able child
AFRICA NETWORK

Amplifying the voices of children with disabilities on climate resilience and adaptability

A survey to understand and amplify the priorities and experiences of children with disabilities in relation to climate change

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Contents

01 Introduction

The Able Child Africa Network's 2024 survey *Amplifying the Voices of Children with Disabilities*[1] explored children's experiences and aspirations across five domains: education, rights, home life, climate change, and hopes for the future. Building on these findings, climate resilience and adaptability emerged as a priority for deeper investigation, given the increasing frequency of climate-related shocks in East and Southern Africa and heir disproportionate impact on children with disabilities.

This report presents results from a survey carried out in 2025 across seven countries in the region. A total of 1,112 children with disabilities across seven East and Southern African countries took part in the survey, which was led by the Able Child Africa Network.

The purpose of this study was to capture and elevate the voices of children with disabilities in relation to climate resilience and adaptability. It examines how extreme weather, early warning systems, community preparedness, and individual coping strategies intersect with disability to shape children's safety, inclusion, and wellbeing. By centering children with disabilities' perspectives, the research aimed to guide policies and programmes that promote inclusive and equitable climate action.

Background

Children and young people with disabilities are among those most affected by the accelerating impacts of climate change, yet their voices remain largely absent from global and local responses. Climate change acts as a threat multiplier, compounding inequalities in health, education, and access to services. Evidence shows that persons with disabilities are up to four times more likely to die or be injured during disasters due to barriers such as inaccessible warnings and evacuation routes[2]. In Africa, where climate change is intensifying droughts and floods, driving displacement, and worsening food and health insecurity, children with disabilities face heightened risks, as documented by UNICEF and the African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACERWC)[3].

Extreme weather deepens barriers to mobility, communication, and essential services. For children with disabilities, these intersecting vulnerabilities are rarely addressed in resilience planning, and children with disabilities are seldom consulted on how environmental shocks affect their lives or what support they need to adapt and thrive.

According to UNICEF's Children's Climate Risk Index (CCRI)[4], nearly 1 billion children, almost half of the world's population of children, live in countries at extremely high risk of climate and environmental hazards, including floods, droughts, heatwaves, and cyclones. Of the 33 countries classified as 'extremely high risk,' 25 are in Africa[5]. While the number of children with disabilities exposed to such risks remain unknown, evidence from the UN Environment Programme (UNEP)[6] and others points to their additional disadvantages, including limited access to early warnings, evacuation routes, and health and education services. These intersecting risks underscore the urgent need for climate strategies that are inclusive from the outset.

The regional picture mirrors global patterns. Children with disabilities continue to face systemic barriers to inclusion[7]. Many remain invisible or are stigmatised, are excluded from education and social protection, and are disproportionately represented among the poorest households[8]. Approximately half do not complete primary education[9], and their exclusion deepens in humanitarian and climate-affected settings[10]. These realities underscore the urgency of developing climate responses that are inclusive by design.

The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD)[11], adopted in 2006, provides a strong legal framework for action, affirming children's rights to participation and obliging States to collect appropriate data and consult them in policymaking. Yet in practice, their perspectives are seldom sought in climate strategies.

Current statistics on climate and disability seldom capture children's lived experiences, particularly in the countries most exposed to climate hazards. This evidence gap limits the design and evaluation of policies that safeguard their rights and resilience.

To address this, the Able Child Africa Network commissioned this study to generate evidence directly from children with disabilities living across East and Southern Africa. By documenting these experiences, the study addresses a major evidence gap and creates a foundation for more inclusive climate resilience policies and programmes across the region.

Project overview

Founded in October 2023, the Able Child Africa Network is made up of nine organisations who were founded in and are based in Africa, and who work specifically on improving the lives of children with disabilities. The Network provides access to a wealth of knowledge to its members, both technical and operational, where like-minded organisations share expertise and build best practice. Network members come together to play a leading role supporting disability movements and other organisations of persons with disabilities in their respective countries, working to improve services, hold their governments to account and deliver lasting change for children with disabilities.

The members are:

- **Action Network for the Disabled (ANDY), Kenya**
- **The Action Foundation (TAF), Kenya**
- **Parents of Disabled Children Association of Malawi (PODCAM), Malawi**
- **Federation of Disability Organisations in Malawi (FEDOMA), Malawi**
- **Uwezo Youth Empowerment (UWEZO), Rwanda**
- **Child Support Tanzania (CST), Tanzania**
- **Uganda Society for Disabled Children (USDC), Uganda**
- **Zambia Association of Parents for Children with Disabilities (ZAPCD), Zambia**
- **Zimbabwe Parents of Handicapped Children Association (ZPHCA), Zimbabwe**

A key component of the Able Child Africa Network's strategy is to "contribute to coordinated systems of data collection to identify gaps and prove models of success." Additionally, the Network's Theory of Change aims to "raise the voices of children and young people with disabilities." This survey, the second of its kind led by the Network, marks a crucial first step in achieving this goal by directly gathering insights from children with disabilities, ensuring their voices are represented in available data.

The survey leveraged the Accessible Surveys platform to gather over 1,000 voices of children with disabilities on climate resilience and adaptability, informing inclusive programming in line with its Theory of Change. Spanning seven countries and including children with diverse disabilities from both urban and rural settings, the survey provides a rich, authentic dataset. These insights are essential for shaping policies and guiding funding decisions to better support children with disabilities across East and Southern Africa.

02 Methodology

Survey development

Following consultation, a concise, disability inclusive climate change resilience questionnaire was developed. The number of questions was intentionally kept limited to prevent overwhelming respondents while ensuring meaningful data collection. Drafts were reviewed by the Able Child team and Able Child Africa Network leads to ensure age-appropriate language, cultural relevance, and accessibility. Questions were organised into four thematic modules: Barriers Faced, Climate Change Education, Community Participation, and Climate Action & Advocacy. These themes were selected based on gaps identified in the 2024 Amplifying the Voices of Children with Disabilities survey and through consultations with the Network members.

Implementation

A pilot of the survey was tested in Kenya to ascertain question flow, comprehension, and the technical feasibility of the survey platform. Following minor refinements, data collection took place in June and July 2025 using the Accessible Surveys[12] platform, which adjusts presentation modes such as text enlargement, audio prompts, and pictorial cues to meet individual needs. The tool also enabled children with disabilities to record voice responses to selected questions.

Data collection

Data collection was conducted through guided interview sessions, designed to be child-friendly and adapted to the individual needs and communication styles of respondents. Most of the questions were asked as open-ended questions and data collectors were then required to select the response category that best reflected each child's answer. Where possible, children were encouraged to provide narrative responses in their own words.

Data collectors were staff from each Able Child Africa Network member organisation. They received funding for travel, staff time, and data connectivity, and have a wealth of experience working with children with disabilities. In additional, several of the children with disabilities interviewed were already known to the organisations. Prior to data collection, staff were trained on the survey tool and received refresher training on ethical considerations, safeguarding, and techniques for creating safe environments for children. Guidance also covered accessibility of venues and materials, and the use of child-friendly communication techniques.

Sampling

The survey used purposive sampling to identify respondents and aimed to collect responses from at least 100 children with disabilities per Network member. This non-random approach involves deliberately selecting participants who align with the study's objectives, which in this case was children with disabilities aged between 3 and 14. The sampling criteria sought representation across disability types, age groups, and geographic settings. Participants were identified through schools, community groups, and parent associations, with efforts made to include out-of-school children where possible. Most respondents were known to Network members, and so children with disabilities who are more hidden by families or caregivers may not have been reached. As such, the findings are not representative of all children with disabilities in the region, but they provide a valuable insight into the perspectives of those engaged by members of the Able Child Africa Network.

The final sample included 1,112 children with disabilities (589 boys and 523 girls) from across the seven Able Child Africa Network countries in East and Southern Africa.

Data cleaning and analysis

Quantitative data were cleaned and analysed using Excel, with results presented through simple charts and graphs for accessibility. Qualitative narratives and transcriptions of voice recordings were reviewed and coded inductively to highlight recurring patterns, perspectives, and illustrative quotes. Data was disaggregated by gender, age, and disability type where possible. Cross-validation checks were performed to correct input errors and remove incomplete records.

Ethical considerations

The survey strictly adhered to the Able Child Africa Network's inclusive child safeguarding protocols, and any concerns were promptly reported to Network leads.

Understanding of the survey and assent to participation were essential, and emphasis was placed on ensuring that each child fully understood the process and their right to decline or withdraw at any time. Network leads prepared country-specific, disability-inclusive and child-friendly consent documents outlining the purpose of data collection, how information would be used, and who it would be shared with. These were reviewed with each child before the survey began. Children were first asked for their assent, followed by legally informed consent from a parent or guardian.

Limitations

While the survey provided valuable insights into the attitudes and experiences of children with disabilities in East and Southern Africa, limitations should be acknowledged.

The purposive sampling approach means findings are not representative of all children with disabilities in East and Southern Africa, particularly those hidden by families or living in remote settings.

Proxy responses were provided by guardians or teachers for children with severe communication difficulties. This ensured inclusion but may not fully reflect the children's own perspectives.

The survey design placed greater emphasis on quantitative data, limiting the depth of qualitative responses and the nuance of individual experiences. Some questions may have been leading and potentially influenced responses.

Connectivity issues in some Southern African regions made it difficult to submit surveys in real time. In some cases, data collectors had to restart surveys due to network failures. While paper surveys could have avoided this, the online tool reduced data entry errors and enabled more efficient analysis.

Transcription of voice-recorded responses was inconsistent. English recordings were sometimes inaccurately transcribed, and responses in local languages could not be transcribed due to lack of available translation services. Due to the scale of recorded responses, those that were inaccurately transcribed or not in English were excluded from analysis, which limited the richness of narrative data and reduced the ability to disaggregate by demographic group.

Despite these challenges, the survey provides valuable insights into the climate change experiences and resilience strategies of children with disabilities in East and Southern Africa. The limitations also highlight areas for improvement in future rounds, particularly around translation, transcription, and reaching more hidden populations.

03 Demographic characteristics

This section provides an overview of the survey respondents across countries, disability types, age, gender, and school status. These characteristics are important for interpreting the findings that follow. Differences in country representation, urban-rural distribution, school status and disability types reflect the geographic reach and programme focus of network members. As a result, demographic patterns may influence the perspectives presented in this report and should be considered when comparing results across groups.

Country and location distribution

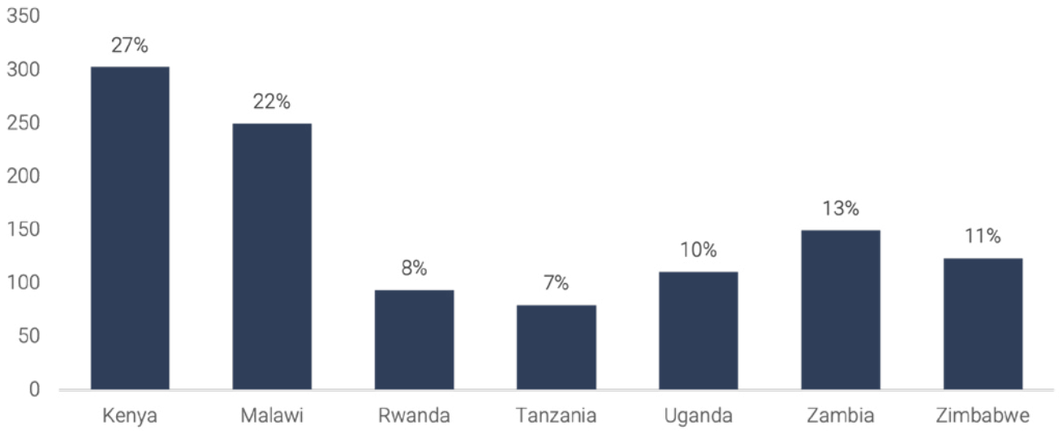


Figure 1. Distribution of country of residence

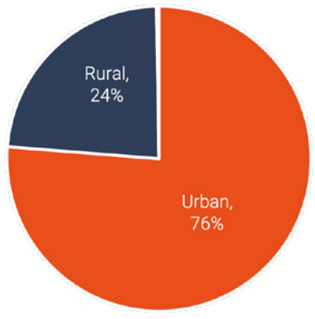


Figure 2. Distribution of rural/urban location

Respondents were drawn from seven East and Southern African countries. The majority lived in Kenya (27%) and Malawi (22%). The Able Child Africa Network has two members in Kenya and Malawi (compared to one member in each of the other countries), reflecting the larger proportion of respondents in these two countries. Rwanda and Tanzania had the fewest respondents (7% and 8% respectively), while Zambia, Zimbabwe and Uganda each accounted for around 10-13% of respondents.

Overall, there was a strong urban concentration with 76% of respondents living in urban areas, compared with 24% in rural areas. This pattern varied across countries. In Kenya (99%), Zimbabwe (99%), and Zambia (84%), respondents were predominantly urban, whereas in Uganda (82%) most lived in rural areas. These differences reflect the geographic reach of Network programmes, and may also shape children's daily experiences of climate impacts and adaptation opportunities.

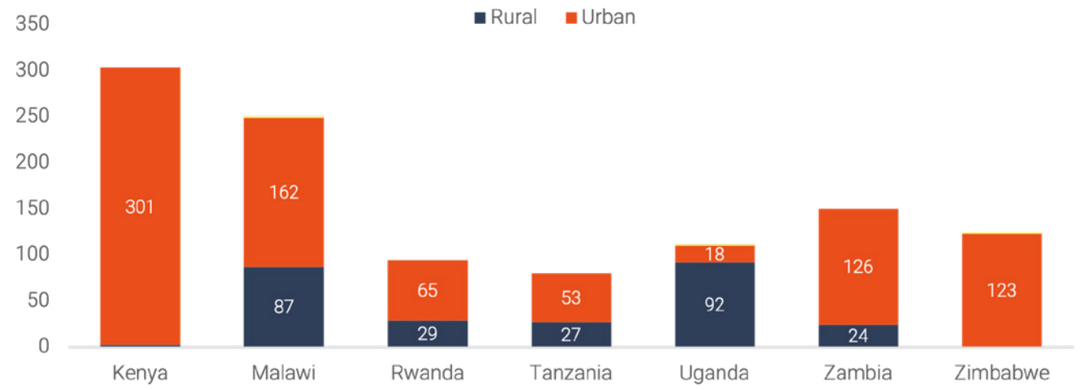


Figure 3. Geographic distribution: country and rural/urban breakdown

Disability type distribution

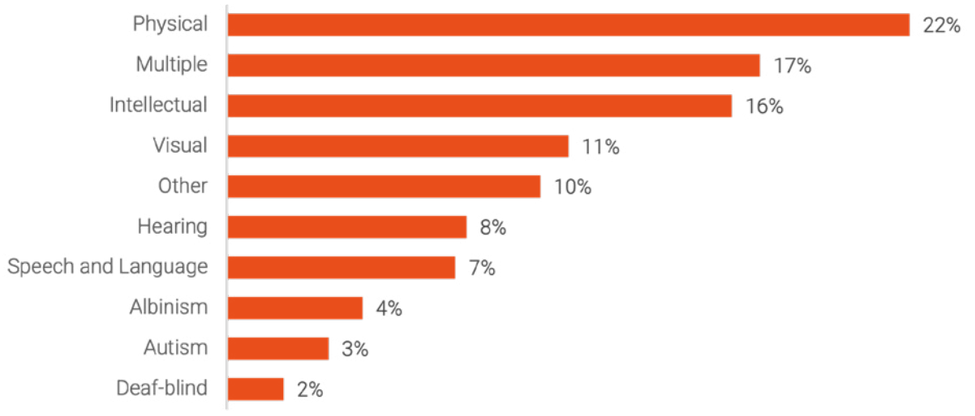


Figure 4. Distribution of disability types

The sample included children with a wide range of disabilities. The most common were physical disabilities (22%), intellectual disabilities (16%), and multiple disabilities (17%). Other groups included children with visual disabilities (11%), hearing disabilities (8%), speech and language disabilities (7%), albinism (4%), autism (3%), and deaf-blindness (2%).

Distribution patterns varied by country. In Rwanda and Zambia, physical disabilities were most common (46% and 37% respectively), while in Zimbabwe intellectual disabilities were more prevalent (39%). Some categories were reported only in certain contexts, such as deaf-blindness in Uganda (9%), Malawi (3%) and Kenya (1%). Children with multiple disabilities were counted under that category, which reduces numbers shown under individual disability types. Definitions of disability vary across countries, so cross-country comparisons should be treated with caution.

