

Equitable Urban Climate Action:

Integrating disability-inclusive plans into school disaster preparedness

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2025

Executive Summary

This study examines how schools in Zambia's Western Province are preparing students with disabilities for climate-related disasters such as floods, droughts, extreme heat, and disease outbreaks. Focusing on schools in Mongu and Kaoma, the research explores whether existing preparedness efforts adequately protect one of the most vulnerable student populations and identifies opportunities to build more inclusive and resilient education systems.

The findings reveal that students with disabilities face significant barriers to disaster preparedness, despite growing exposure to climate-related disruptions. Many schools lack accessible infrastructure, formal disaster plans, inclusive evacuation procedures, and specialized training for teachers. As a result, preparedness often depends on individual initiative rather than systematic planning. Teachers and school leaders frequently reported relying on improvised responses during emergencies because clear guidance, resources, and institutional support are limited.

A particularly important finding is that students attending mainstream schools reported higher levels of disaster preparedness than those attending special schools. This result suggests that disparities in resources, training opportunities, and access to preparedness information create unequal levels of protection for students with disabilities across different educational settings.

The study also found that prior experience with disasters does not automatically improve preparedness. Students who had previously experienced floods or other emergencies were not significantly better prepared than those without such experiences. The research concludes that exposure alone is insufficient; structured education, training, and ongoing preparedness activities are necessary to build meaningful resilience.

The strongest predictors of preparedness were not demographic characteristics or past experiences but institutional factors. Schools that fostered supportive relationships, clear communication, accessible information, and trust between students and teachers demonstrated significantly higher levels of preparedness. Likewise, schools that integrated disaster awareness into teaching, maintained accessible evacuation procedures, and encouraged participation by students with disabilities were more resilient overall.

A notable contribution of the research is the concept of "**relational resilience**." The study argues that preparedness depends not only on physical infrastructure and emergency procedures but also on the quality of relationships within schools. Students who trusted teachers, felt supported, and knew where to seek help were more likely to feel prepared and capable of responding during emergencies. This finding suggests that social and emotional support systems are critical components of inclusive climate resilience.

Participants consistently identified three priorities for improvement: safer and more accessible school infrastructure, enhanced teacher training on disability-inclusive disaster preparedness,

and stronger coordination between schools, local government, and disaster management agencies. Students with disabilities themselves articulated many of these recommendations, highlighting their role as active contributors to resilience planning rather than passive beneficiaries.

Overall, the study concludes that building climate resilience in schools requires a shift from reactive disaster response toward proactive, inclusive planning. Strengthening infrastructure, institutionalizing disability-inclusive preparedness practices, investing in educator training, and improving cross-sector coordination would significantly improve safety and educational continuity for students with disabilities. The findings underscore that equitable climate action must place inclusion at the center of disaster preparedness efforts if schools are to protect all learners effectively.