



ENGAGING WITH DPOS TO IMPLEMENT DISABILITY INCLUSIVE WASH PROGRAMMING

LEARNING FROM THE AUSTRALIAN AID-FUNDED CIVIL SOCIETY WASH FUND

Key Summary: Disabled People's

Organisations (DPOs) have successfully engaged in five water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) projects being implemented by World Vision Australia and WaterAid through the Australian Aid-funded Civil Society WASH Fund. Working in very different contexts, each project was able to engage with local DPOs to support disability inclusion within WASH programming, across the program cycle. The roles that the DPOs played varied according to interest, capacity, geographical proximity and scope of the program. Engagement between DPOs and civil society organisations (CSOs) has not only strengthened project outcomes, but has brought benefits for all partners for achieving disability inclusion, and for broader capacity building and networking.

Background

It is widely recognised that people with disabilities are overrepresented in the poorest communities and often face additional barriers to accessing water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) services and programs. Disability-inclusive WASH programming, including involving people with disabilities in programs through their representative disabled people's organisations (DPOs), is crucial to overcoming these barriers. Civil society organisations (CSOs) however, may not have technical knowledge to ensure disability inclusion, or the networks to reach out to people with disabilities. At the same time, local DPOs may not have the capacity, or technical knowledge to confidently support mainstream development agencies or advise on WASH programming.

This case study documents successful interactions between DPOs and CSOs to promote disability-

inclusive WASH within the Civil Society Water Sanitation and Hygiene (CS WASH) Fund. The CS WASH Fund is an AUD\$103 million Australian Aid-funded program that has funded 13 CSOs to implement diverse WASH projects in 19 countries across Asia, the Pacific and East Africa during 2013-2018.

In line with its objective to reach the poorest and most vulnerable in addressing WASH needs, the Fund has encouraged a focus on ensuring disability inclusion. World Vision Australia and WaterAid Australia have each implemented projects under CS WASH and sought to address disability inclusion within these by partnering with both CBM Australia and with national DPOs in five countries. These examples here illustrate some of the various ways in which mainstream agencies have worked with DPOs, providing examples to others who might want to pursue disability inclusion in their WASH work.



Fatima from Timor-Leste with friends from her village. After WaterAid, with disability inclusion support from CBM Australia, installed an accessible water point outside of her home, she now feels more social when people come to visit ©Erin Johnson for Room3/CBM Australia

Projects

The WaterAid and World Vision Australia (WVA) CS WASH projects are being implemented through



their corresponding national office partners. World Vision's projects are based in Papua New Guinea (PNG), Sri Lanka and Zimbabwe; and WaterAid has two projects in PNG and Timor-Leste.

The projects are greatly varied, with locations ranging from remote rural villages to urban townships, and covering activities ranging from provision of water and sanitation facilities, to hygiene promotion, to building the capacity of WASH service providers such as local government and communities to develop and sustain WASH facilities and services.

DPO engagement

All projects have had a strong focus on promoting disability inclusion, including dedicated budget lines and activities. CBM was engaged to support disability inclusion in each project, with strong prioritisation of brokering relationships with DPOs as partners. The nature of DPO engagement in the projects varied due to a number of factors including:

- existing relationships between DPOs, CBM, and CSOs
- the capacity and resources of the DPO
- the inclusion capacity of the WASH program staff
- having a dedicated disability inclusion officer within the CSO,
- the geographic proximity of the DPO to the project sites.

DPOs engaged in each project are listed below:

| Country | Agency | DPO Partner |
|------------------|------------------|---|
| Papua New Guinea | WaterAid PNG | Assembly of Disabled Persons (ADP) |
| Papua New Guinea | World Vision PNG | Assembly of Disabled Persons (ADP) and East Sepik DPO (member of ADP) |

| | | |
|-------------|-----------------------|--|
| Sri Lanka | World Vision Lanka | Northern Province Consortium of Organizations for the Differently Abled (NPCODA) |
| Timor-Leste | WaterAid Timor-Leste | Ra'es Hadomi Timor Oan (RHTO) |
| Zimbabwe | World Vision Zimbabwe | Federation of Organisations of Disabled People in Zimbabwe (FODPZ) |

Development of DPO and WASH CSO partnerships

In most of the contexts, there was little or no existing relationship between the WASH CSO or its project staff and local DPOs. This meant that CSOs' initial engagement was largely with CBM who were engaged to provide disability inclusion technical advice to the program design, implementation and monitoring and evaluation. To promote leadership and full involvement of people with disabilities and their representative organisations in all activities that affect them, CBM and project staff worked together in each location to identify and engage with DPOs, often leveraging existing relationships through CBM.

