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**WASH and Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities – Mission Report,  
Ghana Red Cross Society – November 2017**

## Background and Purpose of Mission

This mission report covers a one-week orientation mission to the Ghana Red Cross Global Water and Sanitation Initiative (GWSI) WASH program. The purpose of this mission was to identify areas for inclusion of persons with disabilities in the Ghana Red Cross WASH program, raise awareness among Ghana Red Cross senior management and volunteers on inclusion of persons with disabilities, advise on inclusion of persons with disabilities in projects in the field, and engage with relevant stakeholders and potential partners.

According to the WHO World Report on Disability (2011), 15% of the global population are persons with disabilities, and of these 80% live in developing countries. Persons with disabilities are often marginalised in society because of stigma and negative attitudes towards disability. To address persons with disabilities having been left behind in development initiatives, the Sustainable Development Goals include explicit references to rights and inclusion of persons with disabilities. Sustainable Development Goal 6 on ensuring availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all is linked to the UN Convention on Rights of Persons with Disabilities Article 28 on the right to the continuous improvement of living conditions, access to clean water and the promotion of the right to an adequate standard of living for persons with disabilities.

**Institutions/communities met:** Ghana Red Cross Society (GRCS), Ghana Association of the Physically Challenged, Ghana Federation of Disability Organisations (GFD), UNICEF Ghana, Department of Social Welfare (Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection), Asikasu community (Eastern Region), Mothers' Club in Nema (Accra), and Ghana Broadcasting Corporation (UniiqFM).

My thanks to all who supported my mission from the Ghana Red Cross Society, my colleagues in the WASH team at IFRC headquarters in Geneva, and most importantly local RC/RC staff and volunteers on the ground who facilitated my mission and provided valuable insight into their work.

## Meeting with Ghana Red Cross Society

Secretary General Kofi Addo hosted a meeting with the [Ghana Red Cross Society](#) (GRCS) staff in which they introduced GRCS programs, projects and collaborations with other organizations including other National Societies. I briefly described the Movement-wide Strategic Framework on Disability Inclusion and the Disability Inclusion Coordinator position. Unfortunately, there was no opportunity to provide a disability sensitization training/presentation on disability inclusion to GRCS staff.

The Secretary General indicated interest in developing GRCS to be inclusive to persons with disabilities and gaining technical support on disability inclusion. I recommend that GRCS provides regular updates on progress made on agreed implementation action points, including the WASH program and collaboration with disabled people's organisations.

### Recommended action points

An initial meeting is needed between GRCS's Secretary General and the Ghana Federation of Disability Organisations so that they can learn more about each other's work and identify areas for collaboration. In order to develop inclusion of persons with disabilities in WASH programming, the first steps would be to raise awareness about disability rights and inclusion within the GRCS. Some recommendations for future collaboration include:

- Ghana Federation of Disability Organisations could conduct disability awareness and rights training for GRCS staff.

- GRCS has an opportunity to recruit volunteers from member organisations of the Ghana Federation of Disability Organisations and train them in CBHFA, WASH hygiene promotion etc.
- Ghana Federation of Disability Organisations can provide contacts to local disabled people's organisations in the towns where GRCS has branches. The same activities that are recommended at GRCS headquarters can be conducted at branches at the grassroots level.
- In its auxiliary role to the government and on the National Disaster Committee, GRCS could advocate for the inclusion of persons with disabilities in disaster preparedness and response.

## Consultative meeting with members of the Ghana Association of the Physically Challenged

Theophilus (Theo) Tackie, GRCS Regional Manager, Ghana WASH program in Koforidua, Eastern Region, organized a consultative meeting with a local disabled people's organization in Koforidua called Ghana Physically Challenged Association. Approximately 50-60 members of the association (persons with physical impairments) participated in the meeting. The chairperson of the association is a member of the GRCS. Theo provided a briefing on GRCS and the WASH program in Eastern Region, and I provided a briefing on the commitment of the Red Cross Red Crescent Movement towards disability inclusion. We then facilitated the discussion and input from participants. Notably, members of the association did not know about GRCS.

Participants of the meeting were very active and the turnout of so many men and women with disabilities of all ages (children, adults, elderly) was positive.

### Key points on challenges persons with disabilities face in their community included

- Lack of accessible public transportation was a recurring theme in the discussion and one of the primary challenges persons with disabilities face in their community.
- Because of the lack of accessible transportation and because of the barriers in the environment, persons with disabilities need support to get around. This would apply also to persons with mobility limitations as Red Cross volunteers in their community.
- Unemployment and low income was a second recurring challenge that participants raised.
- The participants pointed out that stigma and negative attitudes towards persons with disabilities are the primary cause of barriers in the community.



