

Introduction

The Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) sector should be an entry point to changing attitudes and realizing rights of persons with disabilities. Since 2016, COWASH project implementation (Phase III) has included a strong focus on this issue. COWASH has been a champion, advancing rights, and a pioneer, working with government and other partners to start to address a critical sector gap.

This learning note, based on interviews and case stories from five Ethiopian regions, summarizes the strategies and steps that COWASH has taken towards inclusion of persons with disabilities in the improvement of services. It includes key results and highlights lessons learned. The voices of persons with disabilities are included throughout, reflecting a key aspect of the COWASH approach to inclusion.

CMP approach and activities

Persons with disabilities represent 17.6% of the population in Ethiopia. It is impossible to reach any of the goals in the Growth and Transformation Plan (GTP II) or the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) without addressing the needs of this group. And it is only right that WASH projects (such as COWASH) ensure that persons with disabilities are able to participate in the improvement of WASH services as well as benefiting from universal and accessible provision.

Three main aims in COWASH are:

- to improve the awareness and capacity of WASH experts on disability issues;
- to ensure WASH facilities constructed and rehabilitated are accessible for all; and
- to ensure persons with disabilities benefit, participate and contribute in an equal way in WASH planning, management, and operation and maintenance.

Work on disability inclusion in COWASH is not a separate activity or add-on but has been mainstreamed across the entire project. The main strategy elements that have been employed in doing that are summarized below. Many of these approaches can be replicated by other actors in the WASH sector to improve inclusion and build on the results achieved by COWASH.

Working with a disabled people's organizations (DPOs) on strategy

Persons with disabilities are the best experts in inclusion and accessibility. In 2016, COWASH began cooperation with a local NGO and disabled people's organization (DPO) called the Ethiopian Centre for Disability and Development (ECDD). A detailed guideline on how to ensure the inclusion of persons with disabilities in project activities was developed together with related training materials. The guideline included information about disability and details on how in practice the project would seek to ensure inclusion, such as detailed roles and responsibilities of all stakeholders at different levels and information on

accessible technology solutions in WASH. Later a simpler and shorter guidebook for use in woredas and communities was developed including illustrations by a local deaf artist Tesfaye Menkir.

Box 1: Discovering the WASH sector

Melaku Tekle, the Executive Director of ECDD, describes the COWASH approach to disability inclusion as well planned, very strong and an eye opener for the WASH sector and local DPOs. According to him, there are many different elements that have been essential for its success. First is the collaboration with persons with disabilities and their associations at all levels. It was very important to have persons with disabilities as trainers. Second, was the development of the guideline. It is rare to find such a document he says. COWASH took ECDD into the field so the practical challenges of inclusion in different places became clear. Rural WASH is not something they had worked on before. The team had the opportunity to talk with local people and communities. Third, the commitment of the COWASH leadership and the whole technical assistance team was very high. The team has one person solely focused on disability inclusion, but the whole team has taken up the issue. Melaku encourages COWASH to continue, and to put even more efforts into advocacy and awareness raising, at both ministerial and community levels.



Melaku Tekle leading a session on inclusive WASH at a Federal level awareness raising event for WASH stakeholders in May 2019 in Addis Ababa

Including disability issues in the project M&E system

Without data on disability it is impossible to know what actions need to be taken, or if progress is being made. An early priority of COWASH was to collect more data on persons with disabilities in the project. Disability specific outputs and outcomes were included in the results framework. All the indicators that it was possible to disaggregate by gender, were also disaggregated by disability.

All COWASH data collection formats used in the woredas for the construction of WASH facilities were updated. When making a Community Managed Project (CMP) application for support and investment the community is now requested to share information about community members with disabilities. This is checked during the desk and field appraisal by the woreda. Access to water points and latrines is also checked at that time.

Disability may be seen as negative and associated with shame, so it is not always easy to get information about it. COWASH uses the Washington Group short set of questions that focus on functional difficulties (e.g. difficulties seeing, hearing, or walking long distances) instead of asking directly about disability. Using this set of questions in trainings and at the community level produces much more accurate data. However, there has still been big differences between the woredas in collecting data on disability. Some communities are naturally more open in disclosing data, some woreda staff follow up the issue more strongly, and in some woredas other actors have already done a lot of awareness work.