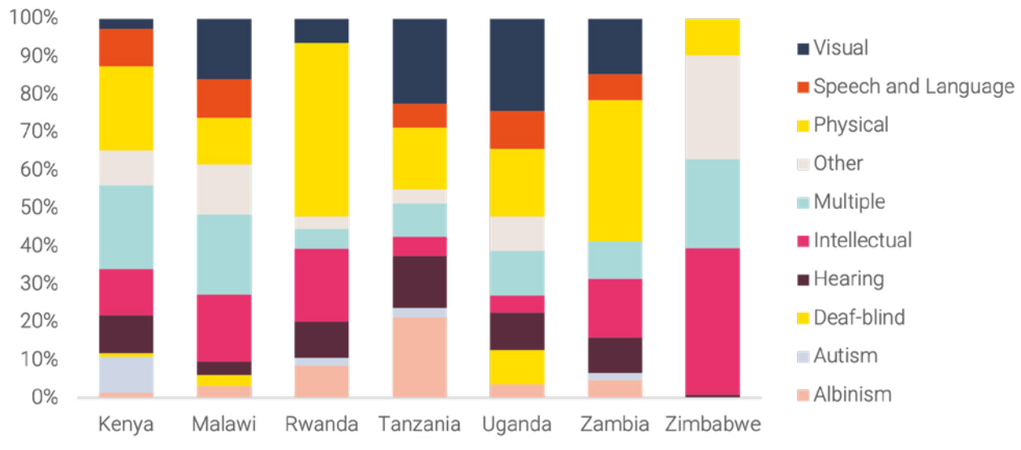


Figure 5. Prevalence of disability type by country

Age distribution

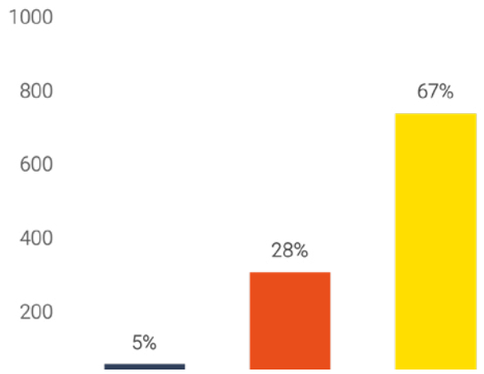


Figure 6. Distribution of age groups

Over two-thirds (67%) of respondents were aged 10 to 14, reflecting the survey's focus on school-aged children. A further 28% were aged 5 to 9, and 5% were aged 3 to 4. The 10 to 14 age group was the largest across all countries, with Zambia (85%) having the highest proportion, followed by Uganda and Zimbabwe (77%) and Malawi (74%). Kenya had the smallest share of 10 to 14-year-olds (49%) but the highest proportion of 3 to 4-year-olds (16%). For the 5 to 9 group, Tanzania (38%), Kenya (36%), and Rwanda (35%) had the largest shares.

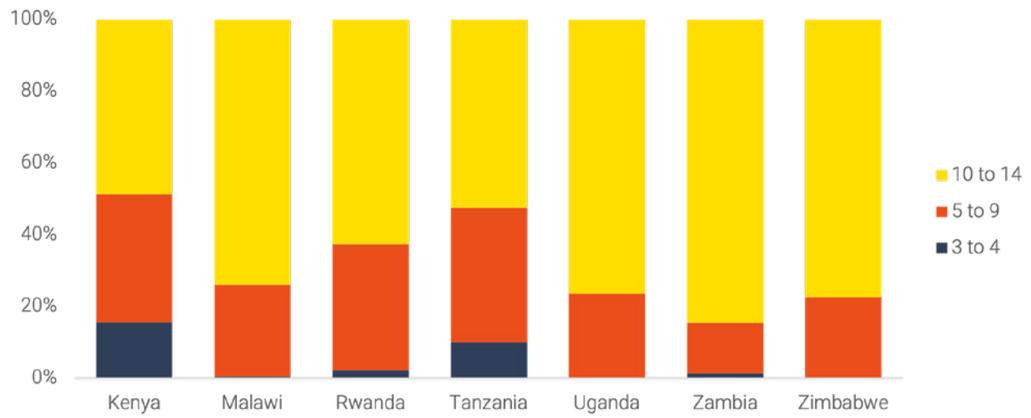


Figure 7. Distribution of age groups by country

Gender distribution

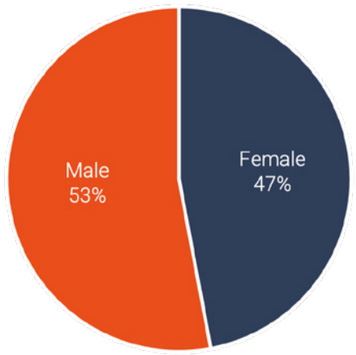


Figure 8. Distribution of gender

The gender distribution of the sample group was fairly balanced, with 53% boys and 47% girls. The pattern was consistent across most countries, except in Zambia (57% girls) and Tanzania (39% girls). Across disability types, gender distribution was similar, though boys were somewhat more prevalent among children with autism (61%) and those recorded under “other” disabilities (67%).

Analysis of the data showed that there were few notable differences in responses between boys and girls, who responded to the questions in similar ways. This suggests that their experiences in climate change resilience activities, their knowledge and education on climate change, and their aspirations for the future, are largely the same.

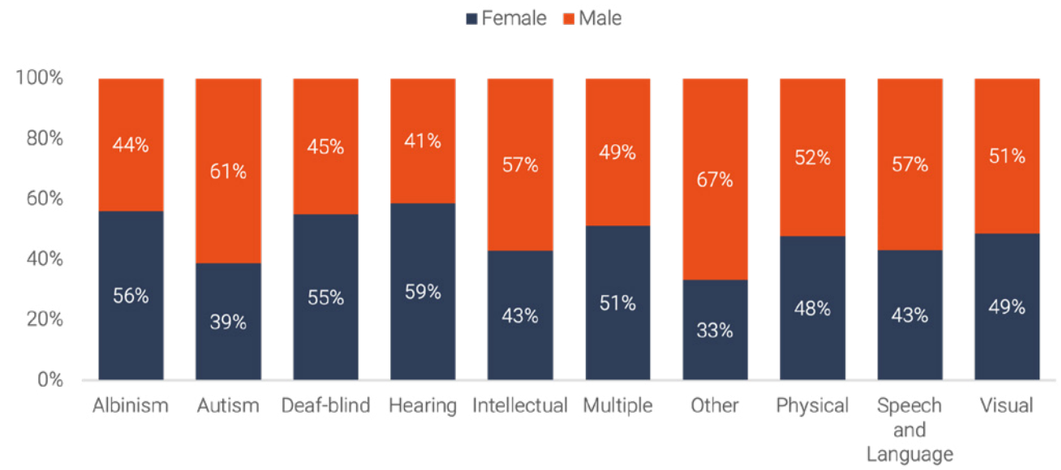


Figure 9. Gender breakdown across disability types

School status distribution

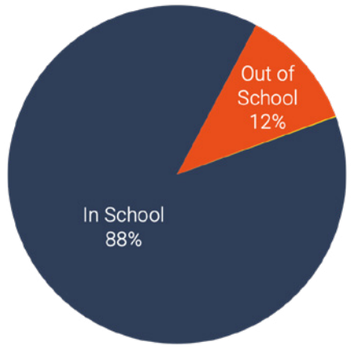


Figure 10. Distribution of school status

A large majority (88%) of respondents were in school. Kenya (34%) and Tanzania (21%) reported significantly higher numbers of out-of-school children compared to the other countries where over 95% of all survey respondents were in school. When comparing rural-urban locations, the pattern was more consistent, with the significant exception being that 100% of children living in rural Kenya were out-of-school.

School attendance rates varied by disability type. Higher proportions were recorded among children with autism (22%), multiple disabilities (20%), physical disabilities (18%), and other disabilities (18%). In contrast, school attendance exceeded 95% among children with deaf-blindness (100%), intellectual disabilities (99%), hearing disabilities (98%), and visual disabilities (97%).

This pattern may partly reflect the tendency of Network members to engage children already linked to schools, as well as the limited understanding of climate change among children with disabilities who are out-of-school, but it could also indicate that children most excluded from education and services remain “hidden” and were less likely to be reached by the survey.

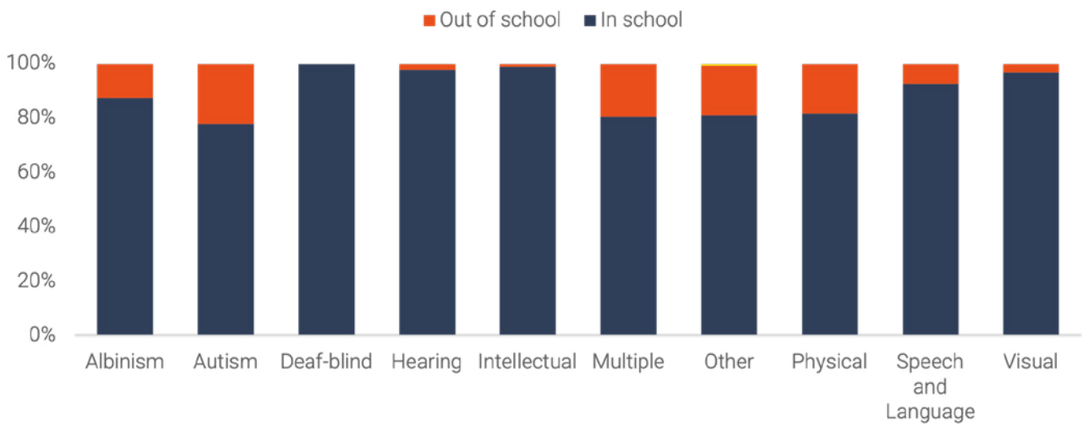


Figure 11. School status breakdown across disability types

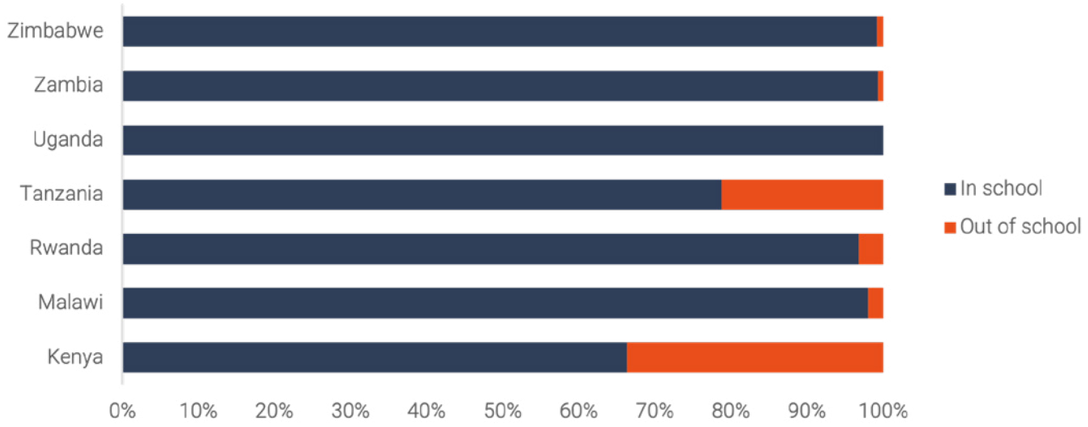


Figure 12. School status by country

04 Survey findings

This section presents the findings of the survey of 1,112 children with disabilities across seven East and Southern African countries. The results highlight the lived experiences, perspectives, and priorities of the children who participated. While not representative of all children with disabilities in these countries, the findings provide valuable insights into the barriers, opportunities, and aspirations that shape children's resilience and adaptability to climate change. The analysis that follows draws out key patterns across age, gender, disability type, and country context, pointing to areas where inclusive policy and practice can make the greatest difference.

Part 1: Barriers faced

Does bad weather or big changes in the weather stop you from doing things you usually enjoy?

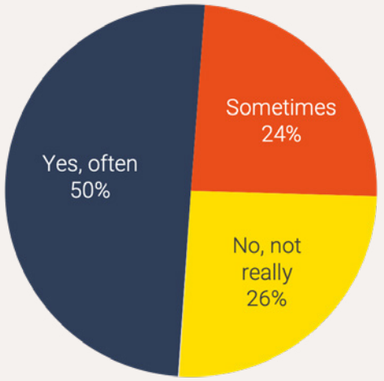


Figure 13. Percentage of children who said bad weather or big changes in the weather stop them doing things they enjoy

When asked whether significant weather changes (because of climate change) impact children with disabilities in doing things they usually enjoy, such as going to school, playing with friends, or taking part in community activities, half of the children (50%) responded 'Yes'. Around a quarter (24%) said such changes only affected them sometimes, while 26% reported that it did not really make a difference.

When disaggregating the data by age, the impact of extreme weather appears to become more pronounced as children grow older. Only 30% of children aged 3 to 4 said they were often affected, compared with 42% of 5- to 9-year-olds, and 55% of 10- to 14-year-olds. This suggests that as children grow older, their understanding of climate change coupled with daily routines and responsibilities, particularly in relation to school attendance, become more vulnerable to disruption. Consistent with this, children in school were more likely to report being affected (51%) than those out of school (40%), highlighting how access to education can be especially sensitive to changing weather conditions.

When looking at the data by country, children in Uganda (62%), Malawi (59%) and Zambia (58%) were among the most likely to say that bad weather often disrupted their activities. In contrast, only 15% of children in Zimbabwe said they were significantly affected, with nearly four in five (79%) saying that bad weather did not really affect them. Yet, Zimbabwean children also reported some of the highest levels of knowledge and awareness about climate change. This contrast suggests that while the interviewed children in Zimbabwe may not currently experience frequent disruptions, they are nevertheless aware of climate risks and are potentially better informed through education or community initiatives, highlighting how exposure to climate knowledge does not always align with lived experience of climate impacts.

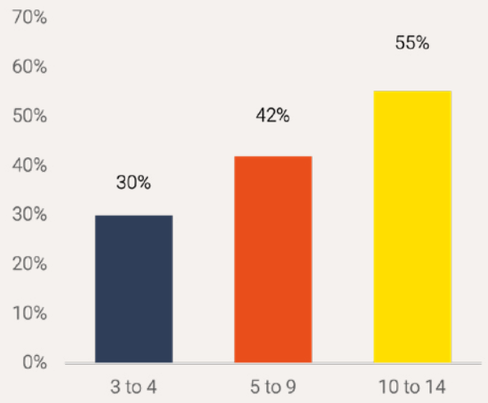


Figure 14. Percentage of children who said they were impacted by bad weather, by age group

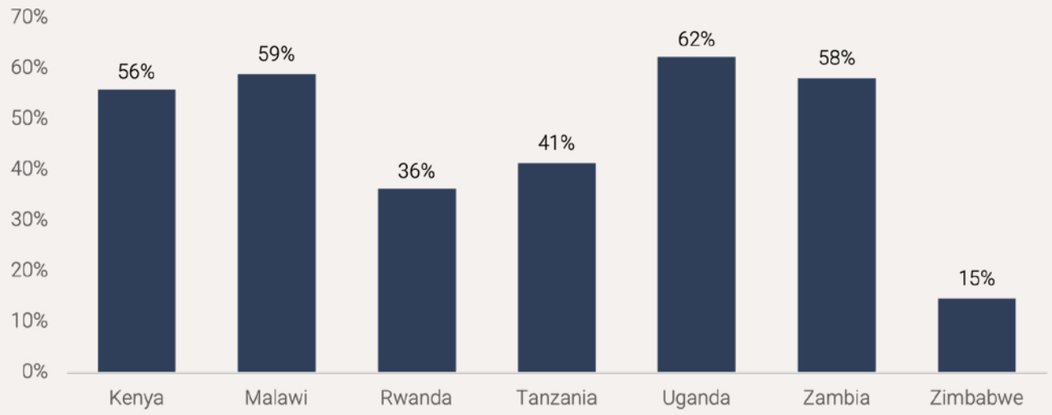


Figure 15. Percentage of children who said they were impacted by bad weather, by country

The rural-urban divide was also clear. **A larger proportion of children in rural areas (58%) said they were often affected by weather changes, compared to 47% of children in urban settings.** This likely reflects the greater exposure of rural communities to environmental conditions, alongside fewer alternatives or protective infrastructure.

Disaggregation by disability type revealed particularly high levels of impact among children with albinism (67%), visual impairments (69%) and deaf-blindness (75%). These findings underline how weather interacts with specific vulnerabilities, increasing risks for certain groups of children with disabilities. Even among those reporting lower levels, such as children with hearing impairments (39%), a significant proportion still described disruption. Across all groups of children with disabilities, at least one in three said that weather disruptions frequently affect their lives.

Overall, while weather changes affect many children, the extent varies considerably. Older children, those in school, rural communities, and children with certain disabilities are disproportionately affected. At the same time, differences between countries suggest that wider social, infrastructural and environmental factors can either mitigate or heighten these impacts.

How does bad weather (like floods, extreme heat or storms) affect your daily life?

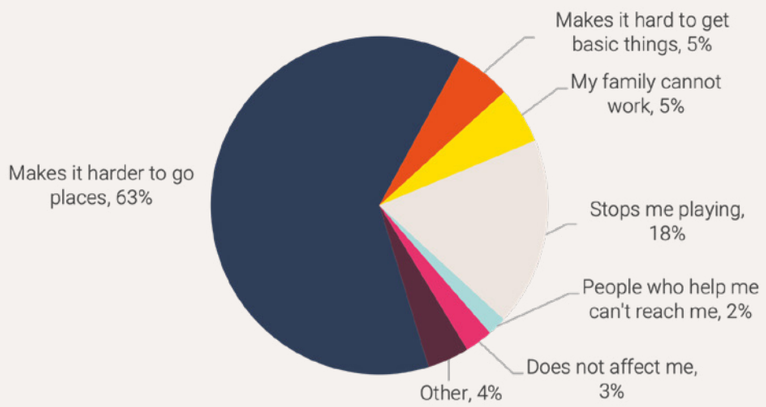


Figure 16. (If 'Yes' or 'Sometimes') Ways in which bad weather affects daily life

Children who responded 'Yes' or 'Sometimes' were asked to explain how extreme weather occurrences affects their daily lives. **The most common impact of climate change was that it makes it harder to go to places such as school or the hospital, reported by nearly two-thirds of these children (62%).** This accounted for half of all respondents overall, underlining how weather disruption directly limits children with disabilities' access to essential services and education.

