

Analyzing Policy Blockages to Equitable and Inclusive WASH in Ethiopia

Key Findings

- Most policy documents state that WASH services are for 'all' but what 'all' means need to be unpacked and qualified.
- There is no clear implementation framework of policies to advice, guide and reinforce inclusion of the needs and rights of marginalized groups to WASH.
- Policy documents fail to present clear statements on what equity, inclusion and marginalized groups are.
- There is no uniform and shared understanding among stakeholders on the issue.
- Inaccurate data on the number of the marginalized and excluded affect policy formulation and investment that guide equitable and inclusive service delivery.
- Marginalized groups are not equally represented in existing polices, plans and programs.
- Decision making processes fail to target special needs of marginalized groups.



1. Introduction

WaterAid believes that access to safe water, improved sanitation and hygiene (WASH) is a human right. Access to WASH can make an immense contribution to health, education, productivity, and social development. These essential services underpin human development and transform lives enabling people to overcome poverty. As it is maintained in the WaterAid Ethiopia Equity and Inclusion Approach Paper (2012), women, children and older people, people living with HIV/AIDS, people with disabilities, residents of geographically remote and challenging areas, internally displaced people, informal settlers and slum dwellers are the most marginalized groups from WASH services in Ethiopia. All these sections of the society are identified as marginalized or excluded groups because they face a range of barriers in accessing WASH services. These group of people face environmental barriers such as infrastructural barriers (steps, narrow entrances, and slippery floors), and natural environment (rough paths, long distances), attitudinal barriers (prejudice, pity, isolation, and overprotection) and institutional barriers (lack of policies/strategies, knowledge, skills, appropriate designs) which limit their access to WASH.

The Growth and Transformation Plan (2010), indicates that Ethiopia's water supply coverage has improved from 19 percent in 1990 to 65.8 percent in 2010. During the same period, improved sanitation coverage increased from 4 percent in 1990 to 20 percent in 2010 (Joint Monitoring Program (JMP)). Even though much progress has been recorded in WASH service provision, there is a huge gap in addressing inequalities or addressing the need of marginalized and excluded groups who cannot access services for various reasons.

In a country that struggles with low levels of coverage and access to WASH, there is great temptation to increase general service coverage rather than targeting particularly disadvantaged or marginalized groups. This can rather lead to service provision being targeted to those who are the easiest and least expensive to reach and an inequitable distribution of services which further exacerbates existing inequalities in the society.

This paper attempted to identify and analyze existing policy level bottlenecks and came up with recommendations in realizing equitable and inclusive WASH. To achieve this, national policies, and strategic plans related to the provision of water, hygiene and sanitation, health, HIV/AIDS and disability were reviewed and analyzed.

Marginalized groups face the following barriers

Environmental barriers such as infrastructural (steps, narrow entrances, and slippery floors) and natural environment (paths, long distances)

Social barriers (prejudice, pity, isolation, and overprotection)

Institutional barriers (lack of clear policies and strategies, knowledge, skills, appropriate designs)

2. Existing Gaps in Policies

2.1 Mainstream sector policies of education, health and overall Development

The Ethiopian government's commitment to WASH is articulated in the 1995 FDRE Constitution. The Constitution in Article 90.1 states that "to the extent the country's resources permit, policies shall aim to provide all Ethiopians access to public health and education, clean water, housing, food and social security." Article 44 states that "All Persons have the right to a clean and healthy environment." Article 92.1 states also that the "Government shall endeavor to ensure that all Ethiopians live in a clean and healthy environment." Inclusion of the right to water and sanitation in the constitution signifies a legal entitlement, and provides the ultimate legal basis for policies, proclamations and plans needed to ensure the realization of this right..

Health related policy documents do not sufficiently addressed the special needs of some population in relation to WASH.

In the Health policy of Ethiopia (1993), there is a clear statement on the special attention that should be given to different segments of the population in the provision of improved health where women, children, pastoralist and urban poor are some. There is no mention of the WASH need of the marginalized.

In the Health Extension Program none of the hygiene and sanitation extension packages give comprehensive advice or guidance on how to accommodate the specific needs of marginalized groups. However, it is important to mention that the Personal Hygiene Extension Package has considered vulnerability of women in relation to menstrual hygiene and children in relation to personal hygiene and provides specific hygiene keeping inputs and considerations.

