

U.S. Implementation of the Senator Paul Simon Water for the Poor Act: Small Steps for a Crisis that Calls for Great Strides



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Contents

Executive Summary	2
Five Years and Still No Strategy	4
Small Steps	4
What is Needed Now	5
Water Touches All of Life	6
Water is Water	7
Held Back by Lack of Capacity	8
Not Directing Funding to the Poor	8
No Time to Waste	11
Recommendations	12

U.S. Implementation of the Senator Paul Simon Water for the Poor Act: Small Steps for a Crisis that Calls for Great Strides

Executive Summary

The Senator Paul Simon Water for the Poor Act (WPA), passed in 2005, sought to position the United States as a world leader in international water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) assistance. It codified for the first time in U.S. law one of the United Nations Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), specifically mandating that the U.S. do its part to reduce by half the proportion of the population living without sustainable access to safe drinking water and basic sanitation.

Five years after the passage of the act and with five years left until the MDG deadline of 2015, meaningful progress has been limited by: a lack of strategic planning, inadequate political prioritization of WASH, poor integration of WASH in broader U.S. development strategies, too little capacity for WASH programming within USAID and the State Department, and poor targeting of U.S. aid to WASH.

There is some limited momentum now at USAID and the State Department, but these are small steps for a crisis that is responsible for 4,000 children under the age of 5 dying each day. Meaningful progress is now unlikely to be made by the MDG deadline unless urgent action is taken to make up for lost time.

The Government Accountability Office (GAO) agrees that the U.S. must immediately take action to fulfill the requirements of the WPA.

In a September 2010 report to Congress on U.S. water and sanitation aid, the GAO recommends that the Secretary of State, in consultation with the Administrator of USAID, take the following actions:

- Ensure that the strategy for U.S. water and sanitation assistance addresses all requirements of the WPA, including the development of specific and measurable goals, benchmarks, and timetables for achieving the objectives of the act.
- Clearly identify, in its mandated reports, the basis for its designations of high-priority countries for U.S. assistance to water and sanitation.¹

What are needed now are not small steps, but great strides to tackle one of the world's greatest development challenges.



¹ GAO. U.S. Water and Sanitation Aid: Millions of Beneficiaries Reported in Developing Countries, but the Department of State Needs to Strengthen Strategic Approach. September 2010.

Recommendations

To fully implement the WPA and accelerate progress on sustainable access to safe drinking water and basic sanitation

1. The Administration should announce and deliver a multi-year U.S. WASH strategy, couched within a wider water strategy, which incorporates indicators, benchmarks and a timetable. The strategy should be developed in meaningful consultation with relevant stakeholders, and the White House should work with Congress to make sure the strategy receives adequate funding.
2. The executive branch should take a comprehensive view of WASH, integrating planning and budgeting meaningfully with a wider water strategy, including water productivity and water resources management, and into the broader development agenda, including Presidential initiatives on food security, health, and climate change.
3. The State Department and USAID should each establish senior water advisors within their highest offices in order to increase coordination across U.S. agencies and champion U.S. leadership in international WASH issues both within the U.S. government and with international stakeholders. USAID should continue to train personnel in WASH to generate long-term expertise and demand within USAID missions.
4. Working alongside Congress, the Administration should take the level of need explicitly into account when targeting its WASH funding.



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Five Years and Still No Strategy

Safe water and sanitation are as basic to human survival as air. It is no wonder that in polls Americans place halving the number of poor people without access to safe drinking water and sanitation as the highest priority of all the UN MDGs.² As a reflection of the strong and widespread public support for this issue, for the last five years Congress has been pushing the United States, through the leverage of foreign assistance, to take a leadership role in sustainable safe drinking water and sanitation for the poor.

