanding inequity and marginalisation through the lens of the rights of people with disabilities can help to promote diversity and inclusion as key components of climate-resilient development. Bell and colleagues argue for “more inclusive climate change discourses that recognize impairment as an ordinary—not ‘specialist’ or exceptional—dimension of human experience”.⁵⁰ Disability-inclusive climate action that seeks to overturn social injustices and shift mindsets and discriminatory policy, can foster a type of climate-resilient development that is accessible to a greater share of the population at large.⁵⁸ The human rights model of disability enshrined in the CRPD reflects an intersectional approach, which takes into account how people can be marginalised through multiple forms of discrimination, including along lines of gender, ethnicity, or age. The convergence of discrimination along several social axes could therefore lead to a double invisibility, such as of disabled children or women, in disaster reduction efforts or climate change adaptation.^{3,19,58}

The CRPD makes a discursive contribution to confronting the social and political forces that shape vulnerability by treating disabled people not as an exclusive group different from the rest of society and requiring particular rights, but by including them in all human rights as a normal part of society. This shift alludes to a recognition of the diversity of all fellow human beings as forming the texture of society, rather than a legitimate reason for othering (defining others as different and less worthy) and exclusion. Personal accounts at the NMBU workshop illustrated that although most people believe that we should be kind and fair to people with disabilities, there is a deep-seated desire among many people not to be like disabled people, which drives an attitude of othering people with disabilities. Discussions at the workshop suggested that making people with disability visible and normalising their presence in all arenas of society are required to shift from exclusive to inclusive discourses. Indeed, rather than asking why people with disabilities or other social features need to be included within climate change policy and research processes, one should be asking why they are not included.

The eight key principles on which the CRPD is built frame people with disabilities as diverse individuals with autonomy and capacity, rather than as a homogeneous and vulnerable group of people. As discussions at the NMBU workshop highlighted, all people have different levels of functionality depending on their situation, illness, and stage in life. Hence, disability is socially contingent and relative rather than absolute. The tendency within the climate change literature to label groups such as disabled people as vulnerable is clearly problematic because it deflects attention from the way that sociopolitical processes of marginalisation produce vulnerability. Such labelling also inadvertently represents an othering that reinforces marginalisation processes by making vulnerability an individual trait and disempowering groups as supposedly lacking capacity.^{54,59} In order to counteract such politics, there have been calls for an explicit focus on agency and resistance within climate-resilient development understandings, which are further explored in the next section.^{25,43}

Exclusion of people with disability is often reflected in a pervasive lack of accessibility in everyday life. Accessibility permeates the CRPD as a prerequisite for dismantling marginalisation.^{19,27} Point 22 in the Preamble of the CRPD stresses that States need to be “Recognizing the importance of accessibility to the physical, social, economic and cultural environment, to health and education and to information and communication, in enabling persons with disabilities to fully enjoy all human rights and fundamental freedoms”.¹⁹ Hence, accessibility goes beyond physical accessibility, such as ramps and elevators or lifts, to include public services, ordinary everyday life activities, and media, through subtitles, sign language, and newspapers (Article 9), as

well as cultural life, recreation, leisure, and sport (Article 30).¹⁹

However, what accessibility entails varies greatly based on the perspective of the individual and their embodied experience.^{60,61} Whereas the CRPD calls for accessibility, we would like to stress that accessibility entails what we call universal access. Universal design is a prerequisite for universal access and is the process of designing products and environments for the needs of people, regardless of their age, ability, or status in life.⁶² This includes not only the infrastructural and material, but also the social, cultural, and relational. Universal access must therefore underpin all climate change adaptation policy processes. Yet, lived experiences of disability illustrate how inclusion or exclusion are performed not only in specific policy actions, but also in the everyday and nested in global development processes and knowledge processes. Hence, inclusion in spaces or processes does not necessarily entail meaningful or equitable participation. Societal and development discourses that privilege notions of time and monetary efficiency undermine ethics of participation and solidarity, and, crucially, risk constraining the diversity of voices required to deliberate the ethical underpinnings of development choices. Participants at the NMBU workshop reflected on how it is often assumed to be costly or difficult to ensure the participation of people with disabilities, and hence efforts are not made to include them in decision making processes and other aspects of the public sphere.⁴⁸ A focus on a maximum return rate on loans and quantitative development metrics has led to development at the expense of people with disabilities. The Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers, mandated by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, left people with disabilities disproportionately excluded from development projects.⁴⁷ The political pressure to quickly reduce and statistically document poverty headcounts has often meant the exclusive focus remained on those easier to lift out of poverty.^{3,49} As a consequence of the mobilisation by organisations of people with disabilities and wider civil society, disability was explicitly included in the SDGs.⁶³ Article 32 in the CRPD also requires “international cooperation, including international development programs to be inclusive of and accessible to persons with disabilities”.¹⁹ However, the gap between people with disabilities and their non-disabled peers is widening in terms of achieving development objectives, despite the clear agenda of the SDGs and the CRPD.^{48,64} The development community is therefore failing to live up to the ethic underpinning the SDGs, that is, to leave no one behind.

