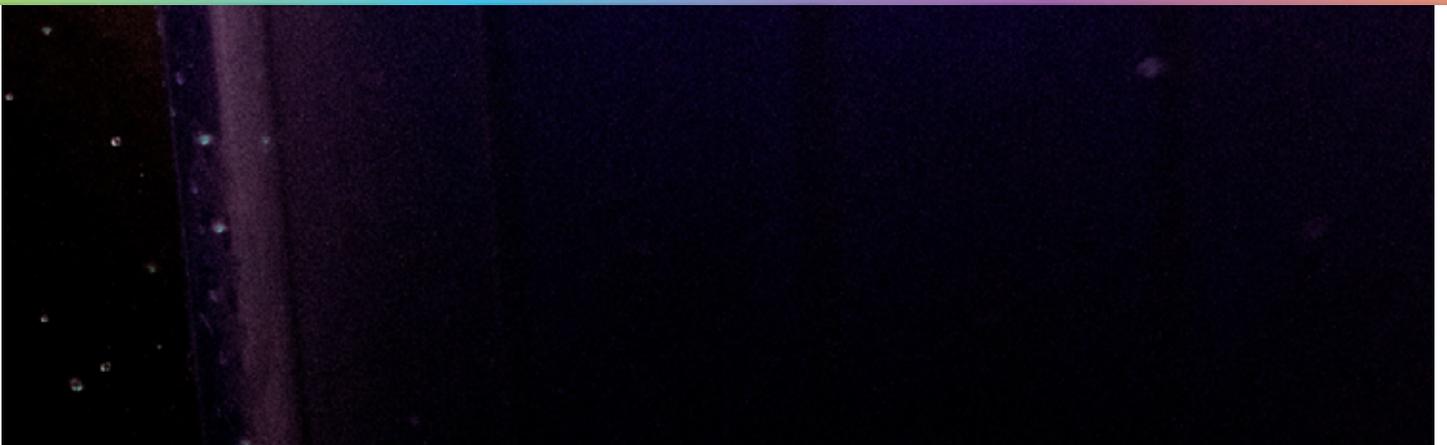




**WATER SECURITY STRATEGY**  
for 2030



# OUR VISION

*Water is effectively and holistically managed to support human well-being, socio-economic development, and the environment—with an emphasis on ensuring equitable access to safe water and sanitation for the very poor, the vulnerable, and disaster-affected populations.*

In 2018, the United Nations estimated that roughly 3.6 billion people live in areas vulnerable to water scarcity and that number could reach 5.7 billion in 2050.<sup>1</sup> Global warming (climate change), over-extraction of water from aquifers, and contamination of surface and groundwater all threaten ecosystems and freshwater availability.<sup>2</sup> In nearly every part of the world, water is being polluted at a scale that threatens human health and economic development—for this and future generations.<sup>3</sup> The ramifications of water resource loss are staggering.

Water is an essential need for all life. For human beings, communities that have safe and adequate water and sanitation access are more likely to thrive economically; without it, many will suffer from disease outbreak, poverty, and even displacement due to water scarcity. Indeed, Pope Francis, when speaking to the Pontifical Academy of Sciences in February 2018, noted, “The right to water is essential for the survival of persons and decisive for the future of humanity.”<sup>4</sup>

Globally, women and girls carry the primary responsibility for domestic water supply, are at increased risk of violence due to poor access to water and sanitation, often have limited ability to sustain services due to poor purchasing power, and have limited rights over water resources and decision-making authority concerning water use. Women are disproportionately affected by natural and manmade disasters in a host of ways.<sup>5</sup> At the same time, “women also play a crucial but often unrecognized role in managing water for livelihoods and food security,” where women account for 43% of the agriculture workforce.<sup>6</sup>

Water security is foundational to humanitarian and development programs at Catholic Relief Services (CRS). Recognizing that threats multiply when water is unavailable, CRS adopts a vision centered on water security: *A Water Secure World for All*. We assert that

water security is a human right, inalienably tied to our health, dignity, and socio-economic development. We realize that water security for all is an elusive goal that requires high levels of collaboration, consensus-building, and collective action. It demands an ambitious undertaking, reliant on partnerships, leveraging a variety of local and external resources, and a strong commitment—a commitment to dream big and act even bigger.

