



USAID
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE



Photo by USAID Water, Security for Resilient Economic Growth and Stability (Be Secure) Project

WASH

for Women and Girls

Through Water for the World, USAID increases access to sustainable water and sanitation services, promotes key hygiene behaviors, and enhances the effective management of water resources in developing countries. USAID also elevates the status of women and girls to empower them as decision-makers and professionals in the water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) sector so they can lead the transformation of water and sanitation services in their own communities and countries.

What is WASH?

Water

safe, piped drinking water available at home and in other settings

Sanitation

safely managed sanitation services, including at-home toilets and waste treatment

Hygiene

consistent behaviors and products, like handwashing with soap, to reduce disease



Photo by Anne Daugherty/USAID

WHY FOCUS ON WOMEN AND GIRLS?

Better WASH and management of water resources means better health, nutrition, opportunity and dignity for women and girls. Women and girls stand to benefit at higher rates and in unique ways from safe, reliable and sustainable water security, sanitation and hygiene. It frees up more of their time for education and employment, reduces their vulnerability to gender-based violence, and provides privacy and dignity. And it enhances women's and girls' success and increases their voice, agency, and economic empowerment.

The sector stands to benefit when women and girls are empowered too. Multiple studies by the World Bank and UN Development Program have found that water projects that include women are more effective and the results sustained for longer. Women also report being more comfortable buying sanitation products from other women.

- **Women and girls are responsible for water collection** in eight out of ten households with off-premises water sources. They collectively spend 200 million hours every day collecting water. Lifting this time burden through on-site water will not only improve their well-being and mitigate vulnerability to gender-based violence, but will free up girls' time for uninterrupted schooling; women's time for agriculture, work and entrepreneurship; and women and girls' time for engaging in social activities that support their mental and emotional well-being.
- **Female-friendly latrines that include facilities for menstrual hygiene management** in schools can improve the learning environment for students and the work environment for teachers, who are predominantly female in many countries. They also promote girls' enrollment, attendance, and success at school, and expand their opportunities in the workforce. Similarly, adequate latrines and facilities for menstrual hygiene, as well as female-friendly workplace policies, are critical for women's full participation in the workplace and marketplace.
- **Women's roles and expertise** are equally important in natural resource management issues like watershed protection and management. Particularly in indigenous communities, women often hold important traditional knowledge about how best to manage, allocate and use both water and land resources. Where conflict over water resources is a risk, women's participation in their management can contribute to peace processes. In fact, programs that include women in the early stages of development tend to have a long-term sustainable impact on water and sanitation service delivery.

ADVANCING EMPOWERMENT

USAID's WASH and water resources management efforts emphasize improving the health and educational opportunities available to women and girls. We also support gender-sensitive approaches to empower women in the development and implementation of water security, sanitation and hygiene-related programs.

Water for the World activities focus on **women as change agents and professionals**. For example, they:

- Engage women in the design, implementation and monitoring of WASH programs.
- Create female-friendly educational and workplace environments by supporting gender-equitable policies and facilities that meet girls' and women's needs.
- Unlock financing for women-owned water and sanitation businesses, especially small ones.
- Tailor technical education and training for female students and members of the WASH workforce to increase their economic empowerment while also filling critical human resources gaps in the sector.
- Confront harmful social and gender norms that impact women's time and labor and menstruation stigmas and taboos that prevent full engagement in society.

Through the Engendering Utilities program, USAID is helping four water utilities increase gender equality and enhance business performance. Through customized best practices, demand-driven coaching, and a Gender Equity Executive Leadership Program, USAID builds the ability of utility leaders to implement gender equality interventions in their organizations and recruit and retain more women in decision-making roles.

In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, during which many governments declared water an essential service that must be provided for free, water service providers faced greater risk of insolvency. As many as 300 million people in sub-Saharan Africa were at risk of losing access to water they have come to depend on. This type of shock disproportionately impacts women and girls, who are often responsible for water collection, caregiving and household hygiene needs. Women also reported that menstrual hygiene supplies were more difficult to access or less affordable as a result of COVID-19. As a result, USAID's Water for the World activities pivoted to focus on maintaining and extending reliable water supplies to ensure hygiene, unlocking financial support for service providers to ensure continuity of services, and facilitating access to WASH supply chains and commodities.



DELIVERING RESULTS

In 2018 and 2019, USAID provided a total of \$835 million to support water, sanitation, and hygiene activities in 51 countries. These investments:



Reached more than **2.3 million women and girls** with safe water, which reduced the burden of collecting water, provided them with more time for other activities, and enhanced their safety.



Enabled **10.6 million** people to gain access to sustainable sanitation, **98 percent** of which accessed it for the first time. **Nearly half of these people were women and girls.**

WOMEN AND WASH IN ACTION

Women Leaders Strengthen Nigerian Utilities

In Nigeria, an assessment of the Niger State Water Board found that only one in nine employees were female. USAID and the utility worked together to address this while also strengthening the utility's operations. USAID provided gender training to key staff to build awareness and confront social norms that limited the utility, such as perceptions that women shouldn't speak up in meetings nor participate in decision-making. USAID also helped the utility reorganize and establish five units, four of which are headed by women. USAID also worked with these women leaders to build their skills and abilities to deliver results for their employer and customers. The "Gender and Pro-Poor" unit, in particular, has made the utility a more female-friendly workplace. One of its first steps was to ensure that its own toilets were available and satisfactory to its newly-prominent female workforce.

Menstrual Hygiene Dialogues in Malawi Open New Doors for Women in Agriculture

In Malawi, menstruation taboos hold women back from fully participating in agriculture and thus the economy. USAID teamed up with the Coca-Cola Company and Foundation to change this. By engaging women and men in conversations about menstrual hygiene management through farmer field schools, we are confronting taboos, providing accurate information, and reducing the stigma of menstruation, such as the belief that women will contaminate food if they harvest during menstruation. As a result, more women report that they are able to ask their husbands for support during menstruation, feel less shame during menstruation, and have the knowledge to manage their menstruation hygienically and with dignity.

