



Anyone can drown,
no one should.

The First World Drowning Prevention Day – July 25, 2021

Information note

1. Background

In April 2021, the United Nations (UN) General Assembly declared July 25 as the day for “Global Drowning Prevention” to be marked every year. This is the first day of its kind that provides opportunity to advocate for prevention of the neglected injury that silently claims thousands of lives every year. More than 90% of these deaths are in low- and middle-income countries where children and adolescents are the most affected. Just like other forms of injuries, drowning is entirely preventable. However, many families and communities continue to suffer the tragic consequences associated with it.

Drowning is a multi-sectoral issue; no single sector has capacity to prevent it. As a UN coordinating agency, the World Health Organisation (WHO) invites all stakeholders to mark this international day, including other UN agencies, governments, civil society organizations, the private sector, academia and individuals. The effective measures for drowning prevention include setting and enforcing safe boating; shipping and ferry regulations; improving flood risk management; teaching swimming, water safety and safe rescue skills; training bystanders in safe rescue and resuscitation; installing barriers controlling access to water; and providing safe places away from water such as *crèches* for pre-school children.

2. Why Drowning Prevention Day

Drowning accounts for 7% of all unintentional injury deaths, with the WHO-African region experiencing the highest drowning death rate of 8/100,000 population. This is believed to be a gross underestimate because it does not include drownings from transportation and flood disasters. Over 18% of Uganda’s land surface is covered by water, exposing more than 12 million people to the risk of drowning. From available studies, Uganda suffers the world’s highest drowning death rate of 502/100,000 population in lakeside fishing communities. A countrywide survey conducted by Makerere University School of Public Health (MakSPH) revealed a high burden of drowning and the circumstances in which the drownings occur, pointing to the fact that drowning is entirely preventable. In addition, the thousands of individuals have been affected by the current rising water levels in nearly every water body in the country. Some of these resulted in deaths by drowning and destruction of property. However, preventive efforts are hampered by many factors, including a lack of enabling laws and policies, predictive and mitigation measures, inadequate or lacking infrastructure (e.g., for access to water and water transport), and low capacity for search and rescue.

3. World Drowning Prevention Day

3.1 Where?

This is a global event. As a UN member state, Uganda will join the rest of the world in commemorating the first international day for drowning prevention on July 25, 2021. This will be a virtual event, given the current challenges brought about by the Covid-19 pandemic.

3.2 Theme

Drowning is a silent killer and important threat to public health worldwide. In Uganda, many drowning incidents only make it to the news if they involve a large number of people or a prominent person. The daily drownings that occur in communities whose livelihoods depend on water, such as fisherfolk, go unreported.

In some drowning incidents, there have been attempts by bystanders/first responders to rescue the victims. Unfortunately, many of these rescuers have also died from drowning either due to lack of competence to conduct safe rescue or lack of required rescue equipment and resuscitation skills. Many of the drownings have also been due to poor safety precautions on the water ways among others.

Research from MakSPH informed the development of the first ever National Water Safety Strategy for Drowning Prevention in Uganda. This day provides opportunity to raise awareness about drowning prevention and to announce this strategy to the country and inform the nation about the country's efforts to prevent this neglected killer. This strategy brings on board different stakeholders to work together to prevent drowning. The stakeholders are shown on Fig 1.

Theme: ***“Drowning: recognizing the silent burden and a call to action”***

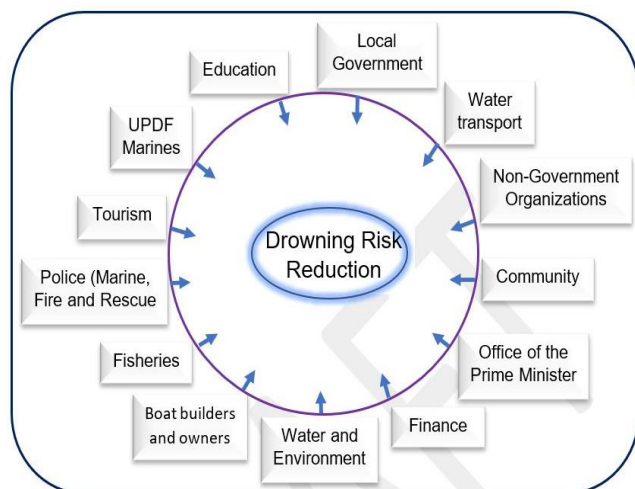


Fig 1: Stakeholders in drowning prevention

3.3 Objectives

1. Raise awareness about the burden of drowning
2. To popularize the first national strategic plan for drowning prevention in Uganda
3. To promote and emphasize prevention and mitigation measures for drowning

3.4 Audience

The target audience is the general public. This will be done with the help of different media houses, including social media platforms. Policy makers and politicians will be of special interest. In addition, schools, recreation and hospitality facilities such as beaches and hotels will be an important audience.

3.5 Proposed formats

Given the current Covid-19 pandemic, this day will be marked virtually.

3.5.1 Preparation

Messages will be sent out via online platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, WhatsApp, newspaper articles (The Monitor or The New Vision) and respective websites of the partner institutions. The institutions include Makerere University, Ministry of Water and Environment, Office of the Prime Minister, WHO – Uganda, CDC – Uganda, Uganda Police Force (Marines), Ministry of Works and Transport etc. The social media messages will run for five days prior to the D-day that will be crowned with a webinar. Flyers will be designed to advertise the event as may be appropriate.

3.5.2 Team

The organizing team will consist of communication specialists and an IT specialist who will ensure smooth running of the virtual event. These will be backed up by the experts in the subject area such as researchers from MakSPH and technical personnel from MoWE and the OPM.

3.5.3 The Webinar

The public will be invited to join a webinar that consists of a panel of discussants from academia, practice, policy etc. The questions for discussion will be jointly drafted by MoWE and MakSPH before they are given to the moderators. This will be hosted at the Ministry of Water and Environment, manned by the IT specialist and assisted by MakSPH. The webinar will also be streamed live on Facebook for those who cannot join directly. The invited journalists will capture clips from the webinar to be streamed during their news broadcasts in their respective TV or radio stations.