



A week before World Water Day, USAID and the Department of State jump-started the implementation process for the new Global Water Strategy at the U.S. Institute of Peace with a room full of collaborators and stakeholders. Photo credit: Water CKM Project

Working Together to Shape the Future Direction of Water Programming

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In November 2017, the U.S. Government (USG) released the first-ever whole of government [Global Water Strategy](#), the culmination of 17 government agencies working together to address the world's most pressing water challenges through diplomacy, foreign assistance, science, and technology. The real work of making this vision a reality and coordinating the implementation of the Strategy at the USG level began Tuesday, March 13, at the “[Reaching a Water Secure World: U.S. Global Water Strategy Workshop](#)” hosted by USAID and the U.S. Department of State, in Washington, DC, and [live streamed](#) worldwide.

During opening remarks, co-hosts James Peters, USAID Acting Global Water Coordinator and E3 Bureau Deputy Assistant Administrator, and Aaron Salzberg, Depart-

ment of State Special Coordinator for water resources, mapped out the strategy development process and highlighted new directions for water-related development and diplomacy. “We know that official development assistance is not enough to help partner countries move away from aid and towards self-reliance,” said Mr. Peters. “It is estimated that upwards of \$114 billion per year of capital expenditures will be required to achieve universal access to safe water and sanitation services by 2030.” He then explained the Strategy’s roadmap to close that gap — mobilizing new sources of financing, increasing sustainable water and sanitation services to the most vulnerable, protecting vital water resources, and harnessing innovation and scientific expertise.

An introductory panel session drew on the perspectives of water experts from seven different USG agencies — USAID, Department of State, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA), Overseas Private Investment Corporation (OPIC), and the Export-Import Bank (EXIM) of the United States — and explored their contributions to the new Strategy.

The Strategy outlines an approach to a water secure world through an emphasis on governance and finance, which will “infiltrate all that we are doing,” said USAID’s Jeff Goldberg, and is vital to ensuring sustainability and self-reliance. He described how USAID’s Development Credit Authority provides partial risk guarantees to attract local private capital and leverage commercial financing in the water sector.

Several panelists weighed in on other ways the USG plans to mobilize resources in support of the water sector. EXIM’s Catherine Miceli explained her organization’s mission to support U.S. jobs through financing of exports of goods and services, and discussed how EXIM’s due diligence protects U.S. private sector water entities interested in selling technologies or services overseas.

OPIC’s Merryl Burpoe described how her agency provides businesses with the tools to manage risks associated with foreign direct investment while promoting U.S. technologies and approaches. OPIC’s new global [2X Women’s Initiative](#) will mobilize more than \$1 billion for projects that support women in developing countries, and water projects will be a key focus. Breakout sessions in the afternoon delved deeper into the topic of water financing and governance, generating lively discussions.

Other panelists discussed how science, technology, and innovation are being applied to implement the Strategy. NASA and USAID’s [SERVIR](#) activity, for example, provides scientific tools and solutions to areas that are both water insecure and data sparse using satellite data and cloud-based services. Meanwhile, USDA shares basic and applied research on agriculture, forestry, and watersheds to ensure sound policy and science-based decision-making.

The CDC’s Rick Gelting made the connection between water security and emerging global health threats. “WASH [water, sanitation, and hygiene] is integral to public health and therefore we need to look at WASH in relation to all emerging diseases,” he explained. CDC provides technical assistance to scale up effective integrated vector control interventions that depend on the availability of water and the practice of handwashing. Ebola and cholera are the top health threats at the moment, but the

agency is preparing for the emergence of the unknown (Disease X).

Finally, Clay Stanger from the State Department addressed diplomatic engagement and the strategic importance of interagency coordination to tackle significant issues — from work with the Army Corps of Engineers to repair the Mosul Dam in Iraq to prevent flooding to mitigating tensions in basins along some of the world's most conflict-prone waterways.

The next session got down to the nitty-gritty of country-level coordination and cooperation, a key component of Strategy implementation. Mr. Goldberg noted that the Strategy will be implemented from the field, not Washington, and provided an explanation of the existing country level operational policy strategic frameworks that will influence implementation, such as [USAID Country Development Cooperation Strategies](#), the Department of State's [Integrated Country Strategies](#), and individual priority country plans.

