

Justification: to support the inclusion of a disability perspective in the Water and Sanitation sector



Disability-inclusive water and sanitation services lead to greater independence for persons with disabilities and -if done well- can significantly improve the living conditions of persons with disabilities and other community members. Here we provide justifications for inclusion of a disability perspective in the water and sanitation sector on statistical, health, economic, legal and political grounds.

Statistical	<p>According to UNDP estimations, at least 1.1 billion people in the world lack access to safe water and 2.6 billion people do not have access to basic sanitation¹. Deaths due to unsafe water, sanitation, hygiene and environmental problems are around 1.7 millions worldwide² (WHO).</p> <p>Of the more than 600 million persons estimated to be living with disabilities worldwide, approximately 80% live in Developing Countries and 82% live below the poverty line³. The World Bank estimates that individuals with disabilities now comprise about 20% of the poorest of the poor⁴. Exact data about persons with disabilities that do not have access to water and sanitation are lacking, however, on the basis of the number of persons with disabilities living in the poorest communities it is essential that they are considered in all development projects in water and sanitation.</p>
Health impacts	<p>Lack of safe water and sanitation can have severe health implications caused by diarrhoeal diseases or infections. To give an example, with an estimated 6 million people who became blind and a further 148 million suffering from active infection, Trachoma, due to lack of access to safe water, is the biggest cause of preventable blindness worldwide.</p> <p>Improving water, sanitation and hygiene conditions is thus a major step towards reducing preventable diseases. Especially diseases caused by pathogen exposure (Dracunculiasis, Schistosomiasis, and Trachoma) and its impacts such as disability can be significantly reduced.⁵</p>

1 Millennium Project Task Force 7 on Water and Sanitation: Interim Report of Task Force 7 on Water and Sanitation. Executive Summary. Millennium Project. 2004.

www.unmillenniumproject.org/documents/tf7interimexecsum.pdf

2 WHO: World Health Report 2002: Reducing risks, promoting healthy life, W.H. Organization, Editor. World Health Organization: Geneva

³ Hope, T., :Disabilities : Aid groups call for a UN Convention to protect rights. UNWire. 2003

⁴ Elwan, A.: Poverty and Disability : a survey of literature. World Bank. 1999

⁵ Montgomery, M. and Elimelech, M. Water and Sanitation in Developing Countries: Including Health in the Equation. Environmental Science and Technology. 2007.

http://pubs.acs.org/subscribe/journals/esthag/41/i01/html/010107feature_elimelech.html and UN Enable Factsheet: <http://www.un.org/disabilities/default.asp?navid=31&pid=18>

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Economic	<p>Lacking access to water and sanitation services compounds poverty and poor health and increases isolation. As persons with disabilities represent around 20% of the population of developing countries (World Bank) and mostly belong to the most disadvantaged parts of the population, ensuring access to safe water and sanitation will have an enormous impact on their individual situation and that of their communities.</p> <p>Compared to medical treatment, improving water and sanitation services is tackling the root cause for some forms of preventable diseases that lead to disabilities and is much more cost efficient and sustainable.⁶</p> <p>Low cost solutions have been found for adapting or constructing accessible water and sanitation facilities. Additional costs for providing fully accessible facilities from the outset are estimated to be at around 1% of the overall costs.⁷</p> <p>Not only it is less costly to plan beforehand to make services inclusive for persons with disabilities, but accessible facilities bring benefits for the whole community: Disability specific or special services are more expensive and only some people might benefit from it whereas accessible general services cater for the whole population including children, pregnant women, elderly and ill.⁸</p> <p>Therefore, the cost implications of excluding people with disabilities clearly outweigh the additional costs for adapting or constructing inclusive facilities.</p>
Legal and Political	<p>The right to safe access to water is clearly defined as a human right by the United Nations:</p> <p>Art. 25 of the UN Declaration of Human Rights and Art. 27 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child mentions the right to safe water and the UN Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities calls on States Parties to "ensure equal access by persons with disabilities to clean water services" (Art. 28 a).</p> <p>In order to reach the MDG target for halving the proportion of people without access to safe drinking water and sanitation by</p>

6 Montgomery and Elimelech 2007 (op.cit)

7 Edmonds 2005 cited in: World Bank: Social Analysis and Disability: A Guidance Note. Incorporating Disability- Inclusive Development into Bank-Supported Projects. March 2007.
<http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/EXTDEC/EXTGLOBALMONITOR/EXTGLOMONREP2007/0,,menuPK:3413296~pagePK:64218926~piPK:64218953~theSitePK:3413261,00.html>

8 Jones, H./ Redd, Bob: Water and Sanitation for disabled people and other vulnerable groups. Designing services to improve accessibility., 2005

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2015, persons with disabilities have to be included in development programs from the planning stage to the evaluation phase. Services that meet the needs of all people (and thus include persons with disabilities) can help to increase the coverage of water and sanitation services.
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