In some projects, there was initial confusion about why the project should engage with DPOs, given they had access to CBM advisors. Through engagement with the DPOs though, these attitudes shifted, and relationships deepened and changed over time. For example, in Sri Lanka the DPO was initially only engaged to provide input into the baseline process, but ended up being engaged throughout the project, after program staff recognised the value add the DPO brought to the project.

One DPO, RHTO, considered WASH a strategic priority before the project, while the other



DPOs engaged as they considered the project to be a means to achieving other outcomes, or for learning and development purposes. For example, FODPZ in Zimbabwe considered the urban WASH project activities as aligning with their objectives of equalising people's opportunities to public services and amenities.

Roles undertaken by DPOs in the projects

DPO engagement in baseline and other data collection

All five projects engaged with DPOs for the baseline assessments for their projects; either consulting with DPOs on disability-inclusive approaches to the process and/or having DPO members participate in activities as research officers and enumerators. For example, in Zimbabwe, DPO representatives were contracted as enumerators. DPO members provided training for enumerators without disabilities regarding how to carry out research activities in a disability-inclusive manner. The activities included baseline household surveys, interviews, focus groups and infrastructure accessibility audits.

The World Vision projects each engaged the DPOs as implementing partners in 'disability assessments'. CBM Australia played a technical support role and trained DPO officers in data collection methods as well as basic WASH processes. In Zimbabwe, CBM Australia advisors provided in-country support to FODPZ, whilst in Sri Lanka, NPCODA independently collected disability-specific survey data with limited remote support. In PNG, ADP partnered with the WVPNG Monitoring and Evaluation Officer to carry out focus group discussions with people with disabilities outside the formal baseline processes, with support from CBM Australia to develop focus group tools. These activities were often the first field activities carried out by the DPOs in WASH, leading to a steep learning curve for both WASH program staff and DPOs.

The WaterAid projects carried out rolling baseline household surveys as they entered new communities, with DPOs (and CBM Australia) providing input into these processes. In PNG, an additional disability situational analysis was conducted with DPO leaders, which provided information to shape programming, as well as to feed into WaterAid and the DPOs' advocacy.

Engaging DPOs in the baseline surveys and disability assessments helped to build trust with people with disabilities amongst communities. In some cases, for example in Zimbabwe, the DPO's existing relationships with its members and communities enabled the project to reach more people with disabilities, as well as extending the DPO's range for its own outreach. By contrast, in the World Vision PNG project the DPO had not visited target villages before. The ADP project officer however, as a person with a disability, was more easily trusted by community members with disabilities and thereby more able to obtain valuable information about their WASH needs and priorities. This information was not only useful for the project, but helped the DPO expand its understanding of the needs of people with disabilities in remote rural settings.

DPO engagement in raising awareness of rights of people with disabilities

DPO partners supported WASH projects to conduct awareness raising within communities on the rights of people with disabilities. For example, WaterAid Timor-Leste engaged RHTO (the DPO) members in community triggering processes as often as feasible for the RHTO. They also collaborated with CBM and RHTO to develop videos and flip charts depicting the barriers experienced by people with disabilities in accessing WASH, and how to overcome these. Project staff used these resources to raise awareness within communities, including



when DPO members themselves could not be present.

Another example of DPO engagement in awareness raising is from Zimbabwe. FODPZ were contracted to carry out awareness raising on rights directly with people with disabilities and allies in the project areas. This empowered people with disabilities through helping them to understand processes for advocacy, state responsibilities and their rights under the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD). Similarly, NPCODA in Sri Lanka received training from CBM on the CRPD, which they in turn used in their own advocacy and awareness raising activities within communities in Sri Lanka.

