

3. Covid-19 made some households to increase the burning of plastic wastes such as bottles, polythene bags, straws among others in the open, during the day and at night. Worst of all, some parents sent children to do the burning without any warning about their dangers. Plastic wastes like polythene bags if burnt release highly toxic gases like phosgene, carbon monoxide, chlorine, sulphur dioxide, nitrogen oxide beside deadly dioxins. These chemicals have far reaching ramifications on the health of people and the environment at large.

4. Covid-19 however, provided an opportunity for innovations among Ugandans to melt plastic waste into coronavirus face shields. Some individuals and companies who had been turning collected plastic waste into building materials in the previous years, shifted gear and instead began manufacturing makeshift plastic face shields from discarded plastic bottles. These were supplied to a number of NGOs, private health facilities, public hospitals and schools.

A. Policy Recommendations on the impact of COVID-19 on chemicals-sanitizers

1. Regular vigilance and inspection is required in the public and by the responsible authorities such as Uganda National Bureau of Standards, National Drug Authority, and Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development over counterfeit hand sanitizers that have flooded the market.

2. To reduce improper use and prevent unnecessary chemical exposures, users should always read and follow directions on the label. Wearing of eye and skin protection material is also critical in minimizing such exposures. The public should also report suspicious sanitizers to the responsible authorities for action.

3. The chemical products that are used in different households should always be kept out of the reach for the children. Children are much more vulnerable to such chemical exposures.

4. The communities and the public should be reminded to wash hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, especially after going to the bathroom, before eating; and after coughing, sneezing, or blowing their nose. Hand washing should equally be emphasized as a cheaper alternative to using sanitizer.

B. Policy Recommendations on the impact of COVID-19 pandemic on plastic wastes.

1. The government should enact strict policies and legislation on plastic waste. Uganda does not have any serious environment laws on disposal and burning of plastics and the existing laws are never enforced. Many companies and investors were allowed to produce a variety of different of plastic related PPEs and containers in Uganda without any law governing them.

2. There is an urgent need to raise awareness to the entire public on issues of plastic wastes and how it should be managed. There is need to sensitize the public about the environmental damage caused by plastics.

3. The government and businesses should identify and promote non-fossil fuel plastic substitutes. The list of non-toxic, biodegradable or easily recyclable materials that could replace plastic includes many well-known materials, such as glass, ceramics, natural fibres, paper, cardboard, rice husk, natural rubber and animal proteins.

4. The government should promote, install and prioritize efficient waste management systems across the country. Manufacturers and business community need to be encouraged to do more of recycling of the used plastics in order to absorb big volumes of plastic waste disposed on the environment.



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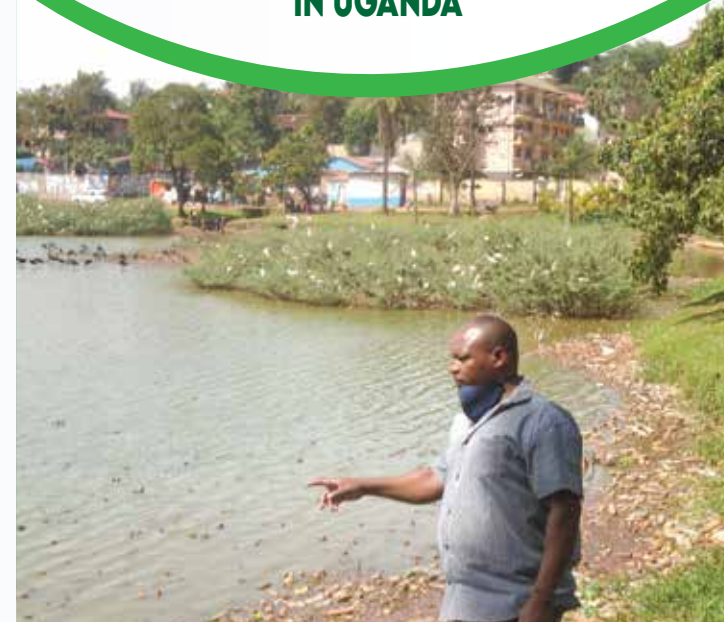
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THE IMPACT OF COVID - 19 ON PLASTIC WASTES & CHEMICALS - SANITIZERS IN UGANDA



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ABOUT COVID - 19 PANDEMIC

Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) continues to threaten and challenge the health of citizens, public health, and the economies of different countries including Uganda. As at 25th January 2021, Uganda had registered at total of 39,149 Coronavirus Cases, of these 317 deaths, and 13,861 recovered.

