

Narrative Change Around Disability & Climate Change:

**Insights and Recommendations
from Stakeholders and Community
Members in the Niger Delta**

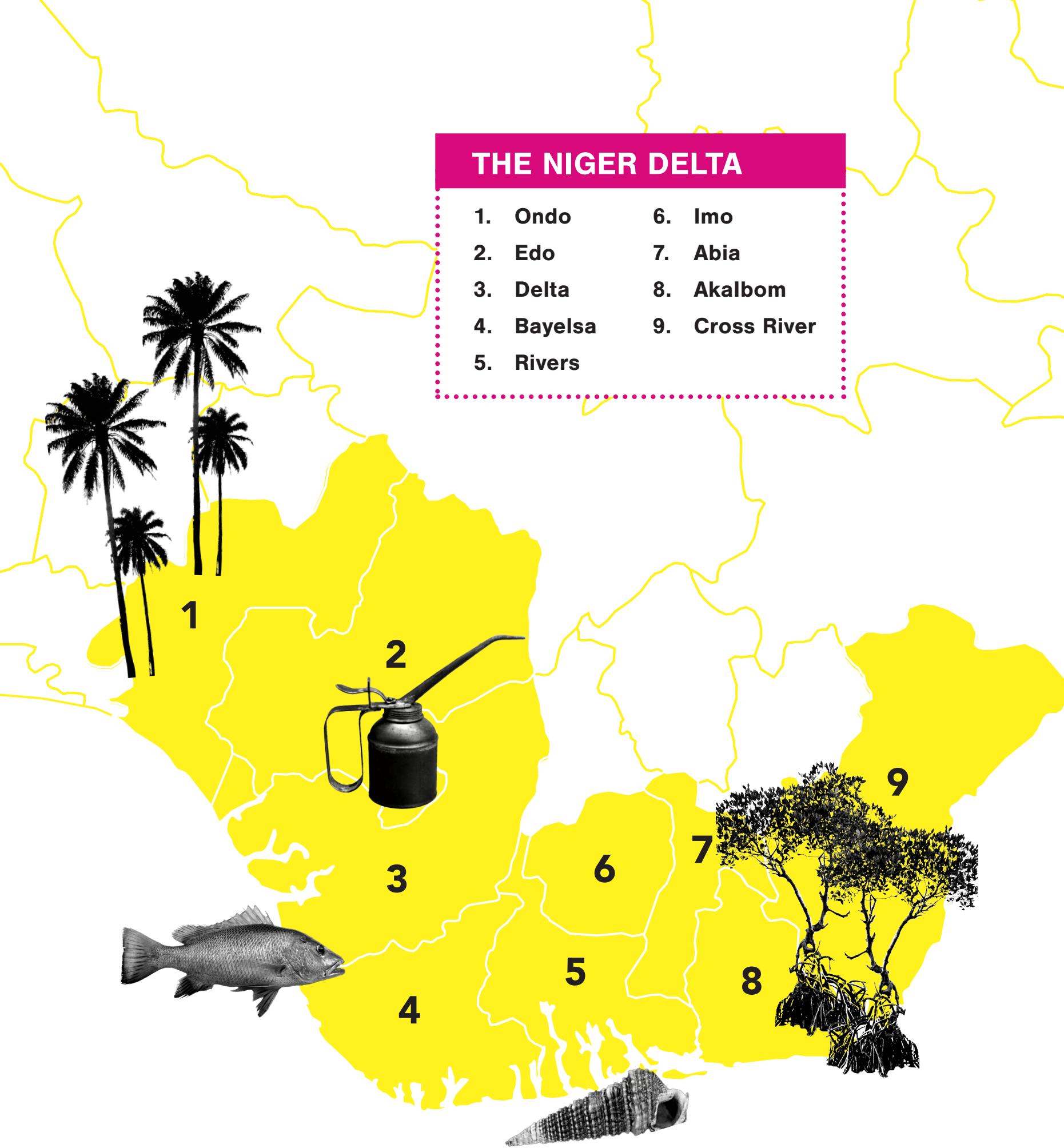
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July 2023

THE NIGER DELTA

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| 2. Edo | 7. Abia |
| 3. Delta | 8. Akalbom |
| 4. Bayelsa | 9. Cross River |
| 5. Rivers | |

The Niger Delta is one of the most populated natural ecosystems in the world, home to the most extensive mangrove ecosystems in Africa, which are essential to preserving the delicate climate balance of the area. More than 20 million people live along the coastlines for the mangrove forests, which also provide numerous goods and ecosystem services to these contiguous populations as well as a last line of defense for littoral communities. Additionally, the mangrove forests sequester an estimated 25.5 million tonnes of free CO₂ per year and provide habitats for myriad species — including for the at least 60 percent of commercial fish species in the Gulf of Guinea that breed in the mangroves of the Niger Delta. All this makes the work of protecting the region from the threats of climate change vital.¹



Acknowledgments

We would like to extend our gratitude to the many individuals whose perspectives and participation were essential to this report.

This research is intended to be for and by the community — and would not have been possible without the active input and contributions from the representatives of the disability communities and civil society organizations (CSOs) in the Niger Delta. To everyone who spoke to the research team, participated in a focus group or interview, or helped us clarify our findings — thank you.

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To everyone who spoke to the research team, participated in a focus group or interview, or helped us clarify our findings — thank you

Acronyms

CSO

Civil Society Organization

MAJI

Media Awareness Justice Initiative

NMAP

New Media Advocacy Project

PWDs

Persons with Disabilities*

* Nota bene: Terminology used in this report is consistent with Section 57 of the Discrimination Against Persons with Disabilities (Prohibition) Act, 2018 (“the Disability Act”). Other terms used in direct quotations from focus group discussions and expert interviews were left in their original form.*

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Executive Summary



Woman fetching drinking water from a polluted stream

Persons with disabilities disproportionately experience the harshest effects of changing climate and environmental degradation.

In partnership with the Ford Foundation, NMAP undertook research to identify opportunities to create new narratives that shift attitudes and mindsets about the interconnection between climate activists and the disability rights movement in the Niger Delta. The goal of this research was to build up a picture of the narrative landscape pertaining to disability rights and climate justice in the region, and to explore opportunities to advance cross-cause solidarity through collaborative narrative building. NMAP conducted this research in partnership with Niger Delta-based MAJI in the latter part of 2022 through to the Spring of 2023 in the Akwa Ibom, Bayelsa, and Rivers states of the Niger Delta region. Research participants included persons with disabilities (PWDs)

and those working for climate civil society organizations (CSOs), and MAJI conducted both focus groups and listening sessions with these groups to gain insight into their experiences.

As the impact of climate change intensifies, not only do persons with disabilities disproportionately experience the harshest effects, more people are becoming disabled due to the short-and long-term impacts of changing climate and environmental degradation. This research has revealed the importance of investing the necessary resources, time, and dedication to remove barriers to a greater intersectional approach developing between these two movements. These will not only strengthen climate action, but will also further the cause of disability justice, which currently is disproportionately under-supported and granular.



Dead fish, by Milieudefensie — Flickr

The following key insights were generated as a result of the fieldwork conducted in the Niger Delta:

- 1.** Persons with disabilities living in the Niger Delta face intense social discrimination which leaves them feeling isolated and undervalued as members of society.
- 2.** Climate change disproportionately affects persons with disabilities in the Niger Delta, further curtailing their freedom and leading to increased insecurity.
- 3.** More often than not climate action does not involve persons with disabilities, due to (perceived and real) gaps in accessibility and education.
- 4.** Persons with disabilities can be involved in both the disability justice movement and the climate justice movement.
- 5.** For the two movements to work together and be built on trust, persons with disabilities should be involved from the very beginning across all activities and processes.



Woman in wheelchair with child.

As the impact of climate change intensifies, not only do persons with disabilities disproportionately experience the harshest effects, more people are becoming disabled due to the short-and long-term impacts of changing climate and environmental degradation.

