

IMPACT STORIES

Promoting Safer Health Care in Burkina Faso

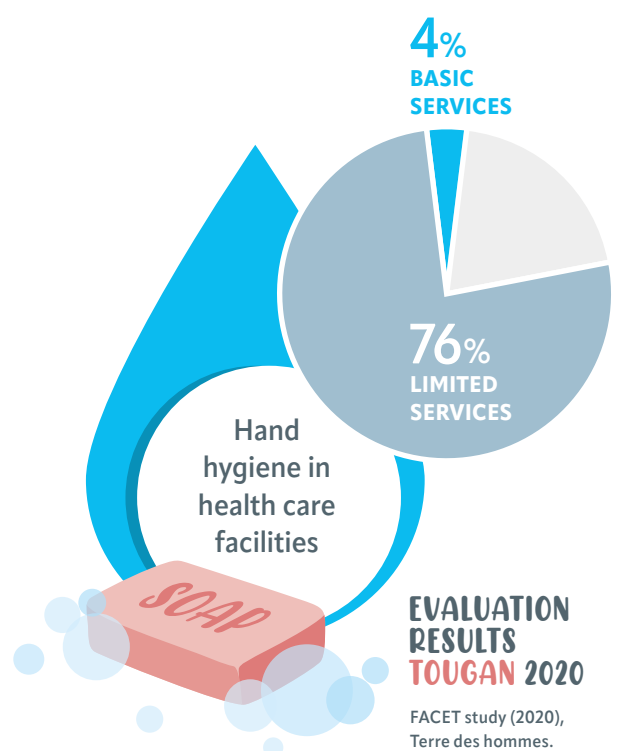


THE BURKINABÈ CONTEXT

In the Boucle du Mouhoun region of Burkina Faso, access to health care has become increasingly fragile. As the country's fifth most affected region for internal displacement, it hosted over 32,000 internally displaced persons (IDPs) as of June 2020. This has placed enormous strain on basic services and heightened the vulnerability of both displaced and host communities.

Primary health care facilities often operate under severe constraints, even under "normal" conditions. A survey conducted by Terre des hommes (Tdh) in 2020 revealed that only 4% of facilities in Tougan health district had basic services for hand hygiene. Many centers lack running water, soap, or dedicated handwashing stations – making infection prevention extremely difficult in environments where patient needs are high and staff are overstretched.

The absence of basic hygiene infrastructure not only compromises the quality of care but also puts both health workers and patients at daily risk.



Voices from the field



WASH FIT takes root in Burkina Faso

➤ In health centers across Boucle du Mouhoun, something powerful began to take shape. With the introduction of the WASH FIT tool, communities didn't just participate – they took ownership. From village leaders to health workers, everyone came together to improve hygiene conditions, creating action plans and following through with determination

The result? A wave of local ownership, with communities investing their own resources to make real, lasting changes. The impact didn't go unnoticed – stakeholders like UNICEF praised the initiative, inspired by the level of engagement and the results achieved. What started as a pilot is now building momentum, proving that when communities lead, transformation follows.



It's our families too

➤ When health care workers in Boucle du Mouhoun received training on water chlorination, something shifted. They didn't just learn how to dose chlorine correctly – they began to see clean water as a personal responsibility.

A powerful realization emerged during the sessions: "It's our families who come here for care." Unlike doctors who might send their loved ones to private clinics, many nurses, hygienists, and support staff rely on the very facilities they work in.

This understanding sparked a deeper commitment to improving hygiene. Staff became strong advocates for chlorination – not just as a technical fix, but as a way to protect their own communities.



MEET THE INTERVIEWER

Aïda Zare. This impact story draws on interviews carried out in 2024 by Aïda Zare, a specialist in sustainable development with a background in water and resource management. With experience across West and Central Africa, Aïda brings valuable insight into how social and environmental factors shape project outcomes in complex settings.



Changing mindsets takes time

➤ Initially, the idea of washing hands with recycled, treated water raised concerns. Health workers were hesitant to use the novel handwashing stations ("Gravit'eau", see Impact Story Nigeria), and patients sometimes took offence when staff washed their hands after treatment – interpreting it as a sign of disrespect.

While handwashing practices themselves have not significantly increased yet, motivation has improved. Training and dialogue helped address early doubts, and staff are now more open to the practice.

Behavior change is a gradual process, and this is only the beginning. The project also revealed a gap in the availability and use of handrub – an area that may deserve more attention going forward.



Behavior change, one step at a time

In Burkina Faso, the project combined behavioral science with simple, visual cues to promote lasting hygiene habits. Using the RANAS approach (Risks, Attitudes, Norms, Abilities, and Self-Regulation), the team developed tools tailored to context and trained local "RANASexperts" to lead change.

One small but powerful example: brightly painted footsteps on the ground now guide staff and patients towards handwashing stations – making clean hands a natural part of the routine.



Evidence-based

RANAS tools and training were adapted to local behaviors and realities.



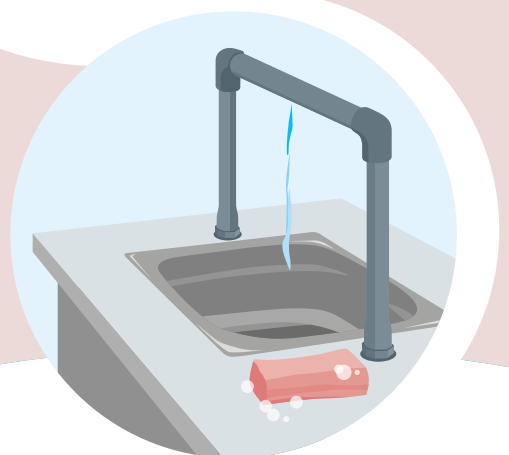
Locally led

Trained teams in all countries can now design and deliver their own hygiene campaigns.



Visual nudges

Painted paths lead people intuitively to handwashing stations.



WHAT IS hands4health?

hands4health is a collaborative initiative bringing together NGOs, academia, and private sector partners to improve hand hygiene, water quality, and sanitation in primary health facilities in Mali and Burkina Faso, and in schools in Nigeria and Palestine. The primary targets are facilities that lack access to functional water supply systems in these four countries. With a strong focus on systemic change, the project not only enhances daily practices but also contributes to stronger systems and long-term health outcomes in vulnerable communities.



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