

STORIES FROM THE FIELD: MALI

Bicycling among households in their community, WASHplus-trained relais identify opportunities for behavior change promotion in the areas of hygiene and sanitation and conduct nutrition screening, referrals, and demonstrations that also incorporate WASH messages.

CONTACT

www.washplus.org for more information on the WASHplus program in Mali.

Relais Champion New Behaviors to Transform Lives

In Mali, USAID's WASHplus project works to improve a broad range of WASH and nutrition behaviors proven to impact the health of young children. The project targets 180 villages within the Mopti, Bandiagara, and Bankass districts in the northern half of the country, priority zones for USAID's Feed the Future and Global Health initiatives. At the heart of WASHplus's efforts to integrate water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) and nutrition are the community health workers, or *relais*.

WASHplus has trained relais to conduct nutrition screening and refer malnourished children to local health centers; to promote treatment and safe storage of drinking water, wash hands at critical times (especially before preparing food or feeding children), and improve sanitation; and to demonstrate ways to prepare nutritious foods to increase dietary diversity.

According to Daouda Karembe, resident of Sibi-Sibi village in the commune of Dandoli, "Relais are contributing to the increased attendance rate in health centers. The implementation of this project is really satisfying for me and the people through the initiatives they develop." The testimonials below illustrate the transformative impact these "frontline" health workers have in their communities.



Relais Souleymane Arama stands at a newly completed improved latrine.

Communities Embrace Improved Practices

"I have witnessed a big change in behavior in our community since the WASHplus project arrived," said Daouda Karembe. "The sanitary condition of our village is now very satisfactory. Previously children just pooped everywhere in the village. Adults also took kettles [for anal cleansing and to wash hands] after they did their business in nature [open defecation]. So during the rainy season we were using water [contaminated] with our poop for drinking and cooking.

"Our village now manages its feces properly because the relais trained by the project play many roles in our community. They screen children, they refer malnourished children to the ASC [community health worker], and they often accompany these children to the CSCOM [community health center]. Today I did not go to the weekly market in Bandiagara; this would have been unthinkable before, instead today I am gaining more from attending the project-related activities."

Lessons in Improved Nutrition Catch On

In the village of Korou, elderly Binta Arama cares for an eight-month-old infant after his mother died in childbirth. Five months ago, Aly was suffering from moderate acute malnutrition. After attending a nutrition demonstration session presented by the village relais, Binta has embraced the practice of feeding Aly vitamin-enriched foods such as enriched porridge and larro (a complementary food made of millet, peanuts, fish, and oil used to treat moderately malnourished children). This practice has helped to stabilize Aly's condition.





Nutrition Demonstrations Emphasize Hygiene

WASHplus organizes nutrition demonstrations for both men and women in their communities. Displaying the correct practices of handwashing with soap and point-of-use water treatment before demonstrating how to prepare a nutritious recipe are important aspects of these gatherings. Relais Ousmane Niaré speaks of his experience conducting such demonstrations in the village of Kargue, commune of Lowol Guéou:

“Men rarely prepare food in our community and are traditionally disengaged from infant feeding practices. I organize nutrition demonstrations in my compound and invite men from around the village to participate. By encouraging their participation in the nutrition demonstrations, several men in our village have become more attentive to the ingredients that go into their children’s food. This has translated into men giving their wives more money to purchase locally available foods that are rich in vitamins for their children. Men are becoming advocates for healthy infant feeding practices and are encouraging their wives to prepare the nutritious recipes the project promotes.”



Mother and Child Benefit from Nutrition Screening/Support

“My name is Fatoumata Guindo. I am a housewife in Sogara (commune of Bankass). My daughter, Balakissa, is 3 years old. When the relais in my community screened Balakissa, she was found to be severely malnourished. She was referred for treatment at the URENI [district treatment center for severe cases of malnutrition] in Bankass. I lacked financial resources to pay for my transport and food during her hospitalization. Worse, I do not have my parents or any relative who could assist me. Two days after receiving the diagnosis, I remembered the news I heard during a community meeting that WASHplus provides support to caretakers at the URENI in Bankass. I bravely went to the URENI and as soon as I arrived, my transportation costs were reimbursed and I ate very well at breakfast, lunch, and dinner for free. I loudly proclaim that this support from USAID should be welcomed without hesitation because they are saving lives. I must thank USAID and WASHplus again—and pray that the assistance continues, especially for us poor rural women—for saving lives of innocent children.”



Relais Visits Make an Impact

WASHplus recruited Souleymane Arama and Mama Djongo from Allaye Daga, a village of 500 people, to work as relais. They enjoy their job because they are improving their skills, have bicycles to use as transport, and have counseling materials to promote improved practices. But the main benefit is seeing that their efforts have yielded good results: fewer children are sick and husbands and wives are communicating better because they are spending less to treat health problems. “We, and the village, are proud of these results,” they noted. “Lots of people come to consult us.”

Since the relais have been conducting nutrition counseling and demonstrations, villager Arama Dico has changed several nutrition and hygiene behaviors. “Now, before preparing food, I wash my hands and cooking utensils with soap and clean water. When making porridge for my child, Kadiatou [14 months] I add gumbo and potato leaves, which provide additional vitamins. The advantages we have experienced are less sickness, and we can receive all kinds of people in our home. We continue our efforts because we can see the benefits of our actions.”

ABOUT WASHplus

The WASHplus project supports healthy households and communities by creating and delivering interventions that lead to improvements in water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) and household air pollution (HAP). This multi-year project (2010-2016) was made possible with support from the American people delivered through the U.S. Agency for International Development’s (USAID) Bureau for Global Health and led by FHI 360 in partnership with CARE and Winrock International. The project uses at-scale programming approaches to reduce diarrheal diseases and acute respiratory infections, the two top killers of children under age 5 globally.