



LIBERIA

High-Priority Country Plan

GLOBAL WATER STRATEGY | 2022-2027

In 2022, Liberia was re-designated as a High-Priority Country (HPC) under the U.S. government Global Water Strategy (GWS or “Strategy”). USAID/Liberia will continue to work with the Government of Liberia (GoL) and other stakeholders to strengthen sector governance and increase access to sustainable water and sanitation services in both urban and rural settings. USAID’s investment over the next five years will support public and private sector water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) service providers to increase access to basic water services for 100,000 people; enable 500,000 people to gain access to basic sanitation services; strengthen the political, social, economic, and administrative systems that influence water use and management; and mobilize roughly \$3.5 million in public and private finance for Liberia’s WASH sector.

CONTEXT

Liberia has made slow but steady progress on increasing access to and use of both basic sources of drinking water and sanitation services, despite unstable socioeconomic conditions due to the COVID-19 pandemic, market barriers that limit private sector participation, and persistent governance challenges, among other factors. Nevertheless, the country has a long way to go to achieve its Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 6 target of achieving universal and equitable access to safe and affordable water and sanitation for all by 2030.

According to 2020 estimates from the WHO/UNICEF Joint Monitoring Program, 75 percent of Liberians had access to a basic level of drinking water, including 85 percent of residents in urban areas and 64 percent of residents in rural areas. The percentage of people drinking surface water in rural areas has remained constant at about 26 percent. However, due to population growth, the total number of people using surface water has increased.

Over 1.9 million people, or about 38 percent of the total population, practiced open defecation in Liberia as of 2020. Only 18 percent of the total population had access to basic sanitation services.¹ As population density continues to increase in both urban and rural settings, the health impact of open defecation will continue to worsen.

Liberia faces both significant challenges and opportunities in its capacity to deliver sustainable and affordable water and sanitation services. The Liberia WASH sector benefits from a strong cadre of development partners—including other bilateral donors, multilateral development banks, civil society organizations, and private sector organizations—working in collaboration with each other and the GoL to achieve sustainable WASH services. However, several major challenges currently inhibit progress, including: (1) weak governance and institutional fragmentation, (2) low levels of financing, (3) a lack of trained personnel, (4) inadequate systems for data collection and monitoring, and (5) poor planning and resource management.

Gender disparity in WASH programming is a significant issue in Liberia, with women and girls being disproportionately affected by the lack of access to water and sanitation facilities. Women are often responsible for collecting water for their families, placing them at risk of gender-based violence (GBV) while traveling to and from water sources. GBV is also prevalent in sanitation facilities, where a lack of privacy and security can make

women vulnerable to harassment and assault. Addressing gender disparities in WASH programming is essential for achieving U.S. government (USG) and GoL WASH goals and requires gender-responsive planning, budgeting, and implementation.

Weak governance. Multiple GoL entities play a role in WASH governance at all levels, and there is a need for clarity around roles and responsibilities. Coordination among WASH-related ministries and entities is difficult, compounded by the shortage of human resources with specialization in water and sanitation service delivery. The government and communities have limited capacity to manage and maintain water and sanitation infrastructure, or to make informed decisions about the construction of new infrastructure. Citizens often have little control over the WASH services that are available to them because most major public sector water and sewage systems are controlled by the central government.

Inadequate government financing. The total combined budget for the WASH sector in Liberia from the GoL and donors since 2019 has been approximately \$30 million per year, with almost the entire amount coming from donors. Currently, the only WASH spending directly from the GoL is for the salaries of a few national-level WASH staff.

Nascent public and private sector WASH service providers. Under the Local Government Act of 2018, local government institutions, including county councils, are allowed to set up local systems for the delivery of basic public goods and services, including water and sanitation services. The GoL has started to appoint such councils in all counties, but the process will take time. Local public and private institutions do not have the financial and human resources needed to establish, maintain, and expand water and sanitation services. Although there has been little progress operationalizing the Local Government Act, both it and the 2009 Water Sanitation Policy present an opportunity for subnational governments and private sector actors to play a direct role in providing WASH services that are more responsive to the needs of constituents/customers.

