



The USAID Kenya Water Sanitation and Hygiene (KIWASH) project, in partnership with Busia County government, has been working to bring reliable clean water to local communities. Photo credit: Emily Mutai/USAID

Kenya Shows How New Water Strategy Will Lead to Self-Reliance

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After the [U.S. Government Global Water Strategy](#) was published last November, I knew my first trip as USAID Acting Global Water Coordinator should be to Kenya. Why Kenya? Because the country is a perfect example of the direction we are taking with the new strategy.

The enthusiasm I witnessed during my trip last month confirmed it was the right choice. I was privileged to meet hundreds of dedicated Kenyans who are working to build their nation and improve lives.

Kenya is designated as one of 13 [high-priority countries](#) to implement the Global

Water Strategy in 2018. While high levels of need persist, Kenya has real national and local political will to expand access to sustainable water and sanitation services. The country also benefits from an interested private sector, an environment that is conducive to donor collaboration, opportunities to access private sector resources, and the ability to make an impact on the lives of women and girls. This fits well with the new Strategy's focus on saving lives, promoting economic growth, reducing conflict, and opening up international markets to U.S. technologies and expertise.

USAID's [water portfolio in Kenya](#) is addressing a wide range of needs — from communities requiring basic services, to entrepreneurs seeking strategic investment and training, to large utilities ready to take advantage of commercial financing opportunities. Our work aims to strengthen the ability of local stakeholders, such as county governments, to deliver sustained water services to their citizens.

While in Kenya, I helped launch three water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) projects along with USAID's Mission Director for Kenya and East Africa Tina Dooley-Jones. [In Busia County](#) we commissioned the Alema Water Project, implemented under USAID's [Kenya Integrated Water, Sanitation and Hygiene](#) (KIWASH) project. KIWASH expanded this water system to provide an additional 12,000 people with clean, affordable water. The project replaced the pumping system with one that uses both solar and conventional electric power. KIWASH also constructed a 100-cubic meter water tank, connected the system to an existing network of piping, and constructed two additional water kiosks. To ensure sustainability, Busia Water and Sewerage Services Company is prepared to take over the management of these water systems and incorporate it into the utility.

KIWASH is also working to improve private enterprises that provide water in small communities outside the city of Nairobi. The project offers these enterprises training on registration and licensing requirements, staff management, financial management, and business planning. One such group is the Geoseismic Water Company, known locally as Ken's Borehole. In addition to training, KIWASH provided the company with infrastructure support, including a storage tank, network pipeline extensions, and kiosks to expand its service from 1,000 to 2,500 people. The next step will be for KIWASH to provide a recoverable grant, which will enable the company to invest in solar pumping, additional metered extensions, and more storage. We had the good fortune to meet some customers of Ken's Borehole. One young woman said before the connection she had to walk to fetch water, but the quality of the water was so poor it gave her skin infections. But now she has better access to safe, clean water. A young man said his connection to the service made it possible for him to run a car wash business. Both were testaments to the impact that first-time, reliable access to clean water can have on people living in small villages.

In Turkana County, we officially commissioned the Lorengelup Community Water Project along with the County Governor Josphat Nanok. Funded under the [Kenya Resilient Arid Lands Partnership for Integrated Development](#) (Kenya RAPID) program, the project will support water access for both people and livestock and serve approximately 5,500 people. As part of the project, Kenya RAPID constructed a 50,000-liter elevated steel tank, three livestock water troughs and a water kiosk. The program also rehabilitated two existing water kiosks and extended a pipeline supplying water to a primary school with nearly 1,000 students.

We wrapped up the trip with the official launch of the Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene Finance ([WASH-FIN](#)) program in Kenya. WASH-FIN builds on the prior experience and efforts of USAID's Sustainable Water and Sanitation in Africa (SUWASA) activity to mobilize local finance for water and sanitation. SUWASA provided a roadmap of ways to make the most of national policies and socio-economic changes to mobilize local sources of finance for subnational WASH investments. To encourage WASH financing, USAID supports and promotes market-based approaches that mobilize local capital sources appropriate to a country's level of WASH sector development. This includes using USAID's Development Credit Authority guarantees that share the risk with local sources of private capital.

As we attended ceremonies to commemorate the impact of USAID investments, the support local stakeholders and officials expressed for these activities could not have been more encouraging. Perhaps the moment that impacted me the most came during an unplanned stop at one of the water towers we were commissioning. As our convoy was going up a dirt track road leading to the launch site, hundreds of girls from the local school surrounded our cars. The school's headmistress knew the water tank was coming into operation and assumed the cars carried the governor and other local officials. She wanted to make sure we were welcomed and thanked for the clean drinking water the tower will bring to her school. Watching these young students celebrating tells the story of how transformative clean, accessible water can be in places that have gone too long without it.

From these young people, to the ministries, communities, and governors throughout Kenya, there is the sense of local ownership of these water activities. It gives me high hopes for the future and a deep sense of pride in the new strategy we have created.

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Additional Resources:

- [U.S. Government Global Water Strategy](#)
- [Global Waters Radio: Jim Peters on Water Improvements in Kenya and the U.S. Government Global Water Strategy](#)

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