



MADAGASCAR RURAL ACCESS TO NEW OPPORTUNITIES IN WATER, SANITATION, AND HYGIENE (RANO WASH) ACTIVITY: MID-TERM PERFORMANCE EVALUATION FINDINGS

BACKGROUND

Rural Access to New Opportunities in Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene (RANO WASH) is a five-year (June 2017–June 2022), \$30 million bilateral United States Agency for International Development (USAID) water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) activity in Madagascar. CARE International leads the consortium, implementing the program with partners Catholic Relief Services (CRS), WaterAid, BushProof, and Sandandrano. The program aims to reach 250 rural communes in six high-priority regions of Madagascar: Vatovavy Fitovinany, Atsinanana, Alaotra Mangoro, Amoron'i Mania, Haute Matsiatra, and Vakinankaratra. It is built around three interconnected strategic objectives (SOs):

- SO 1: Strengthening the governance and monitoring of water and sanitation
- SO 2: Increasing the engagement of the private sector in the delivery of WASH services
- SO 3: Accelerating the adoption of healthy behaviors and the use of WASH service

EVALUATION QUESTIONS AND METHODOLOGY

The Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene Partnerships and Learning for Sustainability (WASHPaLS) project completed a mid-term evaluation between April and August 2021 to assess whether the approaches employed and activities undertaken by RANO WASH are successfully contributing to the program's goal of increasing equitable and sustainable access to WASH services. The evaluation sought to answer five evaluation questions (EQs):

1. How appropriate is the RANO WASH design to the WASH challenges in the target regions and communes?
2. To what extent has RANO WASH built governance capacity to improve sustainable service delivery at multiple levels?
3. To what extent have the different RANO WASH private sector approaches for water service delivery and sanitation access expansion been successful?
4. To what extent have RANO WASH activities been successful at building demand, activating demand, and ensuring use of WASH products and services in intervention regions and communes?
5. What implementation approaches should be prioritized in future for RANO WASH's final two years and by the WASH sector?

For each EQ, the evaluation team devised several sub-questions to guide more detailed analysis. The team employed four principal data collection methods: (a) a review of contractual deliverables and documents produced by RANO WASH, the Government of Madagascar, and partners; (b) key informant interviews; (c) focus group discussions (FGDs); and (d) site observations.

The evaluation team visited 15 communes across four of the six regions in which RANO WASH works and conducted 103 interviews and 24 FGDs. Interviewees included RANO WASH program staff; senior management staff from the various Ministry of Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene (MoWASH) directorates; local government stakeholders; development partners; national civil society representatives; private sector service providers; and commune and community-level

stakeholders who engaged in RANO WASH-supported activities or received direct technical assistance. The team also conducted a desk review and collected secondary data to contextualize background and triangulate findings.

FINDINGS

Overall, the evaluation team found the program to be complex, ambitious, and innovative; perceived positively by a large majority of stakeholders; and seen as a sector leader. While water supply provision through the public-private partnership (PPP) model is substantially off-track, there are plausible reasons for these delays and important lessons to be learned. Sanitation results, particularly regarding open defecation free (ODF) status, are exceeding targets. Findings by EQ are presented below.

RANO WASH Design: In a sector with frequent ministry changes, high levels of staff turnover, and low scores on most sector building blocks, the program’s focus and design are highly relevant and deemed appropriate by the vast majority of informants. The program was welcomed specifically for its emphasis on governance and private sector engagement. However, the design underestimated the magnitude of challenges facing the sector. The complexity of working along three pillars (the three SOs) was not initially supported by a clear strategy and framework, leading to some confusion and slow take-off. The adoption and operationalization of a systems approach into nine building blocks in 2019 helped clarify direction and prioritization of actions, but the approach is still considered highly complex and not yet universally understood among program stakeholders (including implementing partners). The program design’s strong focus on programmatic and joint sector learning has not yet fully come to fruition.

