

Including persons with disabilities in water and sanitation project: Mali

The following case study is an example of a pilot project, including a follow up evaluation and further research on water and sanitation facilities for people with disabilities. It shows how people with disabilities have been included in both the implementation and evaluation stages of a pilot project. WaterAid has used the lessons learned for mainstreaming disability in all its water and sanitation projects.

Area: Africa

Sector: Water and sanitation

Phase of PCM illustrated: Evaluation phase

Degree of relevance: Degree 3 – Disability highly relevant projects

Implementing organisation: NGO

The context

In 2006 a pilot project in the rural village of Tienfala in Mali, funded by SightSavers International, provided water and sanitation (WATSAN) facilities for people who are blind. In 2007 a study on needs and barriers that people with disabilities in rural Mali face has been conducted including an evaluation of the Tienfala pilot project. WaterAid Mali (WAM) are now planning to include people with disabilities in their work in the country.

Statistics from 1999 (Diawara 2005) estimate that disabled people make up 10-19% of the population in Mali. However, national regulations do not systematically take them into account and Disabled Peoples' Organisations lack political influence and resources. People with disabilities have also been given little consideration in the provision of WATSAN facilities.

Low cost adaptation for an increased accessibility

The pilot project in Tienfala provided a new well for blind users in a garden compound. The old large open well had a low wall that made collecting water dangerous for users. The new well is surrounded by gravel to aid orientation, and includes a high wall for



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safety and support. The wall includes a lower section with a ramped access that would be suitable for wheelchair users and children.

When evaluation and a pilot project bring lessons

However, the pulley in use was difficult for the blind users. With a better quality pulley users would not have the same problem. Raised concrete seats affixed to domed slabs were installed free of charge for blind users. The seats provide comfort, support and hygiene; where in the past users would touch to feel for the latrine hole. The seat is easy to locate and keep clean. However, the evaluation showed that accessibility issues can remain, in stand-alone provision, with problems such as slippery and steep surfaces. Furthermore, there is great room for experimenting with other cheaper building materials. Audio tools for hygiene promotion were developed to allow WAM to include people who are blind. The project gave both the financial benefit of improved access to water for garden plot crops, and the social benefits of a sense of increased integration and self-esteem for the users. Where in the case for sanitation people's self-dignity has improved, in not needing to rely on other family members for assistance.



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Participation of persons with disabilities in the process of research

In meeting with wheelchair users and people using supports such as crutches in a second rural location, a number of key aspects of barriers to WATSAN access were identified. Disabled people were involved in the research team, aiding the process of consultation.

A number of ideas and suggestions from the users were discussed and tried out in practice for sanitation where possible. It was found that transport of water is a key issue for disabled people, preventing the collection of water in many cases. It appeared that access to and use of water and sanitation facilities could be improved by small changes in design, or through the provision of adaptations for individuals.

For example, raised wooden seats for use over the latrine and for bathing, were produced, which could be made at low cost and did not interfere with other users. A support bar was also produced.

Discussion produced a large number of ideas that can now be used and tested as WAM continue to include disability in their country-wide work.

Lessons learned and how this is an example for disability inclusion

- The research shows that the needs of disabled people can be met within mainstream programs by small changes to design. Conducting research and evaluating the pilot project was important to ensure that ideas on paper work in practice.
- A more participatory approach, to include disabled people early on in projects, is important and includes an understanding of the social-cultural barriers as well as the technical ones. For sanitation and water transport, strong collaboration with DPOs and a platform for creating and sharing ideas at community level is required.
- Future collaboration between the disability and WATSAN sector will be critical for ensuring the full inclusion of disabled people and other vulnerable groups in water and sanitation projects.

This is an abridged version of a case study written by Tom Russell and WaterAid Mali, Oct. 2007

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