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**"They Are Ignored": Exploring the Rights and
Challenges of Children with Disabilities in Cambodia in
the Context of Climate Change**

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Abstract

The aim of this thesis is to examine the impact of climate change on the rights of children with disabilities and the development of their capabilities in Cambodia. Children with disabilities are one of the most marginalized groups in any society and one of the most affected by climate change. Using the social-ecological model and the capability approach, this paper analyzes participants' stories collected in interviews to better understand how we can fulfill the rights of children with disabilities in a changing climate and what barriers exist for them to develop their capabilities.

The findings show that while children with disabilities are highly affected by climate change, their needs are rarely met due to lack of awareness, resources, knowledge and inclusion. The voices of children with disabilities are rarely considered and in most cases children with disabilities are not represented in government and civil society efforts on climate change. Much remains to be done to fulfill the rights and development of children with disabilities capabilities in the context of climate change.

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Abbreviations

COP - Conference of the Parties

CRC - Convention on the Rights of the Child

CRPD - Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

DICARP - Disability-Inclusive Climate Action Research Programme

NDC - Nationally Determined Contribution

NGO - Non-Governmental Organization

OPD - Organisations of Persons with Disabilities

UNHCR - United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

UNICEF - United Nations Children's Fund

SDG - Sustainable Development Goal

1. Introduction

1.1 Problem description

All children have the right to the best life possible, including children with disabilities, who are first and foremost just that - children. But unfortunately, children with disabilities face many obstacles in realizing their rights. From the very beginning, children with disabilities face discrimination and exclusion, and this often continues throughout their lives (Unicef, 2022). It is estimated that 1.3 billion people live with a disability. This is 16% of the world's population or 1 in 6 people (WHO, 2023) and about 80% of them live in developing countries (United Nations, 2018). For children with disabilities, the number is as high as 240 million, or 1 in 10 children (Unicef, 2022).

Evidence shows that people with disabilities are more likely to live in poverty than people without any form of disability (Unicef, 2022; United Nations, 2018). Evidence also shows that disability and poverty are mutually reinforcing, as poor health, poor living conditions, poor access to health services and environmental risks can lead to disability (United Nations, 2018). In addition, persons with disabilities face more difficulties in accessing education and employment and therefore often lack earning opportunities, leading to higher poverty rates (United Nations, 2018).

Children with disabilities are disproportionately affected during climate disasters and emergencies and are particularly vulnerable to the impacts of climate change (Moran et al., 2017; Unicef, 2022). Children with disabilities are likely to be disconnected from support networks as family members may have to migrate to find income opportunities elsewhere. The child is left behind because of their disability (Unicef, 2022). In addition, children with disabilities are significantly affected by the breakdown of services, such as health services, creating further barriers to the child's access to their rights (Tonne & Adamson, 2020; Unicef, 2022). Evidence also shows that children with disabilities face more obstacles for accessing humanitarian assistance in times of crisis (Unicef, 2022).

Despite all this, people with disabilities, including children, are often overlooked in climate research (Moran et al., 2017). Research has been conducted on the impacts of climate change on vulnerable groups. However, there is a lack of specification of the needs of people within these vulnerable groups, which include children with disabilities (Lewis & Ballard, 2012). There is research on children's rights, climate change, and the rights of people with disabilities-but to date, the combination of these areas has not been adequately researched (Peek & Stough, 2010; Unicef, 2022). It is clear that more research is needed, and this thesis will help expand knowledge and fill some of the gaps.

1.2 Research questions and aim

This study aims to contribute to research on disability and climate by increasing understanding of the issues faced by children with disabilities in exercising their rights in a changing climate. Climate change will continue to worsen, and children with disabilities are among the most vulnerable populations who will be disproportionately affected (Moran et al., 2017; Unicef, 2022). Therefore, it is important to explore this issue. If we do not know how children with disabilities are affected, we do not know how to act. To contextualize the issue, Cambodia is used as a case study. Cambodia was chosen because of the presence of climate change (Nematchoua et al., 2018) and the high percentage of disabilities among youth and children (NISMOP, 2009). In addition, my internship provided the opportunity to focus on this country as I had access to local contacts.

The thesis is guided by two research questions, the first of which will be answered by the multi-level approach of the social-ecological model and the second by the capability approach. The social-ecological model states that to examine a child's development, we must not only look at the immediate environment, but also look beyond and examine the interaction of the child's larger environment (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). The capability approach is a framework for assessing individual well-being and advocates examining quality of life by asking people what they can do and be (Nussbaum, 2003; Sen, 2001).

The thesis draws on interviews from development practitioners whose perspectives are central to the thesis. The participants have experience working with children with disabilities or with climate change and their stories are important to illustrate this topic. The research questions are as follows:

- How do development practitioners describe how we can fulfill the rights of children with disabilities in a changing climate?
- How do development practitioners describe the barriers experienced by children with disabilities in developing their capabilities in the context of climate change?

1.3 Case study: Cambodia

To answer the research questions, Cambodia was selected as a case study to provide a local context. This research is being conducted in collaboration with Barnfonden - a child rights organization that works in many parts of the world. The collaboration allowed me to gain insight into the workings of child rights organizations and provided me with access to contacts in the field.

The reason Cambodia was chosen is because research has shown that poor countries in Asia are among the most affected by climate change (Nematchoua et al., 2018). Although Cambodia has made progress in reducing monetary poverty, about 18 percent of the population still lives below the poverty line (Asian Development Bank n.d.). Cambodia faces many changes related to climate change, especially the high risk of floods and droughts. Most people in Cambodia live in rural areas and rely on agriculture and fisheries. However, climate change has a strong impact on individuals' ability to earn a living and makes the country food insecure (The World Bank Group & Asian Development Bank, 2021).

Cambodia ratified the Paris Agreement in 2017 (Unfccc, n.d.a.) and is therefore committed to improving environmental conditions. To achieve the long-term goals of the agreement each country prepares Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) that include efforts to reduce

national emissions and adapt to the impacts of climate change. NDCs should be submitted every five years, and the next submission deadline is 2025 (Unfccc, n.d.b.). Cambodia submitted the first NDC in 2016 and the updated version in 2020 (The World Bank Group & Asian Development Bank, 2021).

A report that examined the inclusion of persons with disabilities and their rights in climate commitments adapted by countries to the Paris Agreement, found that only 35 of 192 countries address persons with disabilities in their NDCs (DICARP, 2022). Cambodia does refer to people with disabilities in their NDC, but in general terms. They mention people with disabilities in the context of vulnerable people, who are often more affected by climate change, and mention the lack of data on people with disabilities in disaster risk management, emphasizing that data collection is a priority (DICARP, 2022). However, children with disabilities are not considered. There are no presented strategies or concrete actions on how to prevent children and/or people with disabilities from being affected by climate change.

Cambodia has ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and the International Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) (OHCHR n.d.). In addition, the government adopted the Law on the Protection and the Promotion of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, a law that includes nondiscrimination in employment, accessibility, voting rights, and inclusive education (CDPO, n.d.). The conventions and the law are significant milestones for the protection of the rights of persons and children with disabilities in Cambodia. However, disability organizations in Cambodia argue that challenges lie in the implementation and realization of rights (CDPO, n.d.).

The estimated number of people with disabilities in Cambodia is reported differently in different sources, depending on which definitions are used. The Asian Development Bank gave the number as 9.8% in 1997, and the National Institute of Statistics, put it at 4% in 2004 (CDPO, n.d.). More recently, in the 2008 Cambodia General Population Census, the estimated percentage was only 1.44%, representing approximately 192,538 people with disabilities in Cambodia. The same report also provides figures on children with disabilities (NISMOP, 2009). At ages 0-14, an estimated 31.27% have some form of disability and at ages 15-29, 32.45%. Comparing these

numbers to the 30-44 age group, where 17.18% have a disability and only 12.09% in the 45-59 age group. It is clear that the younger population in Cambodia is more affected by disability (NISMOP, 2009, p. 125).

1.4 Policies for children, disabilities and climate change

The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) was adopted by the United Nations (UN) in 1989 and 196 countries have signed its 54 articles (Save the Children, n.d.) The Convention recognizes all the rights of children in society and the responsibility of governments to fulfill these rights. For example, children have the right to express their opinions and be heard. The CRC includes rights for all children, but article 23 specifies the rights of children with disabilities to enjoy the best possible life in society and indicates that governments must remove barriers for children with disabilities to participate actively in the community (Unicef, n.d.).

The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) is designed to protect and promote the rights of persons with disabilities. The CRPD was not developed to create new human rights, but to indicate that the rights of persons with disabilities have been violated and that there is a great need for additional action (Unicef, 2022). It describes the rights of persons with disabilities and the duties and responsibilities that States Parties have to protect and fulfill those rights (United Nations, 2015). The United Nations adopted the law in 2006 and opened it to countries for signature a year later (United Nations, n.d.). Article 7 of the Convention addresses the rights of children with disabilities and recognizes that the best interests of the child must be a primary consideration in all actions affecting children with disabilities. In addition, States Parties must ensure that their laws operate on the same basis as for other children (United Nations, 2015).

