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USAID Recognizes Global Handwashing Day in Zimbabwe

On the second annual Global Handwashing Day, the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) is highlighting this simple hygiene habit – washing hands with any soap as a way to reduce disease in Zimbabwe.

During an Oct. 15 program, USAID partners Population Services International (PSI) and Children First, along with the Ministry of Health and other stake holders, will be celebrating Global Handwashing Day at the Mabvuku 1 Primary School in Mabvuku, Harare with hand washing demonstrations, a hand washing drama, and a donation of buckets and soap to schools and clinics in Mabvuku Tafara.

“Handwashing really matters,” commented Patience Ndlovu, Children First Head of Programs. “Global efforts have helped to reduce annual worldwide mortality in under-5-year-olds from nearly 13 million in 1990 to 9.2 million in 2008.” She emphasized that “Here in Harare we can decrease the incidence of serious diseases like cholera, pneumonia, and diarrhea by teaching school children to use soap and water at critical times such as before eating and after using the toilet.”

USAID’s Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance (USAID/OFDA) collaborates intensively with UNICEF and numerous non-governmental organizations on Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) activities in Zimbabwe. In FY 2009, USAID/OFDA committed more than \$8.6 million for WASH programming throughout Zimbabwe to improve community resilience to cholera and other waterborne diseases.

As part of this effort, USAID/OFDA committed over \$360,000 for 400 metric tons of soap for use in hygiene promotion programs and supported the distribution of 30 million water purification tablets.

USAID has also developed a “Healthy Water, Healthy Habits, Healthy People” educators guide on water, health, sanitation, and disease prevention for nationwide distribution in Zimbabwe. The guide, prepared by Project Wet, provides teaching materials on water

resources through hands-on, investigative, easy-to-use activities such as songs, role playing, and group activities.

According to the World Health Organization, diarrhea kills almost 2 million children globally each year. Studies have shown that washing one's hands with soap could reduce worldwide rates of diarrhea by almost half and save at least one million lives – saving more lives than any single vaccine or medical intervention.

Proper handwashing and safe waste disposal are very closely related with increased health and productivity. Lack of access to sanitation is especially difficult for children who pay the price in lost lives, missed schooling, disease, and malnutrition. Worldwide, inadequate sanitation, poor hygiene, and unsafe water claim the lives of an estimated 1.6 million children under the age of five every year.

The challenge is to transform handwashing with soap from an abstract idea into an automatic behavior in homes, schools and communities worldwide.

The American people, through the U.S. Agency for International Development, have provided economic and humanitarian assistance worldwide for nearly 50 years. For more information about USAID's efforts to fight cholera and waterborne diseases in Zimbabwe, please go to: www.usaid.gov/our_work/humanitarian_assistance/disaster_assistance.

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The U.S. Agency for International Development has provided economic and humanitarian assistance worldwide for more than 40 years. For more information on USAID programs in Zimbabwe, please visit www.usaid.gov/zw.