Water is a common good that transits landscapes and terrains. It belongs to no one individual permanently; yet, its stewardship is an imperative for everyone. Through 2030, CRS continues to strive to achieve its vision by empowering this stewardship in three principal areas:

1. water- and climate-smart agriculture interlock green and blue water development<sup>7</sup> while pollution prevention and water reuse are modeled after nature’s processes for sustainable landscapes and resilient agriculture;
2. innovative, scalable, adaptable, resource-neutral, and gender-responsive water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) services are delivered across the humanitarian to development continuum; and
3. to reach scale, CRS supports improved governance of local systems to be more equitable and inclusive, while leveraging financial resources from diverse sources.

To contribute to our water security for all vision, we support and align with global efforts, including the United Nations (UN)’ Sustainable Development Goal 6 (SDG6), the United States (US)’ Global Water Strategy, the World Bank’s Water Security Strategy, and CRS’ own agency 2030 strategy’s ambition to catalyze transformational change at scale for the world’s poorest, most vulnerable, and marginalized.



Photo by Oscar Leiva/Silverlight for CRS

# CRS AND WATER

*The contribution of climate-related stress to the global disease burden represents 5.5 million disability-adjusted life years annually.<sup>11</sup>*



Photo by Lisa Murray for CRS

## CRS' history in water

In 1943, the Roman Catholic Bishops of the United States established Catholic Relief Services (CRS) to help war-torn Europe and its refugees recover. Over the years, we expanded our efforts to provide disaster relief and to address the cycles of poverty, including food distribution, food production, and broader development. The first CRS clean water project launched in the 1950s. Over the next half-century, our water assistance focused on humanitarian and non-emergency domestic WASH services.

In 2018, CRS supported \$30 million of WASH activities, reaching 8 million people. Through agriculture and other programs, our water activities reached millions more. This work includes WASH services (such as community water supply and domestic sanitation systems), hygiene promotion, sustainable land and water management, water- and climate-smart agriculture, municipal water and sanitation service financing, and capacity strengthening of communities and governments.

## Water security at the onset of the SDGs

Despite years of effort by CRS and many other actors to address water (for health and agriculture), sanitation, and hygiene issues, the context has arguably become more complex and challenging. In 2015, the global population without access to safely managed water supply had been reduced to 29%;<sup>8</sup> however, the population without access to safely managed sanitation remained over 60%.<sup>9</sup> Agriculture accounts for 70% of the world's freshwater consumption, mostly through large-scale irrigation, while 80% of the world's farmers subsist on rain-fed food production.

The majorities of unserved populations have subsistence livelihoods in rural contexts or live on the fringes of informal, urban, and urbanizing settlements. Population growth, resource competition, gender inequality, and lack of investment hinder the ability to provide water and safely managed sanitation to these populations. Increased environmental degradation,

desertification, flooding, pollution, natural and human-caused disasters, climate change,<sup>10,11</sup> deforestation, migration, displacement, urbanization, and water scarcity leave people living on marginal land and more susceptible to water-related diseases.

## Water security through 2030 at CRS

Pope Francis' encyclical *Laudato Si'*<sup>12</sup> recognizes the importance of water. The encyclical calls out the disparities in access, quality, and use of water between the wealthier, industrialized parts of the world and poorer populations. It notes that in many parts of the world, exploitation of water is exceeding natural resource limits—the problem of “peak water”—while still failing to satisfy the needs of the poorest.<sup>13</sup>

With the launch of its Water Security for 2030 strategy, CRS prioritizes the critical role water plays in catalyzing transformational outcomes at scale through its new agency strategy:

- Equitable and participatory management of water resources contributes to *social cohesion and building peaceful and just societies*.
- WASH plays a core component in *helping people survive and thrive in the face of disasters, including its critical role in rebuilding dignified homes*.
- Water security provides a foundation element to provide *resilient livelihoods in sustainable landscapes*.
- Access to water and sanitation and improved hygiene practices is a critical enabler for *children and families to reach their full health and developmental potential*.
- WASH improvement and water stewardship help *protect children by engaging civil society and increasing youth employment*.



