

Resilience Recommendations for the Biden-Harris Administration

Increased U.S. government investments in local systems and actors to promote resilience now will save lives and reduce overall costs

Introduction

For the first time in the last decade, the world is backsliding in the fight against global poverty. While COVID-19 and its economic and social impacts are the latest challenges to a sustainable and improved future, increased conflict, a changing climate, and economic downturns have driven **increased hunger** year-on-year since 2014. **One in three health care facilities** do not have handwashing facilities, and acute climate **hazards are intensifying**. Current and future shocks, such as these, are far more difficult to respond to if not adequately prepared for, as the international community has seen amid the pandemic. Resilience investments save lives, mitigate shocks, and help protect U.S. national security. InterAction, the largest U.S.-based coalition of international non-governmental organizations (NGOs), compiled the following recommendations to help the Biden-Harris Administration restore U.S. global leadership and mitigate future shocks.

Context

The World Food Program (WFP) projects that the number of people facing acute hunger will have doubled to 270 million in 2020 due to the impacts of COVID-19. The Standing Together for Nutrition Consortium also estimates an **additional 9.3 million children** will suffer from wasting by 2022—a severe form of malnutrition that leaves children up to 11 times more likely to die than their well-nourished peers. Malnutrition increases susceptibility to illness and infection, reducing resilience to future disease outbreaks. The pandemic places extraordinary strain on the **40% of households** that lack access to handwashing facilities and on water and sanitation utility companies' solvency and the inputs they rely on, from freshwater ecosystems to soap and chlorine.

Climate change and biodiversity loss have led to the depletion of natural resources, higher temperatures, more frequent and extreme weather events, and increased crop failures and water insecurity. Water insecurity is exacerbated by nature loss and climate change (e.g., droughts, floods, increasing climatic variability), and results in fewer people with access to safe and sustainable water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) services to maintain public health, thus aggravating the risk of destabilizing disease outbreaks. Water insecurity can also increase crop failures, as irregular rainfall impacts livelihoods, food security, and rural-urban migration. The global climate crisis poses a rising threat, particularly to children's health and development, access to water, shelter, nutrition, education, and a child's very survival and future potential, with even more harmful impacts on at-risk groups. Additionally, more cities are likely to run out of water as more people compete for scarce and unsustainably managed natural resources, igniting and exacerbating conflict over shared waters at the local, regional, and transboundary levels.

The Biden-Harris Administration and Congress should rebuild U.S. leadership to address the widespread impacts of current and future shocks, such as COVID-19; climate change and nature loss; rising food insecurity; and conflict. Proactively investing in resilience mitigates the need for costly humanitarian interventions later by helping communities adapt to, prepare for, and cope with shocks and stresses by reducing vulnerability and promoting inclusive economies. **A study in Kenya and Ethiopia estimates that** over 20 years, every \$1 invested in resilience will result in \$2.90 in reduced humanitarian spending. There is a need for greater investments in resilience, including to ensure food and nutrition



security through shocks and stresses; access to reliable, affordable, and sustainable water supplies; and resources for climate adaptation and natural resource management.

USAID has begun this work, creating the R3 family of bureaus (Relief, Response, and Resilience) to address how humanitarian response, development assistance, and peacebuilding programs align strategically across and within country programs. The Biden-Harris Administration should build on these efforts to increase investments in resilience.

Some examples of resilience investments are: social protection programs, including cash transfers to preempt use of harmful coping mechanisms; strengthening livestock markets; adequate and safe housing; household access to markets, thus savings, credit; drought cycle and disaster risk management; investments in natural resource management; agricultural and livestock insurance schemes; livelihoods diversification; expanded forecasting and climate services; contingency funds for drought management or management of other shocks; strengthening institutions including health and education systems; reducing disparities, including gender-based; and preventative nutrition investments such as multiple micronutrients for pregnant women and breastfeeding support.

Recommendations

Scale up proven water security, WASH, agricultural, nutrition, and climate/natural resource management investments that enhance resilience and self-reliance.

