

Burkina Faso: Pivoting WASH Activities to Respond to COVID-19

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INTRODUCTION

Burkina Faso confirmed its first COVID-19 case on March 9, 2020.¹ As of February 6, 2021, a total of 11,285 cases have been confirmed.²

The USAID Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance (BHA)-funded *Victory Against Malnutrition Plus (ViMPlus)* activity rapidly adapted programming to accompany the Burkina Faso government in the preparation and response to this new threat.

The project's behavior change strategy supported the efforts of the Government of Burkina Faso in the fight against the spread of COVID-19. Activities were carried out in close collaboration with the Regional Health Directorate of the North Central Region in the health districts of Kaya and Tougouri.

The strategy relied on the leadership and engagement of community actors, numerous demonstrations of hand washing station construction, and radio campaigns.

This poster describes adapting ViMPlus WASH activities during COVID-19, adaptations, results, and challenges.

DESCRIPTION

- ViMPlus supports vulnerable households in the North-Central region. This is one of the most structurally vulnerable and food-insecure regions in Burkina Faso.
- Interventions in this region are further compounded by changing climatic conditions, resulting in hotter and drier weather, threatening crop yields and water security. In addition, population displacements also have resulted in increased stress on water resources.
- In the 11 communes where ViMPlus works, agriculture (including production of sorghum, millet, cowpea, maize, rice and groundnuts) and livestock are the predominant livelihood activities. Both activities are vulnerable to extreme weather conditions and possible shortages of water for domestic use.
- Health, Nutrition, and WASH activities are undertaken through:
 - Community-Led Total Sanitation
 - Radio Campaigns
 - GASPs - Learning and Monitoring Groups for Infant and Young Child Feeding. These community-based groups are led by dynamic "Mothers Leaders."
(in French "Groupe d'Apprentissage et de Suivi des Pratiques d'Alimentation du Nourrisson et du Jeune Enfant")

Box 3:

ViMPlus is part of the USAID Resilience in the Sahel Enhanced II (RISE II) program, which supports vulnerable communities in Burkina Faso and Niger to prepare for and effectively manage reoccurring crises and to identify sustainable solutions to overcome poverty. Led by ACDI-VOCA, ViMPlus is implemented by a consortium. Save the Children leads on the Health, Nutrition, WASH and youth components.

Learn more by visiting:
<https://www.acdivoca.org/projects/victory-against-malnutrition-plus/>



ADAPTATIONS

- ViMPlus utilized the existing GASPs (Learning and Monitoring Groups for Infant and Young Child Feeding) to support mothers through handwashing demonstrations and lessons on food hygiene, nutrition, and exclusive breastfeeding during COVID-19 to develop the skills and confidence to stay healthy during this critical period of growth.
- ViMPlus collaborated with *TerresEauVie (TeV)* on radio campaigns on handwashing with soap, the importance of continuing breastfeeding during COVID-19, and question and answer sessions to help dispel common myths related to the disease.
- Members of the Water Users Associations set up at least one hand-washing station at each water point (a total of 83 handwashing stations) and empowered members to increase access to water and soap/ash and to require all users to wash their hands with water and soap/ash before handling the pump and at water points. Demonstration sessions on how to build handwashing stations were also set up at the water points. Community members collecting water were advised to respect at least one (1) meter between users at the water point.
- Hand washing kits (soap, jerry cans, etc.) followed by a training/demonstration session on how to make handwashing stations were also provided. ViMPlus installed 722 tippy taps with soap as demonstration sites in the project communes.
- Following the demonstrations, community members made at least 1,000 local handwashing stations with their own funds.



A woman uses a tippy tap to wash hands with soap before visiting the well in Poulale village, Pissila commune. Photo credit: DICKO Hama Hamidou

Box 1:

Construction of additional tippy taps by community members reflect their commitment to prevent COVID-19 and other hygiene related diseases. Access to water services will also be improved over the longer term through the infrastructure improvements underway under ViMPlus.

Box 2:

ViMPlus focused on the safety and protection of staff, volunteers, and community members during activities. Staff and volunteers received protection kits (alcohol based hand rub and masks). Following hygiene guidance such as wearing masks, social distancing and hand washing during activities were also very important.

RESULTS AND CHALLENGES

Results include:

- Six months after handwashing demonstrations, monitoring of 443 tippy taps shows a 94% use by the communities for regular handwashing with soap and water.
- According to the project's annual survey conducted in September 2020, among households that have soap and water at a handwashing station, 76% are from the area covered by the health, nutrition, and WASH program interventions.
- The percentage of households that had a handwashing station with soap and water increased from 2.9% to 7.7% (monitoring data).
- Adapting to COVID-19 requires leveraging remote assistance/support (community actors and project staff) and focusing on hygiene-related practices. Leveraging existing networks as well as trust previously built with community members was instrumental in ensuring a rapid response.

Some of the remaining challenges include:

- Sustaining community engagement and good hygiene practices (wearing masks, social distancing, hand washing with soap) long term, especially given that there is a perception of low risk among some groups.
- Participation and mobilization of some community members because of the fear of being contaminated by this new disease, despite the behavior change efforts.
- Limited availability of certain products such as Aquatabs on the national, communal, and community levels.
- Ensuring that households maintain and improve handwashing stations over time.

CONCLUSIONS

- The social and behavior change activities supported communities to practice the recommended behaviors to protect themselves.
- Several behavior change activities were carried out and long-term follow-up is important to ensure sustainability.
- Efforts such as providing handwashing facilities at all project activity sites can serve as "nudges" and reinforce hygiene messages and practices.
- It is important to continue to support remote communities through telephone calls and the use of community radios, while working with community actors for disease surveillance and continuity of activities.
- Checklists could strengthen the monitoring of compliance with the COVID-19 preventative behaviors in the implementation of community activities.