

## **BEYOND WASH: INCLUDING CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES**



**An Activity report, Ms Wheel Chair Nigeria outreach Program to *School for the Blind Children Gindiri*, Plateau State on May 25<sup>th</sup> 2012**

**Ms Wheel Chair Nigeria**

**Supported by**

**WaterAid**



## **Introduction**

The benefits of Proper School facilities in combination with good sanitary and hygienic practices are enormous most especially in reducing the incidences of sanitation and hygiene related disease among children.

WASH in Schools encourages children's pride in their schools and communities by providing dignity and privacy. It enables children become agents of change or improving water, sanitation and hygienic practices within their families and communities. It helps children realize their full potential now and prepares them for healthy living as adults.

But just very few special schools have received the benefits that comes with WASH. Despite the significant role of improved school sanitation and hygienic education in the personal development of children and communities at large, cultural and social norms have been used over the years to deny children with disabilities the opportunity of developing themselves and contributing to development of societies. Children with disabilities are one of the most vulnerable and marginalized groups in today's society yet little effort seems to be made in ensuring that their voice count in design and implementation of WASH in school campaigns and projects.

**The school for the Blind Children Gindiri** is one of such schools that urgently need WASH.

This report covers major highlights, key lessons learnt and successes recorded during an outreach program by the Ms Wheel Chair Nigeria team led by the National Queen Ms Grace Jerry to the School for the Blind Children Gindiri, Plateau State, Nigeria on 25<sup>th</sup> on May 2012 . The outreach was part of activities aimed at bringing the attention of the world to the challenges children with disabilities face in accessing WASH facilities in schools and households even as we mark this year's (2012) children's day across the world.

It was more than an event for us; it was a call to Action! It was a moment to secure the future of hundreds of Nigerian children with disabilities who deserve to grow up accustomed to inclusive and adequate latrine use and proper hygiene behavior.

We are excited to share this report with you.

***Chukwuma Nnanna***

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## Welcome to School for the Blind Children Gindiri



Daniel 14, reading in Class

Located in Mangu local government area of Plateau State, the **School for the Blind Children** is one of Nigeria's foremost special schools established to cater for the educational needs of visually impaired children.

The school was established in 1953 by the then Sudan United Mission British branch (SUMB) as part of efforts aimed at ensuring that visually impaired children in Nigeria have increased access to quality education. Fifty nine years later, the Church of Christ in Nigeria (COCIN) and other Disability Rights Groups like CBM have

played important role in ensuring that the school remains relevant in the educational and Economic development of hundreds of visually impaired youths in Nigeria.

Education for the Blind has changed dramatically since School for the Blind opened its doors fifty nine years ago. Today the school has an enrollment of over 70 children with various degrees of visual impairment, they come from different communities in the country but have one goal; to become their dreams despite their challenges. The students live in a hostel in hostel facility and are supported by school teachers to learn the activities of daily living like movement and fetching and using Water among others.

A visit to the school brings you very close into the exciting world of persons with disabilities. It's just beautiful watching the students live full and exciting lives despite their challenges. Blessed with passionate and supportive teachers, every thing seems so perfect here except...

The Water and sanitation facilities in the school...



Visual Impaired Students Playing

### In the Beginning...

In bid to further bring WASH closer to Children with Disabilities, Ms Wheel Chair Nigeria Queen **Ms Grace Jerry on May 20<sup>th</sup> 2012**, payed an unscheduled visit to the School for the Blind Children Gindiri. The visit was aimed at the following

- Get first hand information on WASH facilities in selected special schools in Plateau State
- Access the hygiene levels in the selected schools
- Document lessons learnt for increased advocacy and action

**During the visit , the team interacted with the school Headmaster, students at the school and also took tour of existing WASH facilities in**

**the school. Below are some of our findings;**

- 1. The school lacks adequate and accessible water and sanitation facilities. This has affected school enrolment, attendance and even performance as many children suffer from water borne diseases and girls have to stay away from school during their menstruation.**
- 2. Students are forced to walk long distances in search water thereby loosing productive school time and increased exposure to risks.**
- 3. The visually impaired students are forced to use deep wells as the only water source especially during the dry season usually characterized by acute water shortages.**
- 4. Over time , the only Hand pump in the school has proven to be insufficient to carter for the needs of the school.**
- 5. The handle for the pump is heavy thereby making it difficult for the students to get water with relative ease**
- 6. All the pit latrines are almost filled up with no plans of emptying them anytime soon**
- 7. Although the hostels have just one hand washing basin, water and soap is hardly available within close range**
- 8. No form of hygiene education has been carried out by groups or agencies In the past.**

