



Water Sanitation & Hygiene Partnerships for Learning and Sustainability (WASHPaLS) Project

Longitudinal data collection for assessing longer term impacts of COVID-19 on WASH Access

Background The economic shock of the COVID-19 pandemic has affected water and sanitation access and hygiene (WASH) in developing countries. In 2020, the USAID-supported Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene Partnerships and Learning for Sustainability (WASHPaLS) project evaluated the effects of the pandemic on access to WASH services and products across a number of countries.

Both urban and rural households reported that the COVID-19 shock has made it more difficult to obtain water supplies, amplified by consumer income losses, water service provider revenue losses, and supply chain disruptions. International assistance has generally focused on the largest water suppliers that operate in major urban centers, raising concerns about smaller and more financially vulnerable suppliers.

Although consumers did not identify major COVID-19 related sanitation difficulties, we expect sanitation access issues to be a lagging indicator. All service providers reported periods of lower demand and declining revenues in parallel with broader declines in economic activity that accompanied movement restrictions. Handwashing has increased and soap purchases substantially grew, though manufacturers and distributors saw declining profit margins likely due to increased consumer demand for cheaper brands.

These findings highlight uncertainties regarding the longer-term effects of COVID-19 on WASH development: specifically, the degree to which the delivery of services and products will further diminish due to the economic and operational constraints faced by WASH service providers, product manufacturers, and product suppliers, and the amounts by which “demand” will drop due to declining consumer incomes.

Therefore, ongoing data collection on a broad range of parameters is necessary to understand and respond to COVID-19 related WASH challenges and potential opportunities, such as increased awareness regarding the importance of good hygiene in preventing disease spread.

Objective WASHPaLS is currently tracking what data collection is taking place that could further shed light on impacts of the pandemic on WASH access and to identify trends.

Of particular interest are data sources capturing any information on:

- **WASH governance:** What policy changes have been enacted in response to COVID-19? How are governments responding to COVID-19 related challenges in ensuring sustainable and equitable access to safe water and improved sanitation?



- **WASH in households:** How are WASH conditions and access changing at the household level in both urban and rural settings?
- **Small-scale service providers:** What challenges are small-scale service providers facing due to COVID-19, how are they coping, and what financial assistance is reaching them?

We are focusing on USAID's 18 high-priority countries, and based on outcomes of the above exercise, we will undertake primary data collection in a limited number of these countries to complement the existing data we identify and compile.

Work with us

To attempt to answer these questions, we are seeking to learn of data collection efforts taking place in 2020-2021 that cover any aspects of WASH in relation to COVID-19, from government, development partners, private sector and academia.

We are particularly interested in ongoing census, household surveys, phone- and social media surveys, utility surveys, and small service provider (association) surveys. In cases where WASH is not yet included in ongoing efforts, we are also interested in exploring opportunities to build in WASH- related questions where the opportunity exists.

Electronic data are preferred, and we commit to maintaining the anonymity of data sources where it would be a condition of information sharing. If your organization can contribute to this research effort or you would like to learn more, please contact us at data@aquaya.org.