



# DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO

## High-Priority Country Plan

GLOBAL WATER STRATEGY | 2022-2027

The Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) was designated as a High-Priority Country under the first U.S. government (USG) Global Water Strategy (GWS) in 2017 and was renamed a High-Priority Country under the revised GWS in 2022. Over the next five years of GWS implementation (2022–2027), USAID/DRC will continue to support the Government of the DRC (GoDRC) in implementing its Water Law, principally focusing on strengthening viable water and sanitation business models to ensure that sustainable services reach vulnerable populations. Under the GWS, USAID will invest more than \$100 million over the next five years to contribute to the following plan results: 2.6 million Congolese with basic or improved access to water; 700,000 Congolese with basic access to sanitation; 10 institutions, including a mix of national and subnational institutions, strengthened; and \$50 million in new funding mobilized.

## CONTEXT

DRC has an immense water endowment, with one of the highest volumes of freshwater on the African continent, including 62 percent of the Congo Basin. Despite this, the country faces significant challenges to water security, sanitation, and hygiene (WSSH).

The WSSH sector is defined by very low access rates and stark disparities between urban and rural areas, and between major cities and peri-urban areas. Basic water facilities are available to 27 percent of the population, and 19 percent have access to safely managed water services. According to the [WHO/UNICEF Joint Monitoring Program](#), in 2022, 54.4 percent of the population had access to unimproved sanitation, while 13 percent had access to safely managed sanitation services at the national level. Unimproved sanitation services and open defecation are higher in rural settings, while safely managed, basic, and limited services are higher in urban settings.

The country's average urban growth rate in the last decade was 4.1 percent, equivalent to an increase of 1 million residents in Congolese cities every year. As a result of recurrent (and protracted) crises and aggregate shocks (including lack of basic services in rural areas), the areas immediately surrounding the cities—known as peri-urban areas—expand quickly, so subsequent delivery of services is expensive. Peri-urban areas present an opportunity for development actors, because they fall outside of the GoDRC initiatives. These areas also need new infrastructure and support to maintain current infrastructure.

The limited implementation capacity in DRC is the key bottleneck impeding progress in the sector. Even as more financing becomes available, weak institutions, outdated sector policies, and a lack of infrastructure (e.g., electricity) hinder the efficient use of funding.

DRC is vulnerable to the effects of climate change and is among the countries that are least ready to address climate change. Climate change will exacerbate poverty, food insecurity, and political instability. The projected climate change trends of increased extreme rainfall events and increased temperatures will worsen the already degraded natural environment. Major expected climate change vulnerabilities in the water and energy sectors include: (1) damaged water treatment infrastructure, (2) decreased water quality, (3) damaged power production

and transmission infrastructure in erosive areas, and (4) increased prevalence of waterborne and vector-borne diseases (e.g., cholera and malaria).<sup>1</sup>

USAID/DRC recognizes that as its programming expands geographic and programmatic reach, additional emphasis is needed on policy frameworks that enable private sector participation in the management of water services and related infrastructure. While the future structure of the water sector is uncertain, structural reform is needed to open the sector to a broader range of actors, including private operators, and establish a more level playing field among state-owned operator(s), private operator(s), and Autonomous Water Services (AWS) providers.

## NATIONAL PRIORITIES

The 2015 DRC Water Law and Policy lays the foundation for new reforms and clears the way for a far-reaching transformation of DRC water sector policies and institutions. The law notes that this transformation should occur through decentralization, institutional consolidation, and delegation of operational responsibilities. It mandates that provinces organize water and sanitation service delivery, prescribes cost-based tariffs, and calls for a new regulatory authority. The law also positions local authorities to have primary responsibility for the planning, management, and development of water resources because they are better placed to identify, address, and swiftly resolve issues that arise in their region.