*Mina Mojtahedi and Theo Tackie consult members of the Ghana Association of the Physically Challenged on condition of WASH facilities in their communities*



*Members of the Ghana Association of the Physically Challenged tell the GRCS about challenges they face in their communities.*

## Key points raised regarding WASH needs among persons with disabilities included

- Bore hole water pumps need to be made for easy use for persons with physical impairments. A change in design to be disability-friendly was suggested, including access to the bore hole.
- Accessible public toilets are kept locked and staff to unlock them are not available when needed. Participants were not in favour of keeping accessible public toilets unlocked because then they would be in poor condition because everyone would use them.
- Water poured on the floor to clean WASH facilities makes the floor slippery and dangerous for persons with mobility limitations that use a cane or crutches.
- It is difficult to make accessibility modifications after buildings and toilets are already built, therefore participants pointed out the importance of taking accessibility standards into consideration already in planning.



*Traditional latrines are difficult to access for people with disabilities*

## Recommended action points

The meeting was a good starting point for collaboration between persons with disabilities in Koforidua and the GRCS branch. Theo made arrangements to return to the next association meeting to talk about GRCS in more detail and perhaps registering the association as a GRCS branch.

I recommend training members of the association in WASH and particularly in hygiene promotion. Also, arrange for the key leaders of the association to conduct a disability awareness training for GRCS volunteers in Koforidua.

Through the Ghana Federation of Disability Organisations, it is important to identify other local disabled people's organizations that represent men and women with other types of impairments, including deaf, blind and intellectual impairments, because their specific needs are somewhat different from those with physical impairments.



*Even newly constructed latrines can be difficult to access.*

## Consultative meeting with Ghana Federation of Disability Organisations

[Ghana Federation of Disability Organisations](#) (GFD) is a rights-based national umbrella organization of disabled people's organizations. It has 8 members that are disabled people's organisations representing different impairment types (blind, deaf, burn survivors, autoimmune diseases, physical, intellectual, albinism, mental health disorders). It was established 30 years ago, 70% of the board are persons with disabilities (5 women, 2 men), it is a member of African Disability Forum and International Disability Alliance.

GFD works at the national level and advocates for inclusion in legislation, disability specific laws and policies, and implementation of the UN Convention on Rights of Persons with Disabilities. It is on the government's National Council on Persons with Disabilities. The primary areas in which GFD advocates are quality health care, provision of sign language interpretation, inclusive education and employment.

GFD appears to be a strong disabled people's organisation with nation-wide coverage, a good understanding of disability rights and the social model of disability, that is, that disability is the result of interaction between the environment and impairment. This makes GFD a good partner for GRCS and a good contact to reach disabled people's organisations that represent a variety of impairment types. The Programmes Manager indicated that they would be interested in collaborating in disaster preparedness. He mentioned that they know of cases, particularly in the northern areas where there are tribal conflicts that persons with mobility limitations have not been able to flee fires and have burned in their homes. Both the GFD and GRCS are on the National Disaster Committee.

### Recommended action points

A partnership between GFD and GRCS on technical support for inclusion of persons with disabilities in GRCS programs would build the capacity of GRCS to be more inclusive across the organisation's activities. GFD would also benefit from collaboration with GRCS by supporting the implementation of UN Convention on Rights of Persons with Disabilities Article 11 on situations of risk and humanitarian emergencies. Thus, GFD could be better engaged in disaster preparedness and response policies and strategies, especially at the National and legislative level, but also in implementation through their member disabled people's organisations.

The Mother's Club Coordinator at GRCS suggested asking the Ghana Federation of Disability Organisations Director to join the Mother's Club and help develop disability inclusion. This could support both increased awareness of disability issues in the Mother's Club as well as inclusion of persons with disabilities as Mother's Club volunteers.

### Consultative meeting with Asikasu community, Eastern Region

Theo Tackie, GRCS Regional Manager, Ghana WASH program in Koforidua, Eastern Region, organized a consultative meeting with community leaders and GRCS volunteers of the Asikasu community, where the WASH program is being implemented.

In this area bore holes had been drilled but the water pumps had not been installed. Only hygiene promotion activities had been implemented in the area by GRCS volunteers. The area of this community was much larger than mapped in the planning of the WASH program, so



*Meeting with Asikasu Community, Eastern Region, Ghana*

water points were not sufficient to meet the needs of the community. Community leaders raised concerns about the unfinished water pumps and the inadequate number of water points in their area.

