



ZAMBIA

High-Priority Country Plan

GLOBAL WATER STRATEGY | 2022-2027

In 2021, USAID designated Zambia a High-Priority Country (HPC) under the U.S. government Global Water Strategy (“Strategy”). Under the 2022–2027 Strategy, USAID/Zambia will continue to work with the Government of the Republic of Zambia (GRZ) and other stakeholders to strengthen sector governance; address key financing gaps; and increase access to area-wide, sustainable water and sanitation services in rural areas. **USAID/Zambia’s investments over the next five years will increase access to basic water services for 1.5 million people; provide basic sanitation to 1.5 million people; strengthen 150 water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) institutions; and mobilize roughly \$5 million of private investments for the WASH sector.**

CONTEXT

Zambia has demonstrated political stability and consistent economic growth over the past 15 years, consistently ranking highly on the Economic Intelligence Unit’s list of top democracies in Africa and achieving an average gross domestic product (GDP) growth of over 5 percent per year.¹ Since 2015, GDP growth has slowed, and in 2020 the economy shrunk and the GRZ defaulted on its foreign debt. Zambia maintains relatively low rates of access to basic water and sanitation services. Currently, an estimated 6.3 million Zambians (36 percent) lack access to basic water services and 10.4 million (68 percent) lack access to basic sanitation services.² Within schools, only 14 percent have access to piped water, 15.2 percent have access to borehole piped water, 48.2 percent to a borehole with a hand pump, 7.8 percent to protected well water, 10.7 percent to unprotected well water, and 4.1 percent have no access to water.³ Zambia has sufficient ground and surface water resources, with utilization estimated at 54 percent,⁴ but variability in water availability from both sources makes water resources management (WRM) a critical component of future climate resilience.

Access to basic water and sanitation services is substantially lower in rural areas than urban areas. In 2020, only 48 percent of Zambia’s rural population had basic access to water, compared to 87 percent in urban areas.ⁱ Access to at least basic sanitation services (25 percent rural vs. 41 percent urban) reflects a similar gap.⁵ Wider geographic dispersions and lower average incomes of rural populations partially explain these differences, as they result in reduced economies of scale in infrastructure provision and ability to pay for WASH services. Because 55 percent (10.3 million people) of the population still resides in rural areas, overcoming those obstacles is key to Zambia’s national development. Zambia’s population, an estimated 19.6 million,⁶ is growing at approximately 3.4 percent per year (with both rural and urban areas growing at approximately the same rate). Without increased focus on rural service provision, inequalities between urban and rural populations may continue to rise.

Large inequities in access to basic WASH services also exist across wealth quintiles. There is a 59 percentage point difference in access to basic water services between the richest and poorest quintiles and a 50 percentage point difference in basic sanitation coverage.⁷ This inequity between urban and rural populations is similar to other countries in the Southern Africa region.

ⁱ Urban areas here connote formal or planned settlements.

The limited coverage of basic water and sanitation contributes to negative health outcomes, particularly for young children. Zambia has a high burden of childhood diseases, with an under-five mortality rate of 6 percent (although that number has been trending downward from 16 percent in 2000).⁸ These rates are comparable to peer countries but lag behind efforts to meet the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals by 2030.

USAID/Zambia and the GRZ will face the following key challenges and opportunities operating in this WASH context over the next five years.

Funding Gap: Historic underinvestment in water and sanitation services has limited the ability of providers to increase WASH access and improve the quality of existing services. Previous Zambian political administrations provided insufficient funding for the WASH sector, and while previous iterations of the GRZ's Joint Sector Reviews have included WASH, the recommendations from the reviews have not been fully financed. Although the share of the budget allocated to WASH shrank from 0.8 percent of GDP in 2020 to 0.5 percent in 2022, in July 2022, the new administration unveiled a new \$6 billion program for 2023–2030 for water and sanitation services and WRM, to be financed from both public and private sources. Also, in the last two years the GRZ has significantly increased the Constituency Development Fund, a fiscal transfer to the local government councils, to further support community development and the delivery of goods and services.

