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 WASH projects being implemented by World Vision Australia and Water Aid 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 factors including interest, capacity, geographical proximity and scope of the program. DPO-CSO engagement has not only strengthened project outcomes, but has brought benefits for all partners on achieving disability inclusion and broader capacity-building and networking benefits.

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) infrastructure 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;   however Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) may not have technical knowledge to ensure disability-inclusion or the networks to reach out to people with disabilities. . Meanwhile local Disabled People's Organisations (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 which 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 DPOs These examples serve to illustrate some of the several ways in which mainstream agencies can work with DPOs.

Projects

The WaterAid and World Vision Australia (WVA) CS WASH projects were 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 Timor-Leste and PNG.

The projects a greatly varied, situated from remote rural villages to urban townships, and covering activities from provision of water and sanitation facilities to hygiene promotion to building the capacity of local 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 Australia was engaged to support disability inclusion in each project including a strong priority to broker 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,
- the geographic proximity of the DPO to the project sites.

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), Deaf Link
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-CSO partnerships

In most of the contexts there was little or no existing relationship between the CSO or its project staff and local DPOs. Hence initial engagement was largely with CBM Australia. However to promote leadership and full involvement of people with disabilities and their representative organisations in all activities which affect them, CBM Australia 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, but through engagement with the DPOs 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, the other DPOs engaged as they considered the project as a means to achieving other outcomes or for learning and development purposes. For example, in Zimbabwe FODPZ 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 project

DPO engagement in baseline and other data collection

All five projects engaged with DPOs the baseline assessments for their projects; either consulting with DPOs on a disability-inclusive approach 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.

Disability assessments: 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 and were 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. DPOs (and CBM Australia) provided input into these processes, and in PNG an additional disability situational analysis was conducted with DPOs leaders, which provided information to shape programming, as well as to feed into WaterAid and the DPO's 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 but the ADP project officer, 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

Case study: Engaging with DPOs to implement disability inclusive WASH programming

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 roles in infrastructure assessment and development

A key component of all the WASH programs was designing and developing public and/or household infrastructure for water, sanitation and hygiene. DPOs played a significant role across design, testing, and evaluating infrastructure in terms of advising on accessibility for people with disabilities.

In Zimbabwe, FODPZ conducted a Disability Audit of public spaces in the project areas. Many of their recommendations which were adopted by the implementing partners, impacting the design and rehabilitation of public water points and toilet facilities. In PNG the DPO provided some initial technical advice and then during the mid-term review process the ADP Project Officer gave specific feedback on issues such as lack of railings at tap-stands and the distance to handrails within toilet cubicles. This allowed the WASH team to address these in finalising the infrastructure and in ongoing rollout in other villages. In Sri Lanka, the DPO is currently involved in a team documenting a range of alternative low cost, locally sources adaptations that can be used to improve accessibility of regular existing household toilets, where there is no funding for new accessible toilets.

In some locations this influence went beyond the project infrastructure. Through their engagement with DPOs in Timor-Leste, WaterAid TL saw the value in 'walking the talk' and not only sought a direct recruitment of staff from the DPO to the WASH program, but also asked the advice of DPOs in its own organisational accessibility. The DPO assessed and adapted the WaterAid office spaces to be more accessible to staff and visitors with disabilities as a result.

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 TL engaged DPO members in community triggering processes as often as feasible for the DPO and collaborated with RHTO to develop videos and flip charts depicting the barriers experienced by people with disabilities in accessing WASH and how to overcome these. These resources were used by project staff to raise awareness within communities, including when DPO members themselves could not be present.

Another example is in Zimbabwe, FODPZ were contracted to carry out awareness-raising on rights directly to people with disabilities and allies in the project areas. This empowered people with disabilities through helping them to understand processes for advocacy, legal 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 Australia 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 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 a 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, as well as working 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, and provided a platform to advocate on disability inclusion in WASH programs internationally. **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 their skills such as research which could be used in other projects. The DPO identified training needs which were met through the project, both on organisational capacity delivered by WVL, and training on the CRPD delivered by CBM Australia. 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 research and monitoring and evaluation 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. FOPDZ reflected that in Zimbabwe, the funding and logistics provided for the disability assessment enabled FODPZ to visit locations and meet people with disabilities which otherwise they could not have reached. This 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, increasing 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**: Through the projects, DPOs gained access to local authorities and services and a platform through which to influence WASH outcomes, and to also raise awareness of the needs of people with disabilities generally. For FOPDZ, involvement in the project also helped to raise the profile of the DPO, and the organisation has built up long-term relationships with local authority leaders and is now regularly invited to community meetings or policy consultations.

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Benefits to CSOs

- **Strengthened project outcomes:** The relationships also 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 there are commitments to broaden disability inclusion beyond this project.
- **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, and recognition of the need for strong DPO capacity to support successful disability inclusive WASH programming. 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 engagements in the CSO projects were overwhelmingly positive, some contexts required ongoing communication and support to ensure the arrangements ran smoothly. In cases where DPOs were contracted to implement activities at a larger scale than what the DPO had managed previously, additional support was required by the CSO, and in some cases, at times the pressure of project implementation likely impacted upon the DPOs'

Case study: Engaging with DPOs to implement disability inclusive WASH programming

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. 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, WV 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..

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.

The 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 case studies illustrates 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 which match their priorities and capacity.

- Having a dedicated inclusion advisor who knows both the DPO and CSO can assist by brokering and translating information, supporting planning and supporting DPO technical programming capacity.

- Having 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 and may also assist disability inclusion work to be implemented within a broader inclusion approach.

- For a 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 there should be capacity to absorb this within the MoU.

- Recognising and engaging DPOs as key agents of change 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.

- Modelling an inclusive approach at the strategic level 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 triggered interest in other program areas of the 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 the 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.