



I N P R A C T I C E

# Providing Access to Safe Water

*Lessons learned from two decades of  
philanthropic investment in the rural poor*

*Tanvi Nagpal, Ph.D.*

September 2012

## Foreword

Directed by our founder to help those who are most in need, the Conrad N. Hilton Foundation has a long history of increasing access to safe water in regions of Africa, India, and Mexico. From early on, the Hilton Foundation has recognized the essential connection between water and life. We were among the first major funders in the U.S. to invest in a multi-faceted approach, acknowledging the seminal importance of safe water access and adequate sanitation and hygiene in improving the lives of vulnerable people. Over the past 20 years, we have awarded more than \$114 million to provide access to safe water for more than 2 million people.

In 2010, the Hilton Foundation board of directors approved a new strategy for sustainable water access. This five-year strategy focuses on water access for impoverished and hard-to-reach populations, and has three main components: supporting sustainable access to safe water, strengthening the enabling environment for water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) interventions in target countries, and supporting the dissemination and adoption of relevant knowledge across the WASH sector.

We expect our programs to result in sustainable water access for at least one million additional people, increased funding to the sector, and enhanced knowledge and capacity of local communities to effectively implement and maintain water programs.

We worked with Tanvi Nagpal, Ph.D., professional lecturer and student advisor at The Paul H. Nitze School of Advanced International Studies, Johns Hopkins University, with many years of international experience in water access, sanitation, hygiene, and philanthropy to create this report. We are grateful for her excellent work and recommendations, and we hope others working in the WASH sector will find it a useful contribution to the knowledge, transparency, and collaboration of the entire field.



President and CEO, the Conrad N. Hilton Foundation

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## Contents

Introduction .....	3
A History of Investment in Safe Water .....	4
West Africa Water Initiative (WAWI).....	6
A Long-Term Strategy .....	10
Achievements, Challenges, and Lessons.....	14
Recommendations for Future Success .....	20
Appendix .....	24

### *About the Author*

**Tanvi Nagpal, Ph.D.**, has more than 15 years of experience in international development policy research and program management. She has applied her academic training in political economy to a wide range of development issues, focusing on the role that communities play in managing resources, providing services, and influencing government policy. Dr. Nagpal's work experience ranges from positions at the World Bank to think tanks and non-government organizations. From 2007-2010, she was the Director of Water and Sanitation Initiatives at Global Water Challenge. Currently, Dr. Nagpal teaches and advises students in the International Development Program at The Paul H. Nitze School of Advanced International Studies, Johns Hopkins University. She also serves as an independent consultant to foundations and non-government organizations, and has most recently worked with the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and the Conrad N. Hilton Foundation. Dr. Nagpal has contributed regularly to academic journals and more widely read publications.

### *About the Conrad N. Hilton Foundation*

The **Conrad N. Hilton Foundation** was created in 1944 by international business pioneer Conrad N. Hilton, who founded Hilton Hotels and left his fortune to help the world's disadvantaged and vulnerable people. The Foundation currently conducts strategic initiatives in six priority areas: providing safe water, ending chronic homelessness, preventing substance abuse, helping children affected by HIV/AIDS, supporting transition-age youth in foster care, and extending Conrad Hilton's support for the work of Catholic Sisters. Following selection by an independent international jury, the Foundation annually awards the \$1.5 million Conrad N. Hilton Humanitarian Prize to a nonprofit organization doing extraordinary work to reduce human suffering. From its inception, the Foundation has awarded more than \$1 billion in grants, distributing \$82 million in 2011. The Foundation's current assets are approximately \$2 billion. For more information, please visit [www.hiltonfoundation.org](http://www.hiltonfoundation.org).

### *About In Practice*

**In Practice** is a series of knowledge papers published by the Conrad N. Hilton Foundation. It reports on Foundation program strategies and partnerships, and seeks to help inform the practice of other funders and policymakers working in areas of great human need.

## Introduction

The Conrad N. Hilton Foundation is one of the world's leading family foundations committed to the water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) sector. Since 1990, the Foundation has awarded more than \$114 million in grants toward water programs in Africa, India, and Mexico, of which more than \$90 million has been paid to date.

This report provides a retrospective look at the philanthropic investments of the Conrad N. Hilton Foundation in the water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) sector over the last two decades. It summarizes the Foundation's achievements, critical lessons learned, and the evolution of the Foundation's role and strategy based on changes in its own management, feedback from the grantees, and changes in the WASH landscape. Finally, the report provides strategic recommendations for the Foundation's future grantmaking. This document may be viewed as a companion resource to the landscape analysis of the WASH sector completed by FSG Social Impact Advisors in preparation of the Hilton Foundation's new WASH strategy.<sup>1</sup>

A desk review of internal documents, grant proposals, grantee progress reports, and detailed written and oral responses to a questionnaire prepared by the author in consultation with Foundation staff were the primary sources of data for this report. In-depth phone interviews with senior staff from past grantee organizations and partners provided many of the most valuable insights into programs, accomplishments, and challenges. All interviews were conducted confidentially, and the names of interviewees are withheld by mutual agreement. Meetings with senior staff and the president of the Foundation also added tremendous value.

### Why Safe Water?

Safe water, sanitation, and hygiene are critical to human health and livelihood, yet many of the world's most disadvantaged and vulnerable people do not have access to these basic necessities. When the Hilton Foundation began its grantmaking in the water sector in 1990, nearly one quarter of the world's population lacked access to an improved source of drinking water.<sup>2</sup> According to the UNICEF-WHO Joint Monitoring Program (JMP) for Water Supply and Sanitation, in the last two decades the percentage of people who remain without access has dropped to 11 percent. Although the Millennium Development Goal to halve, by 2015, the proportion of the population without sustainable access to safe drinking water has been met, nearly 780 million people, most of whom live in rural sub-Saharan Africa, remain without such access. Hilton Foundation grantmaking today targets this population.<sup>3</sup>

## A History of Investment in Safe Water

*The Foundation's unique place in the WASH sector comes from its consistent presence as a donor and the long-term partnerships it has established with some of the largest non-governmental organizations in the sector.*

The Foundation's unique place in the WASH sector results from its consistent presence as a donor and the long-term partnerships it has established with some of the largest non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in the sector. In addition to supporting water investments in West Africa for over two decades, the Foundation has established valuable relationships with the WASH community and national and local governments in Burkina Faso, Ghana, Mali, and Niger. In the past five years, the Foundation has affirmed its commitment to providing access to safe water, announcing a new grantmaking strategy, expanding the number of grantees funded in this area of work, and increasing its staff dedicated to this priority area.

