

Access to drinking water for people with disabilities in the town of Tenkodogo (Burkina Faso)

Disability

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Towards Inclusive WASH Sharing evidence and experience from the field



"I could not get water on my own because my wheelchair would get stuck in the mud when I went there"

A person with a disability

Background

Since 2001, local NGO Dakupa,¹ with the support of WaterAid, began to implement a water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) project in several urban municipalities in the Central East region of Burkina Faso. In line with the principles of equity and inclusion, the objective of this project was to improve access to WASH services for people with

disabilities (PWD) through the construction of accessible water points and latrines. To date, about ten wheelchair accessible standpipes have been constructed in places such as the town of Tenkodogo, the subject of this study.

Baseline

In the past, PWD in Tenkodogo were strongly dependent on society and family members because of their exclusion from services, including water supply and sanitation facilities. In the 1980s a few measures were taken by government to address institutional barriers faced by PWD. The measures included the establishment of a disability card to give PWD easy access to certain public services such as health, public transport and schooling. The card allowed PWD to get discounts or free services. Similarly, the revolutionary regime from 1983-1987 contributed significantly by addressing certain social and behavioural barriers through information campaigns that promoted awareness around discrimination and inclusion.

However, in addition to the institutional and social barriers, there are environmental barriers that prevent people with disabilities from accessing water and sanitation facilities. On this aspect, there was no notable action before Dakupa's WASH project which commenced in 2001. Since then there has been a clear improvement of access of PWD to water and sanitation. The following story from a person with a disability describes the previous situation in Tenkodogo:

“Before, to satisfy my water needs, I was obliged to await the return of my brother from school. I could not get water on my own because my wheelchair would get stuck in the mud when I went there. There was often mud around the water point.” (Figure 1)

Figure 1

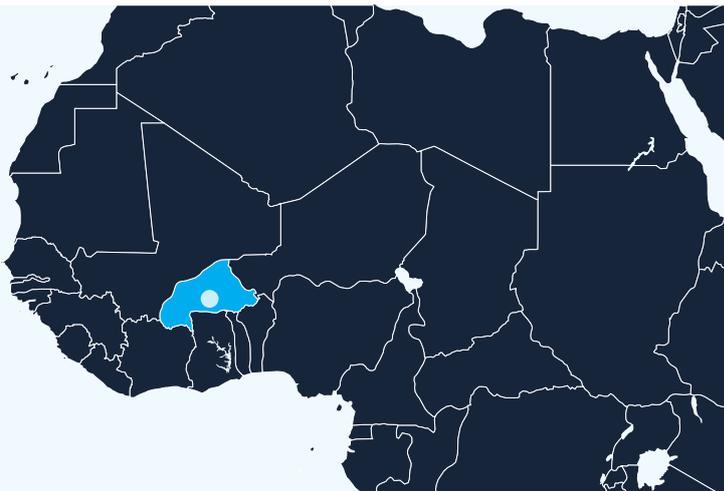
A lady with a disability who uses the new facilities, Burkina Faso

Handicap International, Burkina Faso



Location

» Tenkodogo town, Central East Region, Burkina Faso



¹ Dakupa is a local development NGO working in the Central East region of Burkina Faso. It consists of about fifty member groups and associations, including Disabled People's Organisations (DPO).

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Table 1 Actions taken by Dakupa to address identified barriers to WASH access

Barriers/obstacles	Solution and opportunities
Environmental	
Steep gradients (or presence of steps) makes access to the standpipe difficult for PWD	Construction of ramps and handrails at standpipes (Figure 2)
Surrounding area of the standpipe liable to swamping (mud), thus preventing access with a wheelchair or creating hazards for older people	Earthwork (stone bund) constructed around the standpipe. Local skills were available for implementation.
Taps too high to reach from a seated position	Provide taps at different heights. Easy to solve at the construction stage
Institutional	
Lack of local technical skills to build accessible WASH facilities	Existence of a local private provider that can support WASH actions and the community



Figure 2
Standpipe in the municipality of Garango, Burkina Faso
Handicap International, Burkina Faso

The Dakupa intervention

Under this project, Dakupa aimed to provide standpipes that would be accessible to PWD, featuring ramps and handrails. Several obstacles typically prevented PWD from accessing water sources such as public standpipes. Thanks to the opportunities for intervention identified by the Dakupa team through a community meeting, several technological solutions were found (see Table 1).

