

Influencing leaders in local government institutions to institutionalise budgets for disability inclusion in Bhutan and Nepal

Background

Beyond the Finish Line is a five-year SNV rural water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) programme (2018-2022) in Bhutan, Lao PDR, and Nepal. Supported by the Australian Government's Water for Women Fund, the programme strengthens WASH services by making these more inclusive, accessible, and sustainable through the application of gender equality and social inclusion approaches. It is led by SNV in collaboration with the Institute for Sustainable Futures of University of Technology Sydney (ISF-UTS), and the respective governments, local partners including DPOs and CBM Australia.

In Bhutan, the main Disable Persons Organisation (DPO) partner is Ability Bhutan Society (ABS) and in Nepal is the Nepal Apanga Sangh (NAS) in Sarlahi and Panchakoshi Disability Development Forum (PDDF) in Dailekh.

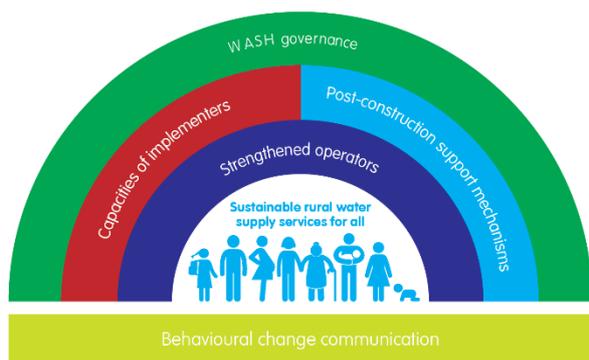


Figure 1: SNV's programme approach in Nepal



Figure 2: SNV's programme approach in Bhutan

Mutually re-enforcing partnerships with DPOs

Guided by CBM Australia, SNV's partnership in Bhutan and Nepal with the DPOs is underpinned by the principle of a mutually beneficial partnership. This means that DPOs such as ABS, NAS and PDDF are enabled to fulfill critical roles in shaping inclusion approaches within the WASH sector, and in assisting the sector to meet its Sustainable Development Goals of safely managed WASH services (SDG 6) and to leave no-one behind. In turn, the WASH sector has a facilitation and enabling role to play in supporting DPOs' objectives to increase awareness on disability inclusion in development programmes, and day-to-day life.

Rationale for strengthening systems for disability inclusion

Access to safe water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) is a human right and governments are the duty bearers of the progressive realisation of this right in their jurisdictions. However, people with disabilities often face additional barriers to accessing and or safely using WASH services and facilities, for reasons such as poor or distant placement of WASH infrastructure, inaccessible toilets and water supply infrastructure, exclusion from community hygiene awareness and general WASH planning processes, and stigma and discrimination. WASH programmes must overcome these barriers and look beyond technology solutions alone. With the focus of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) on universal access stakeholder awareness of the need for WASH programmes to reach and benefit everyone has been growing and programmes are now proactively seeking to reach people with disabilities. There are over 1 billion

people with disabilities globally and 80% of them live in low and middle income countries. Globally, people with disabilities are amongst the most vulnerable populations in the COVID-19 pandemic.

Investments in WASH has an enormous potential to contribute to greater equality and address discrimination and stigma for people with disabilities. WASH is a pre-condition for the social and economic participation of everybody. And responsive and inclusive WASH services enable individuals' and societal progress in that these remove barriers for people of all backgrounds to access an education, quality health care, and to participate in community and broader public spaces. In the case of people with disabilities, facilitating the construction of accessible toilets, both at home and in public places – for example – help ensure that they can access toilets with dignity and without shame.

WASH systems and services can only be improved by actively including groups long excluded from decision-making processes and structures. Only then can we make sure that no one is left behind. But to achieve this, significant work needs to be done. We (WASH sector) need to challenge harmful norms that support these inequalities and ensure there is adequate budget for disability inclusion allocated within national (provincial and local) governance systems and that DPOs are adequately resourced and recognised.

SNV's approach to disability inclusion

Taking a rights-based approach, we're building capacity at every level to ensure environmentally and financially sustainable WASH services and systems. Systems thinking is enabling us to understand better where power lies within the system, and helps us to identify the potential of different actors within the system to enable sustainable and inclusive changes in WASH. For example, in Bhutan, to gain better understanding of the needs of people with disabilities – the best approach has been to collaborate with local DPOs and form mutually beneficial strategic partnerships with them. This ensures that the WASH sector systems we develop are inclusive – not only in terms of facility or technology offerings, but also in terms of enlarging spaces for DPO engagement in WASH planning so that they too can shape service arrangements.

