



# Transformative leadership for inclusive, resilient WASH: experiences and insights from Bhutan

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**UTS**

Institute for Sustainable Futures



**WATER  
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FUTURES** 2023

Achieving SDG6 in a Changing Climate



#WaWF23

# Transformative leadership

Access to WASH services for all that leave no one behind requires transformative leadership. In the context of the challenges from COVID-19 and climate change, the need for transformative leadership in WASH is more crucial than ever.



## What is transformative leadership?

Transformative leadership emphasises the **connections** between a **leader's beliefs** and **actions that challenge inequality and promote inclusion**, which lead to inclusive outcomes.<sup>1</sup>

**ANYONE** can be a **TRANSFORMATIVE LEADER!**

# Bhutan context

**Population:** 756,121 (PHCB, 2017)

**Sanitation status:** 100% ODF with improved sanitation

An **inclusive leadership** put to test by the COVID-19 pandemic



# Project overview

*‘Transformative leadership for inclusive WASH in a post-COVID world’*  
covering 8 districts in Bhutan (2021-2022)

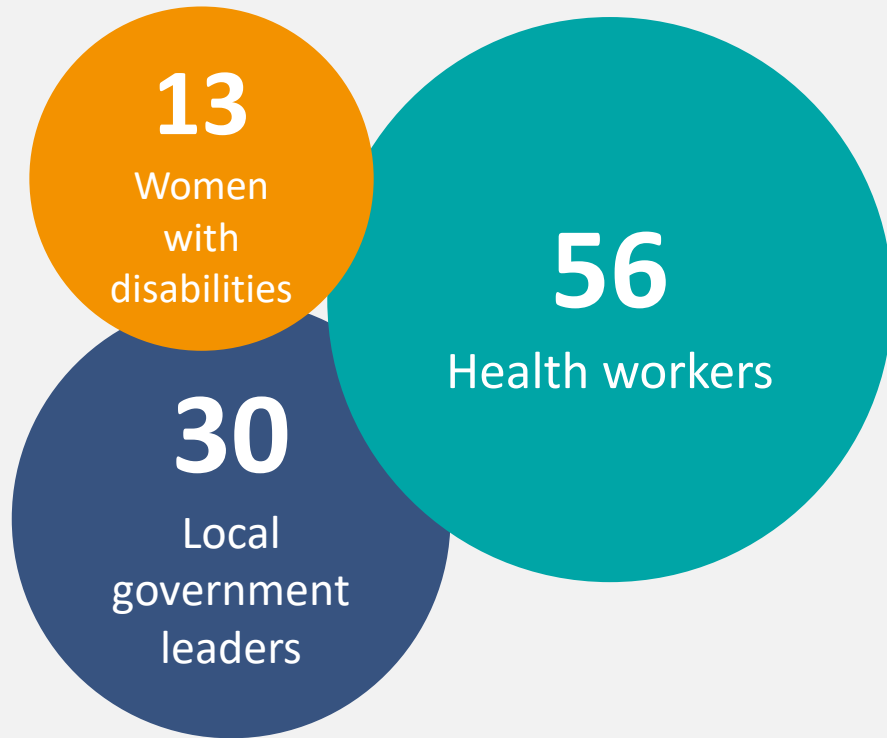
The project aimed to address sectoral needs, including

- Increasing **investment in women’s leadership** skills
- Establishing **networks and collective action**
- **Working with men** to increase women’s voice and influence in the WASH sector

Worked in close partnership with different stakeholders and organisations.



# Project participants and activities



99 leaders from Bhutan's WASH sector (national and sub-national)

## Four key project activities

**Leadership training** for women with disabilities Jun 2022

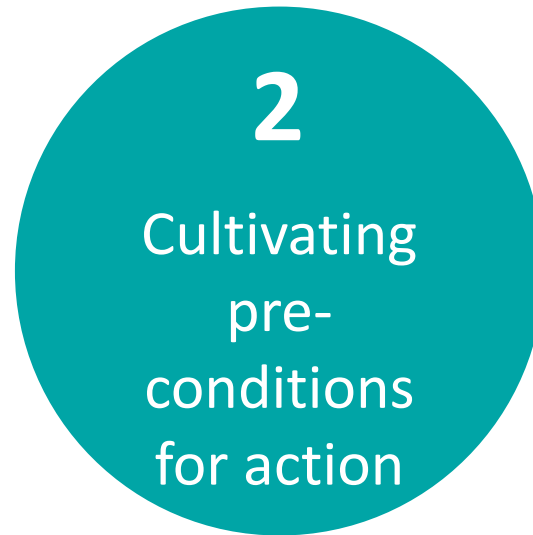
**Leadership training** for health workers (55 F, 1 M) Jul 2022