The second most common was being unable to play (18%), followed by family work or income being affected (6%), and then being able to get basic things (5%), 4% experience 'other' impacts and a small group said that people who help them cannot reach them (2%). Of the children who answered 'Yes' or 'Sometimes', 3% then responded that it didn't affect them. This inconsistency may suggest that some of the children were confused by the question, with differences in how children interpret "being affected," or occasional interviewer error. It also highlights that children may distinguish between minor inconveniences and more significant disruptions when reflecting on their experiences.

"It makes it hard to go places such as school and hospital (62%)

This was by far the most common response, accounting for nearly half of all children overall. Older children were especially likely to give this answer, with 60% of 5- to 9-year-olds and 65% of 10- to 14-year-olds mentioning it, compared to lower proportions among younger children. This reflects how the need to travel to school and health services becomes more important as children grow. Girls were slightly more likely than boys to report travel difficulties (65% compared to 60% respectively), which may reflect gendered responsibilities such as accompanying siblings.

There were also important differences across countries. More than three-quarters of children in Zambia (78%) and Malawi (77%) reported this challenge, while in Zimbabwe the figure was much lower (41%). This is consistent with earlier findings where children were less likely to say that bad weather affected them overall. Children with physical or mobility-related disabilities were also more likely to name this impact, highlighting how inaccessible infrastructure compounds the challenges posed by adverse weather.

"It stops me from playing (18%)

Almost one in five children reported that bad weather prevents them from playing. Younger children were much more likely to give this response (24%), reflecting the importance they place on recreation in their daily lives. Boys were also marginally more likely than girls to emphasise this (19% compared to 18% respectively), suggesting differences in how play and outdoor activities are prioritised or experienced.

Across countries, play was consistently the second most common response, with particularly high levels in Uganda (40%). This indicates that beyond disrupting schooling and access to healthcare, bad weather also reduces opportunities for play and recreation, which are critical for children's wellbeing, friendships, and development. The findings highlight how extreme weather changes, because of climate change, can curtail such opportunities.

My family cannot work or make money (26% in Tanzania; <10% elsewhere)

Although less common overall, this was the second most frequent response in Tanzania, where over a quarter of children cited it. In contrast, fewer than one in ten children in other countries gave this response. This suggests that in Tanzania, children with disabilities are more aware of, or directly affected by, the economic consequences of weather disruptions, possibly due to a greater reliance on climate-sensitive livelihoods.

Other reasons (4%)

A small number of children gave reasons not listed in the options, most of which related to health. Some reported becoming sick during extreme weather, while others described flare-ups of existing conditions such as heart problems. The proportions were higher among the youngest children (15% of 3 to 4 year olds) and those out of school (14%), suggesting that health impacts are particularly visible for groups with less routine access to structured support like school. Zimbabwe (13%) also stood out for higher levels of 'other' responses, despite most children there saying they were unaffected by bad weather overall. Children with multiple or speech and language disabilities (6–7%) were also slightly more likely to give 'other' reasons, pointing to the way health concerns intersect with existing vulnerabilities.

How does this make you feel?

Beyond these practical disruptions, children with disabilities were asked how bad weather made them feel, and this highlighted the deep emotional and social consequences of exclusion.

The most common feelings were of sadness and disappointment. Many said simply that they felt "bad" or "unhappy," while others described feeling "lonely" or "inactive." For some, missing out on playing with friends or joining in community life left them feeling isolated and forgotten:
"I feel very sad when I cannot join my friends."

One child summed up their frustration as:
"I just sit at home, I feel useless."

School disruption was another source of distress. A number explained that they missed classes or exams during storms or floods: **"Because of bad weather I can miss exams, and the teacher will give me zero,"**
And:
"I fail to catch up when I miss school."

These interruptions created frustration and anxiety about their future, and several said they feared failing or being unable to keep up.

Health risks also featured strongly. Many associated extreme weather with illness:
"I get headaches when it is too hot"
or
"My skin peels when I go in the sun."

These worries compounded their sense of vulnerability. Some linked their feelings directly to family hardship, noting that floods or droughts left their parents unable to provide food, school fees or other necessities:
"I feel bad when my parents cannot provide basic needs because of floods."

Finally, there were repeated references to being left out or overlooked. Some said they felt **"out of place"** or **"different"** when they could not take part in what others were doing. Others spoke about boredom and frustration at being kept indoors, showing how exclusion is experienced not only as a barrier to practical tasks, but also as a loss of social connection and personal freedom.

Overall, the responses show that being unable to participate is far more than an inconvenience. It affects children's learning, health, confidence and sense of belonging. Taken together, the accounts illustrate how bad weather can impact every aspect of life for children with disabilities.

When there's a big storm, flood, or other danger coming, do people warn you about it in a way that you can easily understand and act on?

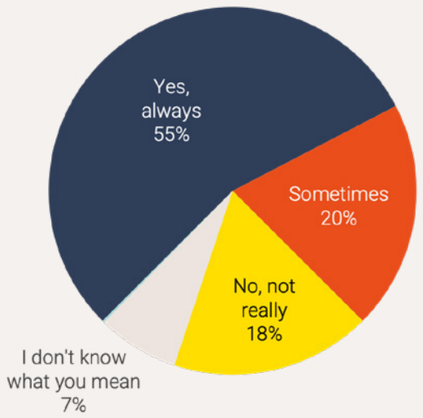


Figure 17. Responses to: Are you warned about dangerous weather (big storm, flood, or other danger), it in a way that is easily understandable?

This question explored whether children with disabilities receive clear warnings that they can act on when there is an extreme weather event about to happen. Most children reported that they do receive warnings they can understand, with more than half (55%) saying that they are always warned in a way they can act on. One fifth (20%) stated that this happens sometimes. However, **almost one in five children with disabilities (18%) stated that they did not receive clear warnings during climate-related disasters**, and a further 7% did not understand the question, highlighting that a **significant minority of children with disabilities in East and Southern Africa remain unprepared for emergencies**.

Younger children aged 3- to 4-years-old were more likely to say they did not understand the question, however there was little difference in the overall trend when disaggregating the data by age group. This was also the case when looking at the school status of the respondents, suggesting that schools do not necessarily play a role in distributing messages. Further research into where children receive such warnings could offer valuable insights for deeper analysis. Gender differences were also minimal, with only small variations between boys and girls.

There were some contrasts when looking at the data by country. Children in Uganda (66%) and Tanzania (65%) were the most likely to say they always receive understandable warnings, while only 40% of children in Rwanda reported this. Zimbabwe presented a striking divide with just over half (58%) saying that they always received clear warnings but a third (35%) said that they did not, suggesting uneven coverage or inconsistent experiences of reliability. A rural-urban divide was also visible, with more rural children (81%) than urban children (73%) saying they always or sometimes received understandable warnings. This challenges assumptions that urban infrastructure ensures better communication and shows that rural systems may, in some cases, reach children with disabilities more effectively.

Deaf-blind children (80%) and those with visual impairments (65%) were among the most likely to say they always received understandable warnings, while children with hearing impairments (42%) and autism (33%) were far less likely to do so. This suggests that some communication formats are working well for certain groups but excluding others, particularly those with sensory or communication-related disabilities. Differences in how the question was interpreted, as well as the

varying levels of daily support available to children, may also influence the responses to this question when looking across the disability types. It is also important to note that only 2% of respondents were children with deaf-blindness, and so this result may not accurately account for experiences of all deaf-blind children.

Why do you think it's hard to get or understand these warnings?

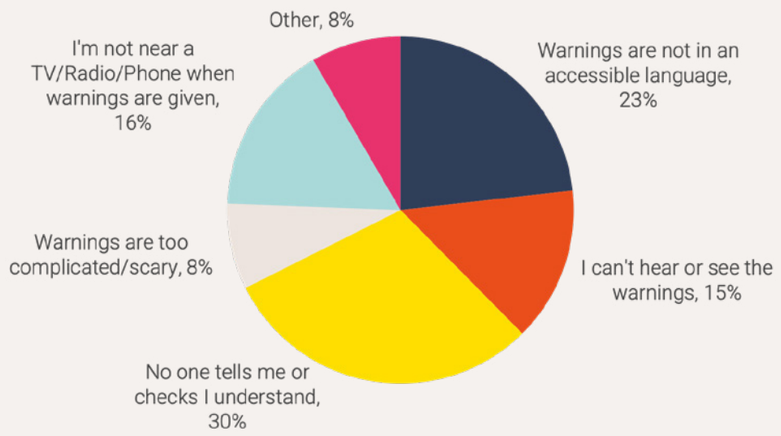


Figure 18. (If 'No', 'Sometimes', or 'I don't know what you mean') Why do you think it's hard to get or understand these warnings?

Children who responded 'No', 'Sometimes' or 'I don't know what you mean' to the question "when there's a big storm, flood, or other danger coming, do people warn you about it in a way that you can easily understand and act on?" were asked why they think it is hard to get or understand warnings. The most common response was 'no one tells me directly or checks if I understand' (30%), followed by 'the warnings are not in a language I understand' (23%).

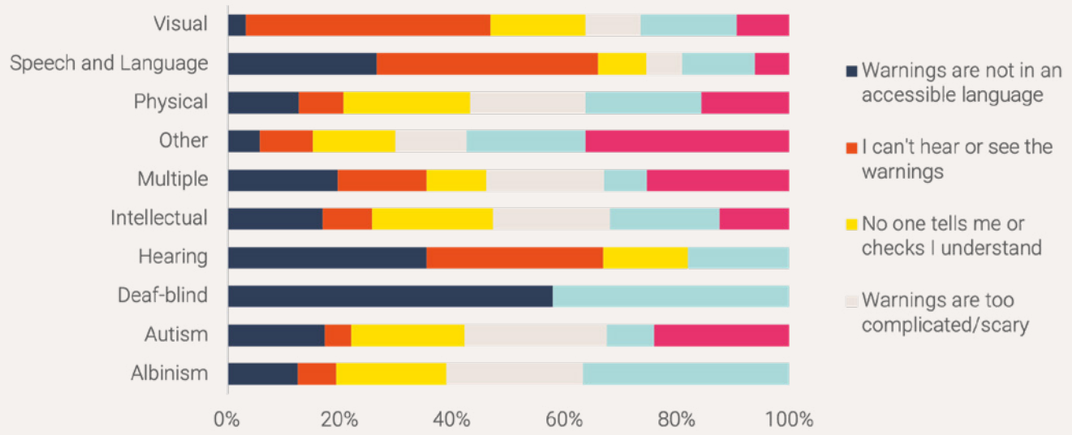


Figure 19. Barriers to receiving warnings, by disability type

No one tells me directly or checks if I understand (30%)

This was the most common reason given, and given by three in ten (30%) of the children. Older children (32% of 10- to 14-year-olds) were especially likely to raise this, suggesting a growing awareness that their understanding is not always confirmed. Of those who responded to this question, Ugandan (43%) and Zambian (39%) children stood out, while children with speech and language difficulties (35%) and those with multiple disabilities (30%) were also more likely to report it. Interestingly, this reason was higher among children in school (31%) compared with those out of school (24%), reinforcing the finding that schools are not necessarily playing a central role in issuing or checking messages. These results highlight the importance of schools, families, and community members working together with the children themselves to ensure that children with disabilities can access and fully understand warning messages.

The warnings are not in a language I understand (23%)

Nearly a quarter of children with disabilities said that warnings are not delivered in a language they could understand. Tanzanian children were particularly affected, with half reporting this barrier. This was also the most reported barrier by children who were deaf-blind (67%), had hearing impairments (41%), had speech and language (35%) and multiple disabilities (30%). This highlights the importance of using local languages and a diverse range of accessible formats.

I'm not near a TV, radio, or phone when warnings are given (16%)

Some children said they missed warnings because they were away from devices such as radios, phones, or TVs. This was the second most common barrier for children in Malawi (30%), Rwanda (27%) and Zambia (21%), but much less significant in the other countries. This reflects how reliance on technology can leave children excluded, particularly those in households with limited access to communication infrastructure.

I can't hear or see the warnings (15%)

Approximately one in six children with disabilities said warnings were inaccessible because of hearing or sight limitations. This was most common among children with visual impairments (38%) and was more often reported in Uganda (24%) and Tanzania (21%) than elsewhere. These findings highlight the importance of using multiple communication channels, including visual and auditory, to ensure all children can access vital information.

The warnings are too complicated or scary (8%)

A smaller group explained that the messages were either too difficult to understand or too scary. While less common overall, there is still a need for child-friendly communication that informs and empowers children without overwhelming them.

Other (8%)

Among the children who responded "Other," the reasons varied widely. Some were too young or had complex disabilities that prevented them from answering, while others were dependent on caregivers, which limited any awareness of extreme weather warnings. Several reported that caregivers or community members showed little interest or failed to explain warnings, while others simply did not know, lacked experience, or had never received clear information. A few children said they relied on their own awareness, but some described difficult home situations, being left indoors, unsupervised, or with unsupportive family members, that further limited their access to, or their understanding of, warnings.

Overall, these barriers reflect a mix of personal limitations, caregiver dependence, neglect, and poor communication. Although expressed by a relatively small number of children, these concerns are significant, underscoring the need to ensure that all children with disabilities are meaningfully included and supported in receiving and understanding warning messages.

If there was a big emergency because of bad or extreme weather and you had to leave your home, do you know where to go to get away from danger?

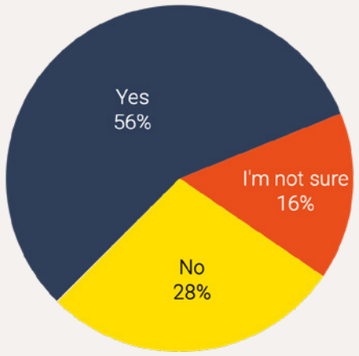


Figure 20. If there was a big emergency because of bad or extreme weather and you had to leave your home, do you know where to go to get away from danger?

The survey then sought to understand whether children with disabilities know what to do if they had to leave their home because of bad or extreme weather events. Just over half of children (57%) said they knew where to go in an emergency. However, **almost a third of children with disabilities (30%) said they did not know where to go in an emergency, and a further 16% were unsure**. This highlights a major gap in children's preparedness and knowledge about evacuation.

Awareness grew with age. Only 40% of 3- to 4-year-olds said they knew where to go, compared with 62% of 10- to 14-year-olds. Younger children were also much more likely to say, 'I'm not sure' (22%), reflecting both developmental limitations and a lack of targeted preparedness education for this age group.

Schooling also made a major difference, with almost 6 in 10 children in school (59%) saying they knew where to go, compared with just 37% of those out of school, suggesting schools are a critical avenue for preparedness education. Country-level patterns reinforced this divide. **None of the out-of-school children in Rwanda, Uganda, or Zimbabwe reported knowing where to evacuate in an emergency**, while small proportions did so in Kenya (25%) and Tanzania (19%), which is still significantly lower when comparing responses from children attending school.

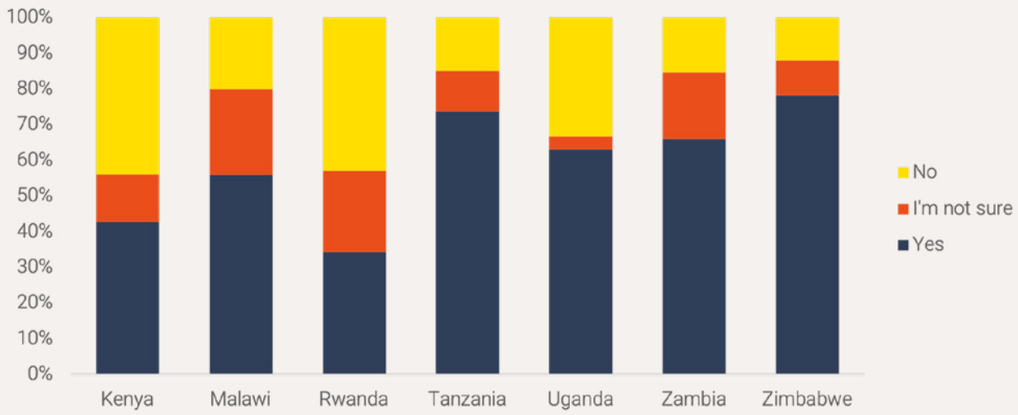


Figure 21. Knowledge of evacuation by country

Children in Zimbabwe (78%), Zambia (66%), and Uganda (63%) demonstrated the highest levels of confidence in terms of where to go in an emergency, while those in Rwanda (34%) and Kenya (43%) were much less certain. In Rwanda, where knowledge of evacuation routes was lowest, uncertainty was especially pronounced in rural areas, where over half (55%) of rural children were unsure. Overall, however, rural children were slightly more likely than urban children to say they knew where to go (62% compared to 55% respectively).

