



More than 4,000 children die annually of diarrhoea caused by unsafe water and poor sanitation

# 400 people dying daily of water borne diseases

By Gilbert Kidimu

Statistics from the health ministry show that Uganda loses 400 people daily from water-borne infections like diarrhoea, dysentery, cholera and typhoid, among others, which are easily preventable.

Saad Luwemba, a resident of Kinyoro zone in Katwe, one of Kampala's slums, had to part with sh170,000 after he was diagnosed with typhoid. He thinks he could have contracted the disease from drinking water commonly sold in sachets.

Uganda failed to achieve the seventh Millennium Development Goal on access to clean and safe water. Through this target, UN member states vowed to halve the proportion of people without sustainable access to safe drinking water and basic sanitation by 2015.

The UN, however, notes that while the world is on track to meet the drinking water target, a lot remains to be done in less developed countries like Uganda, with accelerated and targeted efforts needed to bring drinking water to all households.

Emmanuel Opoki, coordinator of World Vision's WASH programme, in the rural areas, access to water is at 65%.

"Rural areas, particularly those with low ground water potential are the most affected. Nakasongola is one of them," he adds.

Some of the reasons for safe water shortage include breakdown of boreholes due to lack of ownership and sustainability; poor ground water quality and unavailability of water that

meets drinking water quality.

He says problems associated with lack of safe water are common in such areas for example, insecurity for women and children as they cover long distances in search for water; outbreak of water related diseases which are the leading cause of death of children below five years. He says there is an increased strain on women and children who will have to move long distances looking for water.

Although National Water and Sewerage Corporation areas of operation have increased to a total of 149 towns in Uganda, eight million Ugandans still have no access to safe water, according to WaterAid Uganda.

"More than 4,000 children die every year of diarrhoea caused by unsafe water and poor sanitation," the report further reveals, yet a large part of Uganda (36,000 square kilometres) is occupied by lakes, including the largest fresh water lake, Victoria, which forms part of the south-east border.

As stated by WaterAid, ground water, which is the most important source of potable water in Uganda, especially in the rural Uganda, and provides 80% or more of the water supply, is harvested from unprotected sources.

According to Uganda Village Project, an NGO working with the people of Iganga to promote public health and sustainable development; the link between access to safe water and the overall health of the people of Iganga quickly became clear when they began activities in the area.

"Access to water at all, let alone safe water, is greatly lacking in many villages; the water sources that exist are often severely

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contaminated, making cyclical bouts of severe illness and premature death a part of everyday life. In Uganda, 17% of deaths in children under the age of five are simply due to diarrhoea," the report states.

According to Water Uganda, although the number of people with access to safe water and sanitation has improved over the past 10 years, there are still many communities (both rural and urban) that rely on contaminated water sources such as streams and open wells.

## Making ground

The Ministry of Water and Environment report of 2015 indicated the national safe water coverage for rural areas is estimated at 65%, as compared to 64% in the previous year. In 2015, the total additional population served through the sector conditional grants was 729,868 persons.

The increase in persons served, compared

to 632,726 people served in 2014 is attributed to the change in prioritisation in the type of technologies implemented, resulting in an increase in the number of piped water schemes that serve a larger number of the scattered rural population. The activities implemented through centrally managed projects by MWE served an additional total number of 79,500 persons. Rehabilitated boreholes restored supply to 63,300 persons and the off-budget support programmes to MWE served an additional 31,500 people in rural areas.

The report further indicates an estimated 809,368 people have been served by new water supplies in 2015. The overall per capita cost for rural water supplies is thus sh116,897, from sh122,853 for 2014. The per capita investment is still relatively high, as about sh22b was expended on ongoing multi-year projects.

## WaterAid calls for action

According to WaterAid's water sector assessment report, the Government should close the remaining water sector finance gaps by raising budget ceilings and improving equity in budget allocations between different social service sectors.

The Government's Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development and donors should jointly address delays in the disbursement of funds to enhance quality of work, provide adequate supervision and improve value for money.

The report further suggests the Government should provide a separate budget line for sanitation as well as allocation and disbursement mechanisms.