

March 2025

People Reached | Policy

POLICY OWNER:	Insights Department
POLICY APPROVED BY:	Global Director, Insights
POLICY CONTACT:	Global Director, Insights, Heather Arney, harney@water.org

Policy Contents

- I. [Policy Overview](#)
- II. [Policy](#)
- III. [Approval and Responsibilities](#)
- IV. [Additional Resources](#)

I. Policy Overview

Policy Statement

This document provides criteria for when to count people reached directly and indirectly via Water.org interventions. The definitions and criteria provided broadly align with WaterEquity's and WaterConnect's definition of people reached.

Clear, concise definitions for people reached directly and reached indirectly will:

- Ensure that the same definition is consistently applied to all interventions, regardless of impact channel or solution (i.e. Financial Institution - WaterCredit, Infrastructure, etc.)
- Reduce time spent determining when / how to count people reached
- Limit reputational risk by ensuring that Water.org credibly and consistently reports impact across internal and external stakeholders.

Tracking both people reached directly and people reached indirectly means Water.org will capture:

- The number of people who experience a verifiable change in their water and/or sanitation (WSS) access/service (in a manner consistent with the Joint Monitoring Programme's (JMP) safely managed and basic water and sanitation service delivery framework).
- The estimated number of people who benefit from an intervention or investment in other ways outside of maintained or improved services as defined by the JMP.
- The anticipated impact (potential people reached) of capital investment in the WSS sector that cannot be measured or verified by Water.org.
- Potential people reached as a result of policy and practice changes influenced by Water.org.

Doing so will:

- Advance and align Water.org's practice with other water and sanitation sector stakeholders that also report people reached from their programs.
- Enable Water.org to demonstrate the ongoing case for capital investment and mobilization to achieve and sustain universal access to safely managed services.

This is an internal policy document. Please see guidelines below on how to communicate people reached to external audiences.

Applicability

This policy establishes universal criteria for determining people reached and is applicable to departments and all interventions implemented at Water.org. It should be used when reporting impact internally and externally.

Governance

The Insights Department is the owner of this policy and is responsible for administering, reviewing, and making recommendations for updates or changes to this policy in alignment with business needs.

Violations

It is the expectation of Water.org that direct supervisors proactively manage their direct reports' compliance with this Policy. Non-compliance, from an employee or a direct supervisor, may result in progressive disciplinary actions consistent with the organization's established HR procedures.

II. Policy

1. People reached directly

People reached **directly** refers to cases in which persons experience improved, rehabilitated, or maintained water and/or sanitation access as a result of Water.org's efforts and/or WaterEquity's investment.

The people must rely on the water/sanitation service/access:

- For domestic purposes (drinking, cooking, handwashing, bathing, sanitation)

The people must experience the improved, repaired, or maintained change at one of the following locations:

- Category #1: Household or place of residence
- Category #2: Institutional settings (e.g. schools, health care facilities, workplaces, places of worship, and public spaces.)

The people must experience one or more of the following changes:

- Improved access: Access to a water or sanitation facility that meets the Joint Monitoring Programme guidelines of basic or safely managed services.

- Improved water quantity: increased volume of treated/protected water available to the household or institutional location.
- Improved water quality: the water should meet relevant local quality standards for type of use.
- Improved water availability/reliability: the improved water service should be available when needed.
- Improved wastewater management, including containment, transport, treatment, and/or proper disposal or reuse.

The change experienced by the people counted must:

- Occur as a result of a Water.org intervention and/or WaterEquity's investment. There must be a verifiable and credible link between Water.org's intervention and/or WaterEquity's investment and the change in access or service.
- Incorporate a repayable finance component. Water.org's Chief Global Impact Officer (CGIO) may approve exceptions to this requirement for its interventions. Repayable finance refers to borrowed money repaid over time.
- Meet the relevant Water.org or WaterEquity guidelines for reaching people living in poverty. The CGIO may approve exceptions to this requirement for Water.org.

2. People benefiting indirectly

People benefiting indirectly is a way to understand and communicate the number of people who experience benefits *other* than verifiable improved, rehabilitated, or maintained water and/or sanitation access/services.

When possible, Water.org can track and quantify people benefiting indirectly. To count people benefiting indirectly, Water.org and/or WaterEquity activities and programming must have credibly contributed to the benefits.