This finding is somewhat surprising, given that urban areas often have more formal disaster risk reduction structures. It may reflect that rural children are more accustomed to preparing for hazards such as floods or droughts, or that community-level coping mechanisms in rural areas are stronger. Conversely, it may suggest a gap in preparedness planning in urban settings, where children with disabilities may be less directly involved in community resilience activities.

Across the dataset, boys and girls gave broadly similar responses, but country-level patterns revealed more gender disparity. In both Zimbabwe (where certainty was highest) and Rwanda (where it was lowest), over half of the children who said they knew where to go in a climate-related emergency were boys (60% in Zimbabwe and 59% in Rwanda). The only country where the reverse was true was Zambia, where girls expressed greater certainty than boys (56% compared to 44% respectively), a difference that influenced the overall results.

Type of disability again highlighted inequalities. While 75% of children with albinism said they knew where to go, only 33% of children with autism and 45% of deaf-blind children did so, suggesting that preparedness communication and evacuation planning often do not reach children with certain disabilities.

If you do know where to go in an emergency, do you think it would be easy for you to get there safely?

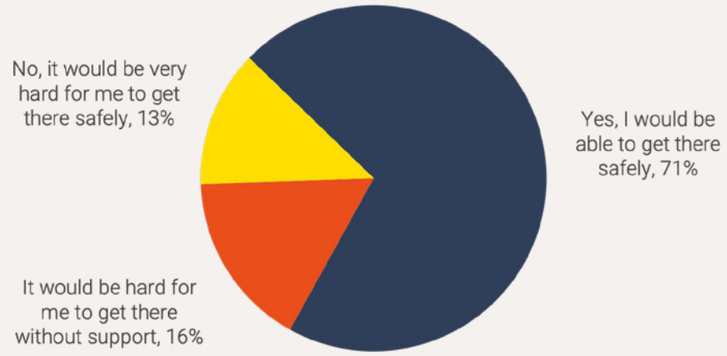


Figure 22. (If 'Yes') Do you think it would be easy for you to get there safely?

Children who said they knew where to evacuate were then asked if they thought it would be easy for them to get there safely. Of these, over two-thirds (71%) said 'Yes', while 16% said it would be hard without support. **Over one in ten (13%) of children with disabilities said it would be very hard for them to evacuate**

from their homes safely. Although the latter groups were smaller, these responses highlight the importance of finding more accessible evacuation points and ensuring adequate support is available so that children with disabilities can reach safety when evacuation routes are otherwise challenging.

‘Yes, I would be able to get there safely’ (71%)

Most children who knew where to go felt confident they could reach safety. This was especially true for older children (74% of 10- to 14-year-olds, 70% of 5- to 9-year-olds, compared with just 25% of 3- to 4-year-olds) and those attending school (74% compared to 31% out-of-school). Country differences were also marked. Children in Uganda (89%) and Malawi (88%) were among the most confident, while just over half of children in Kenya (56%) and Zambia (59%) said the same. Rural children were also more likely to report confidence than urban children (76% compared to 68% respectively).

‘It would be hard for me to get there safely without a lot of help from family/ friends’ (16%)

A significant minority of children with disabilities (16%) said they could only reach safety with support. Younger children stood out, with two-thirds of 3- to 4-year-olds giving this response, reflecting their reliance on adults. Over half of out-of-school children (58%) also said this, further pointing to the role schools can play in evacuation preparedness.

‘No, it would be very hard for me to get there safely’ (13%)

One in ten or 13% of children with disabilities reported that to evacuate safely would be extremely difficult. This was most common in Zambia (31%) and Rwanda (22%), suggesting particular challenges in evacuation planning or accessibility.

Differences by disability type and gender were minimal overall, though small numbers highlight the need for tailored evacuation planning for children with specific support needs.

Qualitative responses revealed both uncertainty and resourcefulness. Many children admitted they had no idea what to do, saying:

“I don’t know where to go, no one has told me,”
Or:
“I am not sure what an emergency means.”

This underscores the significant information gap around preparedness. Those who did suggest options often described relying on family or neighbours:

“With help from an adult I am able to get to a place that is safe,”
Or:
“I would run to my uncle’s house.”

A number said they would follow their parents or depend on siblings and neighbours to guide them. Others pointed to serious barriers that would make evacuation difficult. Some cited long distances or poor roads, while others referred to their impairments:
“I cannot walk fast, so I would be left behind.”

A child with albinism explained:
“It would be very hard… only people who know me can help because others are scared of me because of my skin.”

A worrying number described unsafe coping strategies, such as:
“I would just stay indoors and hide”
Or:
“We crowd in one small house and get sick.”

These responses underline how a lack of safe alternatives leaves children at risk during disasters. At the same time, several children offered constructive ideas. They asked for information in accessible formats, such as:
“They should tell us in sign language where to go,”
And called for inclusion in preparedness planning:
“Government must provide a safe place for children with disabilities.”

These responses show that while some children feel prepared, many are still uncertain or face significant barriers to safe evacuation. Most rely heavily on family networks, and when these are absent or insufficient, children risk being left behind or forced into unsafe alternatives. Yet the children's own suggestions also show the way forward. They will benefit from clearer communication, accessible information, and inclusive planning, which can transform preparedness for children with disabilities.

These findings also further highlight how exclusion is experienced not only as a practical barrier, but also as a source of fear, uncertainty and dependence, reinforcing the emotional toll that children with disabilities described.

Has bad weather (such as too much sun, rain, cold, or storms) ever made you feel sick or hurt your body in any way?

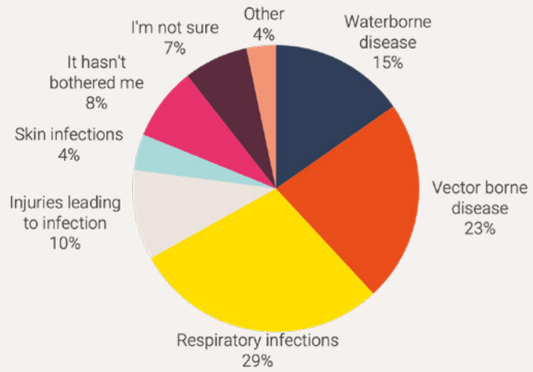


Figure 23. Has bad weather (like too much sun, rain, cold, or storms) ever made you feel sick or hurt your body in any way?

When asked whether bad weather has ever made them feel sick or caused physical harm, an overwhelming majority of children with disabilities reported health impacts. This was a multiple-choice question, so children were able to select more than one impact. The most common response was respiratory infections (41%), followed by vector-borne diseases such as malaria (33%), and waterborne diseases (22%). A smaller but significant group said they had experienced injuries that became infected (15%), while fewer children mentioned skin infections (6%) or other reasons. These findings highlight how extreme weather can directly undermine children's health and compound existing vulnerabilities.

Respiratory infections (41%)

Respiratory illness was the most widespread health impact of bad weather, affecting over four in ten children overall. Older children were slightly more likely to report this (43% of 10- to 14-year-olds compared with 37% of 3- to 4-year-olds), reflecting increasing exposure through school and outdoor activity.

There were strong country differences. More than half of children in Malawi (60%) and Zimbabwe (53%) gave this response, while levels were lower in Tanzania (11%) and Uganda (10%). While children living in urban areas were more likely to experience respiratory infections because of extreme weather than their rural counterparts (43% compared to 36% respectively). Children with intellectual disabilities (45%), autism (56%), and multiple disabilities (55%) were among the most likely to report respiratory illness.

Vector-borne disease (33%)

Almost one in three children linked bad weather to mosquito-borne diseases, such as malaria. This was especially common in Uganda (52%) and Malawi (58%), but was not raised as an issue in Zimbabwe, reflecting how local conditions shape children's exposure.

Older children (36% of 10- to 14-year-olds) were more likely to report this problem than younger children, while rural children were disproportionately affected (48% compared with 28% in urban areas), pointing to the risks of standing water and limited prevention measures. Children with hearing impairments (37%), speech and language difficulties (38%), and deaf-blindness (45%) also reported higher levels, showing how communication barriers may leave some children less protected.

Waterborne disease (22%)

More than one in five children said they became sick with diarrhoea or other waterborne illnesses because of bad weather. Rates were especially high in Malawi (60%), highlighting how flooding and poor sanitation increases exposure to unsafe water. Rural children were again more affected (29%) than those in urban areas (20%).

Children in schools reported this problem more often (24%) than those out of school (4%), which may reflect both differences in awareness and exposure through shared facilities. Children with deaf-blindness (33%), hearing impairments (41%), and multiple disabilities (30%) were among the groups most at risk.

Injuries leading to infection (15%)

A smaller group of children reported being injured during storms or floods, with wounds that later became infected. This was most common in Rwanda (32%) and Zambia (24%).

Boys were slightly more likely than girls to give this response (15% vs 14%), reflecting possible differences in outdoor activity. Children with physical disabilities (31%) and albinism (17%) were also more likely to mention this, showing how mobility challenges and sun sensitivity can increase risk.

Skin infections (6%)

Fewer children mentioned skin infections overall, but this was still an important issue, particularly for children with albinism who are vulnerable to sun exposure. Though smaller in proportion, this highlights another way in which weather compounds existing health vulnerabilities.

Other reasons (small proportion)

Some children gave other health-related responses that were not listed in the options. These included getting headaches, stomach-aches and other body pains, being affected by too much sunshine that hurt their their eyes, and triggering existing illnesses.

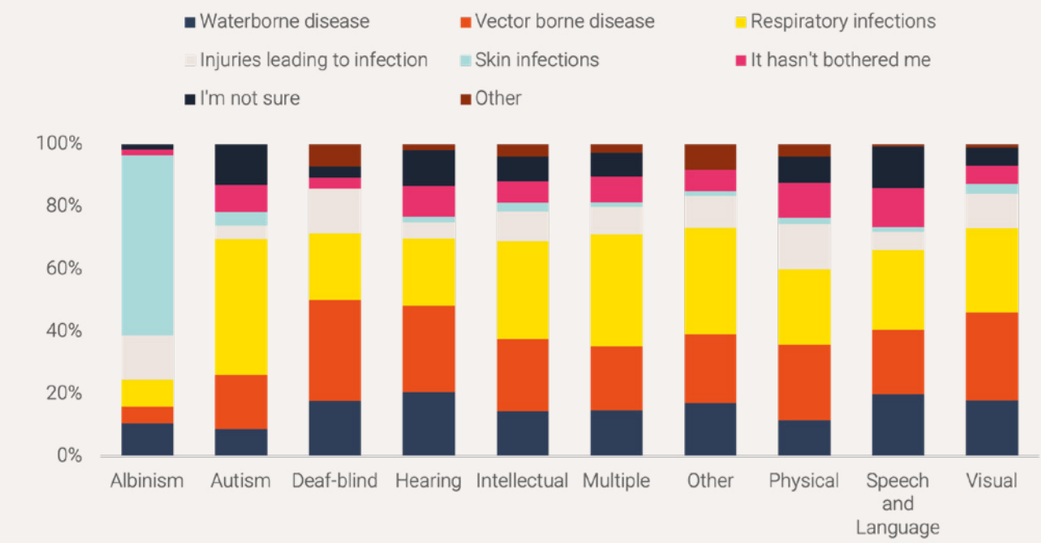


Figure 24. Health impacts of bad weather by disability type

Key findings

Extreme and unpredictable weather is a persistent barrier for children with disabilities across East and Southern Africa, disrupting daily life and taking a significant emotional toll. Children spoke of sadness, loneliness, and frustration when unable to attend school, play with friends, or join in community life. Others described fear, anxiety, and unsafe coping strategies, such as hiding indoors or crowding into unsuitable shelters, underscoring how exclusion is experienced both practically and emotionally.

Half of the children with disabilities reported that bad weather regularly prevents them from doing the things they usually enjoy, such as going to school, playing, or accessing services. While the impact is widespread, it is not evenly felt. Older children, those in school, rural populations, and children with specific disabilities such as albinism, visual impairments, or deaf-blindness, were especially vulnerable. Children also highlighted health risks, reporting respiratory illness, vector- and waterborne diseases, and injuries, with some groups, particularly younger children and those out of school, more exposed to these dangers.

Despite these challenges, many children do not receive warnings in accessible formats or with follow-up to check comprehension. **Even when children know what to do, a large minority do not know where to evacuate, or said it would be very difficult to reach safety without significant support.** Qualitative data revealed reliance on family and neighbours, and fears of being left behind or discriminated against during evacuation.

Overall, the findings show how climate-related risks intersect with disability, age, geography, and national context. They show that climate change is not only disrupting daily life but also undermining health, safety, and preparedness for children with disabilities. Gaps in warning systems, accessible infrastructure, psychosocial support, and inclusive planning stand out as areas of urgent concern.

- **Bad weather disrupts many children's lives:** Half of children with disabilities reported that weather regularly prevents them from doing things they enjoy, with older children, those in rural areas, and those in school most affected.
- **Education and healthcare are hardest hit:** Two-thirds of children with disabilities said bad weather stops them reaching school or hospitals, showing how extreme weather undermines access to essential services.
- **Differences between countries are noticeable:** Children with disabilities in Uganda, Malawi, and Zambia reported the highest impacts of climate change, while most children who responded in Zimbabwe said they were less affected.
- **Warnings do not reach all children:** Almost one in five children with disabilities said they never receive warnings in a way that they understand, with children with hearing impairments and autism most excluded.
- **Preparedness remains weak:** Almost a third of children with disabilities did not know where to go in an emergency, and more than a quarter said reaching safety would be difficult or impossible without support.
- **Health risks are widespread:** Four in ten children with disabilities reported respiratory illness as a result of bad weather. A third experienced vector-borne diseases and one in five cited waterborne illnesses, which they all linked to bad weather.
- **Children with disabilities face additional risks:** Children with albinism, multiple disabilities, and sensory impairments were most likely to report severe impacts as a result of bad weather.
- **The emotional toll is significant:** Many children with disabilities described feeling sad, lonely, excluded or anxious when bad weather kept them from partaking in everyday activities, while others expressed fear of being left behind in emergencies.

Next steps

- Strengthen accessible warning systems by using multiple formats (visual, auditory, simple language) and ensuring direct follow-up with children to confirm understanding.
- Prioritise schools as hubs for disaster preparedness by embedding accessible early warning education, evacuation drills, and information-sharing into school routines.
- Invest in resilient infrastructure that ensures reliable access to education, healthcare, and safe evacuation points in both rural and urban areas.
- Co-design communication methods and evacuation support with children with different disabilities to ensure they are practical and inclusive.
- Address country-specific risks through targeted programming. For example, vector-borne disease prevention in Uganda and Malawi, or improved evacuation access in Zambia and Rwanda.
- Integrate child health into climate responses by strengthening health systems to anticipate and respond to spikes in respiratory, vector-borne, and waterborne diseases that can be linked to extreme weather.
- Provide psychosocial support and safe spaces to address the sadness, anxiety, and exclusion children with disabilities experience when bad weather disrupts their lives.
- Amplify children's voices in climate and disaster planning to ensure solutions reflect their lived realities, priorities, and suggestions for making systems more inclusive.

Part 2: Climate change education

Do you know the term climate change?

Just over half of children (53%) said that they do know the term ‘climate change’, while almost as many (46%) said that they did not. Awareness increased steadily with age. **Only one in five of the youngest children aged 3- to 4-years-old reported familiarity (20%) with the term climate change, compared with nearly two in five of those aged 5 to 9 (39%), and more than three in five of those aged 10 to 14 (62%).** This suggests that as children grow older, they are more likely to be exposed to or remember climate-related terminology.

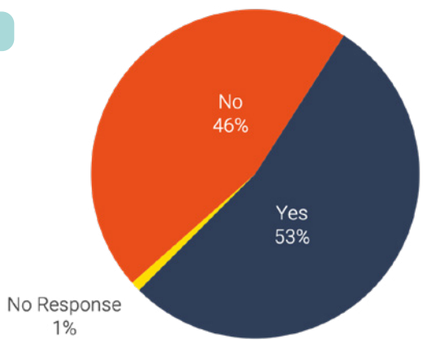


Figure 25. Percentage of children with disabilities who know the term ‘climate change’

Schooling also made a decisive difference. **More than half of children in school (58%) reported knowing the term climate change, compared to fewer than one in five (19%) of those out of school,** highlighting the role of education as a key source of climate awareness. Overall, urban children were slightly less likely than rural children to know about climate change. However, the most striking difference was among out-of-school urban children, where 82% said they did not know the term climate change. Gender differences were negligible, with almost identical proportions of girls (54%) and boys (53%) saying they had heard of climate change.

National differences, however, were significant. Awareness was lowest in Tanzania (21%) and Kenya (28%), while children in Zimbabwe (75%), Rwanda (61%) and Malawi (60%) were far more likely to know the term. Urban children (58%) were also much more likely than rural children (33%) to be familiar with the concept, **suggesting there is greater access to information and education in cities**. Children with disabilities showed varied patterns. Children with albinism (81%) and visual impairments (69%) were more likely to be aware, while those with autism (19%) and hearing impairments (49%) were less likely. This shows that exposure to climate change information is uneven across disability types, which is likely linked to communication barriers and differing levels of inclusive education.

Overall, while just over half of children have heard the term, awareness is strongly shaped by age, education, geography and disability, with certain groups far less likely to be familiar with climate change.

