

# Policy Brief: Water & Public Diplomacy

## Water: A Global Issue

While our planet is indeed blue, 97.5 percent of the water is in our oceans and, unless desalinated, cannot serve water-stressed locations. Fresh water makes up the remaining 2.5 percent of Earth's water supply, but much of this is in glacier form. This leaves 1 percent of fresh water readily available for human consumption.<sup>1</sup> Water shortages, poor water quality, floods, riparian water rights disputes, damming issues and drought can all lead to instability and increased regional tensions.<sup>2</sup> In some nations, such as those in the Middle East and sub-Saharan Africa, water is becoming a perilously scarce resource.

In 2003, the United Nations passed resolution A/RES/58/217 declaring 2005 – 2015 the International Decade for Action: "Water for Life".<sup>3</sup> This resolution put water on the radar of policy makers and development workers around the globe. Shortly after the Water for Life decade was announced, U.S. Congress passed the Senator Paul Simon Water for the Poor Act of 2005 (WPA), which requires "the Secretary of State, in consultation with other U.S. government agencies, to develop and implement a strategy to increase affordable and equitable access to safe drinking water and sanitation within the context of sound resources management in developing countries."<sup>4</sup> Although this measure was enacted seven years ago, only recently has water been addressed as a national security concern and an issue to be taken up by diplomats.

Many governments, most multilateral organizations and scores of nongovernmental organizations are working in this field. Articles addressing critical water issues appear regularly<sup>5</sup> and numerous celebrities support charities aiding water-stressed areas around the world.

## Why Water Diplomacy?

The USC Center on Public Diplomacy (CPD) defines water diplomacy as encompassing work conducted by a variety of international actors to aid water-stressed areas, which in turn can improve relations with foreign publics. Done correctly, these efforts can save lives and enhance influence.

## SUMMARY

Water, essential to humankind's existence, is increasingly unavailable because of pollution, inadequate conservation programs and mismanagement of water resources. Water-related problems are global in scope, and although many international bodies actively support initiatives to address water issues, public diplomacy tools must be harnessed to tackle this critical topic if water-related foreign policy objectives are to be met. This is Water Diplomacy.

While there have been a number of papers, reports and policy memos written about global water challenges and providing recommendations to address this critical issue, none have addressed this topic through a public diplomacy lens. The tools of public diplomacy are important in addressing global water issues and will enhance water diplomacy.

This report addresses U.S. foreign policies related to water, development and diplomacy and makes three public diplomacy recommendations for these: 1) make water diplomacy a priority for the U.S. Department of State and the U.S. Agency for International Development; 2) fulfill the mandate of the Senator Paul Simon Water for the Poor Act of 2005; 3) establish an internationally coordinated water diplomacy working group.

In line with select Quadrennial Diplomacy and Development Review 2010 recommendations discussed below, the main tools of public diplomacy that can be implemented by a variety of actors concerned with water issues are: listening to each community and public;<sup>6</sup> providing technical training in communities to which development diplomacy is directed;<sup>7</sup> and using public diplomacy to raise global awareness of water issues through advocacy programs and international institutions.

In February 2012, the Office of the Director of National Intelligence of the United States released its key judgments on water security and affirmed that U.S. policy interests and objectives will be put at risk because of growing water challenges. The report stated that “[D]uring the next 10 years, many countries important to the United States will experience water problems—they will risk instability and state failure, increase regional tensions, and distract them from working with the United States on important U.S. policy objectives.”<sup>8</sup> The report concluded that “irrespective of other policies toward the United States, both developed and developing states will look for U.S. support of international agreements, and institutions and national and subnational partners... Active engagement by the United States to resolve water challenges will improve U.S. influence and may forestall other actors achieving the same influence at U.S. expense”.<sup>9</sup> Water must therefore be considered not just a tool for development but a key to maintaining U.S. national interests and, as this policy brief outlines, public diplomacy must be an integral part of U.S. water policy, development and diplomacy.

*“If public diplomacy is to consist of service rather than propaganda, water diplomacy is the kind of venture that can advance the national interest while also providing help to people who desperately need it.”*

Philip Seib, Director,  
USC Center on Public  
Diplomacy

### **U.S. Policies on Water, Development and Public Diplomacy**

The United States has a commendable record in tackling water issues. Since the establishment of the Senator Paul Simon Water for the Poor Act of 2005, the U.S. has invested \$3.4 billion in water programs around the world.<sup>10</sup> Numerous bureaus of the U.S. government tackle issues pertaining to water including: collection, management, analysis and application; water resources management; technological developments for sustainability; capacity building; private sector investment; institution building; advocacy, awareness and education; and humanitarian assistance.<sup>11</sup> While the United States is in a strong position to confront water challenges, more must be done to maintain this leadership role.<sup>12</sup>

The U.S. Congress, U.S. Department of State and the U.S. Agency for International Development have all addressed the issue of water through legislation, reports and suggested priorities. The subsections below briefly describe current legislation, frameworks and policies related to water, development and public diplomacy.

