



# Hardwiring Accessibility: Measuring What Matters for and by People with Disabilities

## Introduction

Accessibility is often considered (inappropriately) as an add-on, but needs to be hardwired into water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) services and systems from the outset. To achieve their rights to WASH, people with disabilities must be explicitly included in WASH programs, services and systems. Ensuring the accessibility and sustainability of WASH services, systems and infrastructure is fundamental to this process. Accessibility must be in place to achieve whole-of-community climate resilience.

It is critical to **measure and monitor progress** towards disability equity within WASH, including achievements on accessibility. Resources for the development sector on accessibility and user-centric approaches to WASH are becoming widely available. However, there is still a need for additional guidance for WASH practitioners on what universal accessibility is and how they can **track and measure their progress** towards achieving accessibility in WASH.

This learning brief provides lessons and guidance, drawn from the experiences of Water for Women, on measuring accessibility within WASH programming to achieve disability equity.

### In Brief

- **Accessibility is a prerequisite** for achieving sustainable, climate-resilient WASH infrastructure, services, information and communication.
- **Accessibility requires a fundamental social norms shift** about the value of people with disabilities, their right to access WASH, and their contributions towards processes and outcomes that benefit everybody.
- **Accessibility must be measured** to support progress towards WASH that is fully inclusive of diverse people with disabilities.
- **Partnering with organisations** of people with disabilities (OPDs); building capacity on universal design principles; strengthening local accessibility standards; and applying accessibility considerations to monitoring, evaluation, learning, and risk management processes are key.

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## Abbreviations

CFAR	Centre for Advocacy and Research, India
ESDPA	East Sepik Disabled Persons Association
GEDSI	Gender Equality, Disability and Social Inclusion
MELF	Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning Framework
OPD	Organisation of People with Disabilities
PNG	Papua New Guinea
PWDSI	People with Disabilities Solomon Islands
RHO	Rights Holder Organisation
UNCRPD	United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
UNOPS	United Nations Office for Project Services
WASH	Water, Sanitation and Hygiene
WfW	Water for Women

# Accessibility is a key element of climate-resilient WASH

At its simplest, WASH accessibility refers to all intended users being able to equally access and use WASH services, including people with diverse impairments, genders, older people, and those who are pregnant or menstruating. Often accessibility is primarily considered in relation to infrastructure including toilets and water points, but it is also relevant to other aspects of WASH services, such as information products and communications, hygiene promotion activities, and transport. Accessibility enables more people to be able to access and use WASH facilities, which is key to good health and resilience outcomes in the community.

According to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities<sup>1</sup> (UNCRPD) **accessibility is a right** for people with disabilities. Drawing from [Article 9](#), accessibility can be interpreted within the WASH context to mean that **appropriate measures are taken** to ensure **equal access** by people with disabilities to WASH infrastructure, services, information and communication. Accessibility is best achieved by using a **universal design approach**.

**Universal design** refers to 'the design of products, environments, programmes and services to be usable by all people, to the greatest extent possible, without the need for adaptation or specialised design' (UNCRPD Article 2). It requires engagement with diverse users, including people with diverse impairments, to understand and respond to different access needs.

Accessible WASH infrastructure and services is key to long-term equitable outcomes. Accessibility helps to ensure that WASH infrastructure and services can meet the diverse needs of communities, enabling greater utilisation now and into the future. It reduces the need and associated resources for retrofitting WASH infrastructure.

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*"When infrastructure is inclusive, it empowers all people to have a good quality of life, fully participate in society and be more resilient to climate change impacts."*

Jens Wandel, United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS) Acting Executive Director, 2022<sup>2</sup>

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*"For me, my life is better now. I used to face the challenge of being in an environment that wasn't clean. When I wanted to bathe, I would go over to the tap and wash myself. Then I would need to crawl back to the house. I would be dirty after that. Then, when the project came in, it supported me to have access [to an indoor toilet and shower] with a good ramp and I could be on clean cement to bathe. If the project hadn't come in, I would still have challenges to keep clean."*

Person with disability via World Vision Vanuatu

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Inclusive and accessible WASH approaches increase coping mechanisms and the capacity to adapt to climate change. They are core to **building climate and disaster resilience** for all. The most marginalised people in poorer communities, including people with disabilities, are at the frontline of climate risks and impacts. Sustainable WASH access minimises water scarcity, protects people from climate-related disease outbreaks through improved hygiene, and reduces risks of water contamination during flooding and other disasters. When people with disabilities have secure access to WASH, they have greater ability to access other rights. This includes better health and greater likelihood of participating in education, contributing to the economy and decision-making. This ultimately enhances not only their resilience to climate change impacts but the resilience of their community as a whole.