Because "disability" often has negative connotations in many languages and is understood differently in different cultures, it is important to approach the topic by defining "disability" in terms of functional limitations of persons living in the community. I asked questions regarding members of the community that have a disability by asking about difficulties community members may have in vision, hearing and walking up stairs. Community leaders had first understood persons with disabilities as being born with a disability but then realized that a disability/functional impairment can be acquired at any age,

including in old age. At first community leaders did not think they have any such persons in their community, but then a couple of the leaders said they have at least 5 persons with hearing impairments in their village. Community leaders appeared uncomfortable discussing attitudes towards disability in their community.

When asked, the local Red Cross volunteers told us that they had not provided persons with hearing impairments with hygiene promotion education but had instead educated family members. They assumed that family members will pass on the information to deaf persons but no confirmation of the understanding of hygiene among deaf persons is checked.

### Recommended action points

Volunteers need training on identifying persons with disabilities and understanding the needs and rights of persons with disabilities. Volunteers should promote good practices and inclusion by engaging directly with persons with disabilities themselves rather than relying on and furthering the dependence of persons with disabilities with their family or caregiver. Furthermore, volunteers must ensure that persons with disabilities receive information about good hygiene practices because when persons with disabilities are not educated on hygiene, they put themselves and others at risk for disease.

Disability awareness/sensitization is needed in the community so that persons with disabilities are seen as part of the community and in need of hygiene promotion and other WASH services on an equal basis with others. This training/sensitization should be conducted by persons with disabilities themselves. Because Red Cross volunteers have good access to communities, GRCS and its volunteers are in a good position to support inclusion of persons with disabilities and change negative attitudes that persons with disabilities face in their community.

Moreover, persons with disabilities in the community could be trained to conduct hygiene promotion in their community and become Red Cross volunteers. This would not only further inclusion of persons with disabilities in the community and improve understanding of disability among community members but also help in reaching marginalised men and women with disabilities in the community. For example, a deaf volunteer would be able to communicate better with deaf community members than a hearing volunteer.

The WASH program budget must include funding for *reasonable accommodations* that persons with disabilities may need for conducting training, e.g. transportation, sign language interpretation, guides/assistants. *Reasonable accommodations* means necessary and appropriate adjustments to ensure that persons with disabilities can exercise their rights on an equal basis with others. For example, persons with mobility limitations recruited to conduct a training may need transportation or an assistant/guide to reach the training location; a deaf person may need a sign language interpreter; or a person with a visual impairment may need materials in Braille.

### Consultative meeting with David Duncan, Chief of WASH, UNICEF Ghana

UNICEF Ghana has not used the [UNICEF WASH inclusive guidelines](#) as such. However, they do take accessibility of toilets into account throughout their work, e.g. in costing of affordable gender and disability friendly toilets and menstrual hygiene management.

The government standard toilets for schools includes accessibility criteria: 1 out of 4 blocks should include handrails, ramps and a toilet seat, i.e. a model which UNICEF is promoting. However, a major

challenge is the access to the toilet blocks during the rainy season when school compounds become muddy. Access from approx. 150m to the toilet should be taken into consideration in accessibility.

David emphasized that subsidized latrines may have negative consequences in communities where social protection measures include poverty eligibility criteria. However, he believes that using a disability filter may be useful in targeting households that are poor and have a person with a disability.

### Recommended action points

Check that in the GRCS WASH program targeting of households that include a household member with a disability for accessible subsidized latrines does not cause negative consequences for eligibility for other forms of subsidies or financial support available to persons with disabilities.

## Consultative meeting with Mothers' Club in Nema, Accra

Mothers' Clubs were formed as part of the GRCS. There is one Mothers' Club in each of the 10 regions of Ghana.

In Nema, Accra, the Mothers' Club is recruited by several NGOs to conduct door to door community outreach, particularly education in a variety of topics. For GRCS the Mothers' Club has conducted first aid training in the community. Related to disability, Basic Needs (<http://www.basicneedsghana.org>), a charity NGO supporting mental health, has trained the Mothers' Club volunteers to raise awareness about the rights of persons with mental health disorder and the availability of medication and treatment provided by Basic Needs.

Despite the training from Basic Needs, it seemed that the Mother's Club members do not have a strong understanding of disability. Nevertheless, they are sensitized through the work with Basic Needs, and disability awareness training could be built on this.

*The Mother's Club Coordinator at GRCS, suggested asking the Ghana Federation of Disability Organisations' Director to join the Mother's Club and help develop inclusion of persons with disabilities.*



*Mina Mojtahedi and Margaret Fafa Gamey with members of the Mothers' Club in Nema, Accra*

### Recommended action points

The Mothers' Clubs are a great opportunity to reach the community, particularly families with children with disabilities and other family members with a disability. As the Nema Mothers' Club has a good foundation from their collaboration and training from Basic Needs, there is potential to build on this and train members to raise awareness about disability rights in the community they work in.

