**WASH Cluster Covid-19 Preparedness and Response Strategy**

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# Introduction and objective of this document

In a country under increasing risk of getting affected by the wide spread Covid-19 which has already affected 188 countries, as of 23rd March 2020 South Sudan has not reported a confirmed case. However, the threat for probable cases are imminent. The MoH has already announced and implemented prevention measures to avoid any imported cases arriving at South Sudanese international airports/border areas, and has put certain protocols in place to avoid local transmission. Considering the fact that WASH is an important IPC pillar, required to avoid local transmission and strengthen the country’s plan to avoid disease transmission, a WASH contextualized strategy document is required to guide the partners. To mitigate the risk of Covid-19 in South Sudan, different challenges (shortages of water sources, low-income, limited access to markets) and opportunities (scattered population, number of partner organization, HRP partners available in different areas) are present to mitigate the risk of transmission.

The South Sudan WASH Cluster has the capacity to respond to the epidemic/panademic in South Sudan through its 85 HRP partners which are strategically located across the country. Additionally, the WASH Cluster, through its decentralized strategy, currently has 8 Sub-National Coordinators that ensure the smooth coordination and information flow among partner at state level and national level. In order to cover the gaps that arise due to capacity or funding issues, the WASH Cluster has 14 EP&R standby teams to deploy to cover emergency response. Core Pipeline supplies and management are additional bodies required to mitigate the risk of Covid-19.

The purpose of this document is to frame the WASH preparedness plan to reduce the risk of Covid-19 and to introduce standard activities to respond in case of an epidemic. The Covid-19 Prepardeness and Response Plan is within the within the broader WASH humanitarian response in South Sudan. This will be done by detailing the mandate of the WASH partners, the modus operandi of the mobile interventions, standard activities and relationship with other sectors such as Health, FSL and Nutrition partners.

# WASH Epidemic Response within the WASH Cluster strategy

The WASH Cluster Strategic Objectives as per the 2020 HRP/Strategic Operational Framework is to:

SO1. Reduce morbidity and mortality, as well as suffering from protection threats and incidences of the most vulnerable in severity levels 3 and 4

The Specific Objective for SO1 details the interventions required to mitigate epidemics in coordination with health.

Specific Objective 1.3: Reduce excess morbidity and mortality rates from epidemic prone diseases (malaria, diarrhea, Acute Respiratory Infection (ARI), measles) in priority areas.

Covid-19 will be included under the Specific Objective 1.3 to provide clear guidelines to partners to respond across the country, specifically in the priority areas. As per the WHO guidelines and considering the situation as of 22nd March, the focus will be on border areas and urban areas with international airports to avoid importing cases and prevent the spread of imported cases into the local community. Urban WASH approaches will be adopted through improving the capacity of WASH infrastructure at an urban level and raising awareness. Taking South Sudan’s porous borders into consideration, rural WASH strategies will be strengthened through the WASH Cluster’s support for the Covid-19 Task Force to build on its existing capacity at border screening locations and ensuring the screening protocols are followed for cross border movements.

The key focus of the WASH Cluster is on “**Risk Reduction** by “Handwashing” and “Social Distancing”. **Handwashing:** with soap and mostly handwashing with chlorinated water (0.05%) at communal areas should be promoted at large scale (health facilities, schools, markets and other gathering events by training and setting up functional hand washing devices [e.g. 20 liters’ bucket with tap and HTH] while explaining communities and people at risk about Covid-19 and its impacts). **Social distancing:** will also be practiced at key WASH infrastructure locations (water points, latrines, handwashing stations, markets, etc), with the minimum distance being 2 to 2.5 metres.

Additionally, the WASH Cluster will strengthen the capacity of partners through enhanced prevention protocols at the community level through community engagement strategies that are tailored to meet the MoH guidelines for Covid-19 social distancing, and ensuring access to safe water as well as increasing capacity of water storage and water treatment at household level and promoting proper handwashing.

In line with 2020 HRP SO 1 and WHO Guidelines for Covid-19, the proposed strategy will provide guidance for preparedness and response. **Preparedness:** pre-positioning of the partners, key items supplied to warehouses before the start of lean season, training of key staff and advocacy for resource mobilization. **Response:** Teams deployment, infrastructure building, community engagement, and distributions in hotspots/epic centers, in addition to enhanced coordination to ensure that the epidemic is contained and not wide spread, through the provision of quality and specifically services.

