

## **GLOBAL WATERS RADIO**

### **Celebrating Global Handwashing Day Around the World with USAID**

#### *Interview Transcript*

**Global Waters Radio:** You are tuned in to Global Waters Radio, a podcast series produced by the Water Team at the U.S. Agency for International Development. The series offers listeners insights from USAID officials, development partners, thought leaders, and experts from across the water sector, as they discuss current USAID water programming and cutting-edge research from around the world.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, handwashing with soap has emerged as one of the simplest and most effective ways to contain the spread of the disease. With this year's celebration of Global Handwashing Day right around the corner on October 15, we are taking you to South Sudan and Indonesia this week on the podcast to hear from two USAID water, sanitation, and hygiene [WASH] experts. Among other topics, they are going to be describing the ways USAID has been elevating the role of handwashing in recent months in response to COVID-19, and we will also be hearing about some of the challenges they have been facing as they work to create sustainable handwashing behavior change during the pandemic.

**To start off, why don't you both introduce yourselves to our listeners, and give us a sense of why Global Handwashing Day is important to you.**

**Trigeany Linggoatmodjo:** Hi, thank you for having me here. I'm Trigeany Linggoatmodjo—call me Tri. I'm Senior Project Management Specialist for WASH with USAID/Indonesia. Global Handwashing Day is important to keep increasing our awareness and understanding about the importance of handwashing with soap as an effective and affordable way to prevent diseases and save lives. This year's theme, Hand Hygiene for All, calls for all of society to achieve universal hand hygiene. I learned from my personal and professional experience that washing our hands with soap is simple but essential to protect ourselves from viruses, bacteria, and other pathogens.

**GWR: Thanks, Tri. And Amuda, can you introduce yourself and give us a sense of why Global Handwashing Day is important to you?**

**Amuda Joseph:** My name is Amuda Joseph. I'm the Program Management Specialist, WASH. I have served with the USAID/South Sudan mission for slightly over five years. Global Handwashing Day is important to me because this is the day we dedicate to creatively raise awareness and increase knowledge on the importance of handwashing with soap and clean water. This day is both a fun and a serious eventful day where children participate in big numbers. We pause and reflect on whether the handwashing habit is practiced by everyone. And if not, we ask ourselves "What is it that we need to

do differently to change our handwashing habits?” Many people in South Sudan have died of preventable diarrheal diseases, mainly because of ignorance, which we strive to stop. That is our main focus, and that is why we really value this handwashing day. And I must say, with the coming of COVID, it has even accelerated the behavior of handwashing, because COVID is a very scary disease and everybody wants to be on top of doing their hand hygiene.

**GWR: Before we hear about some of the specific handwashing activities that the USAID missions in Indonesia and South Sudan have been supporting, can you give listeners a sense why reliable water and sanitation service is important for healthy hand hygiene?**

**TL:** Handwashing, of course, requires clean water, so access to safe water, sanitation, and hygiene are also critically important. The improved handwashing habits will need the availability of clean water with access to sanitation so we can wash our hands as much as needed and will not worry about the poor sanitation polluting the environment and affecting our health. Reliable water and sanitation services in households, health facilities, and other public facilities is critical to ensuring both sufficient quantities of safe drinking water and the ability to maintain hygiene, including hand hygiene, cleaning, and disinfection. Knowledge alone, however, may have limited impact on handwashing with soap but there is evidence from a few studies that having piped water access is one of the key determinants of handwashing behavior.

**GWR: And Amuda, what are your thoughts? Does access to a reliable water supply raise the chances that handwashing behavior change will be sustained?**

**AJ:** I must say in a place where people are fully aware and they know the importance of handwashing, the relationship between availability of water and soap will greatly increase handwashing behavior. But in other contexts, where people do not know the importance of handwashing, even if you have available water for handwashing, it is not going to serve the purpose. People are still not going to use it for handwashing, they will use it for drinking, and for bathing, and they will not follow the critical moments of handwashing. So in other words, it is a link to the level of understanding: The more enlightened the community is, the more they are able to use the water available towards their hands. The more unenlightened they are, they are not going to use the water for handwashing, even if the water is available.

**GWR: Handwashing has received more attention than usual this year as many countries are doing everything they can to contain the spread of COVID-19. Tell our listeners about some of the ways your missions have been elevating handwashing within the context of existing WASH programming, and Tri, let's start with you. What can you tell our listeners about the IUWASH PLUS project, and how has it been encouraging better hand hygiene?**

**TL:** IUWASH PLUS is a five-and-a-half year USAID/Indonesia project. It is designed to strengthen the Government of Indonesia's self-reliance in increasing access to water supply and sanitation services. It also seeks to improve key hygiene behaviors, specifically handwashing with soap among urban poor and vulnerable populations—our targeted population.

