

# Time for Bold US Action on Drinking Water, Sanitation and Hygiene for the Poor

A response to the Senator Paul Simon  
Water for the Poor Act (PL 109-211) Report to Congress 2009

## Executive Summary

Passed in 2005, the Senator Paul Simon Water for the Poor Act made the provision of safe water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) an objective of US foreign assistance. The Water for the Poor Act (WPA) mandated that the President, through the Secretary of State, produce a strategy for the provision of affordable and equitable access to safe water and sanitation and that a report on progress towards its implementation be produced every year until 2015. In June 2009, the State Department released its fourth annual report to Congress on the implementation of the WPA. The 2009 Report shows that, despite mounting political will and support for WASH, many provisions of the WPA remain unimplemented. Specifically:

- The Administration has not developed a comprehensive US Government (USG) strategy for foreign assistance related to WASH.



- Methods to coordinate and integrate US WASH programs with other US development programs, with recipient government strategies and programs, and with programs of other donor countries remain unclear.
- USG funding for WASH programs are not being targeted to areas of greatest need.
- Most indicators to measure the progress and impact of US assistance in WASH are overly focused on outputs and do not evaluate other important aspects of WASH programs – including the sustainability of services and the enabling environment related to WASH.

Several barriers impede the full implementation of the WPA. Many provisions of existing foreign assistance law are not aligned with the effective aid principles in the WPA, making implementation of several components of the WPA difficult. Without a clear, multi-year funding commitment from the Administration, the level of WASH funding on a year to year basis is unpredictable, impeding the development of a multi-year strategy. In addition to these constraints, shortage of WASH expertise in USAID Missions is an impediment to prioritizing WASH at the country level and fully implementing the WPA.

Many of these barriers have plagued the implementation of the WPA since day one. Four years after the passage of the WPA, its vision remains unfulfilled. Now is the time for the US to become a leader in global water, sanitation and hygiene and address the systematic weaknesses that have impeded the full implementation of the law. This will require a clear commitment from the Administration and Congress.

## Recommendations

In an effort to fully implement the Water for the Poor Act (WPA):

- The Administration should announce and deliver a US WASH strategy that includes requirements outlined in the WPA and is couched within a wider water strategy including sustainable management of water resources and productive uses of water. The Administration and Congress should work together to deliver the funding necessary to meet the short and long term goals identified in the WASH strategy.
- The Administration should create an office in USAID, headed by a high level official, to lead WASH development assistance and interagency coordination and create a high level office focused on diplomatic freshwater issues in the State Department.
- USAID should train existing Mission staff in WASH and recruit additional foreign service officers who are specialists in WASH.
- Congress should pass the Water for the World Act and exercise strong oversight of US assistance to WASH.
- The Administration should ensure that the level of need and ability to have a greater impact on the lives of poor people are the primary factors in determining WASH funding allocation levels.

## The Global Water and Sanitation Crisis

- Globally one in eight people (884 million) live without safe drinking water and two in five (2.5 billion) do not have adequate sanitation.
- Every day, 4,000 children in the developing world die from diarrheal disease due to unsafe water, sanitation, or hygiene.
- Improving access to safe drinking water and sanitation will contribute 30 percent, on average, to the achievement of each Millennium Development Goal, including goals related to education, health, and food security.



## US Progress in WASH



USG WASH programming has expanded significantly since the passage of the WPA, particularly in 2008 largely due to increased WASH appropriations. Congress appropriated \$300 million in 2008 for the implementation of safe drinking water and sanitation projects, including water resource management projects that align with the WPA mandates.

With increased resources for WASH, the number of USAID Missions funding developmental WASH programs has catapulted in the last year, leading to increased access to safe drinking water and sanitation for millions of people

## USAID Nigeria

The 2009 WPA report provides examples of USG activities in water, sanitation, and hygiene in various countries worldwide. For example, the report describes USAID Nigeria's plan for 2008 activities in WASH stating that, "USAID Nigeria will provide technical assistance and training in selected states to build the capacity of state water boards and local governments. ... Water related activities will be closely coordinated with US Government-funded education and health programs to ensure that target schools and health facilities have adequate water and sanitation. USAID will support community coalitions, local government water and sanitation committees, and community-based organizations to ... develop the capacity for maintenance and management of community-based water systems."

globally. US Government activities to achieve this increased access included: direct investments in expanding and rehabilitating water and sanitation infrastructure; strengthening the enabling environment in developing countries through capacity building of local and regional institutions; supporting household water treatment interventions; and supporting hygiene education programs in schools. The White House has signaled its recognition of the importance of WASH in economic development and poverty reduction. President Obama's inaugural address included a promise to the people of poorer nations that the US will work alongside them to "let clean waters flow." This year's WPA report includes a forward by Secretary of State Hillary Clinton in which she says, "Perhaps no two issues are more important to human health, economic development, and peace and security than basic sanitation and access to sustainable water supplies." However, the 2009 report shows that, despite mounting political will and support for WASH, many provisions of the WPA remain unimplemented.