Changes in climate. While Liberia has one of the highest rates of water resources per capita in Africa, a 2021 World Bank Climate Risk Country Profile warns that changes in seasonal rainfall patterns and rising temperatures are expected to decrease its total water levels and/or degrade water quality through contamination. Climate change is also projected to exacerbate existing flood-related disaster risks and affect water availability. Consequently, Liberia is likely to see an increase in the incidence of vector and waterborne diseases such as cholera, malaria, yellow fever, and schistosomiasis, as well as diarrheal diseases.

NATIONAL PRIORITIES

The GoL's Pro-Poor Agenda for Prosperity and Development 2018–2023 (PAPD) set the ambitious goal to achieve equitable, safe, affordable, and sustainable water supply and sanitation services for all Liberians by 2023. While this goal will not be achieved in 2023, the GoL remains committed to reaching universal access to WASH services in line with the SDGs.

In addition to the PAPD, several other GoL policies lay out priorities in the WASH sector, including the National WASH Commission Act, the National Water and Sanitation Policy (2009), the Public Utility Act of Liberia Water & Sewer Corporation, and several sets of sub-sector specific guidelines. The specific policy objectives are to:

1. Establish and strengthen institutional capacity to manage, expand, and sustain 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
4. Improve sector governance and financing

However, the GoL has not funded these priorities in its national budget. While the government's policy objectives address the most salient challenges in the WASH sector—weak sector governance, insufficient sector financing, and weak institutional capacity in the public and private sectors, especially at the local level—domestic financing is needed to implement them.

USAID/Liberia has designed an approach that addresses these challenges in alignment with GoL policy objectives. The Mission has an overarching Development Objective Grant Agreement (DOAG) with the GoL and a Government-to-Government Agreement for partnership in Health, which contains provisions for WASH.

USAID APPROACH AND RESULTS FRAMEWORK

The goal of the GWS is to improve health, prosperity, stability, and resilience through sustainable and equitable water resources management, access to safe drinking water and sanitation services, and hygiene practices.

Since November 2022, USAID/Liberia has awarded over \$48 million in new Activities that will run until 2027. These Activities aim to improve access to, use of, and sustainable management of WASH services. The design framework is integrated across the Mission's WASH portfolio and focuses on three key intermediate results:

1. Strengthened governance and policies to improve the enabling environment for resilient WASH service delivery;
2. Increased public and private financing in the WASH sector; and
3. Improved capacity to increase demand and deliver equitable and resilient WASH services.

With effective policies, country-led processes, and institutions capable of implementing them effectively, USAID believes Liberia will be better positioned to establish resilient water and sanitation services. USAID/Liberia will achieve these results through its Good Governance Activity (GGA), Improved Access to Safe Drinking Water (IASDW) Activity, and Countywide Sanitation Activity (CWSA). Additional complementary Activities are planned to strengthen WASH service delivery capacity and increase private sector investments in WASH.



STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE I

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

Governance and institutional constraints severely hinder effective development in the WASH sector. There is a need for clarity about the institutional roles related to sector coordination, policy formulation, service provision, and regulation. At present, the sector leadership role of the National Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene Commission (NWSHC) is ambiguous due to the fragmentation of WASH responsibilities across multiple ministries. Improved and effective decentralization of WASH responsibilities is necessary to strengthen the governance of water services at the subnational level.

Intermediate Results (IRs):

IR 1.1 Develop, strengthen, and implement inclusive laws, policies, and regulations: Cross-cutting governance and policy improvement programs like the USAID Good Governance Activity will work with the GoL on structuring and improving policies to enhance regulation and enable the effective management of decentralized WASH services. Other USAID/Liberia WASH investments, such as the IASDW and CWSA, work to strengthen government and private sector capacity to implement inclusive laws, policies, and regulations through a countywide, systems-based approach to expanding and sustaining WASH access.

IR 1.2 Effectively mobilize and target public and private financing: USAID/Liberia's Improved Access to Safe Drinking Water Activity and Countywide Sanitation Activity will take a multipronged approach to strengthening financial sustainability by: (1) improving revenue collection and utilization (thereby building providers' creditworthiness), (2) developing and testing private sector WASH business models, (3) advocating for greater allocation of public resources to operations and maintenance, and (4) strengthening the budgeting and financing capabilities of local government institutions to improve resilience.