## Consultative meeting with Joseph Attigah, Department of Social Welfare, Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection

The aim of the meeting was to learn what commitments or programs the government of Ghana has towards supporting the rights of persons with disabilities. Some key points discussed include:

- The government runs 9 vocational training centres (of which 7 are currently functional) for persons with disabilities.
- All other service provision is under the National Council for Persons with Disabilities.
- The government selects representatives from the Ghana national DPOs to the National Council.
- The National Council includes also a focal point from the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection, and the National Council reports to this Ministry.
- The government does not provide funds to the National Council, and instead funding is aimed to be secured from international NGOs and services to be implemented by DPOs.
- The government uses a 10% estimation of the population of persons with disabilities for e.g. budgeting, as more precise data is lacking.

## Live Radio Interview at Ghana Broadcasting Corporation, UniiqFM

Radio shows and interviews are an excellent tool to reach a broad audience and raise awareness about inclusion of persons with disabilities in the community. Biikinteeb Nanang, GRCS WASH Coordinator and I were interviewed on the Ghana Broadcasting Corporation UniiqFM radio station. I raised issues on the situation of persons with disabilities in Ghana, based on comments shared by members of the Ghana Association of the Physically Challenged, and the RC/RC Movement's commitment to including persons with disabilities. Biikinteeb talked about the GRCS WASH program and how GRCS will aim to be inclusive for persons with disabilities. I pointed out that it is important to ensure that persons with disabilities have access to water, sanitation and hygiene promotion to not only keep themselves healthy and safe but also prevent diseases in their community.

## Conclusions

There is strong potential for implementation of disability-inclusive and accessible WASH hardware in the Ghana WASH program. Implementing this would be relatively straightforward and require a basic technical understanding of accessibility criteria. Hardware must be accompanied with software, i.e. disability awareness/sensitization training and campaigns in the community. Disability awareness must be conducted in partnership with local disabled people's organizations.

Recommendations for actions to promote inclusion of persons with disabilities in RC/RC WASH programming:

- Engage disabled people's organisations in all phases of the WASH program, particularly at the planning phase.
- Use international accessibility standards when planning and designing WASH hardware (latrines, hand-washing stations, water points, accessible pathways etc).
- Use a variety of formats for communication in hygiene promotion, e.g. audio, visual, easy-to-read, sign language, to ensure that people with various impairments can access the information.
- Train all staff and volunteers on inclusion of persons with disabilities. Hire persons with disabilities from disabled people's organisations to facilitate the training.
- Recruit a person with a disability to be a disability focal point that will provide technical expertise and guidance on inclusion of persons with disabilities in the WASH program.

- Consult with persons with disabilities themselves in the community where the WASH program is implemented. Persons with disabilities can inform staff about their needs and how their needs can be addressed.
- Disaggregate data collection by disability, age and gender.

Ghana has strong DPOs that use the social and rights based models of disabilities, particularly the Ghana Federation of Disability Organisations. Ghana Federation of Disability Organisations is a good resource for developing inclusive practices in the Ghana Red Cross, such as implementing disability inclusive WASH practices, inclusion of persons with disabilities in emergency preparedness, awareness raising training on inclusion of persons with disabilities, recruiting volunteers who are persons with disabilities, and ensuring that accessibility standards are met in renovation and construction of Ghana Red Cross premises.

Recommendations for actions to promote inclusion of persons with disabilities in National Societies:

- Create collaboration between the National Society, disabled people's organizations and persons with disabilities in the community. Through collaboration, National Society staff will become more aware of disability issues. In general, when staff and volunteers interact with persons with disabilities and learn about challenges persons with disabilities face, they often become empowered to develop their work to be more inclusive for persons with disabilities. Furthermore, disabled people's organisations are valuable technical resources on disability issues to the National Societies.
- Conduct a basic level interactive disability awareness training, including introduction of tools and guidelines on inclusion of persons with disabilities, with National Societies. Further development of disability inclusion in National Societies would require a strong partnership with a local disabled people's organization and peer support/good practices from other National Societies.
- Collect data that is disaggregated by disability, age and gender. Data is critical for evidence on inclusion of all community members and for developing evidence based practices.

Further resources on disability-inclusive and accessible WASH practices:

<http://www.inclusivewash.org.au/>

[https://www.unicef.org/disabilities/index\\_65839.html](https://www.unicef.org/disabilities/index_65839.html)

<https://www.wvi.org/clean-water-sanitation-and-hygiene-wash/disability-inclusive-wash>