1. WASH Cluster Covid-19 Preparedness Strategy
   1. WASH Infrastructure

As part of the 2020 HRP SO 1, WASH partners will place an emphasis on improving WASH infrastructure to ensure the easy and safe access to water within Sphere Minimum Standards. To optimize resource utilization, geographical location and hotspots of the epidemic will be prioritized in consultation with Health Cluster and MoH. The activities will target the following indicators:

* Number of vulnerable people due to WASH related diseases provided with access to safe drinking/chlorinated water
* Number of vulnerable people due to WASH related diseases provided with functional handwashing facilities with soap and, when possible, 0.05% chlorine running water, in areas categorized as high risk (markets, nutrition and health facilities, government premises)

During preparedness phase, the WASH Cluster will encourage the partners for following activities:

* Pre-positioning of pre-identified partners at high risk areas as per geographical priorities
* Identification of key water sources and services available in the area, specifically in PoCs and urban areas and maintaining a partners’ presence/positioning map for immediate response
* Partner’s training on response modules and WHO guidelines for Covid-19 response for WASH infrastructure development (i.e., appropriate social distancing while collecting water and using sanitation facilities, adapting and promoting handwashing messaging for Covid-19)
* Advocating for resource mobilization
  1. Distributions and Standard Kits Items

WASH Cluster in coordination with Core Pipeline Management Agencies will assess the increased requirement of hygiene items and water storage kits required to respond the Covid-19. Suggested kit items for Covid-19 response are:

* Soap 800 gm/person 3 months
* 20 liter bucket with lid without tap, 3/HH
* 20 liter bucket with lid & tap, 1/HH
* Aquatabs 67mg, 30 sachet/HH/month

HTH (65%-70%) will be made available at PHCC and PHU level while nutrition and, when applicable, health workers will be trained to prepare 0.05% chlorine for handwashing purposes.

Considering the anticipated early rainy season and probable arrival of Covid-19, pre-positioning of WASH Kit items are recommended at Juba and field warehouses such as Wau, Malakal and Rumbek.

In order to ensure the protocols of Covid-19 and social distancing “distributions at open grounds” and large distribution sites will be discouraged. WASH Partners will be advised to conduct house to house registration and distribution of kit items. (for detail protocols of House to registration and distribution please refer to activity matrix)

* 1. Hygiene Promotion and IEC

The Global WASH Cluster (GWC) developed Information, Education and Communication (IEC) and World Health Organization (WHO) recommended Hygiene Promotion Guidelines will be followed to ensure similarity, while the IEC and hygiene promotion techniques will be contextualized for South Sudan. Hygiene promotion will focus on the following key areas:

* Handwashing with soap
* Methods of handwashing
* Social distancing and its importance
* Water treatment at a household level
* Key times for handwashing

In order to reach a wider audience, specifically the beneficiaries at an urban level who have access to radio services, mass media campaigns will be launched with key partners to disseminate the key information regarding Covid-19 while the development of IEC materials for public places and health facilities will be done by selected partners and disseminated by the WASH Cluster and key partners. The IEC materials will consist of pictorial messages and in local languages. Additionally, WASH partners will build on their existing capacity of CHV (Community Hygiene Volunteers) and train them for a Covid-19 applicable response modality of house to house hygiene promotion (as per the guidelines provided in activity matrix) and raising awareness among communities for key issues related to Covid-19. The use of megaphones that play pre-recorded messages will be promoted, as they help with social distancing and limit exposure local staff face.

An IEC material link can be downloaded from here

<https://drive.google.com/drive/u/0/folders/1jQf8mQmR_yJWJTzGkY_Fo42i5ucp-a21>

* 1. Community Engagement

The fourth key pillar for the WASH Cluster Covid-19 Strategy is to engage communities to enhance community awareness and to set up referral pathways for reporting. The WASH Cluster has trained its partners on Accountability to the Affected Population (AAP) and community engagement strategies as well as in setting up referral pathways for Community Response and Feedback Mechanisms (CRFM). Building on existing partner capacity, the same approach will be useful when sensitizing communities in Covid-19 applicable reporting practices to alert authorities about potential affected persons while raising the awareness among communities for Covid-19 symptoms and encouraging voluntarily social distancing and self-isolation. At the preparedness stage, partners will form or restructure the existing WASH management committees and train them on basic awareness, guidance and preventive measures for Covid-19. Community engagement will further enhance Covid-19 applicable peer to peer information sharing and build communities resistance towards epidemic by breaking the cycle of chain.