A grant made to NGO World Vision in 1990 was the Foundation's first international involvement in the water sector. The Foundation board of directors, motivated largely by a vision to accelerate Guinea worm eradication efforts in Ghana, agreed to co-fund World Vision's Ghana Rural Water Program. The earliest funding went to drilling wells in the Greater Afram Plains in Central Ghana, and the Foundation's board expanded its vision to also include northern Ghana.

As the program grew, new organizations were brought in with a vision to be more supportive of WASH outcomes through the Foundation's Water programs, leading to the creation of the West Africa Water Initiative (WAWI), a coalition of 14 partners that expanded to Mali and Niger in 2002.<sup>4</sup>

Building on the previous work of others in the country, the Foundation began supporting a watershed management program in the Popoloca-Mixteca region of Mexico in 1998. This program, implemented by the Mexican NGO, *Alternativas y Procesos de Participación Social (Alternativas)*, is ongoing and has reached more than 200,000 people in nearly 200 communities in the last 15 years.

In 2006, the Foundation joined with the Sir Ratan Tata Trust (the Trust) to expand its programs into India. The Trust and the Conrad N. Hilton Foundation have co-funded two programs in the Uttarakhand and Gujarat states in India. One of the programs also receives substantial monetary support from state governments in India.

In the same year, the Hilton Foundation provided a grant to the Millennium Water Alliance (MWA) to implement a multi-partner program in Ethiopia called the Millennium Water Program (MWP). This program, now in its second phase, is being implemented in five regions in Ethiopia.

In 2008, based on independent evaluations of the West Africa Water Initiative (WAWI), the Hilton Foundation adjusted its funding strategy in West Africa, no longer funding all WAWI partners, but continuing support for three organizations that were original partners—UNICEF, WaterAid, and World Vision.

Since 2008, World Vision's program in Ghana, Mali, and Niger has been called Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene for Human Development (WASH/HD). At the same time, WaterAid and UNICEF also have an ongoing collaboration in a water, sanitation, and hygiene program in West Africa, which is partly funded by the Hilton Foundation. The UNICEF-WaterAid programming collaboration was leveraged to achieve broader West African regional goals by combining advocacy and learning among partners.<sup>5</sup>

*While remaining committed to fostering WASH interventions, in 2012 Hilton Foundation directors approved a new Water strategy focused on the safe water access component of WASH interventions in areas of severe need.*

While not abandoning its commitment to fostering WASH interventions, the Hilton Foundation board of directors approved its new Water strategy in 2010 to focus on the water-access component of WASH interventions in areas of extreme poverty and high need for safe water. Implementation began in 2011 with 14 new grants. In keeping with its practice of nurturing long-term partnerships, all the major implementing partners in West Africa, Mexico, Ethiopia, and India currently have multi-year grants that allow them to continue their work in priority areas identified by the Foundation.

## West Africa Water Initiative (WAWI) 2002-2008

*By providing villages with their first reliable source of clean water, Guinea worm was largely eradicated from the Afram Plains in Ghana and permanent settlements were made possible.*

### Background

The partnership between the Hilton Foundation and World Vision is the longest-running and largest in the water sector. According to senior staff engaged closely in the work of World Vision in the early years, both the Hilton Foundation and World Vision enhanced their reputations in the WASH sector by collaborating within the context of WAWI.<sup>6</sup> In 2002, World Vision and other grantees including UNICEF, WaterAid, and Winrock International, were brought together to form WAWI. From 2002 to 2008, WAWI became a \$56 million public-private partnership. In these six years, USAID joined the Hilton Foundation to provide funding to WAWI, and each of the partners raised their own matches for additional programming in West Africa. In 2007, the *Chronicle of Philanthropy* recognized the Foundation as a pioneer grantmaker in the international water sector, being among the first to create a large, multicountry, public-private partnership.<sup>7</sup>

The partnership had four main objectives:

1. Improve access to safe water and sanitation
2. Reduce the burden of water-related diseases
3. Promote sustainable water management
4. Create an effective partnership

### WAWI Met and Exceeded Goal to Improve Access to Safe Water

According to WAWI reports, the first of the four goals was the one most clearly met and exceeded, with more than half a million people in rural West Africa gaining access to safe water.<sup>8</sup> More than 25,000 latrines were constructed, and hundreds of school health and sanitation clubs were established.<sup>9</sup> In addition, education in personal hygiene and water resource management, as well as water infrastructure management training, were undertaken in thousands of communities. According to grant reports, many of the areas targeted by the Hilton Foundation–World Vision partnership were transformed. By providing villages with their first reliable source of clean water, Guinea worm was largely eradicated from the Afram Plains in Ghana and permanent settlements were made possible.

An independent evaluation of the partnership, completed in 2006, concluded that the partnership had undoubtedly led to a significant increase in access to safe water, sanitation, and hygiene services to rural households, and each implementing partner had not only met but exceeded output goals in terms of the infrastructure provided to communities.

*The WAWI partnership led to a significant increase in access to safe water, sanitation, and hygiene services to rural households, and each implementing partner not only met but exceeded output goals.*

#### Incorporation of Academic Input into Program Design and Evaluation

The most significant achievement of the Hilton Foundation–World Vision partnership from the perspective of the largest grantee, World Vision, was a major change in the way in which World Vision approached its work, especially with respect to integrating academic input into program design and evaluation. The partnership with academic institutions, specifically the Desert Research Institute and Cornell University’s International Institute for Food, Agriculture and Development (CIIFAD), were instrumental in changing the way World Vision implemented its hardware, including how it selected its sites, chose its technology, approached communities, and monitored its programs.