While Congress and the American public have recognized the need for urgent action, leadership from the White House, both under Presidents Bush and Obama, has been noticeably missing. Only recently have political champions emerged for this issue, with Secretary of State Clinton delivering a speech on World Water Day 2010 that outlined a strong, long-term U.S. commitment to water and sanitation,³ and USAID Administrator Raj Shah at the UN MDG Summit in September 2010 declaring a renewed attention by the U.S. to ensure water security world-wide.⁴ While USAID and the State Department have taken some positive steps to advance WASH foreign assistance programming, there remains no champion for WASH in the White House.

Small Steps

Over the last five years, the executive branch has made reluctant progress, releasing only partial pieces of the comprehensive strategy called for in the WPA.

In 2008, USAID included a “Framework for Action” in the WPA report to Congress. The

framework is the most complete statement to date on how the U.S. will use its resources to implement the WPA, laying out the types of investments that the U.S. will make to address water and sanitation issues globally. In both the 2009 and 2010 WPA reports, country plans were also included to provide insights into country-level strategies and programming.⁵

In 2010, with gradually increasing political commitment in both the State Department and USAID, work is being completed on a “Results Framework,” which will define a series of indicators for measuring the impact of U.S. water assistance. There are indications from USAID that this framework will go beyond the typical results framework to incorporate several elements of a strategy document, including hard targets for USAID WASH programming. A WASH programming guide is also under development to guide U.S. Missions in WASH program design and implementation. After five years, planning is also just beginning to move beyond a year-to-year basis. Crucially, this will allow USAID missions to develop longer-term WASH programs.

A bill under consideration by Congress entitled The Water for the World Act calls for senior water positions to be created in the State Department and USAID. With the act having passed the Senate and enjoying strong bipartisan support in the House, there is significant support in Congress for the creation of these positions. The Administrator has indicated his own commitment to creating such a position at USAID, whether or not legislatively mandated. If appointed, these officials would help to increase the priority of WASH within U.S. foreign assistance by championing WASH activities in year-to-year planning and budgeting cycles.

2 UN Foundation National Survey. Project #10185. Hart Research Associates. April 10-14. Pages 13-14. http://www.globalproblems-globalsolutions-files.org/pdfs/BWC_101805_UNF-Interview-Schedule-Final-Data.pdf

3 Speech by Hillary Clinton at the National Geographic Society on World Water Day 2010. <http://www.state.gov/secretary/rm/2010/03/138737.htm>

4 <http://blog.usaid.gov/2010/09/usaid-unga-addressing-the-global-water-and-sanitation-challenge/>

5 State Department. Senator Paul Simon Water for the Poor Act Report to Congress (2006-2010). <http://www.state.gov/g/oes/water/>

These are all positive developments. However, they are a far cry from the comprehensive strategy and political commitment necessary to deliver sustainable safe water and sanitation to the poor in a way that spends taxpayers' money more effectively and efficiently.

What is Needed Now

Three big picture elements are currently lacking for the U.S. to fully implement the WPA and to enhance its leadership in ending the global water and sanitation crisis.

First, although the State Department cites its continuing efforts to create the comprehensive U.S. WASH strategy required by the WPA, four full years after the Congressional deadline, no such strategy exists. The 2008 Framework for Action falls short of the requirements of the WPA for specific and measurable goals, benchmarks, and timetables to meet the mandates of the act, indicators to measure the impact of U.S. assistance to WASH, and the identification of the resources necessary to implement a comprehensive WASH strategy.

While many of the elements for such a strategy now exist, without support from the White House, the State Department and USAID have



been reluctant to put them together. Without a comprehensive WASH strategy that clearly defines U.S. government policies, USAID missions will not see a compelling reason to engage in long-term planning on WASH, resulting in taxpayers' money being spent on short-term programming without a long-term strategic approach. Without a strong policy statement supporting the objectives of the WPA, missions may not give adequate program priority and emphasis to helping the poor gain access to water and sanitation.

Second, the WPA requires that the State Department and USAID consult widely in developing a strategy, including with U.S. and international nongovernmental organizations and with indigenous civil society. Overall, consultation with U.S. civil society has been sporadic with no clear outcomes. Since the passage of the WPA, the State Department and USAID also have not meaningfully consulted with civil society in developing countries. There has been some recent progress in the U.S. with USAID consulting with civil society on the Results Framework for water programming that is currently under development.