Having people with disabilities participating in project activities generally had a major influence on other stakeholders by increasing their awareness of the challenges and rights of people with disabilities in their communities in relation to accessing WASH, and the importance of inclusion. In Zimbabwe, the local authority included DPO representatives in the Gender and Social Inclusion (GESI) steering committee for the WASH program, and went on to introduce a Council-wide disability policy. In PNG the inclusion of the ADP Project Officer, who has vision impairment, in project activities, served to illustrate the capabilities of people with disabilities to the target communities and change discriminatory attitudes. Project engagement in Western Province and interaction with local level disability actors also enabled a three-day workshop, run by the DPO and funded through the project, to support local people with disabilities to form a local-level DPO.

DPO engagement in learning activities

The CS WASH Fund had a strong emphasis on knowledge and learning, with regional and global learning events bringing Fund CSOs together to share ideas. Through their involvement in the projects, various DPO

representatives were able to participate in these, including the respective Pacific, Asia and Africa learning events. DPOs also worked with CBM and the WASH program staff to develop reports and research papers. This gave the DPOs exposure to international events and opportunities to network with CSOs and other stakeholders from across their regions, as well as providing a platform to advocate on disability inclusion in WASH programs internationally.

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Fatima from Timor-Leste now has access to safe water and sanitation thanks to WaterAid, supported with disability-inclusive training from CBM Australia © Erin Johnson for Room3/CBM Australia

Impact on organisations

Benefits to DPOs

- **Strengthened capacity:** For several of the DPOs, engagement in the WASH projects has had a clear positive impact on their functioning and ability to achieve their broader goals. In Sri Lanka, funding through the project enabled NPCODA to establish and staff a small office.

NPCODA representatives felt they had increased their own technical capacity, including research skills for example, which could be used in other projects. The DPO identified training needs, which were met through the project. These included training in organisational capacity delivered by World Vision Lanka, and training on the CRPD delivered by CBM. This has helped to strengthen its long-term capacity and ability to conduct rights-based advocacy in the region.

- **Broader reach to more people with disabilities:** Including DPOs in monitoring, evaluation and research activities enabled them to capture evidence on the local situation for people with disabilities, which supported their broader advocacy and representative work at the strategic level. FODPZ reflected that in Zimbabwe, the funding and logistics provided for the disability assessment enabled them to visit locations and meet people with disabilities that they could not have otherwise reached. This benefit was shared by other DPOs, including in PNG, where the Port Moresby-based ADP Project Officer was able to visit remote villages as part of the project mid-term review. This increased his understanding of these contexts and the specific challenges faced by people with disabilities in such remote areas. Similarly in Timor-Leste, the WASH team conducting household surveys often came across people with disabilities at home who were unknown to disability services and in need of support. The team would refer them to the district RHTO representative who could follow up with linkages to rehabilitation and equipment services.
- **Increased profile and connections:** DPOs gained access through the projects to local authorities and services, and a platform through which to influence not only WASH outcomes, but also raise awareness of the needs of people with disabilities generally. For FODPZ, involvement in the project also helped to raise the profile of the DPO, and the organisation has now built long-term relationships with local authority leaders and is regularly invited to community meetings or policy consultations and asked to run trainings.



Benefits to CSOs working in WASH

- **Strengthened project outcomes:** The relationships improved the outcomes of the specific WASH projects by ensuring they reached their target audiences of the poorest and most vulnerable people.
- **Strengthened organisational capacity:** The CSOs reported increased understanding of disability inclusion and confidence of staff in being able to support disability inclusion, both within the individual projects and in wider organisational approaches. Learnings from the WASH projects have stimulated agencies to review their organisational approaches to disability inclusion, and to look to incorporate the disability inclusion approaches piloted within CS WASH into other projects. For example, World Vision Zimbabwe gained a much deeper understanding of the challenges facing people with disabilities, as well as issues of disability rights and the DPO/disability movement more broadly and as a result have developed a disability policy to guide disability inclusion within all work of the office.
- **Ongoing relationships:** The relationships built up within the CS WASH projects are also enduring beyond these individual projects. For example, in Sri Lanka, the MoU between the agencies now covers other projects in Northern Province. Other international NGOs have also started collaborating with NPCODA. In PNG, the existing relationship allowed engagement by WVPNG with ADP during development of a (successful) project concept for the Water for Women Fund, which is succeeding CS WASH. There has been recognition of the need for strong DPO capacity to support successful disability inclusive WASH programming and World Vision and WaterAid in PNG have agreed to co-fund a position within ADP to work solely on WASH within their upcoming new projects.