The Desert Research Institute introduced the use of geophysical techniques and satellite imagery, greatly improving the dry- to wet-well ratio, making World Vision far more efficient in the use of its equipment and funds. At the same time, the partnership with CIIFAD led World Vision to take a harder look at environmental sustainability; and university professors and students became involved in designing participatory processes that included women in programs, and creating trainings in cross-cultural dispute resolution. According to a senior World Vision staff member, partnering with national and international universities has now become standard practice at World Vision.<sup>10</sup>

#### WAWI Partnership Needs

While WAWI undoubtedly paved the way for the expansion of World Vision, UNICEF, and WaterAid programs in West Africa, the partnership itself was beset with problems. The partnership had not established a monitoring and evaluation system that allowed the assessment of other objectives—most prominent among them being impacts on health and economic security.<sup>11</sup>

#### Funding Inequity

Furthermore, a power imbalance had been created by the dominance of World Vision in terms of total funds received from the Hilton Foundation as well as the match it raised from its other donors. In the absence of a functional system to create trust and collaboration, this led to tension among partners who felt marginalized in the program.

*The Hilton Foundation's new strategy emphasizes the need for grantees and the Foundation to partner in strengthening monitoring and evaluation in order to more accurately measure outcomes.*

## WAWI Lessons

The final evaluation report compiled by the WAWI Secretariat in June 2008 echoed the conclusions of the 2006 independent evaluation. Key recommendations made to the Foundation in this final WAWI document were taken into consideration in the development of a new Hilton Foundation program strategy.

Lessons learned from WAWI included an affirmation of longer-term commitment of resources to a region so as to allow three- to five-year programmatic planning at the country level, and the development of annual work plans aligned with these longer-term goals. The report further highlighted the need for equity and incentives to cooperate within partnerships, as the grantees who had received a larger grant within WAWI had also been able to raise large matches more easily than others.

## Partnership Alignment and Management

According to Foundation staff, because the design of the WAWI partnership evolved as the program developed, and a management structure was not in place from the outset, managing the partnership proved challenging. There was also a misalignment between WAWI partnership goals and the goals of individual partners. The Hilton Foundation intended to create a global water initiative with \$50 million in funding, but due to a decrease in assets following the events of September 11, 2001, the Foundation scaled down its original plan.

According to Foundation staff, the combination of a scaling-back in funding and lack of common goals among partners led to a general decline in both the ability and willingness of organizations to create a long-term partnership. The Foundation was unable to provide adequate funding and incentives to support collaboration. It was agreed that in the future, partnerships would not be a precondition for support from the Foundation. If natural partnerships, with common goals and an agreed-upon management structure, evolved among grantees, they would be supported. Further, Foundation staff observed that although the partnership as a whole was troubled, successful relationships did develop, and the Foundation determined it would continue to support these smaller, organic collaborations.

The Foundation also concluded that it would continue to focus on certain geographical areas where it had already invested in developing key partnerships, and that the approach to WASH provision in these areas would include the prevention and treatment of all water-related diseases, not just Guinea worm and trachoma.<sup>12</sup> In 2006, the Hilton Foundation made a separate grant to UNICEF to continue its collaborative efforts with The Carter Center and Desert Research Institute to eradicate Guinea worm in Ghana.

### Monitoring and Evaluation

Another important finding of both the independent and the WAWI evaluations was that outcome monitoring had not been sufficiently defined or rigorously conducted. The Hilton Foundation's new strategy emphasizes the need for grantees and the Foundation to partner in strengthening monitoring and evaluation in order to more accurately measure outcomes.

In May 2008, at a Foundation-wide board retreat, Foundation directors reiterated and reaffirmed water as a high priority area and instructed the staff to review and refine the Foundation's WASH strategy to achieve measurable outcomes. The Foundation contracted with FSG Social Impact Advisors, an international consulting company, to complete a situation analysis of water access in target countries, and the financial and other resources available for achieving large-scale and sustainable change.<sup>13</sup>

During the period in which the landscape analysis and stakeholder dialogue was ongoing, UNICEF, WaterAid, and World Vision received "bridge" grants to continue their work in West Africa. MWA received a bridge grant to document lessons learned and expand the Millennium Water Program in Ethiopia, with sub-grants to CARE, Catholic Relief Services, World Vision, Living Water, and Life Water.

## A Long-Term Strategy

*The main vision guiding the strategy was to improve the well-being of the water-stressed and ultra-poor by focusing on sustainable access to safe water within a collaborative and holistic WASH+ approach.*

In 2008, the Hilton Foundation undertook a strategic review process to analyze its grantmaking programs. Access to safe water was identified as one of six strategic initiative areas. Lessons learned from prior grants, lengthy consultations with partners and stakeholders in the WASH sector, FSG's final report, and the Foundation board's vision were incorporated into a new strategy developed by staff and FSG in 2010. The main vision guiding the strategy was to improve the well-being of the water-stressed and ultra-poor by focusing on sustainable access to safe water within a collaborative and holistic WASH Plus (WASH+) approach that recognizes that sanitation, hygiene, and livelihood improvement are also essential.

The following key decisions, guided by the board of directors, stakeholder consultations, and the report submitted by FSG, shaped the staff's work on the new strategy:

- **Focus on the safe water component of WASH:** The Foundation's historic involvement in water; relationships with trusted grantees who had developed important skills and knowledge on how to reach rural populations; and the fact that water access continued to be a problem for rural communities in West Africa, Ethiopia, and the parts of Mexico and India where the Foundation had supported programs, led the staff to focus on safe water access. There was an understanding that the interconnected goals of the WASH+ concept are also essential to achieving the ultimate objective of improved health and well-being.
- **Prioritize the poorest and hardest to reach populations:** In keeping with the Foundation's core mission of reaching the most disadvantaged and vulnerable people, it was recommended that new grants focus on the ultra-poor, or those earning less than a dollar a day.
- **Retain the focus on target regions:** The staff recommended that the Foundation continue to focus on target countries in West Africa, Ethiopia, India, and Mexico where it had previously supported programs. Future programs would build on past investments made in these areas (see map on page 24).
- **Leverage Hilton grants to raise additional funds:** Based on prior experience with partners and the board's commitment to leveraging its investment, the Foundation would establish the goal of raising an additional \$50 million for WASH programs. These additional resources would be raised by grantees by matching the grants received from the Hilton Foundation with funds from other donors.

