



Accessible water and sanitation in practice A case study from World Vision Ethiopia

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¹ Consortium comprises Harewelle International Limited, NR International, Practical Action Consulting, Cranfield University and AEA Energy and Environment

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1. Description of enquiry

This enquiry is to write a case study (with photos) on a programme run by World Vision using DFID PPA money. The case studies will focus on accessible school and health centre latrines as well as a small community latrine being managed by a DPO in Ethiopia.

2. Accessible water and sanitation in practice – A case study from World Vision Ethiopia

By Lorraine Wapling, Disability and Development Consultant

Introduction

World Vision is a Christian relief, development and advocacy organisation working with children, families and communities to overcome poverty and injustice. In 2008, World Vision globally worked in 98 countries serving over 100 million people, had 40,000 staff and an income of over £1.5 billion. World Vision UK is part of this global partnership and has been established since 1982.

World Vision UK has had a DFID Programme Partnership Arrangement (PPA) since 2006 which includes an objective to mainstream disability in its work. This does not mean World Vision is increasing its disability specific projects, it means World Vision is actively trying to find ways to ensure **all** of its work brings benefits to disabled children and adults living in focus communities.

This case study highlights the experiences of World Vision Ethiopia as they implement measures to include disabled people in their water and sanitation programme. Having attended initial disability awareness training the advocacy unit looked at specific areas in which to begin proactive work on inclusion. A large sector in the Ethiopia programme is linked to water and sanitation, much of which involves construction of latrines in health centres and schools. To begin the process of inclusion the office organised additional training for staff and engineers on accessible water and sanitation design run by Hazel Jones of Loughborough University and started building closer relationships with local organisations of disabled people (DPOs).

The result was a series of urban and rural interventions which have put implementation of accessible designs to the test. Overall the programme has learned that even without 'specialist knowledge' on disability it is possible to increase accessibility. Links with disabled people themselves help to improve long term success and is a highly empowering process. Engineers are also largely sympathetic to the issue of access once they have seen for themselves the problems disabled people have in using standard design facilities. Attitude is still one of the biggest single factors in preventing implementation of Universal Design standards; not the cost or time involved.

Opportunities in an urban environment

Kolfe Keranio Area Development Programme (ADP)

In one of the poorer areas within Addis Ababa World Vision Ethiopia has been supporting one ADP to work more specifically on increasing the inclusion of disabled people into community development. After taking part in a two day disability awareness training workshop in 2007, along with representatives from offices in Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda, World Vision Ethiopia advocacy staff began to seriously focus on the practical implications of how to bring about improvements in the lives of disabled people. This began with a series of disability awareness

workshops for staff and key partners – one of which included a special focus on inclusive water and sanitation programming. As a result of this many ADP managers changed their attitudes towards disabled people – before, like most people in Ethiopia disabled people had been regarded as a group which required specialist support and interventions outside of the remit of most WV work. Some disabled people had benefitted from medical assistance (provision of wheelchairs for example) but on the whole their needs were not considered in regular programme planning. After the workshops however a significant number of staff began to realise that disabled people were being excluded from much of the work either as a result of negative, stereotypical attitudes or environmental and policy barriers.

Community consultations for accessible latrines

The ADP I visited (Kolfe Keranio, Addis Ababa) had made important changes to the way it consulted with communities. This time around they made sure they contacted disabled people and as a result have formed a very good link with a local cross-impairment self-help group. After discussions it was found that one of their most pressing needs was for some form of accessible sanitation facility. Regularly designed latrines, where they existed, were not suitable for many of the physically and visually impaired householders and so most found themselves in the degrading position of having to go into the bush during the night. Apart from the dangers and inconvenience of this it was also highly shameful and affected individuals' sense of self-worth.



Figure 1 DPO leader outside new latrine block

As a result WVE assisted the community to build a new latrine block containing six accessible latrines. The self-help group, which now acts as the committee maintaining the block, were involved throughout the construction process and as a result several changes were made during the build itself. The resulting latrines are now used by 34 households from the surrounding community and an increasing number of others have started to become interested. The self-help group that manages the latrine block charge 3Birr per month (0.14p) to use the facilities. Despite the fact that most disabled people in the group have no permanent source of income (many that we spoke with still rely on begging) members chose this amount as being affordable. The income generated from this user-fee is put directly back into cleaning materials and maintenance programmes.