None of the above conventions recognize the impact of climate change on the rights of children and/or the rights of persons with disabilities. However, this year the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child will publish a General Comment (No. 26) on the rights of the child and the environment, with a particular focus on climate change (General Comment, n.d.). The comment aims to "Building universal standards for governments to uphold children's rights

impacted by the environmental and climate crisis" (General Comment, n.d.). In addition, the commentary is influenced by children and youth, particularly from communities most affected by climate change (General Comment, n.d.). To date, it is not clear what form this General Comment will take and whether it will include specific recommendations for children with disabilities.

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) were adopted in 2015 and aim to end poverty, protect the planet and ensure global well-being. To date, 193 countries have committed to implementing this plan (Unicef, 2022). Several of the goals explicitly mention disability but not in relation to climate change (UN General Assembly, 2015). These include Goal 4 - Target 4.5, Equal access to education and Target 4.a, Educational facilities accessible to persons with disabilities. Goal 8 - Target 8.5, relates to employment. Goal 10 - Target 10.2, relating to political inclusion. Goal 11 - Target 11.2, access to inclusive transportation systems and 11.7, access to inclusive public spaces. Goal 17 - Support developing countries to improve disaggregated data (UN General Assembly, 2015). Goal 13 refers to goals around climate change and climate action. However, this goal does not mention disability (UN General Assembly, 2015).

It should be emphasized that it could be argued that although disability is not mentioned in Goal 13, it still applies to children with disabilities because the SDGs operate on the principle of "leave no one behind.". This means that the SDGs apply to everyone, including children with disabilities (Unicef, 2022). In addition to the SDGs there is the Sendai Framework for disaster risk reduction which was adopted by the United Nations Development Fund in 2016 (United Nations Development Fund, 2016). The framework aims to make communities safer and more resilient to disasters and is inclusive for people with disabilities and children with disabilities (Unicef, 2022).

1.5 Barnfonden (ChildFund)

Barnfonden is a non-religious and politically independent child rights organization, founded in 1991 in Malmö, Sweden. As a member of the ChildFund Alliance, it works with and for children to strengthen their rights and ensure their safety. Everything Barnfonden does is focused on the child and the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Barnfonden takes a holistic view of child development, and conducts its work in close collaboration with children, families and others who are committed to making positive changes in communities. Regardless of the type of project, concern for the environment and climate is a key element. The ChildFund Alliance, a network of 12 child rights and development organizations, helps more than 21 million children, their families, and their communities each year. Barfonden's ultimate goal is for children around the world to be able to say "I am safe, I am healthy, I am happy, I have an education and I have a voice" (Barnfonden, n.d.a.).

Barnfonden currently has a project in Battambang Province in Cambodia where they are working to improve the situation of children with disabilities. The project focuses on the right of children with disabilities to education, through capacity building in the community and in the child's home environment. The project aims to help families claim the rights of their children with disabilities and reduce the existing stigma associated with disabilities. Since Barnfonden has a strong focus on climate change, this is also a focus here (Barnfonden, n.d.b.).

2. Literature review

2.1 Different definitions/approaches of disability

The UN defines disabilities as "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." (UN General Assembly, 2007, p. 4). However, the debate on how to view disability has been ongoing for a while and there has been a shift from the medical model to the social model, and the model recommended by UN is now the human rights-based model of disability (Degener, 2017; United Nations, n.d.). During the CRPD negotiations, it was agreed that the medical model needed to be overcome, and the human rights-based model of disability was described as the most important achievement of the CRPD (Degener, 2017). Depending on which model we choose to look at people with disabilities, different outcomes emerge. It is important to understand the different debates and why they exist because they can help shed light on the situation of children with disabilities as well as helping us understand the issues they face in developing their capabilities. Therefore, I will briefly describe them.

The medical model of disability defines people with disabilities by their medical condition. According to this model, a disability is seen as something that needs to be cured and only then is the person eligible to participate in society. From this perspective, people with disabilities are not considered equal and cannot enjoy the same rights as others (UNHCR, n.d.). However, disability is more than just a medical factor and medical treatment. On the one hand, the medical aspect is important to receive appropriate treatment (if needed) but this cannot determine how that person lives their life (Brisenden, 1986).

In response to the medical model, disability activists and scholars propose another version: the social model of disability (Goering, 2015) which considers disability as a consequence of the interaction between the person and the environment. The main focus of this model is to remove barriers for the person with a disability so that he or she has the same opportunity to participate as others (UNHCR, n.d.; Shakespeare, 2006). For example, a social barrier may be a building

that does not have a ramp, making it difficult for people in wheelchairs to enter the building. Removing these barriers leads to independence and equality for people with disabilities. (Goering, 2015; United Nations, 2018).

The human rights-based model of disability builds on the social model but adds the rights perspective. It is the responsibility of the state to respect people with disabilities and remove barriers that exist for them so that they have equal rights and opportunities to participate in society. In addition, this model emphasizes that people with disabilities can claim their rights and make decisions that affect them (UNHCR, n.d.).

2.2 Disability and climate change

In the context of climate change and its impacts, researchers agree that people with disabilities are among the most vulnerable populations (Kett et al., 2021; DICARP, 2022; Lewis & Ballard, 2012; Keogh, 2020). People with disabilities are more vulnerable to climate change due to the nature of their impairment and their marginalization in society; they also tend to be poorer and lack the resources to cope with climate change (DICARP, 2022; United Nations, 2018). Much is written about the impacts of climate change on vulnerable groups, who are expected to be disproportionately affected. However, there is not much research examining the vulnerability of people with disabilities within these groups (Lewis & Ballard, 2012). Research has been conducted on how climate change will affect, for example vulnerable groups such as children, women, the elderly (Abedin et al., 2013; Cherotich et al., 2012; Ebi & Paulson, 2007) and poor people in rural and urban areas (Pichdara et al., 2022; Twinomuhangi et al., 2021). However, almost nothing has been written about the impact of climate change on children with disabilities. Research has run in two parallel tracks, one on children, the other on people with disabilities. As a result, little research has been done on how children with disabilities are affected by climate change (Peek & Stough, 2010; Unicef, 2022). This section presents key arguments from the research that has been conducted.

A Unicef study mentions that there is limited data on the impact of climate change on children with disabilities, yet they are expected to be disproportionately affected due to various existing

inequalities (Unicef, 2022). Because people with disabilities (including children) are likely to live in poverty, they are more vulnerable to climate change. Existing barriers that children with disabilities already face on a daily basis, such as access to safe drinking water may be exacerbated, further increasing vulnerability (Unicef, 2022).

Due to warmer temperatures, extreme weather events are likely to become more frequent. By 2015, more than half a billion children (including children with disabilities) lived in areas vulnerable to flooding, and nearly 160 million children lived in areas at risk of severe drought. Disasters have a major impact on children with disabilities and they are less likely to be able to evacuate and access emergency assistance (Keogh, 2020; Lewis & Ballard, 2012; Unicef, 2022). Access to shelter, infrastructure and basic services such as toilets and health care may disappear due to climate change, or at least become more difficult to access as ground conditions deteriorate, with serious implications for children with disabilities (Keogh, 2020; Lewis & Ballard, 2012; Unicef, 2022).

CBM has identified key issues that could affect the well-being of people with disabilities as a result of climate change. One of these is, declining food security leading to malnutrition, which is estimated to cause 20% of impairments worldwide, and as climate change increases, more children are expected to experience impairments (Keogh, 2020; Lewis & Ballard, 2012). In addition, one in ten children is at risk of neurological impairment as a result of Malaria, and this disease is also likely to increase due to warmer temperatures (Keogh, 2020; Lewis & Ballard, 2012). Climate change is leading to forced displacement and migration, making children with disabilities particularly vulnerable, for example, because they have limited social support and are at high risk of health outcomes. Moreover, children with disabilities are sometimes unable to migrate when necessary and are instead left behind by their families (Lewis & Ballard, 2012; Unicef, 2022).

However, people with disabilities are more likely to be seen as vulnerable rather than that they are made vulnerable due to lack of planning, policy, information and participation in climate forums (Kett et al., 2021). An important contributing factor to children with disabilities being vulnerable to climate change is the lack of information in child-friendly formats (Unicef, 2022).

Kett et al. (2021) point out that there is a great need for education and capacity building among people with disabilities (and OPDs) about how climate change affects them, people with disabilities need to participate in climate forums and be part of the discussion. Often people with disabilities are excluded from participating in society and because they have less access to education, which is where disaster risk reduction and climate change information is most often provided. Children with disabilities are less well informed about what to do when disaster strikes (Kett et al., 2021; Unicef, 2022). Research shows that children with disabilities are “... 25 per cent less likely to attend early childhood education, 49 per cent more likely to have never attended school, 47 per cent more likely to be out of primary school, 33 per cent more likely to be out of lower secondary school and 27 per cent more likely to be out of upper secondary school.” (Unicef, 2022, p. 3).