Background



Polluted lake, by Milieudéfense, Akintunde Akinleye — Flickr

Introduction

The intersection of climate change and disability rights is one that deserves more attention — and an area that the Ford Foundation identified as a missed opportunity for building movement power for change. NMAP and the Ford Foundation partnered to explore this field using narrative change strategies and community-engaged field research methods to gain insight into how existing narratives, values, and public discourse prevent an intersectional approach between climate activists and the disability rights movement in the Niger Delta. The research sought to identify opportunities to create new narratives that shift attitudes and mindsets about the interconnection of the two movements.

Our collaboration grew out of Ford’s commitment to apply a disability lens throughout its work, a crosscutting strategy that began in 2015. Since that time, Ford’s Natural Resources and Climate Change program went on a learning journey to understand “**what People with Disabilities have to teach about climate change**”.⁰ Through a partnership with Global Greengrants Fund, which focused in part on the Niger Delta, Ford learned that while the issues of environmental justice and disability

rights are entwined, their movements do not currently see one another as connected. This is a missed opportunity for building powerful intersectional narratives that could help advance the interests of both movements.

These movements have been siloed for complex reasons involving cultural factors, ableism, and narratives in the public discourse—all of which contribute to a landscape that is not conducive to intersectionality. As the impact of climate change intensifies, not only do persons with disabilities disproportionately experience the harshest effects, more people are becoming disabled due to the impacts of climate change. This work also highlighted complex difficulties, from confronting deeply ingrained ableism in how persons with disabilities are viewed in different localities, to identifying local momentum and leaders from both the climate movement and disability rights community that are working for greater inclusion.

Why the Niger Delta?

Our many years of work and civil society networks in Nigeria led us to focus this exploration in the Niger Delta, a region suffering some of the worst impacts of climate change in part due to years of environmental devastation caused by the petrochemical industry.

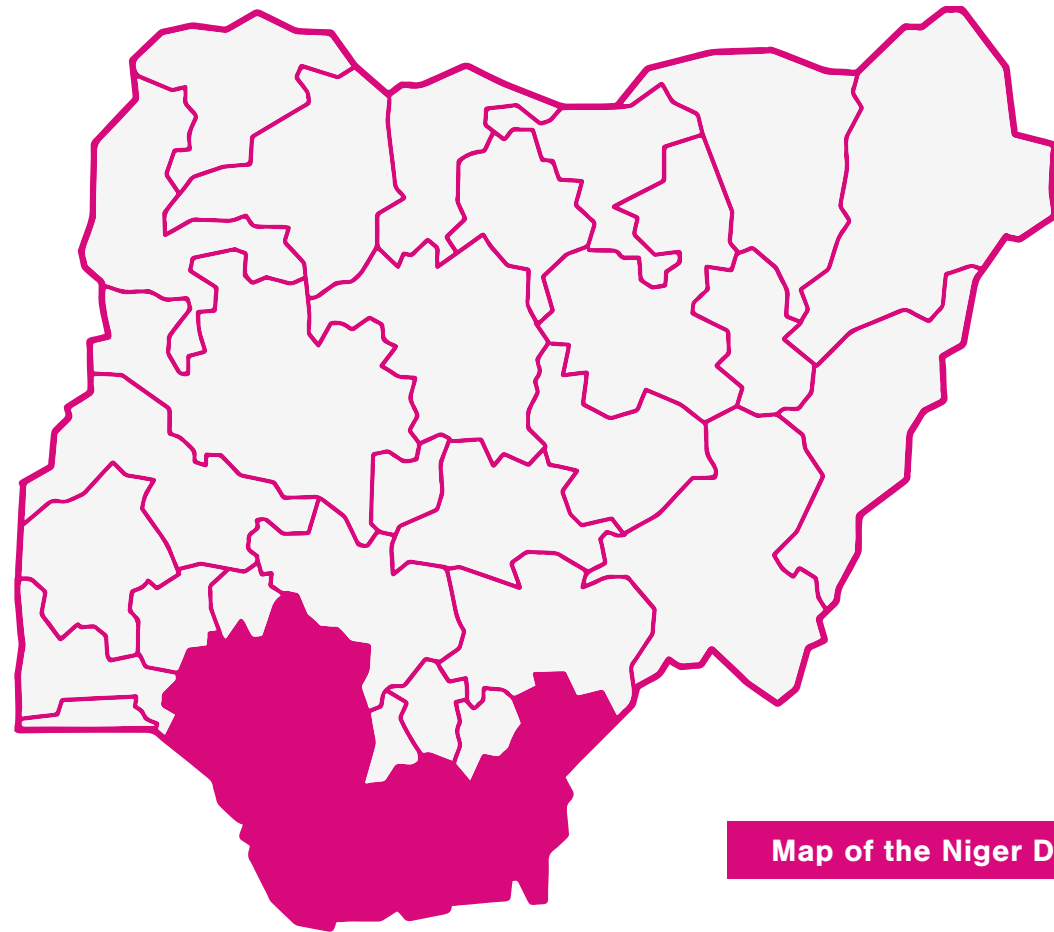
The mangrove forests sequester an estimated

25.5 million

tonnes of free CO₂ per year and provide habitats for myriad species

The area has enormous strategic importance. The Niger Delta is one of the most populated natural ecosystems in the world, home to the most extensive mangrove ecosystems in Africa, which are essential to preserving the delicate climate balance of the area. More than 20 million people live along the coastlines for the mangrove forests, which also provide numerous goods

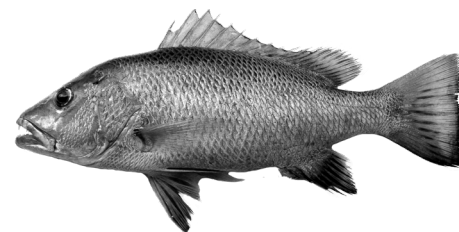
and ecosystem services to these contiguous populations as well as a last line of defense for littoral communities. Additionally, the mangrove



Map of the Niger Delta

forests sequester an estimated 25.5 million tonnes of free CO₂ per year and provide habitats for myriad species – including for the at least 60 percent of commercial fish species in the Gulf of Guinea that breed in the mangroves of the Niger Delta. All this makes the work of protecting the region from the threats of climate change vital.¹

Such threats to the regional ecosystem are grave and ever-increasing. Over the last 50 years, crude oil spills and gas flaring have resulted in significant pollution, with estimates of over 17 million liters of crude oil spilled.² These crude oil spills have led to the contamination of farmlands, air, creeks, water sources, and marine life. For the people who are predominantly fisherfolks and farmers – which is also an



occupation for some persons with disabilities – the environmental degradation has often meant destruction of their livelihoods.³ Response to these challenges has been compounded by serious institutional setbacks. These include mismanagement of public funds at the local, state, and federal governance levels; a severe lack of the required technical capacity and manpower within government agencies; and the overarching background of insufficient enforcement of environmental laws and policies. As a result, the already grave environmental issues within the Niger Delta keep escalating.

Concurrently, Nigeria is in a critical phase of advancing the rights of persons with disabilities. In 2019, the Discrimination Against Persons with Disabilities

(Prohibition) Act was signed into law⁴ in the country, aiming to advance the rights of persons with disabilities in Nigeria. There are still, however, major obstacles to full implementation of the law – including ensuring full inclusion of PWDs in communities. Multiple self-organized groups, CSOs in the Niger Delta are working to advance disability rights in the region yet need support from both local and international partners to advance their work.

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Why narrative change?

When we are thinking about social change, we often see tactics focus on immediate changes, like influencing a particular policy, but these are constantly in danger of being reversed. This can be because they are working against powerful narratives that are embedded in the overarching culture.

Narratives are how human beings make sense of the world. They are rooted in deeply held beliefs, expressed and reinforced by the stories we tell one another and hear in public discourse (including in the media,

within community forums, and online). Narratives give deeper meaning to the stories, messages and experiences we have on a daily basis – and eventually come to feel like commonsense through repetition.

