

## Towards effective integration of nutrition and water, sanitation and hygiene - the Madagascar experience



Credit: WaterAid / Ernest Randriarimalala

### Key figures<sup>1</sup>

**49.2%** of children under 5 years of age are stunted.

**15.2%** of children under 5 years of age suffer from wasting.

**50.6%** of the population have access to 'at least basic' water

**9.69%** of the population have access to 'at least basic' sanitation

**50.5%** of the population have access to 'basic' hygiene facilities

### Key message

Children's health should be the top priority for the Government, international partners and donors in Madagascar. The focus should be on tackling the high rates of stunting, and addressing the underlying causes related to poor water, sanitation and hygiene.

### Introduction

With almost half of children suffering from chronic malnutrition, Madagascar has one of the highest rates of stunting worldwide. Improving children's health and nutrition is not only a moral imperative, but failure to do so undermines all other efforts to stimulate economic progress and development in the country. Access to safe water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) are fundamental determinants of health and well-being for all. A key element of combatting chronic malnutrition among young children is reducing the incidence of diarrhoeal diseases, intestinal worms and other infections.

<sup>1</sup> [scalingupnutrition.org/fr/pays-sun/madagascar/washdata.org/data#!/mdg](https://scalingupnutrition.org/fr/pays-sun/madagascar/washdata.org/data#!/mdg)

Although a multi-sectoral approach to tackling malnutrition is not a new concept and is gaining traction internationally, global progress in integrating WASH and nutrition has been relatively limited. An initiative in this area is the partnership between Sanitation and Water for All (SWA) and the Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) Movement. This partnership seeks to document and share learnings and experiences from around the world on the integration of WASH and nutrition in policies and practice. To assess the successes, challenges, opportunities and recommendations for greater collaboration between WASH and nutrition, a qualitative analysis involving key stakeholders working in these fields in Madagascar was conducted by Action Against Hunger and WaterAid.

## **Success and progress**

Across the country, there are a number of examples of integrated and well-coordinated projects at the community level, involving multiple sectors and addressing the multiple underlying drivers of health and nutrition. For example, the National Office for Nutrition (ONN) is modelling an approach based on the concept of a "nutrition village" in the Masindray area. This project brought together different stakeholders to provide a holistic approach to nutrition, including the improvement of WASH facilities in schools and health centres, school feeding programmes, adequate and timely health care through community health workers, and the promotion of hygiene and nutrition among caregivers.

National coordination of civil society organisations working on nutrition has been particularly effective through the SUN civil society alliance, HINA, which promotes a multi-sectoral approach. This is reflected in the membership of the platform, with WASH actors playing an active role and influencing the ONN to integrate WASH into the Third National Nutrition Action Plan (PNAN III). The new plan sets an ambitious target to reduce the prevalence of chronic malnutrition from 47.3 per cent to 38 per cent between 2017 and 2021. In particular, strong emphasis is placed on nutrition-sensitive sectors, with WASH included as an overall objective with well-defined and comprehensive interventions. The PNAN III facilitates the alignment of government and state action. However, translating the plan into concrete action will require specific budget lines for WASH activities and clearly defined roles and responsibilities.

Strong nutritional governance, especially sector coordination at the national and regional levels, is also a key priority of the PNAN III. At the national level, the ONN's positioning within the Prime Minister's Office is essential to facilitate the coordination of several ministries and stakeholders and to make nutrition a government priority. This political leadership of the ONN, and in particular the ONN National Coordinator, has been key to the integration of WASH into national nutrition policy frameworks.

Similarly, at the lower levels of government, 22 regional nutrition offices are in place. Their functions have focused primarily on monitoring and evaluating the implementation of the PNAN III, but these functions could be strengthened and expanded to facilitate joint planning and implementation of WASH and nutrition interventions.

## **The challenges: leadership, funding, scale and sustainability**

It is clear that the Malagasy Government recognises that to have the human capital needed to strengthen its economy and achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), there is an urgent need to address the country's high malnutrition rates. However, the stakeholders interviewed agree that the low priority given by the Government to WASH as a key ingredient for improving the health and wealth of the population remains a major obstacle to progress. Indeed, communities made little mention of government involvement in the delivery of WASH services in the field, focusing instead on initiatives led by development partners. This situation, combined with continued political instability, which is likely to increase in the run-up to the presidential elections, threatens the prospects for sustainable cross-sectoral action on nutrition and WASH.

Interviewees in April 2018 noted that the loss of a ministry responsible for WASH, which had merged with the Ministry of Water, Energy and Hydrocarbons and the dissolution of the Diorano-WASH national multi-stakeholder platform, had largely halted leadership and coordination of the WASH sector for several months. While a new national platform was established by the Ministry (from May 2018), there were concerns that sanitation and hygiene, in particular, would be neglected while the Ministry focused its resources on large-scale water and energy infrastructure projects.