An article in The Guardian claims that people with disabilities are systematically ignored in the climate change debate (Harvey, 2022). Research has shown that governments are not listening to the needs of people with disabilities. Instead of thinking about how to include people with disabilities, they are ignored (Harvey, 2022). However, there has been some progress in this regard. During COP26, the rights of people with disabilities in the context of climate change were discussed and they were not just referred to as a 'vulnerable group' (Kett et al., 2021). Youth-led activities such as climate strikes have mobilized around 1.5 million youth and children, demonstrating the importance for children to participate in the debate. In addition, it also demonstrates the importance of children with disabilities having access to technology and information to participate in social media platforms. This provides children with disabilities the opportunity to have their voices heard and express their opinions on matters that affect them (Unicef, 2022).

A McGill University study examined the national climate policies countries must submit under the Paris Agreement, which include requirements for people with disabilities. They found that only 35 of the 192 countries referenced people with disabilities in their climate strategies. Most of the countries that did mention it did so without elaborating on how they would go about doing so and how they would advocate for the rights of persons with disabilities (DICARP, 2022).

In summary, we can conclude that the research presented sheds light on the limited research on the rights of children with disabilities in climate change. While there is some research on how climate change affects people with disabilities, it does not address the situation of children. In addition, most of the research and material can be characterized as gray literature, produced by non-governmental organizations (NGO). However, many of the reports produced by NGOs may also be based on research findings, but some are more normative. It is safe to say that academic research on this topic is limited. There is a significant gap here, which is why it is important to explore the research questions of this thesis.

3. Theory

3.1 Social-ecological model

For this thesis I have chosen to discuss my findings with two relevant theories that I believe will help and guide my findings. The first is the social-ecological model, first introduced by Bronfenbrenner in the late 1970s (Guy-Evans, 2020). The model has proven useful in the study of child development (Guy-Evans, 2020; Kellock, 2020). The model suggests that we must view a child's development as a complex system of relationships that form his or her environment. From the immediate environment such as the family to a broader scale of exemplar laws and values. To examine child development, we must not only examine the immediate environment, but also look beyond and examine the interaction of the child's larger environment (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Guy-Evans, 2020; Paquette & Ryan, 2001).

Bronfenbrenner developed a set of structures and organized them according to how much they affect a child. The structures are the microsystem, the level closest to the child, the relationship and interaction between the child and his or her immediate environment. The mesosystem focuses on the microsystem structures, such as the relationship between the teacher and the child's parents. The exosystem represents, for example, the parents' work schedule, which does not directly affect the child, but he or she feels the positive or negative consequences. The macrosystem includes cultural values and laws. Finally, the chronosystem emphasizes the concept of time and how the timing of certain events, such as the death of a parent, can affect the child's life (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Guy-Evans, 2020; Paquette & Ryan, 2001).

The theory proposed by Bronfenbrenner has been widely accepted, and there are several variants of it. The Centers for Diseases and Prevention has adopted a variant of this model for various health promotion efforts, sometimes using a four-level model, while Unicef uses a five-level model (Kilanowski, 2017; Unicef, 2016). The World Health Organization used the model when examining violence and health from the perspectives of individual, relationship, community, and societal factors (Krug et al., 2002). Although there are different variations and this model is used to examine different domains, the fundamentals of the model are the same (cf. figure 1 below).

The idea of the model is to look at multiple influences at different levels and see how those influences interact at the different levels. The diversity illustrates the adaptability of social-ecological models (Rimer et al., 2008). I believe the model is useful for my research and I will explore solutions from the individual, relationship, community, and society factors.

The individual level focuses on the identity of the individual. Age, sexuality, economic status and education level are some characteristics captured at this level. All of these characteristics can influence the child's behavior (Krug et al., 2002). The second level relationship or interpersonal examines close relationships such as family members and peers, simply the close circle that exists around the child (Krug et al., 2002; Lee et al., 2017). The next level is community and examines the community context in which social relationships exist, such as school and neighborhood (Krug et al., 2002). It also includes social beliefs and norms, social and economic resources, knowledge, and a sense of empowerment in the community (Unicef, 2016). Finally, the societal level includes policies and laws at the national and global levels that may affect the child (Krug et al., 2002; Lee et al., 2017).

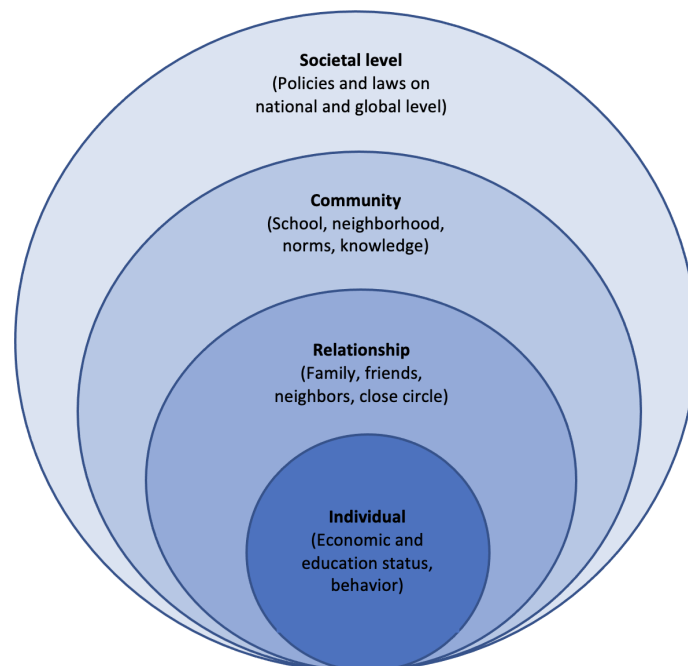


Figure 1: The social-ecological model (source: Krug et al., 2002; Unicef, 2016).

Some of the criticisms of this model focus on the disappearance of individual agency. The emphasis is on influences across levels rather than on individual responsibility for change. Therefore, the social-ecological models could be seen as ignoring individual responsibility for change. On the other hand, the model recognizes that all levels, including the individual, are integrated and influence each other (Rimer et al., 2008).

3.2 The capabilities approach

The capability approach was first introduced by Amartya Sen in the 1980s as a framework for assessing individual well-being and social arrangements (Sen, 2001). He argued that rather than focusing on economic growth and well-being as measures of quality of life, we should focus on capabilities, that is, what people can actually do and be. Sen argues that economic growth is a poor indicator of quality of life. However, if we ask people what they can do and be, we come closer to understanding the social barriers that exist (Nussbaum, 2003; Sen, 2001). Sen argues that one can examine a person's functions, capabilities, what they are capable of doing or being, he gives an example to illustrate:

“For example, an affluent person who fasts may have the same functioning achievement in terms of eating or nourishment as a destitute person who is forced to starve, but the first person does have a different "capability set" than the second (the first can choose to eat well and be well nourished in a way the second cannot).” (Sen, 2001, p. 75).

Sen therefore argues that development should be seen as freedom, and that this freedom depends not only on economic means, but also on social provisions such as health care and education facilities, as well as political and civil rights.

Martha Nussbaum further developed Sen's capability approach. Nussbaum felt that Sen's approach was too vague and therefore wanted to make capabilities more comprehensive and useful to citizens based on what they can ask of their government (Harnacke, 2013; Nussbaum, 2003; Sen, 2001). Nussbaum distinguishes three categories of capabilities: *basic*, *internal*, and *combined*. Basic capabilities, as the name implies, are a person's basic needs to develop more

advanced skills, such as speech and language, which a child later transforms into function (Nussbaum, 2011; Harnacke, 2013). Internal capabilities refer to the performance of one's functions. This may require time and physical effort, and they are fluid, rather than rigid. Most often they are developed through the integration of different environments, for example, social, political, family, and economic. Internal capabilities can be supported by the government through the provision of education, family support and more. Nussbaum describes the combined capabilities as the internal capabilities plus the external social, political, and economic conditions. For example, citizens may have learned to speak freely about political matters (internally), but society prevents them from doing so in reality (Nussbaum, 2011; Harnacke, 2013).

3.2.1 Capabilities and children

In the case of children and their rights, as Sen argues, freedom to make one's own choices is important for human development and well-being, but how does this fit with the perspective of children? When children are given freedom, they do not always make the decision that is best for them (Sen, 2007). Sen considers the problem:

“...there is a special problem in the case of children, since they do not, frequently enough, take their own decisions. If rights are interpreted in terms of freedoms that the right-holders should have, their usefulness must depend on how those freedoms are exercised. But can children take their own decisions? If the application of human rights to children must involve the children themselves taking well-considered decisions on the exercise of those freedoms then we would seem to be on the threshold of a manifest contradiction. Can children take these decisions? But is that the right question?” (Sen, 2007, p. 243).

However, Sen goes on to point out that our freedom depends not only on ourselves, but also on others. To give an example: It may be important for me to travel safely in an airplane, but that does not mean that I take control of the airplane-I put my freedom in the hands of others. The same is true for children, they put their freedom in the hands of their parents and society, to make the right choices for them (Sen, 2007). Sen puts it this way: “What opportunities children have

today and will have tomorrow, in line with what they can be reasonably expected to want, is a matter of public policy and social programs, involving a great many agencies.” (Sen, 2007, p. 244).

3.2.2 Capabilities, disability and environment

The capability approach has been widely used in the field of disability research (Verchick, 2012; Ton et al., 2019). Sen draws the example that “a person who is disabled may have a larger basket of primary goods and yet have less chance to [...] pursue her objectives than an able-bodied person with a smaller basket of primary goods” (Sen, 1999, p. 74).

