

Rights to water and sanitation for People with Disabilities in Madagascar

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Abstract/Summary

This paper illustrates the experiences of the Platform For People with Disabilities (PFPH), working with the support of WaterAid, to highlight and address the gaps in the realisation of the rights of people with disabilities in Madagascar. The focus has been on engaging the government on the National Inclusion Plan for people with disabilities, which includes water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH). This pilot project was designed to increase access to safe WASH for people with disabilities through a human rights based approach. It focuses on strengthening the capacities of rights holders, as well as the capacity and the political will of duty bearers to fulfil their obligations towards the progressive realisation of rights. The project has strengthened the capacity of the PFPH to advocate for their rights and engage with government on all areas of their rights, although an increase in actual WASH provision is limited by the government’s lack of capacity and resources.

Introduction

WaterAid puts human rights at the centre of its Global Strategy 2015 – 2020 (WaterAid, 2015). Studies have shown that where a community improves its water supply, hygiene and/or sanitation then health improves. For instance, WHO confirmed that diarrhoea can be reduced by 26% when safe water, hygiene and sanitation are supplied (WHO, 2014). Therefore, access to water services, sanitation and adequate hygiene makes an important contribution to the realization of rights of persons with disabilities.

Between 2013 and 2018 WaterAid has implemented eight pilot projects in eight of the countries it works in to understand how to apply a rights based approach in its work. The same elements were used in each country but adapted to the specific context of the country and the particular issues faced by excluded groups in each context. All of these pilot projects included the following elements:

1. A comprehensive analysis of the rights, power, environment, risk and barrier where the project will be executed
2. A change in the power relations between the excluded groups and duty bearers and other holders of power through:
 - a. The acquirement of skills and power by the excluded groups (in this case people with disabilities)
 - b. More accountability and responsiveness of duty bearers vis-à-vis the excluded
 - c. The improved capacity of the excluded, the duty bearers and other influence groups
 - d. Improving governance for the excluded
 - e. Sustainable system change
3. The existence of a strategic logic in program change activities
4. Monitoring progress in each of these elements of the approach.

In Madagascar, WaterAid developed a partnership with the PFPH to understand how:

- To ensure that persons with disabilities enjoy their rights to water and sanitation
- The rights to water and sanitation can facilitate the enjoyment of other basic rights for people with disabilities

This was the only project of the eight pilots that specifically focussed on the rights of people with disabilities.

Context, aims and activities undertaken

Context:

The Government of Madagascar has ratified the International Convention of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) and has developed a National Inclusion Plan for people with disabilities. This includes WASH. As part of this, the Government is preparing to gather data on people with disabilities as they plan to include disability issues in general census programs.

People with disabilities access to WASH, is still very low. The inaccessibility of infrastructures make the situation more difficult. Despite efforts by the actors such WaterAid and his partners, Handicap International, the implementation of accessibility standards is very limited and depends on their good will.

WaterAid Madagascar's pilot project with the PFPH was conducted at five localities: Nosy Be, Antsohihy, Ambatondrazaka, Tsiroanomandidy and Morondava.

The main criteria for selecting areas of intervention was based on:

- The geographical and cultural diversity: the five chosen areas are geographically and culturally diverse. Nosy Be and Antsohihy are in the the North; Morondava is in the Southwest; Ambatondrazaka is in the central, east, and Antsirabe and Tsiroanomandidy are in the central highlands.
- The existence of at least one active association and / or support structure for people with disabilities: each locality has between one and eight associations for people with disabilities. Only Nosy Be, which has no support structure for people with disabilities.

The following steps were carried out in the pilot project:

- Analysis of the rights, power, barriers and risks facing people with disabilities. This was undertaken by both local actors (people with disabilities and local officials) and by members of the National PFPH.
- The project then focused on the compilation, enhancement and shaping of information from the field.
- Building local associations' and local PFPH branches' capacities through training, structuring and technical support, equipment and operation, with the aim of enhancing the skills of persons with disabilities associations, to make them more dynamic and able to defend their rights.
- The Local associations identified actions to improve their daily life and visibility and to encourage local authorities to advance a more favorable change in the lives of people with disabilities.
- Capacity building for the duty bearers through training on various types of disabilities and appropriate accompanying measures for each type of disability, including the relevant disability rights laws and accessibility standards.

