



## World Health Organization



Topic A: *“The impact of scarcity of water and lack of hygiene in African countries.”*

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### I. COMMITTEE BACKGROUND

The World Health Organization, also known as WHO, is the committee that directs and coordinates the international health within the United Nations' system. Their goal is to build a better and healthier future for all the people in the world by supporting countries with their national health policies and strategies. In order to do that, they strive to combat - communicable or noncommunicable - diseases and ensuring the safety of all humans.

WHO works in 150 countries with more than seven thousand people in the countries' offices, with their headquarters located in Geneva. Decisions are made by the World Health Assembly, which is attended by the WHO Member States. Together, they determine the policies of the organization, supervise financial policies, among other work with many other responsibilities.

## II. HISTORY OF THE TOPIC

### A. Introduction to the topic

Good hygiene is crucial for everyone. The benefits of maintaining good hygiene include, and are not limited to: a reduction of the risk for diseases and illnesses spread through viruses and bacteria. Our hands touch many dirty objects on a daily basis, and if we don't wash our hands and bodies regularly, this can cause the bacteria to multiply, increasing the risk for infection and other health problems. Some of the consequences of not practicing good hygiene are getting diseases such as athlete's foot, head lice, and scabies. A lack of hygiene in your life can also cause parasites to grow and multiply on your skin, which in turn causes parasitic diseases like malaria and toxoplasmosis. Other medical conditions caused by poor hygiene include gastroenteritis, food poisoning, hepatitis A, influenza, common cold, giardiasis, roundworm, and threadworm.

The continent of Africa has a reputation of having very impoverished countries. Since the economy of these countries is deplorable, they don't have many resources, including a system of obtaining drinkable water. Not many people have access to clean water, and therefore, resort to drinking and showering with contaminated water. The lack of access to water and sanitation enable diseases like diarrhea, cholera, dysentery and typhoid to transmit from one person to the next. In Africa, more than 315,000 children die every year from diarrhoeal diseases caused by unsafe water and poor sanitation. Globally, deaths from diarrhea caused by unclean drinking water are estimated at 502,000 each year, most of them of young children.

## B. Evolution of the topic

A research carried out in 2014/2015 looked at 36 African countries and asked nearly 54,000 citizens about their access to water and sanitation. It should be noted that the survey was an addition to direct observations of the communities themselves. The research found that almost half (45%) of Africans didn't have access to enough clean water for their homes during the past year, while one in five (19%) didn't have access to enough clean water many times or always. One-third of surveyed communities (36%) lacked access to a piped-water system, and two-thirds (68%) lacked access to sewage infrastructure.

The situation has gotten better with time, and more communities can now have piped-water supplies. However, even for those who live in zones with the necessary infrastructure, access to clean water and toilets is still a problem. More than half (51%) of those surveyed said they had to leave their village or community to access water. One in five had to leave their village to use a latrine, and another 8% had no access at all to a latrine or toilet, even outside their village. (Keep in mind that these figures are worse in rural areas.)

## C. Relevant events

Currently, over 40% of the population in Sub-Saharan Africa do not have access to clean water. Consequently, they are unable to wash their hands as a way to stop the spread of the COVID-19 virus. Therefore, the steps to prevent infection are not feasible for many. In the state of Borno, around 80% of the estimated 840,000 internally displaced persons (IDPs) live in makeshift shelters in overcrowded conditions where physical distancing is difficult, if not impossible. Now more than ever, the lack of hygiene and the scarcity of water are proving to be devastating for the poor regions in

Africa. These conditions give rise to all types of illnesses, and the civilians are more prone to fall victim to contagious diseases and infections.

### III. CURRENT ISSUES

#### A. Panorama

Throughout history, sanitization, clean water and hygiene have been the root of many infectious diseases, as well as many other health-related problems. In medieval times, when science wasn't as advanced (more specifically, medical science), many ailments stemmed from a lack of hygiene. There were not many sewage systems in place, so most people, especially those living on the outskirts of town, had limited access to water.

What this occasioned was the death of infants, elderly people, and even vigorous youngsters if they ever got a mild fever. All it would take for the diseases to be deadly was a low immune system, and this only happened because of the quality of the water they drank and with which they showered. Oftentimes, when an infection spread rapidly, and a whole town was affected, it was due to the water they drank. The townspeople obtained their water from a common well, and if the water from this well was stagnant, it most probably contained harmful bacteria.

