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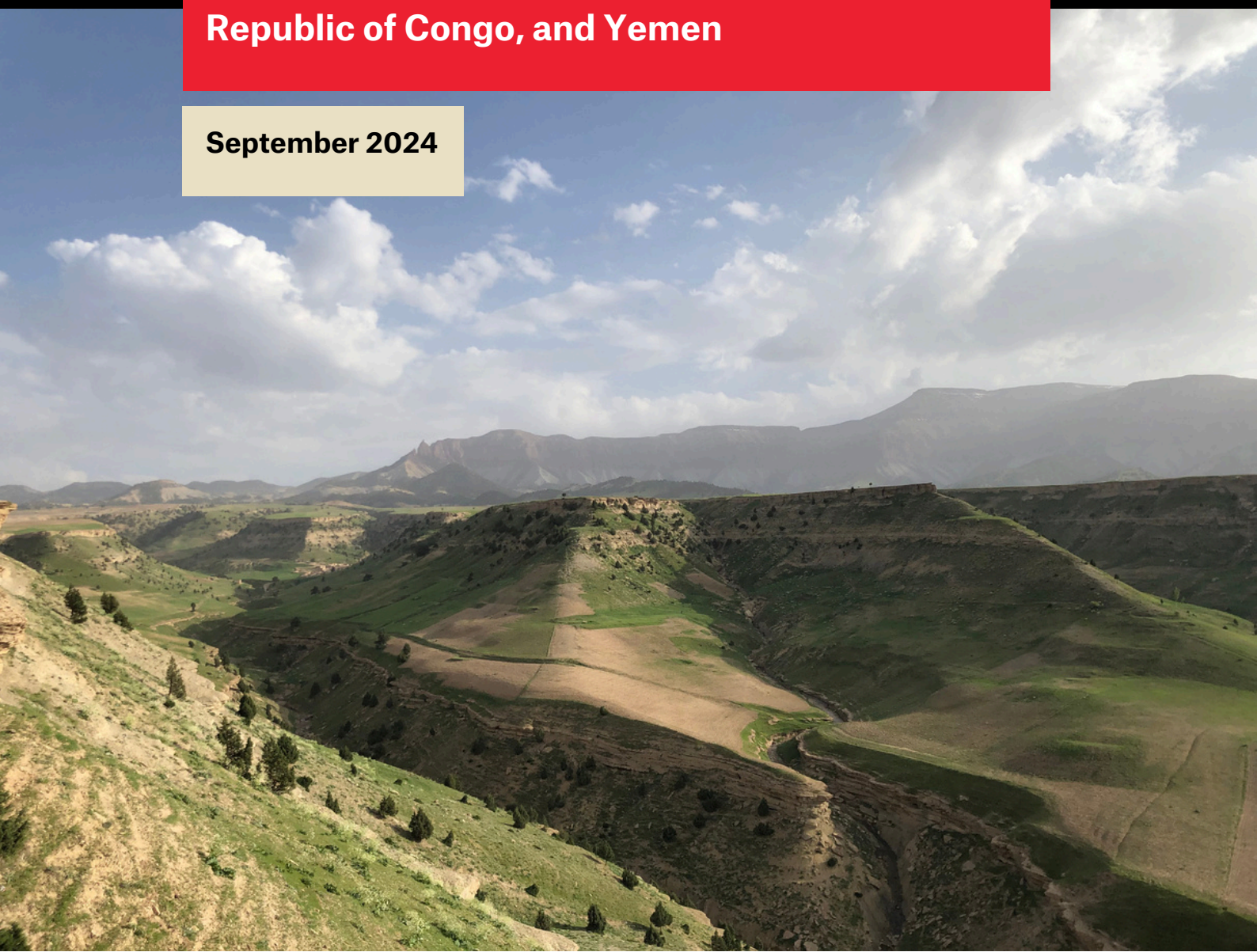
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**ALLIANCE**

# Literature review: the impact of climate change on the livelihoods of women, displaced persons, and persons with disabilities

A case study of Afghanistan, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and Yemen

September 2024



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Cover photo: Badghis, Afghanistan. © Tiara Sahar Ataii.

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This literature review seeks to understand how climate change is impacting the livelihoods of marginalised groups, using Afghanistan, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and Yemen as case studies. The literature indicates that, in all three countries, climate change is a threat- and vulnerability-multiplier. Though the effects of climate change on marginalised groups can be direct and immediate (for example, livelihoods assets being destroyed by floods and droughts), the literature also indicates that indirect effects can be just as potent (for example, being forced to seek out more dangerous forms of labour when goods essential for practising a livelihood become unavailable or prohibitively expensive due to climate change). A second major finding is that in all three countries, social, economic, political, and institutional (SEPI) barriers exacerbate marginalised communities' exposure to climate change, and vice versa, underlining that humanitarian actors can only address social exclusion by also considering climate change. As such, this literature review represents a call to action for livelihoods actors to mainstream matters of climate change throughout their programming, and where they wish to address root causes, to also be climate responsive.

# KEY FINDINGS

For all three marginalised groups considered within this report (women, displaced persons, persons with disabilities) across Afghanistan, DRC, and Yemen, climate change proves a vulnerability-multiplier, undermining marginalised groups' adaptive capacity. Using Connolly-Boutin's Adaptive Capacity Framework, this literature review concludes that climate change directly impacts upon all five classes of assets integral to adaptive capacity. Climate change impacts directly on natural assets through damage to ecosystems and the environment, upon which marginalised groups disproportionately depend for food security and/or income generation. As natural assets become scarce, financial assets are exhausted as marginalised groups are forced to spend more to make ends meet. Social assets are then damaged due to increased competition over resources, especially when marginalised persons are displaced due to climate-related events. Physical assets are also hindered by the impact of climate change on marginalised groups' living conditions, whilst human assets increasingly suffer from underinvestment as limited financial capacity redirects resources away from marginalised members of households.

As the country case studies indicate, the impacts of climate change and social, economic, political and institutional (SEPI) barriers to livelihoods cannot be separated. SEPI barriers to marginalised groups' livelihoods activities — for example, lack of educational investment for people with disabilities — leave marginalised groups sharply exposed to the impacts of climate change. This often manifests in pushed into informal work, especially in the agricultural sector, where the impacts of climate change are felt in all three countries (Reed et al., 2013). Meanwhile, climate change

There is no uniform definition of marginalisation. USAID defines marginalised groups as those who are “denied, or have very limited access to, privileges enjoyed by the wider society” (USAID, 2022). FCDO defines marginalisation as “both a process, and a condition, that prevents individuals or groups from full participation in social, economic and political life” (FCDO, 2020). Meanwhile, UNESCO adopts the Working Group on Education for All definition of marginalisation as “a form of acute and persistent disadvantage rooted in underlying social inequalities” (UNESCO, 2010). This literature review takes a working definition of marginalisation as denial of full participation in marginalisation in social, economic, and political life, due to social inequalities.