9. Teachers have little knowledge on importance of proper Hygiene education

10. The students need WASH in program that is inclusive of their needs



Ms WheelChair Queen interacting with School Management during visit



Ms Wheel Chair Nigeria Queen Tour of WASH facilities at School for the Blind Children Gindiri



**Ms Wheel Chair Nigeria tour of WASH facilities at School for the Blind Children Gindiri**

Worried by the unpleasant hygiene condition in the school , the Ms Wheel Chair Team in partnership with WaterAid Nigeria commenced preparations for what will be the first ever forum to raise awareness on importance of WASH to Children with disabilities especially as it concerned their school enrolment, attendance and performance. It was the Ms Wheel Chair Nigeria outreach program to the school.

### **Activity Description**

*A one day outreach program by the **Ms Wheel Chair Nigeria Queen** to the “**School for the Blind Children Gindiri**” as part of efforts to raise awareness on the importance of accessible and adequate WASH facilities in special schools especially as it relates to school enrolment, attendance and performance.*

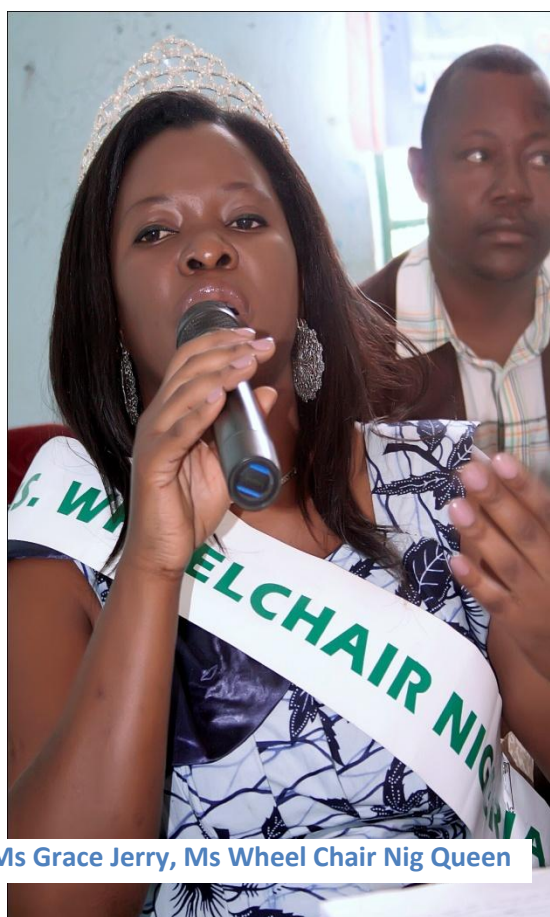
## Objectives

- To further raise the awareness on the importance of WASH in schools especially those serving children with disabilities
- To promote a more inclusive approach for WASH Programming in schools so as to benefit children with Special needs
- To interact with the children in the school so as to get their experiences in accessing Water and toilet facilities in the school
- To encourage Government, Stakeholders and partners to take necessary actions aiming at covering all schools with WASH facilities within the stipulated time.
- To open up space for eventual introduction of WASH in school campaign in the school

The event was held on the 25<sup>th</sup> of May 2012 at the school premises and had over 150 persons in attendance. Participants were drawn from Media, Government, Development partners, Disabled Peoples Association (DPO's), Students among others.

The event featured the following

- Songs by school Children and Mista Seth, a guest artiste



Ms Grace Jerry, Ms Wheel Chair Nig Queen

Goodwill messages from the following

- o Hon. Idi Waziri , Plateau State Commissioner of Water Resources
- Hon. James Lulu Senior Special Asistant to Plateau State Governor on disability Issues
- Mrs Jessica Vonkwat, Cordinator Country Women Association of Nigeria
- Ms Esther Chindaba, WASH Media Cordinatior Plateau State
- Mr George Yakzum, Director of Education COCIN
- Ms Grace Jerry , the Ms Wheel Chair Queen and Water Aid Ambassador on Disability in WASH.

