Water for Women is the Australian Government’s flagship Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) program aimed at improving the health, gender equality and wellbeing of Asian and Pacific communities through inclusive, sustainable WASH.

Research is an important element of Water for Women and is a key pathway for development innovation, helping to inform policymaking and program delivery.

In many low and middle-income countries, people with disabilities are more likely to live in households without access to basic water and sanitation or have poorer quality access than people without disabilities. Over the last decade, progress has been made in tackling discriminatory WASH legal frameworks, but implementation of inclusive WASH policies remains a challenge in many countries.

Led by the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine (LSHTM), this research project will look at how the WASH policies of Cambodia and Bangladesh can more effectively address the needs of people with disabilities and caregivers.
In addition, the research will seek to understand the gendered impacts and requirements of WASH policies and seek to draw out lessons for best practice and synthesise these as draft guidelines for use by Government and WASH sector actors.

Water for Women is proud to be partnering with the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, WaterAid Australia, WaterAid Cambodia and WaterAid Bangladesh in this important research work. The project will also partner locally with Cambodian Disabled People’s Organisation, Royal University of Phnom Penh in Cambodia and Identity Inclusion.

accessible handwashing in Bangladesh

WaterAid/Al Emran

Translating disability inclusive WASH policies into practice: lessons learned from Cambodia and Bangladesh

Data from 34 countries reveal that people with disabilities are more likely to live in households without access to basic water and sanitation than people without disabilities (UN, 2018).

People with disabilities also face stigma and discrimination when using public WASH services. Disability is also a gendered issue, particularly with respect to WASH. Women often bear socially prescribed responsibility for household water provision, regardless of their disability status and are often primary caregivers for household members with disabilities (White et al, 2016).

Governments should take a lead role in designing and implementing plans that progressively ensure people with disabilities gain access to WASH services. Over the last decade, progress has been made in tackling discriminatory WASH legal frameworks, but implementation of inclusive WASH policies remains a challenge. Few efforts to evaluate or document national policies on inclusive WASH exist. Nor is there systematic learning that draws together experiences from different countries in order to derive elements of best practice and identify gaps in inclusive WASH service provision.

This research aims to help improve disability-inclusive, gender sensitive WASH policymaking in low- and middle-income countries through policy and practice guidance for governments. The work will draw on the experience of Cambodia and Bangladesh and will seek to answer the overarching question: “How can the national WASH policies of Cambodia and Bangladesh more effectively address the requirements of people with disabilities and caregivers?”

Ensuring facilities are available for all will be vital in delivering Cambodia’s ambitious targets for universal access by 2025. This research will be critical in helping to understand how Cambodia’s national guidelines on inclusive WASH are being implemented. And also to understand the impacts that inclusive programs are having for people living with a disability.”

WaterAid Cambodia: Pharozin Pheng, Equity and Inclusion Program Manager

In Bangladesh, we need to look at WASH policy frameworks through the lens of inclusivity and identify clear, actionable changes that will allow everyone, everywhere to live to their full potential.”

WaterAid Bangladesh: Mahfuj-ur Rahman, Equity and Rights Specialist

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Australia believes that equitable WASH access is of crucial importance to develop communities. Water for Women and our partners provide innovative solutions to WASH delivery and use research to contribute evidence to the global WASH sector. By working together and building evidence, we can create better, more sustainable WASH outcomes whilst also contributing to strengthened gender equality and inclusion.

Type 1 Awards comprise research that answers critical sector questions and examines emerging challenges and trends. They support research that serves the needs of partner governments, donors, CSOs, international agencies and sector stakeholders.

Find out more at waterforwomenfund.org

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