



Technical Brief

MCDI Adapts WASH programs for the COVID-19 era: Knowledge, Ownership, and Initiative

“Corona, out of Benin! Corona, retreat from all countries around the world!”

repeatedly blasts from large truck-mounted speakers, piercing the midday air. This refrain, like a sirens’ song, rallies nearby villagers within earshot to the sound’s source, where they meet a small parade brandishing placards and banners colorfully warning about COVID-19. The villagers follow the small band to City Hall, where they watch them convince the municipal government to implement improved sanitation and hygiene policies to fight COVID-19. After a brief conversation, the council agrees to implement improved sanitation and hygiene measures to stop the virus’ spread. the band disperses to help villagers comply with the new ordinances, especially those unable to follow the new procedures without assistance, such as the disabled or elderly.

I. Rollout

Scenelets similar to this demonstration metastasized across Benin, from Copargo to Singre to Djougou, reaching over a half million rural Beninese as part of a new COVID-19 strategy from MCDI’s [Improved Access to Sanitation and Hygiene Practices in Rural Areas](#) (PAPHyR) program. The program trained staff of the NGO Action pour La Promotion des Initiatives Communautaires (APIC), which in turn strengthened and trained the community-based organization (CBO) the Association of Basic Promoters of Hygiene and Sanitation (APHA), which planned and carried out the activity.

PAPHyR started in 2014 with the goal of achieving access to adequate and equitable sanitation and hygiene for all, including eliminating open defecation, while paying special attention to the needs of women, girls and those in vulnerable situations. To achieve this, PAPHyR and its implementing partners use a “Community-Led Total Sanitation” (CLTS) approach, along with the promotion of healthy hygiene practices – especially handwashing with soap. The program’s implementing partners are 14 NGOs that work across four of Benin’s 12 departments

Summary

MCDI partners with local NGO’s across Benin to promote good hygiene and sanitation practices throughout the country

MCDI adapted its strategy to COVID-19 and trained its partner NGO’s on how to continue its mission while respecting COVID-19 social restrictions

MCDI witnessed early benefits with its new approach, but remains diligent.

About 500,000 people in about 3,000 communities have benefited from MCDI new COVID-19 message.



APHA conducts geurilla sanitation marketing in the Copargo and Pabegou boroughs to raise COVID-19 prevention awareness among households and public places.

(Borgou, Atacora, Donga, and Collines), reaching approximately 3 million people in about 9,000 localities.

As the country’s first COVID-19 case brought Benin into the novel coronavirus era, PAPHyR had to [adapt its program activities](#), which are spread across northern Benin and which depend on community gatherings. PAPHyR added activities and reinforced existing activities aimed at preventing the transmission of the virus, increasing its promotion of handwashing with soap, one of the more effective barriers to the transmission of the virus. PAPHyR and its implementing partners also had to accelerate the program’s reliance on community leaders in response to restrictions on travel and on large gatherings.

To this end, PAPHyR staff, 131 implementing partner staff, and 366 community leaders were trained to promote measures that interrupt the transmission of the disease. To implement both the original and new activities, communities were segmented into smaller groups, to avoid large gatherings, and community leaders were trained – remotely if necessary – and grouped into federations to accelerate their take-over of program activities.

Additionally, to combat the spread of the coronavirus in collaboration with the Ministry of Health, developed and distributed over 4,800 posters with information for display in public places, along with 53 handwashing stations and 265 liters of soap for health centers. The program also developed and disseminated radio messages reaching 16 communes over 1,519 times, and disseminated additional information over its social media channels.

The new methodology combines several approaches to reduce the spread of the novel coronavirus, while remaining true to fundamental CLTS principles such as keeping the community integral to decision-making. PAPHyR mandated that its partners base their activities on four pillars, that all efforts must:



Through this approach – illustrated in the opening narrative – PAPHyR is still able to achieve its original goal of improving sanitation while adding coronavirus prevention activities, in spite of the constraints imposed by COVID-19. In fact, promotion of anti-virus measures can be an entry point for other project initiatives.

II. Lessons

“We would like to thank you for all the actions you are taking against the pandemic [and] encourage you to continue your efforts so that together we can defeat COVID-19.”



Copargo mayoral representatives thank members of APHA for their efforts and pledge the city's support in building the city's pandemic resilience.

It is important to remain flexible and proactive.

COVID-19 places public health organizations in the unique position of building the ship while sailing it. The value of promotional activities against COVID-19, with an emphasis on equitable access and sustainability, has been brought into sharp relief. PAPHyR's implementing partners witnessed improvements in communities' knowledge about COVID-19 and their adoption of barrier behaviors. However, global experience shows that the mere existence of handwashing stations does not lead to an increase in handwashing with soap.



APHA conducts a COVID-19 awareness campaign in the city of Copargo.

Implementing partners' difficulties in traveling and reaching communities resulting from travel restrictions during the COVID-19 pandemic underscored the critical role of community-level actors and local governments in promoting and sustaining behavior change. As a result of the restrictions, partners redoubled their efforts to strengthen the Strong Base as well as making local government more accountable for encouraging and sustaining hygienic behaviors. This approach is likely to enhance the programs overall sustainability.



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III. Impact

Following these criteria, actors such as APIC and APHA have already spread awareness about COVID-19 and techniques to prevent it to a massive amount of individuals in Nikki and Copargo. Those communities initiated improved hygiene and sanitation measures such as installing handwashing devices in high-traffic areas.

Because of this new approach, countless more individuals were motivated to wash their hands and to improve their sanitation and hygiene. They now enjoy historic access to individual household sanitation facilities such as latrines and handwashing stations.

IV. Conclusion

An effective weapon against the spread of any infectious and highly communicable disease, including COVID-19, is improved hygiene and sanitation practices. Flexibility is key, and MCDI will continue to refine its work to improve behaviors to prevent the spread of COVID-19 as well as diseases related to inadequate hygiene and sanitation.

Key Facts

560K people reached

3K communities reached

3.5K students reached

60 health centers reached

75 schools reached

50 localities reached



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