The implementation of accessibility is inextricably linked to a **transformative approach** to [gender equality, disability and social inclusion](#) (GEDSI). This requires a fundamental shift in social norms about the value of people with disabilities, their right to access WASH, and the contributions that they bring to the process and outcomes. This type of transformative change enables people with disabilities to be involved in decision-making, to demand and influence improved accessibility, and play a role in shaping climate solutions that ultimately benefit everybody.

Explore the latest learning on transformative approaches to GEDSI in our detailed learning brief, **The Criticality of GEDSI for Climate-Resilient Inclusive WASH**



In Vanuatu, [customised latrines](#) made from sustainable local materials ensure safe access to a toilet for people with disabilities at all times  
Credit: World Vision Vanuatu



# Overcoming accessibility challenges: Lessons from Water for Women

Water for Women (WfW) committed to disability inclusion and accessible WASH from the very beginning. WfW partners reflected on challenges to measuring accessibility and shared **effective strategies for strengthening accessibility**.

## Partnerships with OPDs

Developing partnerships with Organisations of People with Disabilities (OPDs) for accessibility and other disability inclusion objectives can take time, so it is important to begin this work at the start of a project. Where there are no formal OPDs, projects needed to create informal networks of people with disabilities (some of which were supported to become registered OPDs).

## Establishing common understanding of accessibility

Challenges arise when stakeholders have different understandings of what accessibility means, how to implement and how to measure it. **Guidance on and shared understanding of accessibility concepts from the start of the program** is required. This can avoid problems, such as ramps being built at an unsafe gradient.

## Assessing universal access

Commonly used guidance on assessing access, such as the Joint Monitoring Program (JMP) guidance, only includes considerations on mobility, and doesn't consider the **full range of accessibility elements** required for universal access.

## Disability audits

A narrow view of accessibility could result in a well-designed facility, but inaccessible surroundings would still inhibit use. Being able to **get to and from WASH facilities** was identified as critical to achieving accessibility. Many Fund partners incorporated the assessment of getting to and from WASH facilities in their disability audit tools that were jointly implemented with OPDs.

## Ensuring accessibility in construction

Early in the life of WfW, many partners engaged in co-design processes with people with disabilities for new builds. However, execution failed when construction contractors didn't implement the accessibility features contained in the agreed designs. There was a need to incorporate **milestone assessments** of accessibility as part of contracting infrastructure and accessibility elements into construction contracts.

## Process indicators

Most reporting mechanisms for WASH include output indicators, such as whether facilities are accessible. However, partners emphasised the importance of also including **process indicators** in measuring and providing evidence on accessibility. Examples were including qualitative information on co-design process with user groups, assessing whether end testing was done to ensure designs were applied in practice, and identifying the kinds of accessibility features used.

## Leadership and Do No Harm

Supporting people with disabilities to take up WASH leadership roles and to have a voice in decision-making was a means of shifting norms about the value and capacity of people with disabilities. However, this can generate backlash and resistance. It is crucial to ensure that work to engage people with disabilities on accessibility is coupled with a robust **Do No Harm** approach to counteract these risks.

## Obtaining data for monitoring inclusion

Disability data is often estimated using a national census (which often underestimates the prevalence of disability). This makes it difficult to accurately measure and monitor the extent of inclusion and, therefore, plan and manage. WfW partners that used **Washington Group Questions in household surveys** reported that they identified more people with disabilities and targeted households for further follow-up on accessibility.

### Do No Harm

‘Do No Harm’ is a key principle of WfW’s Towards Transformation Strategy in WASH. It recognises that any WASH program can have negative consequences for marginalised groups, including people with disabilities. This means that WASH programs and projects **strive to support empowerment, inclusion and equity measures** for people with disabilities in **safe, respectful and culturally appropriate ways**. People with disabilities are best placed to advise on strategies to Do No Harm, identify and mitigate risks, and provide feedback to WASH organisations on the impact of their approaches, including for accessibility.



A woman with disability facilitates a group discussion promoting sustainable WASH practices in her community Credit: World Vision Bangladesh / Proshanto Roy

## Spotlight 1: OPD partnering promotes WASH accessibility in Papua New Guinea

**WfW partner:** WaterAid

**Location:** East Sepik Province, Papua New Guinea (PNG)

In PNG, East Sepik Disabled Persons Association (ESDPA) and WaterAid have formed a strong partnership through WaterAid's WfW project, [Strongim WASH Kominiti Projek](#). The organisations worked together to strengthen WASH governance and service delivery systems in East Sepik Province, with a focus on inclusion.