*Water Challenges in the Developing World: A Framework for Action*<sup>13</sup>

In 2009, USAID created a “Framework for Action” to address water challenges in the developing world. It states that “the challenge facing countries and communities is how to best use their finite but renewable water resources....As competing demands increase, the potential for tensions will heighten, placing current cooperative relationships at risk and raising the possibility of conflicts over water rights, allocations and use. Avoiding conflicts over water is vital.”<sup>14</sup>

*Mandates of the Senator Paul Simon Water for the Poor Act of 2005 & H.R. 3658*<sup>15</sup>

A 2010 Government Accountability Office report on water and sanitation stated that the U.S. must do more to fulfill the WPA (Senator Paul Simon Water for the Poor Act).<sup>16</sup> Although several members of the House of Representatives submitted an updated act in 2012 (H.R. 3658), the WPA’s goal of making “access to safe water and sanitation for developing countries a specific policy objective of United States foreign assistance programs”<sup>1718</sup> has not been reached.

*The Quadrennial Diplomacy & Development Review and State-USAID Agency Priority Goals for 2012-13*

The 2010 Quadrennial Diplomacy and Development Review (QDDR) states that, “[B]ecause today’s most pressing foreign policy challenges require complex, multi-dimensional public engagement strategies to forge important bilateral, regional, and global partnerships, public diplomacy has become an essential element of effective diplomacy.”<sup>19</sup> Despite this affirmation of the centrality of public diplomacy to foreign policy, a close look at the strategic priorities of the U.S. Department of State and USAID as well as their joint budgets in 2011 indicates that public diplomacy has instead been marginalized. Only 3 percent, or \$1.43 billion, which is the smallest portion of their joint budget, is dedicated to public diplomacy.<sup>20</sup> Although the 2011 summary of performance and financial information concluded that 50 percent of the performance indicators exceeded targets for this strategic goal and that 94 percent of the foreign participants in U.S. public diplomacy programming reported “an increased or positive change in understanding” the United States,<sup>21</sup> the 2012-13 fiscal allocation for the joint State-USAID budget was only slightly increased to \$1.67 billion.<sup>22</sup> In addition, no steps have been outlined to fulfill Priority Goal Six, designed to “[A]dvance U.S. interests and universal values through public diplomacy and programs that connect the United States and Americans to the world”.<sup>23</sup>

*“It’s not every day you find an issue where effective diplomacy and development will allow you to save millions of lives, feed the hungry, empower women, advance our national security interests, protect the environment, and demonstrate to billions of people that the United States cares, cares about you and your welfare. Water is that issue.”*

Hillary Rodham Clinton,  
U.S. Secretary of State,  
World Water Day 2010

## The Case for Increased State-USAID Coordination on Public Diplomacy

Currently, public diplomacy and development are conducted separately by State and USAID and are viewed by many practitioners as separate means with separate goals. However, it is important to note that State and USAID share a joint mission: “to shape and sustain a peaceful, prosperous, just, and democratic world and foster conditions for stability and progress for the benefit of the American people and people everywhere”.<sup>24</sup>

The USC Center on Public Diplomacy, through its academic research and practical experience, has found that development and public diplomacy must be linked and aligned to strengthen the national interests of the United States and build mutual engagement through service. The QDDR supports this by emphasizing “building development diplomacy as a discipline within State”.<sup>25</sup> It does not, however, emphasize adding public diplomacy to USAID personnel training. While State is taking positive steps to “assess and provide the development skill sets needed” and “establish institutional mechanisms...to develop and promulgate guidance on best practices and effective management of foreign assistance”<sup>26</sup>, there should be reciprocal efforts to do the same for public diplomacy within USAID.

As the 2010 Quadrennial Diplomacy and Development Review appropriately suggests, “To be truly effective, we need to build the public diplomacy component into every stage of the policy process.”<sup>27</sup> The QDDR report encourages the implementation of a taskforce on Innovation in Development and Diplomacy to examine “how to integrate innovation into every aspect of State and USAID’s work.”<sup>28</sup> CPD concurs that interagency coordination is paramount and endorses water diplomacy as an ideal way to foster innovation and cooperation by State and USAID.