## US WASH Strategy

Despite being mandated in the WPA four years ago, there is still no comprehensive USG strategy for foreign assistance related to WASH. A WASH strategy would allow the USG to enhance the impact and efficiency of its aid by setting out clear and consistent goals, objectives, and indicators that would allow the USG to monitor progress of its aid in WASH. The WPA requires a strategy that articulates:

- Specific and measurable goals, timetables, and identified resource needs to improve affordable and equitable access to safe water and sanitation.
- Methods to coordinate and integrate US water and sanitation assistance programs with other US development programs and with programs of other donor countries.
- An assessment of the commitment of governments of countries that receive assistance to policies that support affordable and equitable access to safe water and sanitation.

Reports from previous years showed small but significant progress in the development of a comprehensive US WASH strategy. For example, a "Framework for Action" in the 2008 report identified WASH as one of three pillars of US foreign assistance related to water along with sustainable management of water resources and water for productive uses like agriculture. However, this year's report does not take this framework to the next level and develop it into a full-scale strategy.

This year's report contains 14 "Country-Specific Water and Sanitation Plans" that individually attempt to meet some of the mandates of the strategy required under the WPA. However, these plans show no strategic coherence in an overall USG WASH strategy and do not reflect the wider policy discussions and transparent decision-making required by the WPA. The Administration should drive the development of a WASH strategy, grounding WASH spending in a strategic framework with an eye towards long-term success and US leadership.

## Coordination and Consultation

The WPA requires broad consultation and coordination in the development and implementation of US WASH strategies and programs. Under the WPA, the USG is required to coordinate WASH strategies and programs among USG agencies, with other donors, and with recipient governments. The act includes these provisions to make the most effective use of US aid to the sector, to avoid duplication, and to enhance sustainability of WASH programs through promoting local ownership. The 2009 WPA report does not clearly lay out the progress of the USG in ensuring the effective coordination and consultation required by WPA.

### Coordination among US Agencies

The level of coordination among US agencies programming WASH assistance is severely lacking with authority split between multiple agencies and bureaus within agencies.

*“water-related efforts of the US Government are balkanized and insufficiently integrated. A small office in the Department of State ... is tasked with ensuring water-related cooperation and strategic coordination across the entire US Government.”<sup>1</sup> – The Center for Strategic and International Studies*

This year’s report states that the Department of State and USAID have co-hosted workshops to strengthen interagency coordination, but the report does not discuss the outcomes of these workshops.

The report also indicates significant WASH resources being channeled through the Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC), with \$429 million being obligated to WASH through the MCC in 2008, to be disbursed over several years. Yet, an interview with a US Government official indicates little coordination

between the MCC and USAID at the country level or in Washington.

*“There is not a lot of coordination between MCC and USAID in water, sanitation, and hygiene. In Mozambique and Lesotho, the MCC is investing several hundred million dollars in WASH but relevant staff at USAID in Washington have little information on how the funding is being used.” – US Government Official<sup>2</sup>*

Coordination between US agencies is an urgent priority to ensure that spending is rationally allocated and that the most is made of opportunities for large-scale impact.

### Coordination and Consultation with Other Donors

Coordination between the US Government and other donors at the country or regional level appears inconsistent between countries and regions. In the report, there are some examples of coordination within descriptions of individual country or regional initiatives. However, interviews with US officials indicate that coordination is largely dependent on individual USAID Missions, with those Missions that have staff who specialize in WASH more likely to reach out to other donors. Coordination with other donors at the country, regional, and international levels must be optimized to ensure strategic use of limited resources.

