



## **Global Handwashing Day 2023; “Clean hands are within reach”**

### **A CONIWAS Statement**

**15<sup>th</sup> October, 2023**

Hand hygiene has been recognized as very effective and crucial in preventing the spread of infectious diseases. However, many people overlook the importance of handwashing when engaging in activities that require handwashing. Annually, Ghana joins the whole world to commemorate the Global Handwashing Day to create awareness on the importance of washing our hands with soap. CONIWAS and its members have also been active in these celebrations every year through the sensitization of the public, and calls for action to sustain hand hygiene practice.

The theme for this year; “Clean hands are within reach” calls on “strong leadership and collective efforts”, to close gaps in access to hand hygiene products and promote practice to achieve hand hygiene for all. The theme calls on everyone to play a role to ensure clean hands are within reach.”

According to UNICEF (2022)<sup>1</sup>, access to basic hygiene service in Ghana is 42%, with 22% of the households having no hand washing facility. The report indicates that, hand hygiene services are higher in urban areas; where 47% of households have access to basic hygiene services, compared to only 35% in rural areas. The assessment also indicates that 54% of schools in Ghana have access to basic service with higher levels of service in urban areas (65%) than for rural schools (45%). Almost half of schools, in rural areas, were without facilities (46%). About 62% of health care facilities had access to only basic service and 3% had no facilities.

Ghana made a lot of strides in hand hygiene during the COVID 19 pandemic. Hand washing facilities were found in many public places such as shops, lorry stations and markets. Institutions put in place effective measures to ensure proper handwashing was practiced while Individuals promoted hand washing with soap in their homes. Due to the fear of contracting COVID, majority of Ghanaians practiced proper handwashing. The Ghana water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) sector, capitalized on these gains to undertake more sensitization in order to sustain the hand hygiene practice even after the peak of the pandemic in the year 2020 Despite all these gains, there’s a greater majority of Ghanaians have reduced hand hygiene practice after the COVID era, with many public places and institutions showing poor attitudes to ensure handwashing since , it has become a common practice for people to walk past handwashing facilities o an institution or shop without practicing proper handwashing.

Promoting behavioral change and encouraging regular handwashing with soap and water remains a challenge, as awareness and sensitization efforts are primarily focused on global celebration.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://clearinghouse.unicef.org/download-ch-media/fd626dec-ad18-4bb0-81af-e98e12fb395e#:~:text=In%20Ghana%2C%20access%20to%20basic,only%2035%25%20in%20rural%20areas.>

To effectively promote handwashing, the Ministry of Sanitation and Water Resources, in collaboration with partners, has developed the Hand Hygiene for All Strategy. This strategy aims to raise awareness and emphasize the importance of hand hygiene practices among the population of Ghana. It includes promoting regular handwashing with soap and water, and the use of alcohol-based hand sanitizers. Additionally, the strategy focuses on improving access to handwashing facilities in public places, schools, healthcare facilities, and households by providing the necessary infrastructure and resources.

However, the implementation of this strategy is currently limited to a few partners operating in selected districts and regions in Ghana. To ensure nationwide coverage, it is crucial to disseminate the strategy and enable its implementation across the entire country.

As we celebrate this year's Global Handwashing Day, CONIWAS would like to urge the Ministry of Sanitation and Water Resources to expedite its efforts in collaboration with the Ministry of Local Government and the Head of the Local Government Service to ensure a collaborative effort to disseminate the hand hygiene strategy to all districts and regions. It is therefore imperative to ensure all Assembly staff especially the environmental health officers, and WASH partners in all districts understand and able to implement the key approaches in the hand hygiene strategy. familiar with the strategy. This comprehensive approach will help promote hand hygiene practices in all districts.

We also want to use this opportunity to call on the Ministry to take steps to initiate the development of the National Hygiene strategy which not only incorporates the hand hygiene strategy, but will deal with other hygiene issues such as Menstrual Hygiene management among others.

CONIWAS would like to remind all citizens to continue practicing handwashing to prevent contamination and the spread of infectious diseases. Let us all contribute to the "***clean hands within reach***" initiative.

Thank you!!

**Executive Secretary**

***Accra, October 15, 2023***

*The Coalition of NGOs in Water and Sanitation (CONIWAS) is a membership-based umbrella CSO formed in 2003 to advocate for improved access to WASH services by the poor vulnerable and marginalised population especially women and children. CONIWAS engages in WASH Sector activities using evidence-based actions gathered through its research agenda and experiences from its members most of whom*