

# How the WASH sector in Timor-Leste can consider people with disabilities

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This issue sheet sets out the barriers that people with disabilities face in accessing water and sanitation, 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 play a part, with disabilities sometimes seen as embarrassing. There is also a lack of education – in rural areas, a majority of adults cannot read and write. People with disabilities are often excluded from community development planning, or barriers to their participation are not considered.

## 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.



Two men from Kulao, Liquiça. Many things can cause disability, including old age, physical impairments, and pregnancy.

## More information

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

### **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, free from [www.wedc-knowledge.org](http://www.wedc-knowledge.org)



A simple bamboo frame with splash guard made of plastic bottles



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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## Barriers to accessing clean water and using a toilet

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

- Access to water – tapstand 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

### 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:

- testing practical inclusive designs
- ensuring that the Community Action Planning (CAP) process is inclusive
- conducting disability training for all staff

## 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