Private Sector Participation: Current policies and regulations limit private sector provision of water and sanitation services. The GRZ grants monopoly rights for urban and peri-urban water and sanitation provision to commercial utilities,ⁱⁱ which restricts private sector entry into the WASH sector and has resulted in the public sector providing 99 percent of utility-based water services in Zambia. Private operators are permitted to operate in rural areas with commercial utility approval and licensing, but the regulatory environment restricts the ability of operators to manage their fee structure to ensure financial sustainability or profitability. This limits innovation and risk-taking, making it difficult for providers to try new modes of service provision, such as preventive maintenance services for rural handpumps.

Climate Change: Zambia has already begun to experience the negative effects of climate change through more frequent and severe droughts, especially in the southern and western provinces. Droughts and floods negatively affect the availability and quality of WASH services, while also having a devastating impact on the agricultural and economic productivity of farmers.⁹ Increased occurrence of droughts and higher temperatures can lead to boreholes providing water only during wetter seasons, forcing households to travel longer distances or rely on unimproved, unsafe sources. Heavy rainfall and flooding may damage water sources and sanitation facilities, reducing access and contaminating water sources.

ii Commercial utilities are state-owned enterprises. The shareholders are local government councils.

NATIONAL PRIORITIES

Since the 1990s, the GRZ has undertaken water sector reforms, which, among other things, devolved WASH to local governments and private enterprises. In 2006, the GRZ launched its Vision 2030, a long-term development strategy to attain prosperous, middle-income nation status by 2030. Priorities under Vision 2030, including achieving universal access to water and sanitation, align with and advance Sustainable Development Goal 6 and the 2015 Ngor Declaration on Sanitation and Hygiene. The Ministry of Water Development and Sanitation, created in 2021, serves as the sector's lead policy and coordination center, overseeing two sector regulators for WASH service delivery and WRM. Other key sector players include commercial utilities, cooperating partners, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and district government and subnational structures. Zambia's WASH sector is supported by guiding national policies and strategies to achieve its water and sanitation targets. Key policies include the Zambia Water Investment Program (2022), the Urban Water Supply and Sanitation Program (2020), the Rural Water Supply and Sanitation Program (2011), and the [NWASCO strategic document 2020–2025](#). The Zambia Multi-Sectoral Cholera Elimination Plan also invests in safe water and sanitation.

The new administration under President Hakainde Hichilema has publicly committed to providing \$6 billion for water security, sanitation, and hygiene from 2022 to 2030.¹⁰ This investment represents a dramatic increase over the historical contributions to WASH services by the GRZ. The GRZ will administer these funds evenly between WASH services and WRM. The expanded Zambia Constituency Development Fund may also provide funds for WASH through a provision for small-scale capital projects determined at the constituency level. Approximately 25 percent of funding supporting the WASH sector is provided by the GRZ and 75 percent by loans and grants.¹¹ In rural areas, most of the WASH financing is from donors and varies from year to year.

USAID APPROACH AND RESULTS FRAMEWORK

USAID/Zambia investments in WASH include the flagship, five-year Expanding Water and Sanitation project (Expanding WASH, 2022–2027), which was launched in Fiscal Year (FY) 2022. The activity’s key objectives address Strategic Objectives 1, 2, and 3 (see below) under the Global Water Strategy. USAID/Zambia also funds the Scaling Up Nutrition Technical Assistance program (SUN TA, 2019–2026), an integrated WASH, nutrition, maternal and child health, family planning, and livelihoods program with ambitious water and sanitation access targets (Strategic Objective 2). Three smaller investments include two Health, Ecosystems and Agriculture for Resilient Thriving Societies (HEARTH) programs: Eastern Kafue Nature Alliance (2021–2026) and Luangwa Livelihood and Conservation (2022–2027) and Revenue for Growth (2021–2026). The HEARTH programs advance Strategic Objective 2 by improving access to basic water access in villages near game conservation areas. The Revenue for Growth program contributes to Strategic Objective 1 by improving GRZ revenue collection that funds social services delivery, including WASH.



STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 1

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

The WASH sector in Zambia has a clear structure that delegates both urban and rural service provision to commercial utilities. However, commercial utilities often lack sufficient capacity, staff, and financial resources to provide these services. USAID/Zambia will work with public sector partners to improve sector governance, capacity, and financing.

