

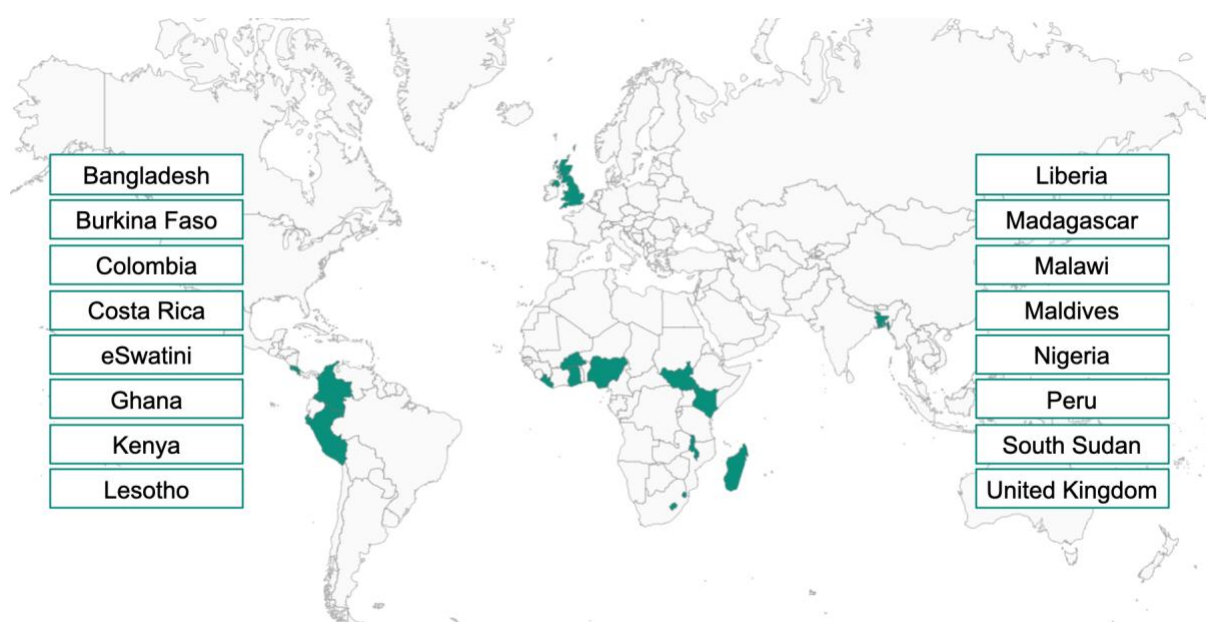
# COVID-19 and water, sanitation and hygiene

## Global Ministerial Webinar: Making WASH a political and financial priority in the time of COVID-19

### Summary

#### Introduction

On 9 April, SWA organised a global webinar entitled “Making WASH a political and financial priority in the time of COVID-19”. This webinar was graced by the presence and interventions from WASH sector Ministers from 15 countries, and Finance Minister from one country (see full list in Appendix), across different geographical, linguistic and sector situations.<sup>1</sup> Eight high-level delegates from different constituencies<sup>2</sup>: International financial institutions (IFIs – World Bank (WB), Interamerican Development Bank (IDB) and African Development Bank (AfDB)), technical partners (UNICEF and WSSCC), private sector (Unilever) and SWA leadership. About **5000 participants across the world** participated or have viewed the webinar.<sup>3</sup>



Countries whose Ministers were present during the webinar

#### Five details setting context and structure of the webinar

1. The webinar focused on making water, sanitation and hygiene political and financial priorities in the time of COVID-19. It was organized in conjunction with AfDB, IDB, UNICEF and World Bank.
2. The webinar is **part of a series of dialogues that the SWA is facilitating** and followed the inaugural webinar on 26 March. Additional webinars address the topics of eliminating inequalities; ensuring service provision; and sustaining gains beyond the immediate response to the COVID-19 crisis, all organized with partners.
3. The webinar was premised on the **consensus principle** that response plans to COVID-19 – at national, regional and global levels – must prioritize water, sanitation and hygiene, which form part of the frontline response. As countries allocate financial resources to support responses, it is critical that adequate priority is given to water, sanitation and hygiene, in particular to reach communities

<sup>1</sup> Ministers from Bangladesh, Burkina Faso, Colombia, Costa Rica, eSwatini, Ghana, Kenya, Lesotho, Liberia, Madagascar, Malawi, the Maldives, Nigeria, Peru, South Sudan and the United Kingdom.