Climate change is defined as a “change of climate which is attributed directly or indirectly to human activity that alters the composition of the global atmosphere and which is in addition to natural climate variability observed over comparable time periods” (UNFCCC, 1992).

can exacerbate existing SEPI barriers: for example, as household financial assets diminish due to repeated crop failures, resources are diverted away from marginalised groups as the wellbeing of other household members is prioritised.

A further key finding is that lack of adaptive capacity hinders livelihoods outcomes, whilst disrupted livelihoods erode adaptive capacity. For example, food insecurity, often exacerbated by poor livelihoods prospects, is correlated with diminished physical and

human assets. This impacts marginalised groups’ adaptive capacity, which in turn prevents marginalised households from engaging in productive activities. As climate change affects either adaptive capacity or livelihoods, the one invariably influences the other. The country case studies highlight that even where marginalised groups’ livelihoods are indirectly and/or minimally impacted by climate change, since marginalised groups’ wellbeing, health, and food security are disproportionately impacted by climate change, their ability to engage in productive activities is undermined.

We conclude this literature review with a call to action. The misconception common to the humanitarian sector that climate change is a purely developmental issue rather than humanitarian is not a valid excuse. Since humanitarian actors commit to the humanitarian principle of impartiality, which entails helping the most vulnerable first, humanitarian actors must consider climate change if they are to tackle the SEPI barriers which face marginalised groups. These country case studies instead underscore that, due to the polycentric nature of vulnerability that has interlocking roots in climate change and SEPI drivers, humanitarian response cannot continue ‘business as usual’ but rather must tackle the complexity of how livelihoods deteriorate through intersecting drivers (Datzberger et al., 2023).

Livelihoods are understood as “capabilities, assets, and activities required for a means of living.” A livelihood is sustainable when “it can cope and recover from stresses and shocks and maintain or enhance its capabilities and assets both now and in the future, while not undermining the natural resource base” (DFID, 1999).

# GLOBAL THEMES

## WOMEN

- Formal and informal SEPI barriers to women's entry to the labour market direct women to livelihoods in the close vicinity of their home.
- Such livelihoods are most frequently agricultural and depend on natural assets, which are sharply impacted by climate change, thus increasing women's marginalisation.
- The impact of climate change on women's human assets (decreased investment in girls' education, rising risk in GBV and explosive ordnances when travelling longer distances to fetch water, increased health risks, and the burden of food insecurity upon women) undermines their earning potential, plunging them into a vicious cycle of marginalisation.

## DISPLACED PERSONS

- Climate change threatens to overtake conflict as the major cause of population displacement. This displacement is often repeated, and with each displacement, adaptive capacity is harmed and productivity is decreased.
- Displaced persons, often facing greater barriers to the workforce and torn from their social assets, typically find informal work, which tends to be dominated by agricultural livelihoods. Such livelihoods, dependent on natural assets, are increasingly affected by climate change.
- Displaced persons tend to live in temporary settlements in deplorable conditions, exacerbating physical and mental health conditions, which reduce their human assets and plunge them into a vicious cycle whereby limited financial capacity reduces their ability to address other

The International Organisation of Migration defines displacement as "the movement of persons who have been forced or obliged to flee or to leave their homes or places of habitual residence, in particular as a result of or in order to avoid the effects of armed conflict, situations of generalized violence, violations of human rights or natural or human-made disasters" (IOM, 2019). This report takes a wide definition of displaced people, especially in recognition that migration can be triggered for multiple reasons, and may be repeated due to continued . Therefore this report's definition includes refugees, internally displaced persons, returnees, and any other person forced to leave their home or territory of origin.

vulnerabilities and bounce back from shocks.

- Due to limited livelihood opportunities in the remote areas to which most displaced persons take refuge, displaced persons are often forced to engage in activities that harm their natural assets to meet their needs in the short-term.

Persons with disabilities are defined as 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” (UNCRPD, 2006).

## PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

- Barriers that persons with disabilities face in accessing education, skills training, or livelihoods support

programmes typically force them into informal work, often in the agricultural sector, which is heavily impacted by climate change.

- Due to lack of investment into their education or livelihoods skills, and as traditional agricultural livelihoods fail, persons with disabilities are often forced into dangerous, dirty, and demeaning jobs, with deleterious impacts on their health.
- In the aftermath of climate shocks, persons with disabilities are disproportionately affected both by the shock itself and its health hazards, as well as by the damage to services they rely on, thus hindering their ability to engage in productive activities.



Photo: Goma, DRC. © Tiara Sahar Ataji.

# METHODOLOGY

Afghanistan, DRC, and Yemen host major humanitarian presence, and yet data on the impacts of climate change in the three countries remains largely inaccessible. The three countries were therefore chosen in order to gather what little evidence there is regarding the impacts of climate change on marginalised groups, especially in light of the fact that Afghanistan, DRC, and Yemen score 174, 167, and 148 out of 187 in rankings of climate vulnerability worldwide (ND-GAIN, 2024). It is hoped that this review will therefore benefit the humanitarian sector, whose operations currently benefit from little evidence on the impact of climate change.

The majority of research was conducted through review of academic literature, using the following key terms: climate change, climate crisis, vulnerability, resilience, marginalised groups, women, children, people with disabilities, internally displaced people, livelihoods. Due to the overall lack of literature on the impact of climate change on marginalised groups' livelihoods within the three countries of focus (Afghanistan, DRC, and Yemen), grey literature – such as the reports of international non-governmental organisations (INGOs) – were also drawn upon to fill data and time gaps in academic literature. Where grey literature was insufficient, key informant interviews (KIIs) were conducted to address these gaps, whilst also corroborating existing findings. A total of 15 KIIs were conducted with War Child Alliance staff, INGO and national NGO staff, international organisation staff, and academics. These informants were selected due to expertise in either one of the following technical areas: climate change; marginalised groups in the country in question; and livelihoods. Each informant had expertise in one of the three countries of focus.