Third, the WPA requires that the Administration report in a strategy "the level of funding and other assistance...needed each year to achieve the goals, benchmarks and timetables" outlined in a comprehensive WASH strategy. The State Department and USAID, with full support from the White House, must do what Congress has mandated – report the amount of funding that will be required from Congress to achieve the objectives of a comprehensive WASH strategy. The Administration has done this for its own priority initiatives on food security, global health, and climate change, and WASH, a legislated priority that enjoys broad support in USAID, the State Department and globally, should be treated similarly. The Administration must also work closely with Congress to ensure that there are adequate increases in the core foreign assistance



budgets from which WASH and other sector directives are allocated so that missions are not faced with having to shift monies from existing programs.

For the U.S. to make great strides in the implementation of the WPA and its goal of accelerating progress on access to water and sanitation globally, it must begin with these three big elements:

- completion of a comprehensive WASH strategy
- consultation with civil society on the strategy
- an estimate of the resources it will take to implement the strategy.

With support at high levels in both USAID and the State Department, White House support for these three elements is key to future progress.

Water Touches All of Life

Water underlies all aspects of human existence from health to nutrition to food production. Because of this, the Administration must prioritize water (including WASH, integrated water resources management and water productivity programs) throughout its broader

development and environmental agendas. The 2010 WPA report to Congress shows that WASH is not yet adequately integrated with the other major foreign policy initiatives of the United States, including Feed the Future, the Global Health Initiative, and the Global Climate Change Initiative.

- Lack of integration can be seen in the Feed the Future strategy, which mentions water scarcity and management, but largely neglects WASH despite the fact that half the cases of childhood malnutrition in the world are linked to unsafe water, inadequate sanitation, or insufficient hygiene.⁶
- The public “Consultation Document” on the Global Health Initiative (GHI) includes strong statements on the need to integrate WASH into health interventions. It highlights water and sanitation as an underlying cause of disease and death, includes safe water and sanitation programs in the list of programs that “work” and need to be scaled up, and places presence of an existing WASH program as a criteria that can make a country more likely to be classified as a GHI priority country.⁷ Progress on stronger integration between health and WASH can also be seen in the framing of recent programming requests from USAID. For example, USAID released a \$100 million global request for applications that focuses on WASH and indoor air quality, two of the main underlying causes of under-five mortality and morbidity. Although there has been some important progress on the integration of WASH and health, funding for WASH within health interventions has not been commensurate with rhetoric with only small percentages of U.S. global health spending being allocated to WASH.
- Climate change will have profound effects on the levels of access to safe water and sanitation, putting at risk millions of dollars of investment in WASH. More frequent and

⁶ World Health Organization. Safer Water, Better Health 2008.

⁷ Implementation of the Global Health Initiative: Consultation Document. <http://www.pepfar.gov/ghi/136492.htm>

more serious droughts and floods will increase water shortages and cause more widespread water contamination and sanitation challenges. Climate-resilient WASH programs must be a priority within the Global Climate Change Initiative to address these increasing challenges.

The three Presidential development initiatives – Feed the Future, the Global Health Initiative, and the Global Climate Change Initiative – will be successful only if the U.S. takes strategic action to ensure that poor people have access to clean water and sanitation. USAID and other WASH implementing agencies would benefit from weaving the WASH strategy called for in the WPA into a government-wide, comprehensive approach that acknowledges the importance of WASH to all development outcomes.

Water is Water

Poor communities worldwide do not distinguish between water to drink, water for livestock and irrigation or water to sustain freshwater

ecosystems: it is all water. It only makes sense for USAID to take a similarly expansive view. As the 2008 “Framework for Action” notes: “Water supply and sanitation service delivery are intimately connected to the sustainable management of upstream hydrologic resources that, if not appropriately managed, affect the health of humans and ecosystems downstream.”

