



# UGANDA

## High-Priority Country Plan

GLOBAL WATER STRATEGY | 2022-2027

In 2022, Uganda was re-designated as a High-Priority Country under the new United States government Global Water Strategy (GWS). Over the next five years of the GWS period, USAID/Uganda will continue to work with the Government of Uganda (GoU) and other stakeholders to strengthen existing governance structures, operationalize existing policies, increase area-wide access to on-premises sanitation and piped water services in rural districts, and invest in water security in the conflict-affected Karamoja sub-region. Alongside broader Mission efforts to promote GoU investment in essential service provision, USAID will advocate for additional GoU investment in water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) and help develop an investment case for increasing public and private funding to the WASH sector. USAID/Uganda's investments over the next five years will result in 800,000 people gaining access to basic or safely managed sanitation; 500,000 people gaining access to basic or safely managed drinking water; \$10 million being mobilized for water security, sanitation, and hygiene; and performance improving at more than 47 water governance and service delivery institutions.

## CONTEXT

Safe water supply, sanitation services, and hygiene facilities are critical for public health and socioeconomic development. Despite progress in recent years and available natural water resources, Uganda is not on track to achieve Sustainable Development Goal 6 — *ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all*. People in Uganda have poor and inequitable access to WASH services, with rural areas lagging behind the urban centers. As of 2021, 56 percent of Ugandans had access to basic water services and only 20 percent had access to basic sanitation services.<sup>1</sup> Even in areas where the water infrastructure exists, operation and maintenance (O&M) remains a challenge. Stakeholders indicate that households are willing to pay for reliable services; however, water user fees barely cover the O&M costs. This disconnect means that only 77 percent of piped water sources and 85 percent of point water sources are fully functional across the country.<sup>2</sup>

The Northern Region has the lowest WASH access compared to the rest of the country. In Karamoja, a water-scarce and conflict-affected sub-region in northeast Uganda, roughly 64 percent of the population still practices open defecation.<sup>3</sup> Water shortages and scarcity limit the adoption of WASH practices, and have resulted in water-related conflicts and violence because members of the population — some of them previously displaced or affected by conflict — compete for limited available water to support their pastoral livelihoods. Competition for livestock water points exists between Karamojong communities and across national borders. These conflicts are expected to remain key risk factors that need to be mitigated in a conflict-sensitive manner.

At the institutional level, only 9 percent of healthcare facilities have access to basic sanitation: 61 percent have access to a basic water supply and 17 percent have no access to water.<sup>4</sup> Many schools do not have access to basic WASH services, with 42 percent of primary schools having no access to water, and an average of 72 pupils sharing one latrine room.<sup>5</sup> The GoU estimates that \$303 million in capital investment is required to attain universal access to WASH

services across all public institutions in the country. The Ministry of Education and Sports (MoES), the Ministry of Health (MoH), and the respective management at each site need to prioritize the operation and maintenance of WASH facilities in schools and healthcare facilities to improve school attendance, especially for girls, and promote equitable health care-seeking behaviors.

Inequities and disparities in WASH access still exist among vulnerable populations, including the elderly, women, children, students, nomadic populations, extremely poor populations, refugees, internally displaced people, and people with disabilities.<sup>6</sup> The urban poor pay 22 percent of their income to access water from vendors, and the financial burden of accessing water usually rests on women.<sup>7</sup> This results in incidents of domestic and gender-based violence related to water access. Uganda's National Water Policy emphasizes the need to involve women and marginalized groups in decision-making processes related to water management; however, the number of women holding key positions in Water User Committees has been declining since 2011.<sup>8</sup> Particularly in rural areas, cultural norms and beliefs affect access to safe water and hygienic sanitation facilities, and contribute to the practice of open defecation.<sup>9</sup> WASH is at the heart of women's and girls' productive and reproductive roles. Therefore, inadequate access to WASH services results in a disproportionate burden on women and girls, which affects their engagement in economic and educational activities and may expose them to threats of violence and health hazards. Targeted interventions are needed to ensure that the most vulnerable and marginalized groups can access safe water, sanitation, and hygiene services.