Photo by Hugh Rutherford for CRS

To achieve CRS' global water security ambitions, we recognize that a project-level view of development is limiting; instead, we operate through approaches, designed for scaling. We work through partnerships, improve systems, strengthen capacity, reinforce strong leadership, coordinate efforts, and promote gender equality.

### Partner with local partners and the local government

At our core, CRS' partnership model is founded on long-term relationships with local partners—frequently Caritas<sup>14</sup> (at local and national levels), local governments, and other partners. In many ways, these partnerships provide CRS a reach unparalleled in the development space. They build on grass-roots relationships and favor local solutions that enable immediate action when responding to disasters while allowing long-term commitments that extend beyond any funding stream.

To contribute to *achieving its water security vision*, CRS also engages a variety of other partnerships to form consortiums, guide research and learning, and implement high quality programs. Examples include local and international non-governmental organizations (NGOs), farmers' cooperatives, research institutes, universities, and many others.

### Systems and governance

While CRS' water (for health and agriculture), sanitation, and hygiene programming has historically operated at a community level, our 2030 vision demands a broader reach. To contribute to the achievement of universal water security, CRS deploys a systems lens to analyze watershed and landscape health; to engage, plan, and respond through national and sub-national policy, actors, and partners; and to strengthen existing public and private systems.

For CRS, scale and sustainability begin with improved and gender-responsive water governance at all levels. We advocate for improved regulations and policies, and we support networks (e.g., civil society, the private sector, and government)—often underdeveloped—to enhance the results they achieve. CRS' water security programs engage various government ministries with responsibilities in water, including Health, Gender, Education, Youth, Rural and Urban Development, Mines and Energy, Environment, Local Development, Agriculture, and others, as well as national civil institutions working in water governance.



Photo by Rick D'Elia for CRS

To improve governance and build effective systems, CRS adheres to Agenda for Change principles,<sup>15</sup> various directives for environmental sustainability (including those from a range of international organizations, e.g., UNEP, UNOCHA, USAID, UNHCR, WWF, MSB, and IUCN), and national- to community-level planning.

### Capacity strengthening, leadership, and coordination

CRS recognizes the many capacity strengthening needs required to achieve *water security for all*; while technical skills transfer is central to our work, problem-solving is also a strong focus. We aim to empower and catalyze individuals and institutions to become agents of change.

Good leadership begets good governance, and CRS—along with its partners—help create transformational leadership at all levels to multiply our efforts. Leaders understand the role water security plays in their successes and are empowered to make changes to this end.

### Gender mainstreaming

Astute awareness of and action to address gender disparities and dynamics are essential for achieving and sustaining results. CRS' water security programming recognizes that structural violence and inequalities faced by women and girls undermine human development, and we adopt a gender mainstreaming approach to ensure that attention to the goal of gender equality is embedded in all activities. In doing so, CRS strives to enable equitable access to water resources, empowers women in decision making and management, and ensures male engagement to achieve gender equality and security.

# STRATEGIC GOAL AND PRIORITY AREAS

To achieve our water security aims, CRS' overarching goal is to ensure that vulnerable communities and households achieve water security in ways that contribute to saving lives, improving health, protecting the environment, ending poverty, preserving dignity, promoting gender equality, and building peaceful societies.

All activities in the water security space undertaken by CRS are driven by this goal.