Knowledge processes constitute another arena where exclusion and marginalisation take place. Issues of who gets to be represented and whose knowledge counts in processes shape decision making and development pathways. Both the NMBU workshop and previous studies suggest that people with disabilities are often excluded from civil engagement beyond those specifically for them,

with low representation in women’s movements, climate activism, and research, for example.^{17,58} In climate change research and policy, decision making authority is often vested in a narrow range of experts and policy makers, legitimised by particular types of knowledges, leading to technical rather than socially contextualised types of measures.⁴³ Nijs and Heylighen show how disability experience can transform to expertise and advocates recognising the situated knowledges that emerge from disability experience as legitimate knowledge.⁶⁵ The authors explain how a traditional epistemological assumption about how knowledge must be produced objectively delegitimises the often embodied knowledge of disability experience.⁶⁵ A recognition of people with disabilities as experts on their situation and the marginalisation processes that they face—mobilising modes of engagement with people with disabilities within research projects and climate interventions—could bring more diverse knowledges and measures into climate-resilient development. This addition could in turn help to address the mechanisms through which climate change adaptation interventions often exclude marginalised groups and their knowledges from design and implementation, take insufficient account of the processes that produce vulnerability, and consequently fail to reach the most marginalised groups.⁴⁴

Key feature 4: navigating uncertainty through inclusive and contestatory politics

A fourth feature of climate-resilient development concerns how society navigates uncertainty and disruption through equitable processes. Embracing uncertainty as a feature of development—rather than trying to eliminate it when many features of climate–society relations are fundamentally unknowable—is crucial to shifting knowledges and practice.^{43,44} New ways of governance are required that address the need to be prepared for the unexpected and the unknown, Schipper and colleagues state: “Observing the pandemic from the lens of climate change is enlightening: in both cases, society is compelled to make decisions and take actions (or choose inaction) with long-term consequences...importantly, we need to look beyond prevailing science, policy and politics for solutions.”¹⁶ Rather than seeing governance that in which “rational decisions and policies can be engineered to achieve calculated and desired outcomes in the face of compound crises”,¹⁶ equitable governance processes are required that also open up the space for dissent, contestation of prevailing knowledge processes, power relations, and attitudes, and inclusive deliberation of the values that underlie society’s development choices.¹⁶

The CRPD emphasises that spaces for politics need to be accessible in order to be inclusive. Point 7 in the preamble and Article 24 underline the importance of making disability issues part of the mainstream policy and political processes, including in sustainable development strategies and within education and

community development.¹⁹ Article 11 specifically commits States Parties to take “all necessary measures to ensure the protection and safety of persons with disabilities in situations of risk, including situations of armed conflict, humanitarian emergencies and the occurrence of natural disasters”.¹⁹ Gutnik and Roth have pointed out that collaboration in the planning of climate change adaptation, disaster risk reduction, and sustainable development interventions is key for their success;⁶⁶ hence, including people with disabilities’ contributions in all stages of planning is essential for ensuring equitable CRDPs. Yet, although the CRPD highlights the capacity of disabled people and promotes participation in policy processes in general, Article 11 is more focused on the vulnerability of people with disabilities than their contributions to managing risks.

However, emerging literature shows that the expertise of disabled people is particularly useful in societal efforts to build resilience. By centring processes of resilience planning on the voices of disabled people, one can reveal the dynamics that render people resilient or vulnerable.¹⁹ Many disabled people are particularly skilled at solving problems in the face of daily unexpected events or barriers to activities, as well as living interdependently with others.³ The fact that these uncertainties and dependencies are inherent features of everyone’s lives has become particularly apparent in the face of climate change and the COVID-19 pandemic. Therefore, the lived experience of disability is an important resource for rethinking both resilience and sustainability.⁴² An understanding of how disability is socially produced also helps to locate resilience within sociopolitical structures rather than as what might be termed fixing individuals or vulnerable communities by enhancing their adaptive capacity. Centring resilience conversations on disabled people might also democratise the process of negotiating resilience, helping to make resilience planning more inclusive overall.^{20,50}