The Ministry of Water Resources and Electricity (*Ministère des Ressources Hydrauliques et Electricité*, MRHE) is the government institution for water supply. MRHE has primary responsibility for creating water sector policies, and the planning, management, and development of water resources. The Ministry of Rural Development (*Ministère du Développement Rural*, MRD) plays a role in planning and implementing rural water projects. The *Regie de Distribution d'Eau* (REGIDESO) is the public utility that is mandated to provide water services to 95 urban centers, but services have ceased to function in more than 30 urban centers supplied by REGIDESO.

After 2006, when a revitalization of state-owned enterprises (SOEs) was underway, the Water Law delegated the management of service provision to either private or public entities. It explicitly recognized the roles that formal user associations (ASUREPs) and private service providers play in water service provision and service management. Many different types of service providers work in the sector, including informal associations and formal private water service providers.

Responsibility for oversight and regulation remains a source of tension between national agencies and provincial governments, between REGIDESO and provincial governments, and between neighboring decentralized territorial authorities (ETDs) as the law is implemented.

Oversight in the sanitation sector is handled by the Ministry of Environment and Sustainable Development (*Ministère de l'Environnement et Développement Durable*, MEDD). The MEDD's Sanitation Department (*Département d'Assainissement*, DAS) is responsible for sanitation planning, while the Ministry of Health (*Ministère de la Santé Public, Hygiene et Prevention*, MSPHP) is responsible for hygiene and sanitation promotion in rural areas. MEDD and MSPHP have jointly developed a Roadmap to Eradicate Open Defecation 2030 (*Defecation a l'Air Libre*, DAL), with a concrete program of policy and investment measures to eradicate open defecation and reduce fecal contamination to the environment by 50 percent by 2030.

The GoDRC has demonstrated its commitment to improving the lives of Congolese people by developing a national water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) framework program (*Programme National Eau-Hygiène-Assainissement*, PNEHA). The PNEHA outlines the policy and regulatory framework in the delivery of water and sanitation services, and the roles and responsibilities of specific actors. It seeks to unify the sector, guide actions between 2020 and 2030, and lay out the priorities for sectoral reform and investments over the coming years. Sustainable financing of the sector is a major stumbling block in the rollout of PNEHA. More resources must be mobilized for water and sanitation programs.

The Water Law and Policy framework has been progressively developed to address different issues in the water sector. Yet, there is no comprehensive sanitation legislation seeking to either address sanitation comprehensively or give the sector an overall direction.

# USAID APPROACH AND RESULTS FRAMEWORK

The goal of the Global Water Strategy is to “improve health, prosperity, stability, and resilience through sustainable and equitable water resources management and access to safe drinking water and sanitation services and hygiene practices.” USAID/DRC’s water and sanitation framework will follow the strategic objectives of the Global Water Strategy. Certain intermediate results of the Global Water Strategy have been selected and contextualized to meet DRC’s evolving circumstances.

The overall goal of USAID/DRC’s High-Priority Country Plan is to sustainably increase the quality of and access to water and sanitation services. This will be done through a series of targeted approaches focused on ensuring viable business models and innovations in the WSSH sector. To strengthen the enabling environment, USAID/DRC will work with national regulatory agencies and provincial governments to improve the water sector regulatory framework and enhance efficient water and sanitation service delivery.



## STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE I

### Strengthen Water and Sanitation Sector Governance, Financing, Institutions, and Markets

USAID/DRC will work with the GoDRC to implement the 2015 Water Law, which stresses decentralization and defines key roles for different actors within the sector. USAID will help the GoDRC develop a programmatic framework with an integrated view of policy reforms, strategy, and investments that prioritizes and sequences water and sanitation interventions. It will also support national-level activities designed to strengthen policy and regulatory frameworks as well as institutional capacity to advance sector reform and promote sustainable service delivery. USAID/DRC will support the MRHE to establish and operationalize the national regulatory authority for the water sector to increase compliance with applicable laws, standards, and contracts. Finally, USAID will support the establishment of a system for arbitrating disputes, including those focused on water prices.

