

Capacity building in the inclusion of persons with disabilities in COWASH

Community-Led Accelerated WASH (COWASH) project is a bilateral project funded by the Governments of Ethiopia and Finland. COWASH aims to improve access to water, sanitation and hygiene in rural areas of Ethiopia through the Community Managed Project (CMP) approach. COWASH supports 76 rural woredas in 5 regions in Ethiopia (Tigray, Amhara, Oromia, SNNPR and Benishangul-Gumuz), covering nearly 10% of Ethiopia's rural areas. The project is supporting community level water supply as well as school and health facility water supply and sanitation through the Government of Ethiopia system. Although the Finnish-Ethiopian cooperation in the WASH sector has a long history (since 1994), the inclusion of persons with disabilities was not done in a systematic way until the start of COWASH Phase III in 2016.

The inclusion of persons with disabilities in the project started with the collection of disability data in the baseline assessment as well as ensuring that all possible data collected in the project's Performance Monitoring Plan is disaggregated not only by sex but also by disability. It is important to collect this data in order to know whether persons with disabilities are included in the project or not, and to make corrections as required.

COWASH Disability Inclusion focuses on the capacity building of WASH stakeholders at all levels. For this purpose a Disability Inclusion Guideline and training materials have been developed in English and the regional languages. All COWASH staff at Federal and Regional levels were trained on the topic. The Disability Inclusion training is cascaded down to the community level to WASHCOs and Kebele WASH Team members through awareness raising given to office heads and a Training of Trainers given to experts in eight sector offices (Water, Health, Education, Women and Children Affairs, Social Affairs, Finance, MSE Agency and TVET) as well as Disabled Peoples' Organisations (DPOs) at region, zone and woreda levels. In total the aim is to train approximately 7,000 people on disability inclusion in WASH in 2017-2018.

At the time of writing (March 2018) the disability inclusion trainings have been cascaded down to the zone/ woreda levels in the COWASH project area. The capacity gap in understanding disability in the WASH sector has been noted to be huge. Most of the participants in the trainings have had no previous knowledge of disability issues and have not considered accessibility or inclusion of persons with disability in their work previously. The training given to the officials has been made as participatory and practical as possible, giving them a good understanding of what disability means and what changes they need to make in their everyday work to ensure the inclusion of all. The training covers the following overall topics: understanding disability, the policy framework, how to ensure WASH facilities accessible for all, the roles and responsibilities of the stakeholders at different levels, as well as the practical inclusion of persons with disabilities in the CMP cycle and the CLTSH process.

Persons with disabilities themselves as well as DPOs at the Federal and regional levels have played a key role in the development of the COWASH Disability Inclusion Guideline and most importantly in the trainings as trainers themselves. It is very important to build these organisations' capacity to serve as trainers and resource persons, as persons with disabilities themselves are the best experts on disability and are also best placed to train others on disability issues. In most cases the DPOs themselves had not had any previous contact with WASH sector actors either. The COWASH experience has facilitated bringing these different sectors together. The need for capacity building is likely to be equally high in the rest of the country. In fact COWASH provided by request a similar training to WaterAid project and woreda staff in Amhara.

The long-term objective of COWASH Disability Inclusion is to ensure WASH facilities in households, communities, schools and health institutions are accessible for all; that persons with disabilities participate throughout the implementation process; and persons with disabilities benefit and contribute in an equal way in WASH planning, construction and management.

Practically, persons with disabilities are to be included into each step of the CMP implementation process, CLTSH process as well as MSE business development.

The COWASH disability inclusion materials can be found here:

<https://www.cmpethiopia.org/page/2244>