1. WASH Cluster Covid-19 Response Strategy

4.1 WASH Infrastructure

As part of the WASH epidemic response and contributing to SO1 of 2020 HRP, WASH Cluster partners will build on and improve the capacity of existing water resources through the rehabilitation and construction of new water sources wherever necessary. Work to improve WASH infrastructure at a community level will focus on both water sources and handwashing facilities. While the WASH Cluster will not work in health facilities, technical guidance will be provided to partners working in health facilities for setting up appropriate WASH services, if required as per South Sudan Health Cluster mandate. The WASH Cluster will follow the following Strategic Objective to respond the epidemic:

* Provide a timely WASH minimum package of interventions on an ad-hoc basis, adapted to the specificities of the related-outbreaks, at an institution level as well as for the wider community
* Set-up of WASH services, training of health workers and pupils as ambassadors for appropriate hygiene practices within handwashing with soap at critical times at their household level

Please refer to the activity matrix for detailed review of activities proposed for WASH Infrastructure response.

4.2 Distributions and Standard Kits Items

As part of the response plan, the WASH Cluster will enhance the distribution of key WASH kit items among vulnerable communities in the hotspot areas. The WASH cluster will work together with the Health Cluster to distribute HTH and handwashing stations at a community and institutional level, while at a HH level WASH kit items will be distributed among the quarantined houses/areas. In order to avoid gathering and practice safe distancing **house to house registration and distribution practices will be promoted and practiced**. The WASH Cluster will reinforce the linkage with Covid-19 National Focal Person and Task Force to share the updates during the outbreak. Coordination with the Log Cluster, Health Cluster and the NAWG will be enhanced to monitor the triggers for Covid-19 and launch the response as early as possible, building on the capacity of existing preparedness planning and pre-positioning of items.

4.3 Hygiene Promotion and IEC

Covid-19 response will be majorly focused on prevention and depend on extensive hygiene awareness through Community hygiene volunteers and IEC materials. WASH Cluster will share the guidance links and IEC material for proper handwashing material with partners to ensure the uniformity in the messages in local languages as well as Mass Media Awareness Campaigns will be launched through radio’s for wider audiences in the Urban areas and high risk areas. IEC material shall be disseminated at Health facility level and Community Health workers to be trained on water chlorination for both drinking purposes (i.e. 0.5ml/g ) and handwashing (0.5ml/g). In Urban areas billboards and signposts will be installed at key entry points (near airports and roundabouts) to address the wider audience.

4.4 Community Engagement

WASH Partners will disseminate the information within communities for Covid-19 response. Community engagement and involvement will be the key in mitigating the epidemic effects and avoiding stigmas that may relate to the infected person/household. Community reporting, identification and referral will be encouraged as part of WASH Cluster Specific Objective in coordination with Health Cluster partners.

# Coordination

An effective Covid-19 preparedness and response strategy can be implemented through strong coordination. WASH Cluster currently has 8 Sub-National Coordinators in 10 States that organize and coordinate among partners and maintain the information flow. WASH Cluster meetings are held at state and national level on monthly basis. Additionally, bilateral meetings between partners and Coordinators/Co-Coordinators are encouraged (Thursday every week allocated as meeting day for partners). For the Covid-19 Preparedness and Response Strategy plan, the WASH Cluster will emplace the following for internal coordination with partners and Inter Cluster:

**Scenario – No Confirmed Case**:

* Monthly WASH Cluster meetings will be suspended to avoid gatherings, information to be shared on the [website](https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/en/operations/south-sudan/water-sanitation-hygiene) and via email – please contact wash.information@gmail.com
* The WASH Cluster will meet with partners on two days (Tuesday & Thursday) for a bilateral meeting with no more than 1 person at a time after receiving a formal request and appointment via email for urgent matters. At this point, no meetings will be taken without prior confirmation.
* SAG, SRC and EP&R meetings to be shifted to Skype meetings
* Only one attendant from the WASH Cluster will attend ICCG/NAWG meetings, while preferable to attend the meetings via skype
* Maintaining the distance of 2 – 2.5 meters during meetings and field visits by Coordinators/Co-Coordinator and SNC
* Anyone entering any WASH Cluster office will be required to practice appropriate handwashing techniques and using sanitizers after every 30 min

**Scenario – After Confirmed Case**

* Restricted bilateral face to face meetings, shift to skype meetings as much as possible
* Limited physical participation in ICCG/NAWG meetings, attend via skype
* Avoid field visits, and maintain social distancing as much as possible
* Temperature record on daily basis and monitoring Covid-19 symptoms in staff
* Phones calls will be mandatory