



NGO COMMUNITY RESPONSE TO THE U.S. GOVERNMENT GLOBAL WATER STRATEGY 2017-2022

October 2021

The InterAction Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene (WASH) Working Group welcomes the opportunity to comment on the U.S. Government Global Water Strategy 2017-2022 and the upcoming strategy revision.

Access to safe water, sanitation, and hygiene has been a cornerstone of U.S. development and diplomacy policy since the passage of the Senator Paul Simon Water for the Poor Act in 2005 and its subsequent update in 2014—the Senator Paul Simon Water for the World Act. In addition to providing reliable access to clean drinking water and adequate toilets, WASH is critical to global health; agriculture and food security; climate mitigation and resilience; education; and women’s economic empowerment.

As the world continues to address the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, the next iteration of the Global Water Strategy must incorporate lessons learned from the pandemic as well as expand its focus to ensure that growing, ongoing challenges—such as climate change and global health security—are integrated across the Strategy objectives. An updated Strategy must also reassert U.S. leadership on a global stage through alignment with current global WASH goals and targets, including Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 6 by 2030.

This collective response was generated through feedback assembled during the USAID-organized Look Back Assessment as well as separate dialogue with Member NGOs of InterAction’s WASH Working Group.

Strengthening Implementation Of The Current Global Water Strategy

The Global Water Strategy should address the evolving nature of foreign assistance with emphasis on how effective program implementation depends on agencies such as USAID working in collaboration with local communities. Specific plans for the deepening of systems across WASH, with greater inclusion of sanitation, should be included. Changes should include a strengthened focus on community-led, decentralized programming that addresses inclusivity and local WASH challenges and needs.

MAINTAINING PROGRESS IN STRENGTHENING GOVERNANCE, FINANCING, AND INSTITUTIONS IN THE WATER SECTOR AT ALL LEVELS REQUIRES FURTHER PARTNERSHIP ACROSS BOTH THE PUBLIC AND PRIVATE SECTORS. The strategy should specifically seek out smaller, nontraditional partners for a “whole of society approach” that fosters national ownership and accountability of WASH services. The strategy should work with partners to increase inclusivity of women, disabled, and native populations.

USAID SHOULD INCORPORATE MORE OUTREACH BETWEEN MISSIONS AND COMMUNITIES TO ENSURE WASH PROGRAMMING IS EFFECTIVELY TARGETING LOCAL NEEDS AND SUPPORTING WASH SYSTEM



SUSTAINABILITY AND CAPACITY. There should also be consideration for program and stakeholder alignment sub-nationally, so that localized programs are supported across governance units, such as municipalities, which share joint outcome areas where WASH is involved (e.g., NTD/health programs and WASH). Additionally, USAID can better coordinate activities across sectors at the district level and link this coordination at the national level. Local government coordination should include civil servants beyond the WASH sector, including public health professionals, educators, and other municipal workers. Coordination should also be happening within the WASH sector to ensure holistic outcomes to WASH systems. This coordination should include sanitation workers and utility workers. In recognizing the WASH challenges women and girls face, the strategy should confront the lack of female representation in the sector both nationally and sub-nationally and how to unlock economic opportunities for women. Participatory planning, as well as effective monitoring and evaluation, can and should be broadened among stakeholders.

Addressing New And Ongoing Wash Challenges

Even in the five years since the last Global Water Strategy was created, the world has evolved, requiring even greater global cooperation around climate change, global health, and economic growth. The revised strategy should elevate ongoing and new challenges that were not adequately addressed or integrated into the current strategy. This includes:

EMPHASIZE LINKAGES BETWEEN WASH AND CLIMATE CHANGE, GOING BEYOND IN WATER RESOURCE MANAGEMENT AND INCLUDING THE ROLE OF WASH IN ADAPTATION AND RESILIENCE. As denoted in Executive Order 13990, the Biden Administration is committed to putting the climate crisis at the center of U.S. foreign policy and national security. Climate change disrupts weather patterns, leading to extreme weather events and unpredictable water availability, as well as exacerbating water scarcity and contaminating water supplies. Four billion people—almost two-thirds of the world’s population—experience severe water scarcity for at least one month each year. Therefore, climate mitigation, resilience, and adaptation should be integrated across the new strategy to help communities prepare for future natural disasters and currently changing climate patterns that impact water and sanitation services.

