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**ENSURING AVAILABILITY AND SUSTAINABLE MANAGEMENT
OF WATER AND SANITATION FOR ALL**

**Everyone everywhere: accessible household sanitation
for persons with disabilities**

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The Constitution of India ensures equality, freedom, justice and dignity of all individuals and implicitly mandates an inclusive society for all including Persons with Disabilities (PwDs). However, in spite of the enabling policies at the national and state level, there have been challenges faced by implementers and service providers in providing accessible sanitation because of lack of appropriate technology options which are disabled friendly, adequate information on inclusive toilet designs not reaching the block functionaries, inherent existing challenges in inter-sectoral coordination and lack of skilled organisations for grassroots implementation. As part of the national effort to enable everyone, everywhere to access improved sanitation, the Ministry of Drinking Water and Sanitation (MDWS), Government of India in collaboration with WaterAid India (WAI) finalised a handbook on accessible sanitation options for PwDs. Through collaboration, MDWS and WAI ensured reaching out to the entire country with these cost effective and locally appropriate sanitation options.

Sanitation situation in India for PwDs

Today almost 560 million Indians lack toilets and where toilets do exist, they remain inadequate for people with special needs, such as Persons with Disabilities (PwDs) and elderly. As per Census 2011, around 26.8 million population in India are physically challenged and nearly 20 per cent are those with movement disability. Without accessible toilets, they remain excluded from opportunities to attend school and gain employment.

The Swachh Bharat Mission (SBM) which is the Prime Minister of India's flagship programme aims at making whole of India Open Defecation Free (ODF) by 2nd October, 2019. It is prudent to say that an open defecation free nation can never be achieved unless the needs of PwDs are addressed. The Ministry of Drinking Water and Sanitation (MDWS) apart from substantially increasing the Government assistance for household toilets, has also broadened the eligibility beyond *Below Poverty Line* categories only, to firmly include households having PwDs. As a result, the Swachh Bharat Mission (Rural) while focusing on universal sanitation coverage is also looking at better ways of addressing PwDs.

To ensure universal access to improved sanitation and provide equal opportunities for PwDs, WaterAid India in collaboration with the Ministry of Drinking Water and Sanitation launched '*The Handbook on Accessible Household Sanitation facilities for Persons with Disabilities*' on December 22, 2015 in New Delhi.

Everyone everywhere

The idea behind the handbook is to reach everyone everywhere with accessible sanitation facilities. The need for convenient access to sanitation and hygiene is stark and acute for many disabled, older and chronically ill people who have to defecate in their dwellings or in the open. In their homes, there are problems of smell and disposal. It is difficult for disabled people to clean themselves and as a result they have to depend on other members of the family. In the open, people with visual impairments have to rely on a guide or make their own way with dangers of trampling shit. Problems faced by people with a mobility impairment are similar, and if they move on all fours, risk getting filthy crawling among the shit. If the

toilets are dirty, it is harder for disabled people to keep themselves clean, especially if they are blind. The dangers of getting dirty affect their health, degrade their self-esteem and can affect how others see and treat them. This can undermine their confidence and self-esteem along with making them unwilling to express their needs.

Process undertaken

The Government of India in SACOSAN V (South Asian Conference on Sanitation, held in Nepal, 22-24 October, 2013) committed to come up with guidelines for providing sanitation services to PwDs.

Various districts in the states of Jharkhand and Odisha are WaterAid's direct intervention areas. Through regular interactions, WaterAid's community mobilisers had found that various people in the rural areas have come up with customised toilet designs that are not only disabled friendly but with slight modifications, can be used by all members in the family.

After understanding the innovation and implementation at the grassroots level, WaterAid organised a meeting in Jharkhand and brought all key stakeholders together including government engineers, local administration, civil society organisations working for disabled people and also various sanitation workers from three states, namely Jharkhand, Odisha and Chhattisgarh. The objective of the meeting was to support knowledge sharing among sanitation service providers and take inputs from them on how to create cost effective and inclusive toilets that do not ignore the needs of the physically challenged.

Meanwhile, WaterAid India also initiated its advocacy efforts with MDWS and informed them of the outcomes of the designs which emanated from Jharkhand and Odisha. Looking at the successful implementation of the designs at grassroots level and also keeping SACOSAN V commitments in mind, the Ministry agreed to take it up at the national level and suggested WaterAid India to prepare a handbook that could be rolled out across the nation.