If you do know the term, what does climate change mean to you?

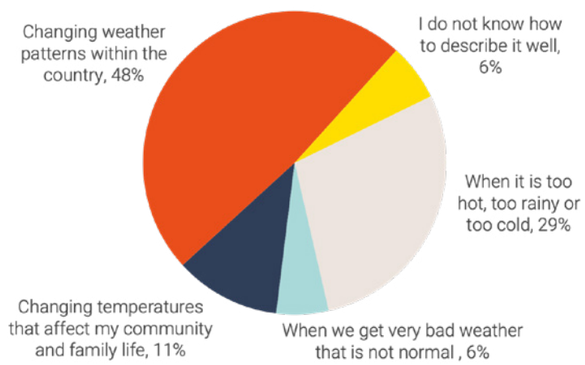


Figure 26. (If ‘Yes’) What does climate change mean to you?

Among the children who recognised the term climate change, they were asked to explain what it means to them. The most common explanation was that it means changing weather patterns within their country (48%). Others described it through personal experiences of unusual heat, rain, or cold (28%), or as changing temperatures affecting their family or community (11%). A small proportion associated it with very bad weather that is not normal (6%) or said they did not know how to describe it well (6%).

‘The changing weather patterns within the country’ (48%)

This was the most frequent response, and it became more common with age, rising to just over half of 10- to 14-year-olds (51%). Urban children were far more likely than rural children to use this explanation (54% compared to 32% respectively), reflecting differences in how climate information is accessed and framed. By country, it was especially dominant in Zimbabwe (63%) and Zambia (52%). Children with intellectual disabilities (63%) and those with visual impairments (44%) were also particularly likely to use this explanation, showing that many link climate change to broader environmental shifts.

‘When it is too hot, too rainy or too cold’ (28%)

This response was much more common among younger children, with 42% of 3- to 4-year-olds using it compared to just 26% of 10- to 14-year-olds. Rural children were also more likely to frame climate change in this experiential way (41% compared to 24% of urban children). Tanzania (38%) and Uganda (36%) had the highest levels of this response, showing how children’s immediate experiences of temperature and rainfall shape their understanding in these countries.

‘The changing temperatures that affect my community and family life’ (11%)

Though less common overall, this explanation was more prominent in Malawi (19%) and among children with autism (29%), who were more likely to link climate change to local, family-oriented impacts.

‘When we get very bad weather that is not normal (such as lots of floods and landslides, it gets too hot for a long time, it doesn’t rain for a long time)’ (6%)

A small but important minority defined climate change as extreme or abnormal events. This was highest in Rwanda (11%) and Zambia (7%), suggesting that children in these contexts may particularly associate climate change with dramatic episodes of flooding, storms or drought.

‘I have read or heard about it but do not know how to describe it well’ (6%)

Some children recognised the term but struggled to define it. This was most common in Zimbabwe (15%) and Uganda (13%). Children with hearing (19%) and intellectual disabilities (7%) were also more likely to give this response, suggesting that some awareness exists without full understanding.

Have you ever learnt about climate change?

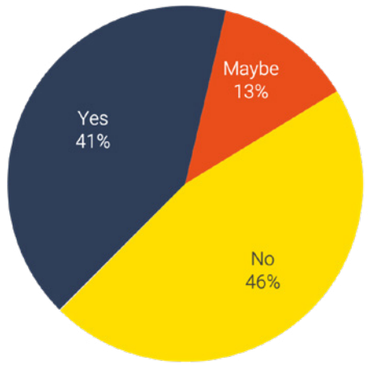


Figure 27. Have you ever learned about climate change?

Although just over half of children with disabilities surveyed knew the term, only 39% reported learning about climate change. 47% of children said they had not, and a further 12% said ‘maybe’. As with awareness, learning increased with age. Only 12% of children aged 3 to 4 reported having learnt about climate change, compared to 27% of 5- to 9-year-olds and half of children aged 10 to 14 (50%).

School status again played a pivotal role. **Almost half of children in school (46%) had learned about climate change, compared with only 8% of those out of school.** Girls were slightly more likely than boys to say they had learnt about climate change (45% compared to 38% respectively), although the differences were relatively small.
There were sharp contrasts between countries. Learning levels were highest in Zimbabwe (68%), Tanzania (55%) and Malawi (52%), but much lower in Kenya (16%) and Rwanda (38%). Urban children were more likely than rural children to report having learnt about climate change (44% compared to 33% respectively).

Disability status again influenced exposure. Children with albinism (63%) and visual impairments (60%) were the most likely to report learning, while those with autism (6%) and deaf-blind children (6%) were the least likely. These findings highlight significant gaps in how climate education is reaching children with different types of disabilities.

If you have learnt about climate change, where did you learn?

For children who said they had learnt about climate change, they were asked to explain where or who they had learnt about climate change from. The most common source was teachers or schools (41%), followed by parents and guardians (14%), community awareness programmes (9%), friends and acquaintances (6%), and a very small group citing other sources (1%).

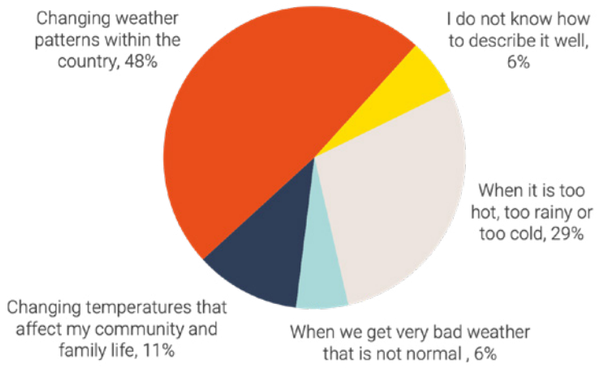


Figure 28. (If 'Yes' or 'Maybe') Where did you learn about climate change?

'Teachers or schools' (41%)

School was by far the most important source for learning about climate change, and this increased with age – reaching 50% of 10- to 14-year-olds. It was the dominant channel across most countries, particularly in Malawi, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe, where over half of children mentioned it. Children with albinism (63%), deaf-blind children (60%) and those with visual impairments (60%) were especially likely to say they had learnt about climate change at school, suggesting inclusive education plays a strong role. By contrast, only 4% of children out-of-school reported learning this way, showing a clear gap for excluded groups.

'Parents or guardians' (14%)

Parents were an important secondary source for children with disabilities learning about climate change. This was most common in Malawi, where nearly two in five children (39%) reported learning from parents. Girls (16%) were slightly more likely than boys (13%) to cite this channel. It was also more often reported by children with 'other' disabilities (25%) and those with visual impairments (21%), pointing to the role of family in reinforcing awareness, especially where school-based learning is limited.

'Community awareness programmes' (9%)

Just under one in ten children with disabilities have learnt about climate change from community initiatives. This was especially influential in Malawi (26%), where such programmes appear to be a major channel of information. Children with visual impairments (18%) were also more likely to report community awareness programmes, suggesting that these may provide alternative, accessible spaces for engagement.

'Friends and acquaintances' (6%)

A smaller proportion learnt about climate change from peers, but this was notably higher in Malawi (18%). It was also more common among children with speech and language difficulties (11%) and albinism (10%), suggesting that peer networks can sometimes play an important role.

'Other sources' (1%)

Very few children mentioned "other" sources, with no clear pattern across groups.

Key findings

Awareness and understanding of climate change among children with disabilities in East and Southern Africa is increasing but remains uneven. **Just under half of the children with disabilities surveyed do not know the term 'climate change', and fewer than four in ten have ever learnt about it.** Age, schooling and geography make a clear difference, with older children, those in school, and children in urban areas far more likely to understand and have been taught about climate change. National disparities are striking. Children with disabilities in Zimbabwe, Malawi and Rwanda are much more likely to know and learn about climate change, while those in Kenya and Tanzania are the least likely. Children with albinism and visual impairments were relatively well reached, but those with autism, hearing impairments and deaf-blindness remained excluded.

Where children do recognise the term climate change, their understanding varies. Many link climate change to changing weather patterns, while younger children often describe it through immediate experiences of unusual heat, rain or cold. Schools are the main source of learning, but families and communities also play a valuable role, particularly where school access is limited.

- **Climate change awareness is not universal:** Only half of children with disabilities recognise the term climate change, leaving a large proportion without even a basic entry point to the issue.
- **Education drives awareness:** Children with disabilities in schools are nearly three times as likely to know and learn about climate change compared with those who are not in school, showing how exclusion from education directly translates into exclusion from knowledge.
- **Older children are better informed:** Awareness and understanding among children with disabilities increases with age, with the youngest children least able to define or explain climate change in meaningful terms.
- **National disparities are wide:** Children in Zimbabwe, Malawi and Rwanda are far more likely to know and learn about climate change than those in Kenya and Tanzania, pointing to differences in policy, curricula and public discourse.
- **Rural children are left behind:** Children with disabilities living in urban areas are almost twice as likely as rural children to define climate change in broader terms, highlighting a serious equity gap in access to information.
- **Disability inclusion is inconsistent:** Children with albinism and visual impairments report high levels of awareness, but children with autism, hearing impairments and deaf-blindness are far less likely to be reached, reflecting gaps in accessible communication.
- **Understanding is partial and uneven:** While many children with disabilities describe climate change as changing weather patterns, younger children and some groups interpret it mainly as day-to-day extremes of heat, rain or cold, showing that depth of knowledge remains limited.
- **Schools are the primary source of knowledge:** Teachers are by far the most common source of learning, but parents and community programmes play an important and complementary role, especially where school access is limited.

Next steps

- Ensure climate education is embedded as a core part of curricula, delivered in ways that are accessible to children with all types of disabilities.
- Develop simple, age-appropriate explanations and activities that help younger children to understand climate change from an early age.
- Invest in outreach support, teacher training, and resources for rural schools and communities so that children outside urban populations are not left behind.
- Strengthen the role of parents, caregivers, and community awareness programmes as vital complementary sources of information, particularly for children who are not in school.
- Use diverse, accessible formats, such as braille, sign language, easy-read text, and visual aids, so that no child is excluded from climate learning.
- Support targeted efforts in countries with low awareness, such as Kenya and Tanzania, while consolidating and scaling up good practice in higher-performing countries like Zimbabwe, Malawi and Rwanda.

Part 3: Life in the community

Have you ever participated in any activity related to helping the environment, such as planting trees?

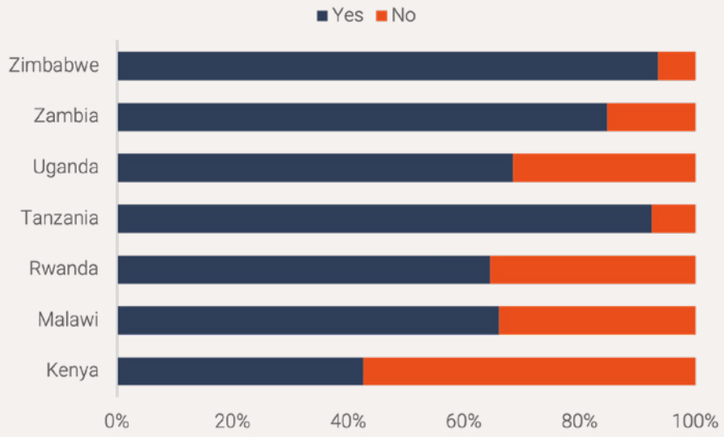


Figure 29. Participation in environmental activities, by country

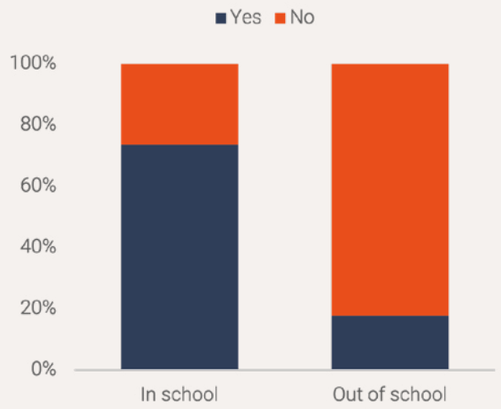


Figure 30. Participation in environmental activities, by school status

Overall, **two-thirds of children with disabilities (67%) reported having participated in some kind of environmental activity**, while around a third (32%) had not. Participation rose with age and school attendance, with three-quarters of older (75%) and in-school (74%) respondents involved. Country patterns were striking, with over 90% in Zimbabwe and Tanzania compared to under half in Kenya. Children with disabilities living in rural communities (71%) were more likely than their urban peers (66%) to have participated, and disability type also mattered. Children with albinism (81%) and visual impairments (82%) reported high participation, while those with autism (44%) and multiple disabilities (55%) reported the lowest.

Among those who had participated, the most common activities were planting trees (54%) and working in school gardens (48%). A smaller group reported involvement in simple water- and solar-saving practices (16%), while only a handful mentioned creating visual signs (3%) or other activities (4%). Since this was a multiple-choice question, many children had taken part in more than one type of activity.

If you have participated in activity to help the environment, what were they?

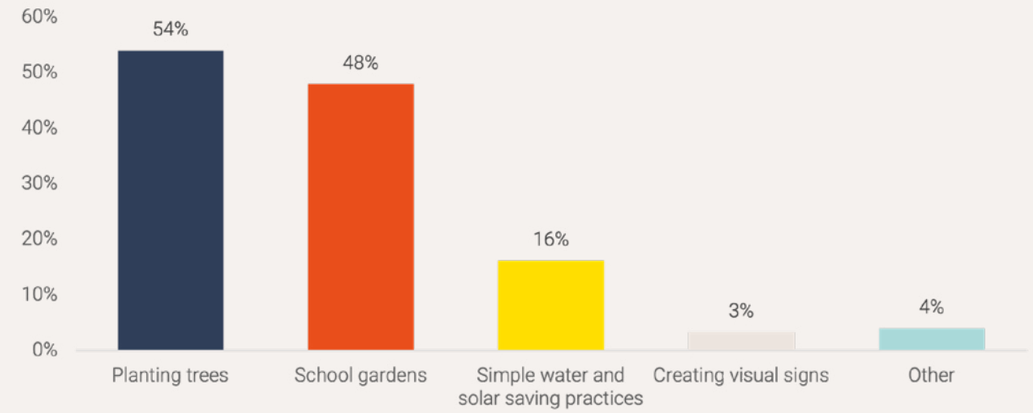


Figure 31. (If 'Yes') Which activities have you participated in?

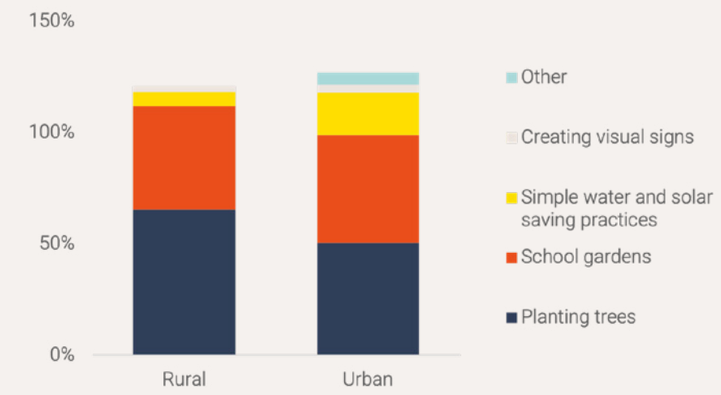
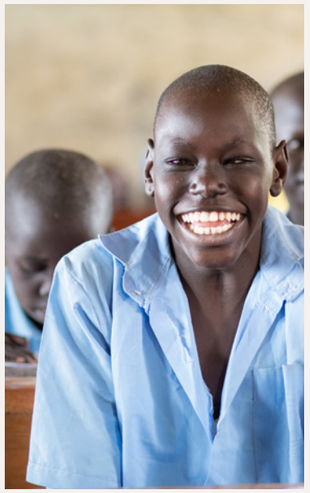


Figure 32. Climate change activities by location



‘I have participated in planting trees’ (54%)

Planting trees was the most common activity. More than half of children with disabilities aged 5 to 9 (56%) and 10 to 14 (54%) reported doing so, compared with fewer than half of the youngest group. Participation was highest in Rwanda (78%) and Uganda (72%), while in Zambia (24%) and Zimbabwe (24%) only a minority had taken part, showing how country contexts shape opportunities and priorities. Rural children (65%) were more likely than those in urban areas (51%) to plant trees, reflecting the closer connection between rural life and land-based environmental practices.

‘I have been involved in school gardens, tree planting, or waste reduction programmes’ (48%)

School-based activities were almost as common as tree planting, with nearly half of children with disabilities reporting involvement. This was especially high among the youngest children aged 3 to 4 (67%), highlighting the role of early childhood education in engaging them. By contrast with tree planting, school-based activities were most widespread in Zimbabwe (59%) and Zambia (58%) but much less so in Rwanda (22%) and Uganda (37%). These inverse patterns further suggest that national programmes emphasise different forms of environmental engagement.

‘I have engaged in simple water- and solar-saving practices like turning off taps properly, collecting rainwater for watering plants or switching off lights when not needed’ (16%)

16% of children mentioned these practices. They were more common in urban areas (19%) than rural (7%), likely reflecting greater emphasis on resource management in urban households and schools. Children with intellectual disabilities (24%) were more likely to mention them than those with visual impairments (6%), pointing to differences in how inclusive or accessible these initiatives are.