Prior to the project, ESDPA had little experience in engaging with government or decision-making forums and participating in programming. By supporting ESDPA's participation in district planning committees, the project has contributed to the OPD's members feeling more empowered and able to advocate for GEDSI considerations in WASH and more broadly.

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*"I am seen as a public figure in the disability sector now. While in the district I am now elevated to the provincial WASH committee. This is a big achievement ... The difference I see is that I never communicated with government officers before ... but now with this partnership program I feel more empowered to talk to a different level of people and different types of people. All these things empowered me and encouraged me to develop more knowledge with encouragement given by WaterAid."*

Inclusive WASH Officer, ESDPA

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WaterAid employed a multistage design process for community, school, and healthcare facility projects to ensure that facilities met universal design criteria. They engaged ESDPA to review designs, then in cooperation with WaterAid's engineers, adjusted them as needed. ESDPA verified and approved all final designs before construction began.

Another important step in ensuring accessibility of infrastructure was the post-construction verification process, whereby ESDPA physically tested facilities. WaterAid solved any problems that ESDPA identified and ensured facilities were fit for use before commissioning occurred.



An elderly woman collects water from one of the new community taps in her coastal community in East Sepik Province, PNG  
Credit: WaterAid / Tariq Hawari



# Promoting, progressing and measuring WASH accessibility

Given that accessibility contributes to climate-resilient inclusive WASH, it is important for WASH programs to collect accurate and useful information and data on their progress towards accessibility. This should include an emphasis on strategies being taken – in other words, the actions to remove barriers to facilitate equal access. Accessibility is an ongoing process, rather than simply an outcome. It is also important to build shared understandings of accessibility among all WASH actors.

Information on accessibility should be collected at each stage of the program cycle to be able to measure a program's progress and contributions towards accessible WASH and ensure usability of WASH infrastructure and services. Examples of the types of data and information that can be collected across the program cycle are explored below. These examples are considered good practice for application in WASH projects.

## Design and assessment

During the design and assessment stage of the program, relevant activities related to accessibility are outlined below.

### Information and knowledge building

Gather information relevant to developing or strengthening **partnerships with OPDs** and building a common understanding with them on accessibility. WfW developed resources such as [Partnerships for Transformation: Guidance for WASH and Rights Holder Organisations](#) to guide effective partnering with rights holder organisations, including OPDs.<sup>3</sup>

### Climate risk and vulnerability assessments

Ensure disability and accessibility considerations are integrated into climate risk and vulnerability assessments. This is necessary to understand the climate vulnerabilities specific to people with disabilities and how accessibility impacts these experiences. Climate risk assessment processes should include OPDs and people with disabilities in mapping these risks. This information will inform the identification and implementation of appropriate strategies in building resilience and agency of people with disabilities.

### Data collection

National census in some contexts underestimates prevalence of disability. Source or collect data on **disability prevalence** in target communities, preferably using the Washington Group Short Set of Questions. If feasible, assess the extent to which diverse people with disabilities are able to **access existing WASH facilities**, as well as **participate in and influence current community decision-making processes**. For further learning on data collection for disability see the WfW learning brief, [Disability-inclusive WASH: Practice within Water for Women](#).<sup>4</sup>

### Qualitative analysis and processes for monitoring, evaluation and learning

Undertake qualitative analysis to understand the key barriers<sup>5</sup> – for example, physical, social, information, communication and legislative barriers faced by diverse people with disabilities in accessing and using WASH facilities, and their experiences related to climate risk. Explicitly include people with a variety of impairments and those with more severe functioning limitations in these processes. Tools such as [Shifting Social Norms for Transformative WASH: Guidance for WASH Actors](#) can guide the identification of and response to harmful social norms that may reduce WASH access for people with disabilities.<sup>6</sup>

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*It is crucial to involve organisations of persons with disabilities (OPDs) from the outset. This partnership ensures that research methods are accessible, reasonable accommodation is provided, and the unique perspectives of people with disabilities are integrated into the research process. By collaborating with OPDs, we can avoid logistical challenges and ensure that our research truly addresses the needs and experiences of persons with disabilities.*

International Water Management Institute, Nepal (IWMI)

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## Assessment of accessibility standards

Assess whether relevant **accessibility legislation or standards** exist, and if they are sufficient to support accessibility. If a country has accessibility standards, demonstrate their application in the design of WASH infrastructure supported through the program. This provides evidence on awareness and alignment with existing standards. It can also include noting the approaches the program intends to take to strengthen standards and/or support implementation of the standards. If a country lacks accessibility standards, highlight the program's planned actions to promote their development.