The new strategy was presented by the staff and approved by the board in 2010.<sup>14</sup>

*The Foundation's commitment to the disadvantaged and most vulnerable remains unchanged, and its new grants have reflected an abiding interest in supporting efforts that target the hardest to reach and poorest rural areas.*

## The Foundation's Water Strategy Includes Three Program Areas

These areas are: increasing safe and sustainable water access, strengthening the enabling environment, and supporting knowledge dissemination and adoption. The strategy also outlines a new overarching goal of providing safe water access for at least one million more people over five years.

### 1. SUPPORT SUSTAINABLE AND SCALABLE SAFE WATER ACCESS INTERVENTIONS

- Ensure that water systems are fully functional, upgraded, and sustainable (through development of market-based or subsidized systems for repair and maintenance of existing water systems).
- Support appropriate technologies for safe water access.
- Develop local capacity to ensure safe water quality at water sources and in households.

### 2. STRENGTHEN THE ENABLING ENVIRONMENT FOR WASH INTERVENTIONS IN TARGET COUNTRIES

- Support national and local capacity building, and participate in coordination, networking, and advocacy in the sector.
- Develop the regulatory and institutional context for micro-finance for WASH in target countries.
- Support in-country leadership to prioritize and deliver WASH interventions.

### 3. SUPPORT DISSEMINATION AND ADOPTION OF RELEVANT SECTOR-WIDE KNOWLEDGE

- Provide cross-cutting support for research, evaluation, and data systems that enhance the field's ability to maximize the effectiveness of WASH interventions.
- Systematically map the geological, technical, financial, and institutional conditions in each target country in order to design locally appropriate solutions.
- Catalyze the development and implementation of a standardized international WASH index to enhance global measures and reporting systems.

The strategy also outlines a new overarching goal of providing sustainable safe water access for at least one million people over five years to help achieve the U.N. Millennium Development Goal (MDG) for sustainable access to safe drinking water. Though the worldwide MDG for safe water access has been met, coverage in most of the Foundation's target countries falls short.

### Geographical Focus

The focus on the sub-Saharan African nations of Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, Ghana, Mali, and Niger was retained, as these countries are home to some of the poorest and most water-stressed communities in the world (see map on page 24). High infant mortality rates related to diarrhea, trachoma, and Guinea worm disease are endemic in rural areas. Women and girls still walk many miles to fetch small quantities of water of dubious quality, and the combination of poor quality and scarcity leads not just to a high disease burden, but also diminishes educational and livelihood opportunities.<sup>15</sup>

*The Foundation has strengthened its focus on rigorous monitoring and evaluation with a view to improving the sustainability of its investments, by moving beyond the input of dollars spent and output of water systems constructed, to measuring the improvement in access to safe and sustainable water and livelihoods.*

#### Emphasis on Reaching Remote Areas That Experience Extreme Poverty

The Foundation's commitment to the disadvantaged and most vulnerable remains unchanged and its new grants have reflected an abiding interest in supporting efforts that target the hardest to reach and poorest rural areas. This is not a trivial point: grantees who work in remote areas often have much higher costs than those who work in urban settings or relatively easy-to-reach peri-urban settings. The costs of transporting people and equipment are higher, it is harder to retain staff willing to travel to and work for long periods in these areas, and monitoring such programs is a challenge. Local government presence in these areas is also weak, and ongoing operation and maintenance is made even more difficult because of tenuous or non-existent supply chains and technical support. Thus, comparing the per capita cost of providing sustainable access in a remote area with one that may be much easier to reach is misleading. Grantees point out that the Foundation's board and staff are to be credited for standing firm in their commitment to the poorest and most vulnerable despite the much higher relative cost of the programs that they support.

#### Focus on Rigorous Monitoring and Evaluation for Long-Term Sustainability

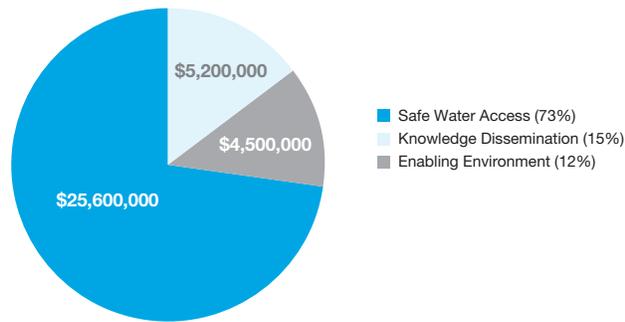
The Foundation has strengthened its focus on rigorous monitoring and evaluation with a view to improving the sustainability of its investments. The metrics used for determining "outcomes" are to move beyond the input of dollars spent and output of water systems constructed to measuring the improvement in access to sustainable, safe water and livelihoods. The Foundation has engaged the University of North Carolina's Water Institute to develop a common monitoring, evaluation, and learning framework with uniform methods, outcomes, and metrics. The Foundation anticipates that this approach will produce consistent metrics across interventions, grantees, and geographies, and allow it to compare outcomes across grants. By taking an iterative approach that will incorporate process evaluations of success and challenges, it will also encourage continuous improvements in the quality of the programs that Foundation grantees implement.

#### Support for Advocacy to Increase Knowledge and Funding

Other important changes include support to advocacy initiatives to increase the amount and effectiveness of funding to the WASH sector, especially in collaboration with other donors, and a commitment to invest in creating and disseminating new knowledge for the sector. New grants reflect the goals set by the strategy and the evolution of the role of the Foundation within the sector.

#### New Grants Focus on Water Access and Include Advocacy and Knowledge Generation and Dissemination

Since the strategy was approved, the Hilton Foundation has made 15 grants to organizations to implement safe water access programs, carry out advocacy in support of increased funding for WASH, improve the effectiveness of such funding, field test new technologies and tools to support monitoring, review the sustainability of its investments, and create new platforms to assist funders and policymakers in evaluating needs and opportunities for grantmaking. These grants are listed on the following page under the three priority areas.



The majority of the Foundation’s grant funds continue to focus on providing new water supply points and rehabilitating non-functioning wells or small-piped networks in rural areas.