Awareness raising and advocacy work at the federal level

COWASH seeks to have influence beyond the project and has worked with other sector stakeholders to advance rights for persons with disabilities. The team has, for example, repeatedly raised the issue of disability inclusion in sector working groups, meetings and whenever it is asked to comment and contribute to sector strategies and documents. COWASH was a founding member of the Gender Equity and Disability Inclusion Taskforce at the Ministry of Water, Irrigation and Energy, which was established to implement the undertakings on equity and inclusion taken by the sector at the annual Multi-Stakeholder Forum. The taskforce (supported by COWASH and WaterAid) organised an awareness raising event on inclusion for WASH ministries and Federal level stakeholders.

Box 2. Leading the Gender Equity and Disability Inclusion Taskforce

Lakech Haile is the Gender, Equity and Disability Inclusion Specialist in the National WASH Coordination Office at the MoWIE and leads a critical taskforce. Generally the water sector has focused mainly on technical issues and social issues are forgotten. The lack of data on disability makes the situation worse. Lakech praises COWASH for working on improving this situation: the inclusive WASH guidelines and trainings that have been cascaded down to the regions and woredas have been a great success, and the clear outcomes and outputs with indicators make it possible for the project to monitor the progress in inclusion. The development of new technical accessible designs has also been good she says, and resulted in more accessible facilities.

Prior to setting up the taskforce, DPOs have not previously been part of the WASH sector. The Taskforce has prepared a TOR for a national strategy and guideline on Gender Equity and Inclusive WASH. According to Lakech, the Taskforce needs a very good relation and recognition from the new Water Development Commission and continuous commitment from the Taskforce members. There is still an immense lack of awareness at all levels with regards to disability and equity, she says, and lots more awareness raising and capacity building to do.



Lakech Haile taking part in a COWASH and Bridging the Gap project training in Inclusive WASH for Care Ethiopia in Bahir Dar

Disability inclusion focal persons at the regional level

In each of the regional support units a focal person was nominated to own the issue of disability inclusion. The focal persons have been in different positions, as specialists in gender, capacity building or M&E. These regional staff have played a key role. Having a focal person supports a change process, but it is important to also ensure that inclusion activities are the

responsibility of all staff, as all project activities have to consider persons with disabilities. To support the focal persons, COWASH employed a full-time disability inclusion specialist in its federal level technical assistance team.

Box 3. The work of a regional focal person

Brhan Weldegebriel is the Gender and MSE Specialist and the disability focal person in the COWASH regional support unit in Tigray. She has organised inclusion trainings for woredas, and supported their practical implementation of activities and collected data on persons with disabilities across communities. She works intensely on ensuring cooperation with the Social Affairs offices at different levels and has also instigated joint review meetings and trainings for all the Water Bureau staff. Brhan is passionate about working with persons with disabilities as they are often forgotten. She feels fortunate that despite her own disability and her parents being rural farmers, she had the chance to get a university level education and did not face much discrimination in her life. She often tells her own story to the persons with disabilities and their families to inspire and to encourage them. The biggest challenge she faces is still the attitudes of some of her colleagues at the region and woreda levels, as some see the disability inclusion work as only her job and do not fully believe in its importance. But as the results are beginning to show more and more on the ground there is a realization that it's possible to do better, and they are being convinced.



Brhan (left) discussing with a kebele level DPO representative in Degua Temben woreda, Tigray

Cascading capacity building and awareness raising to the kebele level

Disability inclusion is about changing attitudes. Reaching high level officials and technical experts at all levels is part of that. During the second and third years of the project's Phase III, over 16,500 government staff participated in COWASH disability inclusion events. One day awareness raising events were organised for office heads at region, zone and woreda levels, and longer trainings were organised for technical experts at

region, zone, woreda and kebele levels. Each event included staff from relevant offices: water, health, education, finance, women affairs, social affairs, MSE agency and TVET. This capacity building exercise was time consuming but it is considered critical to the results achieved.

Having persons with disabilities as trainers and trainees is crucial. They are the experts on the matter and can inspire participants by sharing their experiences. In all the trainings and awareness raising events ECDD ensured the main trainer (especially on the topic of disability and inclusion) was a person with disabilities. Local persons with disabilities were also invited to learn about the initiative and to share their experiences. Not all trainees will remember all the technical accessibility issues raised during the training, but most will remember the touching stories and these are the most likely to push them to make a difference in their own work.

