

# Governance Research on Water Systems (GROWS) USAID Toolkit for Improved Rural Water Governance Programming

June 2022



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# About this Toolkit

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GROWS was awarded following a Broad Agency Announcement from the USAID Africa Bureau's Conflict, Peacebuilding and Governance Division focused on exploring the intersection between private sector engagement and good governance for improved development outcomes.

The toolkit is designed for Democracy, Human Rights and Governance (DRG) Officers, Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) Leads, Private Sector Engagement Leads, and other USAID Mission staff.

## **This toolkit will:**

- Highlight GROWS key research findings on approaches for improving rural water governance;
- Present WASH background information;
- Assist in designing of water and governance activities that foster greater accountability, transparency and subsequently trust; and,
- Provide guidance on what water and governance indicators to use and how to monitor those indicators in order to evaluate progress.

# Index



Exec

## Executive Summary

- Context and Opportunity
- Key Research Questions
- Approach and Key Findings
- How to Use the Toolkit

1

## GROWS Key Findings and Overview

- Key Findings
- GROWS Overview
- Rural Water Sector Background
- Governance and Rural Drinking Water Indicators
- GROWS Research Framework

2

## Rural Water Sector Overview

- Introduction
- WASH for Development
- WASH at USAID
- Rural Water Technologies
- Rural Water Management Models

3

## Designing and Evaluating Integrated Water and Governance Activities

- Design Support Overview
- WASH Governance Scorecards
- Landscape Snapshots
- USAID Water Governance Indicators
- Utilizing Data to Improve Rural Water Governance
- USAID Water Activities Country Reference Guide

4

## Annexes

- Landscape and Research Findings
- Tanzania Quantitative Findings



# Executive Summary

## Context and Opportunity

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We are seven years into the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Despite this, the world is not on track to achieve SDG target 6.1, which calls for “universal and equitable access to safe and affordable drinking water for all by 2030.” In rural sub-Saharan Africa only 49 percent of the population has at least basic access to drinking water services, 17 percent has limited access and 34 percent use unimproved or surface water sources (JMP, 2021).

Governance challenges are often cited as limiting the progress of increasing access to water services. In addition, lack of water access can impact how citizens view their governments (Afrobarometer, 2022).

The U.S. Global Water Strategy identifies that providing high-quality drinking water services presents an opportunity for governments to advance core democratic values around transparency, trust and accountability, while also promoting women’s empowerment.

## GROWS was Guided by the Following Key Research Questions:

1. How can rural communities and local government authorities contribute to improved governance to encourage private sector engagement and hold water service providers accountable?
2. How can private sector service providers contribute to improved governance and hold rural communities and local governments accountable for reliable payments and stable markets?
3. What are the contextual elements (i.e. community organizations, governance structures, business models, or market-derived tools) that enable private sector actors to be successful in providing sustainable rural water services?

To address these questions, a consortium of partners completed quantitative and qualitative field research as well as a desktop landscape review. The field research included interviews, focus group discussions, and surveys with key water sector stakeholders, including local and national government authorities, NGOs, civil society organizations, funders/donors, private sector actors, and water users from rural communities. The landscape research considered the whole of sub-Saharan Africa, but the field research had particular focus on rural locations in Kenya, Uganda, and Tanzania.

## Approach and Key Findings

To dive deeper and explore the interconnections between good governance and rural water services, USAID funded a three-year research activity called, the Governance Research on Water Systems (GROWS). GROWS sought to identify and disseminate innovative governance and private sector-derived models and tools to improve rural water services that will help accelerate eliminating extreme poverty in sub-Saharan Africa.

GROWS viewed governance as the set of systems involved in decision-making about water management and water service delivery, with a focus on the implementation process. GROWS considered four components of effective water system governance: **transparency, accountability, trust, and equity** (together, TATE).

[Learn more about TATE here.](#)

GROWS consists of four partners, including the Global Environment & Technology Foundation (GETF), The Ohio State University, Global Partners for Development (GPFd) and the U.S. Water Partnership (USWP).

## TATE Framework and Findings

GROWS explored governance challenges for rural drinking water services and examples of successful responses to them.

The table below provides brief definitions of the TATE components and key findings associated with each component.

Governance Component	Component Definition	Key GROWS Research Findings
<b>Transparency</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Proper transparency is described by USAID as creating “an environment where governments and public officials engage in the clear disclosure of rules, plans, processes, and actions in a form that is readily accessible to all. Transparency promotes accountability by providing the public with information about what the government is doing” (USAID, 2013).</li> <li>• With respect to water service provision, transparency requires that information be available and accessible to the public on all financial, political, and managerial transactions related to water systems.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• When users were aware of how their money was being spent (e.g., repairs or maintenance), willingness to pay for water and trust in the service provider increased.</li> <li>• Communities preferred that communication around the water system was shared via dialogue at community meetings.</li> <li>• While the use of technology can be helpful in increasing the amount and accuracy of information, its effectiveness depends on it being made accessible, understandable, and useable for users.</li> <li>• Transparency was shown to be of critical importance across all countries and types of water service provision and has a positive influence on other aspects of governance, particularly accountability and trust.</li> </ul>
<b>Accountability</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• USAID defines accountability as “the systems, procedures and mechanisms that ensure that public officials and institutions perform their stated duties and uphold their responsibilities to the public while imposing restraints on their power and authority and providing for redress or sanction when these duties and responsibilities are not met” (USAID, 2013).</li> <li>• GROWS operationalized accountability as the structures and behaviors that ensure accountability between providers and users.</li> <li>• GROWS was particularly interested in the degree to which users perceive water system providers as responsive to their needs, and the degree to which providers anticipate reliable payment from users.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In all contexts, increasing a community’s sense of ownership and involvement with the system led to greater accountability between the users and the service providers in a bidirectional manner.</li> <li>• Two effective methods for ensuring accountability were: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– the use of sanctions (i.e., taking away access to water for an individual or a community in the absence of payment)</li> <li>– smart meter technology (i.e., automated methods for dispensing and paying for water at a communal tap or distribution point).</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Both methods ensured that users paid equitably for water: Smart meters ensured that providers could not overcharge and helped to provide accurate information about billing, keeping the provider accountable for services.</li> </ul>