The capability approach aims to empower people, regardless of their abilities. Nussbaum argues that we should not focus on a person's functions, but on capabilities, and capabilities are the same for everyone, they are a fundamental aspect of a dignified life. Moreover, the resources needed to gain a particular capability, not only for people with disabilities, vary. For example, a blind person might need more active government support to vote, than a person who can see. Therefore, it is important to ask what a person can do and be “...a person with a disability might not be able to do many things that a person without impairments can do, with the same resources. Therefore, the person with a disability should simply receive more resources.” (Harnacke, 2013, p. 772).

In addition, it is important to keep in mind that the capability approach, although focused on individual action, recognizes that people do not act alone. For example, people with disabilities may ask family members or friends for support when disasters occur, and when capabilities are achieved through the help of others, this becomes an external or collective capability. In this way, people with disabilities can gain capabilities that would not otherwise be available to them (Ton et al., 2019). However, it is important to note that the support people with disabilities receive in their daily lives may not be available in times of disaster, making it more difficult for them to achieve their collective capabilities (Villeneuve et al., 2021).

During a disaster, people with disabilities may need more resources than others to cope and achieve the same living conditions. This may result in people with disabilities being denied more

capabilities compared to people without disabilities. However, Ton et al. (2019) argue that rather than focusing on increasing the availability of resources for people with disabilities in disasters, we should enable them to transform their resources into valuable capabilities (Ton et al., 2019).

Participation and voice in the climate change debate is important to ensure disaster preparedness for people with disabilities. For example, it is important for people with disabilities to be able to participate and have a say in a village disaster risk reduction meeting. However, due to a physical impairment or lack of transportation, that person is unable to attend that meeting. Therefore, from a capability perspective, disability is often referred to as dis-capabilities (Ton et al., 2019).

However, there are also some critics of Nussbaum's theory of capabilities for people with disabilities. Critics have argued that people with severe impairments will never achieve their capabilities, no matter how many resources are used and how hard society tries. If a person with a severe impairment cannot achieve even basic capabilities, he or she will not be able to develop the internal or combined either. However, Nussbaum argues that we cannot know this for sure unless we do our best to make all kinds of adaptations (Harnacke, 2013).

4. Method

4.1 Research focus, research design and sampling

For this research, I have chosen to use a qualitative method. Quantitative research is often used when one wants to study people's perspectives, social relationships and find patterns in the oral or written statements of study participants (Bryman, 2012). Qualitative research is useful when one wants to gain a detailed understanding of the topic that can only be determined by talking directly with people. In addition, using qualitative research helps empower people to tell their stories (Creswell, 2013). In my case, I first encountered the topic of climate change and its impact on children with disabilities when I interned at Barnfonden, and this research is a collaboration between us. To overcome the potential bias due to the internship, I have consciously worked to maintain my academic integrity. For example by using different types of sources. I will discuss this in more detail later in this section.

The reason for choosing Cambodia as the focus country for my research was the presence of climate change (Nematchoua et al., 2018) and the high percentage of disabilities among youth and children. In addition, Barnfonden has implemented or is currently implementing several projects in this country on children's rights, children with disabilities and climate change. Therefore, they were able to provide me with interesting contacts with whom I could conduct interviews. I decided not to go on site and to conduct the interviews online instead. I approached the contacts provided by Barnfonden via email and conducted my first interviews. During the interviews I used the snowballing strategy and asked the participants if they could give me more contacts. The snowballing strategy is about finding people who know other people (Bryman, 2012) and this worked well for me.

However, not all of the contacts provided by Barnfonden responded to my email, and in order to obtain a reasonable number of interviews, I began searching the Internet for additional participants. I searched for individuals involved in NGOs in Cambodia that work with either children with disabilities and/or climate change. I wrote to many organizations and some of them responded and agreed to be interviewed. Another reason for me to seek out other organizations

that were not working with Barnfonden, was to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the issue and to avoid bias (Patton, 2015).

The data material consists of interviews with individuals working primarily in NGOs in Cambodia with either children with disabilities, people with disabilities, or climate change. This research aims to explore their experiences and knowledge, which is the central aspect of this work. Based on their experiences, these development practitioners were selected as participants for this study. I interviewed both upper and lower level management individuals as well as individuals working in the field. The organizations that appear in the analysis, in addition to ChildFund Cambodia, are the Cambodian Disabled People's Organization (CDPO), Khmer NGO for Education (KHEN) - a local child rights organization, World Vision, which works with vulnerable children in Cambodia, and Pafid, which works on inclusive development. These organizations have or had projects supporting the rights of people with disabilities. ChildFund has projects with CDPO and KHEN, but not with the other two. To preserve the anonymity of the participants, their names are not provided. At the end of this section in Table 1 the participants, date and time for the interview is presented.

Sometimes I had difficulty finding development practitioners in Cambodia who were willing to be interviewed or even respond to my emails. Therefore, in order to gain a better understanding of the issues, I turned to people who specifically work on climate change and people with disabilities, but not in the context of Cambodia. This is how I came into contact with the Christian Blind Mission (CBM), which works very intensively on the effects of climate change on people with disabilities, as well as with the Disability-Inclusive Climate Action Research Programme (DICARP). DICARP is a platform that brings together scholars and activists from around the world to generate and share knowledge on how the climate crisis should be addressed in a way that meets the rights of people with disabilities (DICARP, n.d.).

It was also difficult to find organizations/individuals that work on both climate change and children with disabilities. Most of the individuals I interviewed were either working with children with disabilities, people with disabilities, or climate change. This was not ideal, but since I could not find anyone who worked with children with disabilities and climate change, I

thought this was the best solution. At least this way I got valuable information from both fields. It is worth mentioning, however, that many of the organizations working with people with disabilities, for example, still had information available on the effects of climate change.

Participant	Date and time for interview
Participant 1	02-01-2023
Participant 2	04-01-2023
Participant 3	05-01-2023
Participant 4	06-01-2023
Participant 5	10-01-2023
Participant 6	18-01-2023
Participant 7	02-02-2023
Participant 8	27-02-2023
Participant 9	27-02-2023
Participant 10	28-02-2023
Participant 11	28-02-2023

Tabel 1: Participants, date and time for interview

4.2 Interviews

There are different ways to conduct interviews, but I chose semi-structured interviews. The advantage of semi-structured interviews is that they provide the researcher with both structure and flexibility (Bryman, 2012). Before the interviews took place, I created an interview guide with some main questions to guide the interview (Bryman, 2012), which can be found in the appendix. However, since this was a semi-structured interview, a few additional follow-up questions were asked in each interview depending on how the conversation progressed. All interviews were conducted online on Teams with audio and video. The interviews lasted about

30 minutes, were very focused and rich in information. The participants (as described in the section above) have rich experiences working with children with disabilities, people with disabilities, and/or climate change.

4.3. Thematic analysis - data analysis

A thematic analysis method was used to analyze the interviews, which involves searching for underlying themes in the transcribed interviews (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis is a flexible method for analyzing research data and can be used to analyze most qualitative data. There are various forms of thematic analysis, but in this thesis, an inductive approach is used, where the focus is on analyzing the underlying data rather than existing theories (Clarke et al., 2015). It is worth noting that I had the social-ecological model in mind when I began the data analysis. However, I had an open approach to the analysis process and welcomed other theoretical frameworks and theories (Nightingale, 2020). As I became more familiar with the data, I decided to add the capability approach as well.

All 11 interviews were transcribed and thematically coded, using Nvivo technical software, followed by thematic coding of documents (Clarke et al., 2015). When it comes to identifying patterns, it is helpful to code. After coding the data, the process of clustering codes into themes began, which is useful for identifying key patterns that occur in the collected data. In addition, when the quotes were included in the analysis, some grammatical adjustments were made and some unnecessary words were removed. However, this does not change the content of what the participant said, but only served to make the analysis more coherent and clear.

4.4 Ethical consideration

4.4.1 Informed Consent

It is important that participants understand the purpose of the study and agree to participate (Bryman, 2012; Scheyvens, 2014). Prior to the interviews, each participant was sent an information sheet and an interview consent form. The documents contained information about the purpose of the study and the extent of participation. If the participant agreed to participate in

the study, they could either indicate this in writing in an email to me or verbally before the interview began. The reason I chose this approach was to make it easier for the participants. Instead of printing out the forms, signing them, scanning them, and then sending them to me, they could save time by just writing a short email stating their consent.

Participants were given the necessary time to read through the form and ask questions about their participation before the interview, as well as decide not to participate after reading the consent form. The complete consent form can be found in the Appendix. In addition, with the consent of all participants, the online session was recorded, this recording will be destroyed once the paper is submitted. Participants are kept anonymous, so I will refer to them as Participant 1, 2, 3, etc. in the analysis. The transcript was also sent to the participants so that they could agree or disagree with the content before proceeding with the thesis.

