USAID Water and Development Country Plan for Afghanistan

I. Executive Summary:

In a very difficult environment, Afghanistan is making steady progress in improving access to improved drinking water and sanitation. With strong donor support, the country is close to meeting its Millennium Development Goal (MDG) for improved water supply. Challenges remain in achieving targeted improvements in sanitation, sustainably expanding infrastructure access to the country's rapidly growing urban population, reaching some highly vulnerable populations, and ensuring sustainable access to water supply sources. USAID is assisting Afghanistan in meeting its water supply and sanitation targets and improving hygiene behaviors in alignment with the Global Water Strategy (GWS) and the USAID Agency Plan through the Potable and Productive Water Project (PPWP), an integrated set of activities addressing water supply, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) needs and related water resource management challenges. Five WASH activities are being implemented under this PPWP. Two additional activities are planned to begin in the coming year. USAID plans for these seven activities to utilize all expected new Water for the World Act appropriations for Afghanistan over the coming five years as well as the currently available funding. Overall, these activities are expected to provide over 700,000 Afghans with sustainable access to improved water supply, and help over one million Afghans gain access to an improved sanitation by 2021.

II. Introduction

More than 16 years after the fall of the Taliban, Afghanistan remains one of the most dangerous countries in the world. Violent extremism, corruption, impunity, and the fragility of the Afghan government impede the economy. To help the country address these challenges, USAID/Afghanistan manages a complex multi-sector portfolio across eight technical offices.

The assistance improves democratic governance, leverages private sector markets, and advances Afghanistan's socio-economic goals, including the provision of basic services such as access to improved drinking water and sanitation.

Since 2001, USAID assistance has helped Afghanistan make progress in expanding provision of improved WASH services; however, the country still ranks among the lowest in the world in terms of access to improved WASH. This situation contributes to stubbornly high levels of child mortality and malnutrition. Using 2015 data on drinking water and sanitation access and associated child health impacts, USAID ranked Afghanistan ninth in terms of WASH "need" among countries receiving USAID assistance.

Given this high priority ranking, USAID/Afghanistan has developed this country plan to guide its WASH programming toward meeting the development objectives of the USAID Agency-specific Plan under the GWS.

III. Government of Afghanistan Water Supply, Sanitation, and Hygiene Objectives

The Afghanistan National Development Strategy 2008–2013 proposed achieving the MDG target of halving the proportion of people without sustainable access to safe drinking water and sanitation by 2020. Using available baseline information in 2004 when this commitment was made, the government adopted overall population targets for access to improved water and sanitation of 62 percent and 66 percent, respectively. By 2015, the WHO/UNICEF Joint Monitoring Programme estimated access to basic drinking water and sanitation at 63 percent and 39 percent, respectively. This represents a dramatic increase in access to improved water supply since 1990 and is a considerable achievement for a country considered to be a fragile state. However, while there has been some progress since 1990 in providing access to improved sanitation and in reducing open defecation, particularly in urban areas, there is still a long way to go to achieve Afghanistan's target of 66 percent by 2020 for sanitation.

While there are encouraging trends at the national level, significant differences in access among regions remain. For example, only about 30 percent of Central Highland Region residents have access to improved drinking water, while about 80 percent of South Eastern Region residents have access to improved sources. Similar variations exist in access to basic sanitation facilities.[1]

IV. Government of Afghanistan Current and Planned Strategies and Approaches to Water and Sanitation

To achieve the MDG target on water supply and sanitation, the Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development (MRRD) adopted the National Rural WASH Policy of 2010. The Policy provides a roadmap for achieving the MDGs through strengthening sector institutions, improving internal governance, and creating a countrywide sector WASH database. It also pledged to make strategic investments, ensure transparency, build capacity in the sector, and promote partnerships with communities and civil society groups. At the Sanitation and Water for All meeting in 2014, Afghanistan made six further commitments to support its WASH efforts and build the government's project implementation capacity in the sector.

MRRD implements the National Rural WASH Policy through its Rural Water Supply, Sanitation and Irrigation Program (Ru-WatSIP). Ru-WatSIP provides safe drinking water and sanitation facilities as well as hygiene awareness for rural residents. MRRD plans to expand Ru-WatSIP over the next three years under the Afghan government's recently announced Citizen's Charter National Priority Programme. Citizen's Charter goals include increasing access to water and sanitation to 76 percent and 36 percent, respectively, by 2020. Ru-WatSIP is funded primarily through the Ministry of Finance with complementary funding and support through UNICEF and its donors, including USAID.