Several factors facilitated the implementation of the Dakupa action on the ground. The most important of these included:

- » Support from local authorities (municipalities)
- » Existence of a local service provider that was able to build accessible facilities using minimal resources
- » Presence of stakeholders committed to upholding the rights of PWD, such as Handicap International which organises awareness campaigns on the rights of people with disabilities in the area
- » Mobilisation of PWD and the disabled people’s organisation (DPO) through participation in meetings in order to collect their views on making water and sanitation facilities more accessible and bestowing management of certain standpipes.
- » Groups within Dakupa carried out activities throughout the municipality to support the success of the project including: facilitation of community meetings, monitoring the work of the service provider, and financing achievements
- » WaterAid in Burkina Faso also formed a partnership with Dakupa and provided both technical and financial support to Dakupa.

Impacts

To date, ten standpipes of this type have been constructed. They have improved the independence of persons with disabilities regarding access to water. Local stakeholders including politicians and local authorities have also realised the importance and value of accessible infrastructure and intend to take this into account in the construction of WASH facilities in the future.

In addition, this project demonstrated how standpipe management can be more inclusive of people with disabilities. The municipality authority has delegated management of the standpipes to all

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Figure 3 and 4
Project participants in
Tenkodogo, Burkina Faso
Handicap International,
Burkina Faso

citizens including people with disabilities. Each neighbourhood is organised around the standpipe by a Management Committee composed of district resource persons known for their moral integrity. This Committee appoints one person in the area to manage the standpipe. The standpipe manager sells water, pays his bill and pays part of the profit to the Committee. Some people with disabilities are in charge of the management of some standpipes, and this has become an income generating activity for them. This allows people with disabilities who previously did not have access to a source of income to improve their living conditions, provide schooling for children, purchase food and pay for health care.

The following comments come from community members speaking about the impacts of the new accessible standpipe:

“It is really good now. Before, I could not access the standpipes with my wheelchair, but now it is possible and I can do it without any assistance.”

“I find this innovation very positive for us PWD; it makes us less dependent on others for our water needs. I really invite the originators to raise more awareness about the usefulness of this innovation.” (Figure 3)

“Now I can do my laundry without asking anyone to bring me water. I can go to the standpipe when I want. I could not do it before.” (Figure 4)

Lessons and experiences

Based on project activities in Tenkodogo, the project team recommends that future work of this type:

- » Involve PWD in all project stages (design to implementation) because they can correct or give their opinion on a certain design;
- » Raise awareness on how to use the facility, before, during and after the action;
- » Use zinc-coated pipes for the handrail; and
- » Have a local service provider undertake the accessibility work.

Close supervision and technical monitoring of the service provider is essential to ensure that infrastructure is built in accordance with the design guidelines. Initially, the service provider for this project had begun construction with no reference to technical designs provided to them by Dakupa.

For all construction work in the municipality, the City Council charges a tax of US\$398. This requirement was unknown to the management committee and therefore not included in the budget. In future, urban WASH projects like this should closely involve the local authorities to enable them to share advice and relevant information.

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To ensure the sustainability of project infrastructure, the team recommends that future projects:

- » Plan to continually educate and inform users for greater ownership and good management of the facilities;
- » Take into account the depreciation of the facility and provide for its renewal;
- » Train standpipe operators in the management and maintenance of the facility; and
- » Promote exchanges between urban standpipe operators who could form a cooperative and support each other.

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