

USAID Water and Development Country Plan for Liberia

I. Executive Summary

Despite the great steps taken by the Government of Liberia (GOL) over the last five years to strengthen the country's water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) infrastructure and service provision, Liberia still remains one of the sub-Saharan African countries with the lowest coverage of WASH services. The GOL has developed a five-year WASH Strategic Plan (2012–2017) that is well aligned with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 6 that envisions universal, sustainable, and equitable access to safe drinking water, sanitation and hygiene, as well as the elimination of open defecation.

The USAID/Liberia water country plan has been developed based on the Agency-specific Plan under the Global Water Strategy, the GOL's WASH Strategic Plan, and consultations with other donors and development partners. This country plan reflects USAID's requirement that essential ongoing and future investments contribute toward meeting the country's sector objectives.

II. Introduction

Liberia has made significant strides in increasing access to and use of improved sources of drinking water and some progress toward improved sanitation services, despite the post-conflict and post-Ebola recovery efforts. According to the latest WHO/ UNICEF Joint Monitoring Programme (JMP), Liberia partially met its WASH-related Millennium Development Goal targets. The country was just 1.5 percent below its target of reducing the proportion of people living without access to safe drinking by half (from 57 percent to 76 percent from 1995–2015). However, there was minimal progress in meeting the target for access to improved sanitation facilities, achieving only 17 percent by the end of 2015, against the 57 percent target. While access to safe drinking water has made great progress, the country continues to face challenges in improving health outcomes related to WASH and food security. Some of these challenges were exacerbated during the outbreak of Ebola Virus Disease (EVD) in 2014. Nevertheless, the outbreak presented an opportunity for Liberia to leverage enormous momentum in the public domain and in the WASH sector to make major improvements in infrastructure, service delivery and strengthening of inclusive governance.

III. Government of Liberia WASH Objectives

In 2011, the GOL signed the Liberia WASH Compact solidifying its commitment to a whole-of-government response for improved WASH services, practices, and health outcomes. Following the compact commitments, the GOL's WASH Sector Strategic Plan (2012–2017) was developed to operationalize the WASH Compact commitments and address the identified bottlenecks through four strategic objectives: 1) establish and strengthen institutional capacity to manage, expand, and sustain Liberia's WASH services; 2) increase equitable access to environmentally friendly and sustainable water and sanitation services and promote hygiene behavior change at scale; 3) establish information management systems and strengthen monitoring, data collection, communication, and sector engagement; and 4) improve sector financing and financing

mechanisms. These objectives were also outlined in the GOL’s Post Ebola Economic and Stabilization and Recovery Plan and are well aligned with the SDG-6 target to ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all, and will contribute to making Liberia a middle income country with access to adequate WASH services.

The GOL’s short-term and medium-term WASH targets as outlined in the WASH Sector Strategic Plan are presented below:

Sector	Sub-sector	Coverage	Target Year		
		2015 (%)	2017 (% Target)	2022 (% Target)	2030 (SDG % Target)
Water Supply	Monrovia	76	93	96	100
	Other urban		93	96	100
	Rural		67	80	100
Sanitation	Monrovia	17	61	80	100
	Other urban		61	57	100
	Rural		52	70	100

Under the Sanitation and Water for All Initiative, Liberia committed to prioritize the delivery of basic services to the poorest rural districts with the highest malnutrition rates, as well as to informal settings in urban dwellings.

IV. Government of Liberia’s Current and Planned Strategies and Approaches for Water and Sanitation

The Water and Sanitation Policy (2009) sets the vision and guiding principles to promote sector reform for rapid expansion and sustainable delivery of water and sanitation services in Liberia. The Water and Sanitation Policy is the GOL’s commitment to provide guidance and direction in institutional, economic and legal reforms that will lead to improved water governance at national, local, and community levels, and improved access to safe water supply and adequate sanitation and ultimately drive toward the sector targets outlined above. A first part of these reforms was the establishment of the National Water Resources and Sanitation Board (NWRSB), chaired by the President to address the uncoordinated and fragmented nature of WASH governance and implementation. The National Water, Sanitation & Hygiene Committee, a high-level, multi-sectoral, multi-stakeholder committee that serves as a technical advisory body for the NWRSB, monitors achievement of WASH targets and activities outlined in the WASH Sector Strategic Plan. The GOL also adopted the National Integrated Water Resources Management Policy to assist decisionmakers and resource users in determining the roles and responsibilities of various public and the private actors in water resources management.