### Coordination and Consultation with Recipient Governments

The WPA requires that USG WASH programs align with the poverty reduction strategies of the recipient countries in order to promote local and national ownership of these WASH programs. This ownership by recipient governments helps to ensure both the sustainability and the relevance of US interventions in WASH. In the 2009 report, some individual country plans highlight significant

efforts to align USG WASH activities with national and sector development plans. For instance, in Ethiopia, the USG is funding work towards implementing the country’s Water Sector Development Plan that aims to increase the proportion of the population with access to safe water to 71 percent by 2015 and achieve universal access to sanitation by 2012. However, interviews with USG officials again indicate that this is not necessarily a standard practice but is dependent on the individual Missions and their staff capacities. There must be an effort to broaden this coordination and consultation into a deliberate, system-wide approach.

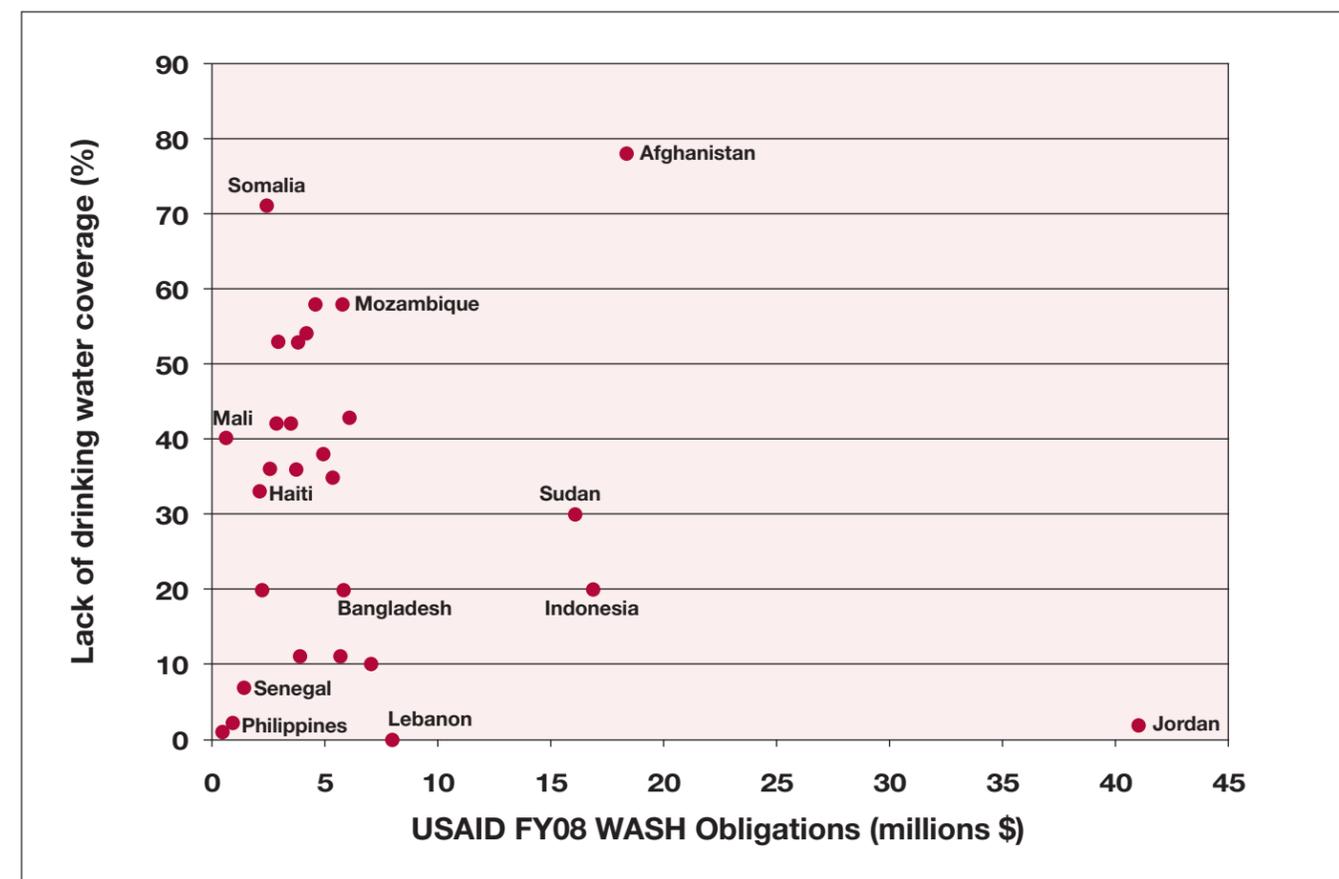
## Targeting the Poor

This year’s report shows little transparency in how decisions are made with respect to WASH assistance. The report does list 31 priority

countries for WASH assistance and presents a variety of factors that are used in determining why certain countries are prioritized for funding, including the level of need, the enabling environment, consistency with US foreign policy priorities, and compliance with statutory directives. However, how these different factors play into prioritizing certain countries is not clear.