4.4.2 Reflexivity and positionality

I am a white Northern European woman and an academic, and this is something that I have constantly thought about during my research. It is important to reflect on your positioning and be self-aware when conducting qualitative research (Scheyvens, 2014). I am studying children with disabilities who are affected by climate change, but I am not a child nor do I have any form of disability. Therefore, it is important that I reflect on my assumptions, interpretations, biases, and positioning during the research process (Creswell, 2013). However, it should be added that there will always be some form of underlying bias when conducting this type of research. I will give voice to the participants, but that voice will be selected and edited by me, the researcher (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

4.5 Limitations

This work is conducted with a qualitative method and is set in a specific context and case, and the findings are limited to the participants' experiences on the topic of children with disabilities and climate change in Cambodia. Because this research is based on the experiences of a few participants, it cannot speak to the situation in Cambodia as a whole or to the experiences of other development practitioners. This research does not claim to provide generalizable findings.

The interviews were conducted with a few individuals and the results only illuminate the statements, perceptions and experiences of those individuals. Had I used a method that allowed me to talk about Cambodia as a whole (for example country-wide survey), it would have been difficult to obtain personal narratives. Surveys can of course focus on thoughts and ideas, but semi-structured interviews leave room for new perspectives and unknowns. The richness of detail of qualitative studies is thus achieved at the expense of generalizability (Creswell, 2013).

Another limitation is that, for ethical reasons, interviews are not conducted with children with disabilities, but the study focuses on adults speaking on their behalf about this issue. Therefore, only the experiences and thoughts of adult development practitioners are presented, rather than the actual thoughts of children with disabilities themselves. Even if the participants work closely with children with disabilities and are knowledgeable about the subject matter, they can never fully understand the feelings of the children. To know that, we would have to ask the child.

The lack of organizations that address both children with disabilities and climate change could also be seen as a limitation. Most organizations deal with either disability rights or climate change, it was difficult to find an organization in Cambodia that combined these two aspects in their work.

5. Analysis

In this section, I will analyze the data I collected through the interviews. I grouped the most common themes that emerged in participants' narratives into three categories: Awareness, Limitations, Inclusion and Collaboration. The analysis draws on the theories of the social-ecological model and the capability approach, as well as previous research. Social-ecological models have previously been concerned with understanding the multiple situations of vulnerability. In this case, the need for a holistic understanding becomes evident after listening to the participants' narratives, as the given information was distributed on different levels. Therefore, the analysis is structured as follows, starting with the individual, relational, community, and societal levels in each category. Based on the information collected from the participants, some levels are more detailed than others. I will also add comments and relate the data collected to the theory of capabilities.

5.1 Awareness raising of disability and climate change

Children with disabilities are particularly vulnerable to climate change and are disproportionately affected by its impacts (Moran et al., 2017; Unicef, 2022). Yet, children with disabilities are often unaware of their rights and/or the impacts of climate change on them. This was consistently mentioned during data collection as one of the areas that needs to be addressed and improved. This impacts the ability of children with disabilities' to develop their capabilities. In addition, awareness was emphasized by participants on an individual level as well as on a relational, community, and societal level. This demonstrates the importance of addressing awareness at all levels. The purpose of this section is to address some concerns and thoughts that were expressed during the interviews about raising awareness.

The capabilities to have a voice, to be heard, to lead and enact change are important yet severely lacking for persons with disabilities. This was one aspect noted by several of the participants. In general children do not have much possibility to raise their voices, and children with disabilities have even fewer "...but having a voice and having a political stake is important." One participant

said, (Participant 6, 18-01-2023). Children with disabilities often have low socioeconomic status and educational attainment (DICARP, 2022; Unicef, 2022), which, according to the social-ecological model, influences individual behavior. It could be argued that they do not feel comfortable enough or that it is their right to have a say, although the CRC and CRPD clearly show the importance of listening to the voices of children and children with disabilities (Unicef, n.d.; United Nations, 2015). Even though children with disabilities have the basic capability of being able to express themselves, they lack the internal and external capability since they lack the ability to voice their opinions and be heard in the climate debate.

According to Unicef (2022), it is important to involve children in the climate debate, and we can see that children also want to participate in the debate. Children are part of climate strike activities around the world and they participate in social media platforms. In these activities and on the platforms, children with disabilities have the opportunity to have their voices heard, as long as the activities are disability inclusive. Unfortunately, in most cases, this is not the case. As Harvey (2022) notes, people with disabilities are ignored in climate debates. Therefore, children with disabilities are denied the opportunity to voice their opinions.

Many participants raised the importance of making children with disabilities aware about climate change and how it impacts their daily life. This is an example provided by one of the participants:

“The school we work at is located down a hill, and there are a lots of hills and valleys, river and water areas, so what we do is that we aware them of safety, for example on how they come to school which is first of all to protect themselves from any problem that may be caused by drain or jungle, or land mines.” (Participant 5, 10-01-2023).

However, if the child is not in school, which is often the case for children with disabilities (Unicef, 2022), they miss out on important information. Children with disabilities have a right to access information about things that affect them. Therefore, this information should be accessible to all children with disabilities, whether they are in school or not. In addition, studies show that the effects of climate change will only worsen and the risk of flooding, for example, will increase

(Unicef, 2022). Because the children with disabilities referred to by this participant live in areas at risk of flooding, climate change could make the situation worse and consequently underscores the importance of educating children with disabilities about how to protect themselves when flooding occurs.

One participant argued for an increase in the capacity of children with disabilities to be able to work as advocates for their rights and most of the participants working in projects located in the school context raised that they do have some awareness raising regarding climate change and that they try to include the children in the activities. One of the participants described some of the activities "...growing, planting trees and collecting garbage from the school yard or making the children aware not to use the plastic anymore, and promoting the use of recycled bottles to put the water in." (Participant 2, 04-01-2023). However these activities were not really focusing on the impact of children with disabilities, more the general impacts for all children.

Children are identified as a vulnerable group to climate change (Ebi & Paulson, 2007). However, as Lewis and Ballard (2012) argue, little research has been conducted on the impacts of climate change on people within vulnerable groups. This group includes children with disabilities who, because of their impairments, may need different support in coping with climate change than other children. From the participant's example, it appears that the awareness activities in the school were general in nature, as was the research on vulnerable groups and climate change.

There are also climate change awareness meetings at the community level, but several of the participants raised the issue that these meetings are not fully inclusive for children with disabilities. Participants were concerned that they may miss out on awareness raising and capacity building and therefore:

"...they are not ready and or lack capacity to cope with the climate change and also sometimes they are not aware of the early warning information so sometime they can not access to the social media or share from other people so they miss that information so when the climate change or disaster happens so it affects on that person more than the normal person." (Participant 2, 04-01-2023).

The participant continues by pointing out the importance of including children with disabilities and their families in these meetings so that they can tell those in charge what kind of support they need (Participant 2, 04-01-2023). Almost all participants emphasized that climate change affects children with disabilities more than other children. These statements are consistent with research that also states that people with disabilities, especially children with disabilities, are more likely to be affected by climate change (DICARP, 2022; Unicef, 2022). If the government is to properly implement the CRC and the CRPD, it must listen to children and people with disabilities, or the results will likely not be inclusive.

As stated earlier by Unicef (2022) and Kett et al. (2021) inclusion is necessary for ensuring the rights of children with disabilities. Therefore it is important that the government, as well as the society as a whole, welcome children with disabilities to be a part of the conversation. However, research done by McGill University found out that only 35 of 192 countries referred to people with disabilities in their climate strategies (DICARP, 2022). Showing that governments do not really focus on ensuring the rights of people with disability in the context of climate change.

Many of the participants highlighted the importance of raising awareness to the families of children with disabilities. One participant said that "...even though children know about how to prevent it, their parents do not understand how they can support their children." (Participant 3, 05-01-2023). One participant elaborated on why this is important and explains that it is because the children with disabilities depend a lot on their families and are under their care. Therefore the family also needs the capacity and knowledge on how to cope with climate change.

Another participant continues on this topic and points out the importance to strengthen the empowerment of children with disabilities and their parents so that they will:

"...be able to raise their own voices and need with in community, within school, any public places, they have a right to be respected, they have a right to access normal services, and entitled to get job. So we need to support them, one capacity building and support them to have a space for them to speak up for themselves." (Participant 4, 06-01-2023).

The freedom of children with disabilities depends not only on themselves, but also on others. Children with disabilities are highly dependent on their parents and society to make the right decisions for them (Sen, 2007). Therefore, it is important that families and society have sufficient information and understand the needs of children with disabilities. In order for the child with disabilities to be empowered, the family and community must also be empowered, or at least be able to provide the right support to the child with disabilities, and this is more likely to happen when there is a sense of empowerment (Unicef, 2016).

However, during a disaster, children with disabilities may not be able to ask family members for help and support as they do in normal everyday life (Ton et al., 2019). Not being able to ask for help affects the ability of children with disabilities to take advantage of their collective capabilities (Villeneuve et al., 2021). For example it happens that children with disabilities are left behind when families need to migrate (Lewis & Ballard, 2012; Unicef, 2022) and this makes them extremely vulnerable.

Most of the participants working in NGOs mention that they work on awareness raising to the community and governmental level to get this issue on the agenda. However they said that they do not believe there is much advocacy about this topic going on at the government level. One participant said that "...we have a department of people with disabilities in the province but it does not function. If it were to function they can link to disaster groups so they can support the children with disabilities." (Participant 2, 04-01-2023).