## Assessment of staff capacities

Assess the level of staff and WASH stakeholder **understanding of disability inclusion and accessibility**, including how any existing accessibility standards are understood and applied. This will help inform related capacity development activities and measure progress on collective capacities. Ensure that even during this initial phase of the program, any progress on developing collective capacities on accessibility and universal design is captured. For instance, determine if stakeholders involved in design and construction of infrastructure undertook initial awareness-raising on these topics and/or prepared and distributed information and communications material, and whether understanding of accessibility has improved.

## Engagement of diverse users

Document practice on the **engagement of diverse users**, including people with disabilities, to inform the design of infrastructure, services, and activities of the WASH program. Consider what processes are being used to engage with and understand the needs of diverse users, including people with disabilities, related to the WASH infrastructure or materials being designed. For example, ask how the design process was informed by user experiences and inputs. This can help to demonstrate how a universal design approach was applied during the design phase.

## Budgeting for accessibility

Ensure **sufficient budget for accessibility** throughout the program. This includes not only infrastructure, but resourcing the partnerships and technical support required for design in settings where standards don't already exist and supporting the engagement of people with diverse disabilities in audits, testing, etc.

## Planning for Do No Harm

Using the information gathered in assessment processes, develop a **Do No Harm strategy** that includes accessibility considerations, ensuring qualitative information about any unintended consequences is collected as part of monitoring.

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*We have ensured that each of the socially marginalized groups that we are striving to empower have a say in determining what they consider as harmful, derogatory and disrespectful ... This includes ensuring that all strategies and processes we deploy are planned and executed in consultation and coordination with the key groups. In the process, all barriers and potential harm that any action can cause to any of them is discussed threadbare with them. But discussion alone will not do, many enabling conditions have been created.*

Centre for Advocacy and Research, India (CFAR)

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## Spotlight 2: Including the most marginalised in formative research in Nepal

**WfW partner:** SNV Nepal

**Locations:** Dailekh and Sarlahi Districts, Nepal

During the assessment phase for the WfW project, [Towards Climate-Resilient Inclusive WASH Services in Rural Nepal](#), SNV Nepal conducted formative research to assess barriers, enablers and strategies used by people with disabilities in accessing WASH in targeted districts. The project worked with a local OPD to select men and women with disabilities, as well as carers of children with disabilities, with a focus on those with major difficulty in functioning (based on use of the Washington Group Short Set of Questions). This was based on knowledge that unless more marginalised people are deliberately included, research often reaches only people with disabilities who have minor functional difficulties.

The research identified that many of those with major functioning difficulty, as well as those with multiple disabilities, faced the greatest barriers in accessing WASH, and were more likely to rely on a family member for assistance. People who used their hands for mobility faced particular problems in fetching water and meeting their hygiene needs.

Based on the research, SNV Nepal worked to improve accessibility using several approaches. Partners built capacity of rural municipalities and engineers on accessibility and disability inclusion, entrenched the involvement of people with disabilities on WASH coordination committees, and established [disability helpdesks](#) in rural municipalities, providing a central point for people with disabilities to access information and services.

One of those rural municipalities decided to place its disability helpdesk on the ground floor and right at the front of the municipal building and ward offices. The municipality, after consulting networks of people with disabilities, selected the location of the disability helpdesk for its accessibility and to increase visibility of people with disabilities and demonstrate that they are a priority. Additionally, the municipality developed standard operating procedures to manage the helpdesk efficiently, leveraging the expertise of the networks to deliver accessible services to people with disabilities.



Chandranagar was the first rural municipality in Sarlahi District to establish a disability helpdesk. Established in partnership with the OPD, the helpdesks offer services to people with disabilities relating to water and hygiene and are mandated as part of the government's decentralisation plan  
Credit: SNV / Meeting Point

### Spotlight 3: Improving WASH accessibility guidance and standards in Indonesia

**WfW partners:** Yayasan Plan International Indonesia (Plan Indonesia) and Plan International Australia

**Locations:** Manggarai and Sumbawa Provinces, Indonesia

In designing the WfW project, [Climate-Resilient and inclusive WASH](#), Plan Indonesia identified that the existing Indonesian accessibility regulations disseminated by the Ministry of Public Works did not provide enough detail to ensure accessibility. For example, WASH infrastructure was being constructed with ramps at a high gradient, which were not accessible for wheelchair users.