However, the Foundation has also made substantive grants to organizations that can effectively advocate within the developing country context and in the U.S. to increase the amount and effectiveness of funding to WASH, and to organizations for piloting innovative approaches and tools that would improve the efficiency and sustainability of WASH infrastructure over time. Without exception, all grantees work with local communities and governments to strengthen their ability to implement and sustain WASH.

**Strategic Areas of Focus Among Current Grantees**

GRANTEE	FOCUS AREAS		
The Foundation Center		●	●
Millennium Water Alliance	●	●	●
New Venture Fund		●	●
One Drop Foundation	●	●	●
Pacific Institute		●	●
Safe Water Network	●	●	●
UNICEF	●	●	●
Water for People			●
WaterAid	●	●	●
WSA		●	●
World Vision	●	●	●

- Support Sustainable and Scalable Safe Water Access Interventions
- Strengthen the Enabling Environment for WASH Interventions in Target Countries
- Support Dissemination and Adoption of Relevant Sector-Wide Knowledge

## Achievements, Challenges, and Lessons

There is little doubt that Hilton Foundation support has enabled its grantees to reach millions who previously had minimal to no access to safe and reliable water, sanitation infrastructure, and hygiene education and training. Beyond providing basic infrastructure, however, grantees have also influenced short- and long-term policymaking in WASH, built the capacity of local communities and decision makers, and introduced new technology and knowledge that has the potential of lowering costs and improving efficiency in the long term.

*Since 1990, the Hilton Foundation has invested more than \$114 million to increase sustainable access to safe water in sub-Saharan Africa and water-stressed regions of Mexico and India.*

### Ongoing Achievements in Improving Access to Safe Water

Since 1990, the Hilton Foundation has invested more than \$114 million to increase sustainable access to safe water in sub-Saharan Africa and water-stressed regions of Mexico and India. According to reports submitted by the grantees (grants completed prior to 2010), Foundation support has been instrumental in providing more than two million people with safe water access.<sup>16</sup> Many more people have gained access with the help of resources that were leveraged by the grantees to match the Foundation's contribution. As mentioned previously, the majority of the people reached are the rural poor in water-stressed areas. Deep and shallow wells, small- and medium-piped water systems, spring catchment, and rainwater harvesting are the main sources of water supply.

The Foundation's new grants continue to focus on improving sustainable access to water in poor, rural communities. Some of the grantees also work in rural schools in addition to providing water sources for communal use. A grant to Safe Water Network looks specifically at market-based water solutions to reach the poor in rural and peri-urban areas. Grants to World Vision, One Drop Foundation, MWA, UNICEF, WaterAid, and Safe Water Network totaling \$24.5 million will be executed over a period of three years in Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, Ghana, Mali, and Niger. The grants are expected to reach more than one million people in these countries.

### Access to Sanitation and Hygiene Training

The Foundation's early focus on safe water aligned well with World Vision, which excelled in drilling wells in hard-to-reach areas. As its regional program grew and relationships multiplied, the Foundation found itself working with NGOs and international organizations that focused equally on sanitation and hygiene. According to the Foundation, its strategy was always to support the safe water component of the holistic approach that combines water provision with sanitation, hygiene, and livelihoods.

*While the Foundation focuses on access to safe water, it recognizes the importance of implementing projects in tandem with sanitation and hygiene interventions to maximize health and livelihood impacts.*

While the Foundation focuses on access to safe water, it recognizes the importance of implementing projects in tandem with sanitation and hygiene interventions to maximize health and livelihood impacts. Grantees have built latrines, provided hygiene training, and implemented a variety of approaches to increase the adoption of safe sanitation and hygiene practices. According to their own reports, they have reached hundreds of thousands of people through their sanitation and hygiene-related programs. In Ethiopia, for example, MWP has reached 770,000 people, including school children, with improved sanitation and hygiene promotion. Many of these interventions have been supported by matching funds, rather than directly through Hilton Foundation grants.

While the Foundation has made the strategic decision to focus on water in keeping with its vision, priorities, and strengths, this may in the future limit its ability to work with smaller actors who cannot raise sufficient matches to fund sanitation and hygiene to complement water access.

### Health and Livelihood Impacts

Access to safe water for hard-to-reach or vulnerable populations has been paramount among other goals that the Foundation has set. In the past, the Foundation evaluated the impact of its water interventions in part by the reduction in specific diseases such as Guinea worm disease.<sup>17</sup> Monitoring health outcomes, however, is complex and expensive. While some grantees have invited limited external evaluations of health impacts by public health researchers, none have established monitoring systems that can rigorously track health outcomes of all or even most program beneficiaries.

For example, World Vision's Area Development Program approach integrates investments in health clinics, basic public health training, and education efforts with other related interventions. While they track health outcomes in their areas of work, they are careful not to attribute them to a specific intervention.<sup>18</sup>

Although MWP invested in a monitoring system that establishes key baseline indicators in both access and health, it was more focused on monitoring the extent of access and its sustainability over time, than actual impact on health and livelihood. Even within this program, it was a challenge to get most partners to report using the same framework, but the program leadership in Ethiopia is fairly confident that this will happen in the new phase of the grant.<sup>19</sup> Emory University's Center for Global Safe Water has completed a baseline data report detailing community, school, and health facility WASH access and behaviors within MWP implementation areas, an essential step in the comprehensive monitoring, evaluation, and learning strategy for the Foundation's grants. This report will inform a new logical framework of indicators that would provide a common basis for measuring improvements in WASH access and behavior over time.