#### Intermediate Results (IRs):

**IR 1.1 Develop, strengthen, and implement inclusive laws, policies, and regulations:** To improve water sector governance, USAID/DRC will work with the MHRE to: establish and operationalize the national regulatory authority for the water sector; ensure compliance with applicable laws, standards, and contracts; and establish a system for arbitrating disputes, including those focused on water price setting and economic regulations.

At the provincial level, USAID will support setting, measuring, and enforcing standards of the Provincial Water Services Authorities (*Regie Provinciales*). USAID/DRC will build the capacity of the Regie to fulfill their role as project owners and support an efficient operator organization for service management. Communities will be engaged to increase ownership, mitigate conflict, and resolve issues associated with service delivery.

**IR 1.2 Effectively mobilize and target public and private financing:** USAID/DRC’s work will focus on improving the economic and commercial viability of existing water and sanitation service providers and piloting new models. More specifically, it will work to encourage public financing and private sector participation at multiple levels. Interventions will focus on the importance of cost-recovery during service provision, accurate forecasting, and sound projection of revenue and accountability for performance improvement. USAID/DRC will engage the *Regies Provinciales* in performance monitoring and support. USAID will also leverage investments from other donors and the GoDRC with wrap-around technical assistance for recently built infrastructure to improve the performance, long-term operations, and maintenance of these facilities.

**IR 1.3 Improve the capacity and performance of regional, national, and subnational institutions:** USAID/DRC will aim to unlock opportunities for decentralization, working with REGIDESO, the *Regie Provinciales*, and the ETD to ensure they fulfill the roles and responsibilities described in the 2015 Water Law. USAID will support and finance a portion of the reform of REGIDESO and contribute to strengthening its long-term performance and capacity for resilient service provision. Support to the Regie Provinciale and ETDs will include improving their capacity to implement well-defined long-term legal contractual agreements for the management of new infrastructure (e.g., a long-term management concession or service contract).

**IR 1.4 Advance transparency, accountability, equity, and efficiency through participatory, data-driven decision-making:** USAID/DRC aims to support evidence-based decision-making. Activities will focus on testing different provision models and delivering evidence on what works and why. Where appropriate, efforts may include creating or increasing the capacity of water service provider associations. Additionally, USAID/DRC will support the development of standards and norms for both service providers and regulators in the sector. This includes developing a database to store and monitor progress, and introducing global standards and data platforms, where possible, to ensure efficient storage, access, and routine use of data to improve efficiency and equity.



## STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 2

### Increase Equitable Access to Safe, Sustainable, and Climate-Resilient Drinking Water and Sanitation Services and Adoption of Key Behaviors

In the DRC, there are huge infrastructure needs in secondary cities as well as in peri-urban and rural areas. While the GoDRC's concerted efforts have resulted in improvements since 2015 with the support of several donors, the task ahead is daunting and sustainable change will take time. USAID/DRC will work with other donors and stakeholders to address challenges. This will include working with REGIDESO and other service providers to ensure increased access to first-time and sustainable service provision.

#### Intermediate Results (IRs):

**IR 2.1 Increase area-wide access to safe, equitable, and affordable sanitation services:** USAID/DRC aims to strengthen the sanitation market, increase consumer demand for sanitation products, and strengthen the supply chain for sustainable improvement in access to and use of sanitation in rural and peri-urban areas. To strengthen service delivery, USAID will explore and expand different models of private sector engagement for sanitation service delivery in rural and peri-urban areas through local partners. USAID/DRC will support the implementation of high-impact interventions that strengthen sanitation markets to increase sustained access to and use of basic sanitation services. Efforts will include supporting sanitation sector governance, marketing hygiene practices, and promoting open defecation free (ODF) status. To strengthen demand, USAID/DRC will fund activities to reach underserved populations, such as unlocking access to sanitation financing and credit for households, or facilitating sanitation and hygiene social and behavior change.