Beyond a number of successful examples of small-scale integrated projects, difficulties persist in scaling up integrated interventions led by the Government. An incomplete decentralisation process results in a lack of resources and implementation capacity at the local level, where institutions still depend on the expertise of technical and financial partners. Centralised decision-making (for example, the Minister's personal authorisation required for most water infrastructure projects) also contributes to limited ownership, long delays and inefficiency at the sub-national level.

Despite the financial commitment to devote 0.5% of the national budget to WASH activities (e.g. high-level SWA meetings), the funds allocated (only 0.22% of GDP<sup>2</sup>) remain insufficient to achieve the objectives of SDG 6.<sup>3</sup> However, the commitment to monitoring WASH funding through the TrackFin initiative and the tripling of the Ministry of Water's budget are encouraging signs. Despite these positive indications, this represents barely 5% of the total needed to achieve the targets under SDG 6. Additional funds are needed to ensure the sustainability of services for operation and maintenance, the absence of which also compromises donor investments. The National Water Resources Fund, a potential source of income for the State, is not yet operational.

## **Opportunities**

There are, however, important opportunities for the Malagasy Government to get back on track with its WASH commitments and to secure critical funding to intensify its integrated nutrition and WASH efforts in the coming months.

The appointment of a new government in June 2018 saw a ministerial restructuring with a Ministry exclusively dedicated to WASH re-established. Some welcome this and see it as an opportunity to revitalise coordination in the sector. Reactivating a WASH platform could provide new impetus to the coordination of multi-stakeholder efforts and the involvement of communities and civil society organisations in the shared responsibility for WASH progress. This national platform could also support coordination efforts with nutrition actors led by the ONN and HINA, and ensure effective implementation of the nutrition-sensitive WASH interventions envisaged in the PNAN III. This is key to ensuring that the WASH interventions described in the PNAN III are fully integrated into, and costed within, the operational plan to meet these commitments.

The development of a revised WASH investment plan, strengthened by a UNICEF-supported limiting factor analysis, is well under way. This work, together with a re-launched WASH strategy, will lay the foundation for much needed funding from development partners, including possibly for integrated nutrition-WASH programmes through international financial partners focusing on multi-sectoral approaches to combating malnutrition (such as the World Bank, the Global Finance Facility (GFF) and the Japan-led Initiative for Food and Nutrition Security in Africa (IFNA)).

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<sup>2</sup> GLAAS 2016

<sup>3</sup> By 2030, 100 per cent access to basic drinking water services; eradication of open defecation in 2019 and 100 per cent access to basic sanitation and soap washing by 2030.

## Recommendations

- The Malagasy Government must fulfil the commitments it has made towards spending on basic social services. Increasing the budget allocation to WASH to meet the Government's commitment of 0.5% of GDP will be fundamental to strengthening the capacity to provide basic WASH services, as well as the integrated WASH-nutrition actions envisaged under the PNAN III.
- Nutrition and WASH mainstreaming should be included in national and regional development plans, including the annual implementation plan that outlines each sector's budget. To this end, planning bodies within key ministries should adopt a cross-sectoral rather than a vertical approach to including WASH components in their planning.
- Technical and financial partners should align their efforts with multi-sectoral national frameworks such as the PNAN III and prioritise capacity building of national institutions for effective implementation of integrated approaches.
- Development partners should document, evaluate and share good practices from integrated projects on WASH and nutrition as a means to support Government to adopt these models, and develop clear guidelines on how to ensure integration in practice.
- The Ministry of Water, Sanitation and Hygiene should define a clear national policy and investment frameworks on WASH, which all partners can support, with clear guidelines for WASH in health centres and schools, as well as investment in capacity and resource building at the regional and community levels.
- Intersectoral coordination efforts at the regional level should be strengthened through the GRSE (Monitoring and Evaluation Research Group) which is provided for in the PNAN III.
- SWA should strengthen its accountability mechanisms to ensure a more effective way of holding governments accountable for meeting their commitments.
- Coordination between the SWA and SUN should be developed, through bringing together their national Focal Points (both government and civil society focal points).
- Platforms for civil society engagement and coordination on WASH and nutrition should be strengthened at the national, regional and community levels.

This case study was developed by Action Against Hunger and WaterAid and aims to document and share lessons learned from Madagascar's experience in advancing integration between the water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) and nutrition sectors at the policy, institutional coordination and practical levels.

The identification of advances, challenges, opportunities and recommendations for progress in the integration between WASH and Nutrition was made possible through interviews with key stakeholders from both sectors – government, donors, civil society, at the national and regional (Tulear) level, in April 2018.