RANO WASH design covers an ambitious spread of activities and themes, and the program therefore set quite conservative targets of people to be reached by WASH services. Given the need to strengthen governance capacity, innovate and demonstrate scalable approaches for the sector, and build ownership to ensure long-term sustainability, the focus on range of activities over scale of numbers reached was felt to be the appropriate choice. However, the evaluation team found that it might have been better to take a commune-wide approach in a smaller number of locations. This would have supported more inclusive planning, as the need to demonstrate the potential of the chosen PPP “construct–invest–manage” model required selection of “viable” schemes in terms of location and population size. This left behind many of the smaller, more remote communities within intervention communes.

Governance Capacity: RANO WASH actively engaged in sector policy and strategy processes, including work on a new Sector WASH Policy. Specifically, the program supported MoWASH to formalize its PPP model contract template and improve its planning and monitoring processes. RANO WASH invested heavily in supporting roll-out and capacity building for the use of the *Suivi Eau et Assainissement de Madagascar* (Madagascar Water and Sanitation Monitoring [SE&AM]) tool, particularly at regional and communal levels. While informants widely appreciated this support, many pointed out that large challenges remain in the development of a harmonized sector monitoring and evaluation system, and that RANO WASH can further support the required assessments and strategy development to arrive at such a system. With regard to institutional arrangements, the evaluation team considers the support to commune-level Technical WASH Services (STEAHs) and Technical WASH Assistants (ATEAHs) a cornerstone of the RANO WASH strategy and one of the key contributions to the sector. Possible sustainability risks relate to the high level of expectations and skills required, the lack of commune governance stability, and insufficient commune budgets to cover ATEAH salaries and STEAHs. STEAHs require backstopping by Regional Directorates of WASH (DREAHs), who are responsible for regional coordination. RANO WASH support to strengthen DREAH capacity, provide operational resources, and co-lead *Structures de Mise en Oeuvre*

de la Coordination Régionale (Regional Implementation Coordination Mechanisms) was widely acknowledged and appreciated by all informants. However, the role of ATEAHs should be formalized, which will help DREAH and STEAH structures to remain stable WASH resources for their communities.

Most national informants recognized RANO WASH for having made substantial contributions to improved sector collaboration and coordination in recent years, despite the delayed establishment of a new government-driven WASH coordination mechanism. At the commune level, RANO WASH invested heavily in the establishment and/or strengthening of a range of community engagement and accountability platforms. While local informants overall expressed appreciation and perceived that this support contributed to local WASH prioritization and ownership, the evaluation team noted some concerns regarding the overlap and confusion in responsibilities between the various bodies, their dependence on RANO WASH, and their self-professed roles in sensitization without necessarily having been trained properly.

Private Sector Approaches: For rural water supply, informants cited RANO WASH as a key contributor to a paradigm shift that is now noticeably underway—from a situation based mainly on community management and the principle of “free” water services to one of private sector management of paid for (and, therefore, ostensibly higher-quality and sustainable) water supply services.

However, given the likely slow pace of transition and the need to cover entire communes with water supply services, the program could build on its PPP+ model designed to expand reach of water systems. RANO WASH could further explore transitional models of private and community-managed services operating side-by-side under commune leadership, with a progressive move toward private sector management, where it can be done viably.

Delays in meeting the original PPP targets were due mainly to underestimating the time needed to build relationships, mutual understanding, buy-in, and PPP-related capacity among all partners involved, as well as the time needed to develop procedures that work and deal with complex approval systems, including those of the donor. Overall, the evaluation team found that the program has managed to demonstrate an approach that works, there is sufficient interest from private sector partners to get involved, and households are by and large willing and able to pay the tariffs. This includes those in vulnerable situations, due to diversified water system connection options, although these households do struggle with connection and water meter costs. Divergent opinions exist concerning the selection of water service providers (WSPs), mainly pointing to the need to ensure strong and customer-oriented local interfaces, no matter the type of WSP. So far, WSPs have not shown autonomous financing capacity to cover, for

example, system extensions, and there have been apparent weaknesses in marketing and diversified targeting of services. RANO WASH’s “100 first connections” scheme was devised as a marketing drive only, but it has the potential to be reshaped into a tool for inclusion of more vulnerable



Latrine and handwashing facilities, Ampila village, Ambositra 2.
Credit: Rado Randrianavoson

households. More can also be done with MoWASH to explore ways to subsidize or reduce household connection costs—seen to be the largest obstacle.

