



The recipe for success: how policy-makers can integrate water, sanitation and hygiene into action to end malnutrition

Country profile: Niger



Key statisticsⁱ

- **43%** of children under five are stunted
- **18.7%** of children under five are wasted
- **46%** of the population have access to at least basic drinking water services
- **13%** of the population have access to at least basic sanitation services

Background

With some 60% of Nigeriens living below the poverty line, significant swaths of Niger's population live with chronic food insecurity and hunger. As a result, malnutrition rates are high, affecting some 40% of children, and rates of deadly acute malnutrition at an alarming 10%. Water quality is not monitored regularly and infrastructure breakdowns are regular. Coupled with weak health systems, poor drinking water coverage is contributing to the worsening of the undernutrition rate.

Niger is not on course to meet the World Health Assembly (WHA) targets for under-five stunting, wasting and anaemia, although has made some progress on stunting prevalence. The country has adopted a National Nutrition Policy (2012–2021) and a National Nutrition Security Policy (2016–2025), for which a costed action plan is finalised and awaiting validation from the Government. The Operational Strategy for the Promotion of Hygiene and Basic Sanitation 2014–2018 and 2016–2030 Program for Water Hygiene and Sanitation Sector guide the WASH sector, and a Water Policy is planned for development by 2020. The Economic and Social Development Plan is on course to be renewed for 2017–2021, with nutrition security expected to be a key priority and the development of a humanitarian policy planned for 2018.

Niger has committed to 'Nutrition for Growth' (N4G) targets on child wasting, stunting in children under two, and reducing micronutrient deficiencies. Niger is also a member of the Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) Movement, REACH (Renewed Efforts Against Child Hunger and undernutrition) and the Sanitation and Water for All (SWA) partnership, and has agreed to the Second International Conference on Nutrition (ICN2) framework for action. The country has signed the Malabo, Abuja and Ngor Declarations.

Is water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) integrated within national nutrition plans?

National Nutrition Security Policy (2016–2025)

The Government has just adopted the new national nutrition policy and is in the process of validating at the time of writing. The policy comprehensively includes WASH and stresses the need for all key sectors, including WASH, to contribute to nutrition security. WASH is included in the situational analysis and through a dedicated WASH objective (Commitment 4), which aims to develop and scale up strategies for access to safe drinking water, hygiene and sanitation facilities. The policy integrates comprehensive WASH interventions – promoting access to WASH, with a gender-sensitive approach and priority given to handwashing and community-led total sanitation (CLTS). The policy also aims to promote water conservation and treatment at household level, strengthen public awareness of the impact of WASH on public health and nutritional status, and prioritises documenting and sharing relevant evidence at local, regional and global levels. It also aims to ensure water quality control and sustainable management of solid and liquid wastes to prevent contamination of the environment and food. The policy calls for nutrition indicators to be taken into account in designing WASH interventions and mobilising resources, and for interventions at both household and institutional levels to incorporate the minimum package ‘WASH in Nutrition’.

In addition to this dedicated objective, WASH is also present within other commitments, including: Commitment 1 on policies, which aims to update key policies, strategies and action plans integrating the latest knowledge and indicators on nutritional security; Commitment 6 on education, which aims for promotion of hygiene and sanitation in schools and communities; and Commitment 8 on communication, ensuring consistency in communication campaigns with key messages on hygiene and sanitation. The WASH Minister is responsible for delivery against Commitment 4 of the policy and is involved in the other relevant areas associated with undernutrition. Finally, a section on governance and finance refers to the decentralisation scheme that should be applied and the national coordination mechanism, the Multi-sectoral Steering Committee of the Strategic Program (CMPS).

National Nutrition Policy 2012–2021

WASH is identified as one of the country’s key challenges, and the links with diarrhoea and diseases are made explicit. WASH is included within the ‘strategic axis 1’ dedicated to the fight against undernutrition in relation to both prevention – where the package of interventions aims to include adequate practices of hygiene and sanitation, and curative – which is to be done in synergy with other actors from other sectors, including water. WASH is also included in ‘strategic axis 4’ on food hygiene, but with the focus on improving laboratory capacity in controlling the quality of water and food products. The Ministry of Hydraulics and Environment is included in the Interministerial Committee for Nutrition.

Is nutrition integrated within national WASH plans?