*In order to incorporate more rigorous monitoring of sustainability, impact outcomes, best practices, and learning into its grants in coming years, the Foundation has made a grant to the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill's Water Institute to assess currently used WASH standards and indicators.*

WaterAid-Ethiopia conducted a quantitative assessment of health impacts of a school WASH intervention in one area of Oromiya Region. The evaluation found that the combined WASH interventions had a statistically significant positive impact on the prevalence rates of intestinal parasites and WASH-related skin and eye diseases.<sup>20</sup>

In Mexico, *Alternativas* has an elaborate monitoring system that tracks both water availability and quality at the household level, as well as basic anthropometric data (height and weight) for all children under age five, but it combines its water access program with a nutritional supplementation program. *Alternativas* does not attribute improved health to any single intervention. According to senior staff, "It is clear that when people drink clean water they are less likely to get sick. We make sure that they get enough clean water on a daily basis. We are not seeking to provide a new scientific answer."<sup>21</sup>

The majority of past grant reports have relied on narratives and qualitative data to report health and livelihood impacts. Both UNICEF and WaterAid provide anecdotal information on "well-being" though neither organization has identified livelihood improvement as a strategic goal of its programming, possibly with the knowledge that it would be virtually impossible to rigorously evaluate the impact of their intervention on the expansion of livelihood opportunities or incomes. The same can be said of other grantees.

On the other hand, CARE-Ethiopia, an MWP partner, researched women's empowerment through WASH interventions and found that there was a significant change (34 percent) in self-reported empowerment and improved welfare among women in areas where there has been a WASH intervention. The study is limited to one province and is careful to suggest that "empowerment" is not the same as an improvement in livelihood. Nevertheless, the study does point out that a dramatic reduction in time spent fetching water and an improvement in sanitation do lead to self-reported improvements in welfare and empowerment among women. The study suggests that programs must build in "deliberate strategies to facilitate the empowerment of women; only then will significant impacts be achieved."<sup>22</sup>

In order to incorporate more rigorous monitoring of sustainability, impact outcomes, best practices, and learning into its grants in coming years, the Foundation has made a grant to the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill's Water Institute to assess currently used WASH standards and indicators and select those to be tracked in Hilton-funded programs in the future. The team will also provide ongoing assistance to grantees on data collection and outcome measurement.<sup>23</sup>

*Grantees have been encouraged to field test new technologies, especially in the area of water supply and treatment.*

## Technological Innovation and Piloting New Approaches

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World Vision's collaboration with Desert Research Institute led to the use of remote sensing to determine whether an area was a good candidate for a deep well. This greatly improved the wet- to dry-well ratio for World Vision.

Winrock International, a WAWI partner, implemented small-holder micro-irrigation projects in Ghana, Mali, and Niger and reported that in Ghana, for example, community gardens and dry-season farming led to an additional average earning of \$100 per person per season.

World Vision supported innovative low-cost water treatment technologies for arsenic removal, which were tested in Ghana, and funded research to develop a local fluoride removal system. The Hilton Foundation and World Vision have also funded a water quality laboratory in Northern Ghana that will allow water quality testing to be carried out in the region.

The MWP has pilot tested low-cost hand-drilled wells, solar-wind hybrid water pumps, and bio-sand bag filters as part of its Ethiopia program.

WaterAid has been at the forefront of testing the rope pump and has actually spread information on its use through its own publications. Staff also reported that they are beginning to see the impact of their inclusion and equity approach as they and Messiah College develop more infrastructure designed to accommodate people with disabilities (up to 90 percent of new WASH infrastructure in Mali).<sup>24</sup>

*Alternativas* (Mexico) has pioneered an approach to watershed recharge through the construction of dykes, reservoirs, and improving vegetation. It also installs biogas toilets in schools, which not only remove the need for septic tanks but also produce useful biogas and nutrient-rich water as byproducts for use by the community. The Water Museum, established by *Alternativas* in 1999 and relocated to its current site in 2004, is probably the boldest attempt among all of the Foundation's grantees to widely share new technologies and approaches. According to *Alternativas*, 54,000 people have undertaken social and technical training at the museum, and in 2011 alone it attracted 77,000 visitors.

## Documentation and Dissemination of Research

Despite the high level of innovation on the ground, research results have been inconsistently and poorly documented. Some of the studies undertaken by grantees have not been published, are not readily available or accessible on the web, and have not been shared broadly even among the Foundation's grantees. This is because prior

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to 2008, dissemination of information and best practices were not explicitly articulated as objectives, and partnerships were not designed with these goals in mind. In addition, such activities may have been seen by some grantees as unfunded mandates that took the focus away from the main aim of the grant, which was to improve direct access to water and sanitation.

According to grantees, internal reports to the Foundation have transparently reported the successes and failures of new technologies piloted within grants, and the Foundation has shown consistent support for innovation. With the Hilton Foundation's new strategic focus on supporting the dissemination and adoption of relevant sector-wide knowledge, however, clear priority has been given to wider adoption and dissemination of knowledge.

The Foundation has provided grants to two NGOs, Water and Sanitation for Africa (WSA), formerly CREPA, and Water for People, to use new mobile phone-based (Android) tools and Google to map infrastructure and monitor its functionality. These grants will provide independent verification of the functionality of 1,500 water access points built by World Vision through Foundation-funded programs in West Africa from 1990–2003. They will also field test a new monitoring tool on a wide scale and build capacity in WSA to undertake such monitoring for other programs in the future.

A grant to the Pacific Institute is funding the development of a decision-making tool that can be used by community members to choose technologies and approaches that would be appropriate given basic data on water needs and availability, hydrogeological conditions, community organization models, costs, and ability to pay, among other variables. The Pacific Institute hopes to pilot the use of the tool with the Foundation's other grantees in West Africa.

It remains to be seen how technological, organizational, and policy innovation undertaken within the context of water supply grants will be shared with the rest of the sector.

### WASH Policy and Advocacy Initiatives

Although policy and advocacy support were not explicitly stated aims of the Hilton Foundation prior to 2010, many of the grantees worked with governments and at the field level to change and improve water- and sanitation-related policies and advocate for greater spending in the sector. Since 2008, UNICEF and WaterAid's partnership has leveraged each organization's capacities and relationships at the national and local levels to influence government decision making.

As one example of many, the partners point to the joint work in Burkina Faso as being instrumental in the 2010 launch of a national advocacy campaign for sanitation and the national commitment to allocate approximately \$507 million per year (four times greater than in previous years) from the national budget to sanitation.<sup>25</sup>

*As the Foundation was developing its new strategy in 2010, it became clear that new leadership would be needed in the WASH advocacy space in the U.S.*

In Ethiopia, MWP has been an active participant in a national WASH inventory, which maps existing water and sanitation infrastructure. They see this as a first step in creating a rational, evidence-based plan to extend coverage. Many of MWP's efforts have been focused on working with the government to try to reach harder-to-access rural areas that have the lowest coverage.<sup>26</sup>

Grantees highlight these successes in their reports but, in the past, they have not clearly made the link between advocacy efforts, policy changes and pronouncements made by national governments, and actual increases in resources for water and sanitation at the local level. Such links would go a long way in increasing support for WASH among a large number of donors.