Instead of taking this holistic view, the past and present reports to Congress go so far as to create a competition between water supply and sanitation, water resources management and water productivity, indicating that increased funding for water supply and sanitation has resulted in a decreased emphasis on these other critical areas. This separation is unhelpful and false. Funding for water resources management and water productivity were in steady decline since 2000, years prior to the passage of the WPA in 2005 and the first year of appropriations for the WPA in FY2008, which featured a significant increase in funding for drinking water supply, sanitation, and hygiene. In fact, funding for water productivity



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and water resources management increased dramatically in the first year of WPA appropriations in FY 2008, though not to the levels that preceded the period of decline.⁸

Comprehensive water management, protection of water sources and wetlands that filter and store water, and investments in productivity are all required to meet the challenge of improved access to safe water and sanitation. The State Department and USAID should articulate goals for water writ large, including all three pillars (water supply and sanitation, water resources management, and water productivity) per USAID's own Framework for Action, and request the requisite funding from Congress.

Held Back by Lack of Capacity

Information from U.S. officials indicates that lack of capacity within the U.S. government is a major barrier to strategic planning on WASH. At the senior political level, champions for water issues are only beginning to emerge. Secretary Clinton's speech on World Water Day this year indicated a sea change in the level of commitment by USAID and the State Department to water issues. In this speech, Secretary Clinton stated that "water issues are integral to the success of many of our major foreign policy objectives" and declared a strong, long-term U.S. commitment to water and sanitation.

A similar public commitment to multi-year engagement in WASH programs from top officials in USAID and the White House would signal that missions could begin substantive planning on a new WASH initiative. Senior advisors for water issues should be appointed within the highest offices of the State Department and USAID respectively, along the lines of what is called for in the Water for the World Act. Such advisors would provide political champions and coordination for U.S. WASH leadership during budgeting and planning cycles.

Lack of understanding of WASH issues at the USAID mission level has been another barrier to progress. With access to clean water and sanitation underpinning almost every development priority, including empowerment of women and girls, food security, climate change, health and educational attainment, WASH interventions should be a central element of the work of USAID missions globally. It is critical that Washington-based officials support the training of field-based WASH expertise. Some real progress has been made in the last year with approximately 75 Foreign Service officers being trained in water-related programming. This progress will need to continue for meaningful change in mission expertise to take hold.

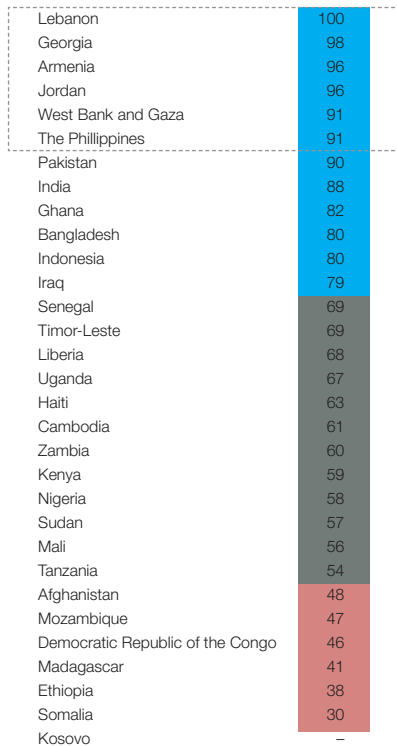
Not Directing Funding to the Poor

Over the last five years, the distribution of WASH assistance has not aligned with the WPA requirement that the U.S. government "focus water and sanitation assistance toward the countries, locales, and people with greatest need." The 2010 report continues this trend. The act specifically calls for increasing the percentage of assistance targeted at high priority countries and requires that these countries be designated based on need and potential impact. Despite these explicitly defined requirements, the GAO found that the designation of high priority countries by State Department is not clearly linked to verifiable analysis and is not consistent with data on need for water and sanitation.

