



Equitable access to water for people with disabilities

KEY QUESTIONS

- What barriers prevent the disabled accessing water?
- How can water infrastructure help the disabled to access water more easily?

Disability is a multi-faceted challenge to people's development. It is both the cause and effect of developmental issues: people with disabilities are more likely than able people to be poor and those who are poor are more likely to be disabled. Integrating the needs of people with disabilities in accessing water and sanitation services is a significant development challenge.

Not many studies examine the difficulties people with disabilities face in accessing water and sanitation services, especially in the developing world. However, two relatively recent studies, one in Malawi (White et al., 2016) and one in Cambodia (Macleod et al., 2014), show that the challenges and barriers experienced in both countries are similar. In the Malawi study, disabled respondents were asked to rank the challenges they faced day to day. Difficulties related to accessing water and sanitation came top of the list affecting people's health, independence and self-esteem.

In rural areas, fetching water often has a social dimension. The responsibility for collecting water rests first with women and then with children. People with disabilities are often excluded from fetching water because of fears in communities that disabilities may spread (Groce et al., 2011). Preventing or impeding disabled individuals from collecting water further isolates them, reinforcing social exclusion. Disabled individuals are often dependent on other members of the family or on someone in the community to collect water on their behalf, which presents a range of other challenges.

PHYSICAL BARRIERS

In many developing countries, water is supplied by standpipes or pumped from boreholes. Many disabled individuals may not be strong enough to pump water from boreholes or operate standpipes. Steps, up or down, and muddy ground around standpipes or pumps limit access by people with limited mobility in wheelchairs or on crutches. They may also struggle to carry water containers back home. Where there is no piped water, water may be sold from kiosks, which are often too far away for those with impaired mobility to access readily or which may also present physical barriers, such as steps and drainage ditches to navigate. The visually impaired and people lacking depth perception may also struggle to overcome these physical barriers.

FINANCIAL BARRIERS

Disabled individuals often resort to paying someone to carry or buy water for them which puts an extra financial burden on already resource-constrained households. Disabled women often experience particular difficulties. The Malawi study reports that disabled men have water fetched for them, often by their wives, but it is rare for someone to collect water for disabled women.



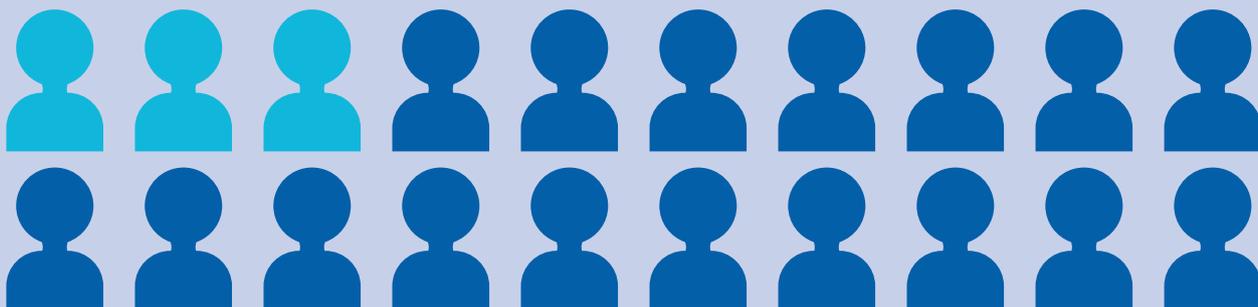
People with disabilities – whether these disabilities are visible or not – encounter physical, financial and social barriers when collecting water
Credit: Martchan / Shutterstock.com

OVERCOMING BARRIERS

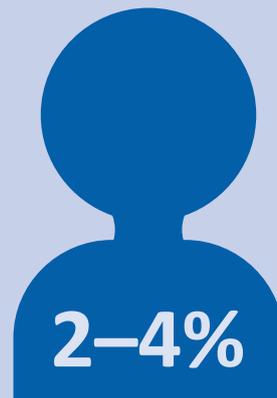
The challenge for CRIDF in working with institutions and communities to provide more equitable access to water, is to influence them to take the needs of people with disabilities into account in designing and constructing water-related infrastructure, with the aim of leaving no one behind. We work with stakeholders to encourage them to involve people with disabilities in dialogue and decision making processes and take into account their specific water and sanitation needs.

Further reading

- Groce, N., Bailey, N., Lang, R., Trani, J.F. and Kett, M. 2011. Water and sanitation issues for persons with disabilities in low- and middle-income countries: a literature review and discussion of implications for global health and international development. *Journal of Water and Health*, 9(4): 617–627.
- Macleod, M., Pann, M., Cantwell, R. and Moore, S. 2014. Issues in access to safe drinking water and basic hygiene for persons with physical disabilities in rural Cambodia. *Journal of Water and Health*, 12(4): 885–95.
- White, S., Kuper, H., Itimu-Phiri, A., Holm, R. and Biran, A. 2016. A qualitative study of barriers to accessing water, sanitation and hygiene for disabled people in Malawi. *PLoS ONE*, 11(5): e0155043.
- World Health Organization. 2011. *World Report on Disability*. Geneva: WHO Press.



About **15% of the world's population** lives with some form of disability, of whom **2–4%** experience significant difficulties in functioning



WHO, 2011

ABOUT CRIDF

The Climate Resilient Infrastructure Development Facility (CRIDF) is a DFID (UK Aid) supported programme working to provide long-term solutions to water issues that affect the lives of the poor in Southern Africa. Our focus is to work together with organisations to show them how they can better build and manage their own water infrastructure to improve people's lives. Because rivers, lakes and river basins cross borders, CRIDF is working with 12 different countries in Southern Africa that share water resources. In so doing, CRIDF aims to improve the lives of over 200 million people, many of them extremely poor.



The CRIDF **Water for All** series highlights cross-cutting themes related to water infrastructure that CRIDF would like to explore with partners and interested parties.

Contact us
If you are interested in the services CRIDF offers, please email: enquiries@cridf.com