



SOUTH SUDAN

High-Priority Country Plan

GLOBAL WATER STRATEGY | 2022-2027

In 2022, South Sudan was re-designated as a High-Priority Country under the U.S. government (USG) Global Water Strategy (the GWS or “Strategy”). Over the five-year Strategy period, USAID/South Sudan will continue to support the South Sudanese government to increase access to sustainable, basic drinking water services, access to basic sanitation, and uptake of key hygiene behaviors to improve health and household resilience, with an emphasis on reaching marginalized groups including women and girls. USAID/South Sudan’s investments will provide access to basic water services for 100,000 people, provide basic sanitation to 75,000 people, and strengthen 30 state- and county-level institutions.

CONTEXT

Since independence, South Sudan has made steady progress in increasing access to improved water sources, with the national rate increasing from 65 percent in 2011 to 78 percent in 2020. However, the rate of access to basicⁱ water service has remained at 41 percent over the last ten years.¹ The national rate of progress also masks significant inequalities between urban and rural areas, where 80 percent of the population lives; 70 percent of urban households have access to basic water access compared to only 34 percent of rural households. Regarding sanitation, 16 percent of the population has access to basicⁱⁱ sanitation nationally, with 41 percent of urban populations having access compared to only 9 percent of the rural population. Rates of open defecation are high, reaching 8 percent in urban areas compared to shockingly high rates of 73 percent in rural areas. Within institutions, only 45 percent of South Sudan’s primary schools have access to safe drinking water, and only 17 percent have adequate sanitary latrines for both girls and boys.² Inadequate water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) access, combined with weak health systems, has severe consequences for the health of the South Sudanese population, particularly for women and girls. South Sudan has one of the highest maternal mortality rates in the world and some of the highest child mortality rates, with one in ten children dying before their fifth birthday.³

South Sudan has abundant natural water resources; the Nile River Basin covers 97 percent of the country and the Rift Valley Basin covers the remaining land. However, surface water availability is unevenly distributed, with significant variations depending on the season. Surface water, which includes rivers and lakes, is a common water source for the population, but is also at high risk of contamination from human and animal feces and industrial effluent from mining and oil extraction. Groundwater is the main source of drinking water for rural areas; however, groundwater extraction is not well regulated, and there is a potential risk of overexploitation.⁴

South Sudan is one of the most vulnerable countries to climate change in terms of vulnerability and ability to respond to hazards.⁵ Flooding and droughts are perennial occurrences. Since 2019, the country has experienced annual floods that cause significant damage. In 2021, floods displaced over 300,000 people and resulted in economic losses of at least \$671 million.⁶ Seventy percent of South Sudan’s population are pastoralists and rely on the availability of water

i Basic water service is defined as “Drinking water from an improved source, provided collection time is not more than 30 minutes for a roundtrip including queuing.”

ii Basic sanitation is defined as “At least improved facilities that are not shared.”

and other natural resources. Droughts, especially in the southeast and northeast, significantly impact their mobility. In addition, soil erosion from poor farming methods and the lack of reliable irrigation and drainage systems contribute to low agricultural productivity.⁷

Water-related threats significantly impact women and girls in South Sudan. The lack of water and sanitation facilities increases their vulnerability to abuse, attack, and ill-health, affecting their ability to study, work, and live with dignity. Up to 65 percent of women and girls in South Sudan have experienced some form of physical and/or sexual violence in their lifetime.⁸ Social norms rooted in entrenched patriarchy and male control of resources perpetuate multiple forms of violence against women and girls; this risk is heightened during displacement due to conflict, flooding, and food insecurity. The threat of violence also leads to fewer women working in the WASH sector; a study on the gender gap in the WASH sector in South Sudan revealed limited participation of women in higher-level and higher-paid positions, with more representation at the volunteer level.⁹ Fear of experiencing gender-based violence by family members and potential colleagues or supervisors was identified as a key barrier to women's participation in the sector.¹⁰

Challenges: The South Sudan Ministry of Water Resources and Irrigation (MWRI) has reported that, at any given time, 30–50 percent of boreholes in the country are non-functional.¹¹ This poses a significant challenge to the sustainability of water and sanitation investments in South Sudan. There are several factors that contribute to this dilemma, including:

- **Donor dependency and lack of public investment:** It is estimated that \$724 million is needed to meet the goals in the government's Rural WASH Investment Plan. The WASH sector is heavily reliant on donor financing, including from USAID, UNICEF, the Japan International Cooperation Agency, the German Corporation for Technical Cooperation, the Dutch government, the World Bank, and the African Development Bank, among others.
- **Governance:** The civil conflict dating back to 2013 has stalled institutional development, particularly for the WASH sector, resulting in overlapping responsibilities across ministries and an unclear reporting structure between national and local government entities.
- **Weak supply chain and lack of quality materials:** A lack of spare part supply chains, insufficient operations and maintenance, and/or inappropriate technologies are some of the challenges affecting the WASH sector in South Sudan. In addition, lack of access to roads, particularly after storms and flooding or during conflict, also block access to WASH services. For sanitation, the lack of affordable, reliable materials for latrines means that households rely on local materials, which can easily wash away during heavy rains and flooding. Once latrines wash away, households are less motivated to rebuild, particularly those living in or near conflict areas.
- **Protracted humanitarian crisis caused by conflicts and natural disasters:** South Sudan is facing the highest levels of food insecurity and malnutrition since independence in 2011. In 2023, up to 8 million people, including 1 million children, require lifesaving food assistance, the largest number ever recorded.¹² Widespread displacement due to ongoing intercommunal conflict and flooding has exacerbated food insecurity and caused significant loss of livelihoods. In April 2023, the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs estimated that 9.1 million people are in need of humanitarian assistance. However, this number is subject to change due to the growing complexity of the crisis in Sudan and the increase in both South Sudanese returnees and refugees.

Opportunities:

- **Build on programmatic success to accelerate access to WASH services:** Despite the aforementioned challenges, there are areas in South Sudan where USAID and other donor development programs have significantly improved access to WASH services. USAID supported programming from 2017–2021 through the International Office for Migration in peri-urban settings of Juba, Wau, Torit, Magwi, Kapoeta South, Bor, and Warrap improved access to safe drinking water for over 400,000 people and sanitation coverage for over 150,000 people.
- **Private sector and youth engagement:** In Juba and peri-urban areas, there are small enterprises that can be engaged through a market-based approach to provide WASH products and services. These enterprises include associations of pump mechanics and businesses that sell water and sanitation supplies, and construction materials. In addition, there are opportunities to involve youth in sanitation initiatives and train them to contribute to WASH goals. It is worth noting that households in these areas are willing to pay for improved water services, as they already bear high costs for inadequate WASH services.

- **Strong cross-sector coordination:** Given the protracted conflict in South Sudan, humanitarian assistance plays a critical role in addressing the country's challenges. USAID participates in the WASH Cluster Coordination group, which assists in coordinating and ensuring alignment between WASH investments across humanitarian and development assistance. USAID will continue to leverage this existing coordination mechanism to maximize the impact of humanitarian and development WASH programming.

NATIONAL PRIORITIES

The Water Policy of 2007 provides guidance for rural and urban water, sanitation, and hygiene, as well as water resources management (WRM) in South Sudan. The 2013 Water Bill has been drafted but not ratified. The MWRI and the South Sudan Urban Water Cooperation are responsible for providing universal water and rural sanitation coverage; the Ministry of Health is in charge of urban sanitation and hygiene; and the MWRI and the Ministry of Lands and Environment are responsible for WRM.

USAID APPROACH AND RESULTS FRAMEWORK

USAID/South Sudan is currently implementing the Afia WASH Activity (2021 - 2026), which is the Mission's flagship WASH program. Aligning with USAID/South Sudan's strategic framework, the Activity focuses on expanding gender-transformative and sustainable access to safe drinking water, improving basic sanitation coverage, and promoting key hygiene behaviors to enhance health and household resilience in thirteen counties within five states. The Activity also aligns with all four Strategic Objectives of the GWS.



STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE I

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

Given the challenges mentioned earlier, USAID/South Sudan will collaborate with the public sector to enhance staffing within county WASH departments, improve monitoring systems, and bolster coordination mechanisms among stakeholders. Additionally, USAID/South Sudan will work with private sector actors to strengthen the market for water and sanitation products and services.

Intermediate Results (IRs):

IR 1.2 Effectively mobilize and target public and private financing: USAID/South Sudan will continue to collaborate with the private sector, local organizations, and social enterprises to enhance the supply chain and establish market connections for WASH. This is done in anticipation of the public sector transitioning from extensive subsidization of spare parts used to build and maintain WASH infrastructure to a commercialized approach that ensures the availability of high-quality pumps and components.

IR 1.3 Improve the capacity and performance of national and subnational institutions: USAID/South Sudan promotes leadership, resource contributions, and coordination among county and state actors to ensure stakeholder participation in WASH planning and oversight. This includes forming WASH management structures in communities and institutions and conducting joint-sector monitoring with staff from the health and education sectors. Through the Afia WASH Activity, USAID/South Sudan will continue to support local governments in fulfilling their roles through a training and mentoring program. This program aims to improve technical skills in drilling, water quality testing, monitoring, operation, and maintenance, as well as management systems and processes such as procurement, accounting, monitoring, and reporting.



STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 2

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

Water and sanitation coverage is low in South Sudan due to a nascent supply chain, low demand for sanitation products, and environmental factors such as frequent flooding and highly collapsible soil. USAID/South Sudan will apply a systems approach in working with local governments to increase access to climate-resilient water infrastructure focused on sustained operation and maintenance. In addition, USAID/South Sudan will also engage with the private sector to strengthen the availability of affordable sanitation and hygiene products while increasing consumer adoption of improved hygiene behaviors.

Intermediate Results (IRs):

IR 2.1 Increase area-wide access to safe, equitable, and affordable sanitation services: USAID/South Sudan has adopted the host government strategy of implementing the Community-Led Total Sanitation (CLTS) to achieve universal access to sanitation. Recognizing that CLTS alone is insufficient, the Afia WASH Activity employs market-based approaches to strengthen the supply chain for desirable, inclusive sanitation and menstrual hygiene products. USAID/South Sudan will continue to support rehabilitation and construction of sanitation facilities within institutions such as schools and health care facilities.

IR 2.2 Increase access to equitable, safe, reliable, and affordable drinking water services: USAID/South Sudan, through the Afia WASH Activity, will increase access to equitable, safe, reliable, resilient and affordable drinking water services through the construction and rehabilitation of water points and systems along with water quality monitoring plans. USAID/South Sudan will also equip local government structures with skills to supervise construction, operation, and maintenance of water infrastructure. At the national level, Afia WASH will support dissemination of lessons learned and share relevant data with the national MWRI. USAID promotes the Do No Harm principle and ensures that safety audits are conducted for each borehole repaired and new water points and systems constructed. Based on findings from safety audits, action plans are developed, implemented, and continuously monitored to address concerns such as gender-based violence.

IR 2.3 Improve performance and climate resilience of water and sanitation service providers: To ensure the sustainability of water and sanitation services, USAID/South Sudan will implement climate adaptive designs for water and sanitation infrastructure. This includes raising sanitation slabs and platforms of handpumps above known flood heights, among other interventions. Additionally, capacity building of WASH local government staff will enable them to diagnose and repair water points and systems promptly.

IR 2.4 Increase adoption of key hygiene practices: USAID/South Sudan promotes healthy hygiene behaviors, including handwashing with soap and menstruation management through a network of WASH Champions who engage households through interpersonal communication, particularly in hard to reach areas. In addition, radio programming is used to increase awareness and education on hygiene practices. To increase the availability of menstrual pads, USAID/South Sudan will explore opportunities to engage the private sector in mass production of reusable sanitary pads. Beyond hygiene, USAID/South Sudan also promotes social behavior change and norms shifting to reduce gender-based violence.



STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 3

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

South Sudan is extremely susceptible to the impacts of climate change, which include disease outbreaks and the displacement of populations, among other consequences. USAID/South Sudan will prioritize climate resilience in its water security programming through a two-pronged approach: (1) enhance climate-resilient infrastructure, with a focus on nature-based solutions, and (2) emphasize community engagement to identify local solutions that improve household resilience to climate impacts.

Intermediate Results (IRs):

IR 3.1 Allocate and use water resources more equitably and efficiently: If peace and stability prevail in South Sudan, USAID/South Sudan may consider supporting small-scale irrigation and expanding access to water for livestock watering. This could be done through the construction of engineered earth pans, which would collect and conserve runoff water during the rainy season for use during periods of water scarcity by both humans and livestock.

IR 3.2 Enhance reliability and quality of water resources through watershed management, including protection, restoration, and nature-based solutions: USAID/South Sudan focuses on strengthening the climate resilience of populations vulnerable to climate impacts. The Mission partners with local populations and communities to find local solutions for climate problems.



STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 4

Anticipate and Reduce Conflict and Fragility Related to Water

During the last three years, some parts of South Sudan have experienced repeated flooding, drought, and conflict, leading to forced displacement and food insecurity. Within USAID/South Sudan, the Office of Humanitarian Assistance (OHA) supports a range of activities that respond to humanitarian needs, including water security and WASH.

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/South Sudan will continue to support the construction of dykes to reduce flooding to protect human settlements. In addition, testing will be conducted as part of early detection measures to protect water quality, preventing water-related disease outbreaks in camps for internally displaced populations (IDPs).

IR 4.2 Address humanitarian water, sanitation, and hygiene needs: USAID/South Sudan will address critical WASH needs within IDP camps, including (1) repair of handpumps and solar powered mini water distribution systems and (2) construction of communal sanitation facilities, including bathing shelters, and facilities for solid and liquid waste management. Humanitarian assistance will also support distribution of dignity kits and educational materials to girls and women of reproductive age.

IR 4.3 Strengthen cooperation and reduce conflict over water: USAID/South Sudan will continue to support the WASH Cluster in South Sudan to strengthen coordination among all WASH stakeholders and avert, where possible, conflicts related to water sources. The Mission has adopted conflict-sensitive programming in its WASH portfolio following the Do No Harm principles. Allocation of water and sanitation infrastructure is achieved through a comprehensive community-led engagement process with views of marginalized people prioritized. Training modules targeting water management committees and local government water structures include conflict resolution sessions.

IR 4.4 Strengthen coherence across humanitarian, development, and peacebuilding approaches to water and sanitation programming: Through the WASH Cluster and other coordination bodies like UNOCHA, all WASH activities are well coordinated through a system that captures and reports who is doing what and where. The UNOCHA has adopted the [Integrated Food Security Phase Classification](#) (IPC) system to determine where

emergency services are provided. Humanitarian actors focus efforts towards IPC levels 4 and 5 while development partners provide recovery or development type of interventions in IPCs 3 and below.

PRINCIPLES

USAID/South Sudan investments in water security, sanitation, and hygiene will work through and strengthen **national and local systems**, emphasizing building state and county government technical capacity. The protracted humanitarian crisis in the country also requires an emphasis on meeting the needs of **marginalized, underserved, and vulnerable people and communities**, including women, children, and displaced persons. Given South Sudan's vulnerability to recurrent crises, all WASH programming will also incorporate **resilience**, with particular consideration for how programming can be responsive to the risk of floods, droughts, conflict, and displacement. USAID/South Sudan will **leverage data, research, and innovation** through a series of WASH assessments in select geographical areas.

MISSION RESULTS FRAMEWORK

USAID/South Sudan's Strategic Framework has four key development objectives (DOs): (DO 1) meeting the basic needs of communities in crisis while decreasing aid dependence, (DO 2) household resilience increased in targeted areas, (DO 3) improved social cohesion in targeted areas, and (DO 4) Government of the Republic of South Sudan becoming more responsive to its citizens. The WASH and WRM programming that spans humanitarian and development assistance will contribute to DOs two, three, and four. This will lead to improved access to water and sanitation products and services and improved hygiene practices, improved food security, nutrition, and the improved health of families (IRs 2.1 and 2.3). Protecting water resources can reduce communal-level conflict and competition for natural resources, thereby contributing to DO 3 (IR 3.1). The governance and systems strengthening activities within Afia WASH and humanitarian WASH activities will contribute to DO 4.