Importantly, participation processes are fraught with difficulties and uneven power relations, demanding attention to who gets to define what climate-resilient development looks like in practice. Personal experiences recounted at the NMBU workshop highlighted that processes of inclusion are never unproblematic. The way that participation is framed, in terms of who is included on what basis and who defines issues to be discussed, can itself reinforce socially differentiating processes that situate people with disabilities as a separate group. Therefore, processes of participation need simultaneously to strengthen the accessibility of decision making processes to disabled people and to enhance these people’s capacity to actively contribute in such processes.⁶⁶ Inserting lived experience, embodied knowledges, and agency into public deliberations could help to decolonise climate change knowledge in decision making, to reveal the community as a site of diversity and tension, and to open up space for contesting the prevailing perspectives

and authority of an assumed majority.^{67–69} In particular, such knowledges and contestations might form a basis for sourcing ethics such as solidarity in order to shift worldviews and paradigms and leverage transformative change for climate-resilient development.^{16,70}

Conclusion

Examining the intersection between the rights of people with disabilities and climate-resilient development provides an opportunity to understand what Schipper and colleagues call the “systemic inequity at the center of risk and response”¹⁶ from the perspective of those marginalised in climate change debates. Following the COVID-19 pandemic, the importance of understanding of how society can govern disruptions and turbulent social transformations in a socially equitable manner seems even more pressing than before. People with disabilities have so far often been left out of decision making processes. Not only does this tendency form part of marginalisation processes that shape vulnerability among people with disabilities; it impoverishes our shared understanding of how climate-resilient development can foster wellbeing for us all through means of solidarity.

Throughout this exploration, we have alluded to the politics of difference and struggles around meaning, values and understandings. The CRPD is itself a document that represents the outcome of such processes, as reflected in criticisms that the disability movement and CRPD have a Global North bias, failing to capture the everyday experiences of people in the Global South.^{71–73} Although it was outside the scope of this paper to analyse such power relations and dynamics in the convention process itself, understanding people with disabilities as individuals with diverse social features and positions within sociopolitical relations underlies our perspective on climate-resilient development.

This examination of the rights and lived experiences of disabled people highlights the need to shift from them being included, as an anomaly, into particular processes to ensuring that they are a natural part of all everyday informal as well as formal arenas. Such universal, rather than invited, participation in the everyday is a means of addressing the marginalisation processes that produce vulnerability. It entails an opening up of space for the knowledge and capacity of all people in generating more climate-resilient development, regardless of ableness, gender, ethnicity, or other characteristics, rather than situating groups as inherently vulnerable. A normalisation of people with disability as part of everyday settings in society counteracts both invisibility and attitudes that set them apart as different. Hence, social justice and everyday wellbeing are intrinsically linked through the issue of participation, dignity, and autonomy.

The issue of disability illustrates particularly well how embracing diversity is a crucial aspect of social justice: our rights and wellbeing needs are similar regardless of

socially differentiating features. The measures required to ensure that these rights and needs are met vary, just as all individuals vary. This observation forms the core of a redefining of climate-resilient development from a social justice perspective—ensuring people’s rights and needs are met through socially contextualised solutions defined through representation and deliberation. Such development necessarily involves recognition of the lived experience of disability as an important form of knowledge, along with expert and researcher knowledge. Yet, processes of inclusion often involve struggles at both a political and personal level. These glimpses into the lived experiences of disability underscore the need for research—particularly research directly involving people with disabilities—regarding how society renders certain groups invisible based on social characteristics, and how people seek to resist such processes. Such research might turn expert-led definitional powers on their head, asking what climate-resilient development looks like to those often invisible in debates, such as disabled people or children.

This exploration draws attention to how a people-centred focus is essential to pursuing climate-resilient development pathways. Climate-resilient development is as much about society’s ability to meet human diversity with both care and recognition of others’ knowledge as it is about the physical risk posed by climate change. Such relationships of empowering care involve recognising our inherent dependencies and treating every person with respect, trust, and compassion in the face of threats to wellbeing, thus transforming individualistic and othering mindsets. Solidarity is not merely a normative goal of climate-resilient development; it is essential to achieving socially just and equitable development. Taking the lens of the rights and lived experiences of people with disabilities allows us to understand how an ethic like solidarity transforms how we do research into or govern climate-resilient development.

Contributors

SHE was responsible for the overall conceptualisation (particularly the conceptualisation of climate-resilient development), the methodology, analysis, the writing, reviewing and editing of the manuscript, project administration, and funding acquisition. RG was responsible for the conceptualisation (particularly concerning disability), analysis (particularly of the CRPD), and the writing of the manuscript, and contributed to the methodology and the reviewing and editing of the manuscript. A-MS contributed to the conceptualisation (particularly concerning disability rights), methodology, and analysis, and was responsible for the reviewing and editing of the manuscript through extensive commenting. All three authors co-organised a targeted workshop that represents a source of data for this paper.

Declaration of interests

We declare no competing interests.

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