The issue of WASH is mentioned in the **Health Sector Development Plan (HSDP IV)** as one of the key measures required for good health. Among marginalized groups, pastoralists and women are identified as marginalized groups for the provision of improved health services. No explicit mention of these groups to WASH was made.

The Growth and Transformation Plan (GTP) also underscores the need for equitable economic growth in its overall objective and its strategic pillars. Most of the hard-to-reach groups are identified and discussed. It talks about cross-cutting sectors including women and children, HIV Prevention etc. With regard to WASH, Potable Water Supply and Irrigation Development are considered as one of the areas for infrastructure development. Importance was also given to water supply and sanitation as one of the crosscutting areas that is relevant factor in determining health outcomes. In Water sector, the discussion is mainly about water infrastructural development and water coverage rather than access to water, sanitation and hygiene to the marginalized. The need for equity and inclusion in WASH initiatives is not discussed.

Even though 7 hygiene packages were introduced in the HEP, none of these packages give adequate advice or guidance on how to accommodate the specific needs of marginalized groups.

2.2 WASH sector policies

The national water policy documents have shown mixed views on equitable and inclusive WASH services. The **Ethiopian Water Resources Management Proclamation** issued in 2000 has made no reference about equity and inclusion in relation to utilization and management of water resources to specific groups. In addition, there is no mention or reference to any marginalized/excluded groups that should be provided with water resources as per their specific needs.

Equity is rather mentioned in several places in the **Ethiopian Water Sector Policy 2001**. From the very beginning, the water resource management policy goal is “to ensure equitable utilization of available water resources in Ethiopia. Though the importance of equity is well established in this policy, the specific groups considered vulnerable or marginalized are not identified at all. The policy treats in a special needs of pastoral communities and underlines the inclusion of pastoral communities in every water and sanitation programs.

The **Water Sector Development Program (WSDP) Vol. 1** states that the social impact assessment at the sub-sectoral program and project level will specifically address how specific WSDP interventions will affect the livelihoods of vulnerable and marginalized social groups. Definitions of who the vulnerable and marginalized are neither exist in the WSDP nor referred from any legal document.

The **WSDP Vol. 2**, in section 11.3.3, recognizes social equity as a parameter of assessment for WSDP related interventions and listed vulnerable groups including: the poor, the elderly, adolescents, the unemployed, women, and ethnic minorities. There is also a clear note as to the need to review the viability of the social tariff, provided in the drinking-water supply policy as a means of enabling poor communities to cover operation and maintenance cost.

The **Ethiopian Water Resources Management Regulation** also gives no reference of equity and inclusion and vulnerable group or discussion on the cross cutting areas in the regulation. The absence of such equity and inclusion related provisions in this important regulation means there is no mandatory requirement for service providers to address the specific needs of marginalized groups.

The **National Hygiene and Sanitation Strategy (2005)** has three Strategic Pillars for Improved Sanitation and Hygiene of which one is about the production of IEC materials that reaches the vulnerable groups of population such as HIV/AIDS patients and Paraplegic individuals and their specific needs. With regards to addressing their special need, it recommends consultations with the groups to come up with appropriate solutions.

The Ministry of Health National Hygiene and “On-Site” Sanitation Protocol (2006) maintained that the special needs of “pastoralists and other groups with special needs” will be emphasized and addressed in all the 8 steps. These groups with special needs are not exhaustively identified either in the strategy or the protocol. Only HIV/AIDS patients and Paraplegic individuals are identified as people with special needs in these two documents.

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Universal Access Program (2005-10) has addressed the special needs of marginalized communities and gender mainstreaming with specific reference to women while UAP (2011-15) gives emphasis to poor communities that can be exempted from payments and certain responsibilities. But the second generation urban universal access program doesn't recognize the special needs of marginalized groups.

WASH Implementation Framework (2011) clearly states that the framework is established for all stakeholders including people with disabilities, disadvantaged and low-income groups. The framework provides specific issues to be considered for pastoral communities in the provision of WASH services. It also recognizes gender mainstreaming and social inclusion as strategies and principles of capacity development in the WASH sector.

Design and construction manual for water supply and sanitary facilities in primary schools and in health institutions provide relatively modernized and tailored references to the issues of marginalization in WASH services. The manual for primary schools discusses the essential requirements of WASH facilities to accommodate the needs of children with physical disabilities. The modifications should include building ramps with hand rails and widening of the internal space for easy use. The manual for health facilities recommends the location of toilets to be at accessible and visible locations.