‘Other activities’ (4%)

A small minority of children (4%) described “other” environmental actions, most frequently in Zimbabwe (18%) and among out-of-school children (13%). Nearly all these responses referred to cleaning surroundings or litter-picking, showing that some children connect environmental responsibility with visible, everyday practices outside of formal education settings.

Among the one-third of children who had not taken part in environmental activities, the most common explanation was that they had not had an opportunity (55%). A further quarter (25%) said that activities were not disability-friendly, while 14% mentioned other reasons. A small but important minority said they were actively looking for opportunities to get involved (4%). In contrast, very few children said they saw no need to participate (3%).

If you have not participated in any environmental activities, why?

‘I have not had an opportunity to’ (55%)

Not having had an opportunity to participate in environmental activities was the most common reason given by children with disabilities. It increased with age, from 39% of 5- to 9-year-olds to 64% of 10- to 14-year-olds, suggesting that older

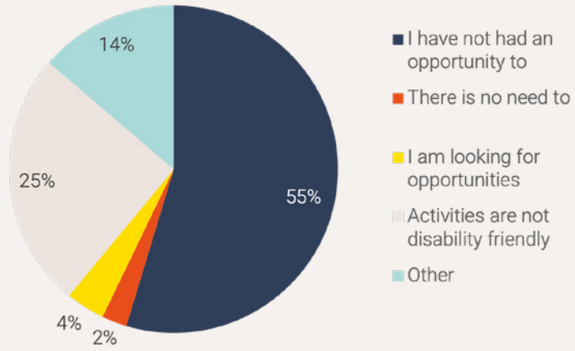


Figure 33. (If ‘No’) Why have you not participated in any activities?

children may be more aware of the gap between their interest and available opportunities. Children with disabilities who were in school were also much more likely to cite this barrier (64%) than those out of school (31%), which is notable given that the children had indicated schools provide more opportunities to participate. Rural children (78%) were far more likely than their urban peers (49%) to report a lack of opportunity, reflecting the uneven distribution of organised activities. Tanzania (83%), Uganda (77%), and Malawi (78%) reported particularly high levels of unmet opportunity, while in Kenya only one-third of children gave this response. Differences also emerged across disability groups, with the highest numbers among children with albinism (89%), visual impairments (76%), and deaf-blind children (78%), and the lowest among those with autism (40%) and multiple disabilities (47%).

‘Activities are not disability-friendly’ (25%)

A quarter of children with disabilities said they had been excluded from environmental activities because they were not accessible. This was more commonly reported by out-of-school children (42%) than those in school (19%), and by urban children (30%) compared to rural children (8%). Children with Autism (60%) were especially likely to cite this reason, followed by those with physical disabilities (31%), multiple disabilities (28%), and intellectual disabilities (25%).

‘Other reasons’ (14%)

A minority of children with disabilities (14%) gave other explanations for not taking part in environmental activities. These were especially common in Zimbabwe (38%) and among children recorded under ‘other’ disabilities (46%). The responses varied, but most centred on practical barriers. Some said they had never been invited or informed about activities, while others cited illness, lack of time, or needing to prioritise schoolwork. A few noted that their parents did not allow them to participate, while others pointed to a lack of nearby programmes or transport difficulties. These explanations highlight how exclusion is not always about attitude or accessibility, but also about information gaps, competing responsibilities, and structural barriers that prevent children from getting involved, even when they might want to.

What do you think children with disabilities can do to help their community be ready for bad weather, such as floods, heatwaves, or storms caused by climate change?

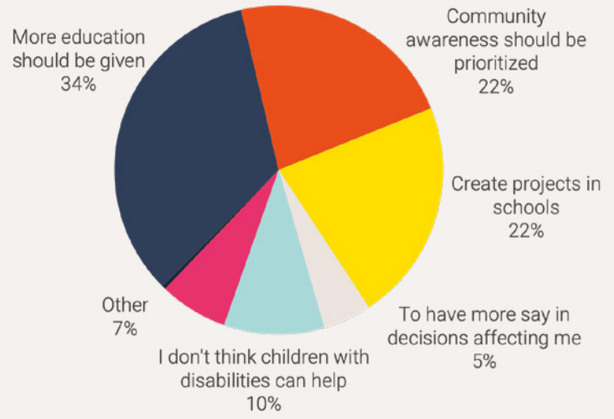


Figure 34. What children with disabilities can do to help their community be ready for bad weather caused by climate change

When asked what role children with disabilities could play in helping their communities prepare for bad weather linked to climate change, the most common answers focused on education and awareness. One in three children (34%) said that more education should be given, nearly one in four (23%) highlighted the need for stronger community awareness, and a similar proportion (22%) pointed to practical school-based projects such as gardens, clean-up campaigns, or tree planting.

Smaller groups said that children with disabilities should have more say in decisions that affect them (5%) or expressed doubt about whether children with disabilities could help at all (10%). A further 7% gave ‘other’ responses, which add uncertainty but also new ideas. Together, these answers show that children value both learning and awareness-raising, alongside concrete, visible activities in schools and communities.

‘More education should be given in schools and the community on climate change and resilience’ (34%)

Education was the most common theme. It was mentioned most often by children aged 5 to 14 (around one-third in both age groups), with younger children slightly less likely to suggest it. Children with disabilities in schools (36%) were significantly more likely to call for more education compared with those out of school (20%), underlining the central role that formal learning plays in shaping awareness of climate resilience. Country patterns showed particularly high emphasis in Tanzania (58%) and Zambia (47%), while children in Uganda (23%) and Kenya (27%) were less likely to suggest it. Among disability groups, children with albinism (42%) and hearing impairments (44%) were especially strong on this point, whereas children with intellectual disabilities (30%) and those with multiple disabilities (27%) mentioned it less.

> **“We want to also learn more about climate because it affects us,”**

> **“Having more information will boost my confidence to reach out to others because I won’t be stuck once they ask questions.”**

Children pointed to lessons, trainings and scenario-based activities, and to the roles of teachers and parents:

> **“Our teachers need to give more information.”**

Several asked for accessible formats, including visuals on tablets and in sign language. Many saw education as a pathway to enable them to educate others. These responses show that **children with disabilities not only want education on climate change but also recognise the importance of being equipped to teach others**.

‘Community awareness should be prioritised to engage more children with disabilities in activities’ (23%)

Nearly one in four children with disabilities said that raising awareness in the community was vital. Younger children aged 3 to 4 (27%) were more likely to stress this compared to the older children, suggesting that simple, visible communication efforts are important entry points for them. Out-of-school children were more likely to mention community awareness (30%) than those in school (22%), reflecting their reliance on local initiatives outside of formal education. Country differences were

notable, where Uganda (28%) and Rwanda (27%) placed strong emphasis on awareness, compared with only 15% in Zimbabwe and 18% in Tanzania. Children with autism (25%), those with albinism (29%), and children with physical disabilities (26%) were especially likely to call for more community engagement.

> **“People should involve children with disabilities, like me,”**

> **“Community and family should be educated.”**

Others highlighted stigma as a barrier, noting that

> **“people in the community are supposed to create awareness for inclusivity of children with disability,”**

> **“In the community people don’t like us, they think we are not like them.”**

These voices underline that awareness is not just about climate change itself but also about valuing children with disabilities as contributors. A few went further, calling for government involvement in community sensitisation to make inclusion a priority.

‘Create projects in schools that will enhance climate resilience such as small gardens, cleaning the environment or tree planting initiatives’ (22%)

Projects in schools were mentioned by over one in five children with disabilities. These activities were particularly valued by the youngest children aged 3 to 4 (27%) and by children in school (24%) but rarely mentioned by those out of school (5%), highlighting again how exclusion from education limits access to these opportunities. Country patterns contrasted with the ‘education’ theme above. School projects were especially mentioned in Malawi (38%) and Zimbabwe (40%), but much less so in Kenya (10%) and Zambia (10%). Among disability groups, children with intellectual disabilities (29%) and multiple disabilities (27%) placed greater emphasis on this type of activity, while children with hearing impairments (17%) and physical disabilities (14%) were less likely to mention it.

Children spoke enthusiastically about gardening, planting flowers, slashing compounds, cleaning drainages, and starting school clubs. One child explained that their school had introduced an orchard where

> **“every pupil has a tree to take care of,”**

while another mentioned being a member of an environmental club. Several said simply,

> **“I want gardening,” or “I want to help plant a tree and start a garden.”**

These accounts emphasise how projects can be made accessible and enjoyable, while also providing a structured way for children with disabilities to be visibly involved alongside peers.

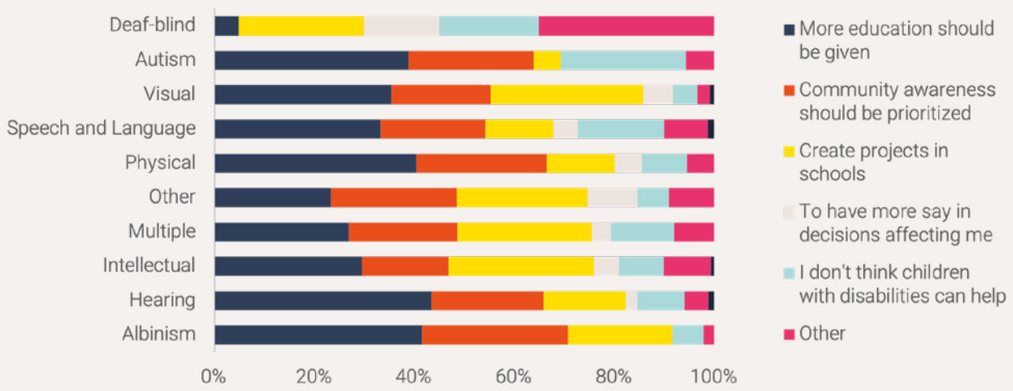


Figure 35. What can children with disabilities do for climate preparedness, by disability type

‘To have more say in decisions that affect me such as government meetings or surveys’ (5%)

A small but significant group said that children with disabilities should have more opportunities to contribute to decisions. Recognising that children with disabilities are rarely invited to have their voices heard in decisions that affect them, this could be an influencing factor for this response.

This response was slightly more common among out-of-school children (9%) compared with those in school (4%), suggesting that those who are less integrated into education may see greater importance in having their voices recognised elsewhere. Country-level responses were even, with small minorities across most countries choosing this. Children with multiple disabilities (10%) and those with ‘other’ disabilities (5%) were more likely to mention decision-making power, reflecting their desire for recognition in spaces where they are often excluded.

Some explicitly said they wanted to be included in discussions and surveys, while others framed this as a matter of rights:

> **“It is better to create spaces for children with disabilities to empower them.”**

These children highlighted that being heard is as important as participating in practical activities, and that preparedness requires recognising their perspectives in community and government planning.

‘I don’t think children with disabilities can help’ (10%)

One in ten children felt that children with disabilities could not help their communities prepare for climate-related challenges. This view was particularly common among out-of-school children (25%), highlighting how exclusion from education can reinforce low self-confidence and perceptions of limited ability. In Kenya, one in five children (20%) gave this response, while in Malawi, Tanzania, and Zimbabwe fewer than 3% did so. Children with autism (25%) and those with speech and language difficulties (17%) were more likely to hold this view, reflecting the barriers some groups face in being included or recognised in community activities. These findings suggest that alongside creating opportunities, there is also a need to tackle stigma and build children’s confidence in their ability to contribute.

“I cannot talk, how can I help?”

“Because of my condition I cannot plant trees,”

“She uses a wheelchair, so she can’t help.”

Some parents speaking for children with complex communication needs reinforced these views

“My child should stay safe at home.”

These responses reflect real constraints but also show how stigma, a lack of adapted opportunities and low confidence among children with disabilities can reinforce each other. They also raise the question of whose views are being captured when adults answer on behalf of children.

‘Other reasons’ (7%)

Beyond the main categories, children proposed additional preparedness actions, such as litter-picking and cleaning the environment, creating kitchen gardens at home, forming clubs to teach others about recycling and water conservation, using visuals and videos to make information accessible, studying weather patterns, and advocacy ideas such as “government must involve us.”

Several also suggested warning others and sharing information learnt at school so families and neighbours can also prepare. These contributions show practical and creative ways children with disabilities want to contribute, from everyday environmental care to new ways of learning and communicating, even if they were less commonly mentioned.

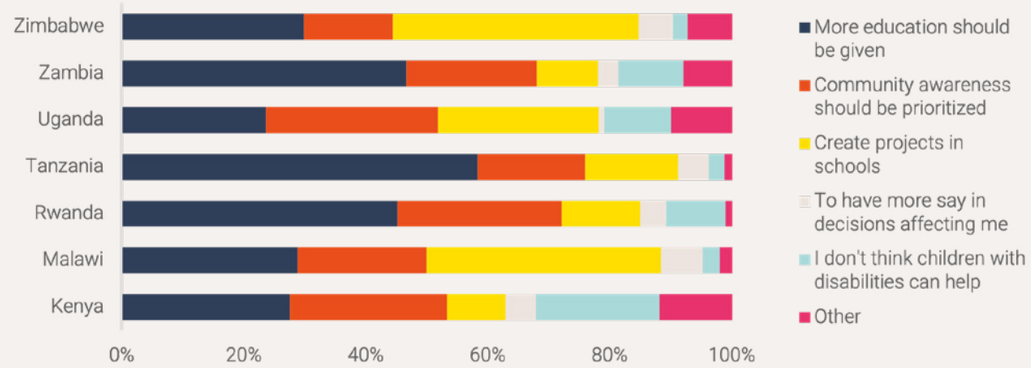
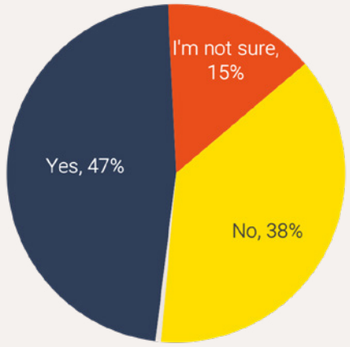


Figure 36. What can children with disabilities do for climate preparedness, by country

Have you ever felt like you couldn’t take part in activities to help the environment because of your disability?



Almost half of children with disabilities (47%) reported that they had at some point felt unable to take part in environmental activities because of their disability. A further 15% said they were not sure, while just over a third (38%) said they had not felt excluded. These findings highlight that for many children with disabilities, barriers to participation are commonplace, though experiences vary widely by schooling, location, country, and disability type.

Figure 37. Have you ever felt like you couldn’t take part in activities about helping the environment because of your disability?

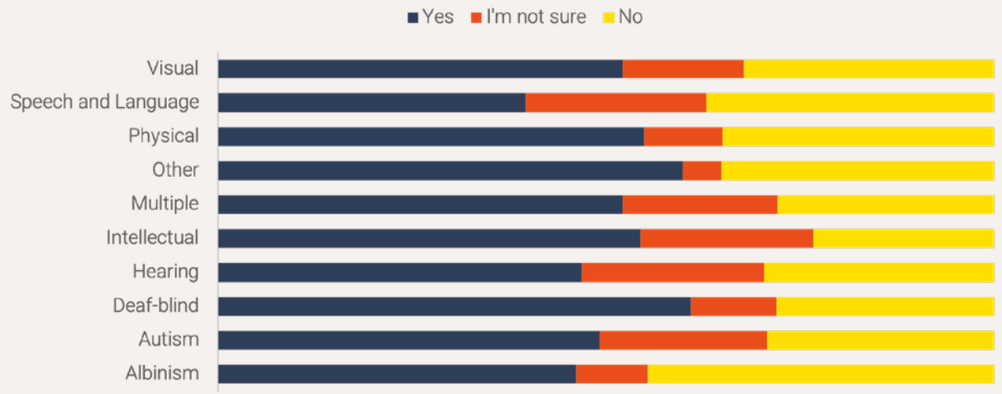


Figure 38. Have you felt excluded because of your disability, by disability type?

Children with disabilities in schools were more likely to say they felt excluded (49%) compared with those out of school (37%). This is interesting because it suggests that while school provides more opportunities for involvement, it also makes exclusion more visible when activities are not inclusive. This underlines the importance of ensuring that schools do not simply expand access to education but actively adapt their practices and curricula to be inclusive of children with disabilities in climate preparedness and response. Country patterns varied widely. Feelings of exclusion were more common in Rwanda (56%), Malawi (55%) and Zimbabwe (54%), compared to Tanzania (35%) and Zambia (40%). In contrast, more than half of children in Tanzania (56%) said they had not felt excluded, the highest proportion of any country.

Urban children were also more likely than rural children to report exclusion (56% compared to 45% respectively). This may reflect higher exposure to organised activities in urban areas, but also sharper awareness of when those activities are not accessible.

Children who are deaf-blind (55%) or who reported 'other' disabilities (54%) were the most likely to say they felt excluded. Among children with intellectual disabilities, exclusion was also widespread, with 69% reporting either exclusion or uncertainty and only 30% saying they had not felt excluded. Most other disability groups reported figures close to the overall average, except for children with speech and language difficulties where 36% said they felt excluded, with a further 21% stating that they were unsure. These varied experiences across disability groups, and the relatively high levels of uncertainty in some cases, highlight how exclusion is not uniform, but shaped by both the type of disability and the way opportunities are presented and communicated.

