

Female-friendly public toilets in Nepal: an assessment of four municipalities in the Kathmandu Valley



May 2022



◀ **Photo 1:**
Public toilet
at Gwarkho,
Lalitpur
Metropolitan
City

Key points

- 115 public toilets were assessed against a broad range of criteria.
- The overall finding was that the public toilets were in a poor condition and scored very low in areas of gender friendliness, menstrual hygiene management, disabled friendliness and meeting the requirements for operator/caretaker health and comfort.
- The highest scores were for location – being in a safe place – and opening and closing times.
- Some simple measures can be undertaken to make dramatic improvements, including the addition of ledges or hooks, disposal systems, a comfortable place for an operator to work from, and improved lighting.
- Substantial work should be undertaken at government level to create and enforce vigorous standards for public toilets.

Introduction

Sanitation is a basic human right. Sustainable Development Goal 6 calls for universal access to sanitation, paying special attention to the needs of women and girls and those in vulnerable situations. However, many people, in particular women and girls, often still cannot go to the toilet when and where they need or want. In 2018 WaterAid, in collaboration with UNICEF and Water & Sanitation for the Urban Poor (WSUP), published [*Female-friendly public and community toilets: a guide for planners and decision makers*](#) to address this gap and offer guidance for meeting the requirements of women and girls. The guide provides detailed information on the essential and desirable features that make toilets female-friendly, and these fall under the following headings:

1. Safe and private
2. Cater for menstrual and other hygiene management requirements
3. Accessible to all
4. Affordable and available when needed
5. Well-maintained and managed
6. Meet the requirements of caregivers and parents

Following this, WaterAid Nepal supported four municipalities in Kathmandu Valley to commission an assessment of public toilets. The aim was to identify the number and location of these facilities, and to assess their status, with the aim of highlighting the gaps to local-level planners and decision-makers.



Profile of the four municipalities

Kathmandu is the capital and largest city in Nepal, accounting for 20% of the urban population (around one million). Lalitpur is also a city, located five kilometres from Kathmandu. It has an urban history dating back to around 2300 years ago, and a current population of just under 300,000 people. Kirtipur and Madhyapur Thimi are municipalities within Kathmandu Valley with populations of less than 100,000.

Methodology (including limitations)

A survey was conducted using a questionnaire to rank each toilet against a number of indicators, loosely based on the categories in the [*Female-friendly toilet guide*](#), but also considering other national guidelines:¹

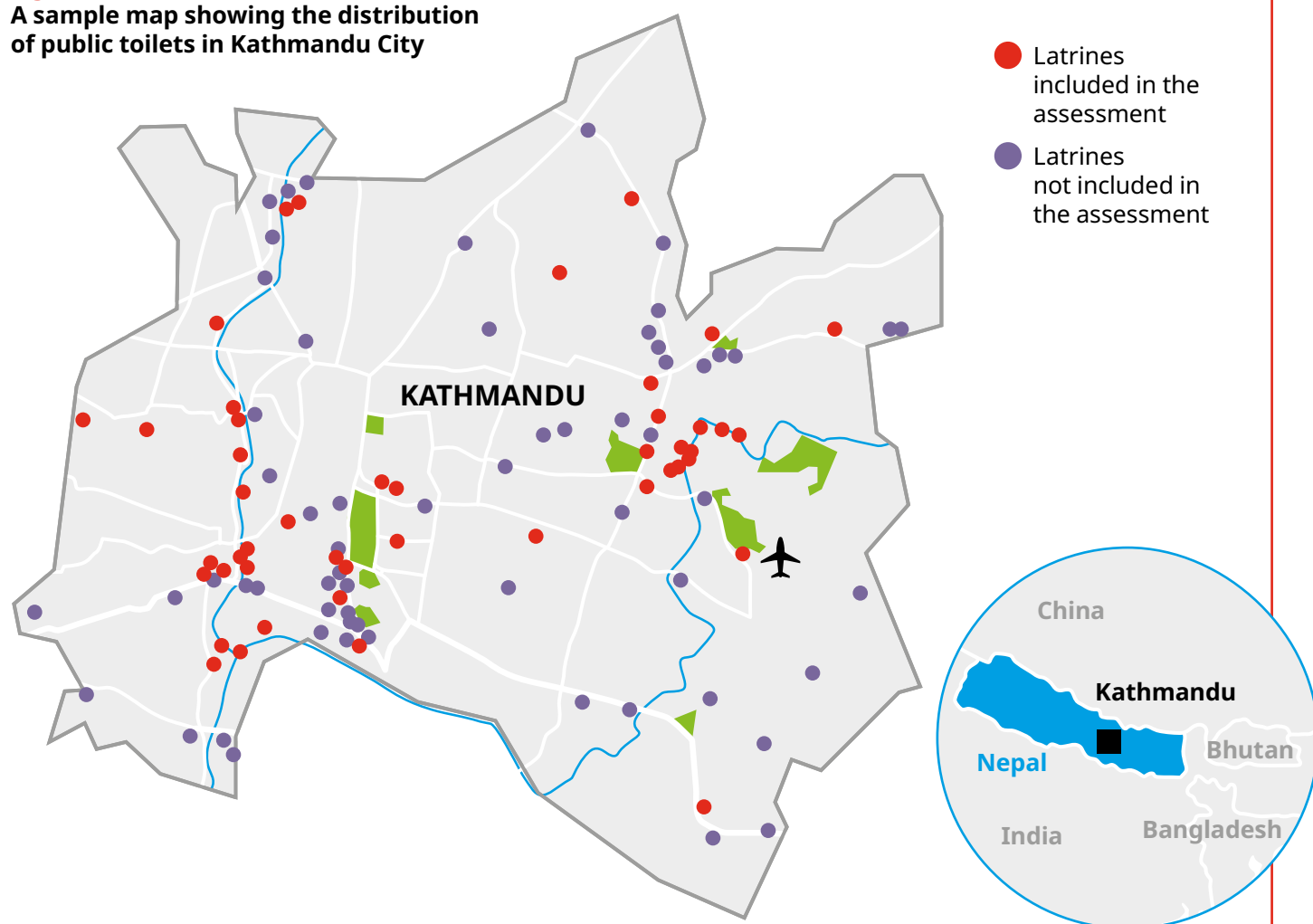
¹ International Training Programme on Sustainable Urban Water and Sanitation (ITP-SUWAS) 2017 D batch and 2018 A batch participants' prepared draft operation and maintenance guidelines; draft operation and maintenance guidelines from the Department of Drinking Water and Sewerage Management; Disabled-Friendly Public Toilet Guidelines prepared by the National Disabled Federation of Nepal, and service contract papers from Kathmandu Metropolitan City. ITP-SUWAS is a global capacity building programme by WaterAid and Niras, funded by Sida (Swedish international development cooperation agency). The programme trains WASH professionals from a range of stakeholders such as public institutions like municipalities, water and sewerage agencies, but also private operators, academia, and NGOs, on topics including Equality and Inclusion, Sustainability, and Integration.

