

Fighting Covid-19, one tippy tap at a time

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KEEPING HEALTHY ... Tippy taps, an invention that consists of a five-litre container filled with soap water and tied to poles, which is then angled against a rope to be used as a pulley as in the picture above, have become a popular alternative for sanitation purposes where water is scarce. Photo: Garwin Beukes

GOTLIB Namupala (23) carries steel poles and pieces of rope while other volunteers carry a plastic bag with 25 empty five-litre bottles, that would be turned into tippy taps to fight against Covid-19.

Like many countries in the world, Namibia has been fighting the spread of Covid-19 and Erongo and Khomas regions (including Okahandja and Rehoboth) have been put on lockdown.

So far, Namibia has recorded 14 confirmed cases, while more than 300 suspected cases have been tested locally and in South Africa.

The group has been visiting homes in Windhoek's informal settlement of Ombili since 08h30, with hopes of not just educating the community members on the dangers of Covid-19, but also on how the use of tippy taps can help reduce its spread.

Namupala said tippy taps can be set up in about seven minutes and consist of three poles, a five-litre container with soap and water. A rope is tied to the bottle neck and attached to a piece of wood that acts as a foot pedal to get the water pouring out.

Ombili is one of the four informal settlements in the Tobias Hainyeko constituency, which are targeted for the provision of tippy taps. The others are Moses Garoëb, Samoral Machel and Khomasdal.

Close to 130 000 Windhoek residents live in informal settlements that have been ravaged by cholera and hepatitis E in the past. These diseases are caused by poor sanitation and lack of access to water.

Namupala and his team work for a non-governmental organisation, the Development Workshop Namibia, and they had also worked on the hepatitis E project to stop open defecation and encourage the building of pit latrines.

He said they set up the gadgets near bars or toilets so that people can easily wash their hands. The organisation aims to set up 10 000 tippy taps in the four constituencies in four to five weeks. They also provide 2,5 litres of liquid soap for use in the tippy taps.

Foibe Silvanus, the emergency response secretary in the Moses Garoëb constituency, said they are also educating the people on Covid-19 and are distributing flyers from the health ministry on the disease.

“We set them up with the hope that not only can those in the immediate surroundings benefit, but that other people can also set up their own tippy taps using these as models,” said Silvanus.

Resident Leena Haihambo and her partner, Willem Jonas, listened to the volunteers explaining in Oshiwambo how the tippy tap works and why it is important in fighting Covid-19.

Haihambo said they had used methylated spirits as hand sanitiser because they feared contracting the virus.

“It is so sad that a lot of people do not have access to water or toilets. We do not even have toilets this side,” said Haihambo, adding that at least her family and visitors can now safely wash their hands.

Frans Ndamonghenda, who owns a bar where a tippy tap was set up, expressed gratitude, but had reservations on the ban to sell alcohol during the lockdown.

“I agree with the government but this is also where I get money to feed my family,” said Ndamonghenda.

Tate Boas, a volunteer, said he decided to work for his people, since he has been living in the area from 2008.

He had seen what his people have to go through, living with little access to water and with no toilets.

Beat Weber, who also runs the Development Workshop Namibia, said it was easy for them to get started on fighting Covid-19 by setting up tippy taps in the informal settlements because they had already worked there during the fight against hepatitis E.

Although the hepatitis E fight has not been won yet, Weber said, he believes that with the tippy taps, a lot of people can wash their hands and thus reduce or stop the spread.

Weber said there is a link between the fight against hepatitis E and the fight against Covid-19 – and that is proper sanitation.

“The informal settlements lack sanitation and we want to promote hand washing and because there is no running water, we

needed a different approach," said Weber.

City of Windhoek's chief executive officer, Robert Kahimise, said the municipality has been making a lot of efforts to address the challenge of housing and by doing so, address the issue of sanitation.

"Unfortunately, we are now in a crisis. Yes, we have contributed to development in informal settlements but now the backlog has spiralled and any efforts to rectify the situation seem to be less than they really are," said Kahimise.

The project, which has been successful due to sponsorship by various stakeholders like B2Gold Namibia, started last Wednesday.

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