Narrative change is the process of examining commonly held ideas within our cultures and working out how they define our reality, and how we can influence them. It then works to construct and promote new narratives which challenge the existing ones to drive social change. Crucially, it is for those with direct experience of the harm caused by the existing, dominant narrative to define its replacement, so that problematic ways of thinking are not unintentionally reinforced.

For as powerful as narratives are in impacting our thinking and ultimately our actions, they are typically invisible and unconscious: they exist as a mental shortcut in our brains helping us to process, sort, and file information, giving us a quick way to decide what we think or feel about something. We approached this research through the lens of narrative change because revealing, challenging, and changing how people think and feel is what we believe ultimately drives social change.

To this end, our methodology centered around responsible community engagement, with actively listening to communities at its core. In this research, the individuals and communities within the disability rights and environmental justice movements were the principal interests. As such, the research investigated any topics that participants cited as being consequential to their lived experience. Our listening-based qualitative methodology also included numerous stages throughout the project's development where we went back to the research participants for their feedback and validation of the findings. The goal was to ensure that we could identify existing narratives – and then use what we heard, learned and verified to create meaningful insights that could be used to change thinking on these deep rooted issues.

Please note: this is a shortened version of the report, adapted for physical distribution. For the full version, which includes all the Appendices outlining the methodology and the sources used, please visit the "Publications" section on our website www.nmap.co.



Person standing in polluted water

Our methodology centered around responsible community engagement, with actively listening to communities at its core.

Key Insights

Our research process focused first and foremost on listening. We sought to understand the lived experiences of the disability community and climate justice activists in Akwa Ibom, Bayelsa, and Rivers states – and to integrate that understanding with how best to approach enhancing the intersectionality between the two. Below we offer five key insights, contextualized further by details drawn from our focus groups, interviews, media analysis, and desk research.



PWD focus group

Key Insight One

Persons with disabilities living in the Niger Delta face intense social discrimination which leaves them feeling isolated and undervalued as members of society.

A major problem faced by PWDs in the Niger Delta is the tendency for society to discount their abilities and strengths because they have disabilities. This was a standout theme both in the disability-focused media coverage we analyzed⁵ and across multiple focus groups and interviews conducted by our team. Research participants spoke of facing significant discrimination from others in society, including people actively trying to avoid interacting with them. Some participants spoke of discrimination and being seen as a burden from their own family.

“You might be more intelligent than them but looking at you physically, they will just grade you as somebody who doesn’t have anything to contribute [because] maybe you cannot join them to do manual jobs and all the rest.” – PWD participant, Bayelsa State

“If they do anything, they will not carry persons with disabilities along, because they will say in my dialect, ‘awokpana’. That the person has an impairment. That the person cannot participate in any aspect of doing something in the community.”

– PWD participant, Akwa Ibom State

Where people do attempt to help, they are, as one PWD participant from Akwa Ibom State put it, “often coming from a place of sympathy rather than empathy” and failing to treat PWDs as full human beings in their own right. This is also reflected in the media: even broadly-supportive coverage sometimes uses questionable vocabulary (e.g. “physically challenged people”⁶) or somewhat derogatory terms (“persons living with various types of deformity”⁷). This adds to the dehumanizing effect and further entrenches a feeling of underappreciation and separation from the rest of society.

“We are still living on the charity model, which they said, “he is a disabled person now, let me just assist him.” And not from the citizen aspect of it that this person is a citizen of the state, this person is a citizen of this country. Let his rights be given to him.”

— PWD participant, Akwa Ibom State

“We see the society as a problem, the society that makes us lose the opportunity to participate equally with other knowledgeable people because their attitude is posing a barrier. — PWD participant, Bayelsa State

As well as bigotry experienced directly from fellow citizens, PWDs also face unnecessary challenges due to a lack of accessible infrastructure. For example, it was mentioned that there are very rarely wheelchair ramps provided in communal places like churches, or sign language or braille provided at Town Halls, despite it being a major information center.

“Even in our churches ... there is no ramp for us to enter the church. They will put steps, five, seven steps which a person with a disability will not be able to climb inside the church.”

— PWD participant, Akwa Ibom State

Communication barriers in particular lead to an information gap, whereby PWDs are excluded from accessing information they need to live their lives independently, causing them further need to rely on friends and family to relay important updates.

“If there is any information for persons with disability, we channel it through phone calls and in most cases, we send messages and call for a meeting, although even that meeting is not actually inclusive... because of financial constraints. So it’s not that effective.” — PWD participant, Akwa Ibom State

“Persons with disabilities that are living in interior villages don’t even know what is happening. Most of them don’t even have phones. Even when they have phones, they don’t have a network until when they see a person one-on-one, that is when they will know that [some activity] is happening...” — PWD participant, Akwa Ibom State

Analysis of Nigeria’s media shows that the plight of persons with disabilities in the Niger Delta is also mostly ignored in the information space. The majority of disability-related coverage from the examined national-level outlets focused on, or included personal stories from, Abuja, Lagos, and the Northern regions of Nigeria. For regional and local outlets in the Niger Delta, disability was a rare topic of reporting. In addition, direct PWDs’ voices and experiences are still largely missing — or are victimized — in the coverage, with only occasional articles, TV programs, and social media projects engaging with PWDs as guest experts⁸ or interviewees.⁹

Due to such widespread discrimination, PWDs reported feeling isolated from others, which can lead to a deep mistrust and a hesitancy to engage in civic life. This emotional strain can also lead to low self-esteem and an internalization of the idea that they have nothing to offer society because they have disabilities.

“Sometimes, I feel ashamed of myself. In certain places I will just judge that they will not consider me [for work] so sometimes I forfeit some of those places.” — PWD participant, Rivers State

Focus group participants expressed a desire to see a shift in public thinking away from equating disability with lesser ability and instead recognize that PWDs have talents and ideas to contribute.

“Let people stop seeing us as liabilities but as able people that can do something. As I am now, I can clean somebody’s house. I was a cleaner and I did it very well. I was baking. I am a baker. I can do those things. But right now, nobody can give me those things that I should go and do. No, they will not, [instead] they will look at me as less.” — PWD participant, Rivers State

“Like me: I produce paint, but how do I go about it? Even though I have paint, I haven’t registered my company. And even though I can produce it, people look at me as if I can’t make a good thing.” — PWD participant, Rivers State

Climate change disproportionately affects persons with disabilities in the Niger Delta, further curtailing their freedom and leading to increased insecurity.

Climate change has a hugely negative impact on the lives of persons with disabilities. These impacts, broadly speaking¹⁰ and on the Niger Delta communities in particular,¹¹ have been recorded extensively in the media and the press. Our discussions with experts and focus group participants further confirmed that such effects were disproportionately negative for PWDs in the region, curtailing livelihoods, exacerbating existing barriers to participating in society or creating brand new ones.

Most immediate consequences of major climate emergency events present profound challenges to PWDs. Their mobility restrictions — combined with the underdeveloped infrastructure in the region — often means they face greater dangers during flooding, erosion, and other disasters. For example, focus group participants described how inaccessible roads caused by lack of government maintenance and exacerbated by adverse weather conditions may not be visible to someone with a sight impairment, or might make traveling difficult for someone who uses a wheelchair. This is made worse by PWDs being unable to prepare effectively for negative weather events because of a lack of effective communications channels available in communities.

“During the rainy season, most of the time, [persons with disabilities] are not fully aware of how the roads and gutters are. Most times, they just walk, and they just fall inside the hole, maybe because there was no proper awareness or information about the right track they should follow so that they can be safe.”

—PWD participant, Akwa Ibom State

In addition to this, PWDs are often not actively supported by others in their communities. Some attempts at offering support, such as pushing wheelchairs or intrusively guiding persons who are blind, are done without PWDs’ consent. This is due to stigma, but also due to low awareness of the disability issues among the general population.

