

# WASH Practices among urban Refugees in Kisenyi during COVID-19

by Dunstan Ddamulira Paul & Gloria Seruwagi

## 1. BACKGROUND

Uganda is home to about 1,434,708 refugees originating from Countries such as; South Sudan, Somalia, Congo, Ethiopia and Eritrea among others. Kisenyi together with other Kampala urban refugee hosting areas is home to approximately 83,614 refugees coming.



Among the essential requirements to fight COVID-19, is the access to WASH Services. WASH is the short form of “**W**ater, **S**anitation and **H**ygien<sup>e</sup>”.

It relates to improved access to clean and safe water, improved sanitation facilities and maintenance of a basic level of hygiene. The three are highly interconnected and interdependent such that the attainment of the benefits of having access to clean and safe water can only be fully realised when there is also access to improved sanitation and good hygiene practices.

COVID-19 can be categorised as a water washed (Stenström A.T, 2014) disease mainly because the lack of clean water for washing hands impedes efforts to curtail the spread of the Corona Virus.

The [REFLECT<sup>1</sup> Study](#), implemented by a consortium comprising; Makerere University, Gulu University, Agency for Cooperation in Research and Development (ACORD-U), Lutheran World Federation (LWF) and Ministry of Health, collected data on WASH as part of its assessment of the knowledge, adherence, and lived experiences of refugees in 3 refugee locations of Kisenyi, Kyaka II and Adjumani.

In line with WASH, the study particularly explored adherence to handwashing by refugee and host communities.

<sup>1</sup> REFLECT (Sept, 2020), A study to assess knowledge, adherence and the lived experiences of refugees in COVID-19.

## 2. THE WASH SITUATION IN KISENYI REFUGEE HOSTING SITE

The SPHERE<sup>2</sup> standards which were developed and adopted before the COVID-19 pandemic, stipulate a water service level of at least 20 liters per person per day for refugees in all settlements in Uganda.

Households in Kisenyi refugee location were mainly found to be supplied with piped water provided by the government utility, the National Water and Sewerage Corporation (NWSC). The population using an improved drinking water source in urban areas as of June 2019 was 79%<sup>3</sup> Those without house connections have the option of accessing water using public standpipes from the same provider. Access to the public standpipes is by use a token system. The token involves a key pad with prepaid credit to access water through an automatic water dispenser at a lower price compared to purchasing water from a private individual's tap.

Access to water for hand-washing did not feature as a problem during the COVID-19 phase. And government put in place more supportive measures. According to the Manager for NSWSC, Kisenyi Office, as part of the government's COVID mitigation measures, they were under instructions to continue collecting water payments, but not to disconnect customers due to non-payment. This however, does not apply to customers using pre-paid tokens as they have to pay before accessing water.

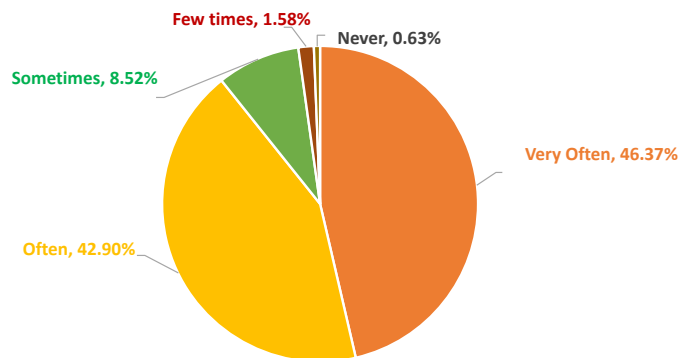


2 The Sphere Handbook: Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Humanitarian Response, fourth edition, Geneva, Switzerland, 2018.

3 (MWE, Sept. 2019). Uganda Joint Donor / Water and Environment Sector Performance 2019, Uganda, Kampala

The REFLECT quantitative assessment found out that 42.9% of the respondents often washed their hands with soap and 46.37% very often did so, while only 1.58% reported that they only washed their hands with soap a few times.

HAND WASHING WITH SOAP - KISENYI REFUGEE HOSTING AREA



Worth noting is that in the Kisenyi area, regular handwashing was adhered to especially among Muslim refugees because it matches with their cultural & religious practices. It was however noted that much as some refugees adopted the use of hand sanitizers, most people in the Somali community in Kisenyi could not use sanitizers because they contain alcohol which is against their religious norms.

## 3. IMPLICATION FOR STAKEHOLDERS

In light of the study findings it is recommended that stakeholders responding to the COVID-19 pandemic endeavour to undertake the following.

Enhance efforts to sensitize refugee communities about the importance of WASH towards the fight against the pandemic in order to increase their adherence to the requirement of regularly washing hands with soap.

Increase the amount of safe water provided to the refugee and urban poor communities so as to increase sustainable access to water which is essential for handwashing and general observance of good hygiene. This can be made possible by putting in place more water systems and redefining the standard amount of water recommended per person per day to cater for extra water that is

required for adherence to more frequent washing of hands and improving hygiene. More research should be undertaken to determine the appropriate increase in water demand during emergencies and pandemic like COVID-19 in order to ascertain the relevant consumption rate design standard to be used by water supply practitioners.

Promote the use of more user friendly and safe hand washing facilities especially for rural areas. This could include popularizing pedal operated hand washing stations and improved tippy taps among others.



#### 4. ABOUT THE AUTHORS

**Dunstan Ddamulira Paul** is a WASH expert who has developed a multi-dimensional niche in programming of Development and Humanitarian projects while combining practical work, research, and advocacy. He is currently working as Director of Programmes for ACORD Uganda. Dunstan's background is in areas of Institutional Management and Leadership, Water Resources Management, Civil and WASH Engineering. He is a Co-Investigator on the REFLECT Study.

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