<sup>2</sup> Leaders from UNICEF, World Bank, African Development Bank, Interamerican Development Bank, Unilever, WSSCC and SWA.

<sup>3</sup> On five different virtual platforms – Facebook, Sparkstreet, Twitter, Youtube and Zoom.



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and vulnerable groups that have little or no access, and alleviate pressure on critical protection systems, in particular the health services.

4. The webinar had two specific **objectives**:
  - Drive home the message that any financing directed at supporting emergency interventions in countries must include water, sanitation and hygiene services and include longer-term solutions.
  - Familiarize government officials and other national and international stakeholders with the above-mentioned finance being made available for the COVID-19 response.
5. The discussions were organized in two **panels**.<sup>4</sup> In the first, Ministers discussed WASH-related initiatives being taken to respond to COVID-19 and the financing of these initiatives; Ministers in the second discussed how the impact of COVID-19 would be absorbed and mitigated in the short and longer-term. **Development partners intervened**<sup>5</sup> to discuss the elements of their response to COVID-19, the resources being put at the disposal of countries and the best ways to advocate to countries' financial decision-makers for adequate attention to WASH in the response to COVID-19.

### Five Good practices from countries in the short-term response to COVID-19

1. Countries have established and operationalized inter-ministerial committees to **coordinate the response to COVID-19, with due space to WASH**:
  - In **Burkina Faso**, CORUS (Centre des Opérations de Réponse aux Urgences Sanitaires) is a government group with different ministries.
  - In **Liberia**, the President constituted SPACCO, the Special Presidential Advisory Committee on COVID-19. The country's technical response is co-headed by the Ministry of Health. WASH is one of the pillars of Liberia's plan, and is led by the National WASH Commission.
  - In **Malawi**, the President constituted a cabinet committee on COVID-19, chaired by the Minister of Health. The committee prepared a plan, with 10 operational clusters (including one on WASH, led by the Minister of Irrigation and Water).
  - In **Nigeria**, the WASH Ministry is collaborating with the Ministry of Health (as well as others) to coordinate the response to COVID-19 through established forums like the Task Group on Sanitation and the inter-ministerial committee on COVID-19.
  - At a more operational level, the WASH Ministry in **Peru** works closely with the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Education to provide COVID-19 related modules in hospitals and schools, respectively.
  - Some countries have also set up **structures to coordinate the WASH response**. In **Bangladesh**, the lead sector Ministry is coordinating the WASH response with CSOs. In **Nigeria**, the "WASH Sector COVID-19 Response Committee is being set up, under the leadership of the Ministry of Water Resources and involving all 36 state commissioners responsible for water. The National Platform for Sanitation will also be integrated in this Committee.
2. In terms of interventions, most countries are **using a hybrid approach**, mixing broad-based measures with WASH-specific interventions:
  - **General measures** include containment, social distancing, communication campaigns to promote hygiene, and installing sanitation and hygiene facilities in public places.

<sup>4</sup> Panel 1 – Nigeria, Peru, Burkina Faso, Bangladesh, UK; Panel 2 – Liberia, Colombia, Ghana, Maldives, eSwatini, Madagascar