The majority of the country does have abundant surface and groundwater resources, thanks to a tropical climate and biannual rainy seasons, with only the Karamoja sub-region having a semi-arid climate and one rainy season. In 2015, Uganda had approximately 60,100 million cubic meters of renewable freshwater resources annually, with only 637 million cubic meters extracted each year.<sup>10</sup> There is huge water potential, but the country must proactively protect its watersheds from environmental degradation and climate change impacts. Between 1994 and 2020, wetland coverage decreased from 15.6 percent to 8.9 percent due to agriculture expansion, and between 1990 and 2020, deforestation reduced tree cover from 24 percent to 12.4 percent.<sup>11</sup> Current climate change projections predict rising average temperatures and more erratic rainfall, resulting in more frequent prolonged dry spells and floods. Uganda's mean annual temperature is projected to increase 1 to 2 degrees Celsius by 2050, even if greenhouse gas emissions decline by 2045. Rainfall projections vary depending on the Representative Concentration Pathways (RCP). Under RCP 4.5, rainfall is projected to increase 5 to 10 percent in the 2040s in the Northern, Western, and Karamoja regions, relative to the 1981–2010 baseline. However, under RCP 8.5, rainfall is predicted to decrease by 5 to 15 percent in the central parts of the country, and under RCP 2.6, rainfall in Masindi, Hoima, and the Karamoja region is projected to decrease by 5 to 10 percent relative to the baseline.<sup>12</sup> Additionally, water resource availability is unevenly distributed both spatially and temporally, resulting in inequitable access and driving conflicts over water and pastures at the onset of dry seasons. The frequency of these conflicts will only increase due to climate change, so climate-smart approaches will be critical to ensure water is available at the right time and in the right quantity in the future.

## NATIONAL PRIORITIES

Three line ministries are responsible for WASH activities: the Ministry of Water and Environment (MoWE) oversees water supply and public sanitation, the MoH oversees community sanitation and WASH in healthcare facilities, and the MoES is responsible for WASH and menstrual hygiene management in schools. Despite being a key mandate for all three ministries, WASH planning and budgeting falls squarely under MoES-led "Human Capital Development" in the National Development Plan (NDP) III. Although this fragmented structure hampers the government's ability to advance a coherent strategy, the three ministries agree on the key WASH priorities: extending services, protecting watersheds, operationalizing existing policies, strengthening governance structures, and increasing awareness about the importance of WASH for economic growth. The GoU aims to eliminate open defecation by 2030, increase WASH services in schools and healthcare facilities, and extend piped water into underserved communities. As outlined in the NDP III, the GoU will adopt a watershed approach to improve integrated water resource management and source protection.

The GoU has successfully decentralized technical and management structures at the regional, district, and community levels. It also has strong policies, frameworks, and regulations.<sup>13</sup> Efforts are underway to develop a centralized WASH data management system, which will be critical for tracking progress towards sector goals through key WASH indicators. The GoU has also adopted evidence-based recommendations, such as the practice of tagging subsidies with achievement of results.<sup>14</sup>

Despite the existence of strong policies and frameworks, the Ugandan WASH sector is chronically underfunded. Although Uganda signed the Ngor Declaration in 2015, which required that countries budget 0.5 percent of GDP for sanitation and hygiene interventions by 2020, Uganda only allocated 0.4 percent<sup>15</sup> to WASH in 2023 — the majority of this for water supply. Sector financing has increasingly relied on donors and external financing, which currently cover more than 60 percent of the WASH budget.<sup>16</sup> Ugandans’ inability to pay for WASH services also threatens the sustainability of rural water supply investments. To generate the resources needed to achieve their priorities, the WASH line ministries aim to sensitize the Ministry of Finance, Planning, and Economic Development and other key stakeholders to increase WASH funding in the national budget.