Given that social categories, such as gender, age, and class, interact and intersect, creating unique systems of oppression and discrimination, and individual experiences of vulnerability (Crenshaw, 1989), the selection of three marginalised groups within this report is admittedly reductive and unrepresentative of the full range of identities. The focus on these three marginalised groups was driven by the availability of literature regarding these groups, since the overall lack of data on certain marginalised groups could not be overcome by the data provided in KIIs. Future research that has the scope to undertake primary data collection with affected communities could consider other marginalised groups, and also better take into considerations of intersectionality. Primary data collection in future research might also fill gaps regarding the three marginalised groups studied in this report. For example, collection of data specifically regarding women is considered sensitive in some contexts and therefore, available literature is often unable to sufficiently represent their perspectives. Moreover, whilst this review used the Washington Group guidance on disability, differing definitions of disability prevented reliable comparison between data sources.



# LITERATURE REVIEW

## WOMEN

## AFGHANISTAN

At 4.8% nationally, women's labour force participation in Afghanistan is disproportionately lower than men's. Following the takeover of the Taliban government in August 2021, this dynamic has accelerated, with women's unemployment increasing by 25% within a year (ILO, 2023). The lack of women's participation in the labour force can be attributed to both formal and informal SEPI drivers; at various points since 2001, Afghan women have been banned from working outside their homes or within certain sectors, and from travelling even in within the immediate vicinity of their homes without a mahram (male family member acting as an escort during journeys) (Goodson, 2001; Tavva et al., 2013; UNICEF Afghanistan, 2023). Moreover, informal SEPI drivers also severely limit women's ability to engage in livelihoods activities: these include cultural restrictions such as purdah (segregation between the sexes and/or seclusion) (Tavva et al., 2013), and community perceptions of women working outside of the household (Larson & Coburn, 2020). Moreover, due to overlapping responsibilities between domestic and income-generating activities, women face an increased burden in labour (Lakhani & Amiri, 2020).

As a result of the restricted environment in which women can pursue livelihoods, women's labour is largely limited to agricultural activities, for which there are fewer barriers to entry and where labour is most likely to be in the vicinity of the home. The latest available data indicates that women's labour force participation in rural areas stood much higher than the national average at 29% (Leao et al., 2017), where common livelihoods practised by women include livestock feeding (Tavva et al., 2013) harvesting, gathering firewood, embroidery, weaving, clothes making and handicrafts (Maletta, 2008). Given the impact of climate change on agricultural livelihoods or livelihoods dependent on the ecosystem (Nemat et al., 2022), as climate change impacts the natural assets that women rely upon, their livelihoods are disproportionately impacted. Thus, women practising such livelihoods are often forced to resort to negative coping mechanisms: interviewees noted one such mechanism adopted following climate stressors such as droughts or floods is that households sell their livestock to afford food, thus supporting households' food consumption in the short-term, and yet decimating the earning potential of female-headed households who are more likely to rely on livelihoods pertaining to livestock, such as the production of animal

foodstuffs or wool handicrafts (Interviews 2 and 3). The data available on women's livelihoods in urban areas is limited, since this is heavily restricted by the authorities (UNHCR, 2023). However, most literature suggests that livelihoods practised by women in urban areas include the production of handicrafts and repairing clothes (ILO, 2023).

Women are also disproportionately impacted by climate-induced vulnerability experienced by the household at large, plunging them into a vicious cycle where the impact on their human assets reduces their ability to bounce back from shocks. In 2023, the proportion of moderately to severely food-insecure women increased to over 85% (FAO, 2021); both literature and interviewees suggested that this is because women are the first to be forced to limit their food intake during periods of food insecurity (International Crisis Group 2023; Interview 8). Second, both literature and interviewees suggest a correlation between a decrease in men's confidence in their 'productive' role in the household as a result of climate change and an increase in gender-based violence (Nguyen, 2019; Interview 2).

Moreover, women are also put at higher risk of gender-based violence (GBV) outside the household, as they must walk further distances to collect water (Afghanaid, 2024), due to infrastructural deficiencies in water storage arising from recurring droughts and conflict (Akhundzadah et al, 2020; Barakat, 2022; Ahmad et al., 2022). Third, emerging data suggest that women's health is disproportionately impacted by extreme climatic events; for example, flooding is suggested to lead to an uptick in anaemia and maternal deaths and disabilities (Oskorouchi et al., 2021), with treatment impeded by limited access to maternal care, shortage in female healthcare personnel (Tavva et al, 2013), and women's health facilities following extreme climatic events (Ikram et al., 2023). Where climate change decimates a household's financial resources, a frequent coping mechanism is to marry girls (UNICEF Afghanistan, 2023; Interview 8), which is associated with a decrease in investment in education and an overall reduction in women's human assets. Women's increased vulnerability thus reduces their productivity and earning potential, further thwarting their decision-making power within their household, and reducing their economic independence (Junussova et al., 2019; UNWOMEN, 2023).

Literature and interviews underline that women are the main actors in agricultural production in DRC: 60% of the DRC's population works in agriculture, and women represent 57% of agricultural labourers (Balasha et al, 2024; Interview 14). Common livelihoods tend to support the food consumption of the household through subsistence agriculture as well as providing some modest profit, such as through farming crops like taro, or fetching wood for household consumption and for sale. Therefore, as climate change undermines natural assets (for example, due to the growing variability in precipitation and flash floods), livelihoods are disrupted (Arsene & Fyama, 2021). As a result, the livelihoods of women, who make up the majority of agricultural workers, are disproportionately impacted.

Insufficient infrastructure hinders communities' ability to manage the impacts of these climatic events. For example, inadequate drainage systems mean that once a field is hit by a flood triggered by climate change, the soil is eroded, rendering the land unusable (Arsene and Fyama, 2021). To address these concerns, agricultural workers resort to negative coping mechanisms, for example by expanding their fields by clearing forest areas, exacerbating their long-term exposure to flash floods and worsening livelihood outcomes (Interview 9). As these livelihoods become increasingly compromised by climate change, their adaptive capacity to withstand the impacts of climate change decreases (Stiem & Krause, 2016).

Even where women practise livelihoods which are not directly impacted by climate change, the burden of domestic responsibilities on women and the increasing difficulty in undertaking these responsibilities further impacts their earning potential (Stiem & Krause, 2016; Interview 11). In rural areas, damage to roads and infrastructure as a result of floods forces women to make longer journeys to fetch water or firewood for energy needs. This exposes them to GBV and diminishes the time they can spend on economically productive activities (Stiem & Krause, 2016). In urban areas, women are frequently relocated to shared spaces following climate shocks where communal latrines and showers increase the risk of GBV (MSF, 2024). The latest statistics indicate that these issues remain widespread and systemic: in 2023, 90,000 women and girls sought medical assistance after being victims of GBV (Aboud, 2023). Such experiences prove debilitating to physical and mental health and thus greatly undermine human assets.