Box 4. Inspiration

Dr Abebe Yehualawork was the lead trainer in disability inclusion training for the COWASH regional support units and then all the regions' trainings to their zones and woredas. Dr Abebe is blind, holds a PhD in Special Needs Education from the University of Jyväskylä in Finland and currently also teaches at the Addis Ababa University. He was very inspirational for all the participants in telling his personal story, but also because of his detailed knowledge and understanding of the topic. His presence was key for the participants to take the issue to heart and take it seriously, to cascade the training to lower levels and to work on the issue on the ground. Dr Abebe has praise for how the disability issue was mainstreamed throughout the project and underlines the importance of having focal persons at the federal and regional levels. He says something for the future could be more building model sites to help different stakeholders get a better practical understanding of accessibility.



Dr Abebe Yehualawork leading disability inclusion training in SNNPR in Shashemane

Training regional DPOs and focal persons with disabilities to support training

To support training in the zones and woredas and to build the capacity of local DPOs, COWASH trained focal persons with disabilities in each region. This was important to ensure persons with disabilities were part of the trainings and to bring their expertise to the lower levels. Regional or woreda level DPOs rarely get opportunities to grow and become experts in such large government-led projects, and typically they grasped it building their capacity and confidence.

Box 5. Achieving change in the regions

Guade Demeke, Chair of the Ethiopian National Association of the Blind (ENAB) Gondar branch and the President of the Federation of the DPOs in Gondar, Amhara received training from COWASH. He also works full-time in the Gondar Women Affairs office. Facing multiple challenges after losing his sight at the age of 14, Guade feels strongly about supporting other persons with disabilities through his work. After training sessions in Bishoftu and a second one in Bahir Dar, Guade felt confident about being able to lead the training for others. In 2010 EFY he led training for over 470 zonal and woreda experts, as well training Care Ethiopia staff in Bahir Dar at their special request. He says the COWASH mainstreaming experience is the first in its kind in the North Gondar zone. He appreciates that the project developed all the materials in local languages, and works fully through the existing government structures without creating a parallel system. He is most impressed about how COWASH has managed to influence different government offices to ensure the inclusion of persons with disabilities in constructing new WASH facilities.



COWASH Focal person Guade Demeke delivering a disability inclusion in WASH training for Dembia woreda stakeholders in Amhara

Using local level DPOs and persons with disabilities as role models in kebele and WASHCO training sessions

Equally, at the community level it was considered vital to involve local level associations in trainings to water, sanitation and hygiene committees (WASHCOs) and at kebele level. In their absence, COWASH worked with persons with disabilities from the area to find positive role models and make visible the practical problems faced by some in their daily lives. Most woredas were able to do this, and it proved crucial to ensuring inclusion at the grassroots level.

Box 6. Local role models

In spite of his disability Mulat Dagnew is an influential person in his community in Oflla woreda, Tigray. He holds a degree in agriculture and works as a farmer near to the community water point. He became a member of the WASHCO a few years back and has been an active member ever since. Often local level people think that persons with disabilities are not able to work or contribute to the community water supply, so his efforts have been inspiring for many. Mulat is a very optimistic and confident person and says he was very happy to have had the opportunity to be involved in the COWASH trainings and share his experience and life story.



Mulat Dagnew in Oflla woreda in Tigray has taken part as a positive role model at the woreda and kebele trainings

Including disability issues in all other trainings and events

As disability is a new issue and is also a cross-cutting issue, it has been included in most other trainings at different levels. This helps to address the challenge of very rapid turnover of officials as they move posts. In most regions disability issues have been brought up in annual review meetings and in briefings to officials. The collection of disability disaggregated data in all COWASH trainings has provided a natural way of introducing the topic in trainings. In most woredas

disability and accessibility issues have been part of the management training to WASHCOs. They have been encouraged to collect data on disability among the community and to explain the importance of constructing an accessible water point or latrine.

Box 7. Reaching schools, teachers and students

Two rounds of trainings on School WASH management, SLTSH and Menstrual Hygiene Management in Hulet Eju Enessie woreda, Amhara in 2011 EFY had a difference. They included sessions on disability inclusion in schools. These trainings usually do not include aspects of inclusion, but the woreda education office considered the issue to be highly important, and wanted to make sure it was raised in all trainings organized. Post-training feedback indicated that teachers appreciated their first opportunity to learn about inclusive approaches to WASH activities in schools. One of the participants said “disability is one of the most neglected issues of the community” and expressed his delight in taking part in this unique training. The Hulet Eju woreda education office has been very active in pushing towards ensuring accessible and inclusive WASH. It has constructed accessible WASH facilities and also improved the accessibility of those schools and classrooms with children with disabilities.