## USAID APPROACH AND RESULTS FRAMEWORK

Over the next five years of the GWS period, USAID/Uganda will continue working with GoU and other stakeholders to strengthen existing governance structures, operationalize existing policies, increase area-wide access to on-premises sanitation and piped water services in rural districts, and invest in water security in the conflict-affected Karamoja sub-region.

USAID/Uganda is currently implementing the Uganda Sanitation for Health Activity (USHA), which was awarded in 2018 and invested \$32 million to improve access to water supply and sanitation services, and promote key hygiene behaviors. This investment strengthened USAID’s relationships with the MoH, MoWE, and the MoES and has established the Agency as a critical development partner in the WASH sector. It also led to valuable lessons and demonstrated scalable results from private sector engagement in sanitation and governance, operational support to Umbrella Associations, and effective O&M in school WASH. USHA is set to close in July 2023. USAID’s future investments will continue to focus on food and water security implemented through a watershed management approach, focused on water resource planning and regulation, governance structure-strengthening and policy implementation for water security through climate-resilient water resources management, market-based sanitation, and implementation of a systems approach to WASH in healthcare facilities.

All of USAID’s WASH and water resource management interventions aim to build individual, household, community, and system resilience to ensure sustainable access to water, sanitation, and hygiene services, despite shocks and stressors.



### STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE I

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

USAID/Uganda will strengthen the capacity of the existing national and subnational governance structures and institutions to improve planning, monitoring, and efficient use of the limited water resources. To help bridge the finance gap, the Mission will work alongside other development partners to build an investment case and advocate for increased public and private funding of the WASH sector. While the focus will be on investments in rural areas, USAID/Uganda will also support the professionalization of both urban and rural utilities, allowing them to become creditworthy and able to secure blended or commercial financing. This will build private sector engagement and permit development funding to be directed where other financial options are not yet feasible.<sup>17</sup>

USAID/Uganda will also support the GoU to operationalize existing policies, such as the USAID-supported [National Sanitation Market Guidelines](#). By translating these strong policies into practice, public and private-sector service providers will be better positioned to expand and sustain rural water and sanitation service delivery. The Mission will also support subnational government structures, such as the MoH’s Village Health Teams, MoWE’s Regional Centers for water and sanitation, and the Catchment Management Committees (CMCs).



## STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 2

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

USAID/Uganda will support the water utilities and other existing WASH service providers to establish new, metered, on-premise piped water connections for rural households and institutions. The Agency's investments in new, non-networked water supplies (i.e., handpumps) will be limited to regions where piped networks are infeasible. Building on a successful pilot, USAID will promote the adoption of pro-poor tariff structures, customer profiling, and targeted subsidies. To ensure climate-resilient and sustainable services, USAID/Uganda will promote solar-powered pumps, remote monitoring of water sources, and investments to reduce water losses within the pipe network, among other measures. USAID/Uganda will also strengthen the management of existing point water sources through rural Area Service Provider utilities, as directed by the [National Framework for Operation and Maintenance of Rural Water Infrastructure](#).

USAID/Uganda will continue to champion and scale up the market-based sanitation implementation approach (MBSIA) to increase household investment in sanitation. MBSIA has demonstrated improvements at scale by improving the desirability and affordability of sanitation products, tailoring marketing efforts to a differentiated customer base, facilitating a service delivery system of public and private actors, and overcoming customers' liquidity constraints through financing. It builds on the actions of Community Led Total Sanitation (CLTS) approaches to provide sustainable access to durable toilets. USAID/Uganda will build on the successes of the "clean clinics approach" in healthcare facilities by integrating WASH in infection prevention and control, and will further contribute to creating healthier learning environments by improving WASH services in schools, including menstrual hygiene management components.



## STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 3

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

USAID/Uganda will support Water Management Zone Offices, CMCs, and Water User Committees to operationalize their plans, promote equitable access to water resources, regulate water usage, ensure and enforce water quality requirements, and promote community-led natural resource management. For selected watersheds, USAID/Uganda will help the CMCs develop or implement existing catchment management plans, and promote participatory approaches to protecting and rehabilitating ecosystems. These efforts will improve water recharge as well as groundwater and surface water storage and flows to ensure water is available for productive and domestic use.

