



Advocating for investment in accessible and inclusive WASH

The need for accessible and inclusive WASH is high. Globally, more than 1 billion people are estimated to have a disability. This includes up to 10 per cent of children worldwide.¹ *An estimated 11 per cent of the estimated 1 billion persons with disabilities worldwide do not have access to improved WASH. More than 110 million people with disabilities may be affected.*

Children with disabilities are among the most at risk of exclusion, yet accessing WASH is a fundamental human right. Accessing WASH can help people access many other rights. Commitments in the Sustainable Development Goals to *leave no one behind* and to improve WASH coverage mean targeting people with disability should be a priority for WASH actors.

UNICEF has mandated through an Executive Directive that accessibility be consistently considered in all new programme-related construction, including WASH. Disability inclusive and accessible WASH may address persistent coverage challenges.

Why the issue is important

Measuring disability inclusion has not always been easy. For many WASH actors, measuring impact and cost-effectiveness related to inclusion has not been a priority.

There is clear evidence of a high unmet need for persons with disabilities, low-cost strategies to make changes and potential avenues to direct and indirect benefits.

Poor access to WASH for persons² with disabilities affects access to healthcare,^{3,4} education,^{5,6} work⁷ and other rights.

Meeting standards for accessible WASH in schools to comply with UNICEF's Executive Directive⁸ would cost less than US\$80 per school in Malawi.⁹ Costs are reduced with pre-planning.^{10,11}

¹ *Promoting the Rights of Children with Disabilities*, Innocenti Research Centre, UNICEF, Florence, 2007.

² *Progress on Drinking Water, Sanitation and Hygiene: 2017 update and SDG baselines*, UNICEF & WHO, Geneva, 2017.

³ Van Rooy, Gert, et al., *Disability & Society*, vol. 27, no. 6, 2012, pp. 761–775.

⁴ Linneweh, Richard W., Jr., *Healthcare Executive*, vol. 27, no. 3, 2012, pp. 72–73.

⁵ Kuper, Hannah, et al., *PLoS One*, vol. 9, no. 9, 2014, e107300.

⁶ Marella, Manjula, et al., *Population Health Metrics*, vol. 14, no. 26, 2016.

⁷ Mensah, Sussan Aggrey, et al., *Journal of Social Inclusion*, vol. 6, no. 2, 2015, pp. 64–76.

⁸ Executive Directive on Accessibility in UNICEF's Programme-Related Construction Activities, Executive Directive CF/EXD/2017-004, UNICEF, New York, 2017.

⁹ Zaunda, Harlod, et al., *Development Southern Africa*, 2018, pp. 1–14.

¹⁰ Singh, Raessa, et al., *Casting the Net Further: Disability inclusive WASH*, World Vision International, Middlesex, 2014.

¹¹ Lawday, Andrew, 'Evaluation of HelpAge International's Programme "Assistance to specific vulnerable groups affected by the Syrian crisis" (2013–2014)', London, 2014.

Despite the challenges in measuring impacts of inclusion, there are many clear pathways to impact through ensuring persons with disabilities have access to and are included in WASH programming. These can be used to inform new methods.

Why invest in WASH?

There are many ways that improving access to WASH creates direct and indirect economic and social benefits.

WASH disrupts the poverty-disability cycle.

Improving access to WASH can help improve access to health services, education, work – which can all benefit individual and household economic participation.

Improving access to WASH creates other valuable social impacts.

When people can independently access WASH, they may need less support from families or friends, can participate in more aspects of community life and are more likely to ‘tap in’ to other information, services and knowledge.

Meeting targets.

High-level conventions and development targets influence national governments, development agencies and donor strategies. The need to demonstrate disability inclusive practice has never been higher. New methods to disaggregate data by disability are available and simple to incorporate into existing methods to measure results in reaching persons with disabilities.

Disability inclusive WASH can be achieved at low cost, and inclusion strategies benefit everyone.