Tadele Di Molla, Education expert at Hulet Eju woreda showing the accessible WASH training materials.

Disability inclusion training to other WASH actors and beyond COWASH project areas

Seeking impacts beyond the project COWASH has provided Disability Inclusion in WASH trainings to other organisations working beyond the project areas. On

request, trainings have been given by regional DPO representatives, COWASH RSU staff or zonal Water Office staff, all previously trained by COWASH. These sessions were similar to the COWASH training sessions and the same materials were used. This proved a motivating opportunity to staff who were eager to share insights from the work done by COWASH.

Box 8. Working with partners

In December 2010 EFY COWASH provided a three day disability inclusion in WASH training to WaterAid Ethiopia (WAE) local project staff, woreda stakeholders and local associations of persons with disabilities in Injebara, Amhara. Tseguereda Abraham (then Head of sector strengthening at WAE) recalls she had heard of COWASH’s expertise on inclusion and was eager to collaborate and make use of the work that had already been done. She explains the training was an eye opener for their staff and the woreda stakeholders in large part due to the participatory tools used. In addition, the engagement of persons with disabilities as trainers impressed and inspired the participants. As a result of the training, WAE engineers improved their WASH facility designs. A key lesson was that persons with disabilities need to be included in reviewing and assessing designs.



Mulatu Ferede (COWASH Amhara), Bethel Shiferaw (ECDD), Hanna Bekele (ENDAN) delivering the disability inclusion in WASH training in Injebara, Amhara

In other cases the Disability Inclusion training has been directly delivered outside COWASH project areas. Officials have considered the issue to be important and sought to learn from the project team. For example, in Tigray COWASH has trained a number of engineers and technical experts at the Water Bureau on accessibility. In Amhara, North Gondar zone trained all its woredas including in non-COWASH project woredas. In Oromia many of the woredas (e.g. Ilfata) trained all kebeles, including those outside of the

project. The impact of these trainings has not been monitored but warrants further follow up.

Cooperation with Social Affairs offices at different levels

The Social Affairs Bureau and Offices are responsible for persons with disabilities, but they are not typically included as a WASH sector stakeholder. This is a critical failing, as they have information about local persons with disabilities and are responsible for establishing and supporting their associations.

Social Affairs were made part of all the COWASH trainings given at the region level and in most woredas they have been part of cascading the training down to the kebeles. In many instances, COWASH has been the first government WASH project to widely mainstream disability issues and to include Social Affairs office in its activities.

Box 9. Working across government

Especially in Tigray region, Social Affairs offices have been working very closely with COWASH, all the way from the regional down to the kebele level. Tigray has held annual review meetings at the regional level led by the Social Affairs Bureau, bringing all the woredas together to discuss progress and challenges in inclusion and accessibility. At the woreda and kebele level, Social Affairs focal persons have been part of trainings and monitoring visits. They have compared and exchanged data about persons with disabilities with the Water office. The collaboration has been something that both offices have appreciated. For example the woreda Social Affairs focal person in Endamehoni woreda complemented COWASH for being the only such mainstreaming project in the woreda, and said it was very influential and important as it supports the work of Social Affairs in disability inclusion not only in WASH but in all sectors' activities.



Girmay (Tigray RSU) and Mulu (Endamehoni social affairs focal person) assessing the accessibility of a shallow well during a joint monitoring visit in 2011 EFY

Communicating to include disability

COWASH has used communications actively as a tool to create awareness on disability inclusion in WASH. The guidelines, monitoring reports, advocacy events, photos, case stories and social media posts have been used to raise awareness on the importance of inclusion and share successes achieved and challenges. This openness has encouraged WASH practitioners to further push for accessible and inclusive WASH and helped open their minds to new thinking.

COWASH has also established Communication Networks in each region that include members of the different WASH sector Bureaus' Communications Directorates. When trained by COWASH they have all also received information about disabilities and inclusion. When they report or write a story about WASH, they have been encouraged to think about the issue. This has led to increased information and a greater focus on disability in the regions in the media.

