

COWASH Ethiopia walks the talk on the inclusion of persons with disabilities in practice.

In Ethiopia, disability is generally considered to be a curse and a burden; so families as well as communities discriminate against persons with disabilities and services and infrastructures are normally inaccessible.

COWASH Ethiopia has recently embarked on integrating the inclusion of persons with disabilities in its current Phase III programme. The strategic direction to include persons with disabilities was realized to be vitally important to reach the whole community we work with and also to reach the neglected and marginalized segments of the society. In realization of this context, COWASH Ethiopia established solid partnerships with organizations focusing on mainstreaming disability as well as organisations of persons with disabilities. Together with these organisations COWASH Ethiopia has facilitated TOT trainings and awareness raising workshops on the inclusion of persons with disabilities at the Federal level, as well as for Regions, Zones and Woredas in Tigray, Amhara, Oromia, Benishangul Gumuz and finally in SNNPR.



Dr Abebe Yehualawork, lead Trainer/April 2018/ Photo credit/ Melaku Tekola.

The unique modality to inculcate the idea of inclusion of persons with disabilities in COWASH phase III programme is working in partnership with organizations of persons with disabilities and persons with disabilities themselves. Our implementation is unique as we not only preach what is the obvious but we demonstrate it by showing the abilities of persons with disabilities in action. So far, all our lead trainers are persons with different types of disabilities and we ensure the participation of local organisations of persons with disabilities in all our trainings. In COWASH Ethiopia, we all are aware of the deep-rooted challenges of persons with disabilities and simultaneously conscious that “mere

awareness or participation of persons with disability” does not transform lives overnight. However, we strongly believe that we are laying a foundation to promote the inclusion of persons with disabilities to Water, Sanitation and Hygiene, (WASH) services.



Amie Genta, Training Team/April 2018/ Photo credit/ Melaku Tekola.

It is based on the above assumption that on 10-13 of April 2018 COWASH team conducted a one-day awareness raising training workshop for Woreda and Zonal Administrative bodies followed by a three days TOT training workshop for Woreda and Zonal experts led by Dr Abebe Yehualawork, Master Trainer from Ethiopian Centre for Disability and Development, (ECDD). Dr Abebe is an inspiring figure in this field as he is a person with visual impairment but also a living proof to demonstrate the abilities of persons with disabilities even in the presence of challenging situations and impeding barriers. Dr Abebe has extensive knowledge and understanding of disability issues as he holds a PhD from the University of Jyväskylä in Finland in Special Needs Education, he is the Executive Director of HPDO (a local organisation of persons with disabilities), and is a lecturer at Addis Ababa University. During this event, Dr Abebe was supported by COWASH capacity building team and regional support unit, representatives of persons with disabilities organizations in SNNPR as well as the Agency for Labour and Social Affairs in the region. This was strategically planned in order to create ownership of the training outcome and also to continue building the capacity of government partners, civil society partners and stakeholders at regional, zone and woreda level.

The awareness raising training in SNNPR was conducted for a total of 101 Regional, Woreda and Zonal management bodies and representatives out of whom 11 were female. According to COWASH disability programme focal person, training the Zonal and Woreda management bodies is required to ensure and secure political and administrative support during the implementation of the cascading

process at grass root level in COWASH and non-COWASH Woredas in the region. The awareness raising training workshop includes sessions such as understanding disability and impairment, barriers to inclusion, disability related policies and rights, inclusive solutions in WASH, importance of inclusions of persons with disabilities in WASH and finally roles and responsibilities of stakeholders.



Training Facilitators in front and participants/April 2018/ Photo credit/ Melaku Tekola.

At the end of the awareness raising training COWASH team conducted a feedback session with the training participants and a participant from Bureau of Women and Children Affairs said that “this training has made us realize that persons with disabilities are people with potential like a volcano”. Atsede from BOWCA added “This is a good beginning and we need to increase the momentum to include persons with disabilities in all development issues. The training has increased my understanding about persons with disabilities rights and provisions needed”. She concluded “The assignment I take now is on how to build a good and accessible toilet for the person with physical disability hired in my office recently”.



Melaku Tekola, facilitating session on Communications/April 2018/ Photo credit/ Aino Himanen

Another participant, Tesema, from Sidama zone, Urban and House Department said that “I have learnt great lesson on how to use proper terminology; learnt disability is not a matter of charity but human right issue. I have also learnt the various policies and frameworks about disability which I will reconsider in my future work”.

Abayneh Assefa, Vice President of peoples with disabilities Association in SNNPR acknowledged and expressed his appreciation to COWASH Ethiopia and Water and Irrigation Development Bureau. He added “this is a great initiative where COWASH takes a pioneer role to advocate inclusion of persons with disabilities in WASH”. He emphasized on the need to further cascade at woreda and community levels and requested the regional government to allocate budget and human resources in scaling up the current initiative.

The following day, a three days training workshop commenced for 75 technical experts from the COWASH zones and woredas (9 female participants and 12 persons with disabilities, of whom only 1 was a female and person with disability).

In conclusion, COWASH will continue its effort in promoting the inclusion of persons with disabilities in WASH programmes and be an ardent advocate of inclusion at various platforms and programming. By doing so, COWASH Ethiopia not only talked the talk about disability, we also affirmed our commitment to walk the talk accordingly. Finally, we are also grateful for the support of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland and the Federal Ministry of Water, Irrigation and Electricity and their regional counterparts.



Training Facilitators in front and participants/April 2018/ Photo credit/ Melaku Tekola.