



Scaling Up Solutions

How Social Businesses Transform Lives through Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene Innovation

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Imagine waking up each day not knowing if you'll have access to clean water or a safe place to go to the bathroom. For billions of people around the world, this is not just a fear but a reality. In the face of this daunting crisis, social businesses—enterprises working at the intersection of profit and purpose—are on the ground in the most affected regions, developing groundbreaking concepts and driven by the mission to ensure that access to clean water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) becomes a reality for everyone. Behind them is the Access Accelerator, a program designed to empower these innovators to scale their impact.

Each Access Accelerator provides capacity-building and seed funding to empower social entrepreneurs to scale their businesses within the WASH sector so they can have a measurable impact on the most affected communities. It comprises a six-month program with practical boot camps and mentorship in systems thinking, purpose orientation, and impact measurement and management. On completion of the program, participants are awarded seed funding to continue scaling their businesses. So far, the program has gone through two rounds and is about to launch its third. It has scaled 18 social enterprises with proven water, sanitation, and hygiene solutions. At the end of each Accelerator round, the organization publishes an [Impact Report](#) with the program's results (Reckitt and Yunus Social Business 2023).



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The Access Accelerator was founded in 2022 with the aim of harnessing the power of business to tackle the world's greatest problems. Social enterprises combine business efficiency with community impact. The Access Accelerator can enable access to WASH for more people while also driving economic growth, creating jobs, and reducing poverty. The program is delivered by Reckitt, a consumer health, hygiene, and nutrition company, in partnership with Yunus Social Business (YSB), an organization co-founded by Nobel Peace Prize Laureate Professor Muhammad Yunus and experts in social enterprise accelerators.



Kiddies & Brands

Hygiene education and access to clean water enable Nigerian children to practice proper hand washing.

Challenges with accessing WASH predominantly affect low to middle-income countries, but as poverty, urbanization, and climate change increase, so do the number of countries impacted. The [latest research](#) points to 135 countries facing water scarcity in 2024 (Hope 2024). Many factors play into this water crisis and exacerbate one another. For example, population growth and urbanization increase water demand, and climate change drives water scarcity. In some regions, conflict and migration act as both the cause and effect of water insecurity.

The last two Access Accelerator rounds were held in Nigeria and South Africa. Both countries face unique challenges regarding WASH that are driven by environmental factors, population density, and economic disparities. Nigeria faces one of the most significant WASH access gaps globally; according to [ICEF](#), only about 10% of the 218,000,000 population has access to a full range of water, sanitation, and hygiene services, and only 8% practice regular handwashing (UNICEF 2021). This contributes to water-borne diseases like diarrhoea, which cause [70,000 deaths in children under five annually](#) in the country (UNICEF n.d.).



At Reckitt we believe that we can have the most impact when we work as a catalyst for community-led innovation.”

Milly Dawson
Social Impact Manager,
Reckitt

In South Africa, increasing urbanization means that poverty is concentrated in rural areas. Consequently, urban dwellers have better access to drinkable water. **UNESCO** reported that 77% of children in formal dwellings have access to water at home, while the figure drops to 55% for children living in informal dwellings and 19% for those in traditional housing (UNICEF South Africa 2023). The same report found that around 6 million children (equivalent to the population of Missouri) lack access to safe water in their homes, and more than a third of South Africa's poor lack access to basic or improved sanitation. WASH is considered the second highest risk of sickness and death in South Africa for children under five. South Africa relies on rainwater to replenish the water needed for WASH services, but this can be unpredictable, especially in the face of climate change. The situation is critical in regions like Cape Town. After a three-year drought between 2015 and 2018, Cape Town nearly hit **Day Zero**—when dams become critically dry (Heggie 2024).



Kiddies & Brands

Kiddies & Brands has successfully implemented hygiene education programs in 30 primary schools, reaching thousands of children and educators.



In an early childhood development center, Kiddies & Brands Founder and CEO, Nneka Osili, teaches children about the importance of proper hygiene in preventing communicable diseases like cholera.

These countries offer valuable lessons in community engagement, governmental policy shifts, and technological innovation. South Africa's water restriction measures and public awareness campaigns have shown effective demand management, while Nigeria's community-based water projects demonstrate the power of local solutions.

In Nigeria, **Kiddies & Brands** seeks to educate both primary school children and their caretakers about the importance of hand washing. Kiddies & Brands has successfully implemented hygiene education programs in 30 primary schools, reaching thousands of children and educators. Their initiative has improved hygiene knowledge and practices among participants through activities like hand hygiene workshops, clubs, and community

engagement events. By integrating corporate partnerships, educational resources, and community involvement, the company strives to foster a culture of hygiene and health, reduce disease prevalence, and improve school attendance and overall well-being among children.

