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EQUITABLE AND SUSTAINABLE WASH SERVICES:
FUTURE CHALLENGES IN A RAPIDLY CHANGING WORLD

Female-friendly public and community toilets: Findings from four country pilot assessment and next steps for the sector

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Introduction

In 2018, WaterAid, UNICEF and Water and Sanitation for the Urban Poor published ‘Female-friendly public and community toilets: a guide for planners and decision makers’. The objective of this guide was to provide practical and evidence-based suggestions for how public and community toilets can be made more female-friendly and suitable for a variety of users. It drew heavily from existing literature and married that with updated visual descriptions and checklists aimed at audiences not necessarily familiar with the theory of gender and disability inclusion.

The guide set out 6 categories of focus for female-friendly public and community toilets. They should be

- **Safe and private:** be in a safe location; have a clearly marked female toilet section with a separate entrance; have good lighting; have trained male and female attendants; have robust, private cubicles.
- **Cater for menstrual and other hygiene requirements by providing:** water and soap; hooks, shelves and mirrors; access to menstrual products; means for washing and/or disposal of menstrual products.
- **Accessible to all users:** be at a reasonable distance from homes or activity centres; be reachable via an accessible path; have at least one cubicle accessible to all users.
- **Affordable and available when needed:** have enough cubicles to avoid long queues, which means allocating extra space and cubicles for women; be open when needed; have an affordable tariff or be free.
- **Well maintained and managed:** have adequate management arrangements and cleaning and maintenance budgets; have safe management of faecal, liquid and solid waste.
- **Meet the requirements of caregivers and parents:** have a baby changing station; have a family-friendly cubicle.

Additionally the guide provides details on how to assess and include these factors in city and local planning so that designing, upgrading and management results in better consideration of the requirements of those who have traditionally been overlooked in such processes including women, girls, older people and people with disabilities. City-wide assessments are recommended to help assess a) how female-friendly current stock is and b) where current stock is and where there are gaps in provision.

Into practice – four pilots

Through 2019 and 2020, WaterAid worked with local municipalities and partners in four countries to carry out an assessment of the female-friendliness of 179 public toilets in - Babati Town, Tanzania; Kathmandu Valley, Nepal; Bhopal, India and Chattogram City, Bangladesh. All assessments were based on the Female-friendly public and community toilets guide, however methodology differed across countries.

Initial findings demonstrate that on the whole, public toilets across the four cities did not score very well in terms of meeting the requirements deemed to make a toilet more female, and user, friendly. Common issues were around cleaning, lack of menstrual hygiene considerations, problems with privacy, no thought to caregivers requirements and issues with water supply.

The detail and experiences of at least two assessments will be shared in the presentation.

Lessons learnt

From putting this guide into action, lessons have been learnt about the strength and gaps in the current guide. These include:

- A gap in the current guide but which assessments in Nepal and Tanzania both assessed was the working conditions for operators. This was found to have a knock-on impact on the users as a well-trained and ethically employed operator would be much more sensitive to the needs of women and girls.
- Where cleanliness and maintenance were a problem it would have been useful to learn more about the reasons behind this. Some of the countries therefore added questions about the availability about maintenance tools, cleaning materials and equipment and PPE as well as consumables such as cleaning soap, and soap and toilet paper for the toilets.

Each assessment led to a set of recommended actions aimed at providers and management teams, local municipalities and national decision makers. These ranged from short-term 'quick wins' to longer term strategic actions. These will be shared with the view of helping similar reflection across other cities. Examples include the need for:

- More stringent standards for female-friendly and universally accessible public and community toilets are needed
- More understanding of and response to the requirements of caregivers is needed
- More comprehensive action and understanding needed on disability accessibility that moves beyond seeing wheelchair inclusion as the sole requirement
- Basic provision of locks on doors, hooks and acceptable and consistent menstrual hygiene management facilities is not being met.

Taking the experiences of these four towns and cities, WaterAid has also been updating the Female-friendly public and community toilets guide, and designing an easy to use mWater-based tool that can be used by more actors.

Conclusion

This presentation will share learnings from conducting female-friendly toilet assessments in four geographies. An interactive component will be used to solicit feedback on updates to the guide and useful tools.

References

WaterAid, UNICEF and WSUP (2018), Female-friendly public and community toilets: A guide for planners and decision makers. Accessed at <https://washmatters.wateraid.org/publications/female-friendly-public-and-community-toilets-a-guide-for-planners-and-decision-makers>

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