

Why GAO Did This Study

The Senator Paul Simon Water for the Poor Act of 2005 (the Act) made access to safe water and sanitation for developing countries a U.S. foreign assistance policy objective. The United States provides such assistance mainly through the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID). The Act requires the Secretary of State to develop a water and sanitation assistance strategy with the Administrator of USAID; designate high-priority countries for assistance; and report annually to Congress on, among other things, implementation of the strategy and progress toward the U.S. policy objective. As requested, in this report GAO (1) describes USAID's accomplishments; (2) describes USAID's obligations of funds for water and sanitation assistance in fiscal years 2006-2009; (3) assesses the Department of State's (State) development of a U.S. water and sanitation strategy; and (4) examines State's designation of high-priority countries. GAO reviewed State and USAID documents and data and obtained the views of State and USAID officials in Washington, D.C., and 15 countries.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that State (1) ensure that the strategy for U.S. water and sanitation assistance addresses all requirements, including goals and benchmarks, and (2) clearly identify, in its mandated reports, the basis for its designations of high-priority countries. State accepted GAO's recommendations.

[View GAO-10-957 or key components.](#)

For more information, contact David Gootnick at (202) 512-3149 or gootnickd@gao.gov.

U.S. WATER AND SANITATION AID

Millions of Beneficiaries Reported in Developing Countries, but Department of State Needs to Strengthen Strategic Approach

What GAO Found

State reported that USAID provided a wide range of water and sanitation activities in 2006 through 2009, such as installing community water taps, building latrines, and constructing major water treatment plants. Nearly 11 million of more than 24 million reported water beneficiaries and nearly 6 million of more than 10 million reported sanitation beneficiaries were in USAID's Middle East and North Africa region.

USAID obligations of funds for water supply, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) activities increased by approximately 82 percent from fiscal year 2006 to 2009, with the majority of funding supporting WASH activities in three USAID regions—sub-Saharan Africa, the Middle East and North Africa, and Asia and the Pacific. In fiscal years 2008 and 2009, about \$337 million and \$495 million, respectively, of USAID obligations for water and sanitation activities was attributed to meet annual congressional appropriations directives that no less than \$300 million be obligated for those years. In fiscal year 2009, about 80 percent of the attributed funds were obligated in countries that State designated as high priority.

State has taken steps to develop a water and sanitation strategy. In 2008, State and USAID issued a joint strategic framework that, according to State, largely comprises the broad current U.S. strategy. State also identified its annual water and sanitation reports to Congress in 2006 through 2009 as containing elements of this strategy. However, the strategic framework and annual reports do not include specific and measurable goals, benchmarks, and timetables, which the Act requires and which are needed to measure progress toward achieving the overall U.S. foreign assistance policy objective. Further, State has not provided an assessment—also required by the Act—of funding needed to achieve such goals, benchmarks, and timetables.

In fiscal year 2008, State began to designate countries as high priority for water and sanitation assistance, designating 36 countries in 2008 and 31 countries in 2009. Nearly half of these countries were in sub-Saharan Africa and more than a quarter were in Asia and the Pacific. State said that in making the designations, it considered USAID mission plans for water and sanitation activities. In addition, State's annual reports to Congress identify factors that are reflected in the high-priority designations, including two criteria specified by the Act: need for improved access to water and sanitation and the existence of conditions that would support long-term sustainable results. Additional factors reflected in the designations include consistency with U.S. foreign policy priorities and compliance with statutory directives. However, GAO found that State's high-priority designations excluded several countries where USAID had provided water and sanitation assistance and included one country where USAID had not provided such assistance. Moreover, the designations for fiscal years 2008 and 2009 are not linked to verifiable analysis. As a result, the basis for State's designations of high-priority countries is unclear.