Donor coordination: The key development partners for the WASH sector include the African Development Bank, the World Bank (WB), UNICEF, and the Government of Ireland, which is funding a WASH consortium of NGOs to deliver WASH services and activities. The African Development Bank’s envisaged support will target WASH activities identified from the national rural WASH studies that it has carried out in 2015. It will be implemented in five counties.

Currently, the WB is investing in improved water infrastructure, specifically the rehabilitation and expansion of the Monrovia sewer lines for increased coverage of water and sanitation services. Future funding through the WB includes additional infrastructure investments in three additional cities. UNICEF, through funding from the Netherlands, implements EVD post-recovery WASH programs, focusing on improving access to WASH services in 30 rural districts and urban slums and in schools in six counties. UNICEF is currently in the final stages of finalizing its country plan (2019–2023) in alignment with UNICEF’s global WASH strategic plan. WaterAid and other NGOs will also continue to implement WASH activities in-country to increase access for WASH services, and depending on the availability of funding. All of these activities are well harmonized through a development partners’ coordination platform that ensure funds are non-duplicative, including those activities funded by USAID.

V. Challenges and Opportunities in the Sector

The Liberia WASH sector is facing a daunting task of putting in place the necessary and appropriate institutional arrangements to ensure delivery of sustainable WASH services. These challenges include:

Fragmentation of the WASH sector: Although remarkable progress has been made toward streamlining the WASH sector in Liberia, the functions within the sector are still spread across eight different ministries and institutions with different mandates. However, a “single public entity” is planned for efficient, sustainable, and accountable water resource management and water and sanitation service delivery to the public. A draft Liberia Water Authority Act is currently going through the legislative process that would establish that entity. The establishment of the entity provides an opportunity for a highly coordinated effort and help streamlining cost-effective expenditure of funds in the sector.

Establishment of regulatory bodies for urban and rural WASH services: The National Water Supply and Sanitation Commission that is planned to serve as the regulatory authority and set sector policies (e.g., standards and norms for consumer services) has not yet been established. Similarly, the Rural Water Supply and Sanitation Bureau, whose primary role will be to assist in hardware procurement, provide technical support, and transfer knowledge and build capacity of county administration and village WASH committees, has not yet been established.

Insufficient domestic investment in WASH sector: Public institutions have an inadequate number of staff in key positions as well as insufficient financial and logistical resources. These compounding factors have limited the achievement of key WASH targets and have led to an over-reliance on donor funding.

Inadequate public spending and lack of operational and maintenance cost recovery mechanisms at the service level: Although tariffs have been set and are collected regularly in most communities, the tariffs are not based on actual or projected costs but are set by consensus by community members and their willingness to pay. The current tariffs are inadequate to meet operational and maintenance costs for water points, resulting in a significant number of non-functional water points.

Other key development opportunities that can be leveraged in relation to the water and sanitation sector are briefly described below:

Demographic trends: Liberia has a population of approximately 4.5 million people. USAID’s focus counties of Lofa, Nimba, and Bong account for 31 percent of the population while the addition of recent Ebola support counties together account for about 45 percent of the total population, providing an opportunity for USAID’s WASH investments to reach a significant portion of the urban and rural populations in Liberia.

Social, economic, environmental trends: The Liberia Water Supply and Sanitation Policy (2009) promotes private sector development in the WASH sector. While there is an emphasis on community-based approaches in rural and peri-urban areas, private sector participation is also encouraged.

Fiscal trends (spending): Despite political commitments to advance the WASH agenda, financial spending in the sector has not kept pace with even modest budget allocations due to diffuse responsibility for WASH across eight government ministries or institutions. For example, WASH activities in 2013/14 fell administratively within the Energy and Environment Sector within the Policy Area of Water and Sewer Services. The GOL budget for 2013/14 for WASH activities amounted to U.S. \$2 million, representing only 0.34 percent of the total national budget, while the actual disbursement to WASH activities was U.S. \$1,354,993, representing 67.7 percent of the total approved budget. A similar spending trend was observed in 2014/15.

Gender, human rights, and social inclusion: According to the WASH Strategic Plan, the GOL is also strongly committed to gender equality as a means of maintaining peace, reducing poverty, enhancing justice, and promoting development in the country. The GOL’s WASH policies and strategic documents recognize the need to mainstream and incorporate gender and human rights issues throughout development programs so that at all levels, gender is automatically addressed.