The graph below<sup>3</sup> shows a scatter plot of assistance related to WASH versus the level of need in a variety of countries. There is little correlation between need and funding despite language in the WPA that one reason countries should be prioritized is where “the need for increased access to safe water and sanitation is greatest.” Jordan alone accounts for almost one seventh of USAID’s global funding for WASH despite very low levels of need.

Given that the size of overall development assistance appropriations are not increasing



1 Peterson, Erik and Rachel Posner. “Global Water Futures: A Roadmap for Future US Policy.” CSIS. 2008: 14.

2 Interview with USG Official, August 5, 2009.

3 Data from: “2009 Water for the Poor Act Report to Congress” and “Progress on Drinking Water and Sanitation: Special focus on Sanitation.” UNICEF Joint Monitoring Programme for Water Supply and Sanitation and WHO. 2008.

proportionately with the increases in the directive for WASH, interviews with USG officials reveal that decisions on WASH obligations are often made based on whether or not Missions are capable of or interested in reprogramming existing development assistance monies to use for WASH services. As required by the WPA, level of need and ability to have a greater impact on the lives of the poor should be the primary factors in determining funding allocation levels for a given country.

## Monitoring for Success

As part of a USG WASH strategy, the WPA requires the Administration to develop specific and measurable goals and indicators to measure the impact of US aid to WASH. This year's report provides important information on USG progress against the Millennium Development Goal targets of halving the percentage of people without access to improved water and sanitation by 2015.<sup>4</sup> Specifically, it shows that USAID's efforts alone led to improved access to safe drinking water for 7.7 million people and improved access to sanitation for 6.3 million people.

The US WASH Framework for Action in the 2008 WPA report to Congress states:

“the internationally agreed goals tell only part of the story about water supply and sanitation service delivery ... a singular focus on the “numbers served” only focuses on immediate service delivery, without sufficient attention either to the long-term sustainability of the service, or to the deeper, structural changes required to overcome the huge gaps in service coverage that still remain.”<sup>5</sup>

Despite this acknowledgment in the US WASH Framework, most of the indicators included in this year's report do not get beyond the level of

simple outputs (such as building X water points, which will serve Y people). While very important, these indicators are only telling part of the story. They do not evaluate the sustainability of services or the natural environment that supports them, track changes in policy, or show whether services are accessible to vulnerable populations such as women and the elderly.



WaterAid/Marco Betti

Indicators for WASH programs should incorporate measures of sustainability, both environmental and technical. To ensure that the benefits of programs bridge into root causes of poverty and injustice, indicators should be disaggregated by gender, and measure improvements in governance and shifting norms such as attitudes towards handwashing. A small basket of standardized indicators should be used across Missions to allow evaluation of different approaches and methods while still leaving Missions some flexibility.

## Barriers to Implementing the Water for the Poor Act

In the fourth year after the signing of the WPA and with no real US strategy for foreign assistance related to WASH in place, it is worth exploring the major impediments to the creation of a strategy and the full implementation of the law.

### US Foreign Aid System

Some of the major reasons for lack of a strategy and full implementation of the WPA are part and parcel of the way the US treats foreign assistance more generally. Currently, the US does not have an overall global development strategy to guide its international development resources. The WPA tries to graft a strategic approach for WASH onto an aid system with no overall strategy for international development. Having an overall global development strategy that includes the provisions of the WPA will help to increase the impact and efficiency of US assistance to WASH.

Additionally, many provisions of existing foreign assistance law are not aligned with the effective aid principles in the WPA, making implementation of several components of the WPA difficult. Under current US foreign assistance, resources are not necessarily focused on improving the lives of the poor, making it difficult to direct WASH resources to the neediest people and areas of greatest impact as required under the WPA. Because funding for

various countries and sectors of development are stove-piped, coordination between WASH programs and other development sectors, as required by the WPA, is impeded. Aligning WASH aid with the poverty reduction strategies of recipient governments is hindered by broader legislative barriers to channeling funds through local or national government or through pooled funding arrangements with other donors.