Our media landscape analysis also shows that national and local media outlets rarely cover disability and climate-/environment-related issues simultaneously. The only thematic overlap uncovered through the media analysis was via the coverage of health issues among the population affected by oil exploration,¹² as well as their entitlement to the benefits from natural resources¹³ and participation in extraction-related decision-making.¹⁴ Impact of environmental hazards, pollution and disaster events on PWDs is discussed very rarely.¹⁵ As a result, as one PWD participant from Rivers State reflected, “during times of climate change when they see disabled people, some other people will just run and leave the disabled person behind.”

In a more long-term perspective, changing environmental patterns and continued pollution negatively affect biodiversity, fishing areas and community farmlands in the Niger Delta, resulting in less fish for fishing, fewer viable crops for farming, an increase in disease and other health related problems. As one community head and CSO representative from Rivers State shared with us,

“I am from a community [where] you can just stroll from your house and go to the riverbank, get your catch, and go back. But because of environmental pollution, the point of fishing is farther, so to speak, very far. ... You have to get your canoe now and paddle



Mangrove, by Jurgen — Flickr

it a very long distance. And you see that [persons with disabilities] cannot go on their own, except they go in the company of people. So, to that extent, they are affected by the environment.”

The negative impact on the agricultural sectors continues to be felt very keenly by PWDs who often rely on the local environment in order to make a living. Without viable crops to harvest, some PWDs are finding that they are unable to make a sustainable income.

“...during the rainy season... [PWDs] from the hinterlands find it difficult to access the urban city because of the nature of the road. And it has equally affected the limits and the time they actually attend to their farm since the majority of them are farmers ... when it rains and the road is not where they can actually pass to their farm it limits the way they attend to their crops.” —PWD participant, Akwa Ibom State

Focus group participants expressed a desire to see special attention being paid to solutions for groups disproportionately affected by climate change, including PWDs. The overall feeling expressed in focus groups was that the deck is already stacked against PWDs, and the negative impact of climate change makes everything worse when targeted solutions are not developed.

The negative impact on the agricultural sectors continues to be felt very keenly by PWDs who often rely on the local environment in order to make a living.

Key Insight Three

More often than not climate action does not involve persons with disabilities, due to (perceived and real) gaps in accessibility and education

Both PWDs and people active in the climate justice space confirmed that PWDs are very rarely involved in climate action. Across the board, PWDs are often ignored even in the most immediate emergency responses. A PWD participant from Bodo community reminisced that:

“...there was a time that they said they were doing cleanup. But I must confess to you that... for the past how[ever] many years that they did it, they did not consider, they did not talk to [persons with disabilities]. ... And as I am talking to you now, nothing has been done in that.”

Some representatives of environmental CSOs perceived their organizations as making some accommodations to include PWDs. For example, there was mention of adopting accessible language and using images to describe environmental destruction. However, PWDs on the whole noted that there were overall systemic barriers to them participating in the workforce, and also felt that much more could be done to welcome them into the climate movement. Research participants mentioned, for example, the need for removing barriers by ensuring ramps are available to access offices and information being shared in a variety of ways including braille and with the support of a sign language interpreter.

“...just look at us, we want to come to the venue where these things will take place. [But] we don't come with ordinary [needs]. You come with a [car] drop, and you must look for somebody to assist you. It's not that we don't want to attend or it's not because we are always asking for money. No, when you take these things into perspective, you find out that these are the small things we need.”

— PWD participant, Akwa Ibom State

Those working for CSOs that we spoke to expressed willingness to make changes to the way they work in order to remove barriers to engagement for PWDs, but they expressed concerns around the financial implications, as well as possible push back from community stakeholders.

“Now we have a problem: how do you approach these organizations? You know, unlike Lagos and Abuja ... most CSOs here in Port Harcourt, we operate under capacity.”

– CSO representative, Rivers State

Persons with disabilities can be involved in both the disability justice movement and the climate justice movement.

Both CSO and PWD focus group participants felt that they could work together as they see shared common goals between their respective areas of focus. Both movements want to create a better life for everyone, where everyone is included, and their rights are respected and upheld.

While there was agreement that voices of PWDs need to be represented to a greater extent in the discourse around climate change, there were differing opinions amongst participants with regards to how PWDs will be further incorporated into the climate movement. Several CSO comments seemed to suggest that as well as CSO organizations becoming more inclusive and accessible, PWDs themselves also need to come forward and express an interest in being involved. Some CSO representatives suggested that PWDs might be feeling too shy, have low awareness of climate change issues, or be too suspicious of potential exploitation to engage:

“Many of them just feel shy of coming up to socialize with people... So, because of that they don’t feel like coming out, and again they don’t have much opportunity to be in charge.”

– CSO representative, Rivers State



Person in oil field

“Considering people with disabilities, it then also means that the awareness is very low on their part. Because how can somebody raise a voice or talk against or for something he has no or little knowledge on what he wants to talk about?”

– CSO representative, Rivers State

“Majority of [PWDs] did not want to show up [to our events], because they feel that we are using them. So socially, I see that there is that issue of withdrawal: they don’t want to come out boldly to associate with what we are doing.”

– PWD participant, Bayelsa State

Other CSO respondents thought that if PWDs were to feel welcomed and valued into the movement they would be much more likely to engage.

“PWDs, I believe if they are given an opportunity they will talk. They need a platform, like coming together and forming a body so we can know them.”

– CSO representative, Bayelsa State

Disability community members themselves, however, reported a higher degree of caution about potential collaboration. They pointed out that unwillingness to engage is

not due to shyness, but because of the conditioned isolation induced by societal discrimination, which fuels reasonable mistrust and makes PWDs want to self-withdraw. Thus, in addition to many existing structural barriers to participation which they reported to often not be considered by CSOs, PWDs stressed the need to invest in a process of trust-building before any meaningful collaboration could take place. In particular, PWDs noted that there are experts in different fields who also have disabilities, and that CSOs should more actively involve these individuals into their work.

“In order to build trust ... you have to bring the person close to you, you must bring the person to see [things] from your own perspective. You also bring in the person to see meaningful contributions, then allow whoever is your partner to know that whatever proceeds comes from that partnership will be shared. It is like [in a company, where a founder] is not the only owner. There are other owners, [the founder] just has a controlling share over the projects... I keep telling people, even on a radio program, I say: we have any kind of person you have in the other world, in the world of persons who are not physically challenged. We have doctors, we have anything you want, we are sound, so what we need is that bonding to create that perfect trust in whatever engagement we are.” – PWD participant, Bayelsa State

“...when they lack the belief and competence in us, there is no way we can thrive in the Niger Delta, even if we have everything we need here.” – PWD participant, Akwa Ibom State



PWD focus group

Key Insight Five

For the two movements to work together and be built on trust, persons with disabilities should be involved from the very beginning across all the activities and processes.

Finally, while recognizing that including PWDs into the climate justice movement is important, it is not enough. Not only can PWDs be included, they should be, both because of their fundamental right to an equal opportunity in decision-making and collective action, and because of the unique experiences and insights they can bring to the table.

Trust building came out as a key requirement in any effort to support greater solidarity between the disability rights and climate justice movements. When PWDs feel their involvement is tokenistic, feelings of mistrust are deepened and collaboration is further hindered.

“They do it in the mindset of ‘let me just include him’. But in the real sense, they find it difficult to actually make the place where it ought to have been.” – PWD participant, Akwa Ibom State

PWD respondents expressed a desire for CSOs to be more transparent and to ensure PWDs are seen and treated as equal – and special – partners. They also argued that PWDs are better-placed to deal with their communities’ issues because of their lived experiences and vested interests in the well-being of fellow PWDs.

“...if we are involved ... we will know that we can deal [with] our people very sincerely.” – PWD participant, Rivers State

To establish better levels of trust, focus group participants acknowledged the importance of PWDs being involved in the planning stages of any project and not just involved at a later stage to fulfill a ‘diversity’ metric or as a means of attracting additional funding.