*Special highlight of the event was an interactive session by the Queen and the children. The children shared their experiences*

*in getting and using water and toilets facilities in the school. Many of the students complained about the weight of the hand pumps and the absence of hand rails in the toilets. Others wanted water closer to the toilet. The concerns were different but one thing was common, they wanted a WASH facility that was inclusive of them and their needs. For young Halima she said*

***“No one thinks about us. The toilet is filled up and we still have to use it, its not good for our health. I have stepped on shit many times because it’s a pit and I don’t even know I come close to the hole in the toilet”***

After the interactive sessions, the Ms Wheel Chair Queen led the participants round the facilities in the school where she lamented about the high level of exclusion of persons with disabilities in the design and implementation of WASH facilities as evidenced by the neglect of the facilities in the school and called for intervention by Government and stakeholders.

According to Ms Grace, having adequate and accessible water supply and sanitation facilities in schools is a major factor in influencing whether children and adolescent girls attend and complete school. WASH helps ensure quality education which in turn leads to better health especially for girls. She further



called on Government and other stakeholders to increase investment in WASH for schools through the provision of facilities and Hygiene education as it holds great benefits for school children. She was quick however to advocate for the consideration of the needs of the children with disabilities when designing such facilities so as ensure equitable access for all. She stressed that safe water and improved sanitation and Hygiene remains a right for all children including children with disabilities hence efforts to ensure that all children get the benefits that comes with inclusive WASH in schools.

***“Children with disabilities have rights to water and sanitation too. Imagine visually impaired students getting water from a deep well that has little protection at the edge or forced to use pit toilets? This students don’t need pity or noodles as common with children day celebrations, they just ask for better access to WASH facilities”***

***-Ms Grace Jerry***



## **SUCSESSES RECORDED**



**Commissioner of Water Resources Plateau State Hon. Idi Waziri inspecting one of the Water Facilities in the school**

begin process upgrading existing toilets facilities to more accessible and modern for the students while better water sources will be provided in the school in addition to a provision of an overhead tank to serve as reservoir so as to ameliorate the challenges faced by the students especially during the dry season. A Technical committee was set up during the event by the commissioner comprising members of the Ministry of Water Resources, Plateau State Rural Water Supply Agency (PRUWASA) and State Water Board. The team is mandated to carry out further technical assessment of the WASH facilities in the school for immediate action. The Special Adviser **Hon.Jams Lalu** on his part also donated 20 set of mattresses to the school as a way of encouraging the educational development in the school and further pledged more support in the future from his office.

### ***Provision of WASH Facilities***

An important outcome from the event is the renewed wiliness of the State Government to priotize WASH in schools from now henceforth . This followed the announcement by **Hon.Idi Waziri** (Commissioner of

Water Resources) of plans by the Ministry to immediately



**Group Photograph of Guests during the event**

### ***Increased Awareness on Inclusive WASH***

A key success of the event is the level of awareness that was created before and after the event. The Ms Wheel Chair Queen paid advocacy visits to relevant stakeholders and Government officials such as the Kanke Local Government Chairman, Hon. Commissioner of Water Resources, Plateau State Water Board, Special Assistant to the Governor on Disability issues, COWAN secretariat in Jos and Highland FM (Radio Nigeria) Jos as part of efforts to mobilize support for the event. Also there were media appearance on " **keep clean and Healthy** " a Water advocacy Radio program on state owned radio station PRTVC the event enjoyed good publicity in both print and electronic media (NTA,PRTVC, Highland Fm, Standard Newspaper).

### ***Networking for Action***

*Among other things, the event provided a unique opportunity for the Ms Wheel Chair Team and other stakeholders to network, share ideas and identify key actions for making WASH for accessible for persons with disabilities in the state.*

## ***Institutional Support***

The Ms Wheel chair Team received a major support during the event. It was the donation of an office space in Jos by the Country Women Association of Nigeria (COWAN). This kind gesture was announced by the Cordinator of the Organization ***Mrs Jessica Vonkat*** during her goodwill message at the event. This is a major boost for our advocacy efforts in the state as it has rekindled our resolve to bring disability issues at the heart of development efforts in the state and country at a large, Thank you COWAN!. Early in April, the Ms Wheel Chair Team payed an advocacy visit to the COWAN team in Jos , the visit was aimed at exploring areas of partnership between both organizations so as to work closely in implementing community WASH projects that are inclusive of persons with disabilities in the state.