Right after the Government of Indonesia announced the first COVID-19 case and the project staff had to shelter in place and work remotely [March 2020], USAID IUWASH PLUS modified its handwashing with soap campaign with specific measures to protect from COVID-19. These include wearing masks, physical distancing, also to stay at home and follow information from the relevant authorities. To supplement this really important behavior change promotion, USAID IUWASH PLUS supported its partners to build hand washing with soap stations at the household level. As of August 2020, USAID IUWASH PLUS distributed a total 1,972 handwashing with soap stations in 34 districts/cities. As the result of the handwashing with soap promotion, the community members themselves developed more than 6,000 handwashing stations using self-funding from the community and USAID IUWASH PLUS partners. In addition, USAID IUWASH PLUS supported the collaboration between USAID/Indonesia and the U.S. Indo-Pacific Command to build a total 250 handwashing with soap stations for public facilities in nine large cities. In this collaboration, the project support included preparation of the facility design, the development of the prototype, the facility sitting in high density communities, as well as supervision for the construction and the installation process. We are making sure that more and more people wash their hands with soap during this pandemic.

**GWR: Well before we turn to South Sudan, Tri, tell us briefly about the #3MPLUS campaign that launched earlier this year, and how it is strengthening public health in the time of COVID-19.**

**TL:** In collaboration with a prominent Indonesian epidemiologist, USAID has launched this #3MPlus campaign to promote improved hygiene behaviors. In Bahasa [Indonesia], the #3M means *Memakai Masker, Menjaga Jarak dan Mencuci Tangan Pakai Sabun*, which is actually “wear your mask, physical distancing, and wash your hands,” the three important actions. Why we put “Plus” here means that increasing access to safe water and sanitation for everyone; we are using this #3MPlus campaign in every project activity for all of our stakeholders in 35 municipalities throughout Indonesia to ensure everyone is practicing these important behaviors during the pandemic and even after that, to keep being safe and still productive.

The proper handwashing with soap is really one of the best ways we can combat COVID-19 every single day, along with face masks and physical distancing. This behavior is really important to be really safe and productive during a pandemic. However, many Indonesians are still unaware of this fact. We need to keep messaging about this until those healthy behaviors become habits for everyone. We don't know how long this pandemic will last. We all know that water, sanitation, and hygiene is the first line of defense against the spread of COVID-19.

**GWR: Thanks Tri. Amuda, over to you. Tell us about some of the public health challenges South Sudan typically faces, and what USAID/South Sudan has been doing to promote better hand hygiene during the pandemic.**

**AJ:** In South Sudan, our case is a bit unique because our medical care services are really wanting, meaning that our preventive measures have to be solid in order to avoid any situation which will require hospitalization. So with the support from the United States, the U.S. Government has enabled people in South Sudan to move on with some steps forward. The funding basically enabled training of hygiene promoters to conduct COVID-19 sensitization at community levels, including identifying key influencers and community leaders, producing radio broadcasts focusing on handwashing, social distancing, and wearing masks, addressing gender-based violence, and protection issues amidst the pandemic.

In addition to that, we also promote entrepreneurship of some local partners or local communities, to produce liquid soap. Within the community, people are trained on how to manufacture or produce liquid soap. This is a very important intervention. In addition to that, we also do the network of permanent and temporary handwashing stations, especially in densely populated areas and semi-urban areas that lack access to hygiene facilities.

We also further improve access to affordable water through construction of new and rehabilitation of water points, access to quality water in reasonable quantities, which accelerates handwashing. Further, sanitation and hygiene services to communities most at-risk of being infected by COVID-19, we also do that a lot. We construct communal latrines in strategic locations, many of these within the displacement camps and highly populated locations.

**GWR: And what changes have you noticed, in terms of the public perceptions of hand hygiene in South Sudan?**

**AJ:** Before the COVID-19, we were struggling a lot, especially when it comes to the area of handwashing and improving sanitation. And I must confess, this is of course purely something to do with the behavior and it is tied to cultural practices. So it takes time to change mindsets. But with the coming of COVID-19, I think there has been a lot, a lot of work done around handwashing.

Handwashing was actually put on top of other WASH interventions. You find resources, WASH resources, being repurposed in order to address the gaps that are associated with handwashing. So during this period of COVID-19, we see a lot of change, at public places, at household levels, you find communities have seriously embraced the habit of handwashing. The question is, is it going to be sustained?

**GWR:** Well this Global Handwashing Day, that is the million dollar question. Thank you so much Amuda and Tri for taking the time to speak with us today. For more information on Global Handwashing Day and USAID-supported handwashing activities

in Indonesia and South Sudan, have a look at the links below. And as usual, be sure to follow the USAID Water Team on Twitter @USAIDWater.

This is Global Waters Radio.