

ALLIANCE FOR WASH ADVOCACY (A4WA)

PRESS RELEASE

ALLIANCE FOR WASH ADVOCACY CALLING FOR URGENT ACTION BY GOVERNMENT ON COVID-19

The **Alliance for WASH Advocacy (A4WA)** has been monitoring with keen interest the recent coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak across the globe and its emergent fallouts such as the declaration of the disease by the World Health Organisation (WHO) as a global pandemic and the fifty two (52) cases of infection confirmed so far in the country.

The A4WA congratulates the Government on its initial response directives and public safety protocols which include the gradually-intensifying public education on precautionary personal hygiene practices, regular briefings on the unfolding COVID-19 cases and response management mechanisms. The commitment to release 100 million dollars (USD) in a holistic bid to quell any potential in-country outbreak is equally commendable, though we see this as inadequate given the weight of the pandemic.

These provisional measures have generally aroused optimism around the country's bid to outmaneuver this evolving global threat and as things stand, member organisations of the A4WA are also pressing forward with public education and other WASH initiatives to help in the collective fight to fend off this pandemic.

As an Alliance promoting WASH access for all and vested in the alleviation of WASH-related diseases in the country, we wish to additionally call the attention of the Government and other relevant stakeholders to the following:

1. There should be a clearly-defined role for the Ministry of Water and Sanitation Resources (MSWR) within the context of the fight against the outbreak of the COVID-19 as well as the sustainability measures thereafter, seeing as it is one of the critical institutions which will continue the fight against other hygiene-related diseases long after the Inter-Ministerial Committee on COVID-19 is disbanded.
2. We advise that portions of the 100 million dollars (USD) committed by Government be allocated to the Ministry of Sanitation and Water Resources (MSWR) to support ongoing WASH initiatives, which have been largely underfinanced over the past years. Although dire, the COVID-19 outbreak has shone light globally on WASH as one of the most critically potent, comparatively inexpensive and universally admissible disease control strategies.

3. Priority must also be given to extensive rural health institutional strengthening initiatives (particularly on maternal and child health issues).
4. In the wake of the unfolding COVID-19 pandemic, we also wish to call on Government to see to a progressive shift of focus from the short-term adhoc measures it has initially rolled out to long-term durable strategies such as sustained improvements in WASH sector financing, key institutional strengthening at all levels, including the setting up of the National Sanitation Authority and the National Sanitation Fund, culturally-appropriate behavioural change communication (BCC) initiatives and the creation of a truly enabling environment for vibrant private sector participation in WASH service delivery. The current shortages in hand sanitizers within the country epitomize the existing avenues for increased private sector incursions within the sector, given the pre-requisite government support mechanisms.

The Government must therefore act to crystallize the gains from the ongoing mass education campaigns which have brought heightened hygiene practices and public health and safety concerns among citizens in the country to unprecedented levels.

5. Both the central and local Government machinery should effectively embrace strong collaboration, broad-based consultations and the active involvement of WASH sector CSOs, networks and the media in all proposed COVID-19 mitigation strategies so as to synchronize efforts and avoid counter-productivity, misallocation and uneven distribution of resources.
6. We also condemn, in no uncertain terms, the exorbitant pricing of hand sanitizers and other sanitary products; and the sale of counterfeit products by some opportunistic vendors to unsuspecting citizens. Seeing as these practices threaten to spiral out of control, derail the ongoing efforts and endanger lives, we call on the Government and its security apparatus to act swiftly and clampdown on this issue. Government should also dialogue with industry players to make the alcohol-based hand sanitizers more affordable and readily available to the ordinary Ghanaian.
7. Last but not the least, we wish to reiterate the ongoing calls for citizens to sternly observe to the recommended public health guidelines issued by the WHO and Ministry of Health (MoH) on regular handwashing and other hygiene practices while shunning false information from questionable sources.

The A4WA is made up of nongovernmental organisations and networks which include WaterAid Ghana, Water & Sanitation for the Urban Poor (WSUP), World Vision Ghana, CONIWAS, SafeWater Network, People's Dialogue, Catholic Relief Services (CRS) Ghana, SNV-Ghana, SkyFox, Plan Ghana and the four (4) local partner Voice for Change Partnership (V4CP) Ghana WASH CSOs namely Intervention Forum, New Energy, Integrated Action for Community Development and the United Civil Society Organizations for National Development.

As a group, we remain committed to playing our part and collaborating with the Government of Ghana and all other key actors in the current fight against the COVID-19 pandemic. We end by supporting governments call for people to stay at home if you do not have anything critical to do in town and lets continue practicing the social distancing as much as practicable. Every Ghanaian should keep well and be each other's keeper in this trying moment.

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