LiquidGold Africa is a success story from South Africa. They are on a mission to save water resources and apply circular economy thinking to handle toilet wastewater. Their solutions include a cartridge that can be retrofitted to any urinal to sanitize it without water. Even more impressive is their automated off-grid Diamond Reactor, a sanitation solution that converts urine into a dry biofertilizer. Not only does it produce a high-value resource, but the system also cleans the wastewater of pathogens without connecting to a sewer or treatment plant. Their solution prevents water pollution and enables easier, circular, smart management of wastewater and nutrients.



LiquidGold Africa

Orion Herman, LiquidGold Africa Founder and CEO, stands in his social business facility where their unique, waterless sanitation solution is created.

Johannesburg-based Murendeni Mafumo, founder of **Kusini Water**, has reimagined what water filtration can look like. His journey began with a question: How can we provide clean water to communities that lack even the most basic infrastructure? The answer came in the form of a versatile, portable, and affordable water filtration system that allows people in rural, peri-urban, and informal settlements to access clean, safe drinking water. Since many rural communities lack infrastructure, electricity is scarce or unreliable, so the system must work without electricity. The Kusini Water filtration technology works by using either solar energy or simple gravity. Their product uses a nano-fiber membrane to trap contaminants on one side and release clean water on the other. In addition, an activated carbon block made from locally sourced macadamia nutshells is used to absorb

How can we provide clean water to communities that lack even the most basic infrastructure?



chemicals like chlorine and pesticides. It's a solution as resourceful as it is effective, with the aim of providing safe drinking water to some of South Africa's most underserved communities.

Murendeni reflected on what drove him to innovate Kusini: "As someone who grew up in a community where water was a topic of conversation my whole life, and after working in the public sector for 9 years, I knew that the solutions to some of our most pressing issues were going to come from people most affected by those challenges. I knew that as a water scientist, I had a role to play."



Murendeni Mafumo, Founder and CEO of Kusini Water, holds his portable water purification system with the hope of making clean water accessible to communities.

An in-depth understanding of local communities' unique challenges and needs is key to facilitating the uptake of new services and technologies. Locally based social businesses are paramount to tackling societal issues such as the water crisis. They offer decentralized solutions that can significantly improve current systems in a faster, more agile, and less disruptive way than traditional top-down approaches. Plus, they know their demographic better than anyone.

The last few years have seen game-changing innovations from social businesses in the WASH sector. However, for social businesses to have an impact and grow at the scale and pace needed to tackle water-related problems, they urgently need financial and developmental support.

Sergio López Ramos, Executive Director of Acceleration & Strategic Sustainability at Yunus Social Business says, "Addressing the gap in access to WASH can't be tackled by public investment alone, as the countries affected are also facing rapid population growth. Social entrepreneurs are well-placed to fill this gap, and it's clear that there are a lot of great ideas



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Murendeni Mafumo
Founder and CEO,
Kusini Water

and off-the-grid solutions out there. By expanding their reach and scope, the Access Accelerator is proving that, with the right support, local entrepreneurs can be at the forefront of global change.”

In the fall of 2024, Reckitt and YSB opened the call for applications for the third Access Accelerator. The program will again include six entrepreneurs from Nigeria, where it has already established a presence and a proven track record in scaling social businesses. The Accelerator will also expand into a new territory, Kenya, where the program will select three social businesses as a pilot with the intention of including more businesses in the future. [Around 40% of Kenyans lack access to safe water.](#)



The scope of the businesses accepted will also expand to include those that aim to improve sexual and reproductive health (SRH) through WASH solutions. Kenya has an estimated 1.4 million people living with HIV—one of the highest rates in Sub-Saharan Africa. Meanwhile, [Nigeria had one of the highest number of AIDS-related deaths in 2023 across countries worldwide](#) (Statista 2024). Inadequate WASH facilities, including unsafe drinking water and poor sanitation, can make people living with HIV more susceptible to opportunistic infections. WASH is critical in addressing sexually transmitted infections (STIs). People need access to clean water to manage symptoms and take oral medications, and WASH plays an essential role in the hygienic use of contraception. Access to clean water and sanitation facilities is also crucial for effective menstrual hygiene and improving the lives of women and girls. Without clean water, decent sanitation, and good hygiene practices, menstruation can negatively impact women’s daily lives, and pregnancy and childbirth pose greater health risks. The Access Accelerator hopes that including SRH in its program can help play a part in solving these WASH-related challenges.

Locally based social businesses are paramount to tackling societal issues such as the water crisis.



As the Access Accelerator continues to empower social businesses to address these critical challenges, the program is not only providing immediate solutions but also laying the groundwork for a more sustainable and equitable future. Looking toward 2030 and the goal of universal WASH access, the work being done today will be instrumental in achieving that vision—a world where no one is left behind in the pursuit of health, dignity, and prosperity. After all, access to clean water and sanitation is not just a health issue; it is a fundamental human right.



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