

Moving Beyond Village-Centric Sanitation Approaches for Sustainable Service Systems Strengthening and Social Accountability

Madagascar has some of the most limited access to water and sanitation in the world. In rural areas, only 36 percent of households have access to improved water facilities, while a significant 57 percent of the population still practices open defecation (UNICEF, 2019). There are three main obstacles to improving and expanding sustainable water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) services in the country. Firstly, there is a lack of strong governance, monitoring, and management capacities related to WASH. Secondly, the private sector and the supply of WASH services are weak. Lastly, there is a prevalence of unhealthy behaviors and low demand for sanitation and hygiene practices.

In 2019, the Government of Madagascar launched the Madagasikara Madio 2025 (Clean Madagascar 2025) campaign. This campaign by the Ministry of Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene's (MEAH) set the following goals for 2023:

- 70% of the population has access to basic drinking water;
- 90% of the population is open defecation free and practicing handwashing with soap; and
- 55% of the population uses basic latrines.

The *Madagasikara Madio 2025* Program aims to eradicate open defecation (OD) and contribute to the global Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), including goal 6.2: “to ensure access for all, under equitable conditions, to adequate sanitation and hygiene services and end OD, paying particular attention to the needs of women and girls and people in vulnerable situations; by 2030.”

[USAID's Rural Access to New Opportunities in WASH \(RANO WASH\)](#) program has been a key implementing partner in assisting the government, private sector, and communities in achieving the objectives outlined in the national Madagasikara Madio plan, which aims to eradicate open defecation by 2025. Prior to launch of the campaign, only national governments were able to certify communities as open defecation free (ODF), but the centralized certification system was too onerous to reach the government's goals of certifying all communities as ODF by 2025.

RANO WASH, implemented by a [CARE](#)-led consortium (Catholic Relief Services, WaterAid, BushProof and Sandandrano) was designed to strengthen the building blocks for sustainable WASH services in Madagascar; test models for private sector investment in WASH to improve coverage and quality of services; and increase demand and sustained behavior change for WASH at the community level. At the core are strong accountability mechanisms between government, private sector, and citizens to ensure that services are affordable and accessible to all.

RANO WASH aimed to improve the health of people in 250 communes in Madagascar regions of Vatovavy Fitovinany, Atsinanana, Alaotra Mangoro, Amoron'i Mania, Haute Matsiatra, and Vakinankaratra. The program focused on expanding clean water access to vulnerable populations, including girls, women, and individuals with disabilities. The aim was to provide clean drinking water access to approximately 300,000 people through the establishment of 140 water supply systems. Additionally, the program sought to improve and rehabilitate existing toilets and sanitation facilities, enabling approximately 375,000 people to access better sanitation options. The initiative also targeted the enhancement of sanitation facilities in 190 public institutions such as health centers and schools.

As of 2023, the project exceeded its life of project targets. More than 742,494 people have improved access to sanitation (basic and limited) and 85 communes (municipalities) have been certified open defecation free, ensuring cleaner environments and protecting health and dignity.

Service System Strengthening and Social Accountability Tools and Approaches in RANO WASH

Achieving access to sanitation at scale continues to be an important challenge for the WASH sector. Successful sanitation strategies can no longer rely on a single approach but must layer and sequence these different activities to achieve and, most importantly, sustain elimination of open defecation.

System strengthening provides an effective framework for designing and implementing sanitation approaches that promote coordination and collaboration between public sector actors at all levels, civil society, market systems and individuals.

As one of six pathways to impact at scale, [Systems Strengthening and Social Accountability \(4SA\)](#) approaches are critical for achieving CARE’s 2030 Vision as they build the structures and provide checks and balances for the progressive realization of human rights by:

- Transforming structural and institutional dimensions of change needed to address the roots of structural inequalities for women, girls, and marginalized communities
- Building more sustainable solutions at scale that are locally led
- Building more responsive, inclusive, and accountable services for all

CARE aims to strengthen and transform structures and institutions to deliver services in ways that are accountable, equitable, inclusive and effective.



Governance activities strengthen government, service providers, and communities so they can plan, manage, monitor, and sustain WASH services in an accountable manner. RANO-WASH’s approach operates at the national, sub-national, and local levels and has three strategic objectives:

- Strengthen governance and monitoring.
- Strengthen capacity of private sector and support public-private partnerships.
- Improve healthy WASH behaviors and the demand for and use of WASH services and products.

RANO WASH has successfully facilitated collaboration between the Ministry and various stakeholders to foster a more decentralized open defecation free (ODF) certification process. The program has further helped regional and local governments to define plans and deadlines for reaching ODF status per the Clean Madagascar mandate and supported regions and regional coordination groups to define strategies, draft plans, and establish monitoring against targets.

To generate greater investment in improving WASH services in Madagascar, RANO-WASH has actively engaged with the private sector. The project has collaborated with the government and private sector enterprises to encourage investments in the development and operation of rural water systems through public-private partnerships. RANO-WASH ensures strong community engagement, service quality, and effective governance to keep these partnerships equitable, sustainable, and affordable.