Key findings

Children with disabilities are actively contributing to environmental activities across the region, but participation is uneven. While two-thirds reported taking part, opportunities are far more accessible to older children, those in school, and those in rural areas. Tree planting and school-based activities dominate as the most common activities, though prioritisation varies by country. Many children with disabilities see themselves playing an important role in preparing communities for climate change, most often through education, awareness, and school-based projects. Others proposed creative contributions such as environmental clean-ups, kitchen gardens, or forming awareness clubs, showing that children with disabilities have both the willingness and imagination to engage when given the chance.

Yet significant barriers remain. Many children with disabilities say they lack opportunities to participate or that activities are not disability-friendly, and almost half reported feeling excluded at some point because of their disability. Exclusion is particularly acute for children with autism, multiple disabilities, and speech and language difficulties, and is sometimes reinforced by adults or parents underestimating what their children can do. A minority of children with disabilities also expressed doubts about whether they could contribute at all, especially those who are not in schools, pointing to the need to build confidence and tackle stigma. These findings highlight that while environmental engagement is widespread, inclusion is not guaranteed and more must be done to ensure that every child has the chance to play a part.

- **Most children are involved, but not equally**: Two-thirds of children with disabilities reported participating in environmental activities, but participation is strongly shaped by age, schooling, geography and disability type.
- **Tree planting and school-based activities dominate:** Planting trees (54%) and school-based activities (48%) were by far the most common activities reported by children with disabilities, though patterns varied by country, suggesting different national priorities and country experiences of climate change.
- **Barriers are widespread and often structural:** Among non-participants of environmental activities, more than half (55%) of children with disabilities said they had not had an opportunity, while a quarter (25%) cited activities being inaccessible.
- **Children see a role for themselves in preparedness:** When asked how they could help their communities be ready for climate change, children with disabilities had creative and practical ideas, calling for more education (34%), community awareness (23%) and school-based projects (22%).

- **Confidence and recognition are uneven:** One in ten children with disabilities said they did not think children with disabilities could help, with this view especially common among out-of-school children and those with autism or speech and language difficulties.
- **Exclusion remains a lived reality:** Nearly half of children with disabilities (47%) felt excluded from environmental activities because of their disability, which was especially acute for some groups and was reinforced by low expectations from adults.

Next steps

- Expand opportunities for environmental and preparedness activities to reach children with disabilities who are not in schools and living in rural areas, ensuring they are systematically included.
- Advocate for better school-based adaptations and ensure all activities are designed to be accessible for different disability types. Disability-friendly projects, such as adapted school gardens or environmental clubs, should be developed, as children with disabilities themselves suggested.
- Strengthen climate education and awareness both in schools and in communities, using accessible formats that all children with disabilities can understand and engage with.
- Involve children with disabilities directly in identifying and shaping community environmental initiatives.
- Recognise and build on the creative ideas children with disabilities proposed, from kitchen gardens to environmental clean-ups and advocacy, and provide support to turn these into real opportunities for participation.
- Build children with disabilities' confidence and tackle stigma by challenging community perceptions that children with disabilities cannot contribute, while actively promoting their role and leadership.
- Create meaningful opportunities for children with disabilities to be involved in decision-making at school, community and national levels so their perspectives shape climate preparedness efforts.

Part 4: Climate action and advocacy

Have you ever felt like you couldn't take part in activities to help the environment because of your disability?

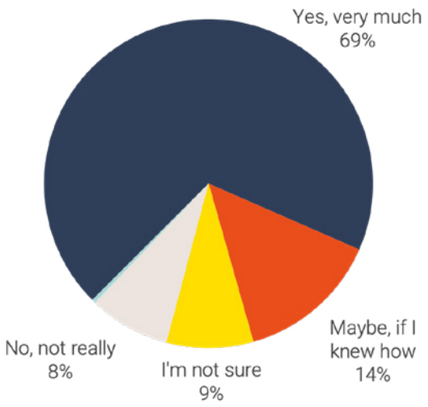


Figure 39. Interest in being involved in helping protect our planet, by school status

When asked if they would like to be more involved in climate action or sharing their ideas, a large majority of children with disabilities expressed enthusiasm. **More than two-thirds (69%) said "Yes, very much"**, with a further 14% saying, "Maybe, if I knew how." Only a small minority said, "No, not really" (8%) or "I'm not sure" (9%). These results suggest that most children with disabilities want to take part in protecting the planet and are eager to find ways to contribute if they are given the right support.

Interest in participation grew with age. Just over half of the youngest children aged 3 to 4 (52%) said "Yes, very much," compared with nearly two-thirds (64%) of those aged 5 to 9, and almost three-quarters (73%) of children aged 10 to 14. Younger children were also more likely to say, "I'm not sure" or "No", reflecting both limited interest and fewer opportunities to engage with climate issues at an early age. Similarly, children in school were far more likely to say "Yes" (72%) than those out of school (45%), underlining the role of education in shaping awareness and confidence. By contrast, children who did not attend school were far more likely to say "Maybe" (20%) or "No, not really" (21%), pointing to how educational access and engagement in wider societal issues are closely linked.

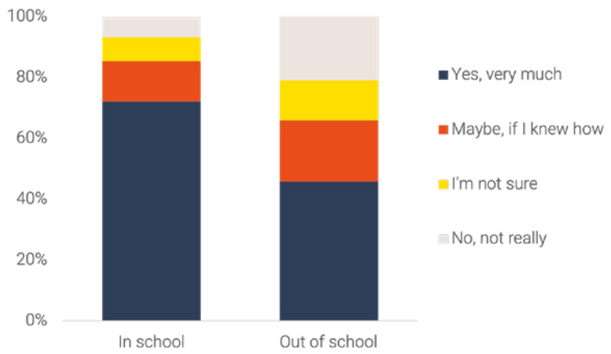


Figure 40. Would you like to be more involved in helping to protect our planet from climate change or sharing your ideas about it?

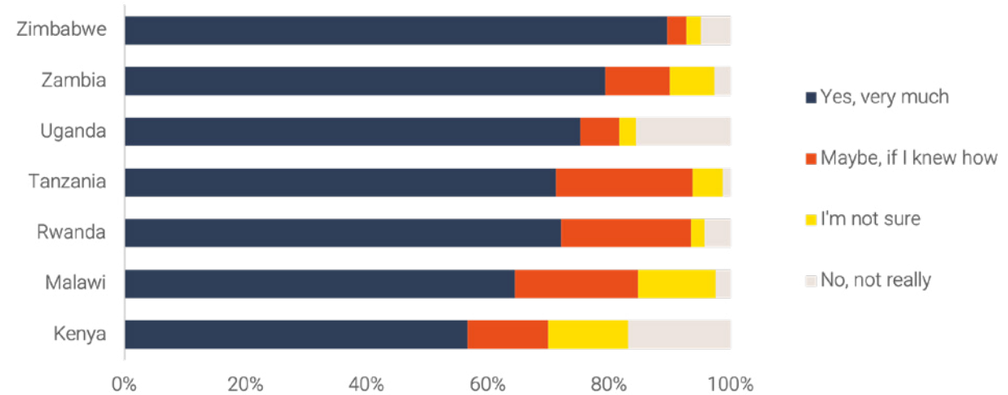


Figure 41. Interest in being involved in helping protect our planet, by country

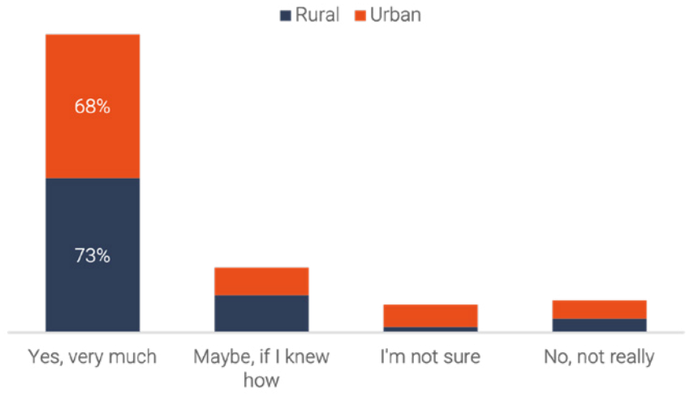


Figure 42. Interest in being involved in helping protect our planet, by location

Country patterns also revealed important differences. Zimbabwe stood out, with nine in ten children (90%) saying "Yes, very much." In contrast, little more than half of children in Kenya (56%) said the same. Malawi (64%), Rwanda (71%), Tanzania (71%), Uganda (74%) and Zambia (79%) showed strong but varied levels of interest, suggesting that national factors, such as exposure to climate programmes, the visibility of environmental ini tiatives, or the impact of climate related challenges, shape how engaged children feel and want to be.

Children with disabilities living in rural areas were more likely to respond “Yes” (73%) or “Maybe” (18%) compared to their urban counterparts (68% and 13% respectively). Children with disabilities living in urban areas were more likely to express uncertainty (10% compared to 3% in rural areas), highlighting how location influences both perceptions and opportunities.

Differences by disability type further highlighted inequalities in opportunity and access. Enthusiasm was highest among children with albinism (79%) and those with visual impairments (77%), but lower among children with hearing impairments (57%), autism (67%) and children with deaf-blindness (60%). These groups were more likely to respond with “I’m not sure” or “No,” reflecting barriers in communication, limited exposure to relevant activities, and stigma. Their responses suggest that while the willingness is there, gaps in accessible information and inclusion hold them back from full engagement.

Overall, the findings show that children with disabilities across the region want to play an active role in climate action and advocacy. Yet the extent to which they feel able to do so is strongly shaped by age, schooling, country context, and disability type. The results point to a clear need for accessible education, inclusive opportunities, and supportive environments so that children’s enthusiasm can be translated into meaningful participation.

If you wanted to be involved in climate action or advocacy, what would help you or how would you like to participate?

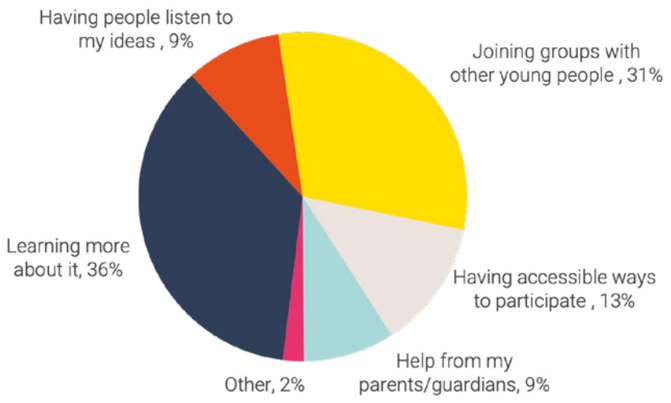


Figure 43. If you wanted to be involved in climate action or advocacy, what would help you or how would you like to participate?

As a follow-up, children who answered “Yes” or “Maybe” to the question, “Would you like to be more involved in helping to protect our planet from climate change or sharing your ideas about it?”, were asked what would help them to do so, or how would like to participate. A clear theme across the responses is that children with disabilities want to learn, join with others, and be heard.

The majority of children with disabilities saw education and inclusion as the keys to meaningful participation in environmental activities. Just over a third of children with disabilities want to learn more about climate change (36%), and another third want to join groups with other young people (31%). Smaller numbers highlighted the importance of having accessible ways to participate (13%), having people listen to their ideas (9%), or receiving help from caregivers (9%). A small number (2%) suggested other ideas.

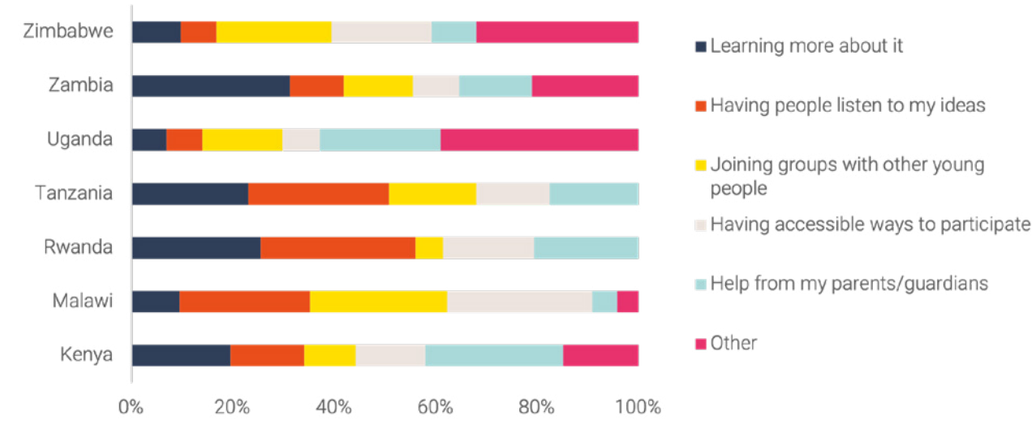


Figure 44. Ways children with disabilities would like to be involved, by country

Country patterns showed variation, with some contexts placing a greater weight on education and others on group activities, suggesting that national programmes and opportunities shape children’s expectations of participation.

Taken together, the results show that while children’s priorities differ, they consistently emphasise the need for knowledge, inclusion, and recognition.

“Learning more about it in school or my community’ (36%)

The most common request was for more education. This was especially emphasised by the youngest children (53% of 3 to 4-year-olds) and those with autism (57%), albinism (47%), and speech and language difficulties (48%). Girls were also slightly more likely than boys to prioritise learning more about climate change (37% compared to 34% respectively), hinting at a gendered preference for knowledge and awareness to engage.

Qualitative responses reinforced this point, with children with disabilities repeatedly asking to learn more about climate change in schools and communities, and in ways they can understand. One child explained,

> **"If we have information that everyone can understand, it will be better."**

Others wanted accessible materials:

> **"I want more easy-to-read information to learn from"**

> **"I want braille and other materials that talk about climate."**

'Joining groups with other young people to take action' (31%)

A close second was the desire to be part of groups, especially among older children (33% of 10 to 14-year-olds) and those with intellectual (37%) or multiple disabilities (35%). Children with disabilities in schools were more likely to select this response (32%) compared to those who are not in school (18%). Boys leaned slightly more toward joining groups than girls (33% compared to 29% respectively), suggesting that group participation may feel like a more natural route for boys to get involved.

Children with disabilities emphasised that groups provide support, motivation, and a way to share ideas:

> **"Groups are the best way to learn things and what we learn from friends is hard to forget."**

Another stressed,

> **"It can be nice and fun to meet new people and share ideas on climate change in the society."**

Joining school clubs or youth groups was repeatedly mentioned as a preferred avenue.

'Having accessible ways to participate (such as sign language, easy-to-read materials, accessible places)' (13%)

Children with disabilities also highlighted the need for participation to be accessible, with particular emphasis from children who are deaf-blind (21%) and children with hearing impairments (18%). Many mentioned sign language, easy-to-read materials, or adapted spaces:

> **"Accessible places and easy-to-read materials can help increase awareness,"**

Another explained,

> **"Make accessibility a priority in everything."**

These responses underline that without accessibility, willingness to participate cannot translate into action.

'Having people listen to my ideas in meetings or surveys' (9%)

A smaller but important group emphasised recognition. This theme was more common among younger children (13% of 3 to 4-year-olds) and children with 'other' disabilities (12%). They wanted decision-makers to take their voices seriously:

> **"Government should listen to children's ideas – nothing for us without us,"**

one child insisted. Another said simply,

> **"I want people to listen to me too."**

These responses stress that participation is not only about doing activities, but also about respect and influence.

“My parents/ guardians helping me” (9%)

Parental support was especially important for out-of-school children (26%), underlining how family support becomes critical when school-based opportunities are missing. Younger age groups (18% of 3 to 4-year-olds) also saw parental support as important, likely due to their reliance on parents and guardians. Parents were often seen as necessary for mobility, communication, or confidence. One child said,

> **“Because I cannot speak, by involving my parent as a helper I can participate.”**

Another explained,

> **“Parents of children with disability can come together and involve their children in cleaning the environment.”**

‘Other’ (2%)

A small number suggested additional contributions such as planting trees, teaching others, or combining multiple strategies:

> **“All of the above,”**

said one. Others proposed advocacy roles:

> **“I want government to listen and take action to our voices,”**

> **“If children with disabilities are given a chance, they will do better.”**

These voices show that children with disabilities not only want to be included, but in some cases are already envisioning themselves as advocates and leaders.

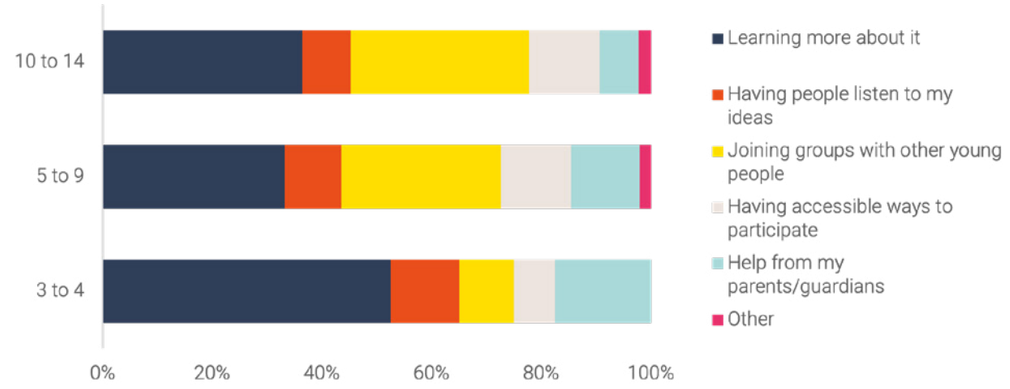


Figure 45. Ways children with disabilities would like to be involved, by age group

Describe your hopes and dreams for a greener environment and safer environment for children with disabilities?

