

## International Disability Alliance (IDA) and International Disability and Development Consortium (IDDC) Inputs to the Thematic Debate on “Water, Sanitation and Sustainable Energy in the Post-2015 Development Agenda”

### Guiding questions

#### 1. What are the major obstacles to achieving universal access to safe drinking water and sanitation services?

Fifteen per cent of the world’s population comprises persons with disabilities – over one billion people. Over one in five of the world’s poorest people are disabled. Persons with disabilities and their families living in poverty are facing reduced access to: clean water and sanitation. The “responsibilities of States to respect, protect and promote human rights and fundamental freedom for all” is now formally recognised in the final outcome document of Rio 2012. In order to be consistent with human rights, planning for all phases of implementation of the rights to water and sanitation must be carried out consistently in adherence with the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (the CRPD). Safe drinking water and sanitation must be accessible to all people including those with long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments.

884 million people worldwide do not have **access to safe drinking water**. Assuming these people are the poorest of the poor, at least **177 million are likely to be persons with disabilities** (20% of poorest).<sup>1</sup>

Persons with disabilities are systemically discriminated against and invisible in development policies. Accessibility of water and sanitation, including toilets, and of related information, is especially important to persons with disabilities as a means to maintain people’s dignity, enable independence and social inclusion. In addition, cost is a barrier where domestic water is privatized and disproportionately affects the most vulnerable, including persons with disabilities. Frequently, development projects to provide clean water, toilets and sanitation do not generate benefits or allow equal access for people with disabilities, failing to take accessibility into account. Although the cost of making inclusive facilities is minimal compared to the costs of exclusion. For example a research carried out by the Water, Engineering and Development Center in Ethiopia presents evidence that building an accessible latrine can add less than 3% to the overall expense of school construction. Other obstacles to achieving universal access to water and sanitation for persons with disabilities include physical distance to water sources, inadequate information (including for those with sensory impairments) and water charges. Fees for water for domestic and personal use, and business use, can disproportionately affect poor and vulnerable groups.

Unsafe drinking water, poor sanitation, and insufficient hygiene practices, and inadequate disposal of human and animal waste have major health implications including causing diarrhoea and Neglected Tropical Diseases, amongst others. Access to safe and affordable water and sanitation facilities greatly benefit persons with disabilities and their families, improving nutrition and preventing death and diseases; reducing poverty and promoting socioeconomic development; labour saving; reducing hazards; and increasing dignity, self-reliance and independence.<sup>2 3</sup>

Sustainable development can only be achieved if it includes measures to prevent discrimination based on disability and ensure equal access to clean water and sanitation facilities, fulfilling the right to an adequate standard of living. IDA and IDDC therefore recommend an assessment and monitoring mechanism on lack of access to water and sanitation, to enact affirmative policies to ensure affordability and accessibility of water and sanitation for persons with disabilities living in poverty and extreme poverty.

According to the latest Joint Monitoring Programme report, going by current trends, in 2015, 0.9 billion people will still lack access to improved drinking water and about 2.4 billion people will still be without improved sanitation. Failure to achieve the water and sanitation targets will negatively impact on achieving other MDGs/sustainable development goals including health and education.<sup>4</sup>

According to WaterAid, the excluded are people who have been systematically discriminated against and these include: **people with disabilities, women, people living with HIV/AIDS, children and older people.**<sup>5</sup>

Persons with disabilities face many barriers in their efforts to gather and use water as well as their efforts/ability to use sanitation facilities. In addition to the obvious environmental and physical barriers such as inaccessible water points and latrines, inaccessible communication for people who are deaf to participate in water management and sanitation education, there are also attitudinal barriers and discriminatory practices which inhibit their ability to gather water at collection points. Persons with disabilities have reported being pushed to the back of the line at distribution points, and thus denied access to water.

Women and girls with disabilities face even greater barriers to inclusion due to double-discrimination on the basis of gender and disability. Data from around the world shows that women and girls are vulnerable to abuse and violence while collecting water, and that their privacy can be compromised /violated. Often women and girls with disabilities may be dependent on non-disabled relatives or family members for all water and sanitation related activities. This dependence makes it more difficult to pursue other activities (education, employment, etc.) and engage in community life on an equal basis with others.

