WATER, SANITATION AND HYGIENE (WASH)

What You Should Know

Access to safe water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) services plays an important role in protecting the health, security, resilience, and economic potential of people worldwide. A lack of WASH is a driver of poverty and loss of life. Estimates show that access to WASH could have prevented 3.3% (1.9 million) of global deaths and 13% of deaths of children younger than 5 in 2016.¹

WASH is the first line of defense in preventing and slowing the spread of most disease outbreaks, such as flu, diarrhea, and Ebola. Development efforts are more effective and sustainable when they address WASH, as it is key to improving maternal and child health, combating neglected tropical diseases, and addressing food and nutrition security.

Yet, 2 billion people lack access to safely managed water services and 3.6 billion lack access to safely managed sanitation services.² More than 802 million children lack access to basic handwashing facilities with soap and water in school,³ and half of healthcare facilities worldwide lack basic hygiene services.⁴ This exacerbates risks for disease, curtails the ability of people and communities to meet their basic needs for economic advancement, and deepens health inequities.

Congressional Calls to Action

Recognize the importance of water security to U.S. national security.
Support U.S. efforts to achieve equitable access to WASH and promote sustainable management of water resources to protect U.S. national security. WASH programming bolsters global economic prosperity and helps prevent conflicts. Estimates show that by 2050 water insecurity could cost some regions up to 6% of gross domestic product.⁵

Support increased WASH program funding and integrate WASH financing across sectors.
Provide robust funding for development assistance and economic support accounts, which fund U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) water and sanitation programs and help integrate WASH in global health and development programs, emergency responses, and humanitarian crises. Also, support the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) by increasing its capacity for preventing and responding to water-related health risks.

The Senator Paul Simon Water for the World Act coordinates WASH policy across the U.S. government and links indicators to positive health outcomes. WASH programming should give increased attention to the needs of women and girls, the differently abled, and other marginalized communities disproportionately affected by lack of WASH.
Bipartisan leadership from the U.S. administration and Congress has helped to improve safe WASH access and water security for millions globally. In Fiscal Year 2020, USAID helped 3.9 million people gain access to sustainable drinking water and 4.1 million people gain access to sustainable sanitation services in 51 countries. U.S. WASH investments reduce morbidity and mortality from WASH-related illness and other infections and build water management practices that lead to economic growth. In addition, scaling up woman- and girl-friendly WASH facilities in communities and expanding menstrual health and hygiene programming support women’s health and promote gender equity.

Climate shocks, increasing water scarcity, population growth, demographic changes, and urbanization pose increasing challenges for water supply and sanitation systems. By 2025, half the world’s population will live in water-stressed areas. Limited access to safe drinking water worsens humanitarian emergencies. For example, children living in conflict areas are almost three times more likely to die from diarrheal diseases caused by a lack of safe WASH than by direct violence. WASH solutions are needed to support ongoing development programs and reach high-risk communities. These solutions establish more resilient and sustainable WASH systems and water supplies, leading to healthier populations.

Why is this investment important?

WASH programming should give increased attention to the needs of women and girls, the differently abled, and other marginalized communities disproportionately affected by lack of WASH.
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Citations