Main results and lessons learnt

Through this pilot project, we can confirm that:

- Rights holders’ perceptions of their rights remain crucial in the realization of rights and in fulfilling their rights- claiming roles: This is an essential step which will enable them to identify specific actions and ensure their involvement during all the processes.
- The dissemination of accessibility standards for the duty bearers and the organizations working with people with disabilities is still lacking in some places. This adds to the lack of awareness of the duty bearers of the rights of persons with disabilities to access to water, sanitation and hygiene. But even when policy makers and operators are aware of these rights and standards, they do not always implement them because of the lack of will to act and the lack of resources. This includes a lack of financial resources, which is often the reason given for inaction.
- Nevertheless, the awareness of the duty bearers about their responsibilities towards people with disabilities is evident from the legal texts, policies and strategies at national and regional levels. For example for Madagascar, the Ministry of Water, Sanitation and Hygiene has decided to act in favor of people with disabilities through its strategic guideline for water, sanitation and hygiene (MINEAH, 2015). This sets out the Ministry’s commitment to ensure: "Special consideration of vulnerable groups; Application of a suitable charging scheme; Compliance with accessibility standards" (ibid). The involvement and dynamism of people with disabilities in the various working groups and networks around the WASH sector allows them to strengthen advocacy efforts to push through these commitments and then to track changes.
- The importance of awareness to the existence of budget line for people with disabilities and funds in regional and local level: special funds in the regional budget, equity funds for health, relief funds in the municipal budget. Previously, the rights holders were not aware of the existence of these budget lines and this ignorance has allowed the duty bearers to use these funds for other purposes, not related to their cause.
- The analysis carried out through workshops and exchanges confirms that we must respect the priorities of the Disabled Persons’ Organisations and work on employment rights, health and education. These three fundamental rights will contribute to the progressive realization of rights in WASH through its cross cutting nature.
- An example of enjoyment of rights: A local branch of a microfinance organisation, Ombona Tahiry Ifampindramana Vola , has extended five loans to people with disabilities for the first time. This has been successful and a further five individuals were offered loans, although these did not materialise for a variety of reasons. The person responsible for giving the loans is planning to provide further loans to the five people who have already had loans, and extend loans to further people with disabilities. She sees the initiative as having been successful, and did not find any particular problems in working with the people with disabilities compared to the non-disabled population.
- While progress on the specific issues of water, sanitation and hygiene are still at a very low level in this commune, wider issues of inclusion are being confidently addressed. The duty bearers are engaging with the issues presented to them, even with the limited resources available to them. Through this project, the awareness of disability rights, and how to include people with disabilities into the social, cultural and economic activities has been invaluable. It can well be imagined that when water and sanitation issues are discussed generally (and there is a lot to be done on this area in the town) there will also be dedicated time and energy given to the needs and rights of people with disabilities.

Conclusions and Recommendations

In terms of recommendations, we can highlight the following points:

Partnerships:

The partnership with the PFPH should be started by developing a long-term capacity building plan.

Despite its structure, which is operational, it is always necessary to ensure the managerial, structural and organizational capacity. The approach adopted by the PFPH, which they call "permanent contact" allowed them to strengthen the accountability of duty bearers.

Financing/resourcing

To prevent duty bearers continuously falling back on the excuse that the lack of resources prevents them from upgrading of infrastructure standards, it is really essential to reinforce sensitization campaigns and provide information right from the start of the project. We must also empower government both at national and regional level to enable them to promote a greater awareness to all actors of the importance of upgrading of infrastructure standards. We must also intensify fundraising measures for the financing of national inclusion plan for Madagascar.

Awareness raising

Rights holders' perception of their rights remains crucial in the realization of rights and in fulfilling their rights claiming roles; the first action should be the information sharing about what are their rights and how to claim them.

Providing accessible information

Promote access to information for the groups involved and support their participation throughout the decision-making process regarding their cause.

In conclusion

Our experiences show the importance of mobilizing excluded groups such as people with disabilities' and strengthening their capacity which can trigger a change in the system and change the power relations between rights holders and duty bearers. Among others, it is important to highlight the importance of people with disabilities' participation in policy making to inform policy makers of their situation, the restrictions they are facing and ways to overcome barriers to fully enjoy their rights.

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