In the area of market-based sanitation, RANO WASH’s engagement with local masons (and with seamstresses marketing menstrual hygiene materials) was felt to be more that of a “social actor” than a business approach. Masons indicated to the evaluation team that they were “selected” or “appointed” for their roles, they set prices based on RANO WASH’s guidance, they are dependent on materials provided by the program, and that, in most cases, they were taking part “for the good of their community” rather than to make money. Some concerns also emerged about the role of mayors, the relatively limited choice of toilet options, and the generally low household ability to pay. While noting the work done by RANO WASH with International Development Enterprises, the potential (and limitations) of a sanitation market-based approach in the context of Madagascar should be studied further in collaboration with development partners and MoWASH.

Demand and Use: Demand for water is omnipresent in Madagascar. As a program that has “water” in its name, RANO WASH could communicate and manage expectations of intervention communes more transparently regarding possible program support to rehabilitation, construction, or extension of water supply infrastructure. With regard to demand and use of improved sanitation facilities, the program devised a thorough sanitation and hygiene behavior change strategy built around five components. With community-led total sanitation (CLTS) at its core, the strategy incorporates the Grow-Up Sticker (GUS) method (the result of extensive research and behavior-centered design with the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine). While the evaluation team endorses any move to support ODF communes, the evaluation highlighted a number of points for continued learning and reflection. These include potential risks linked to:

- Large numbers of actors and community groups with mixed capacity and understanding of WASH and behavior change processes conducting sensitization activities,
- A potential “watering down” of the CLTS principles of facilitation and self-efficacy (versus a more didactic messaging approach),
- Limited potential for scale beyond RANO WASH and limited evidence of the spillover effect of the GUS method,
- The potential adverse effect of “rewarding” ODF communities with water supply,
- The risk of community-sanctioned use of force and coercion affecting people in vulnerable situations hardest,
- The perceived pressure to buy while facing limited sanitation technology options, and
- The complexities of facing more and more villages that were already triggered but did not become ODF certified.



Waterpoint, Ilaka Centre. Credit: Rado Randrianavoson

Many interviewees cited RANO WASH’s programming on menstrual hygiene management (MHM) as a key example of the program’s gender-inclusive approach. The evaluation team found the approach, however, to be largely limited to promoting body washing and the marketing and use of

reusable pads. Of some concern was the spread of misinformation illustrated in informant interviews.

Overall, the program’s focus on sustainability was found to be evident throughout its work and at the forefront of much of its systems building work. Even so, the evaluation proposes a concerted and continued focus on exit planning and balancing the program’s desire to drive change with the need to ensure local ownership.

Recommendations

Selected recommendations for design and/or extension of future programs:

Consider extending the timeframe for a program of this complexity and ambition.
Continue to operationalize and familiarize people with the systems building blocks approach, but explore handing elements off to other programs or sector actors to keep the program focus manageable.
Move toward a district- or commune-wide inclusive planning and design approach: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider reducing the number of target communes, and • With MoWASH, identify and start planning for the first districts and/or communes most able to demonstrate this approach.
Design for scale and scalability, exploring private sector or hybrid models that can include larger as well as smaller communities. Focus on scalable approaches to behavior change programming with community ownership and a clearer exit strategy.
With MoWASH and government partners, develop different subsidy approaches and WSP financial support mechanisms to offer affordable services to more vulnerable households.
Negotiate government co-financing at the start of a program to cover, at a minimum, the salaries and operating expenses of regional and communal structures, specifically DREAHs and STEAHs.
Review the internal consortium set-up and seek ways to reduce procedural load.