### **Why Gender and Disability Matters in WASH<sup>6</sup>**

‘The water project failure rate in developing countries is astonishingly high - as many as

50% of projects fail for one reason or another.’

[http://www.water1st.org/crisis/sustainable\\_projects.html](http://www.water1st.org/crisis/sustainable_projects.html)

‘A study by the International Water and Sanitation Centre (IRC) of community water and sanitation projects in 88 communities found that projects designed and run with the full participation of women are more sustainable and effective than those that do not. This supports an earlier World Bank study that found that women’s participation was strongly associated with water and sanitation project effectiveness.’

<http://www.dworm.gov.vn/en/index.php?cires=News&in=viewst&sid=24>

‘Water supplies closer to home and operational do have the potential to dramatically reduce the collection burden of girls and women, but project failure is considerable worldwide... Water and sanitation can have a significant impact on girls and women if programming is focused on transferring real responsibility to women and girls rather than just assuming they’ll benefit.’

<http://www.waterworld.com>

We would argue that water projects that are designed and run with the full participation of women and girls with disabilities would be more sustainable and address the needs of more people in the community ensuring greater accessibility and inclusiveness.

The challenge of water and sanitation needs to be looked at through the lens of good governance, and good governance requires authorities to be fully transparent and accountable to all members of the community. This requires consultations with those who have the least access to programs and services, and responsiveness to those communities. To be seen as legitimate, the authorities need to involve persons with disabilities, including women and girls with disabilities and promote their greater participation in all decisions concerning water and sanitation.

With the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) having entered into force, disability is increasingly seen as a rights issue within the overall international development debate. The fundamental rights and principles enshrined in the CRPD should be reflected in all aspects of the sustainable development debate. Regarding water and sanitation issues in particular, articles: 6 (women with disabilities), article 7 (children with disabilities) 11 (situations of risk and humanitarian emergencies), 25 (health) and 28 (adequate standard of living and social protection) of the CRPD should be reflected in all water and sanitation debates, policies and programs.

## **2. How could a possible global goal on water look like? What could be appropriate targets for such a goal?**

IDA and IDDC recommend adopting a rights-based approach to food security and the right to water. Future sustainable development goals must be consistent with the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (the CRPD). Sustainable development can only be achieved if it includes measures to prevent direct and indirect discrimination based on disability and ensure equal access to clean water and sanitation

facilities, fulfilling the right to an adequate standard of living. The development and delivery of water supplies (and sanitation, sewage and waste management systems), should involve consultation and engagement with persons with disabilities to ensure these policies and programmes adhere to the right to an adequate standard of living and to the CRPD. Finally all assessment and monitoring mechanisms to be established must include indicators related to the capacities of the affected population, such as people with disabilities.

**Target:** Provide universal access for all, including persons with disabilities to safe drinking water at home and in schools, health centers and refugee camps.

**Indicator:** Proportion of accessible access points to water and sanitation for persons with disabilities.

---

<sup>1</sup> [http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/pdf/MDG\\_FS\\_7\\_EN.pdf](http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/pdf/MDG_FS_7_EN.pdf) (see World Health Organization and World Bank (2011) World Report on Disability. Geneva: WHO Press).

<sup>2</sup> Jones, H. (2013). Mainstreaming disability and ageing in water, sanitation and hygiene programmes. WaterAid UK.

<sup>3</sup> Jones, H. & Reed, B. (2005). Water and sanitation for disabled people and other vulnerable groups: Designing services to improve accessibility. WEDC. Loughborough: UK. (<https://wedc-knowledge.lboro.ac.uk/details.html?id=16357>)

<sup>4</sup> WaterAid: Equity and Inclusion: Reaching the excluded, available at: [http://www.miusa.org/idd/resources/files/watsanresources/equityandinclusion/at\\_download/file](http://www.miusa.org/idd/resources/files/watsanresources/equityandinclusion/at_download/file)

<sup>5</sup> WaterAid: Reaching out to the excluded: exclusion study on water, sanitation and hygiene delivery in Malawi, available at: <http://www.wateraid.org/~media/Publications/equity-inclusion-excluded-study-water-sanitation-hygiene-delivery-malawi.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> As quoted in WaterAid's session on Gender: Women and Girls available at: <http://www.inclusivewash.org.au/gender-women-and-girls>