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WATER FOR AFRICA THROUGH LEADERSHIP AND INSTITUTIONAL SUPPORT

Despite significant investments over the past 30 years, hundreds of millions of Africans still do not have access to basic services or safely managed drinking water and sanitation facilities. The COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated the critical importance of sanitation, hygiene, and adequate access to clean water for preventing and combating diseases.

To help address the lack of access to water and sanitation services and facilities from a regional perspective, USAID created the Water for Africa through Leadership and Institutional Support (WALIS) program. WALIS focuses on building the capacity of national and regional leaders to capture and apply evidence in the development of Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene (WASH) policies, strategies, programs, and investments.

WALIS has spent the past five years (2015-2020) bolstering the ability of African leaders, donors, and stakeholders to use data and analyses to shape WASH strategies, plans, and budgets. WALIS provides technical, programmatic, administrative, and logistical support to improve the capacity of the African WASH sector. DAI leads the WALIS team and engages with multiple partners and key investors in Africa's WASH sector.

ADDRESSING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

The link between access to clean water, sanitation, and hygiene and disease prevention is well-established and has been underscored during the COVID-19 pandemic. Yet the emergence of COVID-19 has also exposed the gaps and obstacles the world faces in achieving Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 6 related to universal and

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sustained WASH access. The barriers to reaching SDG 6 go beyond infrastructure and extend to institutional weaknesses, data gaps, and capacity needs. The WALIS implementation strategy to COVID-19 responds to the needs of African WASH sector institutions, building off core WALIS activities to strengthen WASH integration in national and regional COVID response strategies. WALIS activities support partners to address key bottlenecks with the knowledge that improving WASH will prevent diseases, save lives, and improve the quality of care. In its sixth and final year, WALIS will continue focusing on delivering improved access to safely managed clean water and sanitation for all Africans during and after the COVID-19 pandemic.

WALIS YEAR SIX ACTIVITIES

1. USAID attaches great value to evidence-based decision-making and is supporting its country partners to build linkages among research, learning, and effective action. In 2021, WALIS will research how **African regional institutions, utilities, and partner governments** have accessed data to make informed decisions in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. This research will provide valuable information on the critical WASH responses that African country leaders have undertaken during the pandemic of relevance to USAID programming; how those decisions have been reached; the degree to which evidence informed those decisions – or not; and what lessons can be drawn to inform a better response to future crises and to build back better.
2. In **Zambia**, WALIS supports the Lukanga Water Supply and Sanitation Company (LgWSC) in withstanding the impacts of the pandemic while maintaining water services to communities. LgWSC, like other urban African utilities, has seen operating revenue drop as the economic impacts of COVID-19 are felt by government and consumers alike. Combined with underlying operational inefficiencies, these revenue losses have made LgWSC less able to continue service just when it is most needed. WALIS will work with LgWSC to determine the current and future financial effects of the pandemic, and to develop a business continuity plan so the company can weather the current pandemic and other major incidents in the future.
3. As the COVID-19 pandemic has spread in **Senegal**, public areas are particularly at risk of disease transmission. Public sanitation and hygiene facilities, especially handwashing stations with clean water and soap, are critical to fighting the pandemic. WALIS activities in Senegal build on the program's recent work with the Ministry of Water and Sanitation to identify the public sanitation and hygiene facilities in schools, healthcare facilities, and other public places in regions with high transmission risk. This data is recorded in Senegal's digital sanitation asset management directory so that the government can better address WASH needs in the face of the pandemic and in the future.
4. WALIS works with the **Africa Ministers Council on Water**, the pinnacle WASH organization on the continent and an important USAID partner, to provide political leadership, policy direction, and advocacy in the WASH sector in Africa. This regional-level work is crucial to setting the continent-wide agenda and organizing national-level responses for global strategies. WALIS will work with AMCOW to enhance its reputation as a knowledge management platform where sector leaders across the continent can share information on WASH and COVID-19 through the creation of new policy papers, tools, and templates.

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