Introduction

The COVID-19 outburst has laid a limelight on the economic disparities and the delicate social safety that leaves marginalized communities to bear the brunt with or without a crisis. While the virus infects people from all walks of life, low-income families have been the most affected due to lack of access to basic needs.

With millions of people trying to heed to the health experts’ advice to wash their hands, thousands of Kenyans have been held back from this small action to prevent getting infected as they have no sustainable access to clean water and soap.

KWAHO funded by UNICEF through WASH Alliance Kenya was tasked to distribute handwashing facilities to persons living with disabilities, the chronically ill and the elderly across Mukuru Kayaba, a slum East of Nairobi, cased with thousands leaking shanties housing over 700,000 people.

Fortified with the most effective emergency response to expand access to the most basic of public health interventions to contain the disease, we distributed 14 water storage tanks to serve during unreliable water supply periods, 76 public handwashing stations that were placed at high traffic areas, 3800 household handwashing facilities and 3800 bars of soap.

After the distribution, we did follow ups and sensitized the community members on the benefits of handwashing through educational and behavioral tools and tactics.

This document highlights some of the Covid-19 response project impact stories collected from the field.

Caption: An elderly man being cleared so that he can receive a household handwashing facility and a bar soap.
LIVING WITH A CHRONIC DISEASE IN THE FACE OF COVID-19

Seated on a couch leaning right of his small house made of rusted iron, Danson gasps for breath through oxygen pipes paired to an oxygen concentrator machine right next to him.

“I have been tied to this machine for the last five years which has rendered me immobile as the cylinders are quite bulky. I forgot what ‘normal’ felt like, with or without pandemics, this is my normal.’ Danson is a middle-aged suffering from C.O.B.D. a disease that has impaired his respiratory system and has forced him to rely on oxygen machines. His condition has denied him the mobility to go out and fend for his family as the sole bread winner like he did before the ailment.

Living In an informal settlement characterized with inadequate health facilities, lack of proper housing and sanitation, insufficient water and electricity, and a depleted economic infrastructure has made their living conditions even harder especially during this covid-19 season with measures which according to him, do not seem to address the main needs for survival of people living in slums. He says he has been relying on well-wishers to pay both his medical and domestic needs, but now with the covid-19 stringent measures imposed by the government, life has become harder as they have found themselves facing the current economic crisis and therefore lack enough to share with him and his household.

“We are really lucky that we were among those who received the UNICEF’s household handwashing facilities and bar soaps donation through KWAHO. They have helped us to at least keep as from the virus as now we can wash hands as often as we can. My visitors and well-wishers can also wash their hands from a decent point when they come to visit! Providing such basic facilities in slums not only improves the hygiene conditions for slum dwellers, but also strengthens public health and stimulates the local economy.” He says.
STORIES FROM THE FIELD

COVID-19 STRICKEN PERIOD FROM THE EYES OF A SLUM DWELLER LIVING WITH DISABILITY

Lucas Otin leads our way across a cramped dark alley that also serves as a waste water drainage system to god knows where. He struggles crossing the endless drenches as he leans on his clutches for support. At one point he mistakenly slides into one filled with smelly filthy greenish water and we swiftly rush to his rescue. “I’ve got it.” He says as he tries to find his balance. “The dirty waste water? We are forced to find normal in that. The drenches pass just right near our front doors. I am so used to the disgust to a point it does not affect me anymore.” He says as he resumes the trail.

A few minutes later, we find ourselves at a junction where the dirty water drenches have formed a small reservoir. Next to it, stands a small grocery kiosk made of tattered polyethene material.

“This is my small business to support me and my family. I wake up very early everyday and head to Marikiti market to fetch vegetables for sale. I have walk to and fro the market to save that fare so that I can consolidate enough to get an affordable boda boda rider to transport the stock from the market to this place.” Lucas tells us.

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“Life In the slum is even harder for people like us who live with disabilities. Sometimes I feel like giving up. In fact, that has occurred to me a couple of times during this COVID-19 stricken period.” He sighs.

“Before we got the handwashing facilities donations, a number of customers had stopped coming to buy things from my kibanda because I did not have a nearby handwashing facility. They feared that I might have not been washing my hands as frequent as possible therefore standing a bigger chance to transmit the disease. This really affected my business which made it even harder for me to purchase a decent handwashing facility.” He continues.

“I was so delighted when I managed to convince KWAHO that the area of my premise needed a decent handwashing facility! Now, myself and people living around can easily wash my hands whenever. Also, I get to store enough water for my customers to wash their hands as they come to sought out the vegetables for their purchase! Although the business is not doing as good as before the pandemic, I am glad people out there are thinking about our wellbeing through offering donations to help us contain the disease.”
“Imagine giving birth to bouncy and ever happy baby boy, holding him in your arms, watching him smile in his sleep then the two months down the line watch cerebral palsy day by day snatch the life out of his limbs. That is exactly what happened to me” recalls Mercy Wanjiru mum to the ailing now 5-years-old, Ezan Mwangi

Mercy says ever since the diagnosis, their life has been in and out of hospitals, leaving her heavily burdened with hospital bills she’s unable to pay as the condition left her no choice but to leave her work to take care of her son.

The Covid-19 pandemic made it even worse for them as the economic crisis has left her on her knees. The boy moves by crawling with his belly which poses risk of touching infected areas which forces his mom to change his clothes and immediately wash them together with his hands as often as possible. This had laid a heavy burden on her as where she leaves there’s no piped water therefore forcing her to buy it from the vendors.

“I was really happy to be among those who got the household handwashing facility and bar soaps. Right now, I have enough bar soaps to last us a month and a decent handwashing facility where Ezan can wash his hands. These donations will go a long way for us. It will help me save enough to cater for other needs.” She says.
In a tiny cornered dark shanty, lives Paul Maikani, a blind middle-aged man living with his two daughters, one aged 6 and the other 9. His wife died two years ago leaving him and his children at the mercy of his aged mother and well-wishers.

“Come In.” he ushers us to a rugged arm chair at a dark corner filled with a heap of unfolded clothes where we are to sit and says a casual ‘karibu’, a Kenyan most popular phrase to tell one to feel at home. He seats on a bed opposite where we sit as his children cuddle around him as he pours out his heart about the plight of his misery.

“When covid-19 hit the country, I wondered what our life would be like for me and my two girls. We had no surplus food or money to cater for our needs and rumor had it that the country would be put on a lockdown to contain the disease. Other than that, the government instructed citizens to adhere to the covid-19 prevention guidelines like washing hands often, wearing a mask in public etc. we had no supply of any of the things needed for our personal safety, not even water as we had no money to buy some from the vendors. Worse, the sanitation situation of this slum is quite critical. Toilets are a distance away from our houses that are not even free. We have to pay money to use the available public toilets. I felt shuttered but I had to find strength to sought help for my kids.

Thank God my mom and brother don’t live far from here. They have really come through for us. They have sought for us help from people from all walks of life. In fact, they’re the ones who got us into getting the household handwashing facility and bar soap donations!” He exclaims.

Now at least even with little to eat, we can always wash our hands easily from the household handwashing facility and have enough soap for domestic use to last us a couple of days.

“I am glad, though with little to eat, we can wash hands to keep safe from covid-19.”