



REAL WATER

RURAL EVIDENCE AND LEARNING FOR WATER

IMAGE: VANESSA GUENTHER, THE AQUAYA INSTITUTE

PROGRAM THEORY OF CHANGE

Version: Year 2 (July 2023)

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AQUAYA CONTACTS:

Ranjiv Khush, Project Director
ranjiv@aquaya.org

Jeff Albert, Deputy Project Director
jeff@aquaya.org

Dayna Hansberger, Senior Program and Operations Manager, REAL-Water
dayna@aquaya.org

ABOUT USAID/REAL-WATER:

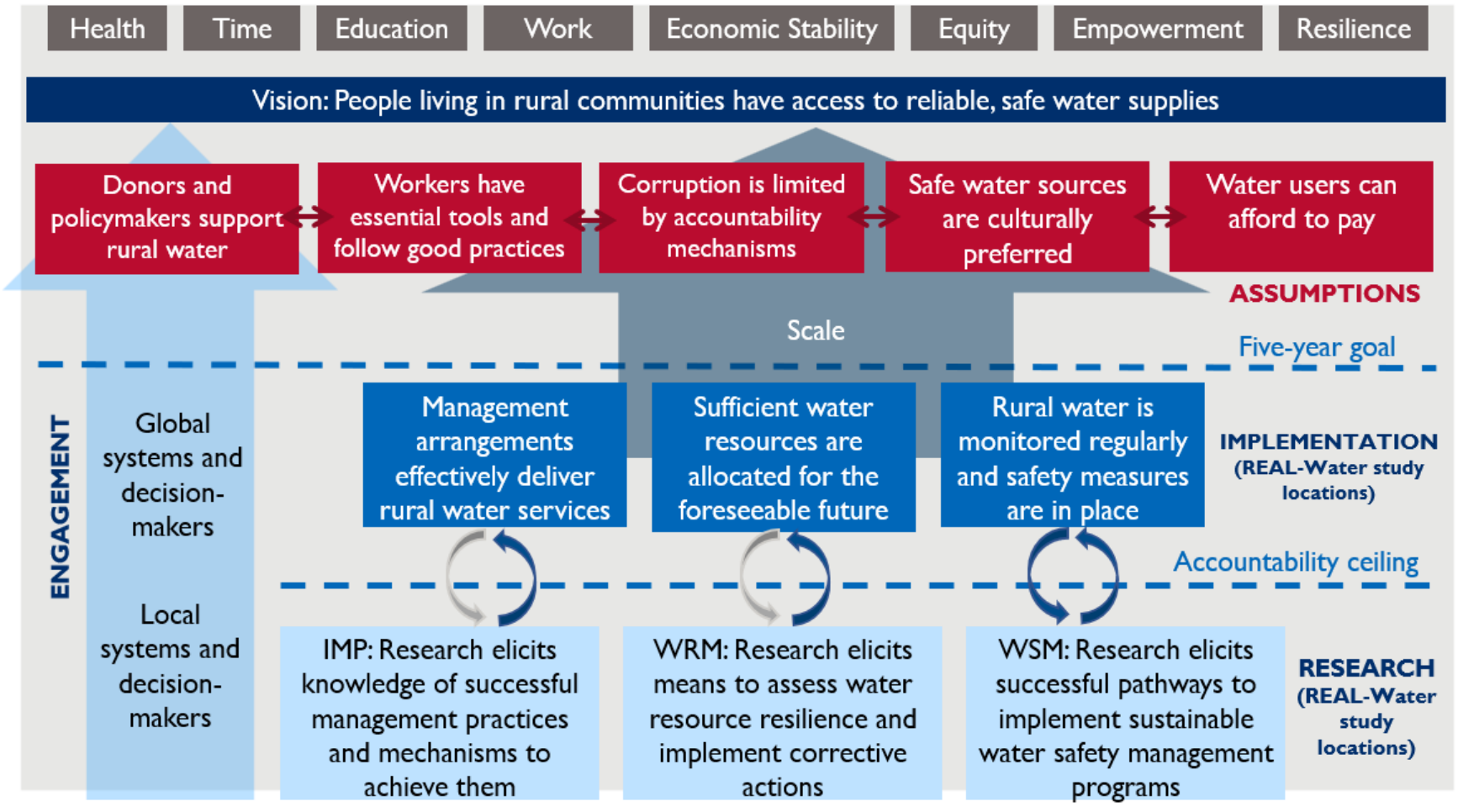
USAID Rural Evidence and Learning for Water (REAL-Water) is a five-year partnership (2021–2026) that develops and evaluates strategies for expanding access to safe, equitable, and sustainable rural water services. REAL-Water supports policymakers, development partners, and service providers to make strategic decisions and implement best practices for water management through implementation research. It also ensures coordination with USAID programs contributing to the water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) and water resources management (WRM) knowledge base, in alignment with the USAID Water for the World Implementation Research Agenda. For further information about this and other aspects of the project, as well as to access our knowledge products, please visit globalwaters.org/realwater.

