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# REAL IMPACT: WEST AFRICA

## WEST AFRICA WATER SUPPLY, SANITATION, AND HYGIENE PROGRAM

*USAID's Real Impact series highlights examples of water sector projects around the world. Each case example provides from-the-field insights about successful approaches, challenges faced, and lessons learned.*

### OVERVIEW

**Location:** Burkina Faso, Ghana, Niger  
**Duration:** 2011-2017  
**Total USAID Funding:** \$24 million  
**Primary Implementing Partner:**  
Florida International University

### CHALLENGE

Access rates for adequate sanitation in sub-Saharan Africa remain among the lowest in the world. In West Africa, three countries in particular – Burkina Faso, Ghana, and Niger – have typically ranked among the lowest performing African countries in this category, with only 20 percent, or less, of the population in each country having access to improved sanitation just five years ago. The practice of open defecation was prevalent in rural areas. The resulting contamination of drinking

water and food supply from poor sanitation practices led to chronic outbreaks of diarrhea, with children showing signs of malnutrition, undernutrition, and stunting.

Meanwhile, an increasingly erratic climate affected the timing and intensity of seasonal precipitation. These shifts triggered widespread food insecurity in a region highly dependent on rainfed agriculture, jeopardizing agricultural livelihoods and threatening rural families with the constant specter of hunger.

In 2011, in response to these multifaceted challenges, USAID began the West Africa Water Supply, Sanitation and Hygiene Program (WA-WASH), an ambitious multiyear initiative to protect and improve drinking water supply, extend sanitation coverage, and provide food security to some of West Africa's most marginalized communities.

## APPROACH

WA-WASH had four areas of intervention: Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH), Food Security, Climate Change, and the cross-cutting activities of gender and capacity building. With this integrated approach, WA-WASH not only responded directly to the assistance objectives of USAID/West Africa's regional priorities, but also created synergies between WA-WASH activities and those of other USAID projects in the region.

WA-WASH supported cooperation between national and regional organizations, and a consortium of partners enabled an extensive, on-the-ground network of experienced local development professionals, with expertise ranging from behavior change communications and community-led total sanitation (CLTS) to infrastructure modernization, climate-resilient agriculture, and institutional capacity building.

**Community Buy-In.** WA-WASH conducted public education campaigns and workshops to drive home the link between open defecation and a lack of health and hygiene. In Ghana, for example, the training motivated village elders to support open defecation free (ODF) communities. This, along with triggering 318 communities for CLTS across the three countries, catalyzed villagers to work together to end the practice. This momentum spread to neighboring communities outside geographic areas of intervention.

To support ODF-communities, WA-WASH introduced affordable WASH technologies – such as latrines, and low-cost water pumps – and trained 549 WASH stakeholders in Burkina Faso, Ghana, and Niger to build these technologies, creating new employment, while also helping to foster the sustainability of WASH interventions.

The program supplemented these village-level initiatives with training for officials at all levels of government in the three countries, explaining the health-related issues surrounding open defecation and introducing governance strategies for supporting WASH.

“Behavior change takes time,” said Lakhdar Boukerrou, WA-WASH chief of party. “It requires lots of work with the target communities, to ensure that new habits are developed. It is not about revolution, but evolution.”

**Program Integration.** The second core element of the WA-WASH approach was to build synergies between WASH interventions and critical USAID West Africa regional priorities related to food security, climate change, and sustainable resource management. WA-WASH coordinated with USAID's Resilience in the Sahel Enhanced (RISE) program in Burkina Faso, to train farmers on best practices for climate-resilient agriculture, while building the capacity of various water stakeholder groups to better understand and manage climate change variability.

WA-WASH also offered follow-on courses in sustainable soil use, best water management practices, and integrating climate data into agricultural production, a particularly relevant issue in the drought-prone Sahel region. Poultry production and highly nutritious, climate-resilient crops such as moringa and cassava were introduced to generate additional income for farmers, to improve food security, and increase nutrition in the three nations.

**Knowledge Sharing.** The third core element of the program's approach involved knowledge management and information sharing between WA-WASH and its many partners at the regional, national, and community levels. This resulted in the dissemination and institutionalization of best practices for sustainable WASH service provision and climate-resilient agriculture. For instance, the partnership between the African Water Association (AfWA) and WA-WASH has enabled AfWA to position itself to become an influential regional WASH knowledge hub, helping to document USAID interventions beyond WA-WASH's conclusion in 2017.



WA-WASH promotes the cultivation of moringa in the Sahel. It is a hardy, adaptable plant with high nutritional content and an ability to survive in semi-arid regions.



Photo Credit: WA-WASH

WA-WASH teamed up with local partners and a noted wrestling celebrity from Niger to promote Aquatabs, a low-cost water purification tablet that can purify 20 liters for \$.02.

