



National and Subnational Level Handwashing Partnerships

“How-To” Series: Organization of Handwashing Partnerships for COVID-19 Response

With WHO, UNICEF, and other health authorities emphasizing the important role of handwashing with soap to reduce the spread of the coronavirus pandemic, the protective power of handwashing has taken on a global focus like never before. Given the scale of the issue, it is important to accelerate local action. Forming national and subnational Handwashing Partnerships could fill a coordination gap for this focus on handwashing and ensure swift action. This brief provides practical steps to facilitate local-level partnerships with the aim of widespread adoption of handwashing practices during and post-pandemic.

Why National and Subnational Handwashing Partnerships?

The increased handwashing rates during the COVID-19 pandemic provide an opportunity to sustain handwashing uptake in the long-term. However, the stakeholders that oversee pandemic response have a full range of issues and competing priorities. Handwashing Partnerships at a national and subnational level can be a resource and key actor among health and WASH clusters overseeing the response, and can help motivate and catalyze handwashing practice in homes, institutions, and workplaces. Subnational Handwashing Partnerships can also help to localize the fight against the novel coronavirus outbreak and enable a scale response.

The Handwashing Partnership will serve as a coordinating body for collective action to support handwashing through social marketing, policies for institutions, risk communication, product supply chain, and other supportive measures. Coalitions that harness different networks can amplify messages and approaches and can guide and monitor message fidelity. The partnership can also form the foundation for a sustained partnership to support the adoption of improved handwashing habits after the pandemic has passed.

How to move forward with a Handwashing Partnership

The urgency of the COVID-19 pandemic requires an accelerated approach to organizing Handwashing Partnerships. The process of partnership building must consider this context and adapt to the need for rapid coordination. The steps below provide guidance on how to initiate a Handwashing Partnership.

Step 1. Establish the need and role for a Handwashing Partnership. A partnership should pool resources and provide added value for each partner. It is important to identify opportunities and gaps to better understand how the partnership can contribute to existing efforts. The partnership should determine immediate and shared goals, such as advocating for proper handwashing facilities and protocols at all health facilities. An example of one handwashing partnership, which has been set up at the national level in Kenya, can be found in the text box on Page 3.

Step 2. Identify stakeholders. There are a variety of stakeholders who are able to contribute to and benefit from the Handwashing Partnership. Often, the public sector will play a catalyst role in partnership development and provide an institutional home and resources. Likewise, private sector partners are able to contribute professional expertise in supply chain, marketing and communications, and consumer research. The Partnership should go beyond WASH specialists and include those who



specialize in health, nutrition, education, and other areas where handwashing is important. Faith and social leaders also have important voices as social influencers among their constituencies, as well as leaders of companies and institutions that need to take preventative measures. Consider the following:

- Determine how to leverage existing stakeholders to fill gaps in scaling up a handwashing response. Building trust takes time, so it is important to leverage existing connections.
- Time, resources, and capacity are limited. It is essential to understand how the partnership can be effectively leveraged and managed. At this time, staff members are busy with their normal workload, plus the extra burden of this pandemic response.
- To sustain the partnership long-term, there must be added value to each individual organization. Good communication can ensure more aligned efforts and ensure there is limited overlap in activities.

Step 3. Assign a focal person(s). It is critical to have one or two people responsible for leading the partnership. Key attributes of the focal person include communication skills, familiarity with government and business structures, knowledge of handwashing programs, passion for handwashing, and ability to oversee activities. A health ministry staff with handwashing responsibility would be a logical choice, though their workload might not allow them to lead the Partnership without additional support. This could be a reason to have co-leaders for the partnership, with one leader from the ministry and another having more time to dedicate to the coordination of the partnership. A private sector co-leader provides ideal balance, but with the demands of the normal operations of their companies, a leadership role for the Handwashing Partnership may not be realistic.

Step 4. Plan activities. The preferred method of bringing all Handwashing Partnership members into a room to find common goals and plan activities is not possible with social distancing to stem the pandemic. Connecting through an initial virtual meeting with specific follow-up meetings among smaller groups can ensure concepts and documents are finalized in a streamlined manner. Also, keep in mind that people have different motivation when adopting handwashing during an outbreak. Formative research, consumer research, and market research often require months or years. In this context, information collection must be rapid. It is important to refer to similar situations or outbreaks to determine best practices and consider existing knowledge of handwashing motivators and barriers. When planning activities, consider tactics that encourage handwashing during the short-term and long-term. **Wash'Em** supports handwashing behavior change programs in emergencies and provides specific recommendations [here](#).

Step 5. Reflect on lessons learned. Facilitated learning and collaboration among partners is essential and can help enable the widespread uptake of handwashing. It is important to collect lessons learned from your partnership initiation process and share them with the Partnership and other implementers. If possible, consider regular webinars and support the local ministry to create a portal to serve as a central repository for information and knowledge exchange hub.



Business and COVID-19: Kenyan National Business Compact

The Kenyan National Business Compact was formed to support the government's response to COVID-19. Together, the Kenyan National Business Compact focuses on an industry-wide approach, bringing together all manufacturers of soap. It provides a platform on handwashing and other preventative measures to stop the spread of the coronavirus. The compact has three areas of focus:

- Provide unified communications around COVID-19 to support and clarify messages to communities;
- Scale up hygiene facilities in government-identified hotspots by leveraging the supply chain to increase handwashing supplies and infrastructure; and
- Create a flexi-fund for rapid response to government appeals.

The work is grounded in local action and community activation. Key lessons from the compact include:

- **It is important to start fast.** As soon as the first case of COVID-19 hit in Kenya, the group set up the first meeting. While many stakeholders may be unconfirmed or not join the first meeting, more stakeholders will join as the issue gains traction, so keep moving and keep non-participant stakeholders in the loop.
- **Leverage early adopters to influence others.** In the case of the Kenyan National Business Compact, Unilever was one of the early adopters and reached out to other companies to join the partnership.
- **It is important to have the right level of leadership at the table.** Consider having representatives from Ministries, UNICEF and other UN agencies, private sector, and civil society for a rich exchange of ideas and perspectives.
- **Determine partnership roles and contributions.** The group has a small, volunteer-based secretariat to coordinate efforts. Likewise, companies that are part of the partnership have provided in-kind support of approximately 17 million shillings of supplies. It is important for each partner to understand and contribute to the overall goal of the partnership to ensure collective action.
- **There is power in togetherness.** This is an unbranded campaign. Companies joined the partnership with the realization that more can be achieved together.

With a shared vision, the group provides a needed platform to support national efforts and ensures the focus on handwashing continues throughout Kenya's COVID-19 response.

Learn More

For more information and resources on handwashing and COVID-19, visit the Global Handwashing Partnership website [here](#). If you are interested in facilitating a Handwashing Partnership in your country, the Global Handwashing Partnership is here to support you. Please contact the Global Handwashing Partnership secretariat at contact@globalhandwashing.org.