Plan developed more **detailed guidance for accessibility of WASH infrastructure**, informed by the Public Works regulations, the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade's (DFAT) accessibility design guide, and accessibility guidance from the Indonesian Ministry of Education. It also incorporated a section on menstrual health and hygiene. This guidance was used to guide Plan Indonesia's own project and promoted and provided to WASH partners.

Plan Indonesia emphasised the importance of **working with people with disabilities from the outset** and engaging OPDs across the project cycle for success in monitoring and evaluation of universal accessibility. Partners reported that empowering people with disabilities, communities and the government were all important elements of projects working on infrastructure accessibility. Three women's organisations and four OPDs (PERSANI, PERTUNI, Manggarai Disability Consortium, and Sarea Disability Forum) have integrated climate-resilient water and sanitation issues into their organisational work plans and **co-designed climate risk assessments**.

As the results of the application of the [Climate Change Response for Inclusive WASH](#) tool, marginalised groups, including 89 people with disabilities, participated in mapping **climate hazards and developing climate-resilient WASH action plans in communities**. People with disabilities in 94 villages strengthened their individual and collective agencies to advocate for their rights to climate-resilient WASH. Specifically, 31 persons with disabilities from four urban villages engaged in Participatory Action Research activities to **advocate for their rights** related to climate-resilient WASH.



Local OPD, Perkumpulan Tuna Daksa Kristiani (PERSANI) facilitated participatory action research workshops for people with disabilities in Kupang City, Indonesia. All participants were encouraged to actively discover the root causes of problems in their community and find solutions independently  
Credit: Plan Indonesia / PERSANI / Yohanes



## Spotlight 4: Promoting accessibility through multi-stakeholder engagement in Solomon Islands

**WfW partners:** Plan International Australia and Plan International Solomon Islands

**Location:** Western Guadalcanal Province, Solomon Islands

To promote accessibility within the WfW project, [Climate Adaptive and Inclusive WASH in Solomon Islands](#), Plan International constructed ablution blocks with shower rooms for menstrual hygiene in two health clinics and three schools. Accessibility was achieved using global standards for inclusive design, and working with the OPD, People with Disabilities Solomon Islands (PWDSI) both during design and on site.

To assess the accessibility of these facilities, the program engaged PWDSI to facilitate accessibility audits, carried out in collaboration with government and sector representatives. This process identified problems that were solved through further modifications, including handrails for ramps and installing door handles rather than knobs. It also raised awareness of accessibility issues for government and sectoral staff.

The project also considered accessibility of information materials, updating a [menstrual health and hygiene facilitators' guide](#) to consider disability inclusion, in conjunction with PWDSI.

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*(The Project) also collaborated with PWDSI to deliver an accessibility audit workshop with government staff and other sector actors. This was a first for the WASH sector in Solomon Islands and was well received by all participants, highlighting the simple process to consider disability inclusion and the modest modifications that can enable universal access.*

Plan International Solomon Islands

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Members of PWDSI led audit training for accessible WASH with Plan International. Among participants were key government stakeholders from the Ministry of Health and Medical Services, including representatives from the Rural WASH Programme and the Infrastructure and Procurement Unit, and the Ministry of Education and Human Resource Development  
Credit: Plan International

## Implementation and monitoring

During implementation and monitoring of WASH programs, consider the following elements of **measuring progress on accessibility**.

### Collective capacities for understanding, managing and responding to climate change and accessibility

Continue to **engage with OPDs** to develop a shared understanding of climate change impacts and coping mechanisms of people with disabilities and support them to be involved in **multi-stakeholder WASH and climate forums**.

With the involvement of OPDs, **support ongoing monitoring processes** to gauge how disability considerations relating to climate risks and impacts, as well as the required solutions, are taken up in these forums and by policymakers and duty bearers.

Continue to support WASH actors in understanding, implementing and measuring accessibility at implementation stage, and monitor progress in developing these capacities.

### Application of accessibility requirements by implementers

Monitor how accessibility requirements determined through the design process have been passed onto **contractors and partners** involved with implementation, and whether these are present in final infrastructure. For instance, are accessibility requirements in designs then incorporated into agreements with contractors undertaking construction or production?

### Accessibility testing

Assess compliance of construction or communication materials with **national or other applicable accessibility standards**, and ensure they are rectified as needed. Also assess whether publications or information processes are in accessible formats for a variety of users.

