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# PREVENTING A WATER AND SANITATION CRISIS: COVID-19 STORIES FROM THE FIELD

No matter where you are in the world, handwashing with soap is the first line of defense against the COVID-19 pandemic.

However, in many developing countries, this simple task is nearly impossible. Even prior to the pandemic, **3 billion people** around the world did not have access to water at home to enable handwashing, drinking, or growing food. The COVID pandemic puts struggling water systems under further stress, and threatens to roll back progress made on expanding water access to the neediest.

**To mitigate a potential water and sanitation crisis, USAID is leveraging existing water for the world programs and networks to help partner countries keep water flowing during the pandemic and beyond, while also promoting hygiene.** The availability and accessibility of water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) in homes, communities, schools, health facilities, and markets is critical to stopping the spread of COVID-19. It also provides a foundation for safely reopening economies and preventing potential second waves of transmission.

## KEEPING WATER FLOWING WHILE PREVENTING FINANCIAL COLLAPSE

Water service providers are currently facing a perfect storm. While they are experiencing revenue declines due to government suspension of customer payments during the pandemic, operational costs are sharply increasing due to the need to buy protective equipment and shortages of critical water treatment supplies. Not only will service providers experience short- and long-term economic distress, vulnerable populations will also be left without a safe water supply at a time when it is more critical than ever. **In response, USAID is leveraging its expertise in WASH to help service providers continue operations, secure critical supplies, and avoid financial collapse.**

- In **Kenya**, utilities are now only collecting approximately 30 percent of their usual revenues. USAID is helping water service providers like utilities identify and implement strategies to not only weather additional stresses, but to also position them for accelerated recovery. The focus is to ensure water supply for drinking and for hygiene in densely populated areas and locations where major hospitals are located.
- In **Nigeria**, USAID is increasing the availability of water for households in six states. In Niger state for example, USAID has helped the utility develop and implement a digital platform for water payments that enables customers to reduce unnecessary visits to pay their bills.

- In **Mozambique**, USAID is partnering with UNICEF and key government partners to provide short-term subsidies for operating costs to private water service providers in peri-urban areas and small towns to help them keep water flowing during the pandemic.
- In collaboration with the **World Bank**, USAID is conducting financial stress tests of water service providers in five countries. Utilities are able to quantify the financial impact of the pandemic on their operations and prioritize potential response options. A pilot test of three Kenyan utilities showed that, within three months, all of them will be unable to cover their most basic operational and maintenance costs if no action is taken. As a result, USAID's WASH-FIN project is helping water utility partners continue their operations, and coordinating with government and donor partners to ensure service providers avoid financial collapse.

## PROMOTING HANDWASHING WITH SOAP

Proper hand hygiene is critical to reducing transmission of COVID-19. It may seem like a simple solution, yet 40% of the world does not have access to a handwashing station with soap and water at home. Handwashing facilities and supplies, combined with correct and consistent hygiene behaviors, are critical to safely reopening markets, schools, and businesses. USAID is addressing these issues by promoting **handwashing with soap, while providing sufficient water and hygiene products for it.**

- In **Burkina Faso**, a USAID supported program is using radio campaign messages and other communication materials to promote handwashing with soap. The project is also piloting a new handwashing system to demonstrate a low-cost solution for expanding access to hygiene facilities more broadly. It is also working with local governments to develop COVID-19 contingency plans that will help them address impacts on WASH services.
- In **Nigeria**, USAID is sharing information on slowing the spread of COVID-19 and increasing the supply of water for handwashing in critical public places, such as markets and hospitals. With support from the Federal Ministry of Water Resources, the Nigeria Center for Disease Control, and other relevant Nigerian government agencies, USAID is building on existing work to promote hygiene and address COVID-19 by providing additional technical support for risk communications to Nigeria's National WASH Response to COVID-19. USAID has also collaborated with telecom firms to deliver messaging about safe hygiene habits to millions of Nigerians.
- In **Indonesia**, USAID is working with partners in 120 communities across 35 municipalities to install 5,000 handwashing stations, more than 900 soap dispensers, and nearly 700 water taps. In March 2020, USAID began collaborating with *puskesmas* (community health clinics) to educate the public about handwashing with soap through a variety of channels, including radio jingles and social media.

## PREVENTING INFECTIONS IN HEALTHCARE FACILITIES

Healthcare facilities are facing a surge in patients due to COVID-19. While USAID invests in WASH in a variety of locations, it is particularly important to protect staff, patients and their families by strengthening WASH in healthcare facilities during the pandemic. USAID is helping to prevent and control infection across more than 30 countries by improving triage and isolation, hand hygiene, water and sanitation, waste management, and emergency supply chains for soap and disinfectant. **As of May 31, 2020, USAID has supported over 1,000 health facilities with related training for COVID-19, reaching over 16,000 health workers.**

- In **Senegal**, USAID, through UNICEF, supported the National Hygiene Service to conduct infection prevention and control activities in the country's 14 regions. As a result, Senegal trained 447 hygiene officers and 549 community health workers; installed 497 large-size public handwashing stands with soap in health structures, isolation centers, and other high-risk places, with accompanying demonstrations on proper handwashing techniques; and distributed 2,423 small handwashing kits to families with positive cases or contacts coupled with awareness-raising sessions.
- In **India, Uganda, Bangladesh, Ghana, and Cote d'Ivoire**, USAID conducted surveys to assess and prioritize the immediate infection prevention risks and needs of healthcare facilities during COVID-19. USAID is identifying priority actions, working to quickly improve access to basic WASH services and prevention and control practices, and helping ensure sufficient stocks of prevention and control supplies.

## ANALYZING IMPACTS TO WASH

COVID-19 and efforts to prevent the spread of the disease, such as border closures, lockdowns and mandates for free water services, are already disrupting WASH services. Health systems and economies will have to cope with these effects in the long-term as countries slowly recover and governments face difficult choices due to the pandemic's significant economic impact. Understanding what these impacts are likely to look like is critical for planning. **USAID's analytical work will inform U.S. government and partner country responses, helping to determine how resources can best keep water and sanitation services functioning.**

- USAID is conducting research to assess and forecast COVID-19-related impacts on access to WASH services in rural and urban areas. Through contributions to the World Bank, USAID is also seeking to better understand the downstream economic impacts of faltering access to water and sanitation as a result of COVID-19.

## MAKING WASH A GLOBAL PRIORITY

Ensuring water and sanitation for all requires action across a variety of stakeholders, now more than ever. For 15 years, USAID has been a global leader in collaborating with countries, businesses, nonprofits and NGOs, academia, other donors and communities to extend WASH services to more people. COVID-19 threatens to undo this progress, but global action can make a difference.

- In solidarity with the global community, USAID Acting Administrator John Barsa signed the **Sanitation and Water for All World Leaders Call to Action**. This joint statement calls on local and global leaders to prioritize WASH services, especially for the most vulnerable, in COVID-19 response plans. It also affirms the need to work collaboratively and in a coordinated manner, and to ensure that water and sanitation systems are resilient. Currently, more than 80 heads of state, global organizations, and world-renowned brands have joined the call to action.

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- [USAID Water, Sanitation and Hygiene \(WASH\): Strategic Approach to COVID-19 Response](#)
- [USAID: Responding to COVID-19's Impact on Resilience and Food Security](#)
- [Globalwaters.org: WASH and COVID-19 Resources](#)
- [Stories: WASH in a Time of COVID-19](#)