A national level meeting was then organised where MDWS, Department of Social Justice, engineers from the Public Health Engineering Department and sanitation workers from six states collectively decided that the proposed handbook will (a) try to fill the existing knowledge gap, (b) address perceptions, (c) involve everyone and (d) help implement a set of accessible WASH designs thus ensuring toilets for PwDs.

The consultative process with various stakeholders having diverse expertise ensured generation of a series of innovative ideas and concrete feedback which helped in improving the overall content. It was critical to seek inputs and feedback from different government departments, civil society organisations, technical experts, community groups and community themselves to ensure that their valuable opinions are factored into the main handbook.

The proposed designs in the handbook were finalised as a result of a series of consultations with various stakeholders from both disability as well as WASH sector working at district, state and national level over a period of two years. The process has been led by the MDWS, Government of India and WaterAid with support from Ministry of Social Justice, Water Engineering and Development Centre (WEDC), Loughborough University and Drinking Water and Sanitation Department, Government of Jharkhand, India.

The handbook was first unveiled during the India WASH Summit, a national level WASH conference organised by WaterAid in India in February 2015, followed by a formal launch by the Ministry in December 2015. The release of the handbook happened before SACOSAN VI which was held in Dhaka in January 2016, ensuring fulfillment of one of the important SACOSAN V commitments by the Government of India.

About the handbook

The handbook is expected to serve as a practical guide and can be used by government functionaries, water and sanitation engineers, and representatives of Panchayati Raj Institutions, WASH sector professionals, disabled people's organisations and disability service providers, and organisations representing or working with other socially excluded groups to provide possible sanitation solutions for PwDs.

A few examples of household sanitation designs are presented in the handbook which families can adapt to suit their needs and budgets. These designs have been implemented by Drinking Water and Sanitation Department, WaterAid's partners in consultation with disabled people's organisations and disabled persons themselves. While there are certain models that are featured in the handbook, many more options are possible and can be explored by making customisations depending on users' needs. Most of the ideas are suitable for disabled and older people, but are not only restricted to them. As we get older, many of us find it increasingly difficult to squat and balance, or we might be injured or sick. Some of these designs can be

used by pregnant women who need support in squatting and in getting up. These designs might also make facilities easier and more comfortable to use by everyone in the family.

The handbook summarises key do's and don'ts which generally masons ignore, like ramps should be smooth for wheelchair users, no sharp edges or corners on guideposts, railings and inside the bathroom or on the way and so on.

The handbook also suggests few tips to ensure implementation at the grassroots level as well as taking into account user suggestions prior to toilet construction like:

- District Annual Implementation Plans (AIPs) to include targets on improving access and use for everyone in planning, budgeting, and monitoring
- Including access and use by disabled people as a criteria of ODF communities in national ODF verification protocols
- Ensure community triggering meeting times are convenient for both women and men (e.g. not during meal preparation)
- Locations of meetings to be closer to homes of the least mobile, and in buildings without steps
- Ensure that disabled and older people are not pushed to the back of meetings and arrangements are made for those with difficulty hearing or seeing to be near the front
- Visit disabled or older people who cannot attend meetings in their homes to ensure their concerns are not ignored

Technical specifications have not been given beyond a few options because all dimensions should be based on user needs. The aim is to provide as much “independent access” as possible – this means facilities that a person can use without help or with minimum help. Implementers can try out ideas first to work out: how high a seat or support rail should be, how wide the entrance should be, and how much space is needed inside a latrine for a particular user and adjust based on users moving or squatting inside. Costs are not itemised because they will vary between communities and geographies, instead relative costs for each design is suggested in the handbook based on the then market rates. Implementers need to work out the local costing considering the prevailing market rate.