There is not an equivalent government "urban WASH policy" or implementation and investment program for urban drinking water, and urban sanitation infrastructure has received limited attention. The government's National Infrastructure Plan 2017–2020 makes no mention of plans for urban

[1] Afghanistan 2015 Demographic and Health Survey Final Report. http://dhsprogram.com/what-we-do/survey/survey-display-471.cfm

sanitation investment nor does it provide any specifics on proposed urban water supply improvements.

Several other donors are active in the WASH sector in Afghanistan. The Germans are currently the most active donor in urban WASH. The German Development Bank (KfW) is leading investment in rehabilitation and upgrading of the Kabul water supply system. USAID and the French and Greek governments are contributing about half the funding for these KfW-led investments. The German technical assistance organization GIZ also provides complementary technical support to water utilities in Kabul, Herat, and Kunduz.

UNICEF is the most active participant in rural WASH. In addition to being the humanitarian WASH Cluster Lead, UNICEF has developed a close working relationship with MRRD, the Ministry of Education, and the Ministry of Public Health in supporting work on rural community water supply and sanitation, WASH in schools, and hygiene promotion. UNICEF utilizes about half of its own institutional resources for these activities, but also receives significant contributions from USAID, Republic of Korea, Finland, and Japan.

In the past, USAID worked closely with the World Bank on urban water utility reform efforts. The World Bank has been inactive in the sector for the last few years, but it is considering new investments. The Asian Development Bank has no major WASH investments, but it is utilizing USAID funds to study the potential for recharge of Kabul's groundwater aquifers, a potentially critical investment to sustain the city's only current source of fresh water.

V. Challenges and Opportunities in the Sector

The WASH sector in Afghanistan faces many challenges. Some challenges are simply inherent to Afghanistan's geography. The country's harsh climate and rough terrain impede the expansion and maintenance of public infrastructure, including water supply systems. Decades of conflict and weak governance have impeded investment in public infrastructure and made enforcing relevant sanitation and hygiene regulations difficult. Overcoming these challenges is becoming more critical as the country experiences rapid urbanization.

Though exact data is impossible to obtain (the only official Afghan census ever conducted was in 1979, and it was incomplete), the rate at which cities are growing in Afghanistan is likely double the current average in Asia. Some estimate that Kabul is the fifth fastest growing city in the world, with a population that has ballooned from approximately 1.5 million in 2001 to around six million people in 2014. People displaced by fighting in the countryside, refugees returning from Pakistan and Iran, and rural residents looking for economic opportunities are all part of this shifting demographic. Meeting the water and sanitation needs of this increasing population will be very challenging as even existing needs are not being met. Urban water supply networks meet the needs of few residents. Even in the capital, the piped-water system reaches less than 20 percent of the population. Afghanistan also has no functioning sewage and wastewater treatment systems, and existing septage management systems are informal.

Urban population growth, land use changes, unregulated construction of deep tube wells, and poor

waste management practices are all endangering existing drinking water sources and health in many cities and even in some rural areas. A study by the U.S. Geological Survey between 2004 and 2012 showed groundwater levels in Kabul city had fallen by an average of 1.5 meters annually during 2008–2012. These challenges to maintaining accessible, clean, and sufficient water resources for drinking will likely be exacerbated by a changing climate, including already changing snow melt patterns. The rural and urban sanitation problems will continue to affect human and environmental health and, with overall population growth, urgent leadership and action is required. While the government is making strides in improving its institutional capacity to effectively manage WASH programming, WASH-related private sector participation remains underdeveloped. Consumers lack attractive, appropriate, and affordable sanitation products and services to help improve their household latrines and waste management practices.

However, there are several opportunities that could lead to future sector success. One is to engage more substantively in the sanitation sector, in particular to improve existing sanitation behaviors. Well over a third of the people in both urban and rural Afghanistan already use a latrine, albeit one that is considered "unimproved" because of its poor design and/or construction. The main challenge, therefore, is to push people to improve their current sanitation facilities. Between 2009 and 2012, USAID partnered with the government to adopt a structured approach to do just that. There is strong evidence that the product of this collaboration, the Afghan Context community-led total sanitation approach, is effective in motivating rural residents to build or improve latrine facilities. The challenge now is to roll out the approach across the country.