Results of COWASH disability inclusion activities

Accessibility of water points

An improved and accessible design for a water point with a hand pump (hand dug well or shallow well) was developed by COWASH in Phase III and has been piloted in many woredas. The main changes are that the headworks are flatter and smoother, so there is enough space to move around to reach both the pump handle and the outlet, there is a ramp that leads to the pump, and the ramp is not blocked by the fence. The design can and should be adapted to the local circumstances and needs. Recently a design for an accessible community tap stand (for RPS and spring protections) was also designed and piloting has started in some woredas. It is based on similar accessibility principles.

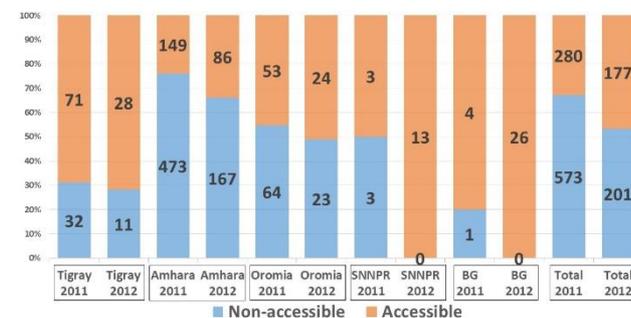


Figure 1. Accessibility of new wells (hand dug and shallow wells) constructed in 2011 and 2012 (EFY), by region

Accessibility of water points constructed, as a proportion of the total built, improved in all 5 regions from 2011 to 2012 (EFY). In 2012 just under half of the

water points (47%) were made accessible, compared to about a third (33%) in the previous year, and none in 2010 EFY.

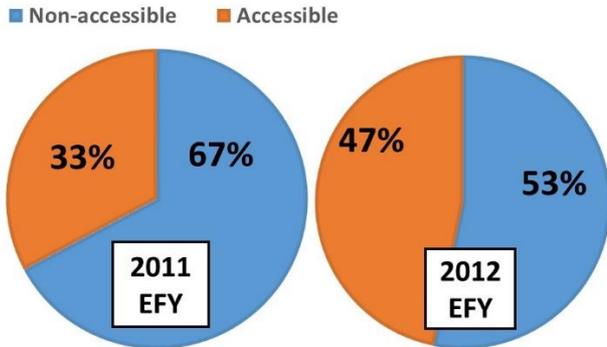


Figure 2. Accessibility of new wells (hand dug and shallow wells) constructed in 2011 and 2012 (EFY), %

Despite extensive training, it has still been difficult for some of the woredas to understand how an accessible water point might look and why it is important. Many have tried, but due to small misunderstandings the result has sometimes been an inaccessible water point. It has required intensive monitoring and practical demonstrations on site to ensure the principles of accessibility are fully understood. Ensuring the route to the facility is accessible is also challenging in difficult topographies. This is especially so for spring developments that are often located far away and over difficult terrain.

There are also big differences between woredas, as some have constructed all the water points with the new design, some a few and some none. These differences are due to attitudinal barriers at different levels. Some woredas have only used the new designs for new constructions, while some have made all rehabilitated water points accessible as well.



Accessible hand dug well in Nonno Benja Woreda, Oromia region. This remote woreda was one of the first

ones to start constructing accessible water points in high numbers out of all COWASH project areas, much due to the strong will of the CMP supervisor Sintayo and his belief to do his work as well as he can.



Rehabilitated and accessible hand dug well in Bahir Dar Zuria woreda, Amhara region.

Accessibility of institutional latrines

COWASH has not developed any new designs for institutional latrines. The current designs developed by the Ministries of Education and Health are accessible for children and adults with disabilities. The cost and time of including the accessible features is very minimal in the construction of the facilities. Challenges are that the designs are either not understood or known or implemented, and they may not be seen as necessary by the woreda or region or by the artisans and contractors. There has also been a lack of monitoring of implementation.