### Funding for WASH

Several US officials have stated that the primary reason there is no WASH strategy is that funding for WASH is unpredictable. Scaling up of WASH programming has been the outcome of increased Congressional appropriations for a WASH directive. But, appropriations are determined on a year to year basis.

Additionally, without adequate increases in the core development accounts from which WASH resources are directed, increased funding for WASH does not necessarily represent new money for the Missions. Instead, Missions are faced with reprogramming monies from existing projects.

Through the WPA, Congress signaled a clear commitment for WASH to the Administration, but this will only go so far. Year to year funding changes are unpredictable, and technical officials in USAID and State are unlikely to launch a comprehensive, long-term WASH strategy in the absence of a clear commitment by the Administration.

*“The Administration really has to be the lead driver behind the resources for WASH.”<sup>6</sup> – US Government Official*

Congress has a strong role to play in setting overall priorities for US foreign assistance, but this must be done in partnership with the Administration. The Administration should fulfill the requirement of the WPA to develop a strategy and clearly identify the resources necessary to meet short and long term WASH goals. Using this strategy, the Administration should work with Congress to ensure that needed funding is allocated. This includes new funding as part of an overall increase in the core development

<sup>4</sup> Currently 884 million people lack access to safe water and 2.5 billion lack adequate sanitation.

<sup>5</sup> 2008 Water for the Poor Act Report to Congress, pg. A-3.

<sup>6</sup> Interview with USG Official, August 13, 2009.



WaterAid/Layton Thompson

accounts of the foreign assistance budget from which WASH funding is drawn.

### Staff Capacity

In the last year, there has been progress in recruiting and training WASH specialists in the USAID Missions. USAID has conducted several trainings of Mission staff to effectively develop and implement water and sanitation activities. USAID has also hired eight engineers and twenty environmental health foreign service officers to work on WASH activities.

Despite these gains, a shortage of capacity for WASH remains a problem. Currently, many of the staff that do oversee WASH programs are not specialized in WASH. At the Mission level, a lack of WASH specialists contributes to low prioritization of WASH programs. As one example, the USAID Mission in Haiti was uninterested in WASH programming this year despite the fact that in Haiti, more than 40% of people do not have access to an improved water source and over 80% do not have access to improved sanitation facilities.

Lack of adequate staff in WASH also impedes the ability of the Missions to fully implement the WPA in other ways, including coordination and consultation.

*“Human capacity has been a big issue in the implementation of the WPA. Having staff dedicated to WASH plays a big role in how the Missions coordinate with other donors, with other USG agencies, and with the national governments. Having the right people at the country level—and the resources to get the right people positioned at the country level—will have a huge impact in the implementation of the WPA.”*  
– USG Official<sup>7</sup>

### Key Recommendations

The issues that have hindered the full implementation of the WPA are not new. Each year since the passage of the WPA, relevant stakeholders have brought these issues to the attention of US policymakers. Yet, progress on addressing the barriers to full implementation of the act has been slow and incomplete. Now, in the fourth year of the WPA, it is time for the USG to redouble its efforts to get water and sanitation to the world’s poorest people.

In the context of the substantial and immediate need mixed with some foundational progress in WASH assistance by the USG, it is the time for US officials to drive a concerted process to establish US leadership in addressing ongoing WASH-related poverty and injustice.

<sup>7</sup> Interview with USG Official, August 13, 2009.

## Recommendations

### To fully implement the Water for the Poor Act (WPA):

1. The Administration should announce and deliver a US WASH strategy, created in extensive consultation with relevant stakeholders. This strategy must incorporate the requirements outlined in the WPA, including the development of indicators to assess the impact of US assistance to WASH. This strategy should be couched within a wider water strategy that includes sustainable management of water resources and productive uses of water. The Administration and Congress should work together to deliver the funding necessary to meet the short and long term goals identified in the WASH strategy.
2. The Administration should create an office in USAID, headed by a high level official, to lead WASH development assistance and interagency coordination (including coordination with the MCC) and create a high level office focused on diplomatic freshwater issues in the State Department.
3. USAID should train newly hired environmental foreign service officers and engineers in WASH and recruit additional foreign service officers who are specialists in WASH. USAID should place these staff in countries with a high degree of need.
4. Congress should pass the Water for the World Act (*H.R. 2030, S.624*), which would increase the capacity of the USG to implement the WPA, and should exercise strong oversight of US assistance to WASH. To exercise this oversight, Congress should conduct a hearing on the implementation of the WPA and the development of the US Government WASH strategy.
5. The Administration should ensure that level of need and ability to impact the lives of the poor are the primary factors in determining funding allocation levels for a given country. In the interest of transparency, weighting of various variables for decision-making for WASH assistance allocation should be made clear in the development of a WASH strategy.