Intermediate Results (IRs):

IR 1.1 Develop, strengthen, and implement inclusive laws, policies, and regulations: Through its Expanding WASH program, USAID/Zambia will support policy and legislative reforms that improve government and service provider accountability and increase the involvement of the private sector. For example, Expanding WASH will seek to ease restrictions by reviewing tariff setting policies and increasing WASH public-private partnerships and capacity development for private sector operators to provide WASH services. Other required reforms include strengthening commercial utilities’ corporate governance, improving their managerial autonomy and accountability, and rethinking the existing community management model for rural water supply to improve operation and maintenance.

IR 1.2 Effectively mobilize and target public and private financing: Efforts to effectively mobilize public and private financing will take place under multiple mechanisms. The Expanding WASH activity will conduct advocacy to increase GRZ budget allocation to the sector and support the enabling environment for private sector participation. SUN TA is empowering village savings and loan associations to raise funds for community-level water and sanitation improvements and repairs. Revenue for Growth will improve GRZ revenue collection, increasing the total amount that can contribute to WASH expenditures.

IR 1.3 Improve the capacity and performance of regional, national, and subnational institutions: USAID/Zambia will strengthen the capacity and performance of WASH institutions at the national and local levels, including commercial utilities, government ministries and departments, local governments, and NGOs. Activities will focus on human resources development, institutional performance assessments, and the development of district-wide WASH investment strategies integrated into the local governments’ development plans. At the provider level, USAID/Zambia will conduct capacity-strengthening exercises to improve operational performance, reduce costs, and reduce rates of non-revenue water.

IR 1.4 Advance transparency, accountability, equity, and efficiency through participatory, data-driven decision-making: USAID/Zambia will work to increase transparency, accountability, and facilitate data-driven decision-making for inclusive service delivery. Transparency and accountability in decision-making requires the participation of a variety of stakeholders, including government, civil society, and marginalized and vulnerable populations. The Expanding WASH activity will work with commercial utility partners to establish a national billing and customer management system for rural water supply and develop performance indicators for gender and social inclusion in service of these goals. This increased availability of rural water and sanitation service provider data (including water quality data) will improve transparency and accountability.

As part of this plan, USAID/Zambia will build government and utility capacity through Expanding WASH activities. There is a substantial financing gap between what is needed to achieve universal access and projected government investment. However, USAID/Zambia's work will contribute to improvements in governance and accountability while mobilizing finance through public sector advocacy, citizen participation in sector decision-making, private sector participation, and increased investment from users through community-level activities.



STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 2

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

Due to years of government under-investment in WASH access and services, rates of coverage, especially in rural areas and rural institutional settings, remain low. USAID/Zambia is committed through its two largest WASH-funded mechanisms to improving rural access to high-quality water and sanitation services and promoting the adoption of key hygiene behaviors.

Intermediate Results (IRs):

IR 2.1 Increase area-wide access to safe, equitable, and affordable sanitation services: USAID/Zambia activities work through government systems and the private sector to increase area-wide access to safe, equitable, and affordable sanitation services. Expanding WASH and SUN TA activities use market-based sanitation approaches and social and behavior change interventions to improve coverage. The Expanding WASH activity will recruit and train entrepreneurs using a market-based sanitation approach to improve the availability of affordable latrines. This training will target entrepreneurs in related businesses (e.g., manufacturing other cement products) and provide them with the knowledge to expand their operations (to include sanitation products such as cement latrine rings), develop business plans, and improve their business profitability. Existing SUN TA programs will continue to use community-led total sanitation approaches to increase rural demand for sanitation services.

IR 2.2 Increase access to equitable, safe, reliable, and affordable drinking water services: USAID/Zambia activities work to increase access to equitable, safe, reliable, and affordable drinking water services through the construction and rehabilitation of water systems. Ongoing activities through SUN TA strengthen the capacity of communities to manage the operations and maintenance of their own rural water points, and Expanding WASH will work to professionalize these services with private enterprise participation. The Expanding WASH activity will also explore the feasibility of cost recovery by providing technical assistance to providers who provide higher levels of service, such as shared pipe connections with safely managed water provision.