“Number one thing is for the association advocating for these persons to involve them in their day-to-day activities so that they can be part and parcel of the advocacy and create an impact.” – PWD participant, Akwa Ibom State

Opportunities for a Narrative Shift

When considering how disability is understood within the Niger Delta region, we should consider the deeper beliefs which underpin and give resonance to the remarks we observed in the media and the comments we were hearing from focus groups participants about their lived experience. Based on the research findings and key insights, below we identify three narrative shifts which we believe would help to foster greater solidarity between the disability rights and climate justice causes in the Niger Delta. These narratives have been validated by our focus group participants.

Narrative Shift One

There is ability in disability: PWDs are capable members of society and valued contributors to their communities.

Currently, the predominant narrative across Nigerian society is that PWDs are not valuable citizens and do not have anything to offer in civic life. This is evident in the testimonies given by PWDs about their lived experience in community today, examples of the media analyzed, as well as the lack of consideration given at the State and government levels to the best ways of removing barriers currently hindering the freedom of PWDs. A number of statements were made during focus groups discussions which mentioned that although Nigeria is a signatory to international legislation on disability rights, as well as having its own policies developed, there is not the political will to see them implemented. Furthermore, there is a lack of organizations proactively supporting and advocating for PWDs to see their rights recognized in full. All of these examples point towards a deep narrative held across society which suggests that persons with disabilities are not as worthy as persons without disabilities and so can be disregarded.

“If you want to go and ask somebody something now, for example, they will say: ‘she’s coming for money’. They will not listen to what you want to say. They will conclude that you are coming to beg them for money because of your impairment, that you have turned into a beggar.”

– PWD participant, Akwa Ibom State

In order to see greater commitment to and instantiation of disability rights, as well as PWD involvement and leadership in the fight for climate justice, the public narrative needs to shift towards seeing PWDs as citizens with abilities and not solely defined by their disability. Instead of being viewed as people who need charity, they would be seen as people with ideas and talents to share.

“We have things to deliver, we have talents to showcase.”

– PWD participant, Akwa Ibom State

Narrative Shift Two

Climate change is a disability rights issue

The second narrative shift we have identified is making apparent the interconnection between climate change and disability rights. Currently, climate change is understood as an entirely separate issue to disability rights. This is evidenced by the lack of media reporting which speaks of both climate and disability justice and the fact that there is very limited collaboration between the two movements.

“You can’t separate [the two]. Because they live in the environment. And if the environment is unsafe or insecure for them to stay, you can imagine ...the trauma they pass through, the challenges they pass through.”

– CSO representative, Rivers State

“I support the co-participation because I believe that nobody can tell the story better than them. ... And I believe that over the years they have made several efforts in order to speak and tell their own stories by themselves. So it’s important that we note this and ensure that PWDs are not just represented but they’re participating.”

— *Community Representative, Bayelsa state*

By building power for a new narrative which acknowledges that not everyone experiences climate change equally, and that the impacts of changes in weather patterns and ongoing pollution have a multiplying effect on disabilities, we would be able to ensure that climate solutions pay particular attention to solutions which work for PWDs.

Caring for our earth means caring for each other

The final narrative shift we will look at in this report is the chance to center a narrative of care both for our natural world and for each other. It was first inspired by our literature review, which unveiled a young, but rich body of publications which promoted rights-based participatory approaches to disability and the added value of the lived disability experience in informing climate-resilient development. Specifically, we saw a refreshingly positive take on PWDs’ dependency relationships being compared to the desirable relationship between humans and the environment.¹⁶ This positive narrative of interdependence is juxtaposed with the “fallacy of misplaced concreteness” in our current economic development model, which is unsustainable and exclusionary¹⁷ — ideas which were echoed by our research participants.

A narrative of care would center and recognize everyone’s personhood, as well as the interconnection between human beings and the wider ecosystem of which we are only one small part. This care, human-centeredness, and solidarity thus become not tokenistic goals, but rather means to a common prosperity through appreciation of our shared vulnerability.

“...this disability thing... I have a friend, just four weeks ago I called him — now he is blind. This lady that came here said four years ago she was a normal person. ... It is just a thin line, but a lot of people do not understand.” — *CSO representative, Rivers State*

This new narrative would foreground the deep connection between the values of care underpinning both disability rights and climate justice, paving a way for greater synergy between these two movements and thus helping to more effectively tackle discrimination against PWDs and gain wider support for climate justice.



Man showing oil on hand, by Milieudéfensie — Flickr

A narrative of care would center and recognize everyone’s personhood, as well as the interconnection between human beings and the wider ecosystem

Recommendations

Developed alongside focus group participants, the recommendations below will help to further the cause of disability justice and climate action in the Niger Delta, by building power for new solidarity between the two movements. We foresee them helping to create greater capacity to advocate for the implementation of existing policies around disability rights and to ensure that climate action can be taken by anyone for everyone.



PWD focus group

Table 11: Summary of Recommendations

Recommendations	Funders	CSOs
1. Ensure persons with disabilities are able to claim their seat at the table	1.1.1. Support monitoring and data collection activities with PWDs	1.2.1. Assess mobility barriers, design plans to tackle them
	1.1.2. Provide core funding for PWD inclusion, make inclusion and accessibility a funding criterion	1.2.2. Review for gaps in communication strategies
	1.1.3. Fund training programs on accessibility	1.2.3. Engage with a local disability rights organization
	1.1.4. Invest in PWD education	1.2.4. Include PWDs from early project stages
		1.2.5. (<i>Disability Justice CSOs</i>): ensure that disability rights CSOs are inclusive of people with a range of disabilities

Recommendations	Funders	CSOs
2. Prioritize initiatives that underline the intersectionality of climate change and disability justice	2.1.1. Educate other funders	2.2.1. Organize a Forum for PWD CSOs, Climate CSOs and PWDs
	2.1.2. Fund field-building work across the two movements	2.2.2 Develop a framework of intersectionality, open to signatories
	2.1.3. Sponsor “train the trainers” programs	2.2.3. (<i>Climate Justice CSOs</i>): Setup PWD advisory board
3. Build power for a new narrative on disability	3.1.1. Resource a narrative change campaign	3.2.1. Ensure the language and messages in communications are inclusive and respectful of PWDs
	3.1.2. Ensure the language and messages in communications are inclusive and respectful of PWDs	3.2.2. Show solidarity to PWD activists by supporting their cause
	3.1.3. Fund trainings for journalists	

Table 11: Summary of Recommendations

Recommendation One

Ensure persons with disabilities are able to claim their seat at the table.

Through our research we heard very clearly that not enough is being done in the Niger Delta to effectively listen to and involve persons with disabilities in climate activism and civil society more broadly. To ensure PWDs’ **full** and **regular** participation in the climate movement, a number of proactive steps should be taken to remove existing barriers and introduce practices that go beyond simple tokenism.

While the research yielded a lot of suggestions regarding expectations to be fulfilled by the government, CSOs and funders have the opportunity to put into practice their belief in the importance of PWD engagement and leadership by investing time and resources into pursuing several key activities.

Above all – and integrated within the outlined recommendations – climate actors and PWDs will need to invest in a series of trust-building activities that are pivotal to any meaningful collaboration. CSOs need to fully come to recognize the talents and abilities of PWDs, and PWDs need to feel that climate activists genuinely want to include them in their work. Additionally, when seeking out guidance from PWDs, CSOs need to ensure that they are engaging with PWDs on a mutually-beneficial basis, either fairly compensating or ensuring other benefits for the PWDs for their work and assistance.

1.1. Funders:

1.1.1. Support monitoring activities that facilitate tracking and updating information about persons with disabilities in different communities. We heard that it can be difficult for CSOs to engage PWDs in their work simply because they have no information about these people, especially in more remote communities. In addition to focusing on persons with physical disabilities, these activities should also pay special attention to persons with intellectual and developmental disabilities, as they are often ignored or dismissed.

