

COWASH Learning Note: most common shortcomings in the accessibility of water points and institutional latrines through practical examples from the field



Since 2016, COWASH project implementation (Phase III) has included a strong focus on improving the inclusion of persons with disabilities and accessibility of WASH facilities. COWASH has been a champion, a pioneer in this field, working to address a critical sector gap.

This learning note, based on numerous field visits by the COWASH Disability Inclusion Specialist to all 5 COWASH regions and covering 47 (out of the total 76) woredas, summarises the key challenges in terms of the accessibility of water points and institutional latrines constructed by the project. During these monitoring visits, many good examples of nicely constructed accessible facilities were seen, but there are also many similar mistakes or forgotten issues in many places.

In order to learn from each other and to improve further in the future, this document lists some of the most common accessibility problems found as well as some good examples for the reference of both the COWASH RSUs as well as all the woredas. The document is not meant to be about finding mistakes or those who have not done well. It is about finding solutions, learning and avoiding repeating the same faults again. This is why it is not specified from where each picture is taken. In all of the sites the aim was to make them accessible, so it is not a collection of bad examples, but a collection of many attempts of making WASH facilities accessible that need some adjustments in order to actually be accessible. This guide may also be useful for other WASH actors in Ethiopia to improve the accessibility of the WASH facilities constructed.

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1. The most common weak points for both water points and latrines are:

1.1. The missing path and long distance to the facility

Oftentimes the first hurdle is the path and the distance to the WASH facility itself. Sometimes due to topography or site selection it is difficult or impossible to solve this issue. However, many times especially so in institutions, it is not a difficult issue to solve. In the institutions the latrines should not be placed too far away (minimum 6 metres and maximum 30-50) and the construction materials should not be left there to block the way. Especially in schools where there are students with disabilities the way to the facility should be checked together with them.



1.2. The ramp:

1.2.1. Is blocked by the fence

It is common to see that the ramp is blocked by the fence or other obstacles, making it impossible to use it. The fence door should always be placed in front of the ramp.



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1.2.2. Is too steep, has no support handles, or the handles are too low to be useful

Often it is not possible to use the ramp as it is made too steep. The ramp should have a maximum slope of 10%, ideally 6-8%. If the slope is steep support handles should be added. The handrail should be high enough (70-90 cm) to be useful.



1.2.3. Does not lead to the correct place

The purpose of the ramp is to get easy access to the facility. At times the ramp has been constructed, but it does not allow access to the water point or the latrine.



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1.2.4. Is not in the logical direction or not straight

The ramp and the entrance should be located on the logical way from the institution or village. Sometimes it is built on the wrong side of the building or water point, not taking into account from which direction the users are coming from. The ramp should also always be straight, not built at a diagonal.



2. The most common challenges in water points are:

2.1. There is not enough space to use the pump handle

This is a very common problem that is easy to fix, but one that makes a big difference to all users.



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2.2. There is not enough space to move around on the headwork or the headwork is not even

It is better for all users if there is enough space to move around the water point or if the surface is even, but it is essential for persons with disabilities.



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2.3. It is not possible to reach both the pump handle and the faucet

This is also a common problem that is usually the result of not thinking about how the water point will be used by the people. However, it is necessary for all the reach both the pump hand and the jerry can. For this all the surface of the headwork needs to be even and smooth.



3. The most common challenge in institutional latrines:

3.1. The door opens to the inside Or the door opens to the outside but blocks the entry to the cubicle as it opens towards the person



When the door opens to the inside once you have entered the room with the wheelchair, it is impossible to close it (as seen on the right above). Therefore, the door has to open to the outside.

However, care should be also be put in the direction of the door opening (left or right) depending on the site. The door should not block the user when entering to the facility – it should not open towards the person but away from the person (as shown on the left).

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3.2. The iron frame around the door or something else creates a step at the entrance to the cubicle



3.3. The door is not wide enough

The door has to be wide enough for a wheelchair to be able to enter. This means 1 metre.

3.4. The entrance is not on the logical or closest side of the latrine block, making entry difficult and the way there unnecessary longer

The entrance should be placed on the side that is nearer to the institution, not the other side to make sure entry is easy and the way there as short as possible.



3.5. There is not enough space to move around the cubicle or for a wheelchair or assistant

The accessible cubicle has to be bigger than the other cubicles to make sure there is space for a wheelchair or for an assistant. This means minimum 1.5 x 2 metres.

3.6. There are no handrails next to the seat, the handrails are too high or the handrails come too far from the toilet seat



For a person using a wheelchair and many others with physical disabilities having handrails next to the seat on both sides is necessary in order to transfer themselves on the raised seat from the wheelchair. Without the handrails it can be impossible or very difficult for them.

The handrails should also not be too high (ideally 70-90 cm) and they should stop where the seat also stops, not continue further in front of the seat. If the handrails are too high and too long like in the photo on the right, it is not possible to use them and they also block the way to the seat. Because of the handrail it is not possible to get close to the seat with a wheelchair.

3.7. There is no raised seat or the seat is not convenient/ practical to use

For many persons with physical disabilities it is necessary to have a seat as they may have difficulties squatting or otherwise they may have to crawl or sit on the floor, which is very unhygienic. The seat can be made of different materials but it is better if the seat is open from the front for more practical urination and the surface should not be too rough. The hole in the seat should also be big enough. Contractors and artisans should be encouraged to sit or test it themselves to get it right. In schools it should be considered if the users are small children.



3.8. The hygiene is very poor

For persons with disabilities it is particularly important that the latrine is kept clean. As they usually have to touch more surfaces it makes a big difference. People with physical disabilities have to touch the doors and handrails/seat (and in their absence the floor and walls) more than others, and people with visual impairments have to find their way around the room. Ideally the toilet should have water inside already. If the institution has no water supply, no water flush toilet seats should be installed as they will quickly fill up and become unusable.



4. Some good examples of accessible water points and latrines

This is one good example of a community hand dug well. There is a ramp, which is placed in the correct place, is not too steep and has a handrail for support. There is enough space to move around and it possible to reach both the pump handle and the jerry can. There are no obstacles and the surface is smooth.



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Similarly, above is a good example of a public fountain with a smooth entrance and enough space to reach the tap from the gate. Only the taps on the left should be lower to ensure reach.

On the left an example of flat even steps which can be a good solution for spring protections where topography is challenging.

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These latrines are located near to the institution and the area/ path is clear. The ramp leads to the cubicle and is not too steep and has a supporting handrail. The door opens to the outside and the entrance is smooth, flat and big enough.



There is a flush toilet seat (but another type of fixed seat is also possible, especially if there is no water available). There are handrails next to the seat and enough space to move around. The toilet is also kept clean.

The photo on the left shows a smooth concrete path leading to the school latrine down the hill from the classrooms. In the steep hill the path will make it easier for all to use the latrine, not only children with disabilities.