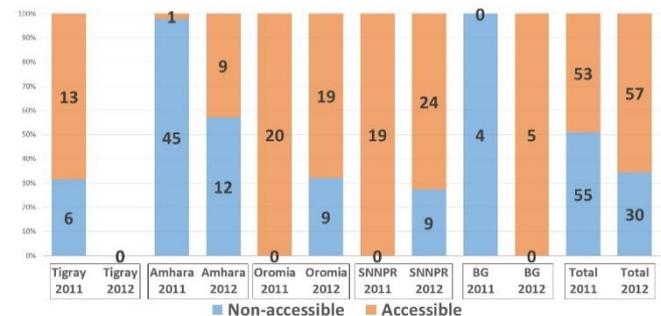


Figure 3. Accessibility of institutional latrines build in 2011 and 2012 (EFY), by region

To have an accessible latrine is critical for children and persons with disabilities. Inaccessible WASH facilities can be a reason for children not enrolling or dropping out of school. Institutions should also serve as models for the community around. Where COWASH has made improvements, as in the construction of accessible water points, intensive monitoring and practical on site demonstrations have been necessary to achieve change.

Overall, in 2012 (EFY) two-thirds (66%) of the institutional latrines that were built were assessed as accessible, up from half (49%) in the previous year. However, as shown in Figure 3 there was slippage in Oromia and SNNPR in 2012 (EFY) having only constructed accessible latrines in 2011 (EFY). Partly this a result of long delays in construction and a lag in monitoring.



A health centre latrine in Bahir Dar Zuria woreda, Amhara region, with a well-made accessible cubicle on the left, including a good ramp, handrails and door opening to the outside. Inside there is a smooth entrance, enough space to move around, a raised seat, handrails and running water for flushing and washing.

Accessibility of household level sanitation

The cascading of the disability awareness to the community and WASHCO levels has in some cases also triggered improvements to access to sanitation at the household level. Some households have adopted the low cost technical solutions demonstrated as part of the trainings. Nevertheless, the impacts have been limited and wider outreach is needed to promote further household level uptake. Similarly to water supply, the

main aim is to ensure independent access to the latrine. This can have a positive impact on the whole household's wellbeing.

Box. 10 Taking sanitation solutions home

After attending a WASHCO CMP management training where disability and accessibility issues were introduced, a WASHCO member in Degua Temben, Tigray decided to implement what she had learnt. Kidan Gebrecheal's husband is blind and needs assistance for almost everything at home. She decided to install a guiding rope from the household to the latrine in the yard and now he can independently use the latrine. He is very happy and she saves time since she does not need to take him to the toilet several times a day.



Kidan Gerecheal, WASHCO cashier in Degua Temben, Tigray, using a guiding rope to the household latrine



In Abichu Gnea, Oromia, a moveable toilet seat made out of wood and metal greatly helps a lady injured in a traffic accident. She is happy about being able to use the toilet without having to depend on her family.

Commitment of CMP supervisors and sector focal persons in the woredas

Especially at the woreda level, the commitment of the CMP supervisors and WASH sector focal persons has been very strong. Most woredas have understood the need to do something about inclusion and have been key driving forces in ensuring the inclusion of persons with disabilities. Despite being an additional task on top of their normal work, it has been encouraging to see the high level of commitment. It is absolutely key for success at the community level.

Box 11. Re-thinking piped water access

In Antsokia Gemza, Amhara, the woreda water office devised a more effective way of ensuring access to water for persons with disabilities. As the woreda planned two large rural piped water schemes serving over 1000 households, it decided to provide water directly to the yards of households with members with disabilities in addition to the public tap stands. This initiative was started and pushed forward by the Woreda Water Office Head and CMP supervisor who wanted to ensure equitable access to water for all community members, mainly due to their personal conviction. Households in the area served by the scheme came to the woreda office asking for assistance and others were identified during field visits. In total 10 households with members with different types of disabilities were provided with a connection directly in their house compound. The cost of extending the pipe system to these households was minimal but has made a huge difference to the quality of life for those 10 families.



Dawid Mohammed (with physical disability) shows the water tap in his yard. Dawid also constructed a handwashing station and a shower from the same connection in his yard to improve hygiene for his family.

Participating in WASHCOs

Persons with disabilities should be part of the committees planning and managing the

implementation of community WASH projects. It is the best way to ensure that their voices are heard. It also shows the community they have the capacity to be active and productive.

COWASH has recommended that in each new WASHCO there should be one person with a disability. In practice, the proportion of WASHCOs with members with disabilities has remained around 5% in both 2011 and 2012 EFY.

