

A National Security Imperative: U.S. Investments in global water security, safe drinking water, sanitation and hygiene

Global water security, including safe drinking water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH), is a critical element of U.S. foreign policy. These US investments serve the American people by saving lives, supporting economic growth, promoting global stability, and preventing and controlling infections that do not respect borders.

Over the past twenty years, **bipartisan** Congressional support has enabled American water security and WASH investments that led to **an estimated 11 million lives saved**, mostly children. In that time, the U.S. has reached **76.6 million people with drinking water and 56 million people with sanitation** that is built to last.

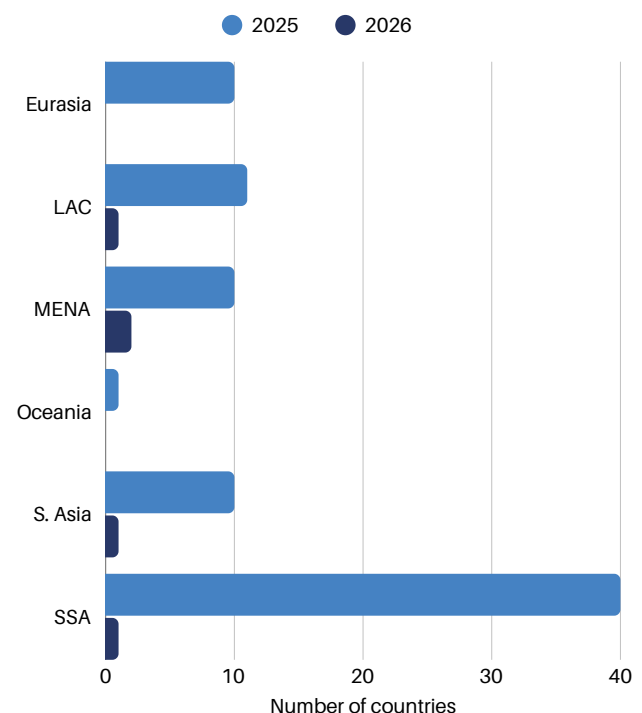
This support is consistent with the views of the American public: Over the past decade, **public polling has consistently found that clean water is Americans' top priority** for U.S. investments in global health.

The U.S. Intelligence Community has recognized that **global water security and low access to WASH are national security threats to the United States**. Basic services like WASH help legitimize governments, quell civil unrest, and bolster our partnerships with other governments, making American investments in water security and WASH a cost-effective and highly impactful tool that protects people at home and around the world.

As a **fully authorized part of US foreign assistance**, U.S. water and sanitation programs were in as many as **75 countries as of 2025**, including 22 countries designated as high-priority under the **bipartisan *Water for the World Act of 2014***. These include critical interventions in global health, particularly for mothers and children.

Countries with US Funded Water Security and WASH Programs

Bilateral Health and Development Programs



Why Invest in Global Water Security, Including WASH

GLOBAL WATER SECURITY IS U.S. SECURITY

Water insecurity and lack of access to WASH **destabilizes communities, contributes to food insecurity, causes sickness and preventable death, forces migration, degrades natural resources, and drives or fuels conflict**, with regional and even global impacts. Almost two-thirds of the world's population experiences severe water insecurity at least one month a year; by 2050, it is estimated that **water insecurity will cost 8% of global Gross Domestic Product**.

Water-related violence - attacks on infrastructure or people collecting water, extortion or terrorist recruitment at water points, and interethnic or transboundary conflict over limited resources - **has increased exponentially** in the early 2020s. Without increased investment in water security, intensifying **floods and droughts** will create more crises that require U.S. intervention

WASH ADVANCES AMERICAN ECONOMIC INTERESTS

Water drives business, creates economic opportunity and supports 1.7 billion jobs worldwide. U.S. Government investments in WASH systems and public-private partnerships yield profitable businesses, increased household purchasing power, and create new export markets for American goods. They build new economic hubs, drive economic growth, leading to investment opportunities for businesses and entrepreneurs. This not only increases access to water and sanitation products for hard-to-reach communities, it opens markets for American firms and offers a viable alternative to predatory actors

WASH SAVES LIVES

1 in 4 people doesn't have safe drinking water and 40% of the global population doesn't have a safe, hygienic toilet at home. This means billions of people face the threat of preventable illness and death, particularly mothers and children. In fact, low access to WASH is responsible for the **top three preventable causes of newborn and child deaths, the third-leading cause of maternal deaths, and half of all undernutrition**.

Americans know that WASH is core to functioning **health systems and infection prevention and control**. Without it, mothers and babies die of sepsis, children's growth is stunted, and cholera, Ebola, and other illnesses spread, **threatening lives everywhere**. Unlike humanitarian investments, Water for the World programs are designed to save lives over the long-term.

The Future of Global Water Security and WASH Assistance

Thanks to the **bipartisan *Water for the Poor Act of 2005 (WFTP)* and *Water for the World Act of 2014 (WFTW)*** and a **robust water appropriations directive** that has support under Republican and Democratic leadership alike, the United States is a global leader in safeguarding global water security and increasing access to WASH. Tools such as the whole-of-government **U.S. Global Water Strategy** further the mission of Federal departments and agencies, such as the U.S. Development Finance Corporation, the U.S. Trade and Development Agency, and the U.S. Department of Defense, by leveraging their unique expertise

RECOMMENDATION 1: MAINTAIN GLOBAL WASH FUNDING

Consecutive years of robust funding for global water and sanitation reflects ongoing commitment to the issue and the intent to uphold the *Water for the Poor* and *Water for the World Acts*. The additional appropriations requirement to spend 50% of the annual funding allocation in sub-Saharan Africa complements the authorizing requirement that programming prioritizes the countries that stand to benefit most.

RECOMMENDATION 2: EXERCISE OVERSIGHT

The bipartisan *Water for the Poor* and *Water for the World Acts* set clear parameters for prioritizing international development and global health investments in water security and WASH. In requiring a whole-of-government U.S. Global Water Strategy, Congress established a clear expectation that water and sanitation are a shared priority across USG.

To ensure water directive funds continue to go where they will have the greatest impact, Congress must require regular reporting on water and sanitation programs, hold the Secretary of State accountable for designating high-priority countries and appointing a well-qualified Global Water Coordinator to oversee full implementation of the law, and extend the requirement for a Global Water Strategy beyond 2027.

The Future of Global Water Security and WASH Assistance

RECOMMENDATION 3: BOLSTER CAPACITY AND COORDINATION

The Department of State should ensure it has technical expertise on water security, including household WASH, at headquarters and in embassies, especially high-priority country embassies as required by law, to ensure appropriated funds are spent in a way that maximizes impact for people worldwide and for Americans. This includes increasing investments to support the cross-cutting impacts of WASH, particularly through global health programs, thus improving both efficiency and impact. Unlike critical humanitarian investments, programs under the *Water for the World Act* and the U.S. Global Water Strategy save lives and change communities over the long term. The right expertise is needed to having lasting impact that supports countries to lead on their own.

RECOMMENDATION 4: MAXIMIZE THE BENEFITS OF WATER AND SANITATION THROUGH STRATEGIC PROGRAMS AND A WHOLE-OF-USG APPROACH

WASH directive funds should be programmed alongside and coordinated with other foreign policy priorities, including to support global health security, commercial diplomacy, food and nutrition, livelihoods, conflict prevention, and economic growth. This means incorporating WASH requirements, targets and indicators into programs and strategies across Federal departments and agencies, such as the Department of State, Development Finance Corporation, the US Trade and Development Agency, and the Department of Defense, and ensuring investments maintain the legal focus on providing basic services while also advancing American interests

