



PRESS RELEASE

Join clean hands to help more children reach their fifth birthday

15 October 2012 – This year marks the fifth anniversary of Global Handwashing Day and for the fifth year in a row, hundreds of millions of people around the world will commemorate this occasion aimed at increasing awareness and understanding of the importance of handwashing with soap as an effective and affordable way to prevent disease. Global Handwashing Day has grown from a one-day celebration in a few cities to a worldwide movement that has mobilized significant investment in and political support for handwashing with soap.

This year, Global Handwashing Day shares its fifth birthday with more than 121 million children worldwide who are also turning five this year.

Dr. Michael Ojo, Country Representative of WaterAid in Nigeria said:

“Sadly, too many children in Nigeria still die every year before their fifth birthday as a result of diarrhoea and other diseases related to unsafe water and a lack of basic sanitation and hygiene. What is even sadder is the lack of access to the simple measures such as handwashing with soap which can help prevent diarrhoea, pneumonia, and other diseases that stop many children from reaching their 5th birthday.”

As handwashing with soap has an important role to play in child survival and health as well as being a cost-effective intervention that drastically reduces the incidence of diarrhoea and respiratory infections among children under five, the theme for this year’s Global Handwashing Day: **"Help More Children Reach Their 5th Birthday"** couldn’t be more fitting

Handwashing with soap is the most effective and inexpensive way to prevent diarrheal and acute respiratory infections, which take the lives of millions of children in developing countries every year. Together, they are responsible for the majority of all child deaths. Yet, despite its lifesaving potential, handwashing with soap is seldom practiced and difficult to promote.

In many developing countries, it is not the lack of soap that is usually the barrier – with the vast majority of poor households having soap in the home – rather, the problem is that soap is rarely used for handwashing. Creating lasting behaviour change and ensuring that handwashing with soap becomes a social norm, are key components of hygiene and sanitation programmes worldwide.

Each year, various stakeholders like ourselves commemorate the day and promote the practice of handwashing with soap. But every year the story remains the same: thousands of Nigeria's precious children continue to die needlessly from entirely preventable diseases that are water-borne or as a result of effective sanitation and poor hygiene practices.

Turning handwashing with soap before eating and after using the toilet into an ingrained habit could save more lives than any single vaccine or medical intervention, cutting deaths from diarrhoea by almost half and deaths from acute respiratory infections by one-quarter. A vast change in handwashing behaviour is critical to meeting the Millennium Development Goal of reducing deaths among children under the age of five by two-thirds by 2015.

As we join others around the world in taking action to promote handwashing with soap on Global Handwashing Day, we must ensure that we also promote long-term behaviour change throughout the year and as a crucial part of everyday life. As we commemorate the important practice of handwashing, the call is for us to come alive to our responsibilities – our responsibility to join hands (Clean Hands!) to promote awareness about the simple, affordable and yet life-saving practice of handwashing.

WaterAid is committed and unrelenting in our efforts to ensure that the core messages of this campaign are spread as widely as possible across our focal states and the rest of the country.

Let us collectively arise to our responsibility of promoting handwashing by beginning with our own homes, offices, shops, compounds and streets where we live. Let us save our homes, children and our beloved Nation. The health and well being of the people of this great country is the foundation for economic growth and sustainable development.

Our life is in our hands. Please wash your hands and live.

About WaterAid:

WaterAid is an international NGO working in 27 countries in Africa, Asia and the Pacific region to improve communities' quality of life through lasting improvements to water, sanitation and hygiene education using local skills and practical, sustainable technologies.

WaterAid has been working in Nigeria since 1995 and currently works in over 100 communities and about 30 LGAs in six States in the Federation. We champion a number of Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) approaches, methodologies and low cost WASH technologies geared towards increasing access to WASH in small towns, rural communities and schools across the nation. Our work seeks to support the Nigerian government in meeting the MDG target of reducing by half the proportion of people without sustainable access to safe drinking water and basic sanitation.

To find out more about our work or to support us, visit www.wateraid.org/nigeria

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