USAID's Agathe Sector provided a mission-level perspective based on her experiences working with other interagency initiatives that took a whole-of-government approach, such as Feed the Future and Power Africa. She emphasized the importance of leveraging diplomacy, speaking with one voice, engaging at both a high level and on the technical side, and holding regular working group discussions. "Coordination is not as easy as it may seem," she noted, "You need structures and processes in place to make it happen."

Breakout sessions in the afternoon invited stakeholders to take a deeper dive into the Strategy's strategic objectives: WASH; water sector governance, finance, and institutions; water resources management (WRM); and transboundary water cooperation.

In the WASH session, attendees were asked to brainstorm answers to two questions: How do you move populations up the water and sanitation ladders to "safely managed" services, and what are the challenges of reaching extremely poor/vulnerable and last mile populations with water and sanitation? A summary of the key takeaways are included below.

Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene: Key Takeaways

- Moving populations up the sanitation ladder to "safely managed" services will require professionalization of water and sanitation service providers to ensure sustained service delivery management and improved quality of drinking water.
- More tailored approaches for WASH sector improvements are needed as there is no one size fits all intervention.
- Research is needed on renewable energy options, including solar power, to decrease costs of diesel pumping faced by water service providers.
- Government prioritization on reaching the poor is necessary, including ring-fenced funding for last mile populations.
- A more comprehensive approach is needed to link supply of WASH products with household demand generation, including understanding what last mile consumers want in WASH products.

The other three breakout sessions elicited input on the challenges, opportunities,

and recommendations associated with moving the needle/mobilizing resources for each strategic objective — WRM, finance and governance, and transboundary issues. Some key takeaways from each session are listed below.

Water Resources Management: Key Takeaways

- A number of issues and trends have heightened the need for USG engagement in WRM globally, including climate change and increased demand for water for different uses and from growing populations.
- Understanding the water balance is fundamental to improving WRM; increased focus is needed on the generation, dissemination, and use of hydrological data, including for groundwater.
- Financing WRM is challenging, but opportunities exist to better engage with communities and private companies to help sustainably fund WRM activities.
- Valuation of water and water-related ecosystem services is an area that is important for incentivizing WRM.
- Integrating WASH and WRM is critical for development, but more learning is necessary to inform approaches for successfully linking WRM at multiple scales to WASH sustainability.

Finance and Governance: Key Takeaways

- Investments in governance and finance are a huge opportunity for leverage — not using donor funds to finance everything means we can have a bigger impact.
- Access to water has political implications, and incentives can be misaligned among host governments, the private sector, and water users.
- Successes in many countries have been made possible by new private sector models and local lending markets.
- The ongoing push to decentralize government responsibilities in many priority countries creates challenges, but also potential opportunities to work with new stakeholders.
- We need to ensure that we understand the full system for water services and resource management to best align the roles of donors, government, and the private sector.

Transboundary Water Cooperation: Key Takeaways

- Transboundary water issues require long-term engagement to make contacts, build trust, and acquire and share data and information.
- Existing networks should be tapped into (including academic exchanges, research, professional associations, and implementing organizations).
- The enabling environment including the rule of law needs to be strengthened to encourage private sector investment and other cooperation.
- Increased attention needs to be paid to financial incentives for collaboration.
- Increased engagement with environment and natural resource management communities would be beneficial.

In concluding remarks, Mr. Peters spoke of the need for ongoing discussion and engagement with partners and the development community around the Global Water Strategy, noting that he viewed “the level of engagement on display at his workshop as a measure of future success.” Mr. Peters committed to continue engagement with the stakeholder community as implementation moves forward, noting USAID’s plans

to convene additional gatherings around the strategic objectives.

Mr. Salzberg recapped the key messages that resonated throughout the day. How do we make in-country processes more accessible? How do we do a better job integrating? How do we become more effective at leveraging knowledge, technology, resources, and relations? And how do we measure and broadcast success?

“All the people who shared their time and worked on the Strategy, you gave us a lot to think about,” Mr. Salzberg added. “I get the feeling you’re in this with us.”

By Wendy Putnam



Additional Resources:

- [U.S. Government Global Water Strategy](#)

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