

NGO COMMUNITY RESPONSE TO THE NEW GLOBAL WATER STRATEGY (GWS) AGENCY PLAN DRAFT

July 2022

The new USAID [Global Water Strategy \(GWS\) Agency Plan draft](#) provides a comprehensive and intersectional framework to operationalize the White House Global Water Security Action Plan and work toward a water-secure world.

The updated strategy draft seeks to improve upon the previous iteration from 2017 to tackle the key challenges driving global water insecurity; develop stronger research, learning, and innovation initiatives; and work to alleviate the risk of conflict and fragility related to water. The improved and better-integrated inclusion of climate, equity, and peacebuilding programming in the new GWS draft underlines a strong understanding that water security is influenced by various factors and contributes to numerous global issues, especially related to conflict and equity. We are encouraged by the willingness of USAID to engage with the NGO community for feedback and insight into the GWS process through formal and informal consultations and written responses. An increased effort should be made to gather input from local and regional implementers and partners in the future. Local perspectives are critical to providing context and nuance to recommendations and highlighting issues and concerns that might have been overlooked.

While the current GWS draft provides a solid overarching base for U.S. global water security, key questions remain if the strategy shifts outlined effectively target key considerations of equity and vulnerable populations such as children and youth for the next five years. A robust implementation strategy and continuing consultation process with a broad range of stakeholders, including local implementers and leaders, will be critical to ensure that the recommendations made within the GWS are fully incorporated and upheld through programming and evaluation.

InterAction provides the following recommendations to strengthen the GWS further and support future implementation materials and discussions. This collective response was collected from across the InterAction community and developed by members of InterAction's Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene (WASH) Working Group.

Opportunities to Strengthen the GWS Agency Plan Draft

Improve impact for vulnerable populations through enhanced programmatic balance and metrics

Reaching the most vulnerable communities is a key target for WASH efforts coming from the [Senator Paul Simon Water for the World Act of 2014](#). The InterAction community was very pleased with the inclusion and expansion on the importance of equity in the GWS, especially the language focusing on meeting the needs of

marginalized and underserved people and communities, and the much-improved language used to discuss women, adolescent girls, youth groups, and other marginalized or vulnerable communities. This is a critical step to overcoming gender disparities in WASH access.

The emphasis on promoting local stakeholders' participation and supporting the development of data collection and data analysis skills at local institutions is key to ensuring that future WASH development is equitable and locally-led. Text Box 1 in the [GWS draft](#) (pg. 10) serves as a good starting point to developing a comprehensive definition of “underserved and marginalized people and those in vulnerable situations.” However, there are areas of oversight including people living in poor urban areas—such as “slums” or informal settlements—or individuals experiencing homelessness. By definition, informal settlements are those that lack access to basic services such as WASH and as such should be included. The InterAction community would like to see the definitions of marginalized people and vulnerable communities added to the glossary.

Additionally, when considering the needs of localizing development and working with local partners, there needs to be a clear definition of what constitutes a “local partner” and that definition needs to be consistent with other USAID strategies and plans.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Develop specific metrics that focus on underserved and marginalized people.
- Include a specific definition of the “underserved and marginalized people” and “vulnerable community” to include in the glossary and ensure that they are consistent with other USAID strategies and plans.
- Include a specific definition of “local partner” and ensure that it is consistent with other USAID strategies and plans.
- Expand the definition of underserved and marginalized groups to include those living in poor urban areas such as slums or informal settlements and those experiencing homelessness.
- Further investigate opportunities to align programmatic zones of influence and publicly share more details about the impact of resources and coordination.

Further strengthen multi-sectoral integration of climate and food security

It was also great to see climate resilience as a key component of a more intersectional approach to the GWS overall, including in growing productivity, strengthening resilience, and increasing gender equality. However, unlike the Global Food Security Strategy Refresh (GFSS-R), the GWS draft does not outline the strong connections between water security and food security. The GFSS-R acknowledges the critical role of understanding [WASH to food security](#), and that without proper WASH practices, households and young children will still experience malnutrition and poor health. This needs to be included in the GWS draft to ensure that WASH programs are considering food security just as food security programs consider WASH needs. Communities are vulnerable to poor nutrition and food-related and diarrheal illnesses when WASH is

not adequately accounted for in food security programming. Many farmers also rely on rainfall as a primary source of irrigation for crops and as unreliable rain is a driver of crop failure, this is an opportunity for irrigation interventions.