People benefiting indirectly fall under two main categories:

- Potential people reached
- People experiencing other benefits.

Potential people reached: People who MAY meet our direct people reached criteria, but Water.org and WaterEquity are unable to know and/or verify who benefited, when, and how they benefited. This includes:

- Advocacy and influence: people who may have improved WSS access from a system and/or policy level change.
- Capital investments facilitated by Water.org to non-Water.org partners: people who may have improved WSS access due to the capital investment; however, there is no reporting or way to verify if the capital resulted in improved WSS access.
- Strengthened value chain: people who we cannot verify as having improved WSS access as a result of a business accessing repayable finance. This scenario includes but is not limited to:

- WSS businesses that use loans to manufacture and/or sell WSS parts, components, and machinery.
- Businesses that serve other businesses where it is not feasible to credibly verify people with improved WSS access.
- WSS businesses that use the loan for operational improvements where it is not feasible to credibly measure or verify that the operational improvements led to improved WSS.

Other benefits: People who benefit from our work in ways OTHER than improved WSS access/services.

- Education: this includes the number of people who participate in informational activities and/or mass marketing where they learn about the importance of WSS and/or financing
- Gender equity and social inclusion: This includes the number of women and girls who are involved in from programs and activities that intentionally integrate a gender equity and social inclusion lens to the work.
- Environment: this includes the number of people who benefit from activities that improve people's environment outside of drinking water and sanitation, including water conservation, industrial waste treatment, watershed management. Specific examples include:
 - Water conservation: technologies or products that track, measure and reduce water consumption and/or water loss (where we are not able to measure a change for a person)
 - People who live within a catchment area of the participating partner or intervention but do not directly experience a change in WSS access due to Water.org's intervention. For example, an intervention may help conserve water in a basin, yet these benefits do not translate into improvements experienced by a utility's customer.
 - Another example can be seen in which wastewater treatment indirectly benefits people living downstream from a treatment plant and the larger water basin itself.

We anticipate additional climate and gender benefits to emerge once the climate and gender strategies are further developed.

3. Examples

The following tables provide examples of people reached directly, indirectly, and not counted at all.

Table 1 people reached directly, where we can measure and verify the person reached.

Type of borrower	Use of loan / proceeds	Outcome
Household	New water connection	Improve access
Institution: Food processor	Construct bathroom for employees	Improve access
WSS business: Construction company	Capital to construct a piped water system for households within a municipality	Improve access
WSS business: Supplies water to customers via a water tanker delivery	Repairs borehole	Improve access

Table 2 people benefiting indirectly, where we are unable to measure and verify the person reached or the person is benefiting in other ways besides improved WSS.

Type of borrower or activity	Use of loan / proceeds	Outcome
WSS business: Retailer of ceramic ware, focusing on toilet components	General working capital and refinancing	Strengthened value chain
WSS business: leak detection company	Capital is used to improve their leak detection technology	Strengthened value chain (in cases where we cannot measure or verify actual leak repairs)
WSS business: water truck delivery that services other businesses	Repair the borehole that sources the water	Improve access but only count people benefiting indirectly. (We are unable to measure and verify people reached directly in this business-to-business delivery)
WSS Business: water supplier	Install solar panels, replacing energy supply	Strengthened value chain, environment
WSS business: wastewater treatment	Upgrades billing system	Strengthened value chain
A capital provider invests in a financial institution that is not a Water.org partner and there is not	Meant for WSS, but unknown	Increased capital into the sector

reporting to the Water.org

Partner conducts safe water and sanitation awareness campaign	N/A	Education
---	-----	-----------

Table 3 Examples where we will not count direct or indirect people because the intervention activity and outcome is outside the scope of Water.org’s strategy

Type of borrower or activity	Use of loan / proceeds	Outcome
Institution: Textile manufacturer	Install industrial wastewater treatment technology	Improve freshwater quality, no domestic/human waste
Institution: Carwash	Water tank for washing cars	Strengthens carwash business, no domestic usage
Institution: farmer, agriculture	Water pumps for crops	Strengthens farmer’s business, no domestic usage
Business: plastic bottle manufacturer	Upgrades equipment to make more single use small water plastic bottles	Strengthens business
Business: water supplier	Upgrades reverse osmosis water treatment for single use small plastic water bottles	Strengthens business

Water.org staff members responsible for proposing, designing, approving, implementing, and managing impact interventions should work closely with Insights’ colleagues early in the process to determine how these criteria will be applied, whether and how people reached will be measured and validated, and how reporting people reached will occur.