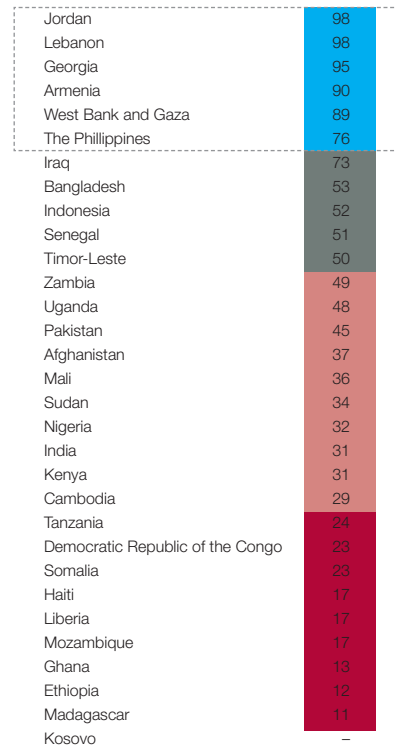
According to the GAO, many of the 31 countries designated as high priority by the State Department in fiscal year 2009 are not among those that UN data show having the greatest water and sanitation needs. The following charts from the GAO report highlight the percentage of the populations in the 31 high priority countries using improved drinking water sources and sanitation facilities.

⁸ USAID. Safeguarding the World's Water: 2008 Report on USAID Water Sector Activities.

Percentage of population using Improved Drinking Water Sources



Percentage of population using Improved Sanitation Facility



Note: The percentages shown for population access to improved drinking water sources and improved sanitation facilities are according to 2008 data from the UN World Health Organization and the UN Children's Fund (WHO/UNICEF) Joint Monitoring Programme for Water Supply and Sanitation.
Source: GAO analysis based on State and UN data.

In 5 of the 31 countries designated as high priority – Lebanon, Georgia, Armenia, Jordan, and the West Bank and Gaza – at least 89 percent of the population had access to both improved water and sanitation. In 12 of the 31 countries designated as high priority, at least 75 percent of the population had access to improved water, and in 24 of the countries, more than half of the population had such access.

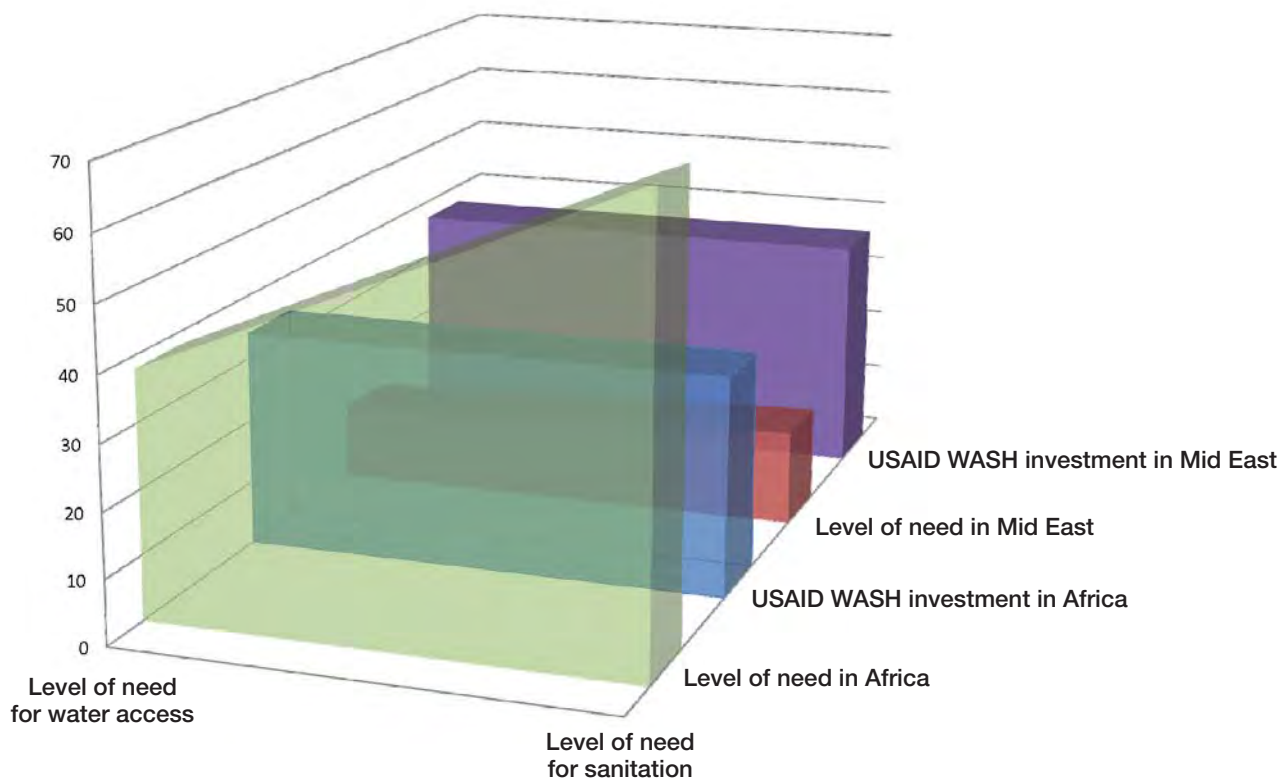
Data for 2009 USAID obligations for water supply, sanitation, and hygiene activities show that on average the U.S. gives more than eight times as much money per capita to countries where the need for sanitation is less than 25% as it does to those where the need is more than 25%.⁹ For water, this per capita spending is over three times as much. The U.S. provides on average more than 21 times as much WASH funding per capita to the Middle East,