Climate was an important addition to the GWS. Climate is a key factor in water security and WASH development. Ensuring that WASH infrastructure is climate resilient is critical to making sure that climate impacts like flooding and drought do not cause major contamination of water resources from sewerage intrusions. Changes in climate have a direct impact on water resources and contribute to either situations of too little water or too much water for a community to manage. The framework should include adaptive management plans to account for negative effects on water security.

Beyond climate, it is critical that the health of freshwater ecosystems is protected as they serve a crucial role in community resilience as nature-based resilience measures and foundations for water security. To further strengthen the integration of the role healthy, connected freshwater ecosystems play in ensuring water security, we recommend adding a water resource management target (page 4), incorporating the importance of connectivity of freshwater systems into the Strategic Objective 3 intermediate results (see [Action 6](#)), and including a definition of water and sanitation systems that explicitly include natural systems in section I.R. 4.1 under Strategic Objective 4.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Should strengthen further the linkages between water, climate, and food, particularly in WASH interventions that can proactively increase community resilience.
- Ensure that the GWS considers food security to the same extent as the GFSS-R considers WASH development and water security.
- In the targeting approach, clarify how or whether food security considerations like those considered in GFSS target countries play into selecting high priority/target countries like those designated under the Water for the World Act.
- Invest in community-based and community-led adaptation planning and action, including increasing access to devolved climate finance and other climate services.
- Stronger emphasis on flexibility and adaptation at the program level to ensure climate adaptation is mainstreamed effectively.
- Inclusion of a water resource management target focusing on the connectivity of freshwater systems.

Better align section on conflict and fragility management with the White House Water Security Action Plan

The expansion of the strategic objective to anticipate and reduce conflict over water resources is a great improvement over the 2017 GWS. However, it seems as though this draft was written before the release of the White House Water Security Action Plan as it is not nearly as comprehensive or as strong of a plan. The

InterAction WASH Working Group was thrilled to see the White House Water Security Action Plan position the U.S. to be a global leader on the issues of WASH development, global water security, and conflict mitigation. InterAction would like to see more influences from the Action Plan in the final draft of the GWS, specifically the role of the U.S. as a global leader in engaging multilateral action to promote water security.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Strengthen the connection between the White House Water Security Action Plan and the GWS draft.
- In the GWS, expand the U.S.'s role in engaging multilateral partnerships to promote water security.
- Highlight how closely linked global water security is to conflict and fragility around the world, and help develop metrics to better track and forecast conflict zones related to water.

Expand inclusion of WASH-related public health considerations such as WASH in healthcare facilities and infectious disease management

WASH access is central to global health through sanitation and hygiene measures that reduce infectious disease transmission. A key element to this is ensuring that healthcare facilities have access to clean water for sanitation and hygiene purposes. One out of four healthcare facilities globally do not have access to clean water. This creates increased risks of infections and cross contaminations and leads to the overuse of antibiotics which can further add to the risk of antibiotic-resistant bacteria. Ensuring that all healthcare facilities have access to clean water is a major piece of pandemic prevention and should be included in the GWS draft. As WASH in healthcare facilities is an issue led by the Bureau for Global Health, we recommend that the Water Leadership Council be utilized to ensure that there is collaboration and cooperation on this issue between all bureaus and agencies.

The WASH community also urges USAID to integrate neglected tropical diseases (NTDs) into the GWS draft. NTDs, which consist of 20 diseases that affect over 1 billion people worldwide, provide an opportunity to accelerate progress toward the Global Water Strategy's Strategic Objectives, particularly *Strategic Objective 2: Increased and More Equitable Access to Safe, Sustainable and Climate-Resilient Drinking Water and Sanitation Services and Adoption of Hygiene Practices*

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Expand programming that acknowledges the interconnected nature of WASH and health systems to make interventions more comprehensive.
- Include language focusing on WASH in healthcare facilities that emphasizes the need to prioritize such programming.
- Incorporate language tapping the Water Leadership Council to oversee intra-agency collaboration on issues of WASH and global health.
- Integrate neglected tropical diseases (NTDs) into the GWS draft.