1.1.2. Make core funding available for CSOs to mainstream inclusion and accessibility into their work. This could be done by making regular consultations or collaboration with PWDs a mandatory element of the project proposals pursuing funding, provided that sponsorship for such activities and infrastructure required can be granted.

1.1.3. Resource training programs, which should be co-designed with PWDs, and make the training programs available to CSOs in order to support them in becoming fully accessible organizations. In addition to training, it would be useful to co-create together with PWDs a CSO-facing best practice guidebook and other supporting materials with case studies of how other organizations are ensuring full involvement of PWDs.

1.1.4. Invest to a greater extent in PWD education programs across the region in order to continue bridging education levels amongst PWDs, which are still low due to social discrimination and economic poverty. This would increase PWDs' confidence about their ability and right to participate fully in CSO climate advocacy and broader civic activities. Also consider sponsoring PWD-supporting programs that address climate change issues (e.g. training PWDs in climate-resilient farming).

1.2. CSOs:

1.2.1. Assess where your organization may have mobility barriers to PWD participation and design an action plan to address these. For example, are the facilities where your organization hosts its activities physically accessible to everyone? If possible, retain a PWD as a consultant in this regard and have them formally advise on facilities or planned events.

1.2.2. Review your existing communication approaches and consider, in consultation with PWDs, other formats you could adopt in order to reach more people (e.g. braille, audio, sign language, simplified language).¹⁸ You could create a communications accessibility guidelines document to be circulated amongst all your staff, so that everyone knows how best to make their communications accessible.

1.2.3. Engage with a local disability rights organization which could provide further training and longer-term support to colleagues and volunteers on PWD inclusion.

1.2.4. Ensure PWD involvement from the earliest stages of planning in any project. We heard from PWDs that both PWD-facing CSOs and climate change organizations should create and follow clear co-design principles to ensure PWD engagement is meaningful. This will be vital to creating greater trust not only between the two movements, but also between persons with disabilities and those directly engaged in PWD advocacy.

1.2.5. (PWD CSOs) Ensure that disability rights CSOs are inclusive of a range of persons with disabilities. One point that came up during the research process was that some PWDs do not feel that disability rights organizations were fully representing the needs of the local PWD community. To ensure better representation and trust, we recommend PWD CSOs pursue regular in-person engagement via community events to identify persons with disabilities across the whole range (including e.g. i.e., physical and intellectual or developmental disabilities)

Prioritize initiatives that underline the intersectionality of climate change and disability justice

This report has been written with the view that intersectionality is crucial to the success of social and environmental justice movements. As well as making each other stronger through the cross-pollination of ideas and tactics, movements become more likely to succeed when they recognize that the values which inspire public concern about different instances of oppression are the same. In other words, the values which are likely to engage someone on disability rights are the same or very similar to the values which are likely to inspire someone to engage in environmental activism.

To further strengthen the recognition of the interconnections that exist between the disability rights and climate justice movements, both in terms of policy overlaps but also in terms of deeper values and narratives, we have developed the following recommendations:

2.1. Funders:

2.1.1. Commit to educating other funders about the intersectionality between climate change and disability. This should include connections at the level of policy change, but should also include the connections at a deeper narrative level that underscore the need for organizations working in the field to internalize that these issues are irrevocably intertwined.

2.1.2. Invest in greater field-building work between the two movements, supporting them to form greater levels of trust, understanding and solidarity. This could take the form of regular Forum meetings where climate and PWD activists can identify shared values and a vision of the changes they want to see, and generate collaborative solutions to achieve this vision. It is important that such engagements do not remain limited to the narrow circle of existing activists, but are used as the opportunity to find and engage with new voices from the PWD and broader civil society.

2.1.3. Sponsor “train the trainers” programs in social inclusion and accessibility for persons with disabilities. The goal of such programs would be to equip these individuals with the skills to further train and provide expertise to CSOs and the government on systematic inclusion of PWDs in decision-making. Such programs could simultaneously help reduce unemployment among PWDs and put them at the helm of driving the change needed in their communities.

2.2. CSOs:

2.2.1. Organize a Forum whereby climate and PWD activists can meet at regular intervals throughout the year to discuss joint objectives and campaign strategies. See a note on the importance of regularly attracting new voices to such Forums in **2.1.2.**

2.2.2. Develop a framework of intersectionality including having forum consortium members make a written commitment to integrate disability rights within the climate change movement, and to make the movement accessible to all who must participate. Signatories to this pledge would hold each other accountable for demonstrating this commitment via PWD inclusion and leadership.

2.2.3. Climate CSOs in particular could consider setting up a PWD advisory board or focusing their board growth strategies on attracting new PWD board members who can help guide the organization to becoming more inclusive. Respondents in focus groups indicated that many CSOs do not have the basic knowledge that needs vary amongst PWDs and so ensuring representation of persons with different disabilities will be hugely important.

Build power for a new narrative on disability

As discussed earlier in this report, currently there exists a negative narrative around disability in the Niger Delta, which reinforces the idea that PWDs have limited abilities and worth as citizens. Investment should be made in ‘building power’ for a new alternative narrative to take root, so as to see durable shifts in the way that citizens of the Niger Delta understand disability. Building power for a new narrative consists of creating imaginative and engaging stories to seed across various aspects of a culture. These stories, messages, and images need to be consistently repeated to see them picked up by other cultural actors within the region. Only when we achieve a particular level of message-saturation can we expect the narrative to take root.

3.1. Funders:

3.1.1. Resource a narrative change campaign to be led and designed by PWDs in the Niger Delta, focused on shifting the narrative around disability and disability justice as a climate activism priority. Narrative work requires commitment from an ecosystem of different actors to be truly successful. In order to see greater alignment between the climate justice and disability rights movements in the Niger Delta, the campaign needs to focus on communications campaigns across civil society organizations, solutions journalism strategies for reporters, and other methods that would help displace negative narratives to make space for a hope-based messaging strategy pursued by all the key stakeholders shaping the discourse on PWDs in Nigeria.

3.1.2. Ensure all messages in communications are inclusive and respectful of PWDs, in alignment with the Nigerian PWD communities’ preferences and best international standards. This equally concerns the formal language and terminology used, the content of communications, as well as the accessibility of the forms and channels used. Work could also be done to support other funders and grantees to review their communications in this light, too.

3.1.3. Sponsor training programs for journalists and media organizations in the Niger Delta / Nigeria to address the issue of offensive and derogatory language that is often used in reference to PWDs.

3.2. CSOs:

3.2.1. Ensure all messages in communications are inclusive and respectful of PWDs, in alignment with the Nigerian PWD communities’ preferences and best international standards. This equally concerns the formal language and terminology used, the content of communications, as well as the accessibility of the forms and channels used.

3.2.2. Show solidarity to PWD activists by supporting their cause. This could include sharing their calls to action on your own platforms, offering them logistical support (e.g. meeting spaces) or publicly adding your name, as an organization, to their campaign and asking your supporters to do the same.



PWD focus group

Conclusion and Next Steps



Children swimming in Ikot Ada Udo, by Milieudefensie / Akintunde Akinleye – Flickr

Conclusion

Communities in the Niger Delta face significant challenges due to climate change, and the findings of this report demonstrate that these challenges are further exacerbated for persons with disabilities. While this is rooted in systemic exclusion, what we have seen throughout our research process is a willingness for CSOs and PWDs to work together to try to improve this situation – both by ensuring that the voices of PWDs are being heard and integrated in the climate conversation and by striving to make conditions better overall.

This report outlines suggested steps for funders and CSOs to take toward ensuring greater levels of solidarity and collaboration between the disability rights and climate justice movements. With that said, this work is difficult – especially when the individuals working to improve societal conditions are those most impacted by them – yet in bringing to life new narratives of care and solidarity, we can advance the knowledge that it is possible to mobilize allies to stand together and become more than the sum of their individual parts.