Afghanistan, and Pakistan as it does to Sub-Saharan Africa, despite the fact that average levels of need in Sub-Saharan Africa are more than twice as high for water and sanitation. The Middle East, a region of significant geopolitical interest to the U.S., receives the majority of U.S. water supply, sanitation, and hygiene funds despite relatively good drinking water and sanitation coverage.¹⁰

9 Need figures refer to the percentage of the population who do not have access to improved sanitation or water according to figures in the Joint Monitoring Programme 2010 Update: Progress on Sanitation and Drinking-Water. WHO and UNICEF.

10 State Department. Senator Paul Simon Water for the Poor Act Report to Congress. June 2010.

Level of need for water and sanitation compared to level of USAID WASH investment in Africa and the Middle East



Despite the high level of need in Africa, as illustrated in Chart 2, USAID invests at a higher level in the Middle East. In the six Middle Eastern countries in which USAID invests 37% of its WASH funds, the average level of need for water is 12% and for sanitation is 15%. In the 27 African countries in which USAID invests 34% of its WASH funds, the average level of need is significantly higher at 38% for water and 70% for sanitation.¹¹

With the majority of assistance going to a region of significant geopolitical interest with relatively good levels of drinking water and sanitation coverage, it is impossible to escape the conclusion that distribution of WASH assistance is influenced more by strategic geopolitical interests rather than level of need or any other articulated factor related to probable impact on the poor. In fact, the GAO reported that five countries strategically important to the U.S. – the West Bank and Gaza, Jordan, Pakistan, Sudan, and Afghanistan – received 54% of funding in

2009. While differing levels of national capacity to implement WASH programs and wide ranges of access within countries may contribute to how U.S. funds are targeted, it is incumbent upon the Administration to demonstrate the systematic decisions it makes regarding how these variables affect the targeting of U.S. assistance to WASH.

