

Ladies and Gentlemen, Dear Colleagues

Good Morning to every one

14<sup>th</sup> of May 2019



It is a great pleasure for me to participate in **WASH national awareness raising event of Equity and Inclusion of persons with disabilities**

- Reducing poverty and inequality and the promotion of sustainable development goals form the main objectives of the current development policy of Finland. The commitment to **Leave No one Behind** -principle is an inherent part of the implementation of our development policy programme. The rights of persons with disabilities are taken into account in all Finnish programs.
- In order to ensure that persons with disabilities are not left behind, it is important not only to have programmes that target only to persons with disabilities, but also to ensure that persons with disabilities and their needs are addressed in all programs through mainstreaming.
- Finland has supported African Union to develop a Protocol on the rights of persons with disabilities in Africa to complete the Charter of Human and Peoples' Rights. The Protocol is an important tool to translate the key messages of the UN's Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities into the context of African continent. The protocol was adopted in 2018, and it urges the governments to take appropriate and effective measures to ensure, respect, promote, protect and fulfil the rights and dignity of persons with disabilities, without discrimination on the basis of disability. These measure include, for example
  - Mainstreaming disability in policies, legislation, development plans, programmes and activities *and in all other spheres of life;*
  - Promoting positive representations and empowerment of persons with disabilities through training and advocacy;
  - *Taking measures to eliminate discrimination on the basis of disability by any person, organisation or private enterprise;*
  - Ensuring effective participation of persons with disabilities or their representative organisations including women and children with disabilities, in all decision-making processes
- In Ethiopia, Finland has promoted education of children with disabilities through various projects since 1980s. We have also worked for long time with Civil Society Organizations and disabled people's organisations (DPOs) in Ethiopia to ensure that persons with disabilities equally benefit from our development cooperation activities.
- Finland has supported the WASH sector in Ethiopia for 25 years. At the moment, Finland supports a bilateral COWASH programme, which covers 5 regions and 76 rural woredas and we contribute also to the CWA in Ethiopia. Previously, in the Finnish support to the WASH sector, disability inclusion was not explicitly emphasised. It was assumed that persons with disabilities would automatically benefit from the support in the same way as others. During ongoing phase of Cowash it was realised that in order to ensure that persons with disabilities are able to equally benefit, participate and contribute to the planning, design, implementation and management of WASH services, specific activities and actions are required. *We understood that inaccessible services are discrimination on the basis on disability because the persons with disabilities couldn't use WASH services on an equal basis with others.*

- Particularly important entry point in realizing the rights of persons with disabilities in WASH services is to reduce **“Harmful practices”** that persons with disabilities face. These practices include behaviour, attitudes and practices based on tradition, culture, religion or other reasons, which negatively affect the human rights and fundamental freedoms of persons with disabilities or perpetuate discrimination. Persons with disabilities are often exposed to targeted violence and abuse, including sexual and gender-based violence. Women and girls with disabilities often face double discrimination on the grounds of the gender and their impairments. *Due to stigma and discrimination, physical barriers and lack of accessible information and communication materials on issues related to sexual health and hygiene, the participation of women and girls with disabilities in their families, education and other aspect of social life is seriously limited.*
- COWASH has developed a disability inclusion in WASH guideline as well as a guidebook for the community level use. These have been translated to the COWASH regional languages (Amharic, Afaan, Oromo and Tigrigna). Over the last two years, COWASH has had a strong focus on capacity building and awareness raising in the WASH sector from the regional level all the way to the kebele level. Over 11,300 people have taken part in Cowash trainings and awareness raising events in 2017/2018. Further 4,500 people are planned to be trained in inclusiveness in 2019. The trainings have included office heads and technical experts from sector offices and disability issues are also part of community level trainings.
- COWASH has worked together with a number of Ethiopian Disabled peoples’ organizations at federal, regional and woreda levels. COWASH has built the capacity of DPOs through training and using persons with disabilities as trainers and resource persons in all trainings organised. We consider important that persons with disabilities and their representative organizations (DPOs) have meaningful participation in the implementation and processes of the development cooperation - **“nothing about us without us”**(slogan).
- I have seen the fruits of the capacity building on the ground level when visiting Cowash program in different woredas and communities. I have been impressed to see how proud the WASH officers have been in telling about their inclusiveness activities and showing their new innovative designs of improved access to the water supply facilities and to the latrines for people with disabilities. I have also met people with disabilities as members of the WASHCOs or as a guard of the water point. The awareness level on disability issues has largely improved.
- Although good progress has been made, there is still a long way to go to ensure full accessibility and participation of all towards the goal Leave no-one behind. I highly encourage all partners in the sector to work further towards the inclusion of persons with disabilities in WASH.