## TATE Framework and Findings

Governance Component	Component Definition	Key GROWS Research Findings
<b>Trust</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) explains that “trust is important for the success of a wide range of public policies that depend on behavioural responses from the public. Trust is necessary to increase the confidence of investors and consumers. Trust is essential for key economic activities, most notably finance. Trust in institutions is important for the success of many government policies, programmes and regulations that depend on cooperation and compliance of citizens” (OECD, 2018).</li> <li>Within the context of rural water provision, trust manifests as confidence that providers will act in the best interest of users, maintain a reliable service, and secure technologies.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Significant issues were identified in the ability of a user community to trust the service providers, attendants, and managers of the water system.</li> <li>If a community has a bad experience with one provider, they may be unwilling to pay for future water services or may seek water from other, potentially unsafe, sources.</li> <li>Trust was eroded when users felt that a provider was dishonest and/or could not account for how much water was provided, at what price, and if payment was equitable for all users.</li> <li>Users will increase their trust in a provider who:             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>demonstrates a record of providing rapid and appropriate responses to any system issues; and,</li> <li>engages frequently and in a meaningful, inclusive way with the community.</li> </ul> </li> <li>Technologies that help monitor the dispensing of water and money collected can increase trust in the fairness of the system and willingness to pay.</li> <li>Communities in all three countries trusted a water system more if they felt a sense of ownership in it.</li> </ul>
<b>Equity</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>For equity, GROWS focused on equality of opportunity as well as equality of outcomes associated with not only use of the water system but also level of participation in the governance of that system.</li> <li>In the context of water provision in rural East Africa, GROWS focused on inclusion along gender, ethnic, and economic lines. Equity was described in terms of ensuring accessible water for all people and ensuring equity in decision-making, mainly through women’s participating on community water boards.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The inclusion of women on community water boards did not necessarily equate to equitable decision-making. Women were said to not speak up in meetings or engage in leadership. The inclusion of women is necessary, but their engagement must go beyond just meeting quotas.</li> <li>Communities recognized the importance of ensuring the most vulnerable in their communities (e.g., the disabled) had access to clean, safe water.</li> <li>Water users also felt it was important to make sure that no one in the community benefited from the system more than others.</li> <li>Transparency in decision-making, accountability and trust with system managers can help ensure equitable water access in the community.</li> </ul>

# 10 Key Insights

Improved governance was generally found when the following elements were present:

2.

## Access to Financing

for rural water providers, especially in areas without economies of scale



3.

## Regular Maintenance

checks and repairs by a qualified or professional technician



4.

## Formal Documentation

of ownership, roles and responsibilities for water services, including performance standards



5.

## Well-defined, Agreed-upon and Well-known Tariff Structures

which are widely known and agreed upon.



6.

## Community Involvement

throughout the entire water service delivery process including planning, decision-making and oversight



7.

## Equitable Access

to water, regardless of ability to pay



8.

## Incentive Providers

through financial or regulatory means to ensure water is provided to marginalized groups.



9.

## Effective Process for Recourse

for recourse / consequences if obligations are not met



10.

## Mass Communication

(public meetings, SMS, WhatsApp, etc.) with accurate information around water system technical and financial performance that is accessible, understandable, and user-friendly for all.



# How to Use this Toolkit

The GROWS toolkit is structured into four sections. It is designed to share background and contextual information as well as technical guidance for integrating governance and rural water activities.

## Section 1

### GROWS Key Findings and Overview

This section provides key findings, GROWS overview, rural water governance background, and insights on private sector engagement for rural water services.

## Section 2

### Rural Water Sector Overview

This section is designed to provide DRG Officers with an overview of the driving factors of water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) at USAID for intersectoral collaborations. This section also includes information on rural drinking water technologies and management systems.

## Section 3

### Designing and Evaluating Integrated Water and Governance Activities

This section includes an interactive scorecard to help DRG Officers both evaluate existing water activities across four key governance indicators (transparency, accountability, trust and equity (TATE)) and design new rural water activities, which integrate the four identified governance indicators. The scorecard shares guidance around collecting and using data for improved integrated programming.

In addition, this section includes an overview of potential U.S. Government Standard and custom indicators that can be used to track water and governance outcomes.

Finally, this section includes an introduction to the Water Point Data Exchange (WPdx), an open platform for sharing, accessing, and using water point data to improve governance by supporting evidence-based decisions. WPdx provides insights on basic water service coverage for different administrative regions, and recommendations on where to prioritize rehabilitations, new construction, and preventative maintenance to inform USAID program design.

## Section 4

### Annexes

This section includes the full landscape report by The Ohio State University and the field research by Global Partners for Development. These reports include descriptions of the methodology, stakeholder groups, and responses to the questions.

## Citations

*Afrobarometer*, 2022. *The battle for water and sanitation*. <https://www.afrobarometer.org/articles/africa-losing-ground-battle-water-and-sanitation/>

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