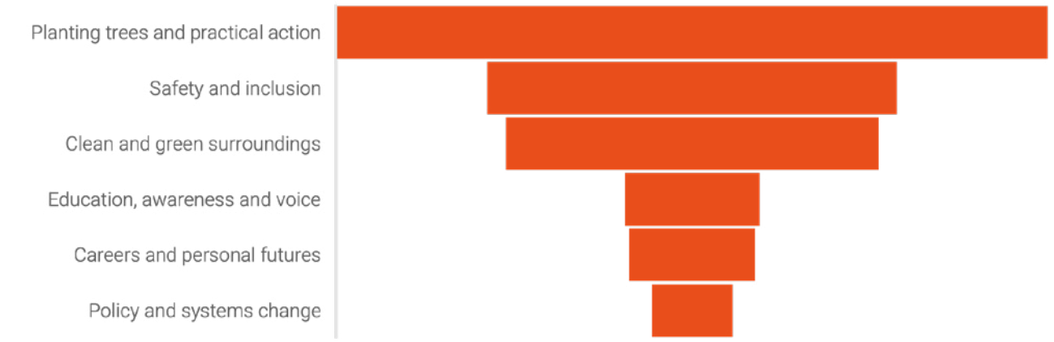


Figure 46. Hopes and aspirations for the future, most common responses

When asked to describe their hopes and dreams for a greener and safer environment, children with disabilities expressed a wide range of aspirations. **At their core, the responses highlight children with disabilities' desire for clean, green surroundings, equal inclusion in environmental action, and recognition of their rights.** Many also spoke of personal ambitions, linking environmental goals to their dreams of education, careers, and community leadership. With emphasis here on qualitative data, no quantitative data has been included.

'Clean and green surroundings'

The most common hope was simply to live in a clean, safe environment. Children repeatedly mentioned planting more trees, reducing pollution, and keeping compounds tidy:

> **"I wish that the world is having a lot of trees for better respiration,"**

> **"Ensure that people do not throw garbage everywhere, clearing bushes around our homes and making sure drainages are kept clean."**

These visions of greener spaces were often tied to personal wellbeing:

> **"I feel good when the environment is good – my goat will get grass,"**

> **"We will have nutritious food so deficiency diseases will not affect us."**

'Safety and inclusion'

A significant number of children highlighted safety, not only from environmental hazards but also from neglect and exclusion. Many called for

> **"a safe environment for all children living with disability"**

and for spaces

> **"where everyone can participate freely."**

These aspirations show how environmental safety and disability inclusion are inseparable in children with disabilities' minds.

'Planting trees and other practical action'

Tree planting stood out as a frequently mentioned activity. Children associated it with shade, food, climate protection, and community pride:

> **"My dream is to have my own forest so people can see that even the disabled can do it."**

Others envisioned projects like kitchen gardens, recycling, and cleaning campaigns. These responses suggest that children with disabilities see themselves as practical contributors to environmental stewardship and not just passive beneficiaries.

‘Education, awareness, and voice’

Another strong theme was the need for education and awareness. Some children with disabilities framed this in terms of what they wanted to learn,

> **“I want to learn more about this climate change”**

while others stressed teaching others:

> **“My hopes and dreams are to become a teacher and help teach children with disabilities about climate change.”**

Many also emphasised the importance of being heard:

> **“Government need to hear our voices and take action to our daily needs,”**

> **“I want to see an environment where children with disabilities have a voice and are able to make decisions for themselves.”**

These responses echo earlier survey findings on the demand for more accessible climate education and inclusion in decision-making.

‘Careers and personal futures’

A subset of responses linked environmental hopes to personal dreams. Children said they wanted to become teachers, nurses, doctors, environmentalists, or police officers

> **“to protect the environment”**

> **“help children with disabilities during trouble.”**

These aspirations show that children with disabilities see climate action not only as a community duty but also as a pathway to fulfilling their own ambitions and identities.

‘Education, awareness, and voice’

Finally, several children with disabilities expressed hopes for government and organisational action. They called for stricter rules against cutting trees, for more disability-friendly infrastructure, and for policies that reduce pollution in the places where they live, learn, and play. Some mentioned inclusive education programmes, the availability of accessible materials such as braille and sign language, and community awareness campaigns. These responses reflect an awareness that systemic change is needed for children with disabilities’ hopes to be realised.

Children with disabilities hopes and dreams for a greener and safer environment are both practical and visionary. They want to plant trees, clean their surroundings, and learn more, but they also want recognition, safety, and inclusion. Their responses reveal a blend of immediate environmental action and longer-term aspirations for education, careers, and rights. Together, these voices underscore that for children with disabilities, a greener environment is inseparable from a safer, more inclusive one.

Key findings

Children with disabilities across East and Southern Africa are eager to take part in climate action and advocacy. Almost seven in ten children with disabilities said they want to be more involved in climate action, with a further group open to participating if they knew how. Children with disabilities' interest in climate change grows with age and is much stronger among those attending school, showing the central role that education plays in shaping awareness and confidence. Yet enthusiasm is not universal. Children with disabilities who are not in school, as well as those with hearing, communication, or multiple disabilities, were far less likely to say "yes" to questions relating to climate action and advocacy, reflecting the barriers that still hold many back.

When asked how they would like to participate, children with disabilities prioritised learning more, joining groups with peers, and having accessible ways to contribute. They also stressed the importance of being listened to and receiving support from families, underlining that meaningful participation is not only about activities but also about recognition and inclusion. Children with disabilities' hopes and dreams for a greener future further illustrate their vision: they want clean, safe, and inclusive environments, accessible opportunities to act, and to be seen as leaders with a role to play in shaping both their communities and their own futures.

- **Most children with disabilities want to be involved:** Nearly seven in ten said "yes, very much" to participating in climate action, with interest increasing sharply with age and schooling.
- **Enthusiasm varies by context:** Children with disabilities in Zimbabwe and Zambia were the most eager to participate, while children in Kenya and those out of school were less certain or said "no" to participating in climate action activities.
- **Disability type shapes opportunity:** Children with albinism and visual impairments were most enthusiastic about participating in climate action and advocacy, while those with hearing impairments, autism, or deaf-blindness reported greater uncertainty.
- **Education and groups matter most:** The most common requests among children with disabilities were to learn more (36%) and to join groups with peers (31%), showing their desire for both knowledge and collective action.
- **Accessibility and recognition are critical:** Children with disabilities highlighted the need information in accessible formats, supportive parents, and spaces where their ideas are listened to and taken seriously.
- **Hopes go beyond activities:** Children with disabilities envision greener, cleaner environments, equal inclusion, and careers where they can make a difference, linking climate action to their broader life aspirations.

Next steps

- Create more opportunities for participation by embedding climate action clubs and projects in schools and extending them to reach out-of-school children with disabilities.
- Strengthen accessible education and advocacy materials on climate change through sign language, braille, easy-to-read formats, and interactive activities that children with a range of disabilities can both understand and share with others.
- Support group participation by funding inclusive school clubs, youth groups, and community projects where children with disabilities can act alongside peers.
- Amplify children with disabilities' voices by giving them structured roles in decision-making processes at school, community, and national levels, and by promoting platforms where their ideas are heard and acted upon.
- Support family and caregiver involvement so that parents are equipped to help their children with disabilities participate meaningfully, particularly for younger and out-of-school children.
- Champion children with disabilities' own visions by investing in the activities they value (tree planting, school gardens, recycling, and clean-up campaigns) to link directly to their expressed hopes and dreams.
- Promote systemic inclusion by embedding disability-inclusive approaches in national climate and environmental policies, so children with disabilities' participation becomes the norm, not the exception.

Conclusions

This survey has highlighted how climate change is deeply shaping the lives of children with disabilities in East and Southern Africa. Across seven countries that members of the Able Child Africa Network operate in, children with disabilities described the ways extreme weather and changes to weather disrupts their access to education, health, safety, and social participation. At the same time, they spoke powerfully of their hopes to contribute to solutions, through learning, taking action, and having their voices heard.

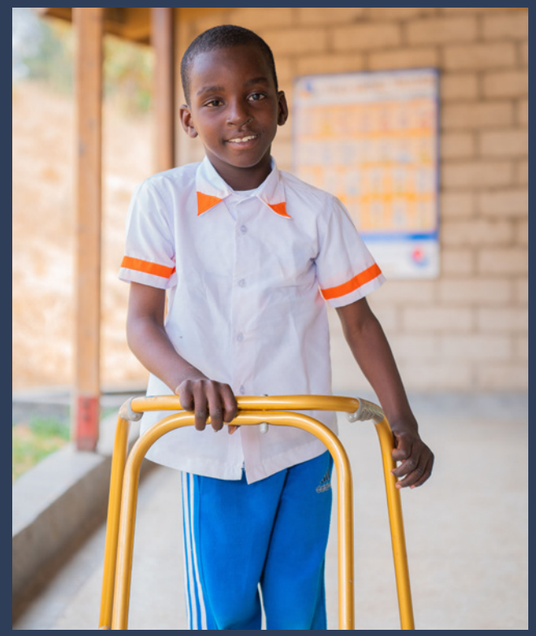
As this was a purposive sample, the findings cannot be assumed to represent all children with disabilities across the region. However, the consistent themes that emerged provide a powerful evidence base to inform national and regional climate responses. It provides critical insights that demonstrate both the urgency of addressing exclusion while championing the creativity and willingness of children with disabilities to contribute solutions and insights that can guide more inclusive policy and practice.

Only 50% of children with disabilities recognised the term ‘climate change’ and fewer than 40% had learnt about it. Children with disabilities in schools are nearly three times as likely to understand climate change as those out of school, showing how exclusion from education deepens exclusion from knowledge.

Yet the findings show that climate change is not a distant or abstract concept for children with disabilities - it is a daily reality. From missed school days and illnesses linked to bad weather, to inaccessible evacuation routes and feelings of sadness, exclusion, or fear, climate risks cut across every part of their lives.

A large majority of children with disabilities say adverse weather conditions prevents them from reaching school or hospitals, undermining access to essential services. 50% of children with disabilities reported that extreme weather prevents them from going to school, accessing healthcare, or playing with friends. Results highlighted that this impact is most severe for older children, children living in rural populations, and those with albinism, visual impairments, or deaf-blindness.

Despite this, responses also revealed strong enthusiasm for participating in environmental activities and climate action, provided the right opportunities and supports are in place. 66% of children with disabilities have participated in environmental activities, such as tree planting and school-based projects. Yet almost 50% of children with disabilities also reported feeling excluded because activities were not accessible.



Importantly, the results underscore that experiences are not uniform. Age, schooling, disability type, and country context all shape how children are affected and how prepared they feel. Zimbabwean children with disabilities reported low disruption but high climate knowledge, while Tanzanian children reported higher exposure to economic impacts.

Children with disabilities living in rural communities were also more likely than their urban peers to know evacuation procedures, challenging assumptions about urban preparedness. Almost one in three children with disabilities did not know where to evacuate during a climate-related emergency, and 25% said reaching safety would be difficult without support.

Out-of-school children, those with sensory and communication disabilities, and those in rural areas are often the least included in climate action, while older children in school and in rural communities are more engaged but also more exposed to risks. These patterns highlight the need for tailored approaches, responsive to children’s diverse realities.

Overall, this report highlights a stark contrast. Children with disabilities are deeply motivated to engage with climate action, yet systemic barriers continue to exclude them. By investing in inclusive education, accessible warnings, resilient infrastructure, and meaningful participation, governments and communities can turn children’s enthusiasm into lasting resilience.

Listening to and acting on children with disabilities’ voices is essential to building a future that is equitable, resilient, and just.

> **“We want to learn more about climate because it affects us.”**

Key recommendations

The findings indicate clear avenues for both targeted intervention and further research. Below is a list of key recommendations. Recommendations specific to each of the four sections of the survey are detailed separately at the end of each section of parts one to four, under ‘next steps’.

Recommendations for programme funding and intervention priorities

- **Embed disability inclusion in climate programming:** Ensure that all resilience and preparedness initiatives, from early warning systems to evacuation planning, systematically include accessible formats and supports.
- **Strengthen schools as hubs for resilience:** Use schools to deliver inclusive climate education, preparedness drills, and environmental projects, while ensuring out-of-school children with disabilities are also reached through community-based approaches.
- **Invest in resilient and accessible infrastructure:** Prioritise safe, disability-friendly access to schools, health centres, and evacuation points in both rural and urban areas.
- **Address health impacts of climate change:** Equip health systems to anticipate spikes in respiratory, vector-borne, and waterborne diseases, and provide targeted protection for children with specific vulnerabilities, such as albinism.
- **Support psychosocial wellbeing:** Create safe spaces and support services to address the sadness, anxiety, and stigma that children with disabilities described when excluded from climate action.
- **Amplify children’s leadership:** Involve children with disabilities directly in the design and delivery of climate programmes, creating opportunities for them to be seen as leaders and advocates in their communities.

Recommendations for research gaps and future studies

- **Hidden populations:** Future research should deliberately include children with disabilities who are out-of-school or less connected to organisations of persons with disabilities (OPDs), whose experiences may differ sharply from those reached here.
- **Country-specific risks and responses:** More in-depth, country-level studies are needed to understand why experiences among children with disabilities diverge so strongly (for example, high impacts in Uganda vs. low impacts in Zimbabwe).
- **Intersectional vulnerabilities:** Further analysis should explore how gender, location, poverty, and disability interact to shape children with disabilities’ climate experiences, particularly for girls and children with disabilities in rural out-of-school settings.
- **Effectiveness of communication formats:** Studies should test which early warning systems and preparedness messages are most effective for children with different disabilities.
- **Longitudinal impacts:** Following children with disabilities over time would show how repeated exposure to climate shocks affects education, health, confidence, and resilience.

Annexes

Glossary

Adaptation Actions taken to adjust systems, communities, or individuals to reduce the negative impacts of climate change and take advantage of any potential benefits. For children with disabilities, adaptation may include accessible infrastructure, inclusive disaster planning, or health system adjustments.

Accessibility Designing environments, services, information, and infrastructure so they can be used by everyone, including people with disabilities. In this report, accessibility refers to things like warning systems, schools, and evacuation routes.

Advocacy Efforts by individuals or groups to influence decision-makers, policies, and practices. In this report, advocacy refers to children with disabilities sharing their voices and shaping climate resilience strategies.

Barriers Obstacles that prevent children with disabilities from participating equally in society. Barriers may be physical (e.g., inaccessible buildings), communication-related (e.g., lack of sign language), or social (e.g., stigma or discrimination).

Climate change Long-term changes in global or regional climate patterns, often linked to human activities that increase greenhouse gases. In East and Southern Africa, this includes more frequent droughts, floods, heatwaves, and storms.

Climate resilience The ability of individuals, communities, or systems to anticipate, prepare for, and respond to climate-related shocks or stresses while maintaining wellbeing and inclusion.

Climate vulnerability The degree to which a group, such as children with disabilities, is exposed to and negatively affected by climate-related risks due to existing inequalities and barriers.

Community participation The involvement of children with disabilities in local activities, programmes, and decision-making that affect their environment and preparedness for climate change.

CRPD (Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities) An international treaty adopted in 2006 that promotes and protects the rights of persons with disabilities, including the right of children to participate in decision-making that affects them.

Disaggregated data Breaking down survey data by characteristics such as gender, age, disability type, or location to highlight differences in experiences and outcomes.

Disability-inclusive development An approach to planning and implementing programmes that actively includes people with disabilities and addresses their specific needs and priorities.

Early warning systems Systems that provide timely and accessible information about climate hazards (such as floods or storms) so people can prepare and act. For children with disabilities, this requires formats they can understand and act on.

Exclusion The systemic or social process by which children with disabilities are left out of opportunities, services, or decision-making.

Inclusive education Education that accommodates all learners, including those with disabilities, through accessible facilities, teaching methods, and materials.

Mitigation Efforts to reduce or prevent the emission of greenhouse gases, thereby limiting the magnitude of future climate change. (This report focuses more on adaptation and resilience than mitigation.)

Out-of-school children Children who are not currently attending school, often due to barriers linked to poverty, disability, or discrimination.

Preparedness Measures taken in advance to ensure safety during disasters or extreme weather, such as evacuation plans, drills, or community awareness.

Resilience The capacity to cope with and recover from shocks or challenges (such as climate-related events) while maintaining dignity, rights, and wellbeing.

Safeguarding Measures and policies that protect children from harm, abuse, or exploitation, especially in research or programme contexts.

Vulnerability The degree to which children with disabilities are at risk of harm due to a combination of exposure to climate hazards and social, economic, and environmental disadvantages.

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