<sup>5</sup> Development partners - World Bank, IDB, AfDB, WSSCC and Unilever

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- A majority of countries are installing **public handwashing facilities**<sup>6</sup>, to implement hand hygiene measures. This is sometimes done in conjunction with the private sector, such as in Malawi.
- 3. Recognising the need for adequate water to implement handwashing, one of the first measures taken by many countries has been to **remove cost barriers to accessing water**.
  - Countries like the Maldives have reduced tariffs (by 30%)
  - Others have made water free for the poorest (Peru, Colombia, Madagascar) while yet others have made it free for the entire population (Burkina, Ghana). This is done with specific timelines of 2 or 3 months, with provisions to renew or review this measure.
  - Some countries have halted or reversed disconnections for unpaid bills (Bangladesh, Colombia).
  - Finally, some countries have frozen tariff increases (Colombia, eSwatini).
- 4. To enable the implementation of the above measures, many governments are **extending financial and technical support to service providers**. These include:
  - Providing financial support to water utilities (Peru, Madagascar)
  - Recruiting and steering public and private water service providers to cover low-coverage areas (Ghana, eSwatini, Maldives, )
  - Exempting WASH-related products imported into the country from taxes (Colombia, Burkina Faso)
  - Opening credit lines to WASH-related enterprises to help them survive (Colombia)
- 5. Recognizing the higher exposure and vulnerability of certain populations to COVID-19, many countries are implementing **measures that target these vulnerable populations** with services.
  - Nigeria - internally displaced persons' camps
  - Ghana - informal settlements
  - Madagascar - small-scale farmers who have been deprived of revenues due to COVID-19 containment measures.
  - Moreover, as mentioned above, many countries are targeting poorest populations with subsidies for WASH services.

### **Funding is simultaneously the biggest area of work and the biggest challenge**

As mentioned above, many of the leading measures in the COVID-19 response involve financing. However, funding of the responses remains the biggest challenge that countries face. While countries typically have multi-phase and costed response plans to COVID-19 (taking into account short-term emergency response, mid-term structural efforts and long-term sustainability), a common thread that runs through the countries present is the insufficiency of available funding. This issue was raised by Ministers of eSwatini, Madagascar, Malawi and the Maldives during the webinar.

### **Five Support actions by the partners in the response to COVID-19**

Development partners (bilateral donors, international financial institutions, technical partners and the private sector), explained their efforts in responding to COVID-19, and the possibilities of countries benefiting from these efforts:

1. The **World Bank** has declared a package of US \$14bn of fast-track financing, and the immediate response has been to support health ministries (with particular attention to integrate WASH into the health-sector response).

<sup>6</sup> Bangladesh and Burkina Faso, Malawi, Ghana, Maldives, Madagascar, ...

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2. The **Interamerican Development Bank's** response is multi-sectoral, with water cutting across all four pillars (health response, safety net for vulnerable populations, strengthened economic productivity and employment, and fiscal stimulus packages). It has made US\$12 bn available to countries, in addition to US \$4bn from the existing WASH portfolio and giving countries the possibility to restructure existing loans to direct them to WASH. The IDB has also streamlined fiduciary processes and timelines for approvals. The support is available for development and implementation of emergency plans, with a special focus on the vulnerable communities.
3. The **African Development Bank's** approach has three elements. First, AfDB has raised US \$3bn through a social bond that is being made available to African governments. Second, up to 50% of resources hitherto not committed to specific projects or programmes can be restructured as loans and can be given directly to governments to inject into programmes. And third, AfDB is working with institutions like DFID and Norway to mobilize additional resources that can be injected directly into government programs. Financial resources can be accessed within five days from the day the request is submitted and are directly injected into government systems so that there are no delays in implementation
4. The **Hygiene Coalition**<sup>7</sup> has been launched with funding from UK's DFID and Unilever, along with other partners (notably London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine and civil society organisations). A total of 100M Euros have been set aside to support countries for behaviour-change campaigns and for hygiene-related products. Twenty priority countries have been identified.
5. From the technical side, **UNICEF** is ramping up handwashing supplies and hygiene kits to families, communities and schools, while also scaling up community engagement and communications efforts to provide information and tools. **Water Supply and Sanitation Collaborative Council** (WSSCC) is working with countries that have access to the Global Sanitation Fund to provide flexibility and reprogramming their funds for communication and planning around COVID-19.

### Colombia's holistic response to COVID-19

To render WASH services accessible in the short term, the government of Colombia has reconnected 250,000 poorest families to water supply (despite bill payment defaults); and frozen any increase in water tariffs/rates for the rest of 2020. For the longer term, the country has also put in place a measure to ensure that 9 million poor families are not affected by due bills even after the COVID-19 crisis. For instance, if a family's bill averages US \$10 per month over the coming 3 months, then they will have to pay only upto 10% more (ie, a total of USD 11 per month) for the rest of the 33 months, irrespective of the actual amount of the bill. The outstanding amounts bill can be paid after these 36 months, with 0% interest or penalty.