IR 1.3 Improve the capacity and performance of national and subnational institutions: High levels of capacity and performance in the WASH sector depend on strong leadership, coordination, and continuous improvement, all informed by data and evidence-based decision making. To achieve this in Liberia, CWSA will enhance the government's capacity in assessment, analysis, data management, joint planning, and monitoring. USAID/Liberia's Clean Water Activity will empower national and local government institutions and WASH service providers to engage in partnerships that improve and expand equitable and sustainable services. To achieve sustainable service delivery, higher-level sector framing, commitment, financing, leadership, and governance

mechanisms are necessary. Capitalizing on the legal provisions of the Local Government Act, USAID/Liberia will catalyze its rollout, advocate for the adoption of the principle of subsidiarity in WASH, and support both WASH decentralization and the establishment of regulatory and policy frameworks for service decentralization, including water-related services. The Good Governance Activity will assist in building local governments' capacities to plan strategically, mobilize domestic resources, and ensure broad-based participation in local development and service delivery, including WASH services. By enhancing county and city government capacities to plan, administer, and execute budgets, there will be better alignment of funding to meet citizen's expectations and priorities, leading to positive implications for WASH services in a decentralized environment.

IR 1.4 Advance transparency, accountability, equity, and efficiency through participatory, data-driven decision-making: Strong governance requires good quality and publicly available data on the quantity and quality of service delivery, consumers, revenue, and funding to hold actors accountable and drive coordination, planning, budgeting, and evaluation. Full visibility of data fosters a shared understanding of the challenges as well as solutions to them. All USAID/Liberia mechanisms incorporate strategies built on fostering transparency, accountability, inclusivity, and continuous improvement by using data and evidence for informed and adaptive decision making. USAID/Liberia's WASH activities will develop national and subnational capacities in assessment, analysis, data management, joint planning, and monitoring.



STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 2

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

To achieve long-term viability, WASH product and service providers must be able to deliver high-quality, reliable services that the population is willing to pay for; which not only increase access but also mitigates risks associated with gender-based violence and psychosocial stress. USAID/Liberia will work to enable local county government systems to deliver water and sanitation services to the entire county population, encompassing households, schools, health facilities, and other public buildings.

Intermediate Results (IRs):

IR 2.1 Increase area-wide access to safe, equitable, and affordable sanitation services: USAID/Liberia's Countywide Sanitation Activity aims to eliminate open defecation and achieve universal access to basic sanitation services in five counties. This will be accomplished by setting up private sector markets for sanitation products that will allow households to affordably build toilets and latrines, improving national and local sanitation governance, and increasing household and business financing for sanitation.

IR 2.2 Increase access to equitable, safe, reliable, and affordable drinking water services: USAID/Liberia's Improved Access to Safe Drinking Water Activity is collaborating with Liberian government institutions at the national, county, and local levels to implement a vision where all Liberians demand, access, and use safe, sustainable water services. The Activity seeks to further enable both civil society and private sector participation in the water sector to achieve its goal of providing sustainable water for all.

IR 2.3 Improve performance and climate resilience of water and sanitation service providers: Aligned with the USAID Climate Strategy, USAID/Liberia WASH activities will work with communities, municipalities, and the GoL to improve water security and increase access to climate-resilient water and sanitation services. This includes ensuring performance monitoring systems, and the capacity to conduct medium- to long-term planning, are fully integrated into Liberia's WASH sector.

IR 2.4 Increase adoption of key hygiene practices: The urgency to improve hygiene outcomes in Liberia is underscored by the fact that the country has experienced two viral disease outbreaks (Ebola and COVID-19) within the past nine years. By addressing various types of discrimination and promoting fairness and inclusivity, we aim to enhance access to WASH services for all. Menstrual hygiene management; a lack of accurate information; and access to clean water, basic sanitation facilities, and hygiene products can have significant negative impacts on menstruators' health, education, and overall quality of life. Through social behavior change and targeted interventions, all USAID/Liberia WASH activities include the increased adoption of key hygiene practices as a critical component to sustaining outcomes.



STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 3

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

Intermediate Results (IRs):

IR 3.1 Allocate and use water resources more equitably and efficiently: USAID/Liberia's Improved Access to Safe Drinking Water Activity will include measures to increase the efficiency of water usage by encouraging water conservation. Increased metering, better management of leaks within the delivery network, and water source protection will help to improve water use efficiency, contributing to broader WRM priorities and making drinking water systems more climate resilient during dry periods. The Countywide Sanitation Activity will increase latrine access, thereby reducing the environmental pollution of water sources during heavy rain events, which are expected to increase in frequency and intensity under climate change.



STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 4

Anticipate and Reduce Conflict and Fragility Related to Water

Intermediate Results (IRs):

IR 4.1 Strengthen capacity to predict, prepare for, and adapt to shocks impacting water and sanitation systems in fragile settings: USAID/Liberia seeks to improve conflict-sensitive contingency planning, budgeting, and disaster risk reduction measures, including through the use of climate information services. This will be achieved through technical support to service providers in developing business continuity plans, climate-resilient water safety plans, and building rapid response capacity (including budgets, contingency plans, and personnel to proactively manage and respond to acute shocks and restore water services when crises strike).

MISSION RESULTS FRAMEWORK

As stated in the USAID/Liberia Country Development and Cooperative Strategy (CDCS), the Mission will take an integrated approach across sectors to achieve development outcomes. Investments in equitable, sustainable, and climate-resilient WASH services are seen as a basic component of creating a healthy, educated population, and therefore essential for sustainable economic growth. WASH activities will be designed and implemented in collaboration with other USAID efforts in health, education, and private sector engagement, as well as with other donors and the GoL. For example, WASH investments will intentionally target population hubs and private service providers for sustainability of WASH services, while also supporting the building blocks for economic growth. Cross-cutting issues, such as corruption, domestic resource mobilization, public financial management, efficient use of resources, and decentralization will be addressed by WASH Activities where appropriate, contributing to larger Mission objectives related to governance and the provision of quality public services.

USAID/Liberia's HPC Plan is linked to all three development objectives (DOs) detailed in the CDCS, touching on specific IRs, as specified below.

Development Objectives (DOs):

DO 1 – Market driven, inclusive economic growth supporting increased job creation:

IR 1.1: Private sector enabling environment improved for greater investment

Through the Countywide Sanitation Activity, USAID/Liberia will support local governments to create policies and programming that strengthen market access and sanitation supply chains. The private sector-driven approach to increasing WASH service delivery will create jobs and build local markets and investments. The resulting improved service delivery will enhance the business environment by overcoming some infrastructure obstacles and challenges to business growth.

DO 2 – Effective and inclusive governance catalyzed through reforms and greater accountability:

IR 2.2: GoL empowered and incentivized to deliver quality public services

Through the Improved Access to Safe Drinking Water and Good Governance Activities, USAID/Liberia will work with Liberian government institutions at the national, county, and local levels to create more responsive, transparent, and accountable public services in the WASH sector. These Activities will work to empower service users and civil society to demand safe, sustainable, and reliable water services, while building the capacity of both private and public providers to deliver improved services and expand coverage. While they are focused on planning, budgeting, and the provision of water services, these Activities will also contribute to Mission goals related to public service provision, governance, and accountability.

DO 3 – Foundation for growth strengthened through a healthy, productive, and educated population:

IR 3.1: Quality of health, HIV, nutrition, and WASH services improved

IR 3.2: Health, nutrition, and WASH systems at national and subnational levels strengthened

All WASH activities implemented by USAID/Liberia will aim to improve the health of all Liberians, through increased equitable access to safe, sustainable, and climate-resilient drinking water and sanitation. This includes household access and access at key public institutions such as health care facilities and schools. Ensuring access both at home and in public areas will reduce water-borne illnesses and encourage public use of services, including school attendance, thereby contributing to multiple sector goals and reinforcing efforts to strengthen the foundations of growth through a healthy, productive, and educated population.