2.3 Policies on Marginalized Groups

HIV/AIDS policy (1998) only recognizes vulnerable groups like long distance truck drivers, commercial sex workers and their clients, military personnel, youth groups, street children, refugees, and prisoners, but not mentioned anything about the needs of equitable and inclusive WASH services in relation to HIV/AIDS. Furthermore, the second strategic plan and management document of the Federal HAPCO (HIV/AIDS Prevention and Control Office) only acknowledges people with disabilities, elderly people, women, youth, and displaced people as specific population groups that should be targeted in all HIV/AIDS interventions; but no reference is made to attach the importance of inclusive WASH services for these target groups. In the National Plan of Action on Disability (2010), WASH is not clearly stipulated in the list of priorities identified by the NPA. In relation to equity, there is neither a clear nor an indirect reference to equity in this policy document.

The second Strategic Plan and Management document of the Federal HAPCO (SPM II) acknowledges people with disabilities, elderly people, women, youth, and displaced people as specific population groups that should be targeted in all HIV/AIDS prevention and control activities. However, references to the importance of inclusive WASH for these targets are not made.

3 Analyzing barriers for equitable and inclusive WASH services

3.1 Policy barriers

Universal definitions undermine special needs: As it can be seen from the collected data most of the policy documents aimed “all” as in “all people” to be fully inclusive but without clear definition. Most of the policies claim to address all segments of the population equally but what ‘all’ means is not unpacked. Here, it is important to note that ‘all segments of the population’ are not qualified and hence is difficult to say that vulnerable groups like persons with disabilities, old persons, or people living with HIV are specifically addressed. The term Equity is mentioned in several places in the policy but it is not defined in the documents.

Lack of implementation framework: Even though a range of policies in the WASH sector claims to address the need of all, these policies lack implementation framework to advice, guide and reinforce inclusion of the needs and rights of the marginalized groups to this basic service. The absence of such equity and inclusion related provisions in these important policies and regulations means there is no mandatory requirement for service providers to address the specific needs of marginalized groups.

Lack of shared understanding and definition: This is the other most important bottleneck in the implementation of equitable and inclusive WASH. Policy documents fail to present clear statements on what equity, inclusion and marginalization are and hence there is no uniform and shared understanding among the stakeholders about the issue. It is quite important to have good understanding and get consensus on whom are the marginalized or excluded groups and the reason for their exclusion, so that everyone having a stake in the sector understand these segment of the population and sufficiently consider them in the provision of equitable and inclusive services.

Lack of data on the size of excluded groups: lack of data on the number of these marginalized and excluded groups out of the total population have been found to affect the level of thinking among the stakeholders to plan for equitable and inclusive services. Absence of strong evidence on the proportion of the population categorized under these groups has impacted on the formulation of policies and procedures that guide service delivery.

Marginalized groups not equally represented in policies: results of the desk review indicated that some policies do not mention anything about equity and inclusion as well as any vulnerable groups while some others have attempted to identify few vulnerable groups and used the word equity. Hence, marginalized groups are not equally represented in existing policies, plans and programs. But, issues associated with women and pastoral communities are to some extent considered. The special needs for WASH by the marginalized groups such as people with disabilities, people living with HIV, children and older people, internally displaced people, informal settlers and slum dwellers have been overlooked in policies and programs.



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3.2 Other Barriers for Equitable & Inclusive WASH

Exclusion of the marginalized in the decision and policy making process: The importance of consultations with these vulnerable groups, to address equity and inclusion, fails short of the necessary actions that should be taken to address the inequality. For instance decision making processes are dominated by men and hence the WASH needs of women and girls are ignored. It was evident that marginalized/excluded groups are not familiar with the available WASH policies, plans and frameworks. They lack information about the commitment of the government in terms of issuing WASH policies to make WASH facilities inclusive to different groups of people who are marginalized from accessing WASH services.

Lack of comprehensive monitoring and evaluation framework: The issue of equity and inclusion was only addressed in a very fragmented and inconsistent manner to monitor and evaluate the progress. There is still lack of comprehensive monitoring and evaluation framework to ensure the provision of equitable and inclusive WASH services.

Lack of coordination between WASH & other sectors: Coordination and collaboration between WASH sector and others like specialized organizations working on the marginalized groups have been very weak and sometimes none existent. These organizations have given insufficient attention to provision of equitable and inclusive WASH services. Besides relevant Ministries representing marginalized groups like the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs, Ministry of Federal Affairs and Ministry of Women, Children and Youth are not closely working with the WASH Ministries to address the special needs of the marginalized in WASH.