## IMPACT

WA-WASH interventions resulted in access to improved drinking water sources for 65,690 people across Burkina Faso, Ghana, and Niger. More than 62,000 people gained access to improved sanitation facilities. Additionally, more than 21,300 stakeholders, including masons, hygienists, drillers, pump manufacturers, local NGOs, local authorities, decision-makers, farmers, women's groups, students, and faculty members benefited from capacity building interventions provided by WA-WASH within the three target countries since 2012.

**Sanitation.** WA-WASH interventions resulted in the construction of more than 8,100 household latrines across the three target countries. As a result of the program's behavior change workshops and emphasis on CLTS, 21 communities in Niger and 23 in northern Ghana are now certified open defecation free.

In Burkina Faso, WA-WASH exceeded its sanitation infrastructure target by building more than 4,900 household latrines. WA-WASH also provided the infrastructure needed to support long-term hygiene behavior change by overseeing the installation of more than 5,800 soap-equipped handwashing stations, which were set up primarily within households, near strategic locations such as kitchens, water points, and latrines.

The program also trained more than 7,100 people on best practices for mainstreaming women into WASH service provision in order to foster greater gender equity in West Africa's WASH sector.

**Drinking water.** While more than 65,000 people across the three countries gained access to potable water, through the construction or rehabilitation of water points and improved water sources developed through low-cost technologies such as rainwater harvesting tanks, WA-WASH achieved greater progress in terms of clean water provision through another approach.

Given the particularly acute need in Niger – where waterborne disease is the cause of 14 percent of all childhood deaths – WA-WASH teamed up with local partner ANIMAS-SUTURA to promote a low-cost water purification tablet called Aquatabs. Robust community outreach, a public awareness campaign on television and radio, and the endorsement by a national wrestling celebrity resulted in sales of more than five million tablets within a few months of Aquatabs' introduction. Across all three WA-WASH countries, roughly 10 million tablets have now been sold, purifying some 200 million liters of water and making Aquatabs one of the region's most popular and affordable water treatment solutions at the household level.



Photo Credit: WA-WASH

Thanks to these pumps promoted by WA-WASH in the village of Koukouldi, Burkina Faso, women spend less time fetching water.

## LESSONS LEARNED

• **Empower program beneficiaries.** Allow program participants to develop their own action plans for improving and sustaining WASH coverage in their communities. This approach enhances local capacity to address drinking water and sanitation challenges, and increases the likelihood of sustaining WASH gains beyond the program activity cycle.

• **Foster self-sufficiency.** The program found that in Burkina Faso, where government and development organization subsidies are in use, it was hard to move citizens to push for ODF status and build their own latrines. In Ghana and Niger, where there are fewer opportunities for assistance, program implementers found it easier to promote a community approach to solving sanitation issues.

• **Develop sector knowledge.** Increase skills and knowledge in the WASH sector to address community needs and reach sustainable development goals. WA-WASH helped develop a WASH curriculum at institutes of higher learning, training professors and trainers. The program also offered 72 scholarships to graduate students from Burkina Faso, Ghana, and Niger, and provided internships to 153 students and young professionals from 13 countries.

• **Encourage private enterprise.** Developing enterprises to encourage private sector involvement can help sustain WASH sector improvements through the development of new businesses and increased livelihood opportunities in the community. WA-WASH provided training on water-pump manufacturing in four cities in Burkina Faso. The resulting new enterprises have since become economically self-sustaining, supplying a healthy customer base with pumps.

**Sustainable agriculture.** WA-WASH evaluated various food security activities to gauge their impact on target communities, and carried out climate vulnerability assessments in 26 communities within the three countries. Climate change-related training resulted in 5,657 farmers with increased capacity to adapt to the impacts of climate variability and change in the target countries.

Moreover, 246 government decision-makers were trained on the importance of integrating climate risks and adaptation into development strategies. In support of climate-smart, conservation farming, 5,855 agricultural producers received short-term agricultural sector productivity or food security training in Burkina Faso, Ghana, and Niger. In all three countries, the program promoted climate-adapted production approaches to increase agricultural production, resulting in 2,549 farmers applying best agronomic practices.

“The greenness of our vegetable garden seems to defy the nearby desert,” says Aïssatou Bocal, who, with 17 female neighbors, helped cultivate a water-efficient communal garden in the rural municipality of Tankougounadje in Burkina Faso. “This proves that if we receive good coaching, we can tame the adversity of nature and get something out of it.”

### To learn more about WA-WASH, visit:

USAID West Africa

<https://www.usaid.gov/west-africa-regional>

Florida International University's WA-WASH homepage

<http://wawash.fiu.edu/drupal-cms/>

African Water Association homepage

<http://www.afwa-hq.org/en/>

Front Cover: Families living in rural Burkina Faso have been among the many recipients of WA-WASH programming to improve local water.

Photo Credit: US Mission to the United Nations Agencies in Rome