KEY RISKS AND MITIGATION STRATEGIES

Subnational and regional conflict and instability: Ongoing conflict at the subnational level and a resurgence of conflict in neighboring Sudan in 2023 threaten stability in South Sudan. This conflict also leads to population displacement and an increased need for water and sanitation services. There is a risk of donor fatigue, and limited resources hindering the government's ability to invest in and provide sustainable WASH services. These challenges undermine individual and community coping mechanisms, community relationships, and human rights and dignity. To address these issues, USAID/South Sudan will continue to provide basic humanitarian and resilient WASH services in communities. These efforts will integrate with other USAID-funded services in health, nutrition, economic growth, education, and democracy and governance to enhance the coping mechanisms of displaced populations affected by conflict. The U.S. Embassy leadership in Juba is actively engaged in advocating for peace at the national, subnational, and regional levels.

Climate change: The frequency and severity of floods and droughts, which are already common in South Sudan, could damage WASH infrastructure, interrupt service delivery, or drain funding from the WASH sector in favor of emergency response. USAID will ensure that any WASH infrastructure interventions are implemented using climate-resilient designs while also responding to damage caused by climate hazards through humanitarian programming as needed.

Infectious disease outbreaks: The poor WASH conditions in South Sudan have contributed to the spread of infectious diseases, such as cholera and polio. These outbreaks not only pose a threat to the effectiveness of WASH activities but also divert funds from the WASH sector to emergency public health responses. To address this issue, USAID/South Sudan will continue to focus on Infection Prevention and Control and WASH in high-risk areas. This includes improving access to safe drinking water and sanitation and promoting hygiene and sanitation practices in institutions and communities.

BUDGET

This plan is costed based on prior year resources still available for programming, the FY 2022 estimated allocation of \$8 million for WASH development, over \$15 million for WASH for humanitarian assistance, and the FY 2023 President's Budget Request of \$3.5 million.

EXPECTED RESULTS

From 2022 to 2027, USAID activities are estimated to provide target communities in South Sudan with the following through the Afia WASH Activity and any other USAID-funded WASH projects:



30 WASH institutions strengthened



100,000 people gaining access to basic drinking water services



75,000 people gaining access to basic sanitation



30 villages achieve open defecation free status



100 percent of safety audits conducted for any repaired, rehabilitated, and new water and sanitation infrastructure

Endnotes

- 1 WHO/UNICEF Joint Monitoring Program (JMP), [Data | JMP \(washdata.org\)](#), 2020.
- 2 Ibid..
- 3 UNICEF Data, [South Sudan](#).
- 4 USAID/Sustainable Water Partnership, [South Sudan Water Resources Series Profile](#), 2021.
- 5 European Commission, [Country Risk Profile](#).
- 6 Borgomeo, Edoardo, Claire Chase, Nicolas Salazar Godoy, and Victor Osei Kwadwo, [Rising from the Depths: Water Security and Fragility in South Sudan. International Development in Focus](#), 2023.
- 7 Edoardo, Chase, Godoy, and Kwadwo, [Rising from the Depths: Water Security and Fragility in South Sudan. International Development in Focus](#).
- 8 Global Women's Institute of the George Washington University, [No Safe Place: A Lifetime of Violence for Conflict-Affected Women and Girls in South Sudan](#), 2017.
- 9 International Organization for Migration, [Closing the Gender Gap in the Humanitarian Water, Sanitation and Hygiene Sector in South Sudan](#), 2020.
- 10 Ibid.
- 11 The Ministry of Water Resources & Irrigation (MWRI) of the Republic of South Sudan (RSS), [Water Sanitation & Hygiene \(WASH\) Sector Strategic Framework](#), August 2011.
- 12 [Integrated Food Security Phase Classification \(IPC\)](#)