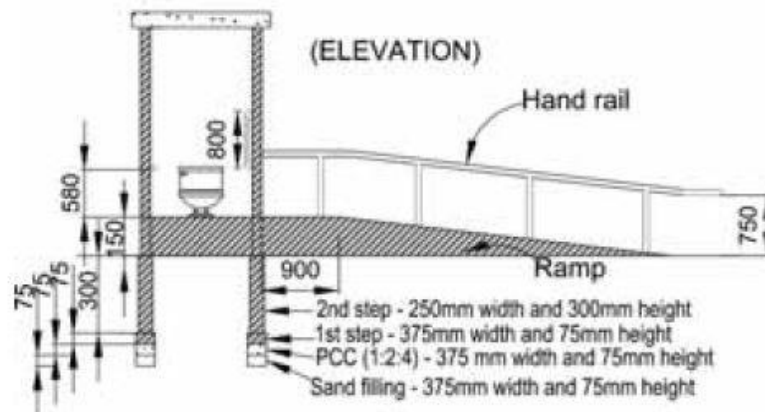


Figure 1. Specifications of a model toilet as given in the Handbook

Source: MDWS, WaterAid. (2015)



Photograph 1. Inclusive toilet model for paralysis affected person_1



Photograph 2. Inclusive toilet model for paralysis affected person_2

Seven existing models have been showcased with different type of features depending on the type of disability along with dimensions and tentative cost. The models shared have been constructed in Jharkhand and Odisha with community engagement and are examples for reference. There can be better and improved options that can be designed.

To make the facilities physically accessible, the handbook has three main sections namely: (i) getting to the toilet or reaching facilities; (ii) getting inside the toilet; and (iii) usability of the toilet.



Photograph 3. Toilet reaching facility for person with partial blindness



Photograph 4. Wide toilet entrance for person using wheelchair

S. No.	Reaching facilities	Getting inside the toilet	Usability of toilet
1	Paths	Wide entrances	Hand pump aprons
2	Ramps for wheelchair users	Flat platform in front of door	Seating (different for pregnant women, old people, disabled people)
3	Support rails for blind people	Easy to close doors and lockable for privacy	Equipment designs
4	Steps (provided no family member uses wheelchair)	Latches to be on internal side of the door	Adapted water lifting mechanisms

The handbook describes each of the above mentioned parameters in detail providing various options depending on user needs and costs, thus aiming to bring a change in the life of: (i) the disabled person by ensuring their self-respect, comfort and safety; (ii) the family by reduced work load to look after the disabled persons in addressing their WASH needs; and (iii) the entire community by providing universal models that will ensure eradication of open defecation not only by the disabled person but also their family members.

Way forward

The handbook has already been translated into three regional languages - Hindi, Kannada and Telugu. Translation into other regional languages is currently underway.

MDWS and WaterAid India will be working closely to develop guidelines for providing accessible household sanitation for Persons with Disabilities. Based on the guidelines, a national rollout plan will be created to ensure everyone everywhere by 2019.

MDWS and WaterAid India along with the national and state governments, will now approach to scale up the rollout by:

1. Creating new models based on the need of the individuals as there is no standard model or design for all
2. Sensitising service providers and communities that if there is a disabled person in the house, then toilet design should be barrier free for the disabled
3. Empowering disabled persons through district level federations so that they can demand their WASH rights for a respectful living

Conclusion

Reducing inequalities is an essential part of achieving universal access to safe water, sanitation and hygiene. Poverty and social exclusion are closely linked. The poorest people are often the most socially excluded and are rarely consulted or involved in decisions about WASH policy and programmes. The situation is often made worse by discrimination, stigma and existing inequalities that occur at all levels. This handbook is a great example of a 'Bottom-Up' approach where designs used and piloted in the rural areas of Jharkhand and Odisha have been adopted at the national level. It is the end result of robust collaborations, effective partnerships and immense support from communities, individuals and families, government officials, networks, and practitioners from various sectors. As a first of its kind, the handbook will be kept dynamic with regular updates as more ideas and examples find their way in.

This handbook can be used as a starting point for discussion with households and as a way to encourage communities to consider disabled friendly design options and thereby enable them to live a life with dignity.

Lessons learnt

Key lessons learnt during the process are as follows:

- However well designed the latrine is, other factors such as location, distance and approach path affect accessibility and need to be a part of planning and design
- Inclusive planning of water and sanitation services benefits the whole community, and often involves only minor adjustments to ordinary services
- It is cost effective and cheaper to plan from the outset to make services inclusive for disabled people, than to provide add on special services which only a small minority benefits from

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