The members we sat with have been delighted by the impact they have seen from this initiative. Both disabled women and men now make regular use of the latrines and they say it has significantly improved the quality of their lives. They had been campaigning for government to provide something like this for a long time but until WV constructed this sample latrine block they had always been denied. Now local government is working together with WV and groups of disabled people to increase the number of accessible latrine sites across the community. Having seen that the design is not that different, complicated or more expensive there is now some level of interest in seeing more facilities like this being built in schools and clinics.

The group is now looking at ways to improve other areas of their lives and are in discussion over the construction of accessible water points and household based bathing rooms.

Considering access to school facilities

Whilst this has been a very successful example of using the construction of latrines as a way to include disabled people into community development we also visited the site of a primary school which has been included in a programme to upgrade its latrines. The standard upgrade process produced new latrine blocks that were not accessible to physically disabled students, despite the fact that the school actually had a number of wheelchair users. In response WVE agreed to build an additional, separate but accessible latrine block for the school. This example however was not as promising and demonstrates the need for good consultation with disabled people at all stages of the construction process and for a set of standardised requirements for the build itself.



Figure 2 School latrine showing distance and rough terrain

The main problem with this latrine block was that it was built at the edge of a large playing field, some distance away from the main school across terrain that would be extremely difficult for a wheelchair user to cross in the dry season and impossible in the rainy season. Whilst distance from the school is partly explained by the need to ensure it complies with health and safety regulations there is need to consider how to improve the environment of the *approach* so that students can actually reach the latrines. In fact the construction process itself seems to have created a lot of the rubble and earth which is now blocking the way (see photographs).

The latrines themselves are not as accessible as they should be – the cubicles would be too narrow for a standard wheelchair user, there are no rails, or raised seats and the door handles are too high and would be difficult to use by those with limited dexterity. There were no separate facilities for boys and girls and no place for washing hands.

Since the school itself has no ramps into any of its classrooms the fact of providing 'accessible' latrines will likely not make a significant impact on the numbers of physically disabled children wanting to attend the school. The head teacher explained that all the wheelchair users they had have now left and gone to more accessible schools. Perhaps more consultation needs to go into thinking about accessibility of the whole school environment with support for the classrooms to be modified at the same time as building the latrines. Greater involvement with disabled people themselves would help this process to improve.



Figure 3 Building material blocks the way to this accessible latrine

Opportunities in rural communities

Digeluna Tijo, ADP

About 200 km south east of Addis in the Oromia region of Ethiopia lies Digeluna Tijo ADP, a relatively new programme focusing on agriculture (food security), education, health and water and sanitation. What marks this ADP out as being something special is that they are also trying to increase the inclusion of disabled people into all their activities, despite reportedly not having anyone with specialist experience in this area.

General poverty markers such as low levels of agricultural inputs, limited sources of income generation and micro-credit facilities, poor access to quality education, healthcare and water and sanitation supplies are all present in this ADP. This programme is also now aware that disabled people are amongst some of the poorest and most vulnerable and are determined to ensure as far as possible that their needs can be addressed.

After undergoing disability awareness training and taking part in a workshop on inclusive water and sanitation programming the strategy has been to look at ways to incorporate disability into all elements of the existing work. They looked for local DPOs to partner with and have provided some help to them to build their organisational capacity. Celebrating International Day of Disabled Persons (December 3rd) has also become a way to help improve the profile of disabled people in the area and provide DPOs with some capacity building support.



Figure 4 This latrine has guide rails but the approach is inaccessible

They now regularly consult with DPOs and have helped to establish a monthly meeting between DPOs and the local representatives of the Ministry of Social Affairs (MoSA). This is now a very important channel for disabled people to feed in their needs as well as to gain information from government about the programmes and services available to them.

