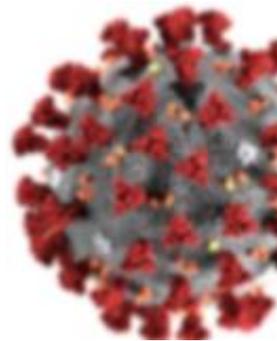


THE IMPACT OF COVI-19 ON WATER RESOURCES: HOW MUCH WATER IS REQUIRED AND HOW MUCH IS AVAILABLE?”

Kampala, 29 MAY 2020

COMMUNIQUE

“Increase investment in sustainable water resource management”



PREAMBLE

Uganda is one of the many countries battling with the Novel Corona Virus (COVID 19) pandemic since early this year 2020. In response to the pandemic, the government established an Inter-ministerial Task Force to oversee the coordination of the preparedness activities against the spread of the Virus. It is however key to note that in the interventions against COVID 19, water as one of the vital resources at the frontline of the fight against COVID-19 has been considered a marginal subject and not critically discussed and prioritized by the Task Force in regards to ensuring its accessibility and sustainable use and management.

Among the government’s directives aimed to mitigate the spread of the virus, the public was guided on protective measures among which included regular washing of hands for at least 20 seconds after every 20 minutes; maintaining proper hygiene and social distancing. This presupposed that there is reliable and sufficient water accessible to all Ugandans, everywhere, at all times in the fight against COVID 19. However, there are parts of the country particularly Karamoja and Teso sub-regions are still considered water stressed areas where access to water continues to be a challenge due to climate change variability characterized by prolonged droughts and very little rainfall. Such complexities can only be overcome if water resources are systematically planned for to ensure effective and efficient access to water by all Ugandans during and after COVID-19 crisis. It should be noted that to address



the existing water challenges and realize the national development targets, Uganda's water sector currently requires at least nine times the present level of funding annually for the next 12 years¹.

Against the above background, mindful of the critical role played by civil society organizations in the development process and the community in general, on 29th April, 2020, Food Rights Alliance (FRA) and Community Integrated Development Initiative (CIDI) in partnership with Trocaire and Danish People's Aid organized a webinar on Water resources under the theme, ***"The Impact of COVID-19 on Water Resources: How Much Water is required and How Much is Available?"***

The main objective was to debate and present a case around COVID-19 to influence various stakeholders including government, private sector, academia, farmers, media, and development partners to prioritize water resources management systems as the first line of defense against health emergencies and as a key requirement for production in other sectors. The observations and recommendations below were jointly developed by Non State Actors (NSAs) in collaboration with representatives from the Ministry of Water and Environment.

OBSERVATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In line with the objectives of the webinar and the overall presentations and discussions, participants highlighted and made the following observations and recommendations:

- a) COVID-19 is a prime opportunity to fast-track financing and investment for integrated water resource management in the country and establishing systems and facilities that provide water to vulnerable communities in both rural and urban areas in times of a crisis.

- b) Stakeholders recognize government for increasing the water sector budgetary allocation for the FY 2020/21 from UGX 931.914Bn to 1.485.515Bn compared to the previous FY 2019/20 allocation. However, we are concerned that in the current Financial Year, there is no supplementary budget for Ministry of Water and Environment and National Water and Sewerage Corporation to meet their operational costs and ensure effective access to water by all during this pandemic.

¹ Budget Monitoring and Accountability Unit Briefing Paper 30/19, Ministry of Finance, 2019

- c) If the current water bills are not cleared by the public waiting until after the pandemic as per the government directive, National Water and Sewerage Cooperation (NWSC) might not have enough resources to run its operations as public water bills have accrued and this poses a negative impact on future access to water by the public.

Stakeholders present resolved that Government:

- 1) Promotes Public Private Partnerships at all levels for increased investments in water infrastructure. This will address challenges in operation and maintenance of the water infrastructure for efficient access to water by the different community water users.
- 2) Prioritizes the importance of water resources through systematic and meaningful investment in the water sector internally to avoid future water crises. This should be reflected in a budgetary increase in allocation to the Water and Environment Sector more especially for Water Resources Management. The Government should also generate data to guide planning and investments for sustainable management of water resources and infrastructure.
- 3) Fosters ideological conversations on the linkage between water-food-health and energy to address coordination challenges among Ministries, Departments and Agencies to enhance management of water resources, implementation of government policies, plans and programs in a collective manner. This needs to be prioritized in the national development interventions and during resource allocation in the annual national budgets if Uganda is to build resilience of the water sector amidst pandemics such as COVID-19.
- 4) Improves water management plans for efficient access to water by the public. The plans should also involve mechanisms for proper waste management to mitigate water pollution in the country.
- 5) Strengthens the existing institutional framework and builds capacity of water management structures at all levels in designing, construction, operating and maintenance of water facilities for improved efficiency and access to water.

- 6) Sets water withdrawal limits for sectors that heavily depend on water such as industry, energy and agriculture to mitigate risks of economic water stress and water-scarcity constraints in the future. The government should scale up rain water harvesting technologies as an alternative to ensure sustainable management of the available water resources to meet the increasing water demand by the different sectors.
- 7) Subsidizes costs of water supply to at least 50% for the entire corona virus season for National Water address challenges related to operational costs being incurred.

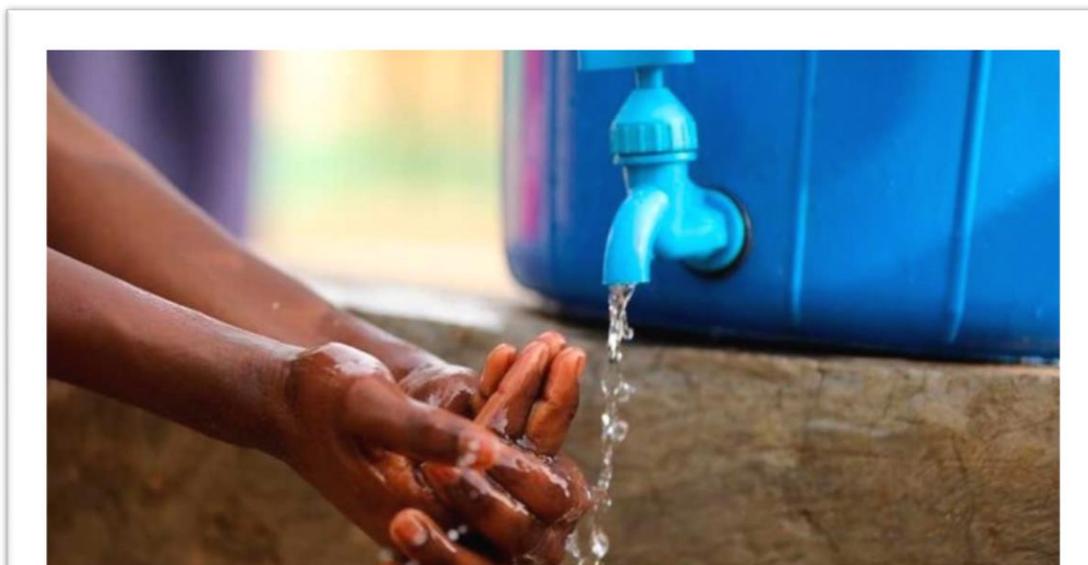
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