Collect **feedback from diverse users** on the usability of the infrastructure developed or information and communications processes. This could be through user testing, such as accessibility audits involving diverse users, or other mechanisms for users to provide feedback. For example, WaterAid in Timor-Leste incorporated accessibility of infrastructure for people with disabilities into its [Community Score Card](#) approach.

Monitor how identified issues or rectifications identified through feedback are addressed.

### Ongoing maintenance

Ensure there are accessible avenues for reporting **maintenance issues** relating to accessibility and that relevant follow-up actions are taken.

Assess results of any **capacity or systems strengthening** related to government processes of monitoring accessibility and maintenance of infrastructure.

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*Partners observed that accessibility measures can go awry at construction stages, even after design processes focused on accessibility. For instance, during some WfW projects, contractors didn't adequately construct the accessibility features that had been designed. This may have been because they lacked the knowledge needed to interpret designs and/or awareness of why accessibility features are important, so reverted to replicating familiar structures instead.*

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## Systems strengthening

Assess progress on any approaches taken to develop or strengthen accessibility standards and/or related guidance. Ensure there are systems and capacity to measure accessibility by WASH actors.

## Do No Harm

To avoid harm, collect qualitative information to understand the situation of people with disabilities and any emerging unintended consequences of program activities or processes.

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*RHOs [rights holder organisations, including OPDs] presenting in sector workshops [felt] disempowered by government participants in positions of power challenging or disagreeing with them. The team mitigated this risk by coaching and supporting RHOs to prepare for each event very carefully. Despite this preparation, WaterAid observed that RHOs were still sometimes shy or reluctant to present, in which case break-out groups and co-facilitation by WaterAid were used as strategies to ensure RHOs had a positive experience.*

WaterAid Timor-Leste

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An elderly woman from rural Manufahi in Timor-Leste, smiles as she stands by her accessible latrine. WaterAid supported improved access to WASH services and systems in Manufahi and Liquiçá through their [WfW projects](#) from 2018-24  
Credit: WaterAid Timor-Leste

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## Spotlight 5: Using indicators to assess infrastructure accessibility at health facilities and schools

**WfW partners:** Water for Women and CBM

**Location:** Asia Pacific

Water for Women developed **quantitative indicators and guidance** for assessing accessibility in WASH infrastructure. Indicators included numbers of health facilities and schools providing universally accessible sanitation, drinking water points, and handwashing facilities.

Guidance specified that infrastructure should be assessed as universally accessible if it was designed and constructed in accordance with one or more of the following:

- results of an accessibility audit tool designed or conducted with input from people with disabilities
- alignment with national standards for accessibility
- application of universal design principles
- removal of obstacles to accessibility/inclusion, and addition of accessibility features
- the engagement of people with a range of disabilities, ages and genders in the design, implementation and/or evaluation of the facility, product or materials.

Importantly, this guidance refers not only to the outcomes of accessibility within a facility, but also the process of designing and auditing infrastructure to ensure this meaningfully engages with diverse people with disabilities.

Guidance was also provided on **qualitative measures of accessibility**. Partners were provided with sample key evaluation questions which they could use to assess accessibility, such as: 'Describe strategies that have been used to plan, implement and influence universally accessible WASH infrastructure, services, communications, and information.'



In the Autonomous Region of Bougainville, WASH upgrades at Skotolan Health Centre, including soap and water at critical points of care, a WASH Improvement Plan and a dedicated community-led committee support a higher quality of care for the more than 4,000 people within its catchment  
Credit: Plan International and Live & Learn Environmental Education PNG

## Spotlight 6: Participatory development of practice guidance for climate-resilient WASH in Bangladesh

**WfW partners:** London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine (LSHTM) and World Vision Bangladesh

**Locations:** Gaibandha and Satkhira Districts, Bangladesh

Research by LSHTM highlighted how existing inequalities faced by persons with disabilities in Bangladesh in relation to WASH are worsening due to climate change.<sup>7</sup> Participatory workshops in Gaibandha and Satkhira engaged people with disabilities, caregivers, OPDs, and WfW partner World Vision to validate findings and co-develop recommendations for inclusive climate-resilient WASH. People with disabilities and their caregivers played a central role in shaping the outputs. Partners used participatory methods such as PhotoVoice,<sup>8</sup> observation, and workshops to ensure that people with disabilities influenced the research findings directly and co-created solutions tailored to their local needs.