Photo by Lisa Murray for CRS



**PRIORITY AREA 1:  
WATER IN SUSTAINABLE  
LANDSCAPES**

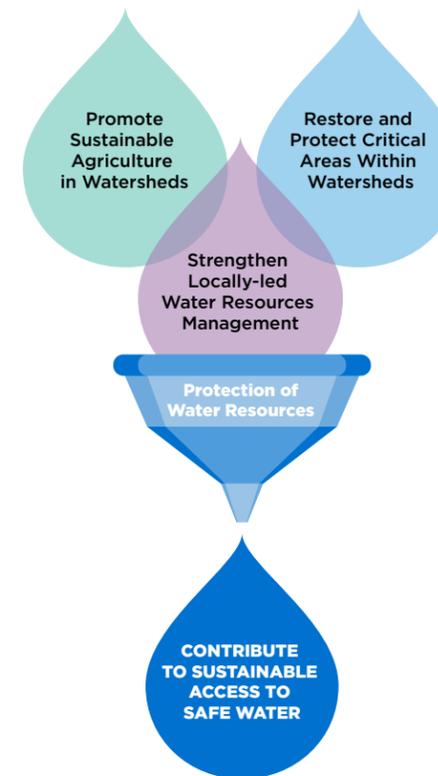
**Strategic objective**

Communities, individuals, and groups conserve, restore, and sustainably manage their water resources.

**Background**

Rapid population growth in the last century has accelerated the demand for water for agricultural production, for energy consumption, and for industrial production.<sup>16</sup> Food is at the center of this picture; in the past 30 years, food production has doubled, but the amount of water used for irrigation has tripled.<sup>17</sup> One of the greatest challenges we face today is to increase food production to meet the demand of the future population as our water resources are increasingly limited.<sup>18</sup>

Globally, “80% of agricultural land relies on rain-fed production systems,”<sup>19</sup> while 70% of freshwater is pumped and diverted from rivers and groundwater for irrigation. Unsustainable agriculture (including crop production, livestock grazing, and managed forests) erodes soils, reduces water recharge, and degrades water quality, all which have negative consequences for people who depend on water and land resources. At the same time, an overinvestment in blue water (e.g., irrigation) versus green water (e.g., nature-based, rain-fed) solutions has left many behind.<sup>7, 20</sup>



**Our work**

SDG6 emphasizes applying the principles of integrated water resources management (IWRM)<sup>21</sup> for achieving economic development, social equity, and environmental sustainability by managing water, land, and related resources together.

CRS recognizes and prioritizes the foundational role that water plays for resilience<sup>22</sup> and human development. We work at the nexus of 1) sustainable agriculture, 2) watershed management, and 3) water supply to support governments, partners, communities, and all stakeholders to adopt and apply integrated and improved, gender-responsive land and water resource management practices for more resilient and equitable agriculture systems and improved water security.<sup>23</sup> We promote and apply gender-responsive water- and climate-smart agriculture practices,<sup>24</sup> deploying soil restoration and agriculture techniques that maximize water efficiency and productivity at both farm and landscape scales, while emphasizing and advocating for investment in rain-fed agriculture systems.



Photo by Oscar Leiva/Silverlight for CRS

**PRIORITY AREA 2:  
WASH IN HUMANITARIAN AND  
DEVELOPMENT CONTEXTS**

**Strategic objective**

Vulnerable and disaster-affected communities and individuals benefit from equitable, safe, and sustained WASH services to stay healthy, to improve well-being, and to live in safe and dignity enhancing environments.

**Background**

WASH practices are central to saving lives and **upholding human dignity**. The goal of WASH is to contribute to the reduction of morbidity and mortality by addressing the basic survival needs of communities and vulnerable populations, eliminating risks of WASH-related preventable diseases and building populations' resilience to future crises. Inadequate access to WASH services for billions of people remains a global challenge that is rooted in poverty, inequality, and poor governance. This leads to environmental degradation and undermines a variety of human development outcomes, including health and nutrition, economic empowerment, and ultimately, **just and peaceful societies**.