While clear evidence of cost-benefit is scarce, addressing minimum standards, delivering rights and achieving impacts can be achieved with modest costs. Principles of *universal design*, *community-driven change* and *enabling environments* can help contain costs, and the

benefits are multiplied by potential cost savings of improving education, health and economic participation.

Improving access and inclusion in WASH addresses multiple inequities.

Strengthening access and inclusion in WASH addresses barriers to other services like health, education, economic participation, livelihoods and other community participation. WASH is therefore a direct benefit, with many potential ‘downstream benefits’. Analysis of the costs of WASH in general and accessible WASH specifically should consider all potential benefits.

Costs of exclusion are high.

People with disabilities are still consistently unable to access WASH on an equal basis with others. Poor access leads to costly health issues, exclusion and marginalization.

Long-term gains and indirect impacts.

Investing in inclusive and accessible WASH can have an impact on people, households and communities, but may also result in long-term savings to duty bearers through improving access to health, education and work, and through improved health and poverty alleviation.

Cross-cutting issues

Inclusive WASH can reduce exclusion and risk for women and children with disabilities.

As inaccessible WASH can lead to women and children defecating in poorly lit and secluded areas, accessible WASH programming helps avoid disproportionate risks of violence faced by women and girls. Improving access to WASH in schools reduces the number of girls with disabilities who leave school early.

Improving the accessibility of WASH also prepares communities for rapidly ageing populations, as the needs of older persons are often similar to people with disabilities.

A call to action

There are many examples of good practice making a transformative difference to people's lives through improving access to WASH.

Many WASH actors, local communities and individuals are already using best practice to ensure full access and inclusion in WASH. To continue to improve, and tackle persistent barriers, good practice should be built on and scaled. Success (and challenges) should be documented and shared, and new innovations should be tried, researched and reported.

- The best argument for inclusive and accessible WASH is that it already works and changes lives.

Work to improve the sector's understanding of impact, through agreed targets and consistent monitoring and evaluation.

Currently, there is no consensus on the best ways to understand and measure impact of accessible and inclusive WASH.

Methods like using Washington Group Questions and the UNICEF/Washington Group Module on Child Functioning, and efforts to understand the aggregate impact of WASH like the Joint Monitoring Programme, are potential entry points to improve evidence for impact and cost-benefits of disability inclusion in WASH.

By developing and agreeing on clear objectives and specific targets for reaching persons with disabilities, beyond improving access and coverage alone, the quality of evidence of the impact of investing in inclusive WASH programming can be improved.

Some potential areas of impact to prioritize and explore from this analysis include:

- better health and increased access to health care
- improved opportunities for work and education
- reduced household financial pressures
- community engagement
- improved dignity and a reduction in disability stigma

Advocate for change. The need for inclusive and accessible WASH has never been greater.