The research identified the need to ensure that emerging climate-resilient WASH technologies and innovations follow universal design principles and meet the needs of people with disabilities. Lessons from similar climate adaptation efforts in other contexts were leveraged to inform solutions.

Six principles for climate-resilient disability-inclusive WASH<sup>2</sup> and suggested activities were co-developed with sector experts, building on the research recommendations and existing frameworks. A key learning for the project team was understanding how practical, adaptable guidelines for climate-resilient inclusive WASH can be developed, validated and disseminated through participatory research.

By engaging people with disabilities throughout the process, partners were able to ensure that the six principles were not only contextually relevant but actionable, demonstrating the power of inclusive research in shaping meaningful solutions.



In Bangladesh, World Vision and LSHTM engaged people with disabilities, carers and OPDs in participatory workshops to co-create actionable and contextually relevant guidelines for climate-resilient disability-inclusive WASH  
Credit: World Vision Bangladesh / Proshanto Roy

## Evaluation

Evaluations are an important way to document impacts related to accessibility and share related learnings from a project. In particular, **participatory evaluations that engage diverse stakeholders**, including people with disabilities, are recommended. Examples of evaluation questions are:

- To what extent could people with disabilities in all their diversity (including impairment type, gender and age) participate in processes to improve WASH accessibility?
- How relevant and appropriate were the WASH accessibility interventions to the specific needs of people with disabilities?
- What were the enablers and barriers to universal accessibility in the WASH project? How and to what extent did the project remove barriers?
- What changes occurred in the awareness, capacity and attitudes of people with disabilities, duty bearers, community leaders and family members relating to disability inclusion, accessibility and universal design?
- What were the changes in access to WASH facilities, services, products for people with disabilities?
- Was the project aligned with best practice / standards for accessibility in climate-resilient WASH?

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*“Whenever there is an event taking place in the village, one of the young people always ensures Anne is pushed to the event and back once it's over.”*

Family member

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Born with cerebral palsy that affects her mobility, and which for many years restricted her largely to home, with improved access to inclusive WASH and a wheelchair, Anne is an active and valued member of her community  
Credit: Live & Learn Environmental Education Solomon Islands



## Spotlight 7: Supporting measurement and accountability mechanisms in India

**WfW partner:** CFAR

**Locations:** Bhubaneswar and Jaipur, India

In their WfW project in India, [Building Climate-Resilient WASH for Climate-Impacted Vulnerable Populations](#), CFAR used community-led approaches, multi-stakeholder collaboration and innovative tools to plan, implement and influence universally accessible WASH infrastructure and services. The project employed participatory governance mechanisms, such as community management committees and sanitation sub-committees, to support design, monitoring and auditing of WASH facilities.

Women, people with disabilities and people from sexual and gender minority groups participated in these committees, leading micro-planning sessions and vulnerability mapping exercises. They ensured that infrastructure like elevated toilets, ramps and accessible community toilets suited local needs and climate risks. Communication strategies focused on inclusivity and accessibility, utilising podcasts and community radio to disseminate information about WASH practices and available grievance mechanisms. Other tools provided real-time monitoring and tracking of WASH services, enabling evidence-based decision-making and ensuring accountability.

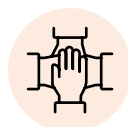
CFAR coupled these activities with training in climate-resilient WASH practices, empowering marginalised groups to lead advocacy and implementation efforts. Inclusive design, measurement and accountability strategies not only enhanced universal accessibility but institutionalised inclusive practices through policy advocacy and partnerships with municipalities and government departments.



A member of the Single Window Forum for people with disabilities counts pads for the Jamdoli pad bank in Jaipur  
Credit: CFAR archives / Amarjeet Kumar Singh / Anindito Mukherjee

# Call to action

**Accessibility is a critical foundation for inclusive communities and climate resilience.** Accessibility needs to be widely understood as such and embedded into global and national climate policies and funding. This learning brief sets out the key entry points for ensuring accessibility in WASH programs. Based on lessons across WfW's projects over the last seven years, the following actions can **hardwire accessibility** throughout a program and support climate-resilient WASH.



**Develop partnerships with OPDs.** Working with diverse people with disabilities is critical to building shared understanding about disability inclusion and accessibility. Involving WASH users with diverse access needs in design is key to making WASH infrastructure and services responsive to this diversity. Subsequently, the involvement of people with disabilities is vital in **monitoring accessibility and usability** of WASH infrastructure and services during implementation. Partnerships with OPDs underpin deliberate and meaningful involvement of people with disabilities.