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Required by the Water for the Poor Act (WPA)	The 2009 US State Department Report on the Water for the Poor Act	Recommended Action
An assessment of planned and current activities for safe water and sanitation.	The report contains 14 “Country-Specific Water and Sanitation Plans,” which include individual country goals and plans for 2008 activities. However, these plans do not provide a comprehensive picture of USG WASH activities globally and do not show a strategic coherence in an overall USG WASH strategy.	The Administration should announce and deliver a US WASH strategy, created in extensive consultation with relevant stakeholders. This strategy must incorporate the requirements outlined in the WPA, including the development of indicators to assess the impact of US assistance to WASH. This strategy should be couched within a wider water strategy that includes sustainable management of water resources and productive uses of water.
Specific and measurable goals, benchmarks, and timetables to achieve the objectives of the WPA.	Within the report, goals and benchmarks for a limited number of individual countries are included. Benchmarks vary from country to country with no overall indicators with which to assess progress across countries. Even though the report has included overall objectives towards providing sustainable access to water and sanitation, there remains no real strategy demonstrating how and when this will be accomplished.	The US WASH strategy should include specific and measurable goals, benchmarks, and timetables and identify the resources needed to provide affordable and equitable access to safe water and sanitation. To develop a comprehensive global strategy, there must be some element of central leadership in the process rather than a process wholly driven by individual country plans.
An assessment of the funding and resources needed to meet these goals within the specified timetable.	The report makes little effort to meet this requirement of the legislation.	The Administration should develop a strategy that clearly identifies resources necessary to meet short and long term goals while, working with Congress to ensure the necessary funding is allocated over the long term.
Methods for coordinating and integrating US assistance for safe water and sanitation.	The report states that the Department of State (DOS) and USAID have co-hosted workshops to strengthen interagency coordination, but does not mention the results of these workshops.	The Administration should create an office in USAID, headed by a high level official, to lead WASH development assistance and interagency coordination (including coordination with the MCC) and create a high level office focused on diplomatic freshwater issues in the State Department.
Methods for coordinating water and sanitation assistance programs with those of other donor countries or entities.	The report states that the DOS and USAID have “consulted broadly” with other agencies and donors, but there is little mention of the details or outcomes of these discussions.	Coordination with other donors at the country, regional, and international levels must be optimized to ensure strategic use of limited resources.
An assessment of the commitment of aid recipient nations to reforms that support affordable and equitable access to safe water and sanitation.	Some of the “Country-Specific Water and Sanitation Plans” include information on the enabling environment in recipient countries for water and sanitation. However, the report does not contain a comprehensive assessment of the enabling environments in the countries that are listed as priority countries.	The US WASH strategy should include an assessment of the enabling environments for WASH for all priority countries and should outline USG efforts to align WASH activities with the WASH strategies and programs of recipient countries.
Ways to assess progress and achieve objectives.	The report measures USG progress against several indicators with some indicators only appearing in individual country plans. The report focuses heavily on outputs. More meaningful measures of program quality are largely absent.	A small basket of standardized indicators should be used across countries and agencies to allow evaluation of different approaches and methods, while still leaving some flexibility at the country level. Standardized indicators should include measures of both project and environmental sustainability, access related to vulnerable populations such as women and children, and improvements in governance.
A designation of high priority recipient countries for safe water and sanitation assistance on the basis of need and expected impact.	The report provides a table listing the priority countries for US water and sanitation activities and lists general criteria for country selection. However, there is no transparency in how criteria are applied, and there are inconsistencies between the list of priority countries and countries chosen to receive funding.	The Administration should ensure that level of need and ability to impact the lives of the poor are the primary factors in determining funding allocation levels for a given country. In the interest of transparency, weighting of various variables for decision-making for WASH assistance allocation should be made clear.



Brooks Keene  
Policy Advisor  
Tel: (404) 979-9144  
bkeene@care.org  
www.care.org



Heather Allen  
Advocate, International Program  
Tel: (202) 513-6266  
hallen@nrdc.org  
www.nrdc.org



Mandy Folsie  
Head of Policy and Advocacy  
Tel: (202) 729-6797  
mfolsie@wateraidamerica.org  
www.wateraidamerica.org