## **FUTURE PLANS**

1. ***Ensure that the voices of children are included in the new facilities.*** As a measure towards ensuring that the student are not just passive beneficiaries of the new WASH facilities promised by the commissioner of Water of resources, we will ensure that at least two representatives of the students (boy and girl) and the Ms Wheel Chair Queen joins the committee that is set up to provide the facilities in school. Furthermore, we will carry out accessibility audits before commissioning of the facility. It is hoped that this move will allow for proper consultation with and participation of persons with disabilities in the whole process from conception to post implementation of the project thereby promoting a Right Based Approach to delivery of WASH services
2. **Launch of THINK ME Project:** A major outcome of the event was the need and demand to intensify advocacy efforts so as to mainstream disability in the design and implementation of WASH Projects in Nigeria. To this end , the Ms Wheel Chair Nigeria team will renew discussions with **WaterAid Nigeria** team on possible areas of support so as to pilot an advocacy program in the Plateau state tagged the **THINK ME PROJECT**. ***The THINK ME PROJECT is a two year advocacy project that seeks to promote, protect and secure the rights of Nigerians with disabilities in WASH. A crucial component of the project is the Toilet Power, a WASH in school campaign that seeks to improve school sanitation and hygiene education for 3 special schools in Plateau State through the provision of accessible WASH facilities in selected schools and continuous hygiene promotion using women with disabilities as agents of change.***

### **3. Deepen advocacy in the state through Radio campaign**

We will deepen advocacy in the state through radio campaign on major radio stations across Plateau State. Early in March this year, the Ms Wheel Chair team produced radio jingles on inclusive WASH and subsequent broadcast on Highland Fm Jos. Efforts will be made to increase the reach of the broadcast through partnerships with other radio stations and subsequent translation in local languages and also produce short advocacy videos for distribution.

### **4. Influencing**

We are excited at the fact that the activity opened up space for further engagement with stakeholders especially Ministry of Water Resources, Ministry of Education, Office of the senior Special Assistant to the Plateau State Government on Disability issues and the Plateau State Rural Water Supply Agency among others. We will maintain communication with these agencies so as continue influencing at the top especially as it relates to increasing investment in WASH for schools in the state.

### **CONCLUSION**



**Group Photograph ,Ms Wheel Chair Queen with the Children at School during the visit**

Great strides have been made by Development partners, Government agencies and other stakeholders in safeguarding the well-being of children in schools

through the introduction of WASH in schools campaigns. Efforts have also been made over the years in ensuring that a good number of children have access to drinking water, sanitation facilities and hygiene education. As we come closer to 2015 target of attainment of the sanitation targets of the MDG's, it is important to renew commitments aimed at ensuring that even children with disabilities also receive the benefits of WASH.

### **About Ms Wheelchair Nigeria**

**Ms Wheel chair Nigeria is an initiative of the Mobility Appliances and Research Development centre (MAARDEC) designed to promote the rights and needs of persons with disabilities in Nigeria through the use of women with disabilities as agents of change. Early in 2011, WaterAid entered a partnership with Ms Wheelchair aimed at promoting a more inclusive approach to delivering WASH services in the country, this followed the appointment of the current Ms Wheelchair Queen, Ms Grace Jerry as WaterAid Nigeria official spokesperson on disability in WASH.**

## **Acknowledgement**

Our special thanks goes to the following for their generous support

- 1. WaterAid Nigeria**
- 2. Hon James Lalu** , Senior Special Asistant to the Plateau State Government on Disability Issues
- 3. Hon Idi Waziri**, Commissoner of Water Resources Plateau State
- 4. CBD NGO forum Jos**
- 5. WASH Media Network Plateau State Chapter**
- 6. Plateau Rural Water Supply Agency**
- 7. Plateau State Water Board**
- 8. Country Women Association of Nigeria (COWAN)**
- 9. Department of Education, Church of Christ in Nigeria (COCIN )**
- 10. Staff and Students of School for Blind Children Gindiri, Plateau State**
- 11. Higland FM Jos**
- 12. PRTVC Jos**
- 13. NTA Jos network centre**

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