Another participant mentions that they work to support children with disabilities right to get an ID card from the government in order to be able to access free services that they might need for their disability. The participant elaborated on the problematics on this by saying:

"...normally the system that they test for proving their disability impairment problems is easy to get some sort of certificate form the health centers, because you can see physically but for mental and intellectual disabilities and other types it is very hard to get the certificate. Some of the children with disabilities have missed that opportunity because it is very challenging to get supporting documents, so some of them are not able

to register so we need to work with that and provide necessary support and other documents to help them to prove that they have a disability as well.” (Participant 4, 06-01-2023).

It is problematic that intellectual and mental forms of disability do not receive as much attention as the visible ones. Children with mental disabilities have the same right to access health care as children with physical disabilities. I would argue that this is viewed through a medical model of disability that focuses on the medical condition of the person (UNHCR, n.d.). While it is important to receive medical treatment, we must not forget the rights aspect of children with disabilities.

Some of the participants working in NGOs in Cambodia raise an important/interesting aspect “Actually we have to be a bit careful when we say the word advocacy especially with the loop of the government. In Cambodia there are a lot of legal aspects that need to be taken into account.” (Participant 9, 27-02-2023). Since this could be problematic many of the participants therefore said that instead of using the word advocacy they use the word awareness. One participant explains it in this way:

“If you are working hard and strongly on the advocacy campaign on climate advocacy in school you might not be accepted but if you aware and inform children about child rights, climate, environment, protection, support, it is more soft and will therefore be more accepted.” (Participant 5, 10-01-2023).

5.2 Limitations in knowledge and resources

A key aspect that came up in all interviews was constraints in the form of knowledge and resources. There is a large gap in knowledge about how children with disabilities are affected by climate change and what the solution to this problem might be. In addition, the resources allocated to improve the situation of children with disabilities appear to be limited. Many participants raised the issue of lack of funding and prioritization of assistance. Therefore, it is important to raise awareness of the issue among leaders, as described in the section above, which

will hopefully lead to more knowledge and thus more funding. Both children with disabilities and families, the community, and the government need to understand the impact that climate change has on children with disabilities. This is important because if they do not know how they will be affected, they will not know how to act.

Most of the participants agreed that there is a lack of knowledge on how to protect and prepare for future climate change risks at all levels: individual, relationship, community and societal level. One of the participants said that “We are really trying to find more knowledge about climate change adaptation especially for disabled children and we are really in need of this.” (Participant 1, 02-01-2023). Another participant raised the knowledge gap in the case of flooding:

“...it could be that the road is cut off, schools close down, the children can drown, even normal children because in Cambodia we do not have swimming as a life skill in our curriculum so most Cambodian children do not know how to swim. So during the flooding there is a lot of risk of drowning.” (Participant 4, 06-01-2023).

One participant was concerned about the lack of information, the children with disabilities need to get more knowledge on how to adapt to climate change and he believed this could be done in school “...especially in the school time, we can guide them on how to be safe during climate change.” (Participant 3, 05-01-2023). However, research by Unicef (2022) shows that children with disabilities are much less likely to be in school. This makes it difficult to reach children with disabilities with information only during school hours. There must be other alternatives, or the school must become more accessible to children with disabilities so that they can attend school.

Given the lack of research on the impact of climate change on children with disabilities (Peek & Stough, 2010; Unicef, 2022), it is not surprising that knowledge is lacking among children, parents, the community, and the government. There is a lack of knowledge on how to protect and prepare children with disabilities for the impacts of climate change, and more research is needed to find the best solutions. How can a child with disabilities understand this when no one else does?

At the societal level, it is the responsibility of the government to implement relevant laws and policies (Krug et al., 2002; Lee et al., 2017). One thing that seems reasonable to add to the curriculum for children is learning to swim. As climate change continues to worsen and flooding becomes more frequent (Unicef, 2022), knowing how to swim is critical, especially for those living near water areas. However, in terms of a human rights-based model, it is important to include children with disabilities in this. If there are barriers to children with disabilities learning to swim, it is the responsibility of the state to remove them (UNHCR, n.d.).

Even here the participants noted the importance of the family of the children with disabilities. One participant said that “.. the parents are still not very prepared to support children with disabilities during climate change, for example when flooding or drought happens.”(Participant 3, 05-01-2023). There is a lack of knowledge among the families of children with disabilities.

Many of the participants highlighted that they want to implement and plan for more activities to support children with disabilities and their families but “...we need resources, we need capacity, we need capacity about disability inclusion in climate change adaptation.” (Participant 2, 04-01-2023).

One participant raised the issue with lack of resources within the family “The parents are determined to support the children, but the parents are living in poverty so how can they support them? They just have the commitment, but they do not have the money or the resources to provide for the child.” (Participant 3, 05-01-2023).

As mentioned earlier, many people in Cambodia live below the poverty line, most of them in rural areas (Asian Development Bank n.d.; The World Bank Group & Asian Development Bank, 2021). It is in the rural areas that we find the children with disabilities and their families that the participants talk about. Because the parents of children with disabilities are often poor, it is difficult for them to adequately support their child. The parents have to work to earn money, and this can lead to the child with disabilities having to spend time alone at home when they do not have the opportunity to go to school. One of the participants told a story of parents who had to

work and the grandparents carried their grandchild with disabilities to school every day. But as the child got older and bigger, this was no longer possible. Therefore, the child could no longer go to school (Participant 8, 27-02-2023). Parents of children with disabilities rely on family, community, and government support, and they need more resources and therefore according to Nussbaum they should receive it (Harnacke, 2013).

Some of the participants mentioned that they have issues on finding a good trainer to include in their projects and one put in in this way “...in Cambodia we have disability inclusion, we have proper trainer, climate change adaptation we have trainer, but for the disability inclusion and climate change adaptation we are still not sure who will provide this training.” (Participant 1, 02-01-2023). They hoped that they would find a good trainer to help and that this could generate more ideas, but there is a lack of knowledge around this and therefore hard to find someone with the proper knowledge.

There are many instances of stigmatization and shame in the participants' stories, and this leads to barriers for children with disabilities to develop their capabilities. One of the participants explained the situation:

“ We need to reduce the stigmatization around disabilities, because in Cambodia disability is linked to karma the Buddhist faith, you are born with a disability because you did something bad in your previous life, and people judge people with disability with - you are the bad person from previous life that affects their life right now. So there is a lot of stigma about that.” (Participant 4, 06-01-2023).

Therefore, the participant feels that there needs to be a greater understanding of what a disability is and what the needs are so that the family, community, and government can provide the proper support. In the community context, there are norms (Unicef, 2016) and it is important to be aware of them as they affect the child with disability. Stigma shapes the views of children with disabilities and limits their capabilities. If a child with a disability is not invited to engage in a community meeting about climate change, their ability to make a difference is limited, regardless of their knowledge.

As mentioned before Cambodia has applied the law of the protection and promotion of the rights of persons with disability and also certified the UNCRPD but several of the participants noted that there are gaps in the implementation and one of them said:

“When we ask how they implement how they give support before, during and after climate change or disaster they say that they lack funding or budget. They know how to do it but they lack resources. So is the gap of the support of the person with disability, especially for the children.” (Participant 3, 05-01-2023).

Another continues this by pointing out that the rights of children with disabilities are not strongly considered in government policy when adapting to climate change (Participant 4, 06-01-2023). Someone else said that agencies need to understand and implement the inclusion of people with disabilities in climate change adaptation, but right now the agency is not aware of it (Participant 3, 05-01-2023). As the capability approach suggests, we should ask people what they can do and be (Harnacke, 2013). This is a relevant question because the answer will guide the government to provide the appropriate support. Nussbaum (2011) argues that it is difficult to develop capabilities if the child is not in school. She continues by pointing out that internal capabilities can be supported by the government through the provision of education, family support, and much more.

In addition, many mentioned that this issue was very new to them, they had only started to deal with it a few years ago, and therefore the knowledge gap is not only at the societal or community level, NGOs also lack the knowledge and funding to deal with this issue. One participant said that " now we try to contribute to mitigate those impacts and those knowledge and practices, and policies need to be enforced to all stakeholders." (Participant 4, 06-01-2023). As this issue is new to many of the participants, it might be problematic for them to work with it if they do not know how. If it is new, it could be that the wrong things are implemented. Therefore, it is very important to listen to the needs of the children with disabilities. Because this limits the risk of doing something wrong.

Listening to participants' stories of implementation, lack of knowledge and resources, it is clear that a holistic approach to the solution is needed. Participants noted that there is a gap at all levels, individual, relationship, community and societal and this needs to change. In order to see how children with disabilities are affected by climate change and how we can exercise their rights, we must not just look at the child, but look beyond and examine the interaction of the child's larger environment (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Guy-Evans, 2020; Paquette & Ryan, n.d.).

However, the most important aspect in relation to the participants' narratives in this part could be that the Cambodian government needs to properly implement the existing laws and policies. It is a good step that the government has passed the laws and conventions, but they fail to serve their purpose if they do not reach the affected population. Then they are just fine words and not reality. It should be noted that one of the participants thought that the government has implemented the law and conventions well and properly, so not all (but a clear majority) of the participants agreed with the above statements. According to Kett et al. (2021), people with disabilities are particularly vulnerable due to lack of planning, policy and information. If governments were inclusive of children with disabilities and implemented existing laws properly, perhaps the level of vulnerability would decrease.