They have helped sensitise the community to the needs of disabled people by carrying out disability awareness training with groups like teachers, school committees and other community and government leaders. On a more practical level they have been looking at how to improve environmental access to places like schools and clinics. Building projects to date have included a new accessible latrine block in the local health centre, construction of ramps in primary schools as well as their own WV ADP office block.

In terms of construction there are certainly issues which need resolving and they are fully aware of the problems. It can be very difficult to persuade local officials to agree on modifications – the planning process is not easy to influence and can take a long time. Local contractors are also not sensitive to Universal Design standards and do not see the importance of checking progress with disabled people themselves. As a result one latrine building project I visited at the local health centre was not well executed. In contrast to the school latrines in Addis the latrine cubicles were much wider and more appropriate for use by wheelchair users. However the ramp leading up to the latrines would be hard to negotiate and the land around the base of the ramp would probably make using it impossible (see photograph). They had similar problems with a generally inaccessible approach and poorly designed door handles.

Nevertheless ADP staff are very aware of the need for some systematic way to ensure Universal Design standards are being applied to new construction and are keen to sit with local engineers to come up with an agreed solution.

Concluding remarks

It is obvious that WVE has come a long way over the past three years especially in the area of awareness about disability. There were occasions where people didn't see how disability could be related to WATSAN or the engineering profession. The training itself helped change people's attitudes simply by the way it was run. Involving disabled people meant finding an accessible training venue which the staff had never tried to do before. One unintended impact to come out

of this process was increased awareness on access issues by training centres and hotels. As staff made enquiries about the accessibility of hotels owners and managers began to question themselves realising that their businesses could be improved if they were accessible to disabled people. Advocacy staff also realised just how inaccessible most buildings are and got a small chance to experience how frustrating that can be.

Bringing disabled people to the training along with the development workers and government representatives made the learning very practical. Disabled people were able to share their experiences of good and bad designs and people were especially affected when they saw disabled people struggling to use a latrine that the programme had just installed.

The staff we talked to all agreed that although they were not specialists in disability they had a responsibility to find ways to ensure disabled people could access their programmes. Whilst they admitted it was not always straightforward they had absolutely no questions about the need for this to happen – perhaps only regretting this had not been done before. There are some interesting observations and learning to have come from these efforts to be more disability inclusive. Above all the importance of awareness-raising in the initial stages has proved extremely beneficial.

Everyone involved from staff, to communities and district engineers need to be fully aware of the rights-based approach to disability. Once people accept that disabled people need to be included in mainstream provisions then it is much easier to start working on accessible designs. This in itself is an empowering process – people come to understand for themselves why access is important rather than having to be ‘forced’ into compliance.

The involvement of disabled people from the very beginning is also crucial to successful outcomes. The latrines in Kolfe Keranio were designed and built in consultation with local disabled representatives. They were able to make important suggestions during the construction phase which other projects (such as the school illustrated above) missed. As a consequence this latrine block is being fully utilised and maintained and there are plans for more.

As these case studies illustrate however there can be challenges, not least because of a lack of Universal Design standards that are locally enforceable. One area in which the WV team struggled was in competing with government design regulations. Engineers although often sympathetic did not always consider access issues to be very important since they are not mandatory and were less inclined to comply with World Vision’s recommendations. Given that access issues are not part of the standard ‘signing off’ process engineers are not being scrutinised on this aspect of their work. This is what leads to missing elements like guide rails or accessible handles and the fact that building materials can be left effectively blocking access. WV staff have been consistently challenged on how to overcome this and are now working on ways to involve government engineers in a standardisation process.

Finally although consulting with disabled people is the most important thing that any organisation can do it should not be underestimated how challenging this can be. World Vision has an approach which means it spends many years working with individual communities but even they have had difficulties at times reaching out to disabled people. That is because disabled people themselves remain largely hidden and unaware they have any contribution to make to development. Development agencies do now have a responsibility to find ways to reach out under the new UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities but this will involve them spending more time on community consultation processes.

Nevertheless the experience of working with DPOs is a major accomplishment for this programme. DPOs now treat all the WVE projects as their own and support them without reservation. They work to mobilize their members and create awareness of the need to support

WVE whenever they can. They work with the staff continuously providing much needed feedback and motivation ensuring things progress as smoothly as possible.