Hydrologic and climatic trends: Although the country is fortunate to have high amounts of rainfall, the distribution throughout the year is extremely uneven, including months in the dry season with little or no rainfall. This causes temporary fluctuations in surface and groundwater yield and quality. Water table depths can vary from less than a meter in shallow wells to 100 meters or more in boreholes. Reliable data on boreholes and yields are scarce, but available information indicates that groundwater yields are not sufficient to support larger municipal supplies in many areas.

Civil society and private sector: Liberia has strong coordinated civil society organizations.

VI. USAID/Liberia Country Plan for Water

USAID is the largest bilateral donor in the WASH sector in Liberia. It supports comprehensive WASH programming that contributes to GOL’s objectives and long term goals as outlined in the WASH Sector Strategic Plan (2012–2017). It is well aligned with Agency-specific Plan under the Global Water Strategy and contributes to three of the Agency’s strategic objectives: increasing

governance and finance, increasing improved access to water supply, and increasing access to sanitation and improving hygiene behaviors.

Building on its past achievements, USAID will focus on addressing water infrastructure and sanitation service gaps and strengthening government institutions involved in both urban and rural WASH. Additionally, through integrated health activities, USAID/Liberia will promote essential hygiene behaviors through community-based health activities.

Geography: The WASH sector is divided between urban and rural areas, with disproportionate progress in the urban areas compared to rural areas. Since urbanization is occurring at a rapid pace, USAID will continue its investments in Voinjama, Lofa County, Sanniquellie, Nimba County, and Robertsport in Grand Cape Mount County. The location of future investments in urban WASH will be selected in coordination with the Liberia Water and Sewer Corporation and ensure complementarity to other donors' urban focused activities. WASH investments in rural areas will continue in the traditional USAID Health focus counties, of Lofa, Bong, and Nimba counties.

Main mechanisms: To address the challenges outlined above and capitalize on opportunities, USAID is investing in the following:

- Liberia Municipal Water Project I & II and Capital Improvement Project (LMWP and CIP): Through LMWP and CIP, USAID is providing improved water supply access to 90 percent of the population in three county capitals with infrastructure managed by locally based entities that have the financial and technical capacity to sustain the service. Focusing on construction quality assurance and institutional support and capacity building, USAID aims to provide 30,000 people with access to clean, piped water for the first time in nearly three decades by 2018. USAID's investment will also benefit additional people as LMWP is supporting the development of governance and financing models for the management of water supply services in secondary cities, a critical contribution given the rapidly urbanizing towns and cities throughout the country.
- Partnership for Advancing Community Based Services Activity (PACS): Through PACS, UASID is providing technical and operational support to the ministries of Health, Public Works, and Gender, Child and Social Protection, as well as CSOs to deliver high quality community health and social welfare services. Specifically on WASH, the activity improves safe water supply and sanitation at the community level through construction of hand dug wells and implementation of community-led total sanitation and hygiene promotion.
- Fixed Amount Reimbursement Agreement (FARA): Through direct support to the Ministry of Health, USAID will also strengthen the institutionalization and scale-up of behavior change and hygiene promotion interventions in health systems and programs, complementing the Mission's community health activities, and will provide support to WASH infrastructure investment in health facilities to provide quality service delivery in the health facilities in USAID focused geographic locations.

Expected results: Overall, these activities are expected to provide 80,000 Liberians with sustainable access to basic water supply, and help over 3,600 people gain access to basic sanitation services. The results reported reflect targets at the time of this document's production, however, targets may be updated on an annual basis.

The Liberia Country Plan is costed based on prior year resources still available for programming, the FY 2017 estimated allocation of \$12.9 million, and the FY 2018 President's Budget Request of \$2.5 million.

Other USG activities supporting the Liberia Country Plan:

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC): In coordination with the Ministry of Health, the CDC is implementing a number of activities in-country to support sustainable WASH service delivery. For instance, the CDC is evaluating and renovating WASH facilities at two county hospitals, including establishing hospital WASH committees to manage the infrastructure long-term. The CDC is also training a Ministry of Health laboratory and a U.S. NGO to accurately conduct quality control (including chlorine concentration, pH, and shelf life) on a locally produced chlorine solution to purify water.
- Food for Peace: USAID will continue to support WASH activities through the Mission's Food for Peace initiative—Development Food Assistance Project (DFAP). DFAP's activities will also include community-level WASH interventions to improve safe water access, sanitation, and hygiene access in the three counties (Grand Bassa, River Cess, and Bong).