

How the WASH sector in Timor-Leste can consider disabled people

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This issue sheet sets out the barriers that disabled people face in accessing water and sanitation and hygiene (WASH), and how they can be overcome. It aims to set out the issues in simple terms, and give examples of small things that make a big difference.

It is **both easy and low-cost** to make water supply and toilets accessible to all: what is needed is:

1. inclusive community action planning, with all barriers to disabled people's participation removed
2. an open mind on design, building on the innovation of disabled people themselves and using local materials.

Disability in Timor-Leste

Around 20% of the poorest people in the world have a disability affecting their daily lives, according to the World Bank. This is likely to be true for Timor-Leste, as 41% of people live below the global poverty line of \$1.25 per day. Anyone who is very old or pregnant is likely to have a disability.

Why are people with disabilities not considered?

People with disabilities are very often isolated from community life. Cultural beliefs can also play a part, with disabilities sometimes seen as embarrassing. There is also a lack of education – in rural areas, 63% of people over the age of 15 cannot read and write. People with disabilities are often excluded from community development planning, or barriers to their participation are not considered.

Using the principle of “nothing about us without us”, people with disabilities and their carers should be involved wherever possible in all aspects of WASH programs

What is Disability?

A disability is anything that reduces a person's ability to function in some way, for example relating to mobility, vision, or hearing.

Disabilities can be:

- Permanent, affecting people from birth or an illness.
- Temporary, such as when recovering from an accident.

Disability is not just about wheelchairs. All of us are likely to suffer from a disability at some point in our lives, particularly as we get older or when we become pregnant. Most difficulties faced by people with disabilities are just obstacles in the environment which could easily be removed.



An old man and Claudio from Kulao Liquiça – people can have disabilities for many reasons

More information

For information on disability in Timor-Leste, contact the National Disabled People's Organisation (DPO), Ra'es Hadomi Timor Oan (RHTO) at joazito.dpo@tlmtl.org or 732 9907.

BESIK (2010) *Disability and rural WASH in Timor-Leste*

Publication focused on Timor-Leste with case studies and a problems & solutions section, available for free from BESIK or the Leprosy Mission

Jones and Reed (2005) *Water and Sanitation for Disabled People and Other Vulnerable Groups*

Technical manual with array of inclusive design options, which is available for free from www.wedc-knowledge.org



Bamboo frame with splash guard from locally available materials



WaterAid's mission is to overcome poverty by enabling the world's poorest people to gain access to safe water, sanitation and hygiene education.

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including planning, management, implementation, monitoring and evaluation.

Barriers to accessing clean water and using a toilet

Accessibility audits of water sources and toilets in Timor-Leste quickly reveal how difficult it can be for people with disabilities to use them. The barriers can be split into access and operation. For example:

- Access to water – tap stand has steps or slippery path leading up to it
- Access to toilet – doorway is narrow or has steps
- Operation of water source – tap is hard to use
- Operation of toilet – no support for squatting

Simple solutions for WASH programmes

The two publications listed in the sidebar should be consulted for detailed low-cost solutions. Here are a few important low-cost or no-cost principles:

Access

- Ramps instead of steps
- Smooth path with handrails if necessary
- Wide toilet doors that open outwards
- Well-drained water points so not muddy and slippery

Operation

- Handrails for support inside the toilet, or a simple bamboo frame to sit on (see picture)
- Additional fitting to make tap easy to turn on/off
- Make the tap low down and easy to reach

What is WaterAid doing?

WaterAid is committed to making disability central to our work in Timor-Leste, through ensuring we include people with disabilities in our programs, and:

- partnering with Ra'es Hadomi Timor-Oan, the Disabled Peoples Organisation
- conducting disability training for all staff
- testing practical inclusive designs

Conclusions

It is **both easy and low-cost** to make water supply and toilets accessible to all. What is needed is:

1. inclusive community action planning, with all barriers to disabled people's participation removed
2. an open mind regarding design, building on the innovation of disabled people themselves, and using local material