## Public Diplomacy Recommendations

❶ **To strengthen U.S. national interests abroad, secure strategic partners and gain influence with foreign publics**<sup>29</sup> the U.S. Department of State and the U.S. Agency for International Development should adopt water diplomacy as a means to fulfill agency Priority Goal Six for fiscal year 2012-2013 and in the future. Water diplomacy can better connect Americans to the rest of the world through listening, technical and educational exchanges and development work.<sup>30</sup>

❷ **The U.S. Congress should fully implement the Senator Paul Simon Water for the Poor Act of 2005 in conjunction with passing the Senator Paul Simon Water for the World Act of 2012 currently being considered by the House Committee on Foreign Affairs.**<sup>31</sup> When the United States makes a commitment to the Millennium Development Goals and passes the WPA and yet does not fulfill the mandate of its own laws, it reflects poorly on the American political process and hurts American interests abroad.

❸ **To better facilitate global water partnerships, the United States government should establish an internationally coordinated water diplomacy working group comprising all actors—governmental, nongovernmental, local, international, multilateral organizations and the private sector—to share knowledge and best practices in creating solutions to water challenges.** Since partnerships are the key to conducting effective public diplomacy and development work abroad, it is essential when working with local and international partners to listen to the public’s articulation of needs before implementing water diplomacy programs. The State Department’s mandate for public



diplomacy with strengths in international cultural and educational exchange should strategically support USAID's water diplomacy development work through technical exchange training programs designed specifically for each public receiving water aid.<sup>32</sup>

## Conclusion

If the United States is to lead the way in cooperatively tackling water challenges, it must use the tools of public diplomacy. The U.S. government, policymakers and practitioners must make public diplomacy a priority and apply it to multiple sectors in U.S. foreign policy. This effort needs to be supported by the various government constituencies that oversee defense, development and diplomacy. All U.S. government representatives, whether they are politicians, diplomats, development workers or members of the armed forces, should be trained in public diplomacy because it is vital to our national interests.

In addressing water issues, the United States must lead with actions, not words. The most effective public diplomacy is conducted not through messaging but through service. Becoming the leader in water diplomacy would enhance America's international influence and protect its national interests.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Naomi Leight serves as CPD's Assistant Director for Research & Publications where she manages all aspects of the Center's research and publications programs, presents the Center's work in public forums, co-develops research projects and contributes articles and blogs for a variety of CPD publications. Ms. Leight received her Master of Public Diplomacy degree from the University of Southern California and her research interests lie at the intersection between public diplomacy and public policy.

## SPECIAL THANKS

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## ABOUT THE USC CENTER ON PUBLIC DIPLOMACY AT THE ANNENBERG SCHOOL (CPD)

Based at the University of Southern California's Annenberg School for Communication & Journalism, the USC Center on Public Diplomacy seeks to advance and enrich the study and practice of public diplomacy through its research and publication programs, professional training and public events. Visit our web site at [www.uscpublicdiplomacy.org](http://www.uscpublicdiplomacy.org).