### Five Elements of Longer-term planning and response

**Countries and development** partners are taking action both through short-term responses to COVID-19, with the above actions, but also through **longer-term planning** so that the country and its economy recover from COVID-19 and that any gains made during the crisis are sustained. This also includes planning to make sure that systems are better prepared to face future epidemics:

<sup>7</sup> Details: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/uk-aid-and-unilever-to-target-a-billion-people-in-global-handwashing-campaign> and <https://www.unilever-ewa.com/news/press-releases/2020/helping-to-protect-lives-and-livelihoods-from-the-covid-19-pandemic.html>,

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1. The International Financial Institutions are working on advocating for WASH to be made part of the longer-term stimulus / recovery packages (**WB**), while also identifying specific country needs to see what to address first (**IDB**). The WB is looking to raise up to US \$ 160 bn to support COVID-19 response and mitigate longer-term impact.
2. Stimulus/recovery packages have been announced with WASH as a significant component in **Bangladesh, Ghana and Nigeria**.
3. The **Maldives** is using the COVID-19 crisis to accelerate the supply of sanitation and hygiene services to all islands, and the country is on track to achieve universal coverage of piped water and sanitation in the next 3-4 years. Similarly, **eSwatini** hopes to strengthen the WASH Forum for coordinating the sector and real-time monitoring of WASH facilities.
4. **eSwatini** and **Nigeria** are looking to strengthen involvement of the private sector, the former specifically for rural WASH and the latter through the OPS-WASH forum (Organised Private Sector WASH forum) to supply hygiene to vulnerable areas.
5. The sustainability plan in **Madagascar** involves continued subsidy to support companies for 4 – 6 months.

### **Five Recommendations going forward from partners to countries**

1. Many governments have already constituted committees to respond to COVID-19. Ministers of WASH must engage with these committees or even be part of them, and also, individually with Ministers of Health and Finance, to make sure the response places due emphasis on WASH.<sup>8</sup>
2. It is important to reinforce the collaborations with Health Ministries, especially to drive home the point that “water, sanitation and hygiene are critical building blocks; they are the first line in strong public health systems. A WASH response is a health response; but a health response starts with a WASH response and as such, it has to be a priority focus for investments going forward”.<sup>9</sup>
3. WASH Ministers must convey that social distancing and handwashing in vulnerable areas cannot be taken for granted, so we need to make sure that the vulnerable have at least access to running water.<sup>10</sup> Another important argument is that in areas where physical distancing is harder, water and hygiene become all the more important.<sup>11</sup>
4. It is important to ensure adequate hygiene arrangements in healthcare facilities, so that these healthcare facilities become a place to combat COVID-19, not spread it.<sup>12</sup>
5. Practically, governments must keep lines open for trade and transportation of WASH supplies, while engaging with local companies as logistics and transportation are challenged due to lockdowns.<sup>13</sup>

#### **Burkina Faso’s “crowdsourcing” approach**

A National Solidarity Fund has been set up to raise funds for the country’s COVID-19 response. It has collected US \$2mn in money and equipment from the general population.

### **Five Recurrent Questions**

The following major issues were raised through the webinar as warranting specific attention:

<sup>8</sup> Mr. Kevin Rudd, SWA High-level Chair, and AfDB representative

<sup>9</sup> Patrick Moriarty, Chair, SWA Steering Committee

<sup>10</sup> Patrick Moriarty, Chair, SWA Steering Committee, and representatives from IDB and WB