Moreover, as a result of SEPI barriers, such as lack of investment in girls' education, women's ability to withstand climate change is severely limited. As they are confined largely to the informal sector (55.3% of workers in DRC's informal economy are women (PNUD, 2013)) which tends to be predominantly agricultural, they are therefore disproportionately impacted by climate change. These SEPI barriers stand to intensify: as deforestation increases, girls of school age are forced to look further afield to gather firewood (Interview 12), or to scavenge for food, particularly in food-insecure areas heavily reliant on rain-fed subsistence farming (Schwinger et al., 2014).

## WOMEN

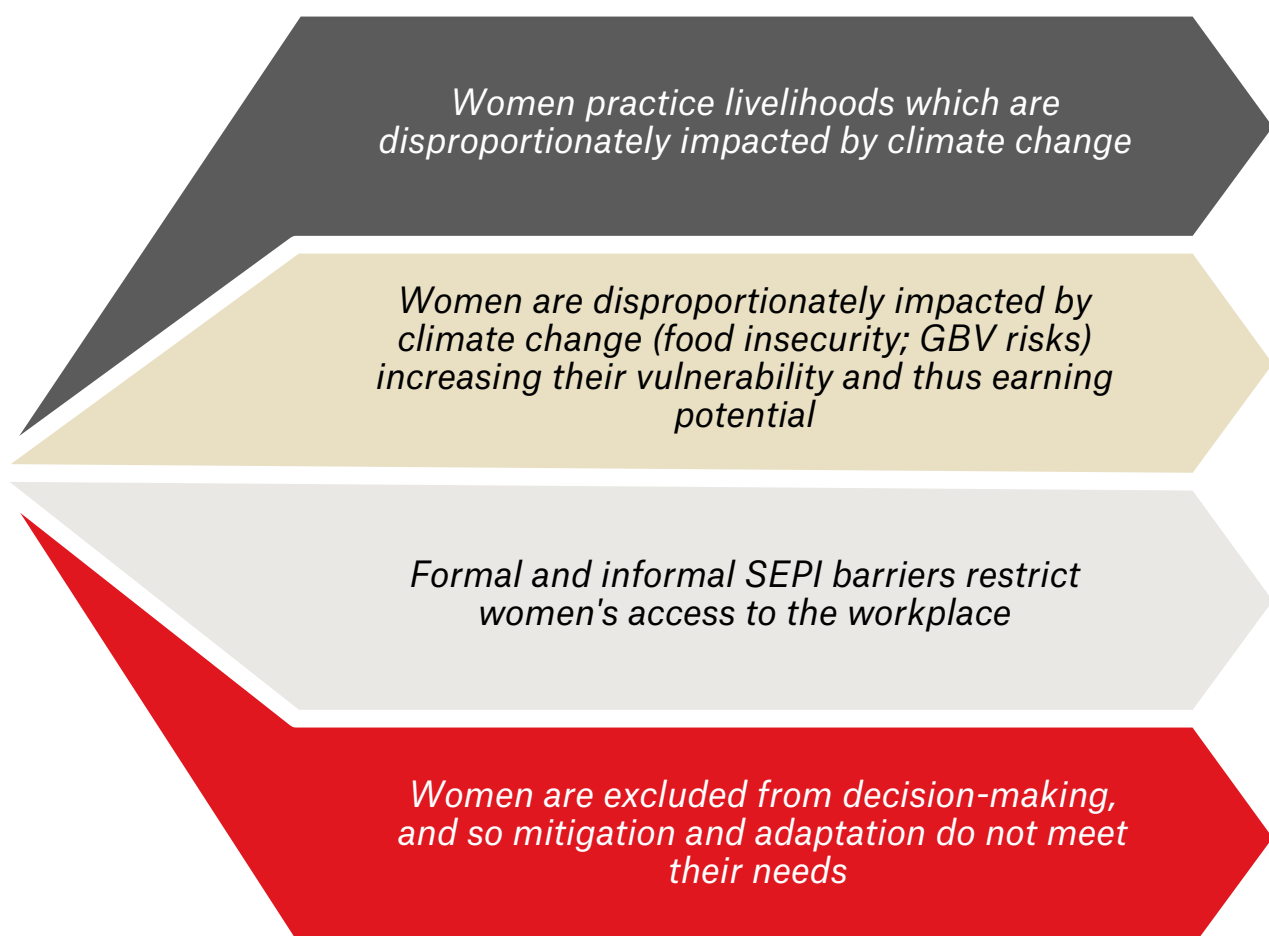
## YEMEN

Women's participation in the formal labour force has stagnated below 10% for years (ACAPS, 2023; Gressmann, 2016), with the exception of rural areas, where women represent the majority of the labour force (World Bank, 2022b), and have a key role in agricultural livelihoods (ACAPS, 2023). In this regard, women's livelihoods are disproportionately affected by climate change, as the natural assets that their agricultural livelihoods rely on are impacted by the evaporation of groundwater (Barry, McMurray & Schmelzer 2024) and rising water scarcity due to unpredictable rainfall (YFCA, 2023).

Despite women's integral role in rural livelihoods, SEPI drivers prevent them from engaging in decision-making processes, thereby excluding them from mitigation and adaptation efforts within their communities (Barry et. al. 2024). Due to cultural traditions, women are often excluded from situations where decision-making takes place, for instance in the diwan al-qat (meetings to chew qat a narcotic leaf) (Mugahed, 2018).

Women's human assets and thus their earning potential are severely compromised by climate change. Facing higher rates of malnutrition, poor health, and early mortality as a result of climate change (Fruttero et al., 2023; Kuehn et al., 2017), women's productivity is seriously compromised, thus reducing their adaptive capacity. This is especially the case in rural areas, where food is typically sourced in the local area, and therefore climate shocks such as droughts or floods have a more direct impact on food security (Al-Zangabila, 2021). When food insecurity increases, women and girls are less likely to be prioritised in household food consumption: in the case of girls, the physical toll of malnutrition impacts physical and mental health into adulthood (Al-Zangabila, 2021), impacting their productive capacity in the long-term. Moreover, as household income is threatened

by climate change, the payment of dowries entices many families to propose early marriage for girls, which is correlated with an increased risk of school drop-outs (Jafarnia 2022; Oxfam 2019). Furthermore, as women are forced to look further afield from their local area to fetch water, due to drought and increasing water scarcity, their exposure to GBV increases and they are more likely to be forced out of education, thus limiting their future income generation potential (Levy et al 2022; Hanna et al 2023; Jafarnia, 2022; YFCA, 2023). When women and girls venture far out of their local areas to look for water, they are also at greater risk of explosive ordnances, which contaminate close to 52km<sup>2</sup> of Yemen and which the latest data indicates claimed 580 casualties in 2022 (regrettably this data was not gender disaggregated) (Hanna et al., 2023). Due to the poor provision for persons with disabilities in Yemen, exposure to explosive ordnances can hinder or altogether prevent income generation in the long-term, thus severely restricting women's wellbeing, economic independence, and adaptive capacity (Hanna et al., 2023).