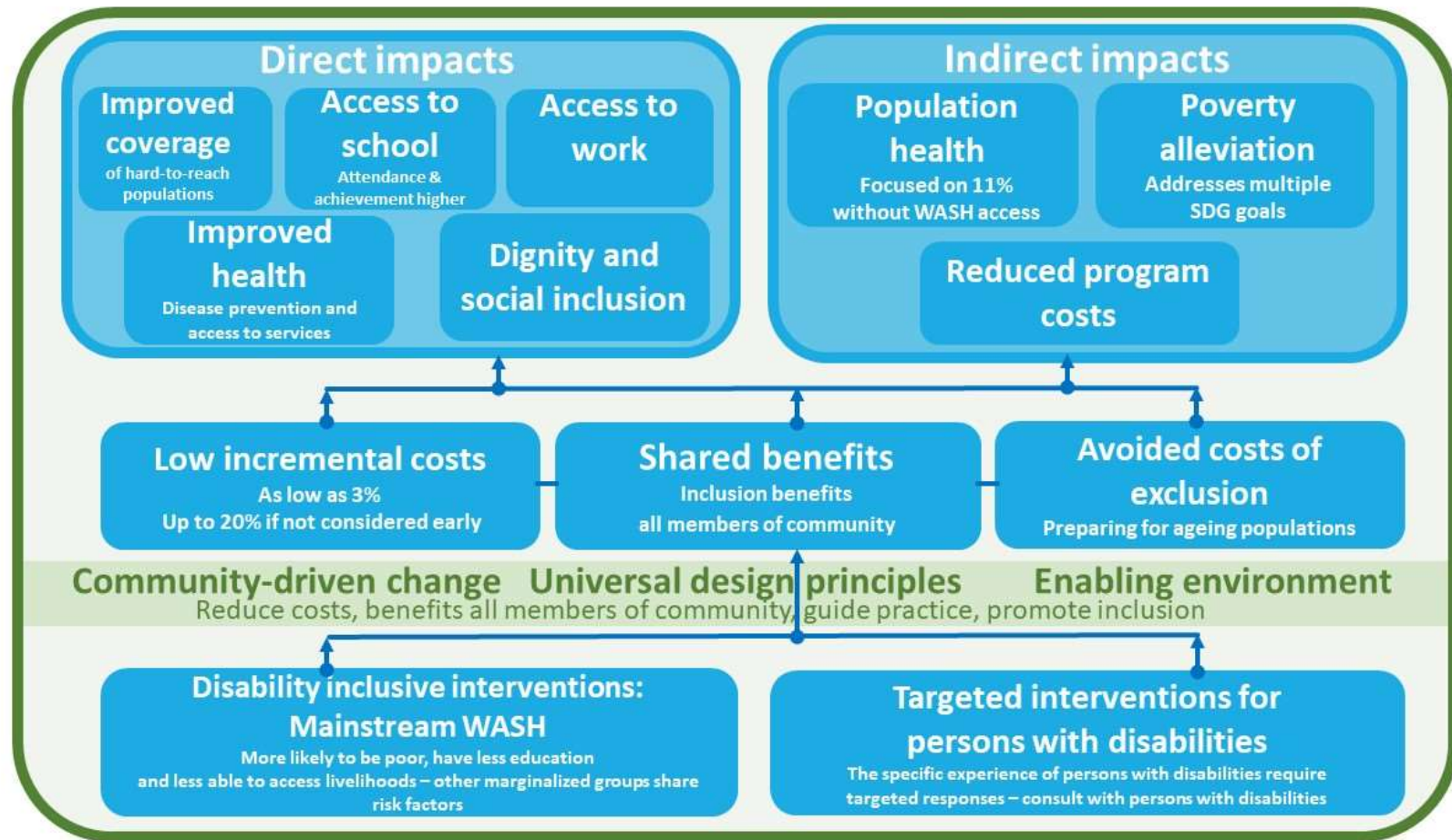
Hundreds of thousands of deaths can be prevented annually through better access to WASH – people with disabilities are among those with the most to gain from efforts to improve access to WASH.

Where there is reluctance to emphasize disability inclusion, highlighting potential direct and indirect benefits, and articulating how accessibility can be achieved in cost-effective ways, may help advocate for change. This includes demonstrating how current good practice may already be helping minimize costs.

Strengthening the case for inclusion in WASH should not dilute the messaging that WASH is a human right *for all*, and fundamental to the realization of many other rights and development targets. Caution is urged against arguing that cost-benefit concerns are the only imperative for action. The challenge is to deliver the right to safe WASH in cost-effective ways.

Up to 110 million people with disabilities have poor access to WASH facilities¹²

Figure 1 - Multiple pathways to impact: towards an investment case for disability inclusive and accessible WASH



¹² Based on estimates of 11% unmet WASH needs and 15% disability prevalence.

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About the series

UNICEF's water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) country teams work inclusively with governments, civil society partners and donors, to improve WASH services for children and adolescents, and the families and caregivers who support them. UNICEF works in over 100 countries worldwide to improve water and sanitation services, as well as basic hygiene practices. This publication is part of the UNICEF WASH Learning Series, designed to contribute to knowledge of best practice across the UNICEF's WASH programming. The documents in this series include:

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