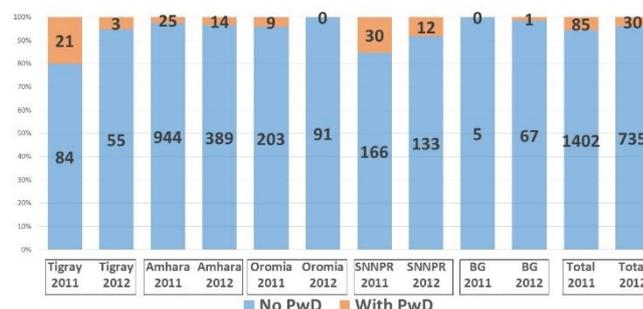


Figure 4. WASHCOs with members with disabilities, 2011 and 2012 (EFY) by region

In some areas it is difficult to get women to be part of the WASH committees, so including persons with disabilities is of course even more challenging. This is because of attitudinal barriers at different levels, but many persons with disabilities themselves may not be willing to take up such a position. Many have been discriminated against for a long time and do not have the confidence in themselves. However, all the regions have succeeded in improving participation compared to 2010 (EFY). In most cases it has been a result of hard work and determination by woreda or kebele staff. In some cases the members with disabilities have only had a token role, but examples of meaningful participation are also found in all the regions. A quota for persons with disabilities in such committees is recommended.

Box 12. Building confidence

Bontu is a young female chairperson of a WASHCO in Gorche, SNNPR. She has a physical disability due to illness at a young age and has some difficulties walking. Despite her young age, being female and having a disability, the committee members all insist that she has equally participated in the trainings, in the procurement of materials and going to the OMO microfinance office. Bontu herself is happy for the opportunity. WASHCO members explained that although the initial demand came from the woreda office, they also wanted to include her into the WASHCO to show the community that she is capable of holding that role and can contribute. Before the training COWASH organized, persons with disabilities were seen as people who could not do anything and should be left alone. Food should not be shared with them. After the positive example set by Bontu, the

attitudes of the community have improved. Despite all that the newly constructed spring protection is still completely inaccessible for Bontu due to the topography and she has never been able to go to the water point. Still is still relying on her family to fetch water for her. To ensure independent access to water for her a piped water with a pumping system would be needed, but the woreda does not have sufficient funds to construct such a scheme.



Bontu in front of her house, Gorche woreda, SNNPR

Attitudes towards persons with disabilities in the community

WASHCO and wider community attitudes towards inclusion and disability are becoming more positive, demonstrating how WASH can be an entry point to improving the situation of persons with disabilities. Visiting communities it is clear that there have been positive changes in attitudes. For most people it has been the first time they hear about disability, what it means and that persons with disabilities have the same rights and needs as everyone else. These discussions have been very encouraging, but at the same time sometimes touching. So many other barriers remain and COWASH as a WASH project cannot influence everything.

Box 13. Planning for access

In Seharti Samre, Tigray region, a visit revealed how the WASHCO had clearly internalized the importance of inclusion and accessibility and showed the results possible from training that is conducted well. At the site was a shallow well where the drilling had been completed, but the headwork construction had not yet started. The WASHCO members were able to identify 5 community members with disabilities among the intended beneficiaries (with physical, visual or multiple impairments). When the WASHCO members were asked how they will make the water point accessible, they started drawing the design into the sand. It was

very clear to them how the water point should look, and how it will be made accessible, with a smooth and not too steep ramp with space and access to both the pump and the outlet, and how the fence will be constructed without blocking the access to the ramp. They even explained how they would make the path to the village (the water point is a short walk away from most of the houses) smooth and convenient for all. They had not yet discussed this all with the community members with disabilities, but when challenged on this, they decided to involve them from then onwards.



The WASHCO members demonstrating in the sand how their water point will be made accessible for all on Seharti Samre woreda, Tigray region

Inclusion in WASH enterprises

To create opportunities and change attitudes COWASH aimed that one member in each MSE should be with disability, while in fact about one third of the newly established WASH enterprises have members with disabilities. Oromia region has done particularly well, with each of the MSEs in the region having at least one member with disability, and in the case of Jidda woreda, the Chairperson of the MSE is a woman with a disability, which is a great example.

In most cases the members with disabilities selected by the woreda MSE agency have been welcomed as active members and have been able to participate equally. They have different types of impairments including physical, hearing and visual. Sometimes members with disabilities have had a lower level of education and it has been difficult for them to travel to the Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) college for the required training. In some woredas at first no member with disability was selected, but when another member dropped out of the enterprise, they were replaced with a person with a disability. This has been a result of strong and regular monitoring and follow up.

