

# World Vision Lanka and NPCODA: Working together for disability inclusive WASH

This case study draws on experiences from World Vision's disability inclusive Civil Society Water, Sanitation and Hygiene Fund (CS WASH) project in Jaffna District, Sri Lanka. It shares lessons learnt by World Vision, Northern Province Consortium of Organizations for the Differently Abled (NPCODA) and CBM Australia – which was a technical partner in the project – in strengthening disability inclusion in the project, in particular by partnering with Disabled People's Organisations (DPO).

## Context

World Vision Lanka (WVL) has been implementing a disability inclusive CS WASH project in two Divisional Secretariats Divisions, namely, Chavakachcheri (Thenmarachi) and Chankanai (Valikamam North) in the Jaffna district, Northern Province, Sri Lanka in project in partnership with the DPO<sup>1</sup>; Northern Province Consortium of Organizations for the Differently Abled (NPCODA) in since 2014. The project was funded by the Australian Aid Program through the CS WASH Fund.

The main objective of the project is to create access for safe drinking water, sanitation and hygiene practices for rural people including people with disabilities, who are facing barriers to accessing these basic needs. WVL has engaged NPCODA as a technical partner for disability inclusion (which also carries out aspects of implementation) since the start of the project, to assist WVL to understand the situation of people with disabilities and their access to WASH. Initially WVL contracted NPCODA to undertake baseline surveys, however this developed into broader activities decided by WVL including:

- conducting disability screening,
- conducting an in-depth disability assessment,
- translating the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities into Tamil,
- providing advice on accessible WASH designs,
- outreach to community members with disabilities,
- raising awareness with key stakeholders,
- providing advice on design of a billboard.

---

<sup>1</sup> Note: In Sri Lanka DPOs are disability organisations where the President and Secretary have a disability. It is common for other Board members, staff and voting members to be people without disabilities.

## Impact

Although WASH wasn't a particular priority area for NPCODA, the project represented an opportunity for NPCODA to influence key stakeholders and strengthen its own capacity and profile. When the project started, NPCODA was still establishing itself, reliant on volunteers and operated with limited funding. With funding from WVL, NPCODA was able to hire staff and rent an office, and received three training opportunities on WASH (including WASH management, and the project's operations) and support to strengthen their longer term organisational capacity. One of NPCODA's member organisations has previously given design advice on accessible toilets but this was without the involvement of people with disabilities. NPCODA President Mr Subramaniam, shares that "WASH was very new to us and we learnt more about WASH rights of people with disabilities".

Members of DPOs reported feeling that they gained knowledge and learnt skills which could be used in other projects, and that their role as community data collectors helped them to feel more respected and esteemed by having a public role within their communities. From these developments, the work with WVL expanded beyond the original WASH project and has opened up many opportunities for NPCODA. Some of these opportunities include sitting on the government's national advisory committee, overseeing UN provincial disability sector meetings, and partnering with the provincial government that is now interested in developing a provincial policy on disability. Further, other development agencies are now looking to work with NPCODA. Collectively, these opportunities enable NPCODA to progress their own interests of advocating and upholding the rights of people with disabilities.

For WVL, this was their first time partnering with a DPO in the Northern Province. They decided to do so for the WASH project, recognising that DPOs could help WVL access more people with disabilities in the district. It was also an expectation of the Government of Sri Lanka and the CS WASH fund.

Through working together, WVL staff's understanding of disability has grown immensely. Moreover, by including people with disabilities in the baseline surveys to ensure the process was accessible, the project was able to capture a rigorous evidence base for the project. After seeing the value of working with DPOs, WVL is now looking at engaging with NPCODA beyond the WASH project and partnering with other DPOs. Through taking steps and adapting the approach over time, WVL has been able to put the theory of disability inclusion into practice.