CRS approaches WASH with an innovative and integrated vision that operates across the humanitarian to development continuum. We work through both rapid and long-term approaches by responding to natural and manmade disasters, slow onset and protracted crises, as well as working on preparedness, mitigation, resilience building, good governance, technical support, financial access to water and sanitation, climate change adaptation, and productive uses of water. Because of CRS' wide presence on-the-ground through long-term partnerships, we are accompanying communities and partners transitioning from immediate and protracted emergency responses to sustainable WASH service delivery.

**Our work**

In **humanitarian** contexts, CRS' WASH programming strives to respond to the immediate- and longer-term

needs of affected populations in gender-responsive and equitable ways. Our interventions complement or integrate with other sectorial programming such as shelter, health, nutrition, and livelihoods. To achieve our aims, we:

1. coordinate and align with Core Humanitarian Standards, Sphere Minimum Standards for WASH, CRS' Protection Mainstreaming guidelines, CRS' Minimum Standards for Mainstreaming Gender Equality, Global/National WASH Cluster standards, and local codes and regulations;
2. influence WASH and water security policies and practice;
3. prioritize social and gender equity, dignity, and protection;
4. mitigate against possible negative unintended consequences, including gender-based violence;
5. deploy market-based approaches where and when appropriate;
6. engage and communicate with affected communities, peer actors, and national institutions at all times with relevant information;
7. invest in WASH information management and sharing systems;
8. invest in WASH monitoring and accountability systems;
9. mainstream WASH disaster risk reduction (DRR) approaches within multi-sectoral preparedness plans that support populations to develop resilient WASH solutions, including outbreak preparedness; and
10. deploy a water security lens across all WASH interventions, in recognition that environmental degradation and sustainable natural resource management are increasingly critical issues in emergencies for both affected and host communities.

In **development** contexts, CRS' WASH work includes gender-responsive stand-alone activities, such as municipal sanitation and community water service delivery, as well as multi-sectoral programs in which WASH components contribute to other objectives (e.g.,



nutrition, health, livelihood, or food security), all in support of achieving SDG6. In water, we work towards universal, equitable, and sustainable access to safe and affordable drinking water services. In sanitation, we target universal and sustainable access to improved facilities and services (including safe management of human excreta, wastewater, vector control, and solid waste) along the chain from containment to disposal or transformation, treatment, and reuse. We are tackling these needs in communities, at households, and in key institutions (e.g., health facilities and schools). These WASH results in development contexts can only be achieved when we:

1. prioritize the needs of the most vulnerable and marginalized populations, including women and girls and people with disabilities;
2. address the requisite hygiene practices required to achieve health gains;
3. engage and give agency to all stakeholders—including government, civil society, private sector (for market-based solutions), communities, individuals, etc.—to plan for and deliver sustainable outcomes;
4. support systems strengthening, improved governance, and coordination across sectors;
5. install appropriate and sustainable infrastructure and services; and
6. support government policies, strategies, and plans related to water security.

**CRS' focus on urban WASH**

By 2050, an estimated 68% of the world's population will live in urban areas; many will reside in informal settlements that are not incorporated into municipal systems and lack appropriate WASH services, thus increasing the risk of disasters and outbreaks (e.g., cholera).<sup>25</sup> Though CRS has traditionally focused on rural food security, livelihoods, and socio-economic development, increasingly our WASH efforts use an urban migration lens to help achieve SDG6. WASH service provision in secondary cities, peri-urban settlements and slums is a core part of our work in both humanitarian and development programs.



**PRIORITY AREA 3:  
WATER FINANCING AND  
GOVERNANCE**

**Strategic objective**

Communities and individuals engage with relevant stakeholders (government, civil society, private sector, and others) to plan, deliver, monitor, and mobilize financing for water resources management and WASH services.