COVID-19 pandemic is a new virus that is a highly infectious. Coronavirus is spread from human-to-human when an infected person's sneeze or cough droplets come into contact with another person's eyes, nose and/or mouth. It can also spread when a person touches a contaminated surface, e.g. desk, chair, door handle, phones etc. then touches their eyes, nose and/or mouth. When the virus is not reported early and managed by health workers it can cause severe illness in humans and can lead to death.

The main signs and symptoms include: Fever, Running Nose (flu), new continuous Cough, General Weakness, muscle aches, headaches, burning eyes, burning when urinating, loss of taste/smell, and difficulty in breathing if the patient develops pneumonia. Older people above 60 years and those with underlying medical problems like cardiovascular disease; diabetes, chronic respiratory disease, and cancer are more vulnerable to the virus.

It is important for everyone to report cases of COVID-19, Boost your immunity, avoiding crowded places, get medical assistance and accept isolation in case one is affected and observe the SOPs.

COVID -19 pandemic has had a significant negative impact on plastic wastes and wide spread use of chemicals-sanitizers. ACCC with support from IPEN documented the impact of COVID -19 pandemic on plastic wastes and chemicals in Lubaga, Kasubi, Kawala and Mulago for Kampala and Nansana and Ganda for Wakiso districts-Uganda from October 2020-January 2021.

A. Findings on impact of COVID-19 on chemicals-sanitizers

1. ACCC established that in public places such as entrances banks, markets, arcades, taxis, bus parks, shops, supermarkets, restaurants and other places, people could find sanitizers with the security personnel or the management which could be forcibly applied to them without any question. One could not be allowed access into some places if insisted on

using his/her own.

2. ACCC established that some people in the communities visited reported a number of side effects as a result of using sanitizers. Some users have complained about side effects such as allergies and skin irritation, vomiting, dizziness and having difficulties in breathing.

3. In the first few months of the Covid-19 outbreak and subsequent lockdown, the public couldn't differentiate the genuine sanitizers from those, which were counterfeit. This exposed them to some expired, substandard and harmful sanitizers. ACCC saw some sanitizers-Focus Hand disinfectant with misleading labels such as, '**effect to Corona Virus, AIDS (HIV), HSV, Influenza viruses, Rota, Vaccinia.**'



Photos taken by ACCC Research Team, November 2020.

4. ACCC further established that some companies making sanitizers in Uganda took advantage of the high demand for hand sanitizers during the coronavirus pandemic and used toxic ingredients such as methanol. Some of these sanitizers have since been banned by the NBS for failure to meet the standards. Sanitizers containing methanol or having less than 60% alcohol can be toxic when absorbed through the skin.

5. Coronavirus pandemic exponentially increased the need for access to hand-sanitizers and disinfectant products for both healthcare professionals and the public at large. When produced and used correctly, these products are safe and effective. However, wrong formulations and improper use of these products could result in life-threatening effects.

6. The public had mixed response in regard to the use of sanitizers. Some could willingly sanitize although in most cases, people could be forced to wash their hands, sanitize or wear a masks—like it makes little sense to them. This risked the spread of the virus to the rest of the public.

7. ACCC found that some members of the public were making their own sanitizers without following the guidelines of Ministry of Health and NDA. Some users could directly consume alcohol- 'waragi' and claimed they were sanitizing themselves.

This was informed by the news that the best sanitizers are alcohol based.

8. ACCC established that there are a number of poor quality sanitizers and masks on the market. Some of the manufacturers had not met the MoH and NDA guidelines and thus produced a number of substandard products on the market that were circulated to the public.

9. ACCC found out that children were freely playing with hand sanitizer bottles without any precaution. Hand sanitizers were tempting to children because some were packaged in colourful bottles with good smells. This put the children at a risk of chemical poisoning.

B. Findings on the impact of COVID-19 on plastic wastes

1. The outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic has worsened the complexities of plastic waste management. The pandemic resulted into massive use personal protective equipment (PPE) much of which contains a substantial proportion of plastic as the most reliable and affordable defense against infection and transmission of the virus.

2. Plastic waste management practices in Uganda are largely ineffective. Lack of proper collection and management of plastic wastes was evident during the lockdown period. Thus, there was uncontrolled use and insensitive way of disposing plastic waste to the environment. Plastic wastes were disposed off into gardens, wetlands, water systems, walkways, roadsides, abandoned and open lands and people's compounds that were not fenced. These will exacerbate plastic pollution in the country.



Photo taken by ACCC Research Team, December 2020.