On climate:

- The new strategy should integrate WASH and water-related climate measures within agency plans for the Department of State, USAID, Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC), and the International Development Finance Corporation (DFC) to align with their specific climate strategies.
- Current and projected needs for water resources and WASH should include holistic analyses of resource draws, such as meeting inclusive WASH access, agricultural needs, public health and healthcare facility needs, population growth, water scarcity challenges, etc. WASH and water scarcity cannot be sustainably addressed without integrated understanding of resource draws. These projections should include, where possible, potential impacts on disabled and native populations, women and girls, and aging populations.
- Climate Risk Indices (e.g., UNICEF’s Children’s Climate Risk Index) could be included in Annex B: Supporting Data for the Selection of Water for the World High Priority Countries.

- The updated Global Water Strategy should give further emphasis to regenerative agriculture, including water resource management and sustainable irrigation and its linkages to food security and sustainable agricultural systems in its overarching strategic objectives and approach and throughout the strategy.
- The strategy should consider the intersection of climate change, water scarcity, water access, and conflict, as the U.S. Government seeks to implement the recently created Global Fragility Strategy.
- Consider making “strengthening linkages between climate change and WASH” a shared objective.

STRENGTHEN LINKAGES TO GLOBAL HEALTH, INCLUDING HEALTH SYSTEMS STRENGTHENING AND PANDEMIC PREPAREDNESS. WASH is critical to meeting many of the U.S. commitments in global health, such as ending preventable maternal and child health, improving nutrition and preventing acute undernutrition, and preventing the spread of novel viruses, antimicrobial-resistant diseases, and neglected tropical diseases.

- Strengthening the linkages between WASH and global health outcomes and global health security. The strategy should seek transparent coordination between USAID’s Global Health Bureau and the Center for Water Security, Sanitation, and Hygiene.
- Incorporating lessons learned from the COVID-19 pandemic with a focus on the role of WASH in pandemic preparedness, including strengthening health systems, strengthening the resilience of utility providers, elevating infection prevention and control (IPC) interventions, and sustaining hand hygiene promotion and behavior change.
- Considering sanitation professionals as essential workers who need to be protected from infection and supported for service continuity to elevate the prioritization of the role of the sanitation sector in response to global health crises. Similarly, sanitation should be included in IPC surveillance methods, given the recent ability to use wastewater to predict upcoming COVID-19 surges and track asymptomatic prevalence. Urban sanitation and non-sewered sanitation should be included as areas of focus.
- Integrating WASH needs of healthcare workers within major global health campaigns, including frontline workers’ rights and vaccine distribution.

PRIORITIZE EQUITABLE ACCESS AND AFFORDABILITY FOR VULNERABLE POPULATIONS. The current strategy emphasizes WASH inequality across countries but fails to consider inequalities within countries. To reach universal WASH access, the strategy should continue to prioritize those who are most in need of WASH, including those living in informal settings and marginalized populations; women and girls; and people living with disabilities. Children and youth, who are arguably most vulnerable to water-borne diseases and at an ‘extremely high risk’ of the impacts of the climate crisis, must also be prioritized. Reaching these populations means both ensuring their access to services and giving them specific consideration as stakeholders in planning and capacity building.

PRIORITIZE INTERVENTIONS WHERE POPULATIONS ARE INCREASINGLY IN NEED, SUCH AS URBAN AND INFORMAL SETTLEMENTS. With increased urbanization across the Global South and widening inequality in these settings, it is important to consider the challenges for providing WASH in growing urban settings, including water and sanitation infrastructure, management, and governance.



BOOST INVESTMENTS IN MULTI-USE WATER SYSTEMS. Water scarcity and climate change strain the availability of safe and improved water sources. Multi-use water systems work to improve water resource management by simultaneously considering WASH and agricultural activities.

ADDRESS THE TARGETING OF WASH ACCESS AND THE DEPLETION OF WASH RESILIENCE WITHIN HUMANITARIAN CONTEXTS. While the first iteration of the Global Water Strategy mentions building bridges between water management, humanitarian assistance, and longer-term food security to ensure sustainability, it fails to address the direct targeting of water and sanitation infrastructure and personnel as tools of conflict. These attacks necessitate that the Department of State’s agency-specific plan account for diplomatic engagement on both conflicts over water and attacks on water. In addition, to build resiliency against such attacks, the U.S. Government must support countries to build a WASH sector capable of consistently providing high-quality water and sanitation services in emergencies and linking life-saving humanitarian responses to the development of sustainable water and sanitation systems for all.

INCLUDE THE ROLE OF WASH AS A NECESSARY ENABLER FOR ECONOMIC GROWTH. COVID-19 has shown us the WASH needs across numerous sectors for supply chains and economies to function. From food markets, to schools, to transportation hubs, WASH access is needed to enable the return of economic functioning in health crises.