Challenges

While the DPO engagement in the CSO projects was overwhelmingly positive, some contexts required ongoing communication and support to ensure the arrangements ran smoothly. In cases where DPOs were contracted to implement activities on a larger scale than they had managed previously, CSOs were required to provide additional support. In some

cases, the pressure of project implementation at times is likely to have impacted upon the DPOs' ability to focus on their other core activities, such as advocacy. DPOs are generally small, under-resourced and are often largely run by volunteers. Meanwhile CSOs often have strict expectations around their administrative processes that can be unfamiliar to external organisations such as DPOs. Some DPOs were unfamiliar with the CSOs' administrative, finance and reporting systems and processes, and expectations had to be clearly discussed and moderated on both sides.

These experiences highlighted the importance of ongoing communication between organisations even after an MoU has been formulated, and being able to revisit this if necessary. For example in one project, World Vision recognised that grassroots and less established DPOs can face challenges such as limited access to accessible transport, phone credit and office space, and in later years it was negotiated that the project would help address these issues by supporting the DPO via a communication budget.

Not all DPOs had a strong understanding of gender and child rights, so to achieve an integrated inclusion approach, some DPOs required capacity development in these other areas.

These experiences also showed the importance of recognising that each organisation has areas in which they have either extensive or more limited expertise—for example DPOs may be new to partnering with mainstream agencies, just as CSOs may be new to disability inclusive programming—and the partnership is intended to be mutually beneficial.

High-level lessons and recommendations

- Take a flexible approach – these experiences illustrate that the ways that DPOs and CSOs engage are context-dependent and that a variety of approaches can be successful. Take the time to ensure each organisation is committing to roles that match their priorities and capacity.
- Seek other expertise, such as from disability focused CSOs to meet needs not met by DPOs. For example whilst DPOs are often skilled at auditing accessibility, sometimes additional technical expertise are required for the design



of accessible infrastructure and hygiene solutions.

- Engage a dedicated inclusion advisor who knows both the DPO and CSO. In addition to assisting with inclusive program design and ME&L, advisors can broker and translate information between parties, collaborate to help determine suitable roles for the DPO, and support DPO technical programming capacity.
- Appoint a dedicated inclusion staff member within the project (even if this is only part of their role), who is the contact point for the DPO and coordinates all the inclusion work, allows for good communication and coordination. They may also assist disability inclusion work to be implemented within a broader inclusion approach.
- For long-term DPO-CSO engagement, an MoU is useful in establishing the parameters of the relationship, clarifying the expectations of both parties and setting out conditions to ensure the collaboration benefits both organisations. The role of a DPO may evolve over time, and indeed a phased approach to partnering can be very useful. There should be capacity to absorb this within the MoU.
- Recognise and engage DPOs as key agents of change - this can be successful in raising awareness within communities about the need for disability inclusion, and in helping partners to identify barriers to inclusion and develop strategies to address these.
- Model an inclusive approach at the strategic level, this demonstrates and generates respect for the knowledge and skills of people with disabilities, and ensures representation of their needs and interests from the top down.
- Look for opportunities to share learnings within organisations and the sector; often the achievements in WASH programs around disability inclusion can trigger interest in other program areas of organisations, other project partners or agencies outside the project.
- Investment in urban-based DPOs can assist in increasing their reach to people with disabilities in rural areas through projects, with benefits for both project outcomes and the ability of DPOs to support rural populations.
- Commit to strengthening capacity. Providing training and capacity building opportunities (particularly for transferrable skills that DPOs can apply in other projects) can strengthen engagement and create new opportunities for DPOs. Likewise, investing in program staff learning about disability inclusion, and often advocacy, from DPOs, means they also transfer these skills to other programs.
- Consider integrating gender and disability inclusion capacity development and advice, which strengthens the quality of inclusive programming, and also provides good cross learning between gender and disability advisors, CSOs and DPOs.