- <sup>1</sup> “Water Down: The Embarrassing Lack of Clean Water Access in the World,” Infographics, (Iowa: Iowa Renewable Energy Association, 2010) <<http://www.irenew.org/uploads/waterdown-full.jpg>>.
- <sup>2</sup> “Global Water Security Report,” Intelligence Community Assessment, (Washington, DC: Office of the Director of National Intelligence, 2012) iii.
- <sup>3</sup> “Resolution 58/217,” International Decade for Action: “Water for Life”, 2005-2015 (New York, NY: United Nations General Assembly, 2004) <[http://www.un.org/ga/search/view\\_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/58/217](http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/58/217)>.
- <sup>4</sup> “The 2011 Senator Paul Simon Water for the Poor Act (P.L. 109-121, December 1, 2005),” Report to Congress, (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of State, 2011) <<http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/166895.pdf>>.
- <sup>5</sup> “Water Diplomacy,” PDIn (Public Diplomacy in the News) Aggregation, (Los Angeles, CA: USC Center on Public Diplomacy, 2012) <<http://uscpublicdiplomacy.org/index.php/tags/tag/water+diplomacy>>.
- <sup>6</sup> “We must ensure that foreign policy is informed upfront by a deep and broad understanding of the attitudes and opinions of foreign publics”. “Leading Through Civilian Power,” Quadrennial Diplomacy and Development Review (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of State, 2010) 61- 62.
- <sup>7</sup> “Expand and strengthen people-to-people relationships”. Ibid, 61-62.
- <sup>8</sup> “Global Water Security Report,” Intelligence Community Assessment, (Washington, DC: Office of the Director of National Intelligence, 2012) iii.
- <sup>9</sup> Ibid, 11.
- <sup>10</sup> U.S. Government Water Policy Brief, (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of State, 2011) <[www.state.gov/e/oes/rls/other/2022/158419.htm](http://www.state.gov/e/oes/rls/other/2022/158419.htm)>.
- <sup>11</sup> “Annex A: Summary of U.S. Agency Missions and Capabilities in Water,” Senator Paul Simon Water for the Poor Act of 2005, (Washington, DC: U.S. Congress, 2004) <<http://www.state.gov/e/oes/water/>>.
- <sup>12</sup> According to the OECD March 2012 Report, the U.S. ranks 4<sup>th</sup> in disbursement of aid dollars directed for water and sanitation programming in 2009-10 behind Japan, Germany and Spain. Countries such as France, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom are not far behind. “Financing Water and Sanitation in Developing Countries: The Contribution of External Aid,” Better Policies for Better Lives, (France: OECD, 2012) 3 <<http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/60/8/49839924.pdf>>.
- <sup>13</sup> “Addressing Water Challenges in the Developing World,” A Framework for Action, (Washington, DC: USAID, 2009) <[http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/F619FB3C75EA4FEF492576F8000425CD-Framework\\_for\\_Action.pdf](http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/F619FB3C75EA4FEF492576F8000425CD-Framework_for_Action.pdf)>.
- <sup>14</sup> Ibid, 9.
- <sup>15</sup> Earl Blumenauer, “H.R. 3658,” The Senator Paul Simon Water for the World Act 2012, (Washington, DC: U.S. Congress, 2011).
- <sup>16</sup> “US Water and Sanitation Aid,” Report to Congressional Requesters, (Washington, DC: Government Accountability Office, 2010) 36 <<http://www.gao.gov/assets/320/310349.pdf>>.
- <sup>17</sup> Earl Blumenauer, “H.R. 3658,” The Senator Paul Simon Water for the World Act 2012, (Washington, DC: U.S. Congress, 2011) 2.
- <sup>18</sup> In section 5 of the Paul Simon Water for the World Act of 2012, principles are laid out for carrying out the mission of bringing increasing sustainability of safe water, sanitation, and hygiene projects and activities. Principles 1 through 8 are all vital for vulnerable populations and they do target directly the water issues. However, they do not include principles of how to strengthen relationships between populations receiving this water aid. It says nothing about enhancing U.S. security through the conduct of water diplomacy and how to better meet that foreign policy goal. Earl Blumenauer, “H.R. 3658,” The Senator Paul Simon Water for the World Act 2012, (Washington, DC: U.S. Congress, 2011) 14-15.
- <sup>19</sup> “Leading Through Civilian Power,” Quadrennial Diplomacy and Development Review (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of State, 2010) 60.
- <sup>20</sup> “Fiscal Year 2011: Join Summary of Performance and Financial Information” Partners in Diplomacy and Development, (Washington, DC: USAID and US Department of State, 2011) 59 <<http://www.usaid.gov/performance/summary/summary11.pdf?120227>>.
- <sup>21</sup> Ibid, 60.
- <sup>22</sup> Ibid, 65.
- <sup>23</sup> State-USAID Agency Priority Goals Fiscal years 2012-2013, (Washington, DC: US Department of State and USAID, 2011) <<http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/187155.pdf>>.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> “Leading Through Civilian Power,” Quadrennial Diplomacy and Development Review (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of State, 2010) 119.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid, 119.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid, 62-63.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid, 213.

<sup>29</sup> Complements the Presidential objectives outlined in the May 2010 National Security Strategy and the September 2010 Presidential Policy Directive on Development. “Leading Through Civilian Power,” Quadrennial Diplomacy and Development Review (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of State, 2010) 9.

<sup>30</sup> This is a first step in stemming the coming global water crisis. “Global Water Security Report,” Intelligence Community Assessment, (Washington, DC: Office of the Director of National Intelligence, 2012).

<sup>31</sup> Position supported by November 2010 report. H, Allen, M. Folse, & B. Keene. “Small Steps for a Crisis that Calls for Great Strides,” U.S. Implementation of the Senator Paul Simon Water for the Poor Act, (Washington, DC: CARE, NRDC, WaterAid, 2010).

<sup>32</sup> Under Section 5b, the WPA 2005 states that “a broad range of local and national stakeholders is consulted in the development of any country-specific water strategy”. But it neglects to address the international stakeholders already working in the area. Water diplomacy is better conducted in partnership with not just the American and local stakeholders but other entities working towards the same end. To be effective, water diplomacy must be conducted multilaterally. Not by many nations unilaterally or even bilaterally. The U.S. should demonstrate leadership on this and not neglect its international partners. Earl Blumenauer, “H.R. 1973,” The Senator Paul Simon Water for the Poor Act 2005, (Washington, DC: U.S. Congress, 2005).