Displaced persons in Afghanistan, often facing barriers to entry into the formal labour market, frequently work in the agricultural sector due to the impact of climate change. In the case of returnees and internally displaced persons, those in both urban and rural locations rely on the agricultural value chain and therefore Afghanistan's natural assets (Lakhani & Amiri, 2020; Interview 2). In particular, many seek out agricultural day labour or work as street vendors of agricultural foods, since they lack land, property, or social assets in the location they return to, having resided outside Afghanistan for long periods (UNHCR, 2023; ILO, 2013).

Following the Pakistani and Iranian governments' policy of returning Afghans as announced in September and November 2023 respectively (IOM 2024; Amnesty International, 2024; D'Souza, 2023), close to 600,000 returnees have arrived primarily in Kandahar, Kabul, Nangarhar, and Kunduz provinces (UNHCR, 2024). Over 20% of returnees are unemployed, and returnees in rural locations rely on agricultural wage labour (Magenta FZE, 2020). However, with an increasing number of returnees, and a deteriorating economy, day wages have been progressively declining (World Bank, 2022a). Most returnees from Iran settle in Afghanistan's Herat province (IOM, 2022), whilst returnees from Pakistan predominantly resettle in Kandahar, Nangarhar, and Kabul provinces (IOM, 2024). In rural areas within these provinces, returnees face an arid landscape with rising temperatures and varying precipitation levels, manifesting in drought and flash floods, and impacting wheat harvests (Foschini & Mirzada, 2024). This traps many returnees into a vicious cycle of continuous attempts to migrate to neighbouring countries to seek out more profitable livelihoods after their livelihoods are disrupted, interspersed with traumatic deportations.

"The term 'returnee' refers to a refugee or internally displaced person who has returned to their country or area of origin to remain there permanently. However, they are not yet fully reintegrated into their community. A returnee loses their refugee status once they return" (UNHCR, 2024b).

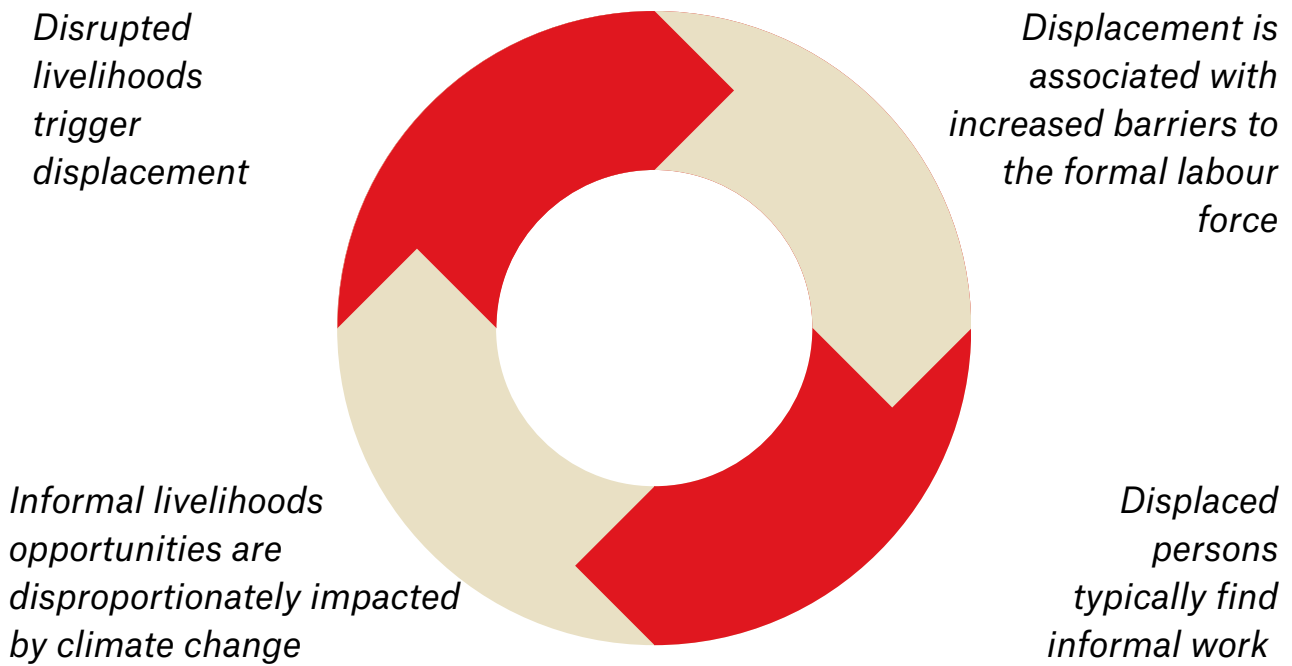
Though conflict remains the primary reason for displacement, climate change is rapidly becoming the leading cause of forced displacement:

between 2020-2022, over 140,000 people were displaced due to floods and droughts (IDMC, 2023a). Whilst the 2023/24 El Niño effect was expected to increase the incidence of snowfall and rainfall in Afghanistan, the country instead experienced a dry and warm winter, aggravating the drought (OCHA, 2023; OCHA, 2024). Afghanistan's eastern and northeastern regions saw 40 to 45% less precipitation than average, straining the livelihoods of nearly 90% of those Afghans reliant on agriculture for food security and income (OCHA 2024). Most internally displaced persons lack any sort of legal documentation, facing challenges to access any existing social services in the communities they settle in, and exacerbating their vulnerability due to repeated displacements (UNHCR, 2023). Moreover, internally displaced persons often live in harsh conditions, in rudimentary housing highly vulnerable to flash floods, which leads to health hazards which ultimately affect human assets, plunging displaced persons into a vicious cycle of vulnerability (Přivara, & Přivarová, 2019).