RANO WASH uses systems strengthening approaches to advance sanitation and water quality. The project's approaches include developing and strengthening markets, business models, and entrepreneurs for WASH services and products to ensure aspirational and affordable technologies (e.g., sanitary napkins and other personal and household hygiene items, household water filters, latrine slabs, and pumping systems) that meet user preference and demand. Simultaneously, the project works to increase WASH service providers' access to financial services and products so they can invest in and expand their WASH enterprises.

As one of its primary approaches in RANO WASH, CARE employs Community-Led Total Sanitation (CLTS) to increase demand for toilets, market strengthening activities that expand availability of affordable and quality toilets, and subsidies to ensure the poorest customers can afford toilets. To achieve these large-scale gains, RANO WASH implemented a systems approach that focused on the commune government as the entry point and tested different combinations of approaches to assist communes. Communes are the decentralized authority closest to the population and in Madagascar encompass an average of 16,000 people each. This is where service authorities work and make decisions that affect the villages that make up their jurisdiction. It is important to think at the commune level rather than just the community level because it takes engagement from service authorities to achieve and sustain ODF. As such, it is essential that there is a clear responsibility of commune government in the achievement and sustaining ODF status in all of their constituent communities. Recognizing the importance of building capacities of commune-level governments and coordination with regional authorities, CARE strengthened commune and regional capacity for monitoring of sanitation outcomes, including ODF verification and certification processes.

RANO WASH strategy successfully mobilized not only commune governments but also involved the private sector, formal and informal leaders, women's rights organizations, schools, health facilities, and community members in the efforts. Key components were:

- Combined triggering at institutional and community levels, and vocal and supportive leadership from the commune Mayor and their team.
- Tackling multiple factors beyond basic triggering for behavior change.
- Discussing and addressing resource-based and cultural barriers to toilet use – going beyond basic triggering for behavior change.
- Testing the layering of approaches, such as supply-side market strengthening and the availability of toilet inputs and designs.

In order for demand and supply-side interventions to succeed, commune governments needed to have a WASH plan and governance frameworks to achieve and sustain ODF. As part of its larger governance strategy to equip commune governments with the tools and processes to develop plans and frameworks, RANO WASH focused on building commune government capacity to lead the planning, monitoring, and budgeting of WASH activities, including public sanitation infrastructure (e.g., public toilets) and social norms and behavior change to encourage household investment in toilets.

RANO WASH actively engaged with the Ministry of WASH to support and align with national priorities and strategies which set targets for each commune. Linking with these priorities also helps programs' scalability and the sharing of experiences among various sector actors. For example, the project facilitated the establishment of regional coordination structures that fostered intercommunal platforms for coordination, collective decision-making, sharing innovative approaches (such as modifications to CLTS), and critical reflection among public, private, and NGO actors. The planning and budgeting processes at the commune level were integrated with the regional and national levels, leveraging monitoring data from the national WASH monitoring platform, as well as regional and national planning and budgeting frameworks.

RANO WASH's framework of leadership, planning, monitoring, accountability, and coordination created a supportive environment to layer and sequence demand and supply-side interventions like behavior change, sanitation market development and sanitation service delivery infrastructure (i.e household and public toilets). The commune entry point also facilitated engagement with schools and health facilities as this requires inter-agency and intersectoral coordination. This systems-based approach effectively connected the public sphere, household demand, and the market-driven private sector, ultimately working towards the elimination of open defecation at the commune level.

The graphic below outlines the interventions by WASH system building blocks that helped achieve ODF communes.

USE OF WASH SYSTEM



Figure 1: Key RANO WASH activities supporting commune-level ODF, organized within the framework of the WASH Building Blocks

Conclusion

Taking a systems approach and strengthening commune leadership is important for success, but also crucial was establishing a culture of learning and adaptation.

Unlike water service delivery, sanitation is often not perceived as a public good. Since it is viewed as a private good, emphasis is placed on individuals and households to purchase and maintain their own toilets. Hence, the role of the service authority, who is mandated to provide WASH services, becomes less clear. However, the RANO WASH team found success in defining and strengthening the roles and responsibilities of commune governments, generating political will, and garnering support from institutions, the private sector, as well as individuals and households, to collectively promote sanitation coverage at the commune level.

Consequently, household-level sanitation practices have been adopted on a significantly larger scale compared to previous village-level approaches, resulting in much less recidivism. Nearly 1 million people in Madagascar currently reside in an open defecation-free environment due to these efforts, with 95% of communities sustaining their open defecation-free status even after a period of 2 years. As for which components of the sanitation system remain the weakest in Madagascar, going forward systems strengthening approaches need to focus on creating an enabling environment for more durable, higher quality and climate-resilient latrines; ensuring toilets are inclusive and adapted for people with disabilities, elderly, or pregnant women; and working on broader fecal sludge management to reduce the risk of contamination, particularly in rural and semi-rural areas.

This brief was derived from CARE's [Water+ Retrospective Report 2023](#). We welcome you to learn more about CARE's contributions to [RANO WASH](#) and [CARE's Service Systems and Social Accountability work](#) across programs.