3. Communicating our impact

It is critical to ensure that Water.org’s “people reached” internal and external communications remain accurate, clear, and in alignment with our brand.

Water.org’s current core messaging on the topic remains accurate:

- **To date, we’ve reached more than [number of people reached directly] million people with access to safe water or sanitation.**
- **To date, Water.org has changed more than [number of people reached directly] million lives with access to safe water or sanitation.**

Guidance for communicating “people reached”:

- Always include relevant qualifiers with the term “people reached” to ensure clarity, for example: people reached with access to safe water or sanitation.
- Use “OR” instead of “AND”, to acknowledge that some people experience water improvements while others gain sanitation benefits.
- Use “more than” instead of “nearly” - we do not “round-up” impact when referring to people’s lives.

Communication nuances:

The updated guidance on “people reached” accounts for specific nuances. It is essential to maintain discipline in our messaging to ensure consistency, accuracy, and clarity. Below are some examples to consider in messaging:

- **Impact beyond the household level** – the definition of “people reached” includes individuals who may experience improved, repaired, or maintained water or sanitation access outside their home (e.g. schools, healthcare facilities, public spaces, workplaces, etc.).
 - Avoid using the phrase “at home” when referencing Water.org’s total number of people reached, as this does not apply to all contexts.

Example: We’ve changed [number of people reached directly] lives with access to safe water or sanitation. ~~at home.~~

- **Reaching people living in poverty** – Reaching people living in poverty remains a priority and a core component in brand messaging.
 - When sharing people reached figures, Water.org will clearly distinguish between “people living in poverty” messaging and the total “number of people reached with safe water or sanitation” messaging.
 - This distinction clarifies that the organization is committed to reaching people living in poverty without promising that every single person in our collective people reached total does, in fact, live in poverty (according to our definitions).

Example: Water.org helps bring lasting access to safe water and sanitation to people living in poverty. To date, Water.org has changed more than [number of people reached directly] lives with access to safe water or sanitation.

An alternative example using “in need” as an approved qualifier: To date, Water.org has helped more than [number of people reached directly] in need get access to safe water or sanitation.

- **Direct vs. people benefiting indirectly** must always be communicated as two separate numbers. It is expected that people benefiting indirectly will start to be tracked, reported, and communicated in FY26

- To ensure that we do not double count people reached (e.g. if our capital invested and capital mobilized efforts impact the same person), direct and indirect impact must **never** be added together.
- Indirect impact including people that benefit in OTHER ways than improved WSS access/services (such as through education), must always be messaged separately from the direct people reached with access to safe water or sanitation number.

Examples:

- Advocacy:
 - We have reached [number of people directly] with access to safe water or sanitation through our direct interventions, and through policy and practice changes we opened the door to [number of people indirectly.]
 - Through our policy and practice changes, a potential of [X million Indonesians] will have access to affordable capital for water and sanitation improvements.
 - By working with local governments and institutions, we've helped shape water and sanitation policies that will increase financing options for millions of people in need.
- Investment and market influence:
 - Through capital investment partnerships we have connected [dollar amount] in investment capital, expanding opportunities for [number of people] to access safe water or sanitation.
- Your support has contributed to strengthening water and sanitation providers, servicing [number of people] with access to safe water or sanitation.
- Education and training impact:
 - Our programming has provided education and training on safe water and sanitation to [number of people], equipping them with the knowledge and resources to drive lasting change in their communities.
 - Through our financial literacy and technical training, we are helping families and individuals gain improved access to lasting water and sanitation solutions, reaching an estimated [number of people].

III. Approval and Responsibility

Any deviation from the definition to count people reached needs to be approved by the Chief Insights Officer.

IV. Additional Resources

Contact for Support

Sr. Manager, Measurement and Impact, mgoble@water.org, or please reach out to a member of the Insights team if you have questions about this policy or its applications.