**Foster inclusive leadership** that recognises the centrality of partnerships with OPDs in creating more accessible environments. Programs need to invest in building the capacity of OPDs to improve WASH accessibility, recognising that they may not yet have technical skills or knowledge in this area. If OPDs are absent, programs should develop informal networks of people with disabilities and support their engagement in accessibility and other program activities.



**Build collective capacities on accessibility across the WASH and climate landscape.** Develop early understanding of accessibility and universal design among all stakeholders involved in design, construction and delivery of WASH facilities or services, as well as those involved in climate programs. This should include co-design of indicators for measuring accessibility using universal design principles. Developing collective capacities in engaging with a diversity of users, including people with disabilities, is an essential component of accessibility. Outcomes of this capacity development work on accessibility should also be measured. Otherwise, we risk the possibility of inadequately inclusive designs due to accessibility considerations being ignored or not followed in the construction phase.



**Understand the local context of accessibility.** Contextual analysis is essential to understanding a country's accessibility legislation and standards, as well as diverse people with disabilities' barriers to WASH access. These understandings help to inform relevant approaches to systems strengthening. These include advocacy with government to develop accessibility standards, recommendations for improving existing national accessibility standards, or suggestions to strengthen standards' implementation.



**Enable the full spectrum of accessibility.** Think about not only physical accessibility in WASH programs but the invisible barriers for people with disabilities, such as discriminatory norms that reduce their access to WASH services and facilities. Take a holistic view of accessibility to work towards reducing stigma and exclusionary practices in **culturally appropriate ways that Do No Harm**.



**Consider unrestricted chains of movement.** The importance of being able to get to and from a WASH facility is a key aspect of accessibility. Rather than meaning simple access to specific pieces of WASH infrastructure, accessibility can be thought of as an unrestricted chain of movement or a continuum in the use of WASH facilities and related services. Remembering and implementing Reach, Enter, Circulate, Use (RECU)<sup>10</sup> can help people with disabilities to:

- **Reach** a facility
- **Enter** a facility
- **Circulate** or move around a facility
- **Use** specific features of a facility.

It is important that measures of accessibility consider all these components of accessing WASH facilities, not simply the facility itself. For example, pathways between classrooms and WASH facilities should be accessible for all children.



**Include accessibility in existing frameworks and plans.** Include accessibility in monitoring, evaluation and learning frameworks (MELFs) and program risk analysis. Accessibility considerations need to be integrated into MELFs and risk registers for climate-resilient WASH programs. Accessibility metrics within MELFs help to ensure that WASH services and facilities are designed and implemented inclusively and provide evidence of equitable access for people with disabilities in all their diversity, including across genders. Incorporating accessibility within **risk registers and Do No Harm plans** means that risks and unintended consequences can be identified and minimised.



Disability-inclusive community tap stands provide access to water for all across World Vision's WFW project villages in Bangladesh  
Credit: World Vision Bangladesh / Proshanto Roy



## Resources and further reading

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# Endnotes

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- <sup>7</sup> J Wilbur et al., *Advancing Equity: Principles for Climate-Resilient Disability Inclusive Water, Sanitation and Hygiene*, LSHTM, 2025. <https://doi.org/10.17037/PUBS.04674714>
- <sup>8</sup> For further information on participatory data collection and planning tools, see: *Exploring GESI Change - qualKit* [web-based resource], University of Technology Sydney - Institute for Sustainable Futures & WfW, 2021. <https://waterforwomen.uts.edu.au/qualkit/>
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Header photo: A member of the Laos Disabled Persons Association presents to local government and ministry representatives on how climate hazards such as floods can impact people with disabilities differently. SNV organised a series of interactive disability-inclusive training and orientation sessions to improve local government capacity in ensuring resilient access to WASH facilities for people with disabilities. Credit: SNV / Malaphone Inthilath.

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## About Water for Women

Water for Women supports improved health, gender equality and well-being in Asian and Pacific communities through climate-resilient and socially inclusive WASH projects and research. It is the Australian Government's flagship WASH program, investing AUD159.9 million over seven years. Water for Women partnered with civil society organisations, research organisations and local partners to deliver 40 projects in 16 countries from 2018 to 2024. Knowledge and learning are central to Water for Women, positioning the Fund as an important contributor to global knowledge development and sharing in climate-resilient, inclusive WASH. Water for Women's [Learning Agenda](#) promotes collaborative learning, knowledge development and sharing to support long-term transformative change to WASH policy and practice globally.

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