Accelerating Progress Toward The Global Water Strategy Objectives

Many components of the 2017-2021 Global Water Strategy remain critically important to realizing progress on water resource management and achieving sustainable access to safe water and sanitation services. Nevertheless, there are catalytic means to further those objectives, including:

ADDRESSING THE NEED FOR WASH NOT JUST IN COMMUNITIES BUT ALSO IN INSTITUTIONS, SUCH AS HEALTH CARE FACILITIES AND SCHOOLS, AS WELL AS PLACES OF BUSINESS SUCH AS MARKETS. USAID’s prior GWS agency plan mentions integration of WASH into schools and clinics, but given the importance of WASH in these settings in achieving other USAID priorities such as preventing child and maternal deaths, supporting economic growth, and ensuring girls’ have access and complete secondary school, more specific goals and approaches should be laid out in the new strategy. Access to WASH is also required in markets and transportation hubs to stop the spread of disease and facilitate economic activity.

BETTER DEFINITION AND ELEVATION OF APPROACHES TO INCREASED ACCESS TO SANITATION SERVICES. Promoting sustainable access to safe drinking water and sanitation services should remain a key objective of the refreshed strategy, but whereas the issues and challenges surrounding water (supply and resources) are prominent from the Executive Summary onward, sanitation solutions are less well articulated. The sanitation target should include “safely managed” in line with the drinking water target. In addition, there needs to be an articulation of inclusive sanitation goals, including those that address the needs of women and girls, disabled populations, and dense urban populations.

CREATE TARGETS FOR SYSTEMS STRENGTHENING. Given the interdependence of other GWS objectives on strong systems, expanded targets should measure social incentives and practices, institutional capacity, legal frameworks, and financial systems. For example, recent gains in hand hygiene as a result of increased attention during the COVID-19 pandemic are proof that behavioral change can make a difference, but practices were not sustained. Similarly, mandates to keep utilities operating despite non-payment are now coming up against solvency issues. Focused attention on good governance, smart public finance, capacity building, social awareness and incentives, consistent data, and innovation will sustain said behavior and access changes.

INCREASE FOCUS ON STRENGTHENING MARKET-BASED APPROACHES FOR WASH. Sustained access to safely managed drinking water and sanitation services are contingent upon local markets with adequate supply chains. Demand generation and monitoring activities must be factored into market-based programming to ensure adequate, affordable provision of both WASH goods and services. Water access has received more attention in this regard, but more work needs to be done to leverage sanitation and deepen the benefits of market-based approaches.

EMPHASIZE PREVENTION BY MAINTAINING AND EXPANDING WATER RESOURCES MANAGEMENT AS A STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE AND INVEST IN EARLY WARNING SYSTEMS (E.G., FAMINE EARLY WARNING SYSTEM NETWORK) TO PREVENT HUMAN AND FINANCIAL HARDSHIP RESULTING FROM CHANGING CLIMATE PATTERNS. Furthermore, ensure WASH is given sufficient attention within said early warning systems and prediction models and support data collection and modeling efforts to improve their reliability.

ALIGN AND COORDINATE WITH OTHER FOREIGN ASSISTANCE STRATEGIES. Including the newly revised Global Food Security Strategy, the new Climate Change and Resilience strategies, the Global Fragility Strategy, USAID Vision for Health Systems Strengthening 2030, provisions under the Global Child Thrive Act, and the Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment Policy. WASH is the underpinning to many of these areas and not only should be integrated throughout these strategies, but these areas should be reflected in the Global Water Strategy to ensure the U.S. is reaching all its development objectives. Doing so requires:

- Aligning priority countries across strategies and evaluating whether these are still the right countries and the right number. For example, a recent [report by the World Meteorological Organization](#) indicated that Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) is among the regions most challenged by extreme hydrometeorological events, yet no priority WASH countries currently fall within the LAC region. As the impact of climate change affects more people and their livelihoods and infectious diseases outbreaks become more common, periodic review of the priority countries could be necessary.
- Re-emphasizing the cross-cutting nature of WASH to make strong linkages to enabling economic growth and supporting nutrition, food security, gender, health, and other sectors.
- Providing—under the USAID Water and Development plan—more monitoring and evaluation on complementary results and how these results are advancing progress towards the overall Global Water Strategy objectives.



- As the DFC did not exist during the development of the current strategy, partnering with the private sector to expand access to WASH and address challenges such as climate change. The DFC should contribute to the new strategy with coordination with USAID to pilot and maximize profitable WASH market schemes.