



Adapting Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene Program to Combat COVID-19 in Benin



[Medical Care Development International \(MCDI\)](#) adapted strategies from its [Improved Access to Sanitation and Hygiene Practices in Rural Areas \(PAPHyR\) program](#) as the COVID-19 pandemic reached Benin in 2020.

PAPHyR reinforced existing activities and added new ones to aimed at preventing the transmission of the coronavirus, such as increasing its promotion of hand-washing with soap, one of the more effective barriers to the transmission of the virus. PAPHyR and its implementing partners also accelerated the program's reliance on community leaders in response to restrictions on travel and large gatherings.

To strengthen the national response to the pandemic, PAPHyR staff, 131 implementing partner staff, and 366 community leaders were trained to promote measures that interrupt the transmission of the virus. Communities avoided large gatherings by segmenting into smaller groups, and community leaders were trained and grouped into federations to accelerate their takeover of program activities.

Rollout

PAPHyR enabled countless more individuals, who were motivated by the pandemic, to wash their hands and improve their sanitation and hygiene. Now, the population enjoys historic levels of access to individual household sanitation facilities, including latrines and hand-washing stations.

The new methodology combines several approaches to reduce the spread of the novel coronavirus, while remaining true to fundamental [Community-Led Total Sanitation \(CLTS\)](#) principles, such as keeping the community integral in decision making. PAPHyR mandated that its partners base their activities on four pillars and that all efforts must:

1. Respect COVID-19 barrier measures;
2. Support the existing Strong Base and other local actors in forming and implementing a solid action plan;
3. Increase the involvement and empowerment of the Strong Base; and
4. Trigger segmented communities in small groups.

To combat the spread of COVID-19, MCDI and its partners developed and distributed:

4,800+

Informational Posters

53

Hand-Washing Stations

265

Liters of Soap for Health Centers and Other Public Places

16

Communes Reached More Than

1,500

Times with Radio Broadcasts

560,000

People Reached with Messaging Including

3,000

Communities

Through this approach, PAPHyR was able to achieve its original goal of improving sanitation while adding COVID-19 prevention activities in spite of constraints imposed by the pandemic.

Lessons Learned

COVID-19 has placed public health organizations in the position of building the ship while sailing it. Since global experience shows that the availability of hand-washing stations alone generally does not lead to an increase in hand-washing, the value of hygiene promotion has never been clearer. As a result of their efforts, PAPHyR's implementing partners catalyzed improvements in communities' knowledge about COVID-19 and their adoption of barrier behaviors including hand-washing.

About the Program

MCDI's PAPHyR program started in 2014 with the goal of increasing access to adequate and equitable sanitation and hygiene, 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 CLTS approach, with the promotion of healthy hygiene practices – especially hand-washing with soap.

The program's implementing partners are 11 NGOs that work across four of Benin's 12 departments (Borgou, Atacora, Donga, and Collines), reaching more than 1.1 million people in over 5,500 communities.