Operational Strategy for the Promotion of Hygiene and Basic Sanitation 2014–2018

The strategy does not explicitly mention nutrition. The introduction does, however, refer to a number of nutrition-sensitive interventions, including handwashing with soap, domestic hygiene, and food hygiene. It does recognise the need to strongly involve other ministries, such as health and education, for the operationalisation of the strategy, and the steering committee includes the Minister of Health. The strategy includes advocacy towards health decision-makers to prioritise hygiene and sanitation as a cross-cutting issue because of the public health benefits and significant economies in health expenditure.

2016–2030 Program for Water Hygiene and Sanitation Sector

The programme dates from 2016 and is aligned with the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 6 targets. General Objective 2 aims to contribute to the improvement of food security and the resilience of populations. Although not making an explicit link with nutrition, the programme prioritises improving WASH services in schools and health centres, aiming for 100% water, sanitation and handwashing services by 2030, with a mid-term target by 2020 of 50%. The programme also aims to undertake research to improve the efficiency of interventions regarding hygiene and sanitation systems and their financing. This is to be done by the Ministry in charge of sanitation, in collaboration with other ministries, and could be an opportunity to strengthen linkages with nutrition.

Recommendations for the Government of Niger

- The National Nutrition Security Policy (2016–2025) is a strong basis to guide WASH and nutrition integration in the country. All stakeholders should support its operationalisation through the development of a plan of action with corresponding financing.
- Prioritise integrating hand hygiene and food hygiene behaviour change methodologies for more targeted and effective impact.
- Nutrition stakeholders should be included in the planning and implementation of the water policy envisaged to be developed by 2020, in order to strength integration and to build long-lasting cross-sector collaborations. The water policy should prioritise action in areas with high prevalence of undernutrition, a greater focus on BabyWASH interventions, food and environmental hygiene and the integration of key nutrition messages in hygiene promotion strategies.
- Nutritional indicators should be taken into account in designing and targeting WASH interventions and mobilising resources, and this should be reflected in WASH policies and strategies, in coherence with the National Policy of Nutrition Security.
- Create an interministerial committee to focus on WASH and nutrition, tasked with harmonising national development policies and strategies to take account of WASH and nutrition interlinkages, and implementing them

through integrated approaches.

- Provide more funding in the national budget for the implementation of integrated WASH–nutrition interventions.
- Strengthen coordination and dialogue between actors involved in WASH and nutrition, to develop more integrated plans and programmes.
- Prioritise reaching rural communities with integrated WASH–nutrition interventions to address the higher prevalence of malnutrition and WASH-related diseases in those areas.

Recommendations for all national governments

- Ensure policies align with the SDGs and their interconnected goals to strengthen WASH and nutrition coordination and collaboration, using opportunities such as policy reviews and joint sector reviews.
- Establish effective cross-ministerial coordination mechanisms championed at the highest level by heads of state, to support sharing of information and joint planning and implementation of policies.
- Ensure cross-ministerial coordination structures incorporate meaningful participation of and consultation with civil society and affected communities.
- Ensure up-to-date national WASH and nutrition plans and progress reports are easily accessible online, to allow civil society to monitor progress and hold governments to account.

Nutrition policy-makers and practitioners should:

- Prioritise nutrition-sensitive WASH interventions and include specific objectives to improve WASH within nutrition plans and policies. Clear entry points to integrate WASH and nutrition include: behaviour change promotion; improvement of provision of WASH in healthcare facilities and schools; and co-location of interventions to areas with lowest WASH access and highest prevalence of undernutrition.

WASH policy-makers and practitioners should:

- Increase the ‘nutrition-sensitivity’ of policies and programmes, including by: targeting geographical areas where undernutrition is most prevalent; prioritising women and children; and including nutrition-relevant interventions, such as improving WASH in health and nutrition centres.

This country profile is drawn from the global report ‘*The recipe for success: how policy-makers can integrate water, sanitation and hygiene into action to end malnutrition*’ produced by ACF, the SHARE Consortium and WaterAid. Read the full report at www.wateraid.org/recipeforsuccess

ⁱ To ensure consistency and cross-country comparability, we have used the most recent figures published by global monitoring reports. In some countries, more up-to-date national statistics are available. Nutrition statistics from UNICEF, WHO & World Bank Group (2017) *Child malnutrition estimates*. Available at www.who.int/entity/nutgrowthdb/jme_dataset2017_final.xlsx?ua=1 WASH statistics from UNICEF/WHO Joint Monitoring Programme (2017) *Progress on Drinking Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene: 2017 update and SDG Baseline*. Available at washdata.org/report/jmp-2017-report-launch-version1