Recommendations for Future Narrative Change Work

Beyond the recommendations for funders and CSOs in the region, we see a number of additional opportunities to build on this work. Looking at how to move forward with the insights gained from the research, we can leverage the findings to continue building narrative power and fostering local collaboration at the intersection of environmental justice and disability rights. Due to feelings of frustration and fatalism expressed in focus groups, it is key to note that the overarching guidance for any work going forward would be to anchor it in a solutions-oriented and hope-based framework in order.



Everyday life in Bodo Chris McMorrow, Creative Associates International – Flickr

1. Opportunities for more research

The current body of work has opened several pathways for additional research into this subject area. This includes: (1) conducting similar research in other Niger Delta states to determine if their experiences align; (2) further research of this nature with a focus on individuals within the disability community who have cognitive, learning and neurological disabilities; (3) more narrative analysis of the campaigns and content produced by the climate justice and disability justice organizations; (4) the role of foreign and domestic energy corporations in shaping the narratives of climate change responsibility, on the national level and within the Niger Delta; and (5) an in-depth exploration of government actions and interactions with both the disability rights and climate change communities.

2. Direct engagement with local advocacy groups

We see a benefit to launching an advocacy mentorship cohort that would work with civil society groups and with members of the disability rights movement to further develop ways to advance the identified alternative narratives. This would enable local voices to collaborate and craft communications campaigns on these local issues, forming a truly grassroots movement to advance environmental justice and disability rights.

3. Deployment of communications campaigns

While the research has identified three potential narrative shifts that could be infused in a messaging campaign, the further work would involve actually deploying narrative change campaigns around those narratives. This would involve developing stories and messages that could advance each identified narrative, testing them in the market, and then identifying the best medium for each one.



Solar powered water tower, Milieudefensie — Flickr

About Us



New Media Advocacy Project — Facebook

New Media Advocacy Project (NMAP)

NMAP changes narratives to advance human rights and environmental justice. We share our research on narratives and values, and our expertise in impact storytelling, with people on the frontlines of global crises. Working as co-producers, we assemble cohorts of creative changemakers, mentor them through our narrative change curriculum, and make grants to realize their visions for a better future. We envision a world where everyone can access their inherent rights as human beings in a society that exists in harmony with nature.

Media Awareness and Justice Initiative (MAJI)

The mission of the Media Awareness and Justice Initiative is to work with marginalized groups and social movements working together for social, economic, cultural, and environmental justice by helping them use media and communication technologies to inform, organize, mobilize, and further strengthen their efforts to create a better, equal, and more just world. MAJI focuses on four thematic areas namely Environment, Human Rights, Digital inclusion and Gender. Our work is based on a culmination of a number of years of disparate participatory media, ICT, and capacity building training for marginalized groups and indigenous communities. To achieve maximum impact, MAJI uses ground level research, low cost human centered FLOSS technologies, and interactive strategies to fully democratize information dissemination, increase awareness, and provide the platform for sustainable interactions betgroups and stakeholders.



Media Awareness and Justice Initiative — Facebook

Evrima Research

Evrima Research, LLC, is a research firm focused on social change. For twenty years and in over 100 countries, our women-owned small business has delivered insights and results to support positive change worldwide. Evrima’s focus is on providing evidence and recommendations that link donors, implementers, and local stakeholders to the communities they serve, utilizing adaptive approaches and leveraging complexity-aware data for responsive implementation throughout the program cycle. The Evrima team is adept at synthesizing, communicating, and visualizing data and research findings into insightful and accessible recommendations to strengthen program effectiveness. Evrima applies the most rigorous qualitative, quantitative, and evaluative methods to answer challenging research questions within a data equity framework.

Ruth Taylor

Ruth Taylor is an independent narrative strategist with a particular focus on “deep narrative”. She works with a range of social and environmental justice organizations across the world to identify and shift narratives in order to create the cultural conditions for a more equitable and regenerative world. Ruth also works part time for the Common Cause Foundation.



Man paddling on lakew, Milieudefensie – Flickr

Evrima’s focus is on providing evidence and recommendations that link donors, implementers, and local stakeholders to the communities they serve, utilizing adaptive approaches and leveraging complexity-aware data for responsive implementation throughout the program cycle.

Appendix: RECOMMENDATIONS FOR GOVERNMENT

Background

In the course of our fieldwork, we heard many specific calls for action directed at government authorities in Nigeria. These were expressed equally strongly by persons with disabilities, PWD community organizations, and climate change activists across all three Niger Delta states that were included in the research activities. While this research engagement primarily focuses on exploring opportunities for synergies between the climate and disability justice movements, we would be remiss not to include the demands for government action in these realms as ultimately the government of Nigeria holds responsibility for fulfilling certain obligations to all citizens within its borders.

Furthermore, it is essential that the government fulfill obligations that it has already signed on to. This includes fully adhering to the 2019 Discrimination Against Persons with Disabilities (Prohibition) Act, and resourcing initiatives mandated by it.

The concerns and calls for government action that were voiced during the research period are grouped below into five areas of desired change: decision-making, education, livelihoods, public infrastructure, and social inclusivity.

1. Decision-making: Improve PWDs' access to public offices and establish clear accountability for failed law enforcement/implementation

One of the most common issues and sources of distrust towards the government and state institutions noted by research participants lay in the exclusion of PWDs from decision-making processes. The infrequent

instances when the government proactively reached out to PWDs were seen as extractive and politicized – and primarily linked to electoral campaigns.

“Government rarely engages with our target group and would rather approach us only during election periods.”

– Disability CSO representative, Rivers State

Research, including examples from other countries, shows that more persons with disabilities should participate in the policy-making and implementation processes as formal office holders or members of special government bodies. Some participants mentioned this as an opportunity to properly implement the Disability Act, which mandates that all public organizations in Nigeria must allocate 5% of their employment opportunities to PWDs.

It is essential that the government fulfill obligations that it has already signed on to. This includes fully adhering to the 2019 Discrimination Against Persons with Disabilities (Prohibition) Act, and resourcing initiatives mandated by it.



Site of first oil well, Rhys Thom – Flickr

“I want [people at the top] to put us in their decision-making. While they are making decisions, they should consider people with disabilities. Because if they do not make decisions from that angle, they cannot reach us.” – PWD participant, Rivers State

“The governor should have aides working under him from different clusters of people with disabilities... A deaf person, a physically challenged person ..., [persons with] albinism and persons affected by leprosy and spinal cord injury [should channel their problem]. We’ll have a person that feeds the SSA to the governor with information then the SSA to the governor will direct this information to the governor. For proper feedback and proper implementation.”
– Disability CSO representative, Akwa Ibom State

“The law says that an office must have at least 5% [places] given to people with disabilities. [But] executive leaders, like a governor or president, have not even implemented up to 2% of that law ... a PWD office in the government house should be established.”
– PWD participant, Rivers State

The government must become more proactive in regularly seeking out and integrating PWD voices, as well as making public employment opportunities available and accessible to PWDs.

2. Education: invest in accessible schools, train the teaching personnel, and include climate and disability into the curriculum

Many research participants conveyed that the most acute problems in both disability and climate justice in Niger Delta are rooted in the inadequate education system. Two broad concern areas surfaced in this regard: physical and cognitive accessibility barriers, and lack of disability and climate education.

Schools face numerous infrastructure related barriers which the government should prioritize addressing, such as inaccessible buildings and classrooms and absence of assistive technologies and equipment. Participants noted a severe lack of teachers trained to accommodate

students with disabilities. Such issues plague even special needs schools, presumably designed with PWDs’ needs in mind.

“I have not seen any public school in Rivers State that is taking persons with disabilities into consideration when it comes to facilities in the school.” – CSO representative, Rivers State

“In that [special] school [for PWDs] you discover that they have many people that are visually impaired who are students with few teachers... In most cases these persons who are there are not even a disability-friendly [group] of persons ... Even the environment right now is not disability-friendly, but that is where it is being called a special school.” – PWD participant, Akwa Ibom State

Curriculum has also been mentioned as a gateway to a more informed and inclusive society. Participants noted that both climate and disability issues should be taught in schools in an action-oriented and learner-centered manner. This would help raise a more responsible and climate- and disability-literate generation, equipped with the skills to adapt to climate change, more attuned to their peers’ various needs, and more capable of cooperating with PWDs. They also noted that curricula should include practical classes, such as sign language, to promote inclusivity in and beyond the classroom.