- **Increase focus on recognizing and building on local, long-term capacity; strengthening institutions including health, education, and governance systems; elevating the rights, agency, and participation of populations with unique risks** such as children, women, those with disabilities, and migrants.
- **Invest in early warning systems** for water security and WASH, climate shocks, and food shortages or famine, such as the Famine Early Warning System Network (FEWSNET), and be prepared to act to 1) prevent such events when feasible; 2) respond incommensurate and supportive ways when such events occur; and 3) ensure continuity of essential services and their quality during crises.
- **Boost incentives in both urban and rural areas for climate-smart, sustainable agriculture practices** to decrease vulnerabilities of small-scale farmers—particularly women and young people—by taking an agroecological approach to improve resource efficiency, enhance food security, preserve biodiversity, protect livelihoods, and promote good governance of both human and natural systems.
- As a means of building resilience, **elevate the role of climate adaptation and considerations into non-climate development programming** that goes beyond “do no harm” to achieving climate mitigation and resilience outcomes. Resource this type of work through the U.N. Adaptation Fund and U.S. bilateral adaptation funding and demonstrate U.S. commitment by making domestic resilience commitments at COP26 and rejoining the Paris Agreement to catalyze global action and ensure credibility and diplomatic leverage.

Build upon [USAID’s commitment](#) to better transition between humanitarian and development assistance.

- **Reduce underlying vulnerabilities that contribute to humanitarian need and lay the foundation for longer-term resilience.** Further refocusing development assistance on longer-term investments in chronically vulnerable communities would build resilience and sustainability, increase well-being, and facilitate inclusive economies.



- **Improve the transition between humanitarian and development programs** (including layering, sequencing, and integrating where appropriate) so programs can adapt to simultaneous shocks and stresses, such as COVID-19 impacts on top of increasing violence and displacement. This could include establishing a fund focused on bridging the gap between emergency response and the onset of development programs; improving donor, implementer, and local coordination in country programs; increased use of crisis modifiers in grant agreements; longer-term programming; and more flexible funding across sectors when possible.
- **Work with Congress to improve and authorize U.S. consideration of, and strategic support for, improving the resilience of developing countries to shocks and stresses** that challenge sustainable, inclusive economic development, peace and stability, governance, and self-reliance. Revise and renew USAID's resilience policy and program guidance and cultivate a whole-of-government approach to support national commitment to building resilience.

Create or build upon structures and mechanisms that reinforce resilience as a core priority of U.S. foreign policy.

- **Quickly appoint qualified experts** to the Associate Administrator for Relief, Resilience, and Response (R3), the Assistants to the Administrator for the Bureau for Resilience and Food Security, and the Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance positions. These positions are critical to elevate resilience challenges in interagency and external fora and ensure strategic policy coherence on resilience across USAID bureaus. As the Resilience Leadership Council leaders, they should increase that group's transparency and stakeholder engagement.
- **Ensure global water, food security, climate, and urban and natural resource management issues**, which impact national security, are appropriately integrated throughout U.S. defense, diplomatic, commerce, and development strategies, programs, and priorities, with the National Security Council as a core interagency coordination mechanism.
- **Ensure water security, sustainable access to WASH, food security, and nutrition are a core focus of the COVID-19 Task Force** to address pandemic disease threats and their role in destabilizing countries, increasing fragility, and national security risks.


About InterAction's Working Groups

The Food Security, Nutrition, and Agriculture Working Group is InterAction's advocacy arm covering humanitarian and development issues relating to hunger and malnutrition. The working group supports legislative advocacy on all relevant food security, agriculture, and nutrition appropriations accounts; relevant bills and resolutions including—but not limited to—the U.S. Government's Global Food Security Strategy, Feed the Future Initiative, Food for Peace, USAID's Multi-Sectoral Nutrition Strategy, and international food aid titles within the U.S. Farm Bill; engages with U.N. agencies and other multilateral organizations and entities; and ensures that Congress continues to prioritize food security and malnutrition as necessary components for implementing sound, impactful, and inclusive U.S. foreign policy.

The Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene (WASH) Working Group seeks to improve U.S. government policies related to WASH issues in order to increase sustainable access to these basic services in the developing world, improve the integration of WASH across development sectors, and prioritize service access to communities most in need. The group encourages partnerships among private, public, and non-profit organizations in the water sector.

InterAction's Climate Advocacy Working Group generates a greater understanding of how climate change impacts development and humanitarian goals and urges the U.S. government, the U.S. Congress, United Nations, and international





financial institutions to take aggressive steps to mitigate climate change and support vulnerable communities to adapt to its effects.

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About InterAction

InterAction is a convener, thought leader, and voice for NGOs working to eliminate extreme poverty, strengthen human rights and citizen participation, safeguard a sustainable planet, promote peace, and ensure dignity for all people.