Make Rights Real & Transformative Leadership **reconvergence workshop** with local leaders (11 F, 19 M) Aug 2022

Established and facilitated a **community of practice** for all 99 leaders Jul 2022 - current

# Three dimensions of change for leaders

- Based on the project's theory of change
- Each dimension of change has specific anticipated short-term outcomes



# Impact assessment approach

Led by UTS-ISF, using a mixed-methods approach

## Knowledge, Attitudes, and Practices (KAP) survey

- Baseline and endline surveys
- 99 participants; 44 responses used in analysis
- Only included data from respondents who participated in both baseline and endline surveys

## Key Informant Interviews (KIIs)

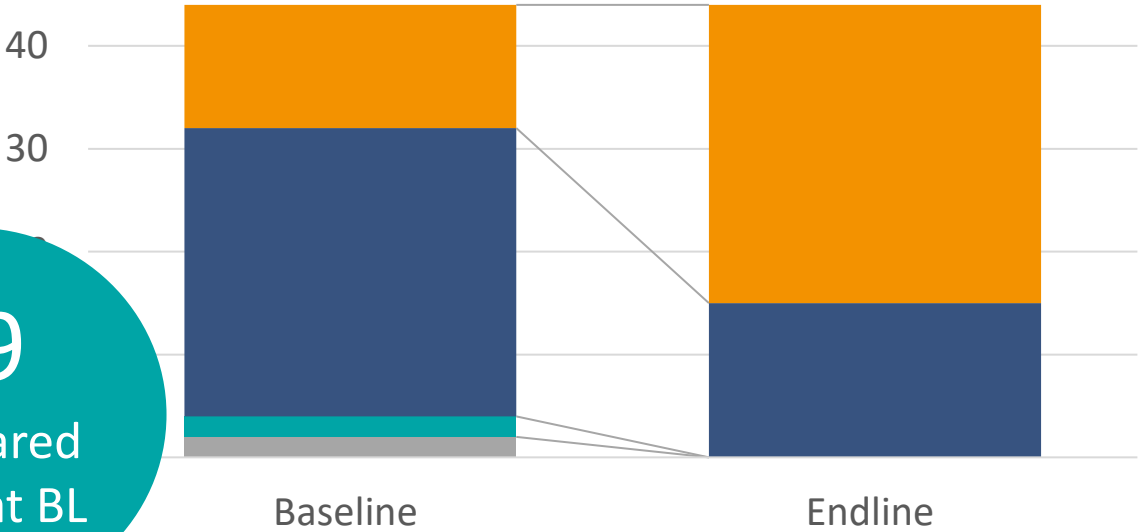
- Conducted only at endline
- Only with selected leaders
- 5 interviews conducted and used in analysis
- Aimed to elicit stories of change

1  
Personal  
outcomes  
for  
leaders

# Selected findings

Leaders became more aware of leadership, and more purposeful as active transformative leaders in the sector

## The biggest improvement related to knowing about different leadership styles



↑  
29  
compared  
to 12 at BL

■ Strongly disagree ■ Disagree ■ Somewhat agree ■ Strongly agree

*The leadership qualities have been sinking in. Before, people didn't really take me seriously, but now I am taken seriously. Leadership qualities changed me - I am able to motivate others to be active and participate. People come to me with issues and problems, and I always use my network to help.*



