

REGIS-ER

Resilience and Economic Growth in the Sahel - Enhanced Resilience

In Woulmassoutou, villagers come together to promote handwashing

Handwashing is an individual action. But when the majority of a population washes their hands, it has a positive effect on the health of the entire community. On the contrary, when a person doesn't wash his/her hands, they can become a vector for disease. In order to make handwashing a habit, people must be convinced of its efficacy, learn the best technique, have soap and water available and, of course, be encouraged. That is what villagers from the Sahel region in Burkina Faso demonstrated with the support of the USAID|REGIS-ER project.



Female villagers from the village of Woulmassoutou in Burkina Faso (Sampelga commune, Sahel region) were worried about the frequent outbreaks of diarrheal diseases, stomach pains, and malarial fevers. Within their “mother-to-mother” (MtM) support groups¹, they

had learned that washing your hands with soap at critical moments is crucial to prevent certain diseases. Only an extensive mobilization and commitment would be able to shift the entire village to overcome this issue. But how could they find a way to raise awareness and catalyze true behavior change across their community?

They decided to partner with the men active in the village’s husbands’ school² to advocate for change. Together they

requested support from the community health and nutrition Quality Improvement (QI) Team³, because it seemed the most appropriate group to tackle this overall problem.

The QI team responded in three ways. First, QI team members organized community meetings in places of worship (during weddings and baptism ceremonies) to expose the problem to a wide range of social strata and generations. These meetings served to

¹ **Mother-to-Mother** groups are groups of pregnant and breastfeeding women who come together to learn about and discuss issues of maternal, infant and young child health, nutrition and hygiene.

² The **husbands’ schools** aim to engage men in actions for maternal, infant, and young child nutrition and health and foster behavior change at the community level.

³ Each **QI team** is made up of representatives from existing, diverse organizations/groups within the community. The team meets to collectively review health and nutrition data to identify areas for improvement, set indicators, develop an action plan to improve chosen behaviors, and work with their respective organizations/groups to implement the action plans. They meet regularly to track their progress and make changes to the action plan, if necessary.

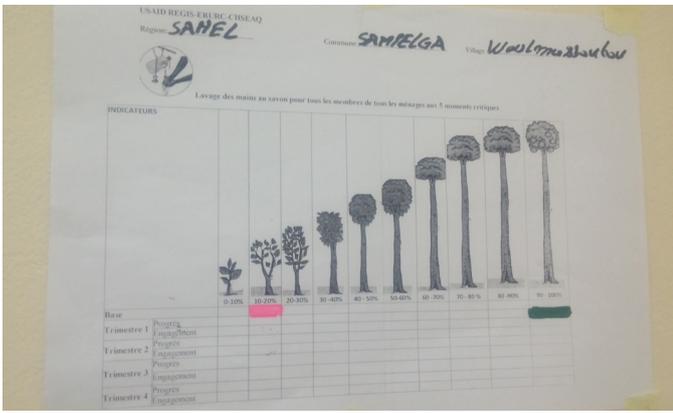


Photo (March 2017, Dori, Harouna Tamboura): QI team monitoring of the indicator for handwashing with soap in Woulmassoutou village



Photo (March 2017, Dori, Harouna Tamboura): Woulmassoutou's QI Team rewarded and congratulated by the Regional Directorate for Health representative

gain the villagers' support for a unified action plan to improve hygiene and save lives. Dicko Aissatou Hama, a member of the MtM group, explained: « *Thanks to these discussions, I have been convinced that we need to do as much as possible to ensure that all family members wash their hands at the five critical moments. I see handwashing as a kind of vaccine, protecting us from disease. Our greatest challenge is just not knowing. Now that we are aware, we don't have a choice. We have to act.* »

Afterward these meetings, there was a community effort to make soap more accessible. Soap was already available in the village, but households couldn't afford to purchase it. Some women in the village had been trained by UNICEF on homemade production of liquid soap, and they were keen on transferring their knowledge. Together, several women from the MtM groups raised approximately \$20 USD and drove more than 70km roundtrip to reach Dori, the regional capital, to buy the necessary items to make the soap. These women now sell homemade soap for 100 FCFA (approximately 20 cents) for a half-liter bottle and 300 FCFA for a 1.5-liter bottle. They set up a small savings fund with the profits in order to sustain the activity. At the same time, villagers met to build Tippy Taps⁴, simple handwashing stations made with locally available and affordable materials, for each household.

This initiative sparked a true change in behavior and led to effective handwashing with soap throughout Woulmassoutou. In March 2017, the regional health directorate in Dori presented the village QI team with a

certificate of merit for this accomplishment. At the ceremony, Louis Armand Zagre, the head nurse at the Center for Health and Social Promotion of Sampilga (Woulmassoutou's commune) testified that « *all of the village's health and nutrition indicators have been achieved. Woulmassoutou is one of the best performing villages in my catchment area.* »

While improved health is rewarding enough, this recognition brought pride to the village. Amadou Hamidou, President of the Village Development Council⁵ recounts: « *When we won the certificate of merit, I was there in Dori in front of a large assembly of nearly 45 people from 15 villages in the region, including health workers and representatives from the REGIS-ER project. I felt overwhelmed with joy, and I called the villagers to share the news with them. The news quickly spread all over the village. When we came back, we were greeted by a welcoming committee, cheering and congratulating us!* » The certificate was shown to everyone because it was a collective success. « *This prize has really motivated us to continue making progress and improvements in hygiene and sanitation and to strengthen the social cohesion in our village,* » confided Amadou Hamidou.

Their success has encouraged two neighboring villages, Niagassi and Damdegou, to make handwashing a reality for all. The village was also rewarded with the donation of an ambulance by the consortium Burkinabe Red Cross and Medecins du Monde Spain.

⁴ See <http://www.tippytap.org/the-tippy-tap>

⁵ In rural and peri-urban areas, Village Development Councils (CVD for the French *Conseil Villageois de Développement*) are strong drivers of development, because they have the ability to mobilize the entire village. Overseen by municipal councils, they have three specific objectives: contribute to the design and implementation of communal development plans, participate in various commissions for local development management, and promote local development within the village.

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