

WHY SHOULD THE GOVERNMENT AND PRIVATE SECTOR COME TOGETHER TO PROVIDE IMPROVED ACCESS TO CLEAN DRINKING WATER?

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Abstract. *This article examines the importance of cooperation between governments and the private sector in improving access to clean drinking water. Despite being recognized as a fundamental human right, access to safe drinking water remains a major challenge for millions of people worldwide due to climate change, population growth, and inadequate infrastructure. The study analyzes the strengths and limitations of both governments and private companies when acting independently and argues that sustainable solutions can only be achieved through partnership. Governments provide legal frameworks, public oversight, and social equity, while the private sector contributes technological innovation, investment, and operational efficiency. The article also highlights the situation in Uzbekistan, including recent public-private partnership initiatives and investments in water infrastructure. The findings demonstrate that collaboration between the government and private sector can improve water supply systems, enhance public health, reduce social inequality, and ensure long-term water sustainability for future generations.*

Keywords: *Clean drinking water; Water supply; Public-private partnership (PPP); Sustainable development; Water management; Government policy; Private sector; Water infrastructure; Public health; Uzbekistan; Aral Sea crisis; Water scarcity.*

The International Water, Sanitation and Hygiene Foundation (IWSH) is an international non-governmental organization established to promote the rational use of water and to improve sanitation and hygiene standards globally. It has achieved significant results in this field and actively collaborates with many governments and private organizations. Access to clean drinking water is a fundamental human right, yet many people around the world still lack this opportunity. Due to climate change, population growth, and inadequate infrastructure, water scarcity has become a global issue. In Uzbekistan, this issue is especially visible through the tragedy of the Aral Sea. The drying up of the Aral Sea is not only an environmental problem but also leads to clean water shortages, health issues, and social inequality. The disappearance of the Aral Sea has become not just a local but a global concern. In such situations, one of the main solutions is cooperation between the government and the private sector. While the government holds political authority to protect public health, the private sector contributes innovation, technology, and financial efficiency. This essay explores why such cooperation is necessary, what benefits it can bring, and how it can provide broader opportunities for sustainable water management.

Today, millions of people still lack reliable access to clean drinking water. According to the United Nations, one in four people globally cannot access safe and clean drinking water. This situation threatens not only public health but also economic and social stability. Even in many developed countries, water systems are outdated, technology is insufficient, and infrastructure is weak. Especially in rural areas, people often still have to use contaminated water or carry drinkable water from distant locations, leading to the spread of diseases and an increase in child

and maternal mortality rates. Thus, the issue of access to clean drinking water is a critical global problem.

Governments play a crucial role in independently ensuring access to clean drinking water. They can protect public health by enacting legislation, building infrastructure, and providing affordable water services. If governments perform these tasks independently, there is a greater chance to ensure equity and social justice since the primary goal would be public welfare rather than profit. However, governments acting alone often face budget constraints and lack technological innovation. Moreover, government-driven initiatives may lack long-term efficiency and sustainability. Therefore, ensuring a constant and modern water supply without partnership becomes difficult. Governments, through legislative action and budget allocations, can develop water infrastructure by building new water facilities, constructing purification plants, and modernizing existing systems using advanced technologies. They also regulate essential water usage rules, pricing policies, and environmental standards. Yet, in many countries, government resources are limited, and bureaucratic processes are slow, meaning that governments alone cannot solve the problem efficiently.

If the private sector independently engages in providing clean drinking water, it can achieve significant technological innovation and efficiency. Private companies can quickly modernize water purification and distribution systems, enhancing service quality. Since private companies operate for profit, competition among them accelerates progress. However, if private companies act without government oversight, water services may become accessible only to higher-income groups, further marginalizing the poor. Additionally, profit-driven motives may lead companies to ignore broader social interests. Therefore, the private sector operating independently cannot fully guarantee fairness and equal access. Despite this, private companies can be strong partners to the government by offering advanced technologies, engineering solutions, and investments. For example, smart water filtration equipment, automated monitoring systems, and water conservation technologies are typically introduced by the private sector. Many companies are now supporting clean water initiatives, but even so, the private sector alone cannot ensure social justice. Collaboration with governments remains necessary.

When the government and private sector collaborate, they can achieve more effective, beneficial, and sustainable results. For example, while the government provides legal frameworks and allocates land for infrastructure, the private sector brings technology and investment, leading to faster, higher-quality, and more affordable water supply systems. Such collaborations have already been successfully implemented around the world.

In Uzbekistan, recent years have seen significant government and private sector collaboration to improve access to drinking water. According to a Presidential decree dated October 24, 2023, the water supply and sewage systems of Kogon, Shirin, Yangiyer, and Yangiyul cities are planned to be transferred to private sector management under a public-private partnership model. This aims to modernize water infrastructure and improve service quality.¹

Additionally, the World Bank and the government of Uzbekistan have signed financial and grant agreements to support the development and institutional strengthening of the water supply

¹ <https://www.lex.uz/docs/-6648585?ONDATE=31.10.2023>

sector. As a result, over 500,000 people have gained access to better water supply and sanitation services.²

Moreover, over the past eight years, 27.5 trillion Uzbek soums have been invested in improving water and sanitation services. Of this, 16.5 trillion soums came from the state budget, while \$1 billion was provided by international financial institutions. These investments have resulted in the construction of 3,627 facilities and 40,600 kilometers of drinking water and sewage networks. Through these examples, it becomes clear how beneficial cooperation between the government and the private sector can be.³

In conclusion, although access to clean drinking water is a basic human right, millions of people are still deprived of it. Addressing this global issue cannot be accomplished by governments or the private sector alone; it requires their joint collaboration. Governments ensure political oversight and stability, while the private sector accelerates progress through innovation and investment. Their collaboration not only improves water systems but also promotes public health, prevents disease outbreaks caused by contaminated water, reduces maternal and child mortality rates, and secures opportunities for future generations. Thus, working together has become a necessity of the times, and humanity stands to gain significantly from this partnership.

² <https://www.gazeta.uz/oz/2021/05/18/wb/>

³ https://uza.uz/oz/posts/ozbekistonda-suv-infratuzilmasi-tizimli-islohotlar-va-kelazhak-rezhalari_702417?q=%2Fposts%2Fozbekistonda-suv-infratuzilmasi-tizimli-islohotlar-va-kelazhak-rezhalari_702417