**Background**

In 2016, the World Bank estimated the cost of achieving SDG6 at \$1.7 trillion.<sup>26</sup> Official Development Assistance (ODA) currently committed to the water sector, including water/sanitation services and water resources management, amounts to less than 20% of that figure.<sup>27</sup> Yet, financial resources are not the only barrier to reaching SDG6. Water management is inherently “a political process, because it deals with reallocating water, the allocation of financial resources, and the implementation of environmental goals.”<sup>28</sup> Leveraging sufficient finance and stewardship resources is not possible without strong governance and enabling conditions. In order to achieve SDG6, we must address the gaps in both finance and governance.

**Our work**

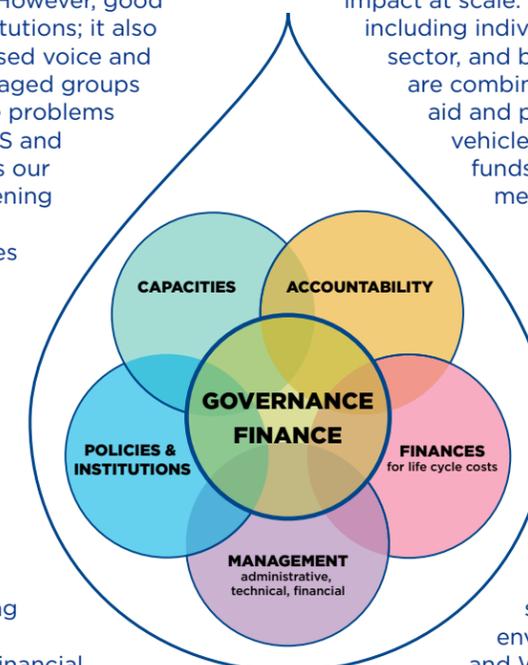
Because water is a public good, ensuring sustainable water security requires systems change; it requires fostering an enabling environment and supporting governments and local institutions to manage their



own resources effectively. In *Laudato Si*, Pope Francis cites the necessity to foster policies and institutions that address issues holistically.<sup>29</sup> However, good water governance is not just institutions; it also requires social capital and increased voice and agency of traditionally disadvantaged groups to enable communities to resolve problems related to public goods.<sup>30</sup> For CRS and our partners, water governance is our entry point for systems strengthening and scale. All water development incorporates a suite of approaches designed to advocate for and support accountability, responsiveness, gender equity, transparency in institutions, and participation by communities. We carry out this work at watershed and landscape scales, working with multiple stakeholders impacted by water resource use across a range of rural and urban contexts.

To help address the gap in funding needed to achieve SDG6, CRS catalyzes and mobilizes diverse financial

resources to reduce water scarcity, extending beyond conventional, grant-based fundraising to achieve impact at scale. Funding from a variety of sources, including individuals, communities, the private sector, and both local and national governments, are combined with and supported by traditional aid and philanthropy through diverse funding vehicles like social-impact investment funds, guarantees, pay-for-success mechanisms, and green bonds.



Ultimately, water governance and finance mobilization are interrelated and mutually reinforcing. CRS and its partners are working to expand and replicate models that successfully integrate governance and financing for water security (e.g., Azure,<sup>31</sup> Water Funds,<sup>32</sup> etc.) and to identify new models (e.g., leveraging remittance capital) that can catalyze change at scale and improve the enabling environment for sustainable landscapes and WASH.



# MEASURE AND DO BETTER



Photo by Michael Stulman/CRS

In the SDG era, individual project reporting matters less than tracking achievement of transformational change. To achieve greater water security, our measurement systems inform understanding of how approaches and programs succeed or fail at scale, while also driving continual improvement. They always seek to do better.

## Contributing to global monitoring

Achievement of CRS' *water security for all* vision requires its monitoring systems to feed into global efforts that track SDG6. Indicators for drinking water, sanitation, and hygiene are clearly defined and accepted across the sector via the Joint Monitoring Program's (JMP's) service ladders for WASH.<sup>33</sup> Global indicators for water in landscapes, water governance/finance, and gender inequality are less harmonized, and CRS contributes its voice and experience to refine how best to measure and improve this integration. Because SDG indicators are measured at the country level, CRS engages in country-level monitoring systems to report results.