### Supporting WASH Advocacy

As the Foundation was developing its new strategy in 2010, it became clear that new leadership would be needed in the WASH advocacy space. Prior to 2010, the U.S. NGO Water Advocates had assumed this role. With the planned sunset of this organization, however, the Hilton Foundation and other leading family foundations were approached by NGOs in the WASH sector to assume a greater role in advocacy.

The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, the Conrad N. Hilton Foundation, and the Howard G. Buffet Foundation retained FSG to review the landscape of advocacy opportunities in the U.S. The final report summarizing the landscape and recommendations was released in 2011. The report highlighted the need to obtain consistent and sustainable funding of WASH programming, and to focus the programming of U.S. government and multilateral aid institutions toward populations most in need in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia.

The Foundation's new strategic focus on advocacy within the U.S. and in priority developing countries, and the recommendations of the FSG report led to two important multiyear grants to the Foundation Center and New Venture Fund.<sup>27</sup> The Foundation Center will facilitate collaboration and more strategic decision making on water issues among donors by sharing pertinent information, news, and knowledge relating to philanthropy and sustainable access to safe water through a public-facing, web-based platform ([washfunders.org](http://washfunders.org)).

New Venture Fund, a public charity that operates a number of funds related to global health and advocacy, will serve as a fiscal agent to WASH Advocates, a new endeavor that will build upon the work and relationships established by Water Advocates and the WASH Advocacy Initiative. WASH Advocates has two main objectives: to increase the effectiveness and coordination of support for WASH in developing countries from public and private institutions in the U.S., and to coordinate WASH-focused advocacy initiatives in the U.S. and abroad.

The Foundation also provides funding to pursue in-country and regional advocacy to WaterAid in West Africa and MWA in Ethiopia.

*In the next phase of its water initiatives, the Foundation could do even more to ensure that its grants not only reach the most water-stressed people, but also create valuable knowledge on the best approaches and technologies to do so at scale and sustainably.*

## Recommendations for Future Success

It is clear that philanthropic resources alone will not be sufficient to meet the water needs of the millions of people who currently lack basic access to safe and sufficient quantities of water. The Foundation's goal of serving the needs of the poorest among them places it in the unique position of focusing attention on those who are the hardest to reach, and for whom maintaining even simple infrastructure may be economically challenging.

In the past two decades, the Hilton Foundation has become a leading voice in support of the rural poor who often face insurmountable odds in trying to address basic needs of water, food, health, and education to their families and children. In the next phase of its water initiatives, the Foundation could do even more to ensure that its grants not only reach the most water-stressed people, but also create valuable knowledge on the best approaches and technologies to do so at scale and sustainably.

In conclusion, this paper presents recommendations, of which some are already being considered at the Foundation as it refines its philanthropic strategy and role in the WASH sector.<sup>28</sup>

### Evaluate the Effectiveness of Alternative Approaches in Sustainably Reaching the Rural Poor

From World Vision's area development programs to *Alternativas'* participatory watershed conservation and social development approach, the Foundation's grantees have used very different approaches to WASH provision in the last decade. A comparison of the alternative approaches adopted by various grantees, their costs and benefits over time, and the scalability of their methods would be tremendously useful to the sector.

Such a comparison would inform other critical questions on the effectiveness of alternative approaches in implementation, post-construction support, and the ability of rural community-level institutions to manage water supply infrastructure.<sup>29</sup> Results of such an evaluation would also fit well with other innovative approaches to rural water service provision, such as Triple-S (Sustainable Services at Scale), which are being piloted by local governments in India and a number of countries in Africa and Latin America.<sup>30</sup>

### Support Long-Term Monitoring

The Foundation has recently been involved in a series of discussions on the sustainability of WASH interventions and, as a leading donor, it has added its voice to a movement in the sector demanding greater transparency in reporting outcomes. It has committed to the development of a common WASH sustainability index. The grants to WSA and Water for People to carry out the first large-scale external evaluation of the Hilton Foundation

investments in water supply in West Africa send an important signal to the rest of the sector, and particularly to the philanthropic community, that the Foundation is serious about its commitment to ensuring that the beneficiaries of its grants have sustainable, long-term access to water.

As new grants are made, the Foundation should consider how it might require and support all grantees to incorporate long-term monitoring into their plans. This is all the more critical because the rural poor in sub-Saharan Africa have been the hardest to reach and gains in these areas have been the most difficult to sustain.

### Articulate Why Leveraging Resources and Matches Are Critical and When Exceptions May Be Made

The Foundation may look internally at its own guidelines for grantees to raise an equal or greater match. Exceptions may be made when grantees take on particularly challenging programs which receive little support elsewhere or present a truly catalytic idea. This may be especially important if the Foundation begins to support smaller in-country NGOs directly or provides a grant to a research or educational organization that is unable to raise a match. While leveraging resources clearly enables the Foundation to have a greater impact in certain areas, its unconditional support of underfunded initiatives could be an equally important signal to the sector that the issue is being neglected.

### Insist on Transparency in Reporting

By supporting external evaluation, the adoption of common indicators and metrics for evaluating outcomes and impacts, and the sector-wide adoption of a WASH sustainability index, the Foundation will contribute to making the goals and achievements of development assistance more transparent. The Foundation could also require that its grantees post their own monitoring goals, standards, reports, research, and learning papers on the newly created WASH funders website ([washfunders.org](http://washfunders.org)), thereby providing them with an incentive and a venue to share their insights with each other and more widely with the sector.

## Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> A landscape analysis of the WASH sector completed by FSG in preparation of the Hilton Foundation's new WASH strategy is also available on our website as a resource.
- <sup>2</sup> UNICEF-World Health Organization Joint Monitoring Programme for Water Supply and Sanitation, Progress on Drinking Water and Sanitation: 2012 Update.
- <sup>3</sup> UNICEF-World Health Organization Joint Monitoring Programme for Water Supply and Sanitation, Progress on Drinking Water and Sanitation: 2012 Update.
- <sup>4</sup> WAWI partners included World Vision, UNICEF, WaterAid, Winrock International, Desert Research Institute, Helen Keller International, The Carter Center/Global 2000, International Trachoma Initiative, Lions Club International Foundation, United Nations Foundation, United States Agency for International Development, World Chlorine Council.
- <sup>5</sup> Unpublished grant report submitted to the Hilton Foundation by WaterAid-USA.
- <sup>6</sup> Phone interviews with author, August and September 2011.
- <sup>7</sup> Nicole, Lewis (2007). "A fresh look at water: Global issue attracts new interest from charities and donors." *The Chronicle of Philanthropy*. October 18, 2007 online issue.
- <sup>8</sup> West Africa Water Initiative (WAWI) description (<http://www.hiltonfoundation.org/wawi>).
- <sup>9</sup> Unpublished Final Evaluation Report for WAWI, June 2008. Submitted to the Hilton Foundation by WAWI Secretariat.
- <sup>10</sup> Phone interviews with author, August and September 2011.
- <sup>11</sup> Nancy Allen. WAWI: A Preliminary Assessment. Report prepared for the Conrad N. Hilton Foundation. 15 November 2007. Conclusions updated 27 January 2008. Accessed on March 26, 2012. ([http://www.hiltonfoundation.org/images/stories/WAWI\\_PrelimAssessjan08.pdf](http://www.hiltonfoundation.org/images/stories/WAWI_PrelimAssessjan08.pdf)).
- <sup>12</sup> The Carter Center received support from the Conrad N. Hilton Foundation from 1999-2011 for its Trachoma Control Program, which has assisted the Ghana Health Service's Trachoma Control Program to promote hygiene and sanitation. In 2008, with technical assistance from The Carter Center, Ghana became the first sub-Saharan African country to eliminate blinding trachoma as a public health problem through implementation of the SAFE strategy. (<http://www.cartercenter.org/countries/ghana-health-trachoma.html>).
- <sup>13</sup> FSG. Phase 1 Findings: WASH Landscape Research for Strategic Planning. Prepared for the Conrad Hilton Foundation, July 9, 2009. ([http://www.hiltonfoundation.org/images/stories/Downloads/Conrad\\_N\\_Hilton\\_Foundation\\_WASH\\_Landscape\\_Research\\_for\\_Strategic\\_Planning\\_5-14-2010.pdf](http://www.hiltonfoundation.org/images/stories/Downloads/Conrad_N_Hilton_Foundation_WASH_Landscape_Research_for_Strategic_Planning_5-14-2010.pdf)).
- <sup>14</sup> Conrad N. Hilton Foundation Water Initiative ([http://www.hiltonfoundation.org/images/stories/Downloads/Conrad\\_N\\_Hilton\\_Foundation\\_WASH\\_Strategy\\_Summary\\_3-19-2010.pdf](http://www.hiltonfoundation.org/images/stories/Downloads/Conrad_N_Hilton_Foundation_WASH_Strategy_Summary_3-19-2010.pdf)).
- <sup>15</sup> Approximately 20.3 million people remained without an improved source of drinking water in 2010 in the four West African countries of Burkina Faso, Ghana, Mali, and Niger. Given the significant population increases in these countries, this represents only a 14 percent improvement since 1990 when the number of people without access to an improved water source was approximately 23.7 million. Data from: UNICEF and World Health Organization (2012) Progress on Drinking Water and Sanitation. New York: UNICEF.

- <sup>16</sup> FSG. WASH US Advocacy: Appendix to Supplement Final Report. Submitted to the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, the Howard Buffet Foundation, and Conrad N. Hilton Foundation, February 2011.
- <sup>17</sup> Hilton Foundation support to The Carter Center for its Trachoma Control Program and for its Guinea worm disease eradication efforts has contributed to the successful control of both diseases in Ghana. Endnotes
- <sup>18</sup> Grantee phone interview with author, August and September 2011.
- <sup>19</sup> Grantee phone interview with author, November 2011.
- <sup>20</sup> WaterAid-Ethiopia. Assessment of the Health Impacts of WaterAid Ethiopia's Techo-Kella Water, Sanitation and Hygiene Project at Tenna District, Oromiya Region, Ethiopia, August 2010. Unpublished.
- <sup>21</sup> Grantee phone interview with author, January 2012.
- <sup>22</sup> Abebaw Kebede, Haregewein Admassu et al. Research into women's experiences and their empowerment through a WASH intervention. April 2010. CARE-Ethiopia. Unpublished.
- <sup>23</sup> A grant to undertake this effort has not yet been made but is under consideration.
- <sup>24</sup> Written response to questionnaire.
- <sup>25</sup> Written response to questionnaire.
- <sup>26</sup> Interview with author, November 2011.
- <sup>27</sup> FSG. US WASH Advocacy: Landscape Report. Submitted to the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, the Howard Buffet Foundation and Conrad N. Hilton Foundation, February 2011. Published March 2011. ([http://www.fsg.org/Portals/0/Uploads/Documents/PDF/US\\_WASH\\_Advocacy.pdf](http://www.fsg.org/Portals/0/Uploads/Documents/PDF/US_WASH_Advocacy.pdf)).
- <sup>28</sup> Programmatic recommendations, based on the author's conversations with grantees and Foundation staff, and a desk review of grant documents, were presented in a separate internal document to the Foundation.
- <sup>29</sup> The 2011 grants to WSA and Water for People will evaluate the functionality of water points; they are not *per se* evaluations of the unique approaches adopted by UNICEF, WaterAid and World Vision in West Africa.
- <sup>30</sup> Triple-S is a six-year, multicountry initiative coordinated by IRC and funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. It seeks to identify sustainable approaches to safe water delivery and access by moving away from project-based and stand-alone interventions. (<http://www.irc.nl/page/45530>).

# Appendix

## Conrad N. Hilton Foundation Support for Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene Programs, 1990-2012