“There is no school in Nigeria that teaches climate change on a blackboard. I have not seen [any].” – Climate CSO representative, Rivers State

“In our schools in the Niger Delta, they should make a curriculum where sign language can be taught in our classes, so that students with normal hearing [abilities] can also have a fair or basic knowledge of sign language. So that if they see a deaf person, it will not be strange to them.” – PWD participant, Akwa Ibom State

The government should ensure that education across the country is supporting the broad goals of disability rights and climate justice, and remain accountable to fulfilling this need.

3. Livelihoods: provide employment opportunities and support for the self-employed PWDs

Issues of employment emerged as one of the biggest sources of worry for persons with disabilities. The government has a key role in consistently ensuring sustainable livelihoods and helping PWDs escape precarious conditions and protracted dependency on welfare and the good will of their families.

While participants praised some individual training initiatives for PWDs in The Niger Delta, they said the number of persons who received help via those is limited. Thus, it is crucial that employment support should be regular in nature and properly documented, so that local offices and NGOs operate with up-to-date information about persons with disabilities and their needs even in the most remote communities.

“I want them to have some kind of empowerment. Employment where necessary. They should employ those with disabilities so that they ... can earn. And lastly, I also want everybody who is in the position of trust to put those with disability [into employment] not only for self-pity.” – PWD participant, Rivers State

“There [should] be a database for the number of persons around each community... We need a platform where we should have the data concerning people living with disabilities. We should also do some analysis on the rate of employment of persons with disabilities in the state.” – PWD participant, Akwa Ibom state

In addition to assisting with employment directly, the government should pursue regulatory action to protect PWDs’ interest vis-à-vis international oil companies (IOCs). As stated by research participants, considering the profits made by IOCs off the natural resources from the Niger Delta and the negative environmental impact from their extractive activities, IOCs should be required to invest into the well-being of the local PWD communities, including by providing employment opportunities to PWDs.

“International Oil Companies should create an enabling environment for all. There should be ... deliberate legislation that will give PWD a voice. [IOCs] should also be compelled and held accountable.”

– Expert, Bayelsa State

Participants also stressed the precarious conditions facing persons with disabilities who are self-employed or whose livelihoods depend on the environment, for example in the agricultural sector. We have heard cases when ever more frequent extreme climate events, such as floods, severe storms, and droughts destroy farms or severely hurt farming productivity, leading to loss of livelihoods.

Farmers with disabilities, who often already struggle financially to invest into the required equipment and seeds, find it especially difficult to start anew following destructive climate events. With all this in mind and considering best international practices, Nigerian government authorities should provide additional support to PWDs. Exposed to such risks via, for instance, special emergency funds.

“When deaf people have a farm, they don’t have equipment, they don’t have hoes, cutlasses, and they also don’t have seeds like, for example, maize. And sometimes they may want to get land to farm. Sometimes [it] is very expensive, so the government should fund [initiatives to help] buy seeds and land for farmers [with disabilities].”

– PWD CSO representative, Akwa Ibom State

“The government can set aside funds for emergencies, like when disasters happen. How swift are they to respond to a disaster? Like [was mentioned, pipeline] explosions do happen. So, when such things happen, they can send a rescue team for persons who are physically challenged, you know, to move them out of that place.”

– PWD participant, Rivers State

This must be a priority for the government, because the lives and livelihoods of the Niger Delta population hinge on individuals being able to work and to provide for themselves.

4. Public infrastructure: improve physical infrastructure, and provide inclusive communication formats and channels

The research has shown that inclusive infrastructure, such as accessible buildings and transportation, is key to greater cooperation between the climate and disability justice movements. It is also at the core of any healthy society.

However, climate activists, PWDs and disability CSO representatives have frequently mentioned that, despite existing obligations under the law, the government and local authorities across the Niger Delta are not providing adequately accessible public infrastructure. Due to budget limitations, CSOs often cannot create accessible environments on their own, which is why the government, as the primary provider of public goods, should prioritize this area of action.

“There is a policy that requires that public buildings be made accessible to both able and physically challenged persons. Even after the passing and enacting of that law, less than 5% of public buildings and places have remodeled their spaces. And, to make matters worse, there have been no consequences.” – Expert, Rivers State

“Governments, individuals, and organizations [should] invite bus shuttles so they should have a bus stop where persons with disabilities can assemble and [be transported] to their destinations.”
– PWD participant, Akwa Ibom State

In addition to physical infrastructure, the government should ensure that all communications under their responsibility reach persons which might have additional difficulties accessing information. This might include, but not be limited to, employing special interpreters or officers responsible for communications with PWDs in towns and remote villages, providing sign language in TV broadcasts, offering important official communications in braille, and other improvements in accessible communications.

“Actually, they do not have an interpreter going about the town criers. [Only] if somebody is by the side of a [person with disability], he can talk to him or her about what is happening.” – PWD participant, Rivers State

The right to accessing information and to freedom of movement are fundamental human rights, and it is critical that the government ensure that all citizens are able to access these inherent freedoms.

5. Social inclusivity: create conditions for human connection and public participation

The government has a big role to play in addressing the social isolation PWDs experience as a result of stigma and discrimination. This starts from countering stigma within the government institutions themselves. Several experts and CSO representatives suggested the Nigerian government on all levels adopt the Social Model of Disability as the standard framework for assessing, mitigating and removing attitudinal, institutional, communication and environmental barriers to inclusivity.

“[The government] should take into consideration the Social Model of Disability. We see society as a problem, the society that makes us lose the opportunity to participate equally with other knowledgeable people because of their attitude is posing a barrier.”
– PWD participant, Bayelsa State

Several examples of social initiatives to nurture a more disability-inclusive society in Nigeria were offered by our participants, such as opening recreation centers for PWDs and designing TV and radio programs to teach sign language and educate the public about disability – and climate – issues.

“The government, a parastatal or individual [should create] a Recreation Centre that can bring [persons with disabilities] from their homes. Because some of the [PWDs] at home, their brothers, their mothers, did not allow them to go out. And only that one alone can kill them. Because if you don’t associate with people, you will think that you are not part of this world. ” – PWD participant, Rivers State

“Talking about voice, how many times have our TV and radio stations [taken] an opportunity for people to learn sign language?”

– PWD participant, Akwa Ibom State

It is only with an inclusive and connected society that harmony can be found. It would be of great benefit to everyone living in Nigeria if the government made significant strides to enhance public participation and inclusion of all.



Person fishing, Water Alternatives – Flickr



Oil pollution, Milieudéfense – Flickr

While not exhaustive, these recommendations were given by our participants with specific communities in mind. Echoing the community-engaged approach adopted in this project, the often hyperlocal experiences shared with us confirm the importance of consulting PWDs and activists in solution-generating deliberations. Such consultations should be the starting point for government authorities striving to address any issues.

Furthermore, many of the issues and recommendations mentioned earlier in the report should also, where appropriate, be addressed by the government. This addendum reflects the limited supplementary guidance that is government-specific, which emerged as a byproduct of the research. To provide a more nuanced and comprehensive landscape of issues and opportunities for change on the policy design and implementation level, further dedicated community-centered research is required.

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Palm trees, Rhys Thom – Flickr



Two men paddling on a lake, Milieudéfense — Flickr

“I am from a community [where] you can just stroll from your house and go to the riverbank, get your catch, and go back. But because of environmental pollution, the point of fishing is farther, so to speak, very far. ... You have to get your canoe now and paddle it a very long distance. And you see that [persons with disabilities] cannot go on their own, except they go in the company of people. So, to that extent, they are affected by the environment.”

