



# GLOBAL WATERS



*Waiting in line for water should be a thing of the past, not a portent of the future. Photo credit: Shutterstock*

## World Water Day 2020: Five Ways USAID Is Helping Thirsty Cities

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Our world is becoming more urban, and USAID is helping partner countries adapt to this rapid change. By 2030, [68 percent of the world's population will be living in cities](#), with the majority of that growth happening in the developing world. The infrastructure of these cities, peri-urban areas, and market towns is under great strain as their populations grow. Access to safe drinking water in many urban areas is actually declining in response to demographic shifts, while water insecurity is growing, particularly among the urban poor, as city planners struggle to adapt to changing water supply and demand.

With severe water shortages in major cities such as Cape Town, Mexico City, and Chennai recently grabbing headlines, USAID is helping partner cities and towns avoid their own “day zero” scenarios — when taps run dry — and improving sustainable water access for the most needy.

*For more information, please visit [Globalwaters.org](https://Globalwaters.org).*

To commemorate World Water Day, here are five ways USAID is helping thirsty cities become more resilient in the face of a growing water crisis:

## **1. Providing Professionalized Customer Service**

USAID's Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene–Finance ([WASH-FIN](#)) project is leading a program to transform customer relationship management in Cape Town, a component of the city's new water strategy that aims to not only conserve water but also bring in tens of millions of dollars in additional revenue. When reservoirs are drying up and citizens are urged to severely curtail their water use, why would customer relationship management be a priority? In addition to improving goodwill among customers, and thus willingness to pay and to conserve water, it improves cash flow by resolving inaccurate metering, billing errors, and collection backlogs. All of this delivers outsized payback to water service providers — and not only in times of crisis — enabling them to adapt to future droughts and other shocks. [Read more.](#)

## **2. Fostering a New Culture in the Water Service Sector**

Close to half of Nigeria's 183 million citizens reside in urban centers. Decades of domestic migration have put a significant strain on the country's water and sanitation services, with residential access to piped water dropping from 32 percent in 1990 to just 7 percent in 2015. Water service remains generally unreliable due to ineffective governance, lack of regulatory mechanisms, and inefficient financial structures. USAID's Effective Water and Sanitation Hygiene Services ([E-WASH](#)) project has embedded technical experts into six Nigerian state water board offices to work alongside decision-makers and local employees to help create a corporate culture in the water service sector. The goal is for these state water boards to become more autonomous in managing services and financially sound. Changing the management structure to a corporate model will not only lay the groundwork for increased efficiency and expanded services, but will ultimately spark job creation in the sector. [Read more.](#)

## **3. Conserving Water in an Era of Scarcity**

Although Jordan is among the most water-scarce countries on Earth, its people lack awareness about the extent of the challenges and the role they can play in stemming the crisis. USAID's [Water Management Initiative](#) partnered with a local water utility in the capital city of Amman to implement a social marketing campaign to raise awareness about the looming water crisis and encourage residents to take practical action to conserve water. The campaign's slogan, "Don't underestimate the value of a drop," not only went viral, but also proved to be effective. A post-campaign survey found people's knowledge of Jordan's water crisis increased 19 percent and that 24 percent of the targeted population checked their roof tank valves for leaks in the first three days of the campaign. Calls to the utility's customer service number also increased 70 percent. The final phase of the initiative shared practical actions people can take to conserve water, including participating in a USAID-supported program that incentivizes families to retrofit water fixtures and roof tanks with water-saving devices. [Read more.](#)

## 4. Building the Capacity of Service Providers

A decade after the devastating 2010 earthquake, Haiti's decentralized water sector is still struggling to serve its customers. USAID's [Water and Sanitation Project](#) works in five cities, including Cap Haïtien, Haiti's second-largest city, to help its semi-private municipal water utilities expand their customer base and improve operations. USAID is helping these utilities restore basic functions, such as understanding who their customers are; providing clean, reliable water; billing regularly; and finding and repairing leaks. An "mWater" cloud-based system provides real-time monitoring of the utilities' financial and operational systems, helping the businesses to increase their self-reliance. With operations, maintenance, and monitoring systems in place and supported with their own revenue streams, more resilient utilities can be independent of donors and the central government. [Read more.](#)

## 5. Partnering for Sustainable Solutions

Tagbilaran is a growing city in the central Philippines with great economic potential. But the city's inability to deliver reliable and safe water has limited economic growth. Water rationing is common for its 100,000 residents. In response, USAID's [Strengthening Urban Resilience for Growth with Equity](#) project facilitated a partnership between the Tagbilaran City Waterworks System (TCWS) and Maynilad, a Philippine private water and waste services company, to extend the government-run water utility's service hours, improve its revenue generation, and update its accounting. The partnership's first priority was improving billing and district metering. From 2015 to 2018, TCWS recorded a 144 percent increase in revenue collection, enabling it to acquire additional water pumping units and improve its service hours. Then Maynilad and USAID technical experts worked with TCWS to shift perceptions on the importance of reducing leaks in the water system. Called non-revenue water, or simply water loss, these leaks can drain funding for cities if left unchecked. With improvements in place, Tagbilaran residents now have access to water nearly 24 hours a day, seven days a week and more revenue is available to upgrade the system and address ongoing challenges like water loss. [Read more.](#)

This work to promote local utility reform, improve water quality management, and reduce non-revenue water is critical to ensure the reliability and sustainability of water services in growing urban areas. USAID is also committed to advancing rural water access, particularly for underserved poor and vulnerable households.

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