In FY 2005, USAID spent approximately \$15 million on developmental water and sanitation programs for all of Sub-Saharan Africa. This has improved greatly, but has been driven primarily

¹¹ Figures on levels of need for water and sanitation are calculated from 2008 access figures reported in The Joint Monitoring Programme 2010 Update: Progress on Sanitation and Drinking-Water. WHO and UNICEF.

by Congressional appropriations language recommending at least 40% of funding be directed to Sub-Saharan Africa. There is a real danger that developmental WASH funding to the region that needs it most will bounce back to insignificant levels unless the Administration, working alongside Congress, takes need into account when targeting assistance. While different funding streams constrain the fungibility of dollars from one country to the next, it is important that the Administration and Congress take a comprehensive look at how development resources for WASH are allocated and improve the targeting of WASH resources to more directly benefit the poor, no matter from what account the funding stems.

In the draft of the Global Partnerships Act, legislation from House Foreign Affairs Committee Chairman Berman that would revamp the U.S. Foreign Assistance Act, there is recognition that the U.S. must prioritize level of need in all development sectors in order to have a significant impact on poverty reduction globally. Closely tracking language in the WPA, one of the principles of assistance highlighted in the Global Partnerships Act is that “assistance should be concentrated in countries that have the greatest need for outside assistance and that will make the most effective use of such assistance.” Further, the act states that “United States foreign assistance to achieve short-term political objectives or meet emergency humanitarian needs should not come at the expense of efforts to address the root causes of poverty and human suffering.”¹² These components of the draft legislation underscore the need for the U.S. to increase transparency of the criteria used when deciding the distribution of foreign aid, including aid to the WASH sector.

Through improving its targeting of WASH aid to the poor, the U.S. has an opportunity to be a

global leader in the WASH sector. A report by the World Health Organization and UN-Water found that at the global level, aid for drinking water and sanitation is not well targeted, with only 42% of aid going to low-income countries.¹³ If the U.S. improves its own distribution of WASH aid to these low-income countries, it can serve as an example to other donors and help to spur investments that will have the greatest impact on poverty reduction.

No Time to Waste

Half of the time between the 2005 WPA passage and the MDG deadline of 2015 has passed. The U.S. has much more work to do in order to meet the goals outlined in the WPA, much of which will now need to come after the MDG deadline. Progress to date is largely the result of Congressional statutes and a small number of committed staff at USAID and the State Department.

USAID and the State Department, with strong support from the White House, should immediately work with Congress and U.S. and international civil society to begin undertaking the recommendations below to ensure that great strides are made towards solving one of the world’s greatest crises – the water and sanitation crisis. Now is the time to for strong action to address a big problem, not more small steps.



¹² Global Partnerships Act of 2010: Discussion draft. http://www.cgdev.org/doc/PREAMBLES_xml.pdf

¹³ WHO and UN-Water. GLAAS 2010: UN-Water Global Annual Assessment of Sanitation and Drinking-Water.

Recommendations

1. The Administration should announce and deliver a multi-year U.S. WASH strategy, couched within a wider water strategy, which incorporates indicators, benchmarks and a timetable. The strategy should be developed in meaningful consultation with relevant stakeholders, and the White House should work with Congress to make sure the strategy receives adequate funding.
2. The executive branch should take a comprehensive view of WASH, integrating planning and budgeting meaningfully with a wider water strategy, including water productivity and water resources management, and into the broader development agenda, including Presidential initiatives on food security, health, and climate change. Lack of safe water, sanitation, and hygiene is a leading cause of malnutrition and death in children, and it should be treated as such in wider development priorities.
3. The State Department and USAID should each establish senior water advisors within their highest offices in order to increase coordination across U.S. agencies and champion U.S. leadership in international WASH issues both within the U.S. government and with international stakeholders. USAID should continue to train personnel in WASH to generate long-term expertise and demand within USAID missions.
4. Working alongside Congress, the Administration should take the level of need explicitly into account when targeting its WASH funding. International calls for good donor practice in the sector recommend that 70% of all aid for WASH should go to low-income countries.¹⁴



¹⁴ End Water Poverty. Sanitation and Water for All: A Programme for Action.
http://www.endwaterpoverty.org/documents/end_water_poverty_a_programme_for_action.pdf

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