

Increasing Funding for the Water for the World Act
Fiscal Year 2021 Appropriations

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With coronavirus or COVID-19 dominating the news the importance of handwashing is front and center as one of the only effective ways of preventing infection. Both the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the U.S. Surgeon General have touted the importance of washing your hands.

As a matter of fact, access to safe drinking water, sanitation, and hygiene (including handwashing), or WASH, is one of the first lines of defense in slowing the spread of most infectious disease outbreaks such as the flu and Ebola, as well as protecting communities, patients, and frontline health workers over the long-term. During the Ebola epidemic in West Africa, the lack of access to safe WASH in health care facilities and communities was a factor in the inability to contain the disease. And the lack of WASH in many health care facilities put patients seeking routine services such as neonatal care at risk of infection. WASH also plays a role in combatting the rise of “superbugs,” or drug-resistant diseases, by lowering the need to use antibiotics and preventing infections.

Recognizing the threat that a disease outbreak would pose to the United States, Congress included in the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2020 a directive for the Director of National Intelligence to report on global water security, as well as the impact of an infectious disease outbreak, including the ability of health systems to respond. WASH is a critical component of a strong health system, and must be part of plans to prevent, detect, and respond to outbreaks.

The investments USAID makes in WASH are pivotal to global health security efforts, providing access to water, sanitation, and hygiene services in communities, schools, and health care facilities. The U.S. Government Water Strategy reinforces the importance of WASH programs across USAID, other federal agencies, and public and private stakeholders, such as Rotary International, faith communities, schools, corporations, and nonprofits.

WASH programs advance other U.S. priorities including maternal and child health, neglected tropical diseases, nutrition, and economic development.

Yet despite this progress, 2.2 billion don't have access to safe drinking water. And 4.5 billion people are without access to adequate sanitation. Most worrying is the lack of WASH in many schools and health care facilities around the world. One in four health care facilities lack access to toilets and over 30% of schools don't have clean water or a decent toilet.

For this reason, Global Water 2020 recommends \$57.4 billion for the State, Foreign Operations bill and \$500 million for Water in all accounts at USAID for Fiscal Year 2021 to continue to address these needs in some of the poorest regions of the world. The funding could:

- Provide long-term, safe WASH services to an additional half a million people in Africa, Asia, and Latin America;
- Help prevent infectious disease outbreaks and provide WASH in healthcare facilities, communities, and schools; and
- Amplify the impacts of USAID's cross-sectoral work related to WASH, including global health, nutrition, livelihoods, economic development, gender, and food security.

Making investments in WASH now is critical to putting in place preventive measures that can slow the spread of the next novel coronavirus, Ebola outbreak, or the yet to be identified disease X and perhaps prevent billion dollar emergency supplementals in the future. But perhaps Former Senator Bob Corker said it best: "We need to make every dollar of our limited foreign aid resources count by addressing problems where we can have a real impact on people's lives. By focusing our efforts on clean water and sanitation, we can save lives, improve public health and provide stability in vulnerable communities throughout the world."