To climate-proof WASH investments, USAID/Uganda will support nature-based solutions to protect and conserve the wetlands and forests that sustain water availability and quality in selected basins. Where appropriate, economic tools and approaches, including payment for ecosystem services, will be applied to link water catchment protection to investments in water supply schemes. Additionally, investments such as non-revenue water reduction and sanitation improvements will limit the impacts of development on freshwater ecosystems.



## STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 4

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

To reduce and mitigate conflict over water resources, USAID/Uganda will improve the reliability of new or existing water infrastructure in areas suffering from scarcity, primarily Karamoja. USAID will conduct participatory and inclusive hydrology assessments and infrastructure gap analyses to locate water sources and site infrastructure improvements, to avoid contributing to violence. In addition, USAID/Uganda will capture participant feedback and complaints, and ensure that activities respond effectively to mitigate conflict. To guarantee sustainable access, USAID/Uganda will invest in community, utility, and government structures to improve O&M nationally, while continuing to identify and promote private sector partners as Rural Area Service Providers. By improving service delivery to the last mile and focusing on the poorest and most marginalized, USAID/Uganda will reduce water scarcity-induced conflicts and strengthen the resilience of these communities. USAID/Uganda will also evaluate how investments in the sector affect water-related conflict under changing climate conditions.

## PRINCIPLES

USAID/Uganda's WASH investments will incorporate the four key operating principles from the GWS. Interventions will operationalize many GoU policies, support local systems that lead to sustainable services, and empower local stakeholders to improve sustainable access to drinking water, sanitation, and hygiene. USAID aims to reach marginalized and underserved populations, specifically **by ensuring that 50 percent of the households served are receiving access to basic services for the first time**. USAID/Uganda will also continue to produce influential data, research, and learning for the Ugandan and global WASH sectors, and operationalize its findings in activity design and advocacy with the GoU.

## MISSION RESULTS FRAMEWORK

USAID/Uganda's Country Development Cooperation Strategy (CDCS) 2022–2027 recognizes that WASH and water resource management are critical to support the Ugandan people and achieve Vision 2040. The water sector cuts across all three CDCS core development objectives, specifically: improving the quality of health care services (sub IR 1.3.2), managing natural resources and biodiversity sustainably and inclusively (sub IR 2.3), increasing access to and use of basic water and sanitation services and improving the adoption of key hygiene behaviors (sub IR 2.3.2), and improving public and private resource mobilization (IR 3.3). In alignment with the CDCS, the principles of diversity, equity, inclusion, conflict sensitivity, and learning will be operationalized across all four objectives of the Global Water Strategy.

## KEY RISKS AND MITIGATION STRATEGIES

*Inadequate resource mobilization* — Historically, WASH has not been a national priority for public funding and has relied heavily on external financing. Even in areas with a functioning utility or Area Service Provider, the user fees or tariffs are insufficient to cover O&M costs. This plan's sustainability depends on local systems in which local governments, utilities, and water resource management entities have sufficient public resources, viable water user fee structures, and transparent systems to increase the quality and extent of services. The private sector must also be incentivized to invest in parallel with government structures. USAID/Uganda will address this risk by coupling investments to strengthen local systems with evidence generation to support the investment case for WASH and water resource management that target national policymakers, donors, and the private sector.

*Water quality assurance* — As rural water utilities continue to scale operations without a viable financial model, water treatment and quality monitoring protocols may be compromised and result in a public health risk. As Uganda begins to rely more heavily on groundwater sources, there is a higher probability that drinking water supplies located near geological plate shifts, such as Lake Albert, will be contaminated with heavy metals like arsenic. To mitigate these



water-quality risks, USAID will help institutions develop business plans, advocate for additional funding, and build technical capacity on heavy-metal testing and restrictions on groundwater abstraction depths.