- Safety
- Operation maintenance and management
- Accessible for all
- Factors affecting operator's ability to do their job
- Construction/operator's/attendant's sensitivity to female needs
- Menstrual health and hygiene
- Factors affecting operator's comfort and health
- Operator's financial concerns

Public toilets: toilets constructed in public and private places which the public could access freely. It is debatable whether toilets at petrol pumps or in commercial buildings and hospitals should be categorised as 'public' as they are privately owned, but considering them as such gives people a lot more access to toilets away from home.

The toilets were identified based on historic data from the municipalities, and surveys by local enumerators. The indicators were mostly scored using a Likert scale ranging from 1 (very bad) to 5 (very good). Some categories were based on absence/presence and therefore used binary scoring. The scores were then totalled for each category, and a mean was used to give the overall index of a particular toilet.

Figure 1:
A sample map showing the distribution of public toilets in Kathmandu City



Summary of results

The initial mapping exercise identified 242 public toilets, distributed as follows:

Name of Municipality	Public toilets	Toilets in religious places	Toilets in government buildings	Toilets in parks	Petrol pumps	Commercial buildings/ malls	Hospitals	Total number of possible toilets
Kathmandu	37	22	5	5	56	17	9	151
Lalitpur	9	5	8	2	18	5	7	54
Kritipur	10	2	2	1	2	N/A	1	18
Madhyapur Thimi	6	5	N/A	N/A	8	N/A	N/A	19
Total	62	34	15	8	84	22	17	242

The toilets highlighted (above) in blue were then used for a complete survey of their status.

The table below shows the average overall score for each category in each of the four municipalities.

	Municipality name ► ▼ Facility features	Lalitpur	Madhyapur Thimi	Kathmandu	Kirtipur	Average overall score
1.	Safety (<i>average score out of 5</i>)	2.8	2.8	3.0	2.7	2.9
2.	Operation maintenance and management (<i>average score out of 5</i>)	2.7	2.2	2.7	2.2	2.6
3.	Accessible for all users (<i>% positive responses</i>)	0%	0%	12%	13%	9%
4.	Factors affecting operator's ability to do their job (<i>average score out of 5</i>)	2.2	1.5	2.2	1.7	2.0
5.	Construction/operator's/ attendant's sensitivity to female needs (<i>% positive responses</i>) ²	35%	13%	26%	24%	27%
6.	Menstrual health and hygiene (<i>% positive responses</i>)	19%	3%	16%	21%	17%
7.	Factors affecting operator's comfort and health (<i>% positive responses</i>)	23%	7%	34%	46%	31%

² This included the ability of females to maintain privacy, the presence of female caretakers, and a mirror above handwashing stations.

