

East Africa Regional Newsletter April–June 2020

Putting Water, Sanitation and Hygiene at the centre of East Africa's Development Agenda



WaterAid/ Ernest Randriarimalala

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Empowering youth through radio in Rwanda

Physical and social distancing measures are key in the fight against COVID-19, however for many developing countries these measures are more difficult to adopt. This calls for alternative and innovative strategies for hygiene and sanitation campaigns. To halt community transmission of COVID-19 in Rwanda, WaterAid partnered with Radio Ishingiro to produce radio dramas, keeping communities entertained and educated. Previously produced as part of WaterAid Rwanda's School Wash/ Focus Country Programme, the radio dramas were repurposed to promote good hygiene behaviour in the current context of COVID-19. The series reached four million listeners which is nearly a third of the population of Rwanda.

Despite the challenges of social distancing and national lockdowns, our approach to risk communication was lauded, catching the attention of global news media The British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) and Radio France Internationale (RFA).



Solone, with her mother Emelthe, 42, and younger brother, Danny, 6, at home, listening to the radio. Solone is a member of the hygiene education programme with community radio Ishingiro, in 82 schools.



Providing WASH supplies to centres in Ethiopia



On 20 May, WaterAid Ethiopia provided water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) supplies to support the Government's response to COVID-19. Materials included:

- 20 water tanks (10,000l each)
- 6,000 hand sanitizers (250ml each)
- 1,000 bottles of liquid soap (250ml each)
- 44,000 large biohazard bags
- 140 colour-coded waste disposal bins, worth over 2 million ETB (£48,000)

This builds on our previous support of 2.5 million ETB (£59,535) to the Government of Ethiopia towards public awareness campaigns on the virus, hygiene promotion and WASH supplies to healthcare facilities across the country.

In receiving WaterAid Ethiopia's support, Aschalew Abayneh, Deputy Director for the Ethiopian Public Health Institute said: "The Institute is very grateful for the essential support provided by WaterAid Ethiopia, which will help the different healthcare facilities and quarantine centres across the country in tackling the pandemic." On behalf of WaterAid, Haile Dinku, WASH Program Advisor and Acting Head of Sector Strengthening for WaterAid Ethiopia stated that as an organisation working on WASH for over 30 years in Ethiopia, WaterAid will continue supporting the Government until the country beats the virus. WaterAid was lauded for its support to the Government through the Ministry of Water, Irrigation and Energy for a quick response through technical and humanitarian support.

"As always, WaterAid Ethiopia exerted immediate humanitarian aid in terms of WASH supplies to reach our critical isolation and quarantine centres. We highly value your commitment and championing the cause in this demanding season."

**-Dr Negash Wagesho, State Minister,
Ministry of Water, Irrigation and
Energy**

WaterAid provides over 2 million ETB (£ 48,000) emergency support to Ethiopia to contain COVID-19



Reflecting on service continuity with our Water Utilities in the context of COVID-19

As well as exacerbating vulnerabilities in our healthcare system, COVID-19 also causes concern for the water utilities sector, given that prevention calls for frequent handwashing with soap under running water. While the utility sector has played its part in flattening the curve, they are also among the most likely to be hardest hit with expected income losses of more than US\$220 billion in countries of the Global South (UNDP, 30 March 2020). Utilities play an essential role in keeping the water flowing to support the response to COVID-19. The pandemic is affecting the utility workforce, household incomes, interrupting supply chains and many utilities' revenues are already starting to drop significantly.

Resilient water and sanitation utilities are pillars in times of crisis, helping to ensure that communities can count on their fundamental right to water. Clean water helps in self-protection against infection and ensures that the burden of collecting water faced by women and girls does not further expose them to infection, sexual violence and does not increase the burden of care. Interruptions in supply chains and drops in utilities' revenues will affect the utilities' ability, to maintain current service levels and to scale up measures needed to protect vulnerable and unserved populations. Several national utility regulators have expressed their concern regarding financial and organisational capacities in both the short term and long term and are already working on interventions to keep utilities afloat.

Water utilities webinar

On 7 May, WaterAid held a webinar for water utilities in East Africa to share their response to COVID-19, the impacts of the pandemic on their operations and measures they are taking to ensure service sustainability post COVID-19. A total of five water utility companies across East Africa delivered presentations including:

- Water and Sanitation Corporation (Rwanda)
- Water and Sanitation Service Providers Association (Kenya)
- Eastern Umbrella of Water and sanitation (Uganda)
- Finote Selam Town Utility (Ethiopia)
- Arusha Urban Water Supply Authority (Tanzania)

“Investing in WASH by ensuring universal safe and affordable drinking water and safely managed sanitation services is a lifesaving decision. If we fail to do so in the wake of the pandemic, existing fragile healthcare facilities are at risk of further damage; while women, children and people living with disabilities risk facing wider WASH inequality gaps.”

**- Olutayo Bankole-Bolawole
Regional Director, East Africa**



Key takeaways from the webinar

- Water utility workers are essential staff who carry out meter readings, address customer complaints, and fix leakages along pipelines. There's a need for continued awareness raising among staff on COVID-19 and training.
- The WASH needs of people living in refugee settings, informal settlements and slums, require specific attention in the context of COVID-19.
- COVID-19 has emphasised and facilitated the need to adopt innovative technologies to operate and monitor water supply. For example, SCADA systems have been installed to facilitate remote supervision and data analysis, as well as increased use of online payment platforms like Momo and Mpesa.
- The response to COVID-19 calls for collaboration between water utilities, governments, the private sector and other development partners (both nationally and regionally) including developing joint response plans to ensure complementarity of response and ensuring everyone, everywhere has clean water and access to handwashing facilities.
- Increasing community assessment processes to systematically identify the areas needing the most help.
- Mismatch between the impact of COVID-19 on household incomes and cost of operations for water utilities.
- Support to urban informal settlements and slums has been a major challenge due to accessibility and city plan regulations. However, installation of water tanks and water trucking have been useful as an emergency response.
- Significant reduction in revenue across water utilities has been observed. There is a need to support utilities with alternative revenue sources, beyond collection from user fees or bills. Some utilities already had major underlying water supply issues including; loss due to non-revenue water and water quality.
- There is a growing demand to improve water supply in healthcare facilities, especially those designated as testing and treatment centres. This is due to the fact that health care facilities are now facing a "double burden" with the majority already considered to lack adequate water services before COVID-19.

The webinar cemented the evidence for the need to prioritise water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) as a response to COVID-19.

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In our next edition: WASH & Climate Change / Back to School

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