One participant commented on the fact that people seem to be unaware of the impact of climate change on people and especially on children and that this leads to authorities not prioritizing the issue in their agenda, saying that:

“The thing that really stands out for me is people's sort of level of analysis, it is very easy to say "children have a right to not be hungry" and people get that. But to have a rights based approach around climate change it takes an extra leap, you got a few more lines to join the dots. Yes children have a right not to be hungry but if you do not do something about climate change they will be hungry, so there is a rights based link there, the same children have a right to be healthy, okay but they are not going to be healthy if we do not do something about climate change.” (Participant 8, 27-02-2023).

Much of what has been mentioned in this section above has to do with funding. To do something about the inclusion of children with disabilities in climate change adaptation requires a policy and a plan, and the most important component of that is a budget that shows commitment and priority. However, this is not the situation today and this is something that all participants were concerned about. One participant said that “Not much funding is available to respond to that and because it is not a priority of the government so not much money was allocated for that.” (Participant 4, 06-01-2023). Another participant talked about this issue on a more global level saying that “aid does not generally go to people with disabilities” (Participant 10, 28-02-2023).

One participant raised concern about that:

“Our target is very small, we have many more people and targets that we should work with but because of the budget we can not. I can estimate around 1200 students only, should benefit from our projects and the total with parents and everyone around 3000 but in the two areas there are millions of people and we can not have a big scope on that.” (Participant 1, 02-01-2023).

The UN promotes a human rights-based model for disability (Degener, 2017), but listening to participants' stories, one may wonder if this is the case in the context of climate change. If children with disabilities are not a priority and are often ignored by governments and stakeholders (Harvey, 2022), this does not fit the rights-based model of disability. It also contradicts the context of CRC, which indicates that governments need to remove barriers for children with disabilities so that they can actively participate in the community (Unicef, n.d.). As does the CRPD, which states that governments must ensure that their laws operate on the same basis as for other children (United Nations, 2015). Cambodia has ratified both conventions and must therefore comply with them. However, according to CDPO (n.d.), the problem lies in the implementation of the conventions and this coincides with the participants' narratives.

5.3 Inclusion and collaboration

One of the main barriers that emerged in the data is the lack of inclusion. Many of the participants noted that children with disabilities are overlooked when it comes to access to buildings and health care, or social factors such as lack of voice in climate change issues, and are often excluded from decision-making. This leads to various forms of discrimination against children with disabilities. To eliminate this discrimination, children with disabilities must be included and participate in all aspects of society and development programmes. Recognition is a word that came up in this part of the data collection and I think it is a good summary of the participants' stories.

People with disabilities are not always included in government or NGO projects on climate change, and as mentioned earlier, children with disabilities even less so due to barriers of all kinds. Children with disabilities are often lumped together with all vulnerable groups and important considerations of specific needs are overlooked. One participant mentioned the lack of representation in climate negotiations: “there is gender representation, indigenous representation and other stakeholders but there is no representation from people with disabilities.” (Participant 6, 18-01-2023). Another participant said that:

“The voices of people with disabilities are so little heard and that has an impact on planning. We have to listen to what people want and what they need and again that would have a double, double impact when it comes to children with disabilities because children are heard even less than adults.” (Participant 8, 27-02-2023).

Here we see that vulnerable groups are represented to some extent in climate debates, but as Lewis and Ballard (2012) argue, there is a lack of representation from the disability community. And if people with disabilities were invited to the discussion table, children with disabilities would most likely not be invited. Just as the participant says in the quote above. As the social-ecological model suggests, the different levels, even if they do not directly affect the child, have a positive or negative impact on the child. In this case, the larger environment has a negative impact on the child with disability because he or she is not invited to participate in

issues that affect him or her (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Guy-Evans, 2020; Paquette & Ryan, 2001). According to Nussbaum (2003), this also affects the development of the child's capabilities.

In addition, some of the participants stressed that children with disabilities and persons with disabilities are so little included in meetings and debates on climate change that they therefore have no idea about climate change and how it affects them (Participant 11, 28-02-2023).

Another participant continues on the importance of including children with disabilities saying that “The movement of climate change and climate justice have been led by children and young people because it is about their future. Therefore children with and without disabilities should have a really strong say in that.” (Participant 10, 28-02-2023). All participants agreed that children with disabilities' voices need to be heard in debates around climate change and one participant said:

“Usually the children have not been consulted enough in planning because they are children. They are so often overlooked and they talk to adults. There is a gap, we need to start seeing the value of participation of children in the discussion that can impact their life.” (Participant 9, 27-02-2023).

One participant raised an aspect of an issue within mainstream child rights organizations saying that “They do not necessarily promote inclusive education, they do not include inclusive programming, they do not necessarily promote inclusion as a kind of cross-cutting agenda. By not doing that they are essentially indirectly or directly promoting exclusionary agendas.” (Participant 11, 28-02-2023). The participant explained that when we talk about education, most of the children with disabilities will not be found in school since school is defined for children without disabilities, therefore the participant argues that schools are not inclusive.

The participant continued with providing a recently found positive example of inclusion education saying that “During the pandemic when schools were closed, schools as a global community actually got to promote education in a way that should help promote inclusive education, this created a wider access for everybody to join.” (Participant 11, 28-02-2023).

All participants agreed that we need to listen to the voices of children with disabilities. People with disabilities are rarely invited to meetings on climate change, and children with disabilities even less often. Children with disabilities are often excluded from participating in society in general and the situation is no different when it comes to climate change (Kett et al., 2021; Unicef, 2022). And when children with disabilities are invited, they lack child-friendly materials (Unicef, 2022), so they are excluded from participation anyway. Here it can be argued that the necessary change is in the hands of the government. It is the government's responsibility to strengthen the rights of children with disabilities and it is their responsibility to remove the barriers for the child (Krug et al., 2002; Lee et al., 2017) to participate on equal terms with everyone else.

In this case, one could argue that the child with disabilities has their basic and internal capabilities but not the combined ones (Nussbaum, 2011; Harnacke, 2013). You can clearly see the lack of inclusion for children with disabilities in the fact that very few countries include people with disabilities in their Paris Agreement (DICARP, 2022). If children with disabilities are not included in the Climate Strategic Plan, the government will most likely do nothing to improve the situation. However, some progress has been made. During COP26, people with disabilities were addressed directly and not lumped together with other vulnerable groups (Kett et al., 2021). And this could be seen as a step in the right direction.

The participants mentioned that there is still a lot of work that needs to be done to promote and engage all people with disabilities (including children) in accessing services like others. One participant raised concerns around this:

“For example when we build a toilet or school, we need to include the perspective of people with disabilities and children with disabilities, for example the use of wheelchairs, because the knowledge and the focusing is not really on the rights of children with disabilities, that is why they only do for normal people. So people with disabilities and children with disabilities still have some obstacles to access any service like normal people, even participation in our program. Sometimes they do not have something to

travel, or they are deaf and we do not have people that can translate with sign language.” (Participant 7, 02-02-2023).

In the social model of disability, the focus is on removing barriers for people with disabilities in society (UNHCR, n.d.; Shakespeare, 2006) and here participants talk about how they take into account the needs of people with disabilities when they build new buildings, for example. If we do not take into account the needs of people with disabilities, they may not be able to participate in climate meetings or in school. After all, a deaf child needs someone to translate in order to participate under the same conditions as others. Moreover, these barriers affect the child with disabilities opportunities to develop their capabilities. One participants reflected on this:

“ We are still being treated as a kind of clinical being, who should not be part of this mainstream development conversation, (which is like something that we deal with everyday). Large organizations and NGOs in general treat people with disabilities as a clinical being not as a complete human being, with rights. So these rights do not apply in cases of people with disabilities who are a diverse community, they are still predominantly identified as a health matter, not a development matter. So that is a challenge within the sector itself. The leading climate actors need to make the conversation about climate change inclusive, everybody needs to sit at the table for this collective challenge.” (Participant 11, 28-02-2023).

Although the SDGs include disability in many of their goals, the inclusion of disability rights in relation to climate change is missing (UN General Assembly, 2015). Perhaps the lack of inclusion of children with disabilities and persons with disabilities is related to the fact that they are still seen as medical beings who need to be cured. They are not seen as individuals with rights, with the same rights as everyone else. One of the reasons given by a participant for the lack of inclusion would be the following:

“We still are busy with the general population category, the majority and their agenda, and people with disabilities represent a minority population. And minority populations are almost always excluded from the majority's list of agenda, because these

organizations, you have to keep in mind that these organizations are a representation of the majority who are in general non disabled, so that is a political thing, whose agenda is being served?” (Participant 11, 28-02-2023).

However many of the participants agreed that there is a big potential for disability inclusion in every aspect of NGOs work.