Internally displaced persons are "persons or groups of persons who have been forced or obliged to flee or to leave their homes or places of habitual residence, in particular as a result of or in order to avoid the effects of armed conflict, situations of generalized violence, violations of human rights or natural or human-made disasters, and who have not crossed an internationally recognized state border." (Commission on Human Rights, 1998)

Literature also suggests that failing livelihoods can also be a trigger for conflict, thus triggering further displacement. Kuchis ('nomads' in Dari) are nomadic tribes who inhabit Afghanistan's southwestern desert areas and have traditionally relied on livestock herding and trading activities (Lakhani & Amiri, 2020). Contemporary Kuchis have abandoned their nomadic traditions and resettled in northwest Afghanistan where livelihoods consist of subsistence farming and informal wage labour in peri-urban settings. Meanwhile, a small minority still depend on livestock herding by following 'semi-sedentary' practices, temporarily settling in places with water

availability (MRG, 2024), which can often become the source of tensions due to increased competition over resources (Přivara & Přivarová, 2019). An interviewee highlighted that, with higher incidences in drought and fewer locations with sufficient water, Kuchis must "fight for the same limited labour opportunities" as host communities, exacerbating conflict (Interview 8): literature suggests that such tensions have already emerged in Hazarajat, where conflict over resources has exacerbated pre-existing ethnic tensions (Foschini & Mirzada, 2024). This plunges communities into further cycles of displacement and poor livelihoods prospects that accompany it.



**DISPLACED PERSONS**

**DRC**

DRC has a large and heterogeneous population of displaced people whose livelihoods are vulnerable to climate change. DRC hosts 6 million internally displaced persons, mostly concentrated in the north-east, and accommodates over 520,000 refugees and asylum seekers predominantly from the Central African Republic, Rwanda, Burundi and South Sudan (UNHCR, 2024; UNHCR, 2023a). Most internally displaced persons and refugees in the DRC have become displaced due to conflict, but the number of those displaced due to climate stressors, such as changes in the frequency or severity of landslides or floods, or as pastures for cattle becoming increasingly scarce is growing. In 2021, the last year in which data was collected, the DRC witnessed a notable increase in internally displaced persons stemming from disasters, with approximately 890,000 individuals forced to relocate due to floods, storms, and droughts (Kelly-Hope et al, 2023).

The livelihoods of most internally displaced persons and refugees are within the agricultural sector, since most camps are located in rural areas (Tafere, 2018). Thus, they are highly vulnerable to climate change stressors such as varying rainfall patterns, as this affects harvest yields, income and food security levels, and the viability of maintaining livestock. Without land ownership, many internally displaced persons engage in informal labour such as fishing or selling wood for income (Interview 11; Arsene & Fyama, 2021). Such activities, borne from desperation, regrettably often harm the local



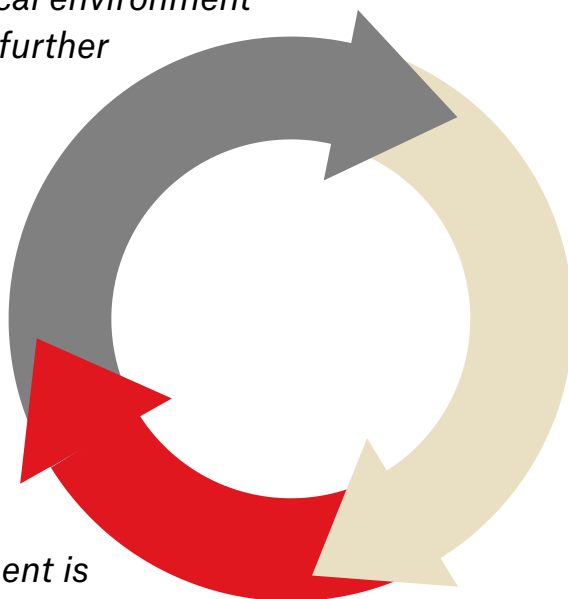
environment through soil degradation (NRC, 2014) and deforestation (Molinario et al., 2020). In the long term, deforestation reduces future livelihood opportunities due to the depletion of natural assets, as well as contributing to soil erosion and higher incidences of flooding, further accentuating vulnerability (Tafere, 2018; Interview 9).

Most refugees in DRC do not have the right to work, which restricts them to working in the informal sector, and typically in agriculture as wage labourers or through subsistence farming. In such jobs, refugees are therefore disproportionately exposed to climate stressors such as erratic rainfall and droughts. As such climate stressors increase, historical tensions with host communities can create a hostile environment, which further limits displaced persons' access to land (Bele et al, 2014). Climate change, by placing a strain on already scarce resources, has the potential to further exacerbate these tensions and lead to increased conflict (UNHCR, 2017).

*Degradation of the local environment and conflict prompts further displacement*

*Degraded natural assets force displaced persons to engage in harmful practices such as deforestation*

*As the local environment is degraded, conflict is triggered*



In both urban and rural areas, displaced persons' earning potential is hindered by poor living conditions, limiting their adaptive capacity. In urban settings, displaced persons have a higher rate of unemployment and are more likely to resort to insecure or low-paid sectors such as construction work, agricultural labour or portering (NRC, 2014). Such work is highly exposed to climate stressors, with the increase of hotter-than-average days leading to severe impacts on health, and thus degrading human assets. Displacement sites are densely populated, and their temporary nature accentuates the infrastructural deficiencies endemic to the DRC (Interview

9). Climate-resilient shelters are rare, and poor shelter in general increases vulnerability to subsequent effects of floods or landslides, including outbreaks of cholera or other water-related diseases (UNICEF, 2023). As a result, the percentage of displaced persons facing unemployment, generally poor health conditions, problems with overcrowding, irregular access to services including water, property ownership, and safety. Displaced children also face lower school attendance rates (NRC, 2014). This ultimately undermines human assets, leading to a vicious cycle whereby displaced persons are trapped in the informal labour force, which is disproportionately affected by climate change.

## DISPLACED PERSONS

## YEMEN

The majority of displaced people in Yemen are internally displaced persons: in total, 4,500,000 people are displaced in Yemen, an equivalent to 13% of the population. Moreover, Yemen hosts 71,628 refugees and asylum seekers, of which 64% originate from Somalia, and the remainder from Ethiopia and Eritrea (UNHCR, 2023b; Diab & Jerjawi, 2022).