**IR 2.2 Increase access to equitable, safe, reliable, and affordable drinking water services:** To strengthen water service delivery, USAID/DRC will explore different models of private sector engagement. Infrastructure work will be combined with governance and business development support tied to SO 1 and IR 2.3, respectively. USAID will leverage water infrastructure constructed by other donors to ensure economically sustainable and accountable water service delivery models. It will also support the installation of water and sanitation facilities in health care institutions in low-resource settings. There also is an opportunity to explore models for aggregating small and medium-size peri-urban settlements for water supply service provision using innovative contractual forms (for example, Build, operate, Train, Transfer [BoTT]) to improve efficiency through economies of scale and scope.

**IR 2.3 Improve performance and climate resilience of water and sanitation service providers:** There are many service providers in the DRC, and a number of these providers lack business plans or other governance procedures to ensure quality and sustainable provision of services. USAID/DRC will support state-owned utility, private operator(s), and AWS providers and offer technical assistance to build Congolese entrepreneurial capacity for water and sanitation delivery. Beyond the need for increased wastewater collection, treatment, and proper disposal, special attention will be given to strengthening utility resilience against climate change by reducing non-revenue water and increasing energy efficiency. USAID/DRC will finance resilient infrastructure to expand access and improve the efficiency and quality of water services; this will include civil and electrical/mechanical installations for water treatment and supply for households.

Electricity is a key concern for the provision of water services. USAID/DRC will explore avenues to finance the water and energy nexus. Water and energy systems are interdependent and drive human and ecosystem health. Furthermore, wasteful water and energy use contribute to climate change. Working with other activities and global USAID initiatives, such as Power Africa, USAID/DRC will seek market-based approaches to incorporate private sector interests into country- and context-specific business models to expand access to water, electricity, and digital connectivity in institutional settings (primarily health care facilities) and surrounding communities.



## STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 3

### Improve Climate-Resilient Conservation and Management of Freshwater Resources and Associated Ecosystems

Climate change is likely to exacerbate water insecurity by compromising the availability, quantity, and quality of different sources and increasing conflict among different uses and users of water. USAID/DRC will incorporate climate change adaptation into activities through the explicit protection of water resources and the implicit promotion of water security. “Water security” refers to sustainable access to an adequate quantity and quality of water for consumption or other uses, including agriculture, energy, and other economic activities, and the protection of ecosystems. To respond to the ongoing climate challenges, USAID/DRC will finance infrastructure to store, transport, and treat water, build stronger and more adaptable institutions, and promote information systems that enhance local institutional capacity to predict, plan for, and cope with climate variability.

#### Intermediate Results (IRs):

**IR 3.2 Enhance reliability and quality of water resources through watershed management, including protection, restoration, and nature-based solutions:** USAID/DRC will support water feasibility studies to advance conservation objectives in new areas. It will also conduct an integrated assessment of water supply and demand, and identify solutions that address water scarcity in communities around national parks. Once the studies are completed, USAID will design interventions to respond to the needs identified.



## STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 4

### Anticipate and Reduce Conflict and Fragility Related to Water

Portions of the DRC, particularly in the eastern part of the country, face protracted violence and insecurity. USAID/DRC recognizes the east as a situation of the “triple nexus”: fragility, conflict, and violence. USAID will work with other donors, including the International Federation of the Red Cross and the World Bank, as well as the GoDRC and the private sector, to implement activities.

#### Intermediate Results (IRs):

**IR 4.1 Strengthen capacity to predict, prepare for, and adapt to shocks impacting water and sanitation systems in fragile settings:** Humanitarian funds will work with communities in eastern DRC to prepare for and respond to shocks, such as conflict, floods, droughts, disease outbreaks, and others as they arise. Development funds will work with service providers in Goma to install resilient water and sanitation systems and respond to any shocks.

**IR 4.2 Address humanitarian water, sanitation, and hygiene needs:** Humanitarian funds will be used to improve access to safe water through the Resilience Food Security Activity and other BHA and Mission emergency response activities. Humanitarian efforts will focus on supporting communities to achieve ODF status and practice key hygiene practices. This funding will also be used to respond to rapid onset emergencies that drive WASH needs, primarily in the eastern part of the country. These responses include water trucking for displaced groups, the installation of water networks in locations where internally displaced persons reside, the construction of emergency sanitation facilities such as latrines and shower spaces, and the provision of WASH services to affected health care facilities.