Looking Ahead to GWS Implementation

Ensure implementation consultations and plans elevate locally-led perspectives

It is critical that the GWS implementation consultations and plans incorporate more local and diverse groups in program design and implementation. Consultations with local implementers of WASH projects and communities impacted by the programs were limited in the initial drafting of the GWS, and the draft relied on outside stakeholders to facilitate these perspectives. Collecting feedback from local implementers was difficult due to the very short window for public comment which overlapped with a federal holiday weekend. As the GWS turns to implementation, it is even more critical to incorporate and elevate diverse and locally-led perspectives. This includes publicly releasing draft implementation plans and providing time and opportunity for all stakeholders to respond and provide feedback. Combining these perspectives will give contextual realities to WASH and water needs in the communities where USAID works; pinpoint unique or systematic barriers to water security and WASH in those communities; and identify what strategies are most effective at eradicating water insecurity—ultimately leading to more sustainable and effective programming.

Implementation strategies need to include the philosophy behind the importance of local ownership and engagement with local organizations, as well as guidance on how to integrate and connect with local implementers and communities from the start of the implementation process. Locally-led consultations can also help elevate nuances and context-specific challenges in sector programming. Additionally, short comment windows are especially problematic for local organizations outside of Washington, D.C., as well as organizations with staff who do not speak English because the translation and distribution of information takes time—and often more than is given.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Facilitate consultations with local and regional experts and implementers located in high-priority countries and incorporate perspectives from across sectors and stakeholders when designing GWS implementation plans.
- Encourage robust co-creation with local and regional implementers to design WASH programs.
- Demonstrate locally-led development within GWS frameworks at each level and within local initiatives.

Strengthen data transparency through improved monitoring and evaluation of multi-sectoral programming and a stronger focus on impact

The GWS provides a heavy focus on multi-sectoral strategies. This emphasis is critical to the successful implementation of the GWS. Still, additional attention needs to be paid to tracking the impact of sector programs through robust monitoring and evaluation plans and strong indicators. As multi-sectoral programs are implemented, areas that need to be addressed will include drafting budgets, funding allocation within

sector-specific projects, and developing indicators that collect implementation impact. When possible, historical funding breakdowns across the GFSS-R's three main objectives should be publicly released.

Furthermore, the metrics set by the GWS are of some concern. The goals set—to connect 20 million people to improved access to water and 20 million people to improved access to sanitation over five years—indicate a rate of approximately 4 million people per year, which is roughly the same pace that USAID has been working in recent years. In F.Y. 2020, USAID WASH activities across 51 countries helped 3.9 million people gain access to improved water and 4.1 million people gain access to improved sanitation. The InterAction WASH community would like to see increased goals for USAID, rather than a “business as usual” approach.

Additionally, the goal of mobilizing \$1 billion over five years for WASH programming is also worrisome as this seems to be less than the \$1.2 billion, three-year commitment USAID announced for WASH on World Water Day on March 22, 2022. InterAction would like clarity on whether the \$1 billion mentioned in the GWS is in addition to the \$1.2 billion announced previously or whether this is the same funding in different packaging. If it is the same funding, the GWS draft should be updated to reflect that. If this funding is in addition to the \$1.2 billion, then that should be outlined in the GWS draft.

The WASH Working Group acknowledges that working to ensure future WASH programming is both equitable and climate-resilient will, by necessity, increase the costs and time needed for such programming. As such, the rate of USAID WASH programming might slow down due to these expanded needs. However, the GWS draft should either outline these considerations and explain why the chosen metrics are at the level written or, if these are not major constraints, should increase those metrics to better reflect the goal of accelerating WASH programming over time.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Develop stronger targets that increase the yearly impact of USAID's WASH programming
- Provide detailed language on why the chosen targets for the GWS draft are effectively business as usual.

About the WASH Working Group

InterAction's 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. Point of Contact: Chris Askew-Merwin, Policy and Advocacy Coordinator, InterAction, caskewmerwin@interaction.org.



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.