

Foreword

An adequate and dependable source of water is needed to sustain human life, future economic development, and the integrity of ecosystems. About 884 million people lack access to safe water supplies (although the number of people without access to water in their homes is considerably higher) and 2.6 billion are without access to basic sanitation (JMP, 2010). Approximately 10% of the global burden of disease worldwide could be prevented with improvements to water, sanitation and hygiene and better water resource management worldwide. The burden of water-related diseases falls disproportionately on developing countries and particularly on children under five, with 30% of deaths of these children attributable to inadequate access to water and sanitation. Wastewater from industrial and domestic uses often reach the environment untreated or insufficiently treated, resulting in major impacts on surface waters and associated ecosystems.

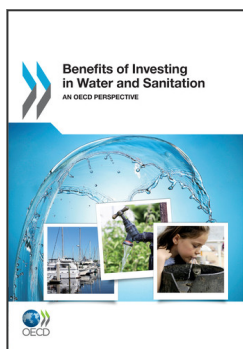
Investment in water supply and sanitation services (WSS) typically generates a number of economic, environmental and social benefits. Access to clean drinking water and sanitation reduces health risks and frees-up time for education and other productive activities, as well as increasing the productivity of the labour force. Safe disposal of wastewaters helps to improve the quality of surface waters with benefits for the environment (*e.g.* functioning of ecosystems; biodiversity), as well as for other economic sectors (*e.g.* fishing, agriculture, tourism).

However, the benefits of water and sanitation remain insufficiently documented, resulting in low political priority for water issues, and most likely, in sub-optimal levels of investment in water infrastructure. Where numbers are available (*e.g.* for health benefits), their reliability is a matter of debate between experts. More generally, information about the benefits of water and sanitation are usually hidden in various technical documents, where they remain invisible to key decision-makers in Ministries of Finance and Economy.

The purpose of the present report is therefore to draw together and summarise existing information on the benefits of investing in water and sanitation services and to present this information in a format that is informative for policy makers.

The report highlights that overall benefits from investing in water and sanitation are likely to be large, but that there are wide variations depending on the type of investments made along the water and sanitation services “value chain” and the local conditions (*i.e.* depending on the existing level of development of water and sanitation infrastructure, the prevalence of water-related diseases, availability of water resources, etc). The report throws light on the relative magnitude of the benefits emerging from various types of investment in water and sanitation. This should ultimately help with identifying areas of needed investment in the water and sanitation sector and with the prioritisation and sequencing of such investments.

The readers targeted by this report are policy makers in both OECD and non-OECD countries concerned with water, environmental policy, finance and development. The Report addresses specialists, but is also intended to be accessible to non-specialist readers. With this in mind, it tries to be jargon-free and sparing in its use of technical vocabulary.



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