Several participants talked about the concept of mainstreaming, which refers to including, for example, the rights of persons with disabilities in every aspect of work. This has already been done quite well with gender rights, for example the UN sustainable development goals are very gender sensitive. However, participants noted that this is not the case with disability rights. One participant who is working to introduce disability rights mainstreaming to other organizations said that many of them responded that they do not work with disabilities and they want to change that. Another participant said:

“I think the main thing is that there need to be some joined up thinking about it, because climate change is one of those meta things that is going to affect everything so it will have implication of livelihoods, health and everything. It is no easy answer, but I suppose it is to ensure that this thread gets through everything and it genuinely becomes a cross-cutting issue.” (Participant 8, 27-02-2023).

The participant continues by stating that we cannot have projects in silos, this theme must run through all projects (Participant 8, 27-02-2023). Climate change leads to food insecurity, which in turn leads to malnutrition. Research by Keogh (2020) and Lewis and Ballard (2012) suggests that this will cause 20% of impairments globally. Therefore, it is likely that more children will suffer from impairments due to climate change. Furthermore, research shows that with higher temperatures, malaria will also increase, putting one in ten children at risk of neurological impairment. The impact of climate will most likely lead to more children with disabilities, and it is therefore important that these issues are addressed.

Moreover the participants agree that there needs to be more collaboration among sectors around children with disabilities rights in climate change. One participant said:

“We have NGO working on climate change, NGO working on children, NGO working with disability, and I think the big thing is the lack of collaboration. It would be very interesting to see these three people together in a room to design a program and to see how it would go. But so far it is a lack of this on the agenda.” (Participant 9, 27-02-2023).

Another participant agrees with this and says “There are NGOs and civil society groups on climate, separate ones on disability- they do not talk to each other, they go to different forums, same in scholarship.” (Participant 6, 18-01-2023). In order to fight climate change the participants mean that we all need to work together.

6. Discussion and conclusion

To help answer the first question: How do development practitioners describe how we can fulfill the rights of children with disabilities in a changing climate? The choice fell on the social-ecological model. From the participants' narratives, it is clear that we need to work at different levels to realize the rights of children with disabilities in a changing climate, as suggested by the social-ecological model. According to the participants, a holistic approach is needed. Below is a summary of the responses given by participants at the individual, relationship, community and societal levels.

Most of the participants' responses in terms of solutions at the individual level related to raising awareness of children with disabilities about their rights and increasing their knowledge of both their rights and climate change. At the relationship level, many of the participants pointed out that families also need to know about their child's situation in order to support them in the best possible way. Therefore, participants advocated not only educating children with disabilities about their rights, but also their families. However, it should be added that participants pointed out that even if the family wants to provide support, they might not be able to do so because they do not have the necessary resources. Therefore, resources in the form of money and knowledge need to be made available to the families of children with disabilities. However, this is a problem that needs to be addressed at the societal level, but this shows the importance of involving all levels to address this problem.

At the community level, participants' narratives indicate that school is an important place for children with disabilities. However, some of the participants pointed out that children with disabilities are often not found in school. This is because they are not able to attend school and there are no suitable alternatives for school attendance and/or support in the existing school system. It has been shown that it is necessary for children with disabilities to attend school and that they have a right to be an active part of society. Therefore, participants advocated for a disability inclusive school and for community activities (such as climate meetings) to be disability inclusive.

Although Cambodia has ratified both the CRC and the CRPD, many of the participants stressed that they are not being followed. If the government only adapts the laws and policies but does not implement them, not much will improve for children with disabilities. It is worth noting that ratification of the laws is a step in the right direction, but participants felt that implementation was lacking. Participants argued that the lack of implementation is because they simply do not prioritize the issue. Children with disabilities are not a priority, nor is climate change, and this needs to be addressed through awareness raising. There is also a lack of knowledge and understanding at the societal level about what is needed and why, and to understand this, children with disabilities need to be included in the discussion.

The capability approach was chosen to answer the second question: How do development practitioners describe the barriers experienced by children with disabilities in developing their capabilities in the context of climate change? Participants described climate change as affecting the development of capabilities of children with disabilities, in more than one way. The capability approach focuses on what a person can do and be. According to the participants, children with disabilities face more barriers than other children when it comes to the impact of climate change. This has a lot to do with lack of government support, resources and knowledge.

One of the most forthcoming barriers described by the participants is the capability to have a voice and be heard. This is important, but a major shortcoming for children with disabilities. As many participants emphasized, we need to listen to the voices of children with disabilities to know what their needs are in relation to climate change. But how can we listen to them if they are not invited to participate in meetings on climate change, for example? The development of children with disabilities capability is hampered by the fact that they cannot participate.

According to the participants, the opportunities for children with disabilities to participate in climate action are limited by the lack of awareness and consideration of disability issues and rights by the government and society. The government needs to address the needs of children with disabilities and break down the barriers that prevent them from participating in climate action. For example, by ensuring that laws and policies are improved to provide emergency

assistance to children with disabilities. Otherwise, climate change will continue to negatively impact children with disabilities. This could also contribute to a greater acceptance of people with disabilities in society and a more inclusive and accessible world.

In summary, children with disabilities are clearly severely affected by climate change and this needs to be addressed in order to fulfill their rights and protect their development of capabilities. This is an important issue for future generations and participants advocated for more disability-inclusive development work. This could be done, for example, by including the rights of children with disabilities in the SDGs on climate change. While this work highlights some important intervention gaps and challenges as described by development practitioners, it is limited to a small sample. These findings could be complemented by further research with a larger sample and in a wider geographical area.

7. Literature

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8. Appendices

8.1 Information sheet and consent form



Participation information sheet

Introduction

My name is Louise Carlsson. I'm conducting this research as a part of my master studies in International Development and Management at Lunds University, in collaboration with Barnfonden (ChildFund). You are invited to take part in a research study. Before you make your decision it's important that you understand why the research is being done and what it involves. Please take time to read this following information, and reach out to me if you have any questions or concerns.

What is the purpose of this research?

The purpose of this study is to research *how climate change affects children with disabilities*. A lot of research has been done on climate change but not so much on children with disabilities and almost nothing on how climate change is affecting children with disabilities. Therefore this research is important. Climate change is only getting worse and it is of importance to know how this affects children with disabilities (one of the most vulnerable populations) and how NGOs might improve their work in this area in the future. I will research this from a multilevel approach and investigate solutions from an individual, family, community and state perspective. I will look at different projects being done in this field by ChildFund and interview around 10-15 people that are working with projects either related to climate change and/or children with disabilities.

What will your participation involve?

You have been invited because you work with climate change and/or children with disabilities and I would like to hear your perspective on this. Your participation will involve one interview with me around 45 minutes and this will take place online. It is up to you to decide if you want to participate or not. If you decide to participate you will be asked to write in an email to the researcher (me) that you agree to participate. Even if you do give consent you are free to withdraw from the research at any time without giving reason. I will keep the participants anonymous in the research and share the research with all participants when it is finished.

Interview consent form

Research project title: *How are children with disabilities affected by climate change?*

Research investigator: Louise Carlsson

Research Participants name:

Thank you for agreeing to be interviewed as part of the above research project. We don't anticipate that there are any risks associated with your participation, but you have the right to stop the interview or withdraw from the research at any time. This consent form is necessary for us to ensure that you understand the purpose of your involvement and that you agree to the conditions of your participation.

- The interview will be recorded and a transcript will be produced
- You will be sent the transcript and given the opportunity to correct any factual errors
- The transcript of the interview will be analyzed by (Louise Carlsson) as research investigator
- Access to the interview transcript will be limited to (Louise Carlsson) and academic colleagues and researchers with whom she might collaborate as part of the research process
- Any summary interview content, or direct quotations from the interview, that are made available through academic publication or other academic outlets will be anonymized so that you cannot be identified, and care will be taken to ensure that other information in the interview that could identify yourself is not revealed
- The actual recording will be destroyed at the latest 5 of June 2023
- Any variation of the conditions above will only occur with your further explicit approval

By signing this form I agree that;

1. I am voluntarily taking part in this project. I understand that I don't have to take part, and I can stop the interview at any time;
2. The transcribed interview or extracts from it may be used as described above;
3. I have read the Information sheet;
4. I don't expect to receive any benefit or payment for my participation;
5. I can request a copy of the transcript of my interview and may make edits I feel necessary to ensure the effectiveness of any agreement made about confidentiality;
6. I have been able to ask any questions I might have, and I understand that I am free to contact the researcher with any questions I may have in the future.



Contact Information This research has been reviewed and approved by the Lund University Research Ethics Board. If you have any further questions or concerns about this study, please contact:

Name of researcher: Louise Carlsson

Tel: +46736956472

E-mail: LouiseCarlsson@live.se or Louise.carlsson@barnfonden.se

8.2 Interview guide

Interview guide

Questions:

- What is your role in this organization?
- How would you describe the situation for children with disabilities in the context of climate change?
- In your work, can you see that children with disabilities are affected by climate change, *In that case in which way? Worse than others?*
- From your perspective, how can we fulfill the rights of children with disabilities? What is the solution for these problems?
- How do you think NGOs should work with this in the future?
- What is the main lack in carrying out this work? What kind of resources do you need in order to work on this?
- Is there any advocacy about this at the government level?
- How are you working with families on this?
- How are you working with communities on this?
- How are you working with authority/state?
- How are you working with children on this?