Knowing this, it is no surprise that the basic foundation for a nation is its sanitation system. Without it, disease and infections will ensue. African countries, due to scarce resources, lack the basic means for their citizens to lead healthy, sanitized lifestyles. Because of this, many people suffer from health problems.

## B. Points of view

### Mozambique

Mozambique is an East African country. Its rural population has virtually no clean water and sanitation. In March and April of 2019, Cyclones Idai and Kenneth dealt a terrible blow to coastal Beira city and the north respectively, displacing many families. Flooding continued for months, creating conditions for outbreaks of cholera and other water-related diseases

### Niger

In Niger, a county in West Africa, most people are farmers, but they struggle with water shortages and frequent droughts in arid, desert-like conditions. It is one of the poorest African countries, and with its increasing population, there is not enough water for everyone.

### Chad

In Chad, a Central Africa country, nearly 6% of the 12.2 million population depends on getting water from unsafe open sources like streams and rivers that animals use as well. This proves to be unsanitary, and it's putting people's health at risk.

### The Democratic Republic of the Congo

More than 50 million people in the Democratic Republic of the Congo use unsafe water. It's all they have for drinking, cooking, and washing. Dirty water leads to diseases such as diarrhea and cholera, which often results in the death of children.

### Somalia

Somalia is an East African country. The lack of clean water and sanitation, along with poor hygiene, contribute to a high rate of

water-related diseases, which frequently affect children and pregnant women. Its internal conflicts, droughts, and floodings also increase the scarcity of water.

#### IV. UN & EXTERNAL ACTIONS

##### A. UN actions

The UN has reported that 1.3 million people die of malaria each year, and that most of the disease burden is in Africa south of the Sahara. The factors that affect this problem are Intensified irrigation, dams and other water related projects. According to studies, the better management of water resources reduces transmission of malaria and other vector-borne diseases.

Similarly, approximately 160 million people are infected with schistosomiasis each year, and of those people, many heed from sub-Saharan Africa. This disease is strongly related to unsanitary excreta disposal and absence of nearby sources of safe water. According to some studies, basic sanitation reduces the disease by up to 77%.

Dr Dr LEE Jong-wook, the Director-General of the World Health Organization, said the following when asked about the impact of water, sanitation and hygiene on overall health: “Water and Sanitation is one of the primary drivers of public health. I often refer to it as “Health 101”, which means that once we can secure access to clean water and to adequate sanitation facilities for all people, irrespective of the difference in their living conditions, a huge battle against all kinds of diseases will be won.”

##### B. External actions

The International Organization for Migration, more commonly known as IOM, is an intergovernmental organization that provides services and advice concerning migration to governments and migrants, including

internally displaced persons, refugees, and migrant workers. On average, IOM is supplying two million liters of water per day to 113,500 people in Borno, where torrential rains and flooding have caused substantial damage to latrines, showers, handwashing stations and solar panels. With the pandemic, having these tools available is crucial for the citizens' health. What IOM is doing is sending volunteers to repair and maintain these facilities, as well as construct an additional 1,040 handwashing points using foot-operated water taps and soap dispensers to avoid contact with surfaces.

## V. CONCLUSION

Safe and readily available water is a human right and an important contributor to public health. If these problems aren't addressed, they won't be solved. Africa needs to improve the accessibility of water to marginalized and rural areas of its countries, as well as implement efficient sewerage systems. Access to water, sanitation, and hygiene go hand-in-hand, and what they all have in common is that, if a country fails to have these three aspects working, then its citizens will likely suffer from disease and infections. It is in African governments' best interest to improved access to clean water and sanitation, since this boosts economic growth, contributes to poverty reduction, and is fundamental to achieving the goals of improved health and education, greater food security, and improved environmental sustainability.

## VI. IMPORTANT QUESTIONS

1. How has your country experienced the effects of a lack of sanitation and availability of water? What systems do you propose to be implemented in your country to fight disease and infections? How can other countries in extreme poverty handle sanitation and clean water distribution?
2. Can progress in the supply of clean water best be realized through local control and/or nongovernmental organizations? Or is it better with foreign investment? What is the better approach between a centralized government investment versus management and control of water infrastructure?
3. Outline the importance of basic sanitation and sewage systems for a country's overall health. Reflect on how something we take for granted, such as access to water, can have an impact on the spread of disease.



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