IR 2.3 Improve performance and climate resilience of water and sanitation service providers: Expanding WASH will work directly with commercial utilities and other water and sanitation providers to strengthen staff capacity in budgeting, administration, and engineering. These efforts will improve operational efficiency, service quality, and the providers' climate resilience. By reducing non-revenue water, overall withdrawals from surface and groundwater sources can be used more efficiently, a critical part of WRM and climate resilience.

IR 2.4 Increase adoption of key hygiene practices: Hygiene practices are critical to the health and well-being of communities, yet remain a neglected part of WASH programming. USAID/Zambia will support the Ministry of Health to implement strategies aimed at improving hygiene practices in homes and public spaces. Future SUN TA programming will reorient community-led total sanitation approaches to inspire emotions of desire and aspiration for higher quality services to trigger behavior change and shift norms to support latrine construction and handwashing with soap, moving away from the current approach that relies on disgust and shame associated with open defecation.

In the next five years, USAID/Zambia will continue to support activities focused on increasing access to basic and safely managed water and sanitation services while improving consistent practice of key hygiene behaviors. In particular, the current focus will be on targeting vulnerable and marginalized people living in rural areas, which have not received the same level of support as urban communities.



STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 3

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

Zambia's rainfall patterns have shifted over the past decade to less rain in the south and west and less predictability as a result of climate change. Rural communities rely on a mix of surface and groundwater for drinking, but surface water sources require treatment before they can be safely consumed and the total availability of groundwater sources is largely unknown. WRM is a critical component of Zambia's climate resilience, given seasonal variability in both surface and groundwater supplies and more frequent droughts.

Intermediate Result (IR):

IR 3.1 Allocate and use water resources more equitably and efficiently: USAID/Zambia will support WRM, particularly in areas and basins in agroecological Regions I and II (parts of the Western, Southern, Central, and Eastern provinces), which are drier and more prone to drought. Expanding WASH covers the Southern and Western provinces, which are at growing risk of drought and receive less than 700mm of rainfall per year. Expanding WASH will support improvements in water treatment, distribution, and allocation to ensure that water extracted from surface and groundwater sources is being used efficiently. Future work will facilitate the development of green infrastructure, such as reforestation areas with high potential for groundwater recharge, to increase resilience to further changes in climate and rainfall.

PRINCIPLES

USAID/Zambia will integrate the Global Water Strategy Operating Principles into this plan and throughout its programming. USAID/Zambia investments in water and sanitation, across both of its major WASH mechanisms (Expanding WASH and SUN TA), use a **systems approach**, working to strengthen governance at a national and local level. Their focus on serving rural populations demonstrates the prioritization of the needs of **marginalized and underserved communities** and those in vulnerable situations. These programs will reach Zambians who have never before had access to a basic level of service. USAID/Zambia has two dedicated monitoring and learning activities, which can provide staffing and mandate to **leverage data, research, innovation, and learning** to make **evidence-based decisions**. USAID/Zambia will also incorporate resilience across its programming to advance, sustain, and safeguard progress in water and sanitation in the face of shocks and stressors such as increasing water stress induced by climate change and global health threats such as COVID-19.

MISSION RESULTS FRAMEWORK

The approaches and objectives outlined in Zambia's Global Water Strategy High-Priority Country Plan advance USAID/Zambia's existing priorities laid out in its Country Development Cooperation Strategy (CDCS). Specifically:

Development Objectives (DOs):

DO1: Equitable, Accountable Governance: Expanding WASH will work with commercial water utilities and government partners to improve the governance of water and sanitation service provision. By strengthening capacity in these sectors and encouraging partnerships with the private sector, these programs will ensure better usage of public funds (DO 1.2) and lead to more accountability within government. Improvements in provider performance will lead to increased water and sanitation access in their target districts.

DO2: Rural Poverty and Enterprise-Driven Economic Growth: Through its efforts to develop innovative enterprises providing WASH services, Expanding WASH will directly improve rural poverty and private sector participation in the water and sanitation sectors. This activity will support the recruitment and training of small enterprises to sell latrines through market-based sanitation. In addition, the activity will pilot enterprise-focused approaches to rural water point repair, increasing the functionality of boreholes and handpumps and leading to consistent, year-round access to improved water supply.

