



USAID
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

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

Since 2018, USAID's WALIS project has collaborated with the Government of Senegal to collect critical field data on its public sanitation facilities in select areas of the country. In 2020, following the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, the project expanded to 76 communes in the Dakar, Diourbel, and Thiès regions. This partnership among the MEA, Ministry of Health and Social Action, and Ministry of National Education, with USAID's support through WALIS and its local implementing partner, *Centre de Suivi Ecologique*, will allow Senegal to better address its WASH policies and service delivery needs in the face of the pandemic and in the future.

PHOTO: ENGIDRO

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LESSON LEARNED #3: SANITATION COUNTS: A WOMAN'S FIGHT AGAINST COVID-19 AND GENDER INEQUALITY

SENEGAL

When Daba Sene was a schoolgirl in Tocomack, a small village in Senegal, her school did not have toilets or a place to wash her hands. She and her classmates would run out into the fields to relieve themselves. Even when she moved to a nearby city for high school, she did not have regular access to a clean toilet during school hours. Little did Ms. Sene know that she would find a career in public sanitation as the Head of the Dakar Regional Sanitation Division at the Ministry of Water and Sanitation (MEA).

The Government of Senegal has been working to meet the Sustainable Development Goals to ensure access to clean drinking water and sanitation facilities and services across the country. The COVID-19 pandemic has further shown that access to these facilities, specifically places to wash hands with soap and water, is more important than ever. But Ms. Sene is also focused on ensuring that the water and sanitation sector in her country addresses gender inequalities, like promoting menstrual hygiene management, a necessary component of gender-responsive WASH services.

“Sanitation is the basis of all socio-economic development, including the improvement of conditions for school learning. Lack of sanitation and hygiene leads to more disease transmission and can result in disease “hotspots.” In the past, we have recorded the resurgence of multiple diseases linked to poor sanitation practices, particularly in children. This is why the Government of Senegal has focused on providing access to safe and clean sanitation facilities,” she explains.

Ms. Sene is just one of the regional sanitation specialists working with USAID’s Water for Africa through Leadership and Institutional Support, or WALIS, project to count and record in an online database the public sanitation facilities in the parts of Senegal that have been hardest hit by COVID-19. This includes toilets and hand washing stations at healthcare facilities, bus stations, places of worship, schools, and other public places. Ms. Sene and her colleagues will also record the condition, functionality, and location of these facilities.

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“The information we collect in this online database will allow officials in the water and sanitation sector to make informed decisions on the public’s access to clean, functional sanitation facilities and services, particularly in this context of COVID-19 where access to adequate basic health services is essential to eradicate the pandemic,” said Ms. Sene. “Just as important, this platform will also record women and girls’ access (or lack thereof) to menstrual hygiene management services in public places. This is a necessity in Senegal, especially for young women who should have regular access to appropriate toilets while in school.”

With the support of USAID, Senegal continues to improve its WASH sector monitoring to better identify gaps or weaknesses in accessibility and maintenance of public sanitation facilities. Understanding these weaknesses and gaps and in turn using this data to improve WASH services in public places will strengthen Senegal's resilience to public health threats and other chronic WASH challenges.