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Lessons Learned Series

COMBATting COVID-19 IN AFRICA

USAID's [Water for Africa through Leadership and Institutional Support \(WALIS\)](#) project focuses on building the capacity of sub-Saharan Africa's national and regional leaders to capture and apply evidence in the development of policies, strategies, programs, and investments to improve the capacity of their water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) sectors.

The [African Ministers' Council on Water \(AMCOW\)](#) is a specialized African Union technical committee mandated to accelerate the achievement of WASH goals and provide policy direction across their 55 member states. AMCOW strives for an Africa with equitable and sustainable water resource use and management for socio-economic development, poverty alleviation, and regional cooperation. AMCOW's leadership on water and sanitation issues places the organization at the forefront of WASH knowledge, and as a hub for timely, reliable WASH information and data.

AMCOW and WALIS have developed the Lessons Learned Series, which examines emerging experiences, knowledge, opportunities, and challenges of African-led WASH policy development and implementation. The Series also identifies individual country solutions that others can replicate, with a focus on COVID-19 response mechanisms.

BACKGROUND

From 2016 to 2020, WALIS implemented the [Improving WASH Evidence-Based Decision-Making \(IWED\)](#) program to encourage a shift toward sustainable services delivery, consistent with [Sustainable Development Goal 6](#), through smarter use of data, better monitoring, greater emphasis on analysis, and evidence-building. The program also focuses on strengthening WASH sector policies and strategies and encouraging sharing lessons learned and experience among African governments.

IWED supported demand-driven, country-led initiatives to improve data monitoring and analysis in six countries: Ethiopia, Ghana, Madagascar, Mozambique, Senegal, and Tanzania. The initiatives strengthened the respective governments' abilities to develop informed policy and sectoral planning for sustainable WASH services and their capacity to improve the collection and use of sector data.

PHOTO: ENGIDRO

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LESSON LEARNED #2: STRENGTHENED WASH DATA SYSTEMS HELP AFRICAN GOVERNMENTS RESPOND TO COVID-19

MOZAMBIQUE

In Mozambique, WALIS supported the National Directorate of Water Supply and Sanitation (DNAAS) to develop the National Water and Sanitation Information System (SINAS). SINAS is a database which provides reliable WASH data at the central, provincial and district levels. SINAS is now used to help stop the spread of COVID-19 infections.

Until 2019, SINAS derived from manual, paper-based collection and management of data at the local



level. This process resulted in a fragmented system with often out of date, inaccurate, or inconsistent data. The framework further resulted in data analysis and sharing issues, with DNAAS unable to plan and monitor sector investments effectively. With support from WALIS, DNAAS strengthened SINAS' functionality by harmonizing the methodologies for collecting, processing, analyzing, sharing, and storing data in a consolidated central database useful for planning and budgeting processes.

“SINAS is now updated regularly, and data from rural and urban areas are stored in the same database,” says Alcino Nhaçume, Head of the Planning Department at DNAAS. “We now know exactly where demand for sanitation and hygiene infrastructure is and where to invest, which is especially important during the pandemic,” he adds.

Specifically, the Mozambican government uses the data in SINAS to determine where to introduce new sanitation and hygiene infrastructure and measures to prevent the spread of COVID-19 during the phased reopening of schools. “With the onset of COVID, it has become increasingly important to use data to guide actions. SINAS has helped us identify gaps and improve hygiene access in schools by putting in place the required sanitation and hygiene facilities, and over 700 schools are set to benefit from this,” says Nhaçume.

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While the end of the COVID-19 pandemic is still far off, it has highlighted just how intricately connected WASH and public health are. Further, responses to the pandemic have emphasized how important accurate and complete data are to help African governments to make informed decisions and effectively allocate resources for the WASH sector. With people's health and lives at stake, this has never been more urgent.