

## Water for the World Act: HR 2901

### Talking Points & FAQ's

#### What is the Water for the World Act?

The Water for the World Act is legislation that would build upon the Paul Simon Water for the Poor Act, which was passed by Congress and signed into law in 2005. This legislation established WASH as a priority in U.S. foreign and development policy and instructs the State Department and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) in their work on WASH.

By amending the Water for the Poor Act of 2005 and responding to USAID's new Global Water Strategy, Water for the World will make better use of existing WASH funds, strengthen accountability for WASH programs already underway, and ensure the greatest impact on communities worldwide without spending new money or creating new bureaucracy.

#### Key provisions

Water for the World will:

- Institutionalize existing capacity in the U.S. government to ensure WASH remains a political priority and expertise is available at USAID and State Department headquarters and in country-level missions to guide strategic implementation of effective and sustainable WASH programs;
- Enhance criteria for choosing high-priority countries to ensure that limited funds are directed to the countries and communities most in need, recognizing evidence that the poorest people benefit most from receiving WASH services;
- Advance best practices of effective aid, such as improved monitoring and evaluation and a focus on leveraging non-Federal partnerships and funds; and
- Improve the strategic approach to international safe water, sanitation and hygiene, by providing smart guidance that builds off USAID's own strategy, such as requiring transparency in how and why focus countries are selected, the results and challenges of each program, and regular reviews of progress against published metrics.

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## Why Support the Water for the World Act?

**783 million people** live without access to safe drinking water. **2.5 billion people** lack access to improved sanitation (a pit latrine or better); that's **35% of the world's population, the poorest and most marginalized people**. Access to water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) is a basic human right, and lack of access is not only an injustice but is detrimental to economic productivity, childhood survival, public health, education, environmental conservation, climate resilience, and much more.

### Key Talking Points

- Research has found that safe drinking water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) programs offer a **return of \$4 in increased economic productivity for every \$1** invested. The World Bank has estimated that **hygiene is the most cost-effective** health intervention available.
- A lack of access to clean water and adequate sanitation has disproportionate, and too often deadly impacts on children. Lack of access to WASH contributes to **two of the three leading killers of children** under five years old in the world. Diarrhoea is the most serious of these diseases, alone killing **over 3,000 children each day**, and is the second biggest cause of death in children under five years. **88%** of diarrhoeal disease is attributed to unsafe drinking water, inadequate sanitation and poor hygiene. Even when bouts of diarrhoea don't kill, these episodes can physically and mentally stunt children, affecting them for the rest of their lives.
- Having adequate and appropriate water supply and sanitation facilities in schools is a major factor influencing whether children, and especially adolescent girls, attend school.
- Many **Neglected Tropical Diseases could be prevented** or even eliminated if safe drinking water, sanitation and hygiene were available.
- Lack of access to WASH is estimated to **contribute to up to half of all under-nutrition** in the world. Yet, WASH would not only help prevent poor nutrition, but **stunting** and cognitive delays, as well.
- Up to **40 billion working hours are lost every year due to water collection**, mostly by women and girls who must walk long distances, sometimes in dangerous circumstances, to collect water. This, combined with water-borne diseases **keeping people from school** and work, **costs countries in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia 5-6% of their Gross Domestic Products each year**. WASH access would help return lost income and productivity, contributing to financial stability and reducing poverty.

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- Approximately **half of the world's population lives in areas that currently or will soon face physical water scarcity**, or that lack the necessary infrastructure to take water from rivers and aquifers. Unfortunately, water scarcity is being exacerbated by climate change with many regions and people experiencing more severe and more frequent droughts and floods. Never has it been more important to protect the freshwater ecosystems that can supply clean drinking water in the face of these changes.

## Questions You May be Asked (or have yourself!)

### *1. Why hasn't Water for the World become law yet?*

The Water for the World Act has had strong bipartisan support in past Congresses. In 2010, the Senate bill passed the full Senate unanimously, but there was insufficient time in the session to achieve the same in the House. In 2012, the Senate Foreign Relations Committee passed the bill unanimously, but again the calendar ran out before the full House or Senate took a vote. Despite these challenges, there has long been strong support for the intentions of Water for the World: to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of USAID-supported water, sanitation and hygiene programs, without creating new bureaucracy or spending any additional money.

### *2. I heard USAID has a new Global Water Strategy. Do we still need Water for the World?*

USAID has launched a new Global Water Strategy, which focuses on water, sanitation and hygiene for improved health, agriculture and food security. However, this is not the strategy required by the Senator Paul Simon Water for the Poor Act of 2005, which required a focus only on the poorest of the poor. Instead, the new Global Water Strategy allows USAID to continue investing WASH funds that are meant for the poorest in countries that already have access to water and sanitation. Water for the World would not only prevent the U.S. government from spending money meant for the poor in countries with very low need for WASH services, but it would require greater transparency in how and why countries are selected for USAID WASH support, require that we monitor and evaluate the impact is of these programs, and enable USAID to do be able to do better without spending any additional money. In addition, USAID has put forth a 4-year strategy without a requirement to be updated when it expires in 2017. Water for the World would require USAID to make the long-term commitment to WASH that these critical issues deserve.

### *3. What would Water for the World do?*

Water for the World focuses on fixing four long-standing problems: (1) improving the focus of limited WASH funds so they help people who need it most; (2) increasing the effectiveness of the WASH funds that USAID invests by identifying what is needed for them to have the greatest impact, working with local experts, and ensuring WASH programs support the health and development priorities of our partner countries and our own priorities, as well;

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(3) increasing the capacity of the State Department to mitigate cross-border conflict over shared freshwater resources that grow evermore scarce, and (4) increasing the transparency of U.S. taxpayer dollars invested in WASH, so we can all be aware of how focus countries are being chosen, what impact WASH programs are having, and what the results of monitoring and evaluation tell us about how we can do even better.

#### 4. *What will Water for the World cost?*

Based on informal estimates from the Congressional Budget Office (CBO) last year, we anticipate the cost of Water for the World to be minimal. This means we anticipate that it will constitute negligible cost under current House rules, and we are committed to ensuring the bill maintains its emphasis on doing more with what we already have. However, we cannot secure an official cost of the bill until after it has been introduced and scheduled for a committee markup.

#### 5. *Who are the Congressional champions for Water for the World?*

**Congressman Earl Blumenauer** (Democrat, Oregon) and **Congressman Judge Ted Poe** (Republican, Texas) have introduced the Water for the World Act in the House, and **Senator Dick Durbin** (Democrat, Illinois) and **Senator Bob Corker** (Republican, Tennessee) are expected to introduce the bill in the Senate. If you are asked how to get more information, you may refer Congressional staff to the foreign policy staff in any of these offices.

#### 6. *How much do we already spend on WASH and water programs?*

Since fiscal year 2009, Congress has allocated approximately \$315 million dollars per year for safe drinking water, sanitation and hygiene programs pursuant to the Senator Paul Simon Water for the Poor Act of 2005. However, not all of this money has gone to the poorest countries and communities, despite this focus being the intent of Congress. That is why we need the Water for the World Act.

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