Understanding that it is people within the system that can strengthen systems, in Bhutan, we facilitate and bring together a multitude of stakeholders in dialogue and ensure that within these exchanges, rights-based organisations and women's groups are well represented. Such is the case during the annual national WASH stakeholder meetings where actors from various government agencies, CSOs, private and even disability champions meet to influence and agree upon key WASH sector priorities. And, to strengthen the participation of potentially disadvantaged groups whose voices have traditionally been muted in these decision-making spaces, we invest in strengthening their capacity to engage by, for example, organising pre-sessions with women with disabilities before a multi-stakeholder discussion.

Our practice has also been informed and guided by inclusion lenses. In the more recent years, we have begun integrating Do No Harm and Making Rights Real approaches to enable WASH stakeholders – specifically those who are not human rights experts - to gain the tools and know-how to carry out actionable rights-based water and sanitation programmes.

To understand the impact of heightened risks of practising poor hygiene and contracting infections and diseases on menstruating women and girls, our programme in Nepal has integrated a gender and socially inclusive approach in its COVID-19 response with hygiene promotion activities. For example, in line with National sanitation and hygiene coordination committees (NSHCC) guidance, together with the Rural Municipality offices and DPO groups, SNV and its local support partners engagement in awareness raising programme during Menstrual Hygiene Day included individual counselling for women with disabilities and their caregivers. SNV also engaged in dialogue with rural municipality chairpersons, presenting MHH-related gaps in their plans, and explaining the importance to strengthen MHH response within municipality plans to meet their commitment to Nepal's 'Total Sanitation' programme. As a result, several Rural Municipality chairpersons expressed their commitment to allocate budgets for MHH in their respective annual plans.

In both programmes in Bhutan and Nepal, SNV together with local partners and supported by CBM, invested in formative research on impacts of disability on access and participation in WASH, to gather evidence and data for influencing and informing programming, and for wider disability inclusion advocacy within the sector.

Promising results

In Bhutan, motivated by the direct engagement with local DPOs and through SNV's facilitation, and through capacity building on disability inclusion; several local government institutions started allocating disability specific budgets within their local budgeting. An example is the gewog office (local government institution) in Tashiding sub-district under Dagana district allocated Nu. 300000 (AUD 6000) as part of its community support mechanism including providing bed side toilets for four people with disabilities at a concessional rate through collaboration with ABS. Another gewog office in Toebisa gewog under Punakha district, allocated Nu. 180000 (AUD 3600) including supporting two households with members with disabilities in constructing accessible toilets at home.

In Nepal, in Sarlahi district the rural municipality allocated NPR 4,00,000 (AUD5,100) for menstrual hygiene management for women with disabilities. This fund is being utilised for mobilisation of female community health volunteers (FCHVs) for counselling and DPO networks (self-help group) for motivation of family members of female with disabilities. The Rural Municipalities have recently established helpdesk at all four RM level in Sarlahi. They have started to distribute sanitary pads to needy women with disabilities in collaboration with the DPO network and FCHVs. Additionally, persons with disabilities were prioritised during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown, and budget allocated to provide disability-friendly handwashing stations at quarantine and isolation centres.

Learnings

The only way we can achieve SDG 6 is if we leave no one behind, ensuring disability inclusion is integrated in our vision and plans to change systems, and we actively encourage and strengthen the capacity of potentially disadvantaged groups to get their voices heard and their ideas acted upon. For this, CSOs intentional GSI work around WASH services are well placed to bring about transformative change within WASH systems and services through investments in realising rights to basic services for all and focusing on inclusive service delivery systems for the end goal of improved health, lives and well-being of all including women and girls with disabilities. Some of the learnings so far include:

- Institutionalising budget support for disability inclusion requires dedicated and consistent capacity building followed by regular follow up and monitoring.
- Peer sharing on disability inclusion between different local institutions has also proven useful in motivating and inspiring positive changes on disability inclusion
- Programmes can be instrumental in garnering local government support for disability inclusion through providing the platform for local actors to talk about disability inclusion during pivotal WASH decision making forums.

Going forward:

SNV will continue to engage with our DPO partners in Bhutan and Nepal to ensure disability inclusive outcomes in our rural WASH programmes, with particular emphasis on local government commitment for increasing the participation, voice and influence of women with disabilities within the sector.

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