- Ms Leki Lhaden, Woman with a disability





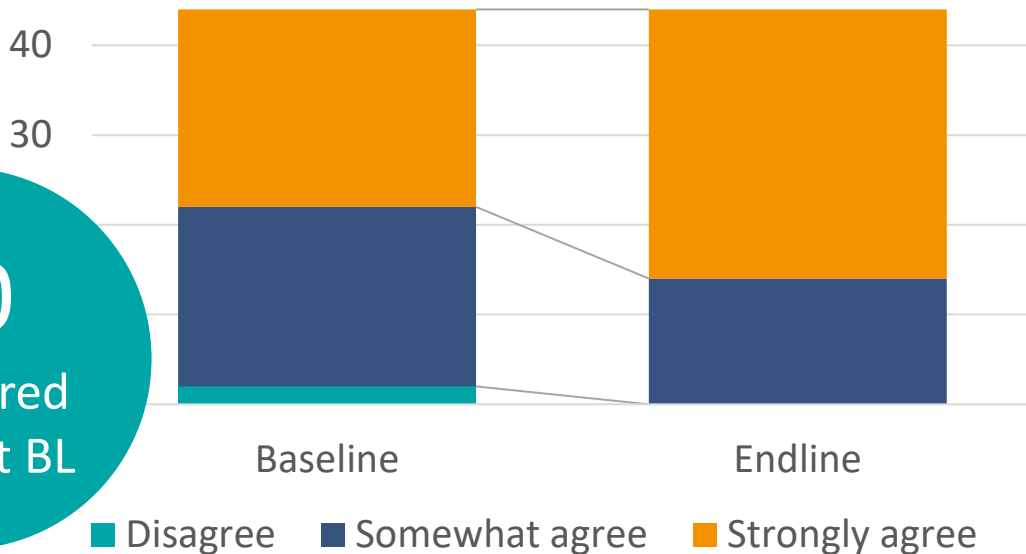
2

Cultivating pre-conditions for action

# Selected findings

## Meaningful improvements in leaders' understanding of GESI issues and their sense of duty and agency

The biggest improvement related to knowledge about gender issues and typical issues facing people with disabilities



↑  
**30**  
compared to 22 at BL

*“I did understand gender in a general sense, but I was not sure if I stressed the need before. However, now I have understood, and as a District Education Officer and having attended the training, I have learnt that women and people living with disability need the additional support.”*



- Mrs Ugyen Pem,  
Chief District Education Officer

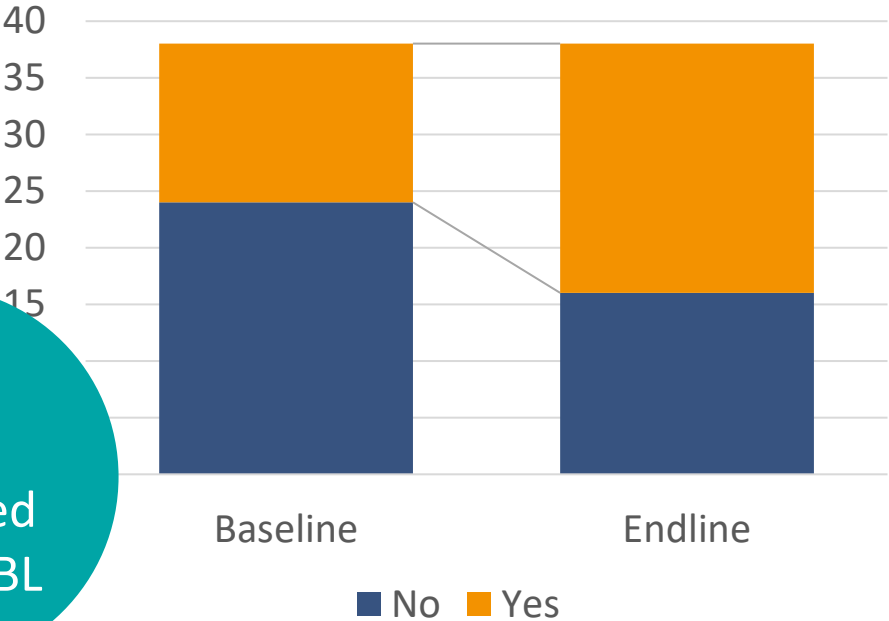


3  
Taking  
action

# Selected findings

Several leaders reported taking transformative GEDSI action

The biggest improvement related to taking action for people with disabilities



↑  
22  
compared  
to 14 at BL



*“I have also ensured that all the upcoming public toilets have separate toilets for men and women. If there are no provisions for gender-sensitive public constructions, I as a local government chairman, do not grant approval for the construction.”*

- Mr Samten Phuntsho, Local leader





## Key lessons learnt

1. Significant preparatory efforts are required to build trust and create an inclusive space for all
2. Working in partnership throughout helps achieve quick wins
3. Leadership participants are agents of change with the potential to create a 'ripple effect' to lift other leaders
4. Communities of Practice and social media platforms help with post-programme mentoring and support for leaders

**‘My engagement with human rights and inclusion  
furthered my approach and passion. It helped to  
approach the program from empathy and rights-  
based’**

Mr Wangay, Local Government elected leader

Access the full research report

Get in touch

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