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# GLOBAL WATERS



*Addressing the issue of access to clean drinking water has the opportunity to strengthen women's lives.  
Photo credit: Andre Fanthome*

## **Tackling Water Issues Lightens the Load for Garment Workers**

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**T**he apparel industry employs millions of people throughout the world, a majority of whom are women. In many garment-producing countries women also bear the disproportionate burden for household responsibilities, particularly water collection.

Lack of access to safe drinking water and sanitation takes up their time, affects their health, lowers their income-earning potential, and stands in the way of caring for families and improving their education.

On World Water Day 2017, USAID and Gap Inc. announced the formation of the Women + Water Global Development Alliance to advance the health and well-being of women, families, and communities touched by the apparel industry. The partnership will be USAID's first water sector public-private partnership to focus on women as change agents by increasing their participation in decisionmaking and improving

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

access to sustainable water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH).

India, one of the world's global leaders in garment production, will be the first focus country for the Women + Water Alliance. Not only is India one of the largest garment-producing countries in the world, it is also where much of the cotton that is used in the apparel industry is grown and turned into fabric. Cotton is one of the most water-intensive crops grown, and the production of cotton into fabric also uses a large amount of water. The Women + Water Alliance will strengthen women's voices and agency through [Gap Inc.'s Personal Advancement & Career Enhancement \(P.A.C.E.\)](#) program in communities where cotton is grown and fabric is produced, while supporting their access to WASH finance and services and developing community-based water management committees to address the multiple demands on shared water resources. A systems-based, gender-sensitive, and adaptive approach will be put in place to ensure sustained and scalable impact of the Women + Water Alliance's activities in India and beyond.

At a launch event for the Women + Water Alliance in Washington, D.C., on March 22, key partners, including USAID's Water Office and Global Development Lab, Gap Inc., and implementing partner organizations Water.org, CARE India, Institute for Sustainable Communities, and International Center for Research on Women discussed common interests and their roles going forward.

Marcus Johnson, acting deputy executive director at the U.S. Global Development Lab, provided opening remarks, which touched upon USAID's history of embedding public-private partnerships into its foreign assistance approach. In the past 15 years, USAID has built more than 1,600 partnerships with the private sector involving more than 3,500 unique organizations.

"Partnering with USAID provides access to specialized development expertise, support, and relationships that advance business goals while fostering the economic growth and poverty reduction needed to sustain industries in the long term," said Johnson.

He went on to describe the complementary strengths the Women + Water Alliance partners bring to WASH programming and the advancement of women, including USAID's technical expertise and bilateral relationships, and Gap Inc.'s experience implementing life-skills training through its P.A.C.E. program and its work in supply chain sustainability.

P.A.C.E. Vice President Kindley Walsh Lawlor later added that women's lives change when they go through the program, which currently reaches 50,000 people in 12 countries. "In addition to improved self-esteem and self-confidence," said Walsh Lawlor, "they become advocates for other women in their communities."

Jim Peters, acting global water coordinator and deputy assistant administrator for USAID's Bureau for Economic Growth, Education and Environment, described the Women + Water Alliance in the context of USAID's WASH and gender portfolio.

"When we work with women on water issues, we see improvements in areas as diverse as health, nutrition, and school enrollment," Peters explained. "For example,

improved water quality can address the startling reality that worldwide a child dies every 90 seconds from a water-related disease.”

The Women + Water Alliance also echoes USAID’s water strategy, in which women are empowered to effectively advocate for their perspectives and priorities, so that they are able to fully engage as managers, partners, and entrepreneurs in water-related activities and enterprises.

Dan Henkle, president of the Gap Foundation and senior vice president for Global Sustainability at Gap Inc., explained the key takeaway gleaned from his many years of implementing corporate social responsibility programs. “We’ve learned the key word is integration,” Henkle said, “to integrate this work into the fabric of decisions made every day by our 135,000 employees across the globe.”

“Why water?” he was asked. “Why women?”

Henkle did not hesitate in his response. “If we’re serious about empowering and advancing women and not thinking about water, we’re really missing something.”

*By Wendy Putnam*



### **Additional Resources:**

- [Women + Water Alliance](#)
- [Gap Inc.’s Personal Advancement & Career Enhancement](#)

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