KEY RISKS AND MITIGATION STRATEGIES

USAID/Liberia recognizes that the WASH sector faces significant risks that hinder the sustainability of WASH services. These risks arise from issues including insufficient public budget allocation, a nascent private sector, broken governance, an inadequately trained workforce, and uncertainties surrounding decentralization efforts. The governance and financing challenges translate into risks for new WASH infrastructure when it is built without plans for a sustainable management system. Additionally, the impacts of climate change present an ongoing and escalating set of risks. To address these risks and challenges, USAID/Liberia will integrate mitigation measures into the design and implementation of its WASH activities. The Mission's comprehensive WASH objectives are formulated to tackle these risks, in coordination with other sectors and in alignment with the GWS and the CDCS.

The provision of WASH services in Liberia currently faces large governance challenges. The roles and responsibilities of WASH sector government institutions are fragmented and unclear, and there are overlaps in regulation and policy implementation. These issues lead to confusion, challenge efforts at sector oversight, and create opportunities for corruption. Although provisions for decentralized WASH governance exist, they have not been operationalized and there is little accountability for the accessibility and quality of WASH services. Liberia has very little domestic financing for WASH services and there is an unmet need for a technically trained workforce that can successfully design, manage, operate, and maintain improved and expanded WASH services. Sustainable service provision will require improved sector governance and increased budgetary support from the GoL, which may include increased investments in staff capacity and operational efficiency, as well as tariffs designed for resource management and the long-term sustainability of services. USAID/Liberia will focus on clarifying WASH governance roles and responsibilities to increase the local government entities' ability to effectively plan, budget, and oversee WASH services; improve measures for transparency and accountability in the WASH sector; and address the human resources needs across the sector.

USAID/Liberia has learned from its past experiences with project implementation and adapted its approaches for new projects. Recent investments in WASH infrastructure have struggled to achieve operational sustainability because operations and maintenance planning were unrealistic at the start. Similarly, prior investments in community-led total sanitation (CLTS) resulted in widespread community backsliding as soon as USAID support ended. To address these issues, the Mission has adopted a new approach that diversifies the range of sanitation products available in the country. This practice aims to ensure the longevity of infrastructure and stabilize the supply chain for sanitation products, particularly in rural areas. USAID/Liberia also recognizes the importance of community engagement and will actively involve communities at the early stages of investment planning for local water and sanitation systems. By doing so, the Mission seeks to gain a better understanding of the specific contextual factors and identify effective strategies that will work for the communities.

USAID/Liberia will also integrate expert projections about future climate challenges into programming. WASH infrastructure and its operation and maintenance must be designed and implemented with climate change impacts in

mind, including the increased frequency and intensity of precipitation events, and the subsequent pollution that occurs during heavy flooding. Climate resilience will be integrated into water supply and sanitation services planning through capacity-building in local institutions and the private sector, to help address vulnerabilities during flood events.

BUDGET

This plan is budgeted based on prior year resources that are still available for programming, the FY 2022 estimated allocation of \$15 million, and the FY 2022 President's Budget Request of \$15 million, in addition to estimated allocations for future years through 2027.

EXPECTED RESULTS

Through the water directive funds, the Mission intends to achieve the following results:



Expand sustainable access to basic drinking water to **100,000 people** in two counties



Expand access to sustainable, market-driven, and climate-resilient basic sanitation for **500,000 people**



Improve governance processes at both the national and subnational levels to strengthen the management of water, sanitation, and hygiene services through **3 national institutes, 10 county councils, 100 community water committees, and 150 community sanitation committees**



Strengthen **5 national-level government institutions**, including ministries, agencies, and the WASH Commission

Strengthen **110 local government institutions**, including county governments, district governments, and traditional and community leaders

Strengthen **340 private sector water and sanitation institutions**, including small to medium enterprises, to manage water resources or improve water supply and sanitation services



Mobilize **\$3.5 million** in public and private financing for the WASH sector

Endnotes

I WHO/UNICEF Joint Monitoring Programme for Water Supply, Sanitation and Hygiene (JMP), [Progress on Household Drinking Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene, 2000–2020, 2021](#).