REAL-WATER PROGRAM OVERVIEW

The Rural Evidence and Learning for Water (REAL-Water) program is an implementation research program dedicated to building the evidence base for achieving safe, equitable, sustainable rural water supplies in low-and middle-income countries. REAL-Water is supported through a Cooperative Agreement between the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and The Aquaya Institute. This knowledge-building initiative contributes to the goals of USAID's Water and Development Plan, established under the U.S. government's Global Water Strategy. The REAL-Water program comprises three interrelated components:

1. Implementation research that applies scientific methods, international collaboration, and rigorous analyses to address critical water and development themes:
 - a. Improving rural water management (IMP)
 - b. Strengthening water safety management (WSM)
 - c. Improved planning for water resources (WRM)
 - d. Increased USAID mission access to specialized expertise
2. Fostering the use of evidence in decision-making by national policymakers and government officials, development partners, and public and private sector service providers through collaboration across this range of sector stakeholders. Related activities include engagement with a representative Advisory Board, and the strategic dissemination of program findings via multiple channels.
3. Coordination and collaboration within USAID and with related USAID programs that are contributing to the water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) knowledge base, including USAID Missions and centrally funded WASH mechanisms: Urban Resilience by Building Partnerships and Applying New evidence in WASH (URBAN WASH) and Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene Partnerships and Learning for Sustainability (WASHPaLS 2). This component will also emphasize regular engagement with USAID's Communication and Knowledge Management II (CKM II) program to ensure that REAL-Water findings are captured in CKM II dissemination efforts and to support CKM II in the production of dissemination materials and outreach activities.

REAL-WATER PROGRAM THEORY OF CHANGE



THEORY OF CHANGE EXPLANATION AND ASSUMPTIONS

- The bottom research level focuses on the three central research streams initiated under Component 1 implementation research in year 1. Additional buy-in opportunities, in which USAID Missions opt to add funding to address specific research questions under the rural water umbrella, will add to the REAL-Water research portfolio.
- Circular arrows represent the use of research knowledge in implementation activities and the use of implementation knowledge in research activities. These connections would ideally be in place for all implementation research streams, but they are strongest where water safety management (WSM) interventions were piloted prior to the start of the REAL-Water program and therefore primed for scale-up activities.
- The accountability ceiling represents a minimum level of program outputs (research knowledge production), while the five-year goal represents the proposed level of program outputs, assuming that conditions in the REAL-Water study locations favor multi-stakeholder engagement and inputs into implementation activities in practice.
- As represented by the light blue arrow on the left, activities to support REAL-Water Component 2 (use of evidence in decision-making) take place during all program years through both local- and global-level engagement activities. Specific activities follow a three-step process to move engaged stakeholders from overall program awareness to providing input to applying knowledge in practice. Movement along this journey may take temporal advantage of decision-making windows of opportunity. Some knowledge applications require longer time scales than others, and these will likely extend beyond the program end date.
- Assumptions (in the red boxes) highlight factors partially influenced by REAL-Water sponsors and consortium members underlying scale-up of the research knowledge and pilot interventions from REAL-Water study areas into other areas. This level is more likely to be subject to external influences and moderate larger-scale outcomes, rather than being systematically targeted by REAL-Water program activities.
- Gray boxes along the top represent long-term outcomes and impacts that may be theoretically or empirically linked to REAL-Water program implementation, as well as related development work under the USAID portfolio.

USES FOR THEORY OF CHANGE

- The program-wide theory of change captures a broad scale of anticipated change processes and synergies, but it does not delve into specific actors and change factors in any given local study areas. It may be accompanied by study-specific or location-specific theories of change (e.g., for locations enrolled in the water quality assurance fund implementation research in Ghana).
- The program-wide theory of change was developed collaboratively in program years 1 and 2. It should ideally be revisited and updated at project closeout in year 5, to incorporate updates and lessons learned.
- The program-wide theory of change is mainly intended for internal reference and external communications related to monitoring, evaluation, and learning (MEL) and engagement activities. It does not replace the existing program results framework, as cited in the MEL plan.
- Broader sharing of the program-wide theory of change may help to further Component 3 goals (coordination with USAID, CKM II, and the other WASH mechanisms).