DO3: Improved Health Outcomes of Vulnerable Populations: The ongoing efforts of the integrated WASH, Nutrition, and Livelihoods SUN TA program will make substantial contributions to the three Intermediate Results under DO 3. This program increases water, sanitation, and hygiene access for vulnerable, rural populations to improve the quality of life and major health outcomes for at-risk children. This work, in concert with Expanding WASH's focus on systems strengthening, will create a more robust WASH sector that prioritizes the needs of rural populations that have been underserved relative to their urban counterparts.

KEY RISKS AND MITIGATION STRATEGIES

Changes in longstanding climate patterns have increased the **frequency and severity of droughts** in Zambia. Especially in the Southern and Western provinces, lower amounts of rain and less predictable rainfall threaten the livelihoods of Zambian smallholder farmers and strain drinking water sources. To support climate change adaptation, USAID/Zambia will prioritize climate-resilient water and sanitation systems and infrastructure. Activities will work with rural water service providers to improve efficiency of water distribution, and improved maintenance approaches will ensure that water sources remain operational throughout both wet and dry seasons.

Persistent conflict in neighboring countries threatens regional security. Ongoing humanitarian crises in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) has led to flows of refugees entering Luapula and Northern provinces and the establishment of the Mantapala Refugee Settlement in northern Zambia. According to the UNHCR, as of December 2021, Zambia hosted more than 100,000 refugees, asylum seekers, and former refugees, including over 63,000 from the DRC. USAID/Zambia will continue to improve performance of commercial utilities throughout the country, which will allow them to expand and improve services targeting the poorest and most vulnerable populations.

Finally, there remains substantial risk from **recurring infectious diseases**. An outbreak of COVID-19 could require reprogramming of WASH funds to address such a crisis. In addition, Zambia is a cholera endemic country and the capital city of Lusaka has suffered cholera outbreaks in 2016, 2018, and 2022. Persistent outbreaks of cholera are an indication of the continued WASH needs in dense urban settlements, and risk rising to the level of a national emergency. This disease burden can threaten health and livelihoods, increasing the challenge of providing high-quality WASH services. SUN TA and Expanding WASH will improve access to basic water and sanitation while encouraging key hygiene behaviors, all of which help prevent the outbreak and spread of cholera.

BUDGET

The cost of the plan is based on prior year resources still available for programming, the FY 2022 estimated allocation of \$9.8 million, and the FY 2023 President's Budget Request of \$10.1 million.

EXPECTED RESULTS

From 2022 to 2027, USAID activities are estimated to provide Zambia with:



Basic water services, safely managed water services, or improved water service for **1.5 million people** half of which will be gaining first-time access



Basic sanitation services, safely managed sanitation services, or improved sanitation service for **1.5 million people** half of which will be gaining first-time access



150 institutions strengthened through capacity-strengthening activities at the national and district levels with water and sanitation service providers, government agencies, and civic institutions



\$5 million mobilized for the WASH sector through increased public sector allocations, raising funds from commercial banks, village savings and loan association funding for water and sanitation, and increased tariff collection for WASH services

Endnotes

- 1 World Bank, [Global Indicator Library](#), 2006–2021; Economist Intelligence Unit, [Global Democracy Rankings](#), 2020.
- 2 UNICEF/WHO Joint Monitoring Program, [Population lacking basic WASH access, 2015 and 2020](#).
- 3 Government of the Republic of Zambia, [2020 Zambia Education Statistical Bulletin](#).
- 4 Government of the Republic of Zambia, Zambia Water Investment Programme 2022–2030.
- 5 UNICEF/WHO Joint Monitoring Program, [Population lacking basic WASH access, 2015 and 2020](#).
- 6 Zambia Statistics Agency, 2022 Census of Population and Housing Preliminary Report.
- 7 UNICEF/WHO Joint Monitoring Program, [Subnational inequalities in basic WASH services](#), 2017.
- 8 UNICEF, [Zambia Country Page](#), Accessed on November 14, 2022.
- 9 USAID, [Power Africa Zambia Country Page](#), Accessed on November 14, 2022.
- 10 Continental Africa Water Investment Programme, [Multi-billion Water Investment Programme Launched in Zambia](#), August 10, 2022.
- 11 World Bank, [Zambia Water Supply and Sanitation Sector Diagnostic](#), June 2020.