



Water is the foundation for global health and a healthy global economy.

Yet [785 million](#) people do not have access to clean drinking WATER and at least [2 billion](#) people use a fecally-contaminated drinking water source. [2 billion](#) do not have SANITATION, the safety and dignity of a basic toilet.

[3 billion](#) (40% of the globe) cannot practice adequate HYGIENE, including handwashing. The critical absence of Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene (WASH) harms global health, economic productivity, ecosystem functions and national security.

WASH is the U.S. Economy.

Our economy and economic recovery require global consumers for American agriculture, goods and services as do the [1 in 5](#) American jobs tied to international trade. That [80%](#) of purchasing power lies outside the U.S. cannot be overlooked. Improving global WASH access adds over [\\$60 billion](#) to the world economy annually, returning \$4.30 for every \$1 invested. Conversely, poor sanitation and water supply result in estimated economic losses of [\\$260 billion](#) annually in developing countries (1.5% of GDP). With [11 of the top U.S. 15 trade partners](#) once recipients of U.S. foreign assistance, increasing access to WASH is a key to moving beneficiaries from aid to trade.

WASH is Health.

Healthcare workers cannot wash their hands or properly clean facilities when [45% of healthcare facilities](#) in low-resource countries lack basic water services at points of care, with sanitation not faring much better. Two billion people rely on these facilities for COVID-19 treatment and other health needs, including the [17 million women](#) who give birth in healthcare facilities without adequate WASH every year. Over 50 illnesses and diseases—from sepsis, cholera, typhoid, malaria, HIV and 20 Neglected Tropical Diseases (NTDs) to Ebola and now COVID-19—could be curtailed or prevented with access to safe water and soap. An estimated [1 billion people](#) are at immediate risk of COVID-19 because they cannot adequately wash their hands, particularly concerning in communities where PPE and social distancing are not possible.

WASH is Food Security and Nutrition.

Approximately half of all undernutrition is due to diarrheal diseases caused by the lack of clean drinking water. Diarrhea depletes the body of nutrition and is a leading cause of child death, claiming nearly [300,000 lives](#) under age 5 each year. [45%](#) of diarrheal cases could be prevented with hand hygiene. Lifelong cognitive and physical impairment called stunting, is another tragic product of malnutrition. Malnutrition costs [\\$3.5 trillion](#) in healthcare and lost productivity annually.

WASH is Education.

Sick children miss school, and girls drop out when they do not have facilities to meet their menstrual hygiene needs, opening them up to dangers like child marriage and trafficking. As children return to school during the pandemic, [818 million children](#) will be without handwashing facilities in schools (44% of schools), [698 million children will](#) (37% of schools) lack basic sanitation and [584 million children](#) (31% of schools) will lack safe drinking water services.

WASH is Peace or War and Terrorism.

Countries actively engaged in water cooperation do not go to war, according to an extensive [analysis](#) by the Strategic Foresight Group. In their report, [Water Cooperation Quotient](#), they examined 146 transboundary waters and found “countries enjoying peaceful co-existence have active water cooperation and countries facing risk of war have low or no water cooperation.” Water is also a target for terrorist groups. ISIS launched [nearly 20 major attacks](#) against Syrian and Iraqi water infrastructure, gaining dangerous leverage over local governments and religious minority populations (2013-2015). CNA’s Military Advisory Board of retired 3- and 4-star officers detailed security threats posed by global water scarcity for the U.S. and allies in coming years in their report, [The Role of Water Stress in Instability and Conflict](#).

Water’s Future is Sobering.

In the next decade, 2.9 billion people in 48 countries will face [water shortages](#).

WASH is Bipartisan and widely supported.

Less than 1/100th of a percent of the federal budget is invested in global WASH. WASH is strategic and cost-effective and needs to be a cornerstone of U.S. development, diplomacy and defense. [Americans in all 50 states](#) support solving global water challenges through non-profits, houses of worship, Rotary clubs, schools and more. Prioritizing WASH can help stop drought from turning into famine and disease from becoming a pandemic as it builds more stable, resilient and economically thriving families, communities and nations around the world, including our own.