Selected recommendations for the remainder of the RANO WASH program:

Institutional arrangements	Advocate for an increase in DREAH budgets, explore ways to strengthen lines of engagement and dialogue between DREAHs and STEAHs, and progressively hand over responsibility for STEAH training to DREAHs.
	Work with government to formalize status of STEAHs and ATEAHs and ensure inclusion in communal budget lines. Undertake a review of the breadth of required skills and responsibilities of ATEAHs to ensure realistic load and sustained continuity.
	Support the establishment of local dialogue and input structures in a phased way and along the needs of the commune to avoid confusion and overlap.
Planning, monitoring, and evaluation	Engage in a joint assessment, with sector partners, of the root causes hindering successful implementation of national sector monitoring and planning, beyond the SE&AM tool. Include an assessment of capacities required for the establishment of a solid sector-wide monitoring, evaluation, and planning system.
Private sector engagement in WASH	Develop clear criteria to guide decision-making on the process of transition toward private sector management from community management and any transitional measures required.
	Design and develop a package of activities to support communes as they manage private and community management methods at the same time in their territories.

	<p>Continue to operationalize PPP+ components and build diversified marketing and customer relationship management skills to increase coverage. Consider setting targets or bonuses for inclusive, possibly phased, service delivery to larger numbers of vulnerable households per scheme.</p> <p>Continue working with partners toward a common vision on private sector engagement in WASH in Madagascar and continue to explain and promote the PPP model.</p> <p>Work with communes to develop longer-term plans and strategies for universal drinking water supply at the commune level, its capital (<i>chef lieu</i>), and villages of all <i>fokontany</i>. Invite private sector WSPs to engage in this commune-level planning in terms to be specified.</p>
Coordination and dialogue	Continue engaging in and, where relevant, driving sector dialogue, learning, and sharing, including advocating for and supporting a Joint Sector Review.
Communication and clarification	Clarify and clearly communicate which communes/communities and institutions will still receive what support for water system construction/rehabilitation/PPP establishment between now and the end of the program.
Market-based sanitation	Continue to gain understanding of the potential (and limitations) of market-based approaches in the context of rural Madagascar and work with sector partners to jointly develop a shared sector roadmap for market-based sanitation.
	Revisit the mason and seamstress selection process and further support and strengthen marketing and business planning training, supply chains, and access to finance.
WASH in schools and health care facilities	Continue joint advocacy with sector partners, particularly UNICEF, to promote a more effective and scalable approach for institutional WASH beyond the “WASH-friendly” institutions approach.
Equity and inclusion	Train implementing partners and commune stakeholders, particularly mayors, ATEAHs, and <i>Structures locale de Concertation</i> (Local Structures for Cooperation), on Do No Harm principles and the potential consequences of using force or penalties to motivate behavior change.
Behavior change programming	Review MHM training and messaging provided to ensure correct understanding of safe management and facilitate informed choice.
Learning and documentation	Refine program learning and sharing on the systems approach and building blocks. Prioritize documenting good practices on governance, private sector contracting, and STEAH strengthening, and offer peer-to-peer exchanges between communes.
	Ensure continued learning and documentation of the RANO WASH behavior change strategy and approaches used, focusing on scalability, sustainability, and the effective combination of approaches.
	Conduct a program end-line survey, including a focus on habit creation, equity and inclusion, and service delivery.

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About USAID/WASHPaLS

The USAID Water, Sanitation and Hygiene Partnerships and Learning for Sustainability Project (USAID/WASHPaLS) is a five-year task order that identifies and shares best practices for achieving sustainability, scale, and impact of evidence-based environmental health and WASH interventions. Through extensive desk reviews, key informant interviews, and field-based implementation research, USAID/WASHPaLS works with implementing partners to broaden the evidence base on the use and effectiveness of sanitation interventions, including Community-Led Total Sanitation (CLTS), market-based sanitation (MBS), and the promotion of safe hygiene environments for infants and young children. For further information about this and other aspects of the project, as well as to access our knowledge products, please visit globalwaters.org/washpals.