***"NPCODA knows about disability. We collected their experience and knowledge for the project... We are proud to say we are working directly with people with disabilities... We believe NPCODA is the right organisation to speak on the rights of people with disabilities rather than WVL. We are happy to strengthen a peak body in the Northern Province".***

Jeyald Rasaratnam,  
Operations Manager  
WVL



**"The publicity we received through the partnership (has been good)– now every government officer knows about NPCODA. Now we have the opportunity to meet with government officers about WASH and other related issues. Now government officers know about the challenges faced by people with disabilities".**

Mr Subramaniam, President  
NPCODA

## Challenges and Lessons learnt

WVL and NPCODA have identified a number of lessons learnt on partnering together:

- *Working together:* The WASH project was WVL's first time partnering with a DPO and NPCODA's first time partnering with a development agency. With this inexperience, it took time and some trial and error to build up mutual understanding of each other's goals and ways of working. This was documented in a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU).
- *Priorities of each organisation:* The WASH project's management structures required NPCODA to directly implement some disability-specific components of the project. This put a major strain on NPCODA's capacity and distracted from its core focus on advocacy, awareness raising and providing technical advice. As a result WVL needed to provide much more time, resources and budget to NPCODA than was planned or provided to other change agents. This is creating challenges for WVL's management of the project.
- *Operations:* NPCODA initially struggled to meet the administrative requirements of WVL's partnership and program management processes. This required NPCODA to negotiate requirements with WVL, and prompted WVL to invest in the capacity of NPCODA which was a fledgling organisation at the time. Strengthening capacity of NPCODA in a sustainable way has also sometimes been difficult as the organisation has not been able to identify emerging leaders to support the current President.
- *Managing expectations:* WASH was initially not a priority for NPCODA. WVL had to manage expectations about other funding for NPCODA's priorities that NPCODA hoped was available.
- *Investing time to ensure mutual understanding:* Both partners had a different understanding of meaning and expectations of the terms 'technical advice' and 'implementation'. In addition, NPCODA had different understandings of the format and purpose of the in-depth disability assessment, and not enough time was spent clarifying and sensitising the assessment tool before the work was undertaken. This has meant that although the assessment was done, the results have not been widely used to influence the project's decision making and direction. WVL has invested significant time and resources, but on reflection more may be necessary.

## Strengthening disability inclusive WASH practice

From the lessons learnt above, a few key recommendations arise that can support development agencies working in WASH who are thinking about working with DPOs:

- *Formalise partnership agreements:* Creating a MOU that sets out the respective obligations of each organisation to contribute to a project helps manage expectations and creates clarity. This should be flexible and amended over time as new activities arise and the respective capacities of partner organisations evolve.
- *Ensure DPO priorities are heard and respected:* DPOs have their own strategic and organisational priorities, and these may not be related to WASH. Understanding the priorities of DPOs and exploring with them how they want to be involved in the project is important to ensure both organisations benefit. This should be reflected in the MOU.
- *Commit to strengthening capacity:* DPOs may have limited experience in specific activities or areas, and providing training and capacity building opportunities (particularly for transferrable skills that DPOs can apply in other projects) can strengthen engagement and create new opportunities for DPOs.
- *Work with DPOs to connect with communities and issues:* Working with a DPO helps development agencies make connections with local communities and issues, given their understanding of the context.

For more information contact:

- Jeyald Rasaratnam, Operations Manager, World Vision Lanka:  
[Jeyald\\_Rasaratnam@wvi.org](mailto:Jeyald_Rasaratnam@wvi.org)
- Vellayan Subramaniam, President, NPCODA:  
[npcoda2013@gmail.com](mailto:npcoda2013@gmail.com)
- Tarryn Brown, Disability Inclusion Advisor, CBM Australia:  
[tbrown@cbm.org.au](mailto:tbrown@cbm.org.au)



Photo credit: World Vision  
*DPO members conducting the base line survey.*



Prepared by CBM Australia as part of a partnership with World Vision to strengthen disability inclusion in World Vision's Civil Society WASH projects in Papua New Guinea, Sri Lanka and Zimbabwe, with support from the Australian Government.