



**Water and Environmental Sanitation Network (WES Network) Qadri House Area 3 –
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WESNET STATEMENT ON MALAWI'S NATIONAL RESPONSE TO COVID-19

Background:

Where are we now?

The COVID-19 outbreak that was declared a global pandemic by the World Health Organization on 11th March 2020 this year. As of 26th April this year, there were 2,999,958 confirmed cases and 206,640 deaths that were recorded worldwide. Malawi recorded its first case on 4th April and since then the cases have risen to thirty-three (33) with twenty-seven active cases, three recoveries and three deaths as of 26th April 2020. There is an imminent risk that the number of cases, and therefore the number of deaths, may continue to rise if immediate steps are not taken to prevent further transmission of the virus in the country.

Appreciating Efforts

The Water and Environmental Sanitation Network (WESNET), a local umbrella network of organizations and individuals working to deliver water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) services in Malawi, would like to commend the Government of Malawi for the measures already taken to combat the further spread of the disease as part of a national preparedness response. Notable measures, among these, have been the Declaration of a State of Disaster in Malawi by the President His Excellency Professor Arthur Peter Mutharika; instituting a Presidential Committee on COVID-19 to lead the national preparedness response; directing all schools to be closed with immediate effect; restricting gatherings to less than 100 people; banning travel to Malawi from countries highly affected by the disease; directing all institutions, except those providing essential services, to roll-out employee rosters to decongest work spaces; cancelling formal meetings, gatherings and ordering that all buildings and structures with public access should

ensure proper ventilation; and, most importantly, spreading awareness about the need for proper and thorough handwashing with soap.

Much as we appreciate the efforts the Government of Malawi has put in place to prevent further spread of the virus, we, nonetheless, note the inadequacy of calling for widespread handwashing practices without proper consideration of access to water, hygiene supplies and soap by the general population. We urgently and strongly appeal to Government to prioritize water supply and accessibility as a central strategy in the national response to the COVID-19 pandemic. For the citizenry to practice proper and thorough handwashing to curb the spread of the virus, there is a need for all communities and public spaces such as markets and health care facilities to have ease of access to clean water and soap. Ease of access to water in or near dwellings, markets and health care facilities would also directly support social distancing measures, especially in over-populated or water-poor areas.

Recommendations

According to the Ministry of Irrigation and Water Development, only 89 percent of the Malawian population have access to clean water (at basic and limited levels), and there are geographical variations in access to safe water amongst urban, peri-urban and rural dwellers. Furthermore, existing water supply mechanisms need to match the increase in demand for water during this pandemic period. WESNET urgently and strongly recommends that the following key issues should be incorporated into Government's response strategies to this pandemic:

1. Repair strategic non-functional boreholes, fitted with hand-pump in rural districts using data from district water development offices as informed by the most recent water points mapping exercise as the basis for prioritization;
2. Provide water to under-served urban and peri-urban populations using available water bowsers already within the Government's possessions & following a schedule that is well-publicized
3. Reconnect and lower water tariffs, through removal of VAT, on communal water schemes servicing communities and public places such as markets through Water Boards and Water Users Associations and arrange for a payment plan for payment of arrears;

4. Support water utilities through government financing - grants and other rescue packages to manage the extra demand for water and income loss from waived disconnections
5. Institute a moratorium on household water disconnections by Water Boards during the State of National Disaster and arrange for a payment plan for arrears with water users;
6. Support district-level Water, Sanitation and Hygiene plans on COVID-19 preparedness and response through disbursement of funds to districts to enable intensification of preventive activities such as water quality monitoring & testing & chlorination;
7. Ensure full involvement of WASH CSOs in the government implementation and coordination of the COVID-19 national response plan at the department of disaster management affairs (DODMA).
8. Facilitate access to soap for the poor through private sector partnerships, social cash transfers
9. Removal of VAT on hygiene and infection prevention supplies such as soap, mops, chlorine and handwashing buckets
10. Strengthen enforcement of handwashing in public places.
11. Ensure that all health care facilities and Covid-19 emergency treatment units are provided with adequate access to water, handwashing facilities and hygiene supplies such as chlorine, soap and mops to enable effective infection prevention and control

Continued Partnership: We are in this together!

The WESNET board, secretariat, and its member organizations pledge to continue supporting the government, at all levels, through the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Irrigation and Water Development to help improve access to WASH services to all Malawians – young or old – rich or poor. WESNET will also continue supporting the national emergency response through the WASH cluster, using its diverse expertise and resources across its members in various districts of the country.

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