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4. Conclusions

The extent to which policy documents capture issues associated with equitable and inclusive WASH services have shown a mixed view. Some policy documents somehow used key words like 'equity, inclusion, vulnerable groups' while others not mentioned anything about it. It seems that these documents generally agree on the existence of exclusion and marginalization of certain groups from WASH services. Some policy documents used universal definitions that are 'services for all' which can be taken as the point of intervention to qualify the phrase so as to clarify how services can be equitable and inclusive and how the marginalized groups can take the advantages. Lack of shared understanding and definition of equity and inclusion and exclusion and marginalization, lack of implementation framework to advice, guide and reinforce inclusion of the needs and rights of the marginalized, lack of evidence, lack of comprehensive monitoring and evaluation framework, lack of coordination between WASH and other sectors, and exclusion of the marginalized and the excluded in the decision and policy making process are some major gaps identified. Below recommendations are provided to improve the situation of the Marginalized in WASH.



5. Recommendations

Based on the gaps identified, the following recommendations were made to advance the provision of equitable and inclusive WASH for all including the marginalized and the excluded.

- WASH policies, plans and protocols should further provide clear and comprehensive implementation frameworks to guide proper implementation and enhance equitable and inclusive services. By doing this it can be possible to transform the lives of marginalized and excluded people through provision of WASH services.
- Existing policy documents should be periodically reviewed to put in place strong enforcement mechanisms so as to inculcate thinking in people's mind to bring about participatory planning and provision of WASH services are always based on the principles of equity and inclusion. Besides, formulation of new policies should recognize the voices of the marginalized and excluded groups by providing open space during consultations.
- Lack of uniform definition of equity and inclusion and marginalization has deterred efforts to address the specific needs of different groups. WASH coordination office should hold consultations among key stakeholders to come up with commonly agreed definitions on who these marginalized and excluded groups are and the strategies to address their special needs in the provision of WASH services.
- Since marginalization is an umbrella name for different sub-groups of people with diverse needs, there should be a clear understanding among all stakeholders that one intervention may not address the needs of all, as one size doesn't fit all. Hence, there is a need to introduce different approaches to address specific needs of the marginalized.
- WASH sector actors should be capacitated in terms of their knowledge on the challenges associated with the marginalized / excluded communities in the provision of services and on how these special needs can be met. By doing this it can be possible to enhance common understanding among stakeholders on the needs for equitable and inclusive WASH services so that all people regardless of their special situation can equally access the services.
- Organizations working on and for excluded groups should also be provided with the opportunity to work with WASH actors to learn more about the significance of WASH to the specific groups they work for to multiply impact.

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- Policy formulation process needs to appreciate consultation and participation of the excluded groups and their association and organizations that have the mandate to advocate for their rights. These groups should be provided with the necessary information on the existing enabling legal environment to help them demand their rights for equitable and inclusive WASH
- Sector monitoring and evaluation mechanism should have sufficient indicators to measure the extent to which provision of WASH services address the special needs and whether WASH services are equitable and inclusive. This will help to improve accountability mechanisms so as to address the needs of the marginalized groups. There is a need to put in place contextualized standards that can be replicated cost effectively.
- Existing partnerships among WASH Ministries should be strengthened and embrace other relevant ministries like the ministry of Labor and Social Affairs, Ministry of Women, Children and Youth and Ministry of Federal Affairs who are working for the marginalized and excluded groups.
- Available platforms like the Water and Sanitation Forum, WASH Ethiopia Movement, Forum for Learning in the Water and Sanitation should be effectively used to advance knowledge and good practices in the provision of equitable and inclusive WASH services.
- It is important to create platforms where specialized institutions and non-specialized institutions share knowledge and good practices in the provision of equitable and inclusive WASH. Existence of such platforms will help address the issue of exclusion more systematically through sharing knowledge, research, advocacy and creating technical cooperation and developing of manuals and standards.
- Further study is required on the links between WASH and exclusion to gather evidence for advocacy and influence sector policy makers. The different groups of people considered marginalized and their specific needs should be studied and an all inclusive WASH program should be designed to ensure the provision of WASH services for all.



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WaterAid transforms lives by improving access to safe water, hygiene and sanitation in the world's poorest communities. We work with partners and influence decision-makers to maximize our impact.

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