*Climate change* — Increasing water scarcity due to climate change is the principal environmental risk to improving drinking water access. Some areas of Uganda are already experiencing reduced precipitation,<sup>18</sup> which reduces recharge of the shallow aquifers on which most water supplies depend and portends losses in agricultural productivity and associated economic hardship. This risk is exacerbated by a rapid increase in domestic and productive water demand. USAID/Uganda will mitigate the climate change risk by operationalizing water resource management structures at the regional and community levels and investing in climate-resilient, nature-based solutions for water recharge.

*Conflict and violence* — Conflict, particularly in Karamoja but potentially elsewhere, is and will remain a key risk factor. As a result, Karamoja will be a priority geographic area. To this end, the WASH program will be conflict-sensitive, ensuring that no harm is caused as a result of its interventions and that activities do not exacerbate existing conflicts.

## BUDGET

The budget for this plan is based on prior year resources still available for programming, the FY 2022 estimated allocation of \$11.55 million (\$9.8 million in DA Account, \$1.75 million in GHP Account), and the FY 2023 President's Budget Request of \$5.9 million.

## EXPECTED RESULTS

Through the 2023 to 2028 period, USAID/Uganda's activities are expected to achieve the following targets:



**800,000 people** gaining access to at least basic sanitation service



**500,000 people** gaining access to at least basic drinking water service



**\$10 million mobilized** for water security, sanitation, and hygiene



Improved performance of **47 water security institutions**

USAID will also contribute toward Uganda's achievement of the NDP III targets, such as attaining 40 percent basic sanitation coverage and 80 percent basic rural water supply access, and MoH's [Open Defecation Free and Accelerated Basic Sanitation Roadmap](#) for elimination of open defecation by 2030.

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## Endnotes

- 1 WHO/UNICEF Joint Monitoring Program. [Uganda Country File](#), 2021.
- 2 Directorate of Water Development, Ministry of Water and Environment (MoWE). [Water Supply Atlas](#), 2023.
- 3 MoWE, [Sector Programme Management Report 2022](#).
- 4 MoH, [National Micro-planning Handbook for WASH in Healthcare Facilities in Uganda](#), 2022.
- 5 MoES, [National Micro Planning Handbook for WASH in Public Primary and Secondary Schools in Uganda](#), 2019.
- 6 Ahabwe, et al. [Governance conundrum in pursuit of the human right to water and sanitation: tracking the progress of the leave-no-one-behind principle in Uganda](#). *Journal of Water and Climate Change*, January 2022.
- 7 Water.org. [Uganda's water and sanitation crisis](#), 2021.
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- 9 Ntaro, et al. [Contextual and psychological factors influencing open defecation free status: an exploratory qualitative study in rural South Western Uganda](#). *BMC Public Health*. 22(1): 414, March 2022.
- 10 USAID Sustainable Water Partnership. [Uganda Water Resources Profile](#), 2021.
- 11 MoWE, [Water and Environment Sector Performance Report 2020](#).
- 12 Uganda's Third National Communication to the UNFCCC, 2022.
- 13 Eastern and Southern Africa Water and Sanitation (ESAWAS) Regulators Association. *The Water Supply and Sanitation Regulatory Landscape Across Africa, Eastern Africa Regional Report*, 2022.
- 14 World Bank. *Doing More with Less: Smarter Subsidies for Water Supply and Sanitation*, 2019.
- 15 World Health Organization. [Strong Systems and Sound Investments: Evidence on and Key Insights into Accelerating Progress on Sanitation, Drinking-Water and Hygiene](#). UN-Water Global Analysis and Assessment of Sanitation and Drinking-Water (GLAAS) 2022 Report.
- 16 MoWE. [Natural Resources, Environment, Climate Change, Land And Water Management Programme Performance Report](#), 2021.
- 17 World Bank Public Private Infrastructure Advisory Facility (PPIAF), Technical & Financial Review of NWSC, 2020.
- 18 P. Ssentongo, et al. [Changes in Uganda Climate Rainfall at the Village and Forest Level](#). *Scientific Reports* 8, no. 3551, 2018.