Also encouraging is the resiliency demonstrated by rural communities in maintaining improved water systems built by donor assistance. A recent retrospective evaluation of the functionality of 3,000 wells built by USAID between 2009 and 2012 found that almost all of the wells, if properly constructed, were being successfully maintained by communities The main challenge for water supply programs in Afghanistan seems to be simply designing water supply improvements that respond to community needs and are constructed with proper technical oversight. The government's existing rural water supply program is already designed to meet that challenge.

VI. USAID/Afghanistan Country Plan for Water

USAID plans to assist Afghanistan to meet its water objectives through the PPWP, an integrated set of activities addressing WASH needs, water resource management challenges, and irrigation concerns in alignment with the USAID Agency-specific Plan under the GWS. Five WASH activities are being implemented under PPWP, and two additional activities are planned to begin in 2017. These activities will address emerging urban WASH challenges, build on the successes to-date in rural water supply, address the country's unique sanitation challenges, and empower Afghans to sustain improvements over time.

Supporting sustainability: The PPWP aims to sustain project results by ensuring partner country buy-in, developing socially sound activities in the varied contexts of Afghanistan, and minimizing recurrent costs within the fiscal capacities of the host partners. The Initiative for Hygiene, Sanitation and Nutrition focuses on rolling out the Afghan Context community-led total sanitation approach. The Afghan government and civil society support this evidence-based approach and simply lack the resources to quickly expand its application. However, USAID is going further to expand the

effectiveness of this approach by getting the buy-in of the private sector. Through the Afghanistan Jobs Creation Program activity, USAID will work to help businesses to improve supply chains, marketing, and financing to make sanitation products and services affordable to more Afghan consumers.

Geographic focus: PPWP activities target both urban and rural areas where our implementing partners can safely implement activities but where identified needs are high. For example, urban water supply efforts have a strong focus on Kabul, where needs are great and sustainable drinking water supplies are at particular risk. The Kabul Urban Water Supply activity is constructing infrastructure to expand access to piped water, safely managed by the city's water utility, to over 135,000 people. Meanwhile, the Kabul Managed Aquifer Recharge activity is piloting efforts to safely increase surface water recharge of the groundwater aquifer, the sole source of water for the city.

Other activities are more flexible in their geographic focus. The communities where rural water supply improvements are being constructed under the Rural Water Supply, Sanitation, and Hygiene activity are selected according to criteria developed by the MRRD—community buy-in being one of the most important criteria. The Emergency WASH activity has the most geographic flexibility. This activity's small scale grants implemented by local and international humanitarian organizations respond to the evolving needs of the most vulnerable populations, such as Afghan returnees from Pakistan, with rapid-response drinking water and sanitation interventions.

Activities: The PPWP includes seven activities designed to scale up effective, integrated WASH interventions. These activities were designed to jointly address the challenges and opportunities in the WASH sector.

Figure 1. Main Mechanisms

Activity	Duration	Implementation Approach	Status
Rural Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene	2016 – 2020	Public International Organization Agreement	Implemented by UNICEF
Initiative for Hygiene, Sanitation and Nutrition (IHSAN)	2016 – 2021	Contract	Implemented by FHI 360
Kabul Urban Water Supply	2017 – 2019	Agreement on delegated cooperation	Implemented by German Development Bank KfW
Kabul Managed Aquifer Recharge pilot	2016 – 2018	Public International Organization Agreement	Implemented by the Asian Development Bank

Emergency WASH	2014 – 2019	Grants	Three grants being implemented. Additional round in procurement.
New			
Leveraging Urban Water Supply and Sanitation Initiative	2017 – 2021	TBD	In procurement
Afghanistan Jobs Creation Program	2017 – 2020	Grants/cooperative agreements	In procurement

The Afghanistan Country Plan is costed based on prior year resources still available for programming, the FY 2017 estimated allocation of $10.0 million, and the FY 2018 President's Budget Request of $5.7 million.

Other USAID-funded USG activities: USAID also is providing funding to the U.S. Geological Survey to facilitate its assistance to the Afghan Ministry of Energy and Water. This collaboration will include mentoring the Ministry in water data collection and analysis to identify the most effective means of ensuring the long-term sustainability of drinking water supplies in the Kabul River Basin.

Activities will begin in 2017 and are expected to last through 2019.

Expected results: Overall, these activities are expected to provide over 700,000 Afghans with sustainable access to improved water supply, and help over one million Afghans gain access to an improved sanitation facility. The results reported reflect targets at the time of this document's production, however, targets may be updated on an annual basis.