In summary:

- Positive trends: the majority of the surveyed toilets were located in a safe place, not too isolated.
- The highest score in the survey was for the convenient opening times.

Negative trends:

- Many were difficult to identify from the outside, with very little signage.
- Lighting was satisfactory in only the top 25% of toilets, and poor or non-existent in the rest.
- 75% of toilets lacked 'good' locks (1).³
- The lack of cleaning schedules and poor overall state of cleanliness led to a middling score for operation maintenance and management (despite most being open at convenient times). Water supply consistency and waste disposal were also assessed in this section (2).
- Two of the municipalities had no disability-friendly cubicles at all. Of the few that did in the other municipalities, they had very limited disability-friendly features (3).
- Only five toilets had soap and toilet paper. Additionally, cleaning products, protective materials and basic maintenance supplies were also lacking in most toilets (4).
- The toilets on the whole were not sensitive to female needs due to privacy issues, and most had no mirror (for self-care).
- Ideally there would be more female than male cubicles, and female attendants should be present. Female attendants were only present in 38% of surveyed toilets (5).
- To be considered menstrual hygiene management-friendly, public toilets should have a disposal method within the cubicle as well as a supply of water. Additionally, they should have supplies available for users to purchase if necessary (or nearby). Only 17% of these criteria were met on average across all toilets, with particularly poor results in Madhyapur Thimi (6).
- Finally, the conditions for the operator or caretaker were found to be poor. Only 13% were paid a living wage, and only half had somewhere to sit during their working hours. They were also rarely given comfort breaks and were considered to have unreasonable working hours in 39% of cases (7).
- Overall, the toilets in Madhyapur Thimi scored poorly compared to the other municipalities. Kirtipur had the most female-friendly toilets of the studied areas.

³ Numbers refer to facility features (from table above).

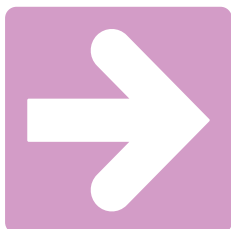
Quick wins and long-term actions

Short term	Medium term	Long term
Improve the lighting systems in the toilets	Establish regular monitoring of public toilets within the municipalities	Local governments set a standard specification for public toilets in their jurisdiction. The components and indicators used here can be taken as reference for developing indicators
Provide a means for sanitary pad disposal, and install hooks and ledges to keep clothes and belongings off the floor in the cubicles	Employ female attendants in public toilets for the comfort and safety of female users	Local governments develop operation and maintenance guidelines, and train contractors, operators and caretakers on these
Establish clear and visible signage separating male and female toilets	Provide handwashing facilities in every toilet	Establish appropriate laws to provide an encouraging environment for private investors and entrepreneurs to invest in the public toilet business
Install proper door locks for the safety and privacy of users, and ensure that female users cannot be seen from outside the toilet block	Ensure that all public toilets have clear ramps and pathways for the use of people living with disabilities	Construct disability-friendly cubicles in all public toilets that meet the needs of wheelchair users and women caring for children or vulnerable people
Ensure that all caretakers have access to cleaning materials and undertake regular cleaning of the facilities	Explore business models for management of public toilets which include socially responsible employment of operators/ caretakers	
Install handrails to make existing toilets more accessible to those living with disabilities and the elderly		
Include a chair for operators to work from, and ensure timely payment of salaries		

Acknowledgements

This summary report is based on the work of Mr. Govind Shrestha, Ms. Sandhya Chaulagain, Mr. Sunil Koirala and Mr. Man Bahadur Lama from WaterAid Nepal, Mr. Prakash Amatya and team from Guthi who led the research, analysis and full report on the situation of public toilets in Kathmandu Valley.

The summary was produced by Joanne Beale (consultant), and supported by Ellen Greggio, Andrés Hueso González and Priya Nath from WaterAid UK.



Additional information:

- The full report of this assessment can be accessed at:
<https://washmatters.wateraid.org/publications/city-and-town-wide-assessments-of-female-friendly-public-and-community-toilets>
- The *Female-friendly public and community toilets: a guide for planners and decision makers* can be accessed at:
<https://washmatters.wateraid.org/publications/female-friendly-public-and-community-toilets-a-guide-for-planners-and-decision-makers>
- This assessment was part of a series of assessments done across four countries – Bangladesh, India, Nepal and Tanzania. The summary of each country assessment as well as a four country overview report can be accessed at:
<https://washmatters.wateraid.org/publications/female-friendly-public-and-community-toilets-a-guide-for-planners-and-decision-makers>
- An assessment tool to help assess the female-friendliness of public and community toilets can be accessed on the mWater WASH data management platform (free and open access) at:
<https://formlink.mwater.co/#/90ec9f061ae041c583643de0fea05095/409d75577b6f460ea13a167facec5678?branding=mwater>



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