**IR 4.3 Strengthen coherence across humanitarian, development, and peacebuilding approaches to water and sanitation programming:** Because the DRC is a complex operating environment, USAID/DRC WASH interventions will ensure a continuum between development and humanitarian activities. USAID/DRC teams will coordinate and seek to layer humanitarian and development work where possible. The insecure eastern regions face compounding challenges, including disease outbreaks, climate change shocks, forced displacement, and food insecurity. Where possible, USAID will seek geographic alignment (particularly in the Kasais and Kivus) to offer more robust

WASH programming, ensuring that the regulatory framework and government capacity in the contexts and geographic areas where humanitarian partners work can be strengthened in both water and sanitation arenas. USAID will build on and maintain the forthcoming Humanitarian Private Sector Landscape Assessment section on WASH. It will also use other relevant information and opportunities to further explore and implement approaches across humanitarian assistance and development cooperation mechanisms, working together with the private sector to increase access to water services.

## MISSION RESULTS FRAMEWORK

The USAID/DRC High-Priority Country Plan aligns with the Mission's 2020–2025 DRC Country Development and Cooperation Strategy (CDCS). WSSH cuts across all three development objectives (DO):

**DO 1 – Responsiveness of Public Institutions to Citizens' Needs Improved:** Water and sanitation services are key citizen needs. USAID/DRC will work in the WSSH sector to build provincial and local institutions' capacity to plan and regulate WSSH services. It will also ensure the linkage between formal and informal service providers with the relevant public institutions.

**DO 2 – Community Resilience Increased:** Emergency programming will support household food and water security for vulnerable households, particularly in the Kasais and eastern DRC. Development programming will increase the resilience of water and sanitation service providers and infrastructure in conflict-prone areas, particularly in the Kivus.

**DO 3 – Inclusive, Broad-Based, and Sustainable Economic Growth Increased:** USAID/DRC will focus on viable business models, to support economic growth and increase business opportunities in the water and sanitation sectors. Improved natural resources management, including for water and sanitation and electricity, are vital for economic growth, so investments will be made to increase water security, and electricity opportunities, and alternatives for water and sanitation services.

In the DRC, the WSSH portfolio sits under the Health Office but the sector cuts across all offices. Therefore, the WSSH Lead will coordinate with other Mission teams. Specific coordination will include working with: humanitarian colleagues to ensure layering and smooth transitions between humanitarian and development assistance; economic growth colleagues on business planning for water and sanitation service providers and the WASH-energy nexus; and governance colleagues on national and subnational institutional strengthening.

## KEY RISKS AND MITIGATION STRATEGIES

**Political change:** Elections in the DRC are foreseen during the first year of implementation of this plan. The results of the elections may affect implementation. USAID/DRC will monitor the situation and work with other donors to initiate dialogue with the (potentially new) government to understand its vision and share the advances and challenges in the sector.

**Conflict:** There is conflict in the DRC, particularly in the eastern part of the country. USAID/DRC will monitor the situation with implementing partners and the United Nations, and will determine scenarios for future implementation.

**Water Law:** The GoDRC is currently working on implementation decrees for the Water Law. These decrees may impact the future of donor programming. The donor community will work with the GoDRC to evaluate the new decrees and implications for programming.

## BUDGET

This is a costed plan based on prior year resources still available for funding, the fiscal year (FY) 2022 estimated allocation of \$22 million and the FY 2023 President's Budget Request of \$22.112 million.

## EXPECTED RESULTS

Between 2022 and 2027, USAID/DRC's activities are expected to reach the following targets:



**2.6 million Congolese** with basic or improved access to water



**700,000 Congolese** with basic access to sanitation



**10 institutions** including a mix of national and subnational institutions, will be strengthened



**\$50 million** in new funding will be mobilized

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## Endnotes

1 USAID [Democratic Republic of the Congo Water Resources Profile Overview, 2021](#).