<sup>11</sup> Minister from the United Kingdom

<sup>12</sup> Representatives from UNICEF and WB

<sup>13</sup> Representative from UNICEF



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1. **WASH response in rural and underserved areas:** COVID-19 is so far mostly limited to urban areas and many countries are working on WASH in urban areas to stop COVID-19. However, it is projected that COVID-19 will reach rural areas where access to WASH services is much lower than urban areas. So, what is being done for WASH in rural areas as a barrier to COVID-19?
2. **Support to service providers:** Many governments emphasized the need to ensure that WASH services are continued and even expanded to reach vulnerable populations. The concerns raised were about the viability of service providers and their ability to provide uninterrupted services especially where tariffs will be frozen or removed. How can governments support state water suppliers to ensure uninterrupted water supply; and how can development partners support the water utilities going forward with free or tariff-reduced services called for by governments?
3. **Collaborating with Ministries of Health:** Ministries of Health are at the forefront of the COVID-19 response and often head the inter-ministerial response committees. Moreover, the predominant interventions against COVID-19 are 'health interventions', and these are supported by technical and financial partners too. How are WASH Ministries collaborating with their Health counterparts, to ensure that the conceptual importance of WASH in the COVID-19 response is translated into WASH actions and interventions on the field?
4. **Taking into account vulnerabilities and inequalities:** The most disadvantaged, excluded and marginalized groups are also the same ones who are most vulnerable to COVID-19. What specific actions are being taken for the following groups: women, the illiterate, children, persons with disabilities, people living in informal settlements, etc?
5. **Integrity and effectiveness of financial support:** Technical and financial partners are supporting countries to implement the response to COVID-19, under the leadership of governments. In emergency situations, chances are high that good governance practices of accountability and transparency can be ignored, procurement procedures are compromised, budgets are inflated, and substandard materials are procured. What measures have been put in place by the governments and the funding institutions to address the issue of integrity? In addition, what measures will help evaluate the effectiveness of interventions, especially those related to hygiene?

### **Five follow-up steps planned to capitalise on the webinar**

1. The concerns and solutions raised during the webinar will be used to **inform the work with all SWA constituencies**, with the aim of creating multistakeholder collaborations at both international and national levels. A first avenue is the Partner Exchange Forum.
2. The Ministerial webinar helped confirm the importance of the specific topics that will be **taken up in the coming webinars**.
3. Outstanding questions will be taken forward in **virtual ministerial roundtables** that are planned through May and June 2020.
4. The recurrent issues brought up will be further **discussed with domain experts** with a view to answering these issues.
5. Efforts will be made to **create pairs of partners** specifically at country level.



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### Appendix: High-level representatives present during the webinar

#### Ministerial level participants from partner countries

1. Bangladesh - Hon. Md Tazul Islam, Minister, Ministry of Local Government, Rural Development and Co-operatives
2. Burkina Faso - Niouga Ambroise OUÉDRAOGO, Ministre de l'Eau et de l'Assainissement
3. Colombia - SE. José Luis Acero Vergel, Viceministro de Agua y Saneamiento Básico
4. Costa Rica – Yamileth Astorga, President AyA, Instituto Costarricense de Acueductos y Alcantarillados
5. eSwatini - Senator Peter Bhembe, Minister for Natural Resources and Energy
6. Ghana – Hon. Cecilia Dapaah, Minister of Sanitation and Water Resources
7. Kenya - Hon. Cecily Kariuki, Cabinet Secretary, Ministry of Water, Sanitation and Irrigation
8. Lesotho - Hon. Nkaku Kabi, Minister of Health
9. Liberia - Amb. Bobby Whitfield, Chairman and CEO, National Water, Sanitation and Hygiene Commission
10. Madagascar - Voahary Rakotovelomanantsoa, Ministre de l'Eau, de l'Assainissement et de l'Hygiène
11. Malawi - Hon Joseph Mwanamvekha, Minister of finance & economic planning
12. Maldives - H.E Dr. Hussain Rasheed Hassan, Minister of Environment
13. Nigeria - Suleiman H. Adamu, Minister of Water Resources
14. Peru - Julio Kosaka Harima, Deputy Minister of Building and Sanitation of the Peruvian Ministry of Housing, Building and Sanitation
15. South Sudan - Hon. Manawa Peter Gatkuoth, Minister of Water Resources and Irrigation
16. United Kingdom - Hon. Wendy Morton, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the Department for International Development

#### Leaders from Partner organizations

1. Henrietta Fore, Executive Director, Unicef
2. Jennifer Sara, Global Director, Water Global Practice, World Bank
3. Oswald Chande, Manager, Water security and sanitation division, AfDB
4. Sergio Campos, Chief of water and sanitation division, IDB
5. Alan Jope, CEO, Unilever
6. Hind Khatib-Othman, WSSCC chair
7. Kevin Rudd, High-level Chair, SWA
8. Catarina de Albuquerque, CEO, SWA