The increasing frequency of extreme weather events in Yemen has resulted in the gap closing between persons presumed displaced due to conflict and violence and persons presumed displaced due to climate. In 2022, there were 276,000 new internal displacements from conflict and violence and 171,000 internal displacements from climate (IDMC, 2023b), though this data can presumably be taken with some caution given that, as research indicates, distinguishing between climate and conflict causality of displacement can prove challenging.

Displaced persons are more likely to engage in livelihoods that are impacted by climate change, since land right contestation and prejudice push displaced persons' settlements to valleys and undesirable land with high vulnerability to ecological disasters, with limited economic opportunities other than agricultural work (World Bank, 2023; Interviews 6 and 7). Common livelihoods include daily wage labour in beekeeping or as taxi and motorcycle drivers (Interviews 4, 5, 6, 7). These livelihoods are increasingly unprofitable first due to the decreased fertility of the land and also due to the working conditions: as temperatures rise, many displaced persons, who typically receive daily wages, can only work for limited hours (Interview 5). In

particular, livelihood opportunities are harmed by the degradation of land and an increase in water scarcity (Jafarnia, 2022): freshwater availability has decreased from 1100 cubic metres per capita per year in the 1960s (World Bank 2009 in Hadeira et al 2011) to 74 cubic metres in 2018 (World Bank 2018 in Jafarnia 2022), bringing Yemen below the internationally recognised water poverty line of 1000 cubic metres per capita annually.

Moreover, the poor conditions in which displaced persons live in severely limits their productive capacity and thus results in a vicious cycle in which their adaptive capacity to future climate shocks is undermined, thus forcing them into informal labour, which is most affected by climate change. Displaced children are at a higher risk of missing out on education, with around two million displaced children in Yemen currently unable to attend school (Levy et al 2022). Most displaced persons live in tents within temporary camps, which provide almost no shelter from the elements, especially in high temperatures, and which can be easily damaged by heavy rain and flash floods (Interview 7; World Bank, 2023).

Displacement is also a major factor in exacerbating poor land management, thus harming communities' future livelihoods possibilities. Once people flee their homes, their land is either left fallow, or taken by conflict actors or other internally displaced persons who may lack the skills to work the land (NRC, 2023; Interview 7). Disruptions in land management degrade the land and the littering of explosive ordnances prevents those who would otherwise work the land from agricultural livelihoods, thus accelerating soil degradation and topsoil erosion, and hindering the livelihoods of displaced persons hoping to return to their land later (NRC, 2023).



In Afghanistan, close to 80% of adults suffer from some sort of disability, and 14% live with severe disabilities (Shinwari et al., 2020). Disabilities in Afghanistan are typically developed during a person's life – 18% of children suffer from a disability (Shinwari et al., 2020) – and are often the product of long-term conflict, climate-related disasters, and SEPI drivers. The most prevalent sources of disability are conflict-related injuries (including those originating from landmine and explosive remnants of war), trauma and psychological distress, and cerebral palsy and polio (HRW, 2020).

Close to 14% of Afghans suffer from a severe disability, and out of those, 90% are unemployed (Nasiri et al., 2023; CCD, 2013). Their ability to meet their basic needs therefore depends on their household's overall income and on social payments. As one interviewee explained, "There are hardly any [government-sponsored] interventions in terms of livelihoods for disabled people. Those with the most severe disabilities are totally dependent on their household's members for food and income. With [climate change] impacting food security, disabled people will be among those with least food" (Interview 1).

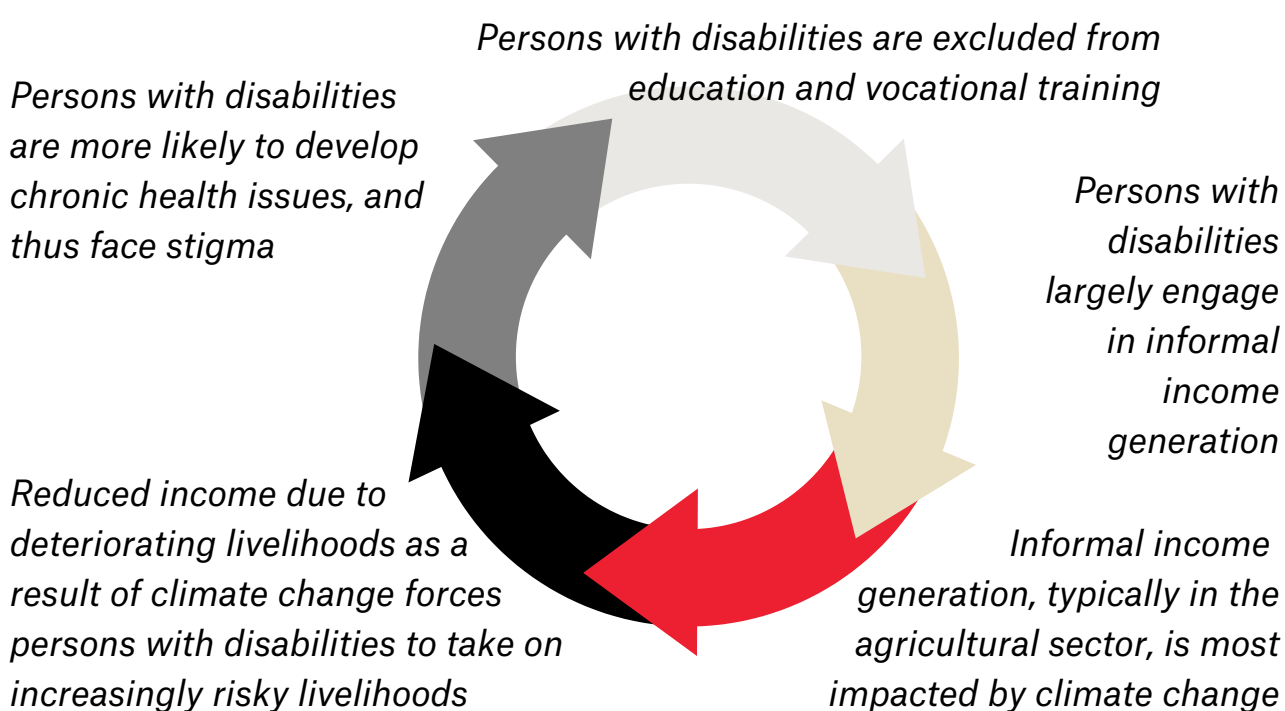
Moreover, as traditional livelihoods such as agriculture fail due to climate change, and as the cost of living rises due to climate stressors such as drought, Afghans are often forced to seek out jobs with higher rates of injury like brickmaking or construction, or with poor working conditions (Nemat et al, 2022). Persons with disabilities are disproportionately affected in this dynamic due to their lack of access to programmes that would increase their human assets. Due to the gap in governmental programmes addressing the livelihoods of persons with disabilities (ILO, 2013), who are often assumed 'incapacitated' (Humanity & Inclusion, 2021), persons with disabilities, whose living costs are typically higher, are more likely to seek out such '3D' work (dirty, demeaning, or dangerous), such as begging (Ahmadi, 2024). This plunges persons with disabilities into a vicious cycle of work-related injuries, followed by more dangerous labour practices.

## PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

## DRC

Approximately 10.5 million people live with disabilities in DRC, accounting for roughly 15% of the population. Severe disability in DRC primarily stems from injuries sustained during conflicts, infectious diseases like polio and leprosy, congenital defects, and obstetric emergencies (PADDC, 2019). In recent years, the intensity of extreme weather, food and water insecurity, degradation of ecosystems, and infrastructure have catalysed respiratory impairments, musculoskeletal injuries, and mental and psychosocial health issues (WHO, 2023).

Amongst persons with disabilities, 90% are illiterate, 93% are unemployed, and 96% live in poverty. Moreover, the livelihoods prospects of persons with disabilities are also hindered by the perception of vulnerability as a consequence of impairment rather than social structures. As a result, persons with disabilities are often excluded from livelihood support programmes (Bell et al., 2019), and therefore are more likely to engage in informal livelihoods that are the most impacted by climate change. Persons with disabilities in DRC in rural areas typically practice agricultural or subsistence-based livelihoods, be it from crops, livestock or wage labour (Diao et al., 2019). Such livelihoods are increasingly disrupted through altered rainfall, temperature shifts, and extreme weather events, which impacts agriculture (reduced yields, livestock harm, land degradation) and



urban areas (infrastructure damage, business disruption, job losses, health risks).

Even where persons with disabilities do not work in sectors that are directly impacted by climate change – such as those in urban areas who often work in small-scale trade (Diao et al., 2019) – as climate change results in an increase in poverty and food insecurity due to the rising cost of goods (IPCC, 2022; UNDP, 2023), persons with disabilities see their adaptive capacity weakened. Moreover, lack of access to disaster preparedness programs, early warning systems, and evacuation processes make it difficult for disabled individuals to navigate and respond effectively to environmental hazards (UNHCR UK, 2021). As a result, persons with disabilities face higher mortality rates during disasters due to exclusion from contemporary climate adaptation planning (Bell et al., 2019). This is particularly nefarious for those with intersecting identities, such as women with disabilities who experience compounding discrimination and exclusion (Sida, 2014). Accessing information and resources poses significant barriers, limiting the knowledge and their capacity to build resilient livelihoods in the face of climate change that challenges traditional livelihoods (UNHCR UK, 2021; PADDC, 2019). Though global figures indicate that persons with disabilities are more frequently displaced due to disproportionately higher poverty, food insecurity, and inadequate housing (UNHCR UK 2021), the gap in literature means that this inference is not yet validated within DRC.

## **PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES**

## **YEMEN**

WHO estimates that about 4.5 million Yemenis are disabled (Shahabi et al, 2020), of which 70% are male (YFCA Research Unit). Though disaggregated data is not available on the prevalence of each disability (YFCA, 2023), it is understood that widespread contamination of explosive ordnances has contributed to the high incidence of disability in Yemen (Al Waziza et al 2023), as well as psychological trauma from conflict exposure and limited health system capacity.

In Yemen, the unemployment rate of persons with disabilities is 80% for women with disabilities, with data for other gender groups and men unavailable (Simeu et al, 2018). Due to stigma, persons with disabilities in Yemen face significant barriers to accessing services that would allow them

to increase their income generation potential (Al Waziza et al 2023), such as education or other professional training. The latest data on illiteracy rates among youth with disabilities is as high as 98% (Simeu et al, 2018). This undermines their ability to build human assets.

In the aftermath of climate shocks, persons with disabilities are disproportionately affected (Interview 7; YFCA 2023), thus affecting their ability to engage in productive activities. The unreliability of energy combined with the rise in global temperatures (Al Waziza et al 2023; Hanna et al 2023) leads to increased mortality and morbidity from heat stress, heatstroke, cardiovascular, and respiratory disease especially amongst persons with disabilities (Green et al 2019; Watts et al 2021). Moreover, the scarcity of services upon which persons with disabilities can rely on exacerbates their vulnerability: only 54% of health facilities are fully functional due to funding gaps and low availability of healthcare workers (Al Waziza et al 2023). This contributes to their further marginalisation, preventing them from engaging in productive activities which would support their economic independence.



# CONCLUSION & GLOBAL RECOMMENDATIONS

This report has demonstrated that considerations of climate change are not the exclusive realm of development organisations but rather essential for humanitarian organisations to ensure the efficacy of their work. Although the three country case studies highlight context-specific considerations, there are also patterns that can form the basis for strategies at a global level.

**Develop gender-sensitive livelihoods methodologies that consider the impacts of climate change.** Women, as the major practitioners of rural agricultural livelihoods, hold the key to mitigating the environmental impacts of agriculture, and research suggests that female farmers are more likely than men to embrace climate sensitive agricultural practices (Brachio & Chhiber, 2023). Effective mainstreaming of gender equity within livelihoods would also address the barriers that women face in participating in policy forums and decision-making processes (Stiem & Krause, 2016), which would in turn ensure effective climate change adaptation strategies (Interview 12).

**Invest in data and collaborate with forecasting organisations.** Literature has suggested that the lack of forecasting data on climate stressors has impeded local resilience strategies from developing (Barakat, 2022; McNally et al, 2022), and that early warnings enhance adaptive capacity among vulnerable populations (Bele et al., 2014). However, as this report has suggested, marginalised populations lack effective access to such data. Partnership with forecasting organisations to ensure public access to these indicators, is key to building livelihood resilience (World Bank, 2021b).

**Implement anti-poverty and human development measures alongside interventions that address climate change.** Poverty is a key driver of poor environmental practices; as this report has shown misuse of natural assets increases where marginalised populations are deprived of any other livelihood options. Second, adaptive capacity to climate change hinges on food security, health, and human assets. As this report has shown, poor adaptive capacity can force marginalised communities into livelihoods which are more sharply exposed to climate change. As such, anti-poverty and human development measures are also a matter of climate justice and should be integrated into programmes that have a climate mitigation or adaptation objective.



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