Box 14. Treated as an equal

Berhane Hailu is one of ten members of the Sanitation Marketing microenterprise established by COWASH in Bambasi woreda, Benishangul-Gumuz. She has a physical disability with her left hand and leg being partially paralyzed. Berhane was not part of the original group, but as some members dropped out the CMP specialist in the woreda, Atsbah, wanted to make sure that the enterprise included a member with disabilities. Her role is controller. She keeps track of the materials of the enterprise and also takes an active role in the slab production. She happens to live nearby to the shed where the members produce the slabs, so she also serves as a guard and has the key to the shed. She says she is treated equally by the other members of the group and took the training with them at the local TVET.



Berhane Hailu with Benishangul-Gumuz region Water Bureau Head Geleta Hailu, at the MSE shed in 2012 EFY

However, she says that persons with disabilities still face a lot of negative attitudes. She is trained as a teacher but has never been able to find work due to her disability. Berhane is also a member of a local DPO in the town. She hopes that the enterprise keeps growing the group will make more profit out of the products.

Lessons learned

Working with persons with disabilities and their associations is not only right but effective. Through COWASH training and other activities, persons with disabilities showed they are best experts in how to achieve inclusion and on the accessible solutions that are needed. Trainees will always remember their personal stories and this can have a lasting impact on their work and attitudes towards disability. Nothing about us, without us.

Capacity building and awareness raising is necessary for all. In COWASH, all staff members and all stakeholders and sector offices that we work with were

trained. This was crucial to make sure all people have the same knowledge. In disability inclusion, everyone needs to take it into account in their work. Participation of office heads showed leadership support. While it was important to have focal persons at the federal and regional levels to coordinate the work, but it was more important to make sure disability inclusion was understood as everyone's business.

Leadership in disability inclusion can successfully be located within a project's main sector lead even if it is a new topic for them. In the case of COWASH, this is the water sector. Initially it was thought that perhaps Women affairs or Social affairs offices should take the lead on the issue, as it would more "naturally" be part of their responsibilities and competence. But it proved right to put the water sector in the forefront, highlighting that disability inclusion and accessibility is an integral part of the work of the water sector too, and not a marginal "soft" component that other sectors should implement alongside.

Intensive practical supervision in the field is necessary to ensure proper implementation even given good quality and repeated trainings. Physically demonstrating at the water points or latrines what accessibility means and looks like to technical experts, contractors and local artisans was needed for them to understand it fully. Exchange visits to model sites were very considered very valuable investments.

Accessible WASH facilities are important, but inclusion in WASH planning and management is even more important. COWASH has shown that WASH can be a good entry point to improve the attitudes towards persons with disabilities in the community, an issue that concerns everyone.

Quotas for including persons with disabilities in the WASHCOs and the MSEs has increased significantly their participation. It has shown both woreda experts and community members that persons with disabilities also have the capacity to contribute and lead. Making persons with disabilities part of the committees and events at the community level is a step towards ending invisibility and neglecting their needs.



Accessible school latrine in Degua Temben woreda, Tigray region



Disability inclusion training in Asosa, Benishangul-Gumuz region



Accessibility audit training in Bahir Dar, Amhara region

About COWASH and this learning note

Community-Led Accelerated Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (COWASH) is a bilateral project between the governments of Finland and Ethiopia. The project combines capacity development, innovation and the delivery of new infrastructure at scale through the empowerment of communities and government, extending community and institutional WASH services through the Community Managed Project (CMP) approach.

The first three phases (from 2011-2020) have included 76 rural districts in five regions: Amhara, Tigray, Oromia, Benishangul-Gumuz and Southern Nations and Nationalities Peoples' Region. Activities are focused on achieving the rural WASH targets of the second Growth and Transformation Plan (GTP II). COWASH is led by the Ministry of Water, Irrigation and Energy and regional water bureaus, with technical assistance provided by Ramboll Finland Oy (lead consultant), Niras Finland and IRC WASH.

This learning note was written by Aino Himanen (COWASH Disability Inclusion Specialist) and edited by John Butterworth. The learning note and other materials from the COWASH project are available at www.cmpethiopia.org. For more on COWASH see [@cmpethiopia](https://www.facebook.com/cmpethiopia) on Facebook.

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