## Agency and performance monitoring

In line with CRS' agency strategy, water security work feeds into agency-level indicators to track progress on achieving priority humanitarian and development outcomes. It invests in establishing a measurement system that captures above project-level outcomes and delivers value for money, including enabling improved learning, decision making, evidence-based storytelling, and accountability to stakeholders.

Performance monitoring is essential for CRS to develop and improve deliverables; to assess, reflect, and strengthen approaches; and to deliver high-quality and impactful results.



Photo by Katie Price/CRS

## Sustainability measurement

Sustainability is embedded in all measures. While a wide variety of methods are available, the following five key factors in measuring sustainability drive CRS' approaches: *policies/institutional, financial, management, technical, and environmental*. Measuring coverage and project outcomes is insufficient; CRS interventions strive to evaluate the level of service over time, including performance of key technical, financial, and management indicators to better inform local planning and decisions for delivery of safely managed services for all.

## Environmental due diligence

All water interventions at CRS, be they agriculture, health, or emergency-related, incorporate environmental impact and risks in their monitoring. Individual water production points are monitored and evaluated based upon potential impact on the natural environment, effect on water scarcity, and impact on other users. Likewise, agricultural practices incorporate measurements of water availability and change, as well as downstream impact.

## Information and Communications Technologies for Development (ICT4D)

CRS deploys technology strategically to achieve its water security aims. Where necessary, we continue to innovate (e.g., developing water balance tools such as a water benefits calculator<sup>34</sup>); elsewhere, we deploy and contribute to novel technologies and efforts (e.g., digital water dispensers, satellite monitoring tools, data collection systems, water meters, leakage sensors, and water point data exchanges) to improve our services and those of our partners.

# CROSS-CUTTING THEMES



Recognizing that vertical silos create barriers for achieving transformational change, we are breaking out of these silos by integrating a variety of cross-cutting themes across our programs. To achieve our water security goals, our water team works with colleagues across gender, youth, partnerships, disability and inclusion, conflict and peacebuilding, agriculture and climate change, protection, emergency response, and other sectors and sub-sectors.

Access to water, whether limited by natural disasters, **climate change**, **urbanization**, pollution, or over-extraction, can cause or exacerbate **conflicts**.<sup>35</sup> This water insecurity can lead to civil unrest and localized violence. Combining water insecurity with

a growing **youth** population that encounters higher unemployment and economic pressures can result in heightened risk of violence and political instability. Such water stress can be exploited by non-state actors, violent extremist organizations (VEOs), insurgents, and other belligerents. By focusing on water insecurity, CRS accepts the interconnectedness of these themes and understands that achieving our vision requires working across them, whether through **job creation** for water and sanitation entrepreneurs, **protection** mainstreaming to ensure the safety of women, children, and the elderly, or **inclusion** mainstreaming so that people living with **disabilities** receive the same access to water and sanitation that others do.

# OUR TEAM

At CRS, water is a nexus that connects our agency, our programs, and our people. We rely on this network of people to ensure water is available for people, plants, and production. Water security is the job of everyone. If you work at CRS, you work in water.

It is also a partnership. We can only achieve our mission of providing *water security for all*—every day, and in every country—when our partners thrive. As such, our team is not any individual or small group of individuals. Rather, it is the collective of agro-economists, water engineers, health practitioners, accountants, operations managers, leaders, soil scientists, nutritionists, geographers, gender specialists, doctors, behavioral scientists, entrepreneurs, and so many more.

We are thoughtful. We think outside the box. We embrace the big questions and seek answers to them. We are change-makers and leaders. We are committed. We are bold.

We are hundreds—indeed thousands—of people working with millions of others to build a better and more water secure tomorrow.

For more information, please go to [crs.org/water](https://crs.org/water) or contact us at [water@crs.org](mailto:water@crs.org).

Find us on Twitter @[CRS\\_Expertise](https://twitter.com/CRS_Expertise).

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