



A student washes his hands after a demonstration.

IEDA Relief Report Cameroon

IEDA Relief celebrates the International Hand-Washing Day

Far North Region, Cameroon

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Summary

The WASH department of IEDA Relief Cameroon in the Far North region celebrated the 8th edition of the International Hand-Washing Day in order to raise awareness about the consequences of poor hygiene among the population of the camp and surrounding villages, and to remind people of the importance of hand-washing for health, particularly for children. The event took place in the primary schools of the refugee camp of Minawao and surrounding villages.



Introduction

International Hand-Washing Day is celebrated on the 15th of October of each year. It was created in 2008 with the aim of raising awareness among a maximum number of people on the consequences of poor hand washing.

The celebration of this day is the perfect occasion to remind people of the importance of this habit for health, particularly among children. To do so requires raising awareness within the population on the benefits of hand washing, particularly among parents, students, teachers, health care staff and the ill, with the aim of encouraging people to adopt this habit in everyday life.

According to UNICEF, the simple act of washing hands with soap can save one million children in the world each year.¹ Hand washing with soap is the cheapest and most effective way of preventing diarrhoea and other water-borne illnesses as well as pneumonia. It is also the most effective way to fight cholera, often named “the illness of dirty hands”, which is currently present in several provinces in Cameroon and for which the main symptoms are diarrhoea and vomiting.

Dirty hands are the cause of roughly 23% of acute breathing diseases, one of the main causes of death of children under the age of five. These infections are responsible for an average of 18% of deaths and around 50% of diarrhoea cases, the second leading cause of mortality among children under the age of five, are caused by dirty hands. As a consequence of diarrhoea, around 8000 children die every year before reaching the age of 5².

IEDA Relief’s celebration

Children were the main target of the awareness raising sessions and demonstrations conducted throughout the day by IEDA Relief with the support of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), not only because they are main victims of illnesses linked to dirty hands but also due to their high learning capacity and their ability to learn by imitating the gestures of others. Schools, as a gateway for hygiene and health promotion, were particularly targeted by IEDA Relief for their awareness raising activities.

IEDA Relief led an activity lasting four days and benefitting a total of 6255 children in 5 primary schools in the Far North region of Cameroon (3940 children in the primary school of Minawao, 607 children in the primary school of Mayo Laddé, 710 in the primary school of Zamai, 512 in the primary school of Gadala and 486 in the primary school of Gawar) as well as 1040 children not registered at school and living at the camp of Minawao.

In the camp Minawao, a total of 5995 people were reached through the awareness sessions, among which 345 men, 670 women and 4980 children.

In addition to this, IEDA Relief distributed 16 hand washing sets, 40 buckets and cups (20 of each), and 300 soaps in the primary schools visited in the camp and surrounding villages.

¹ www.unicef.org - Source consulted in October 2015.

² www.cieau.com - Source consulted in October 2015.

All in all, the messages of the day reached a total of **8310 people**, including **7295 children**, in the camp of Minawao and surrounding villages.

The hand-washing campaigns mainly centred on messages on hand-washing with soap during the essential moments of hand washing³. They were carried out with the active involvement of all the IEDA Relief staff, teachers, directors, parents of the students at the targeted schools and other water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) partners in charge of child protection and health at the refugee camp of Minawao.

It must be noted that this campaign was carried out in a difficult context since the Minawao camp is located in the Far North region of Cameroon, an area that remains at high risk in terms of security according to the United Nations, and which also presents challenges in terms of the weather due to the heat of the Sahelian area.

Pictures of the event



Animating the awareness sessions

³ According to UNICEF, the five key moments of hand washing are: before cooking, before eating, before breastfeeding, after having used the toilets and after changing baby diapers.



Raising awareness during the caravan



Refugee children in the Minawao camp benefitting from the awareness sessions



Donating hand-washing sets to the primary school in the Minawao camp