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**DELIVERING WATER, SANITATION AND HYGIENE SERVICES  
IN AN UNCERTAIN ENVIRONMENT**

**Responding to the changing WASH needs in Mali**

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*The political unrest that started in Mali on the 21st of March 2012 has had a significant impact on access to safe water and sanitation for an estimated 1.9 million people. Like most development or non-humanitarian organisations, WaterAid Mali was forced to stop their water and sanitation interventions in northern target communities due to insecurity. In the south, water, sanitation and hygiene needs changed quickly, as a result of the large number of people migrating from the north. WaterAid Mali has adapted to these changes through reallocating resources, implementing new activities and internal capacity building. This paper will discuss the experiences of WaterAid Mali as well as the lessons learnt.*

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**WaterAid Mali**

WaterAid is an international non-governmental organisation (NGO) dedicated exclusively to the provision of safe water, sanitation and hygiene education to the world's poorest people. WaterAid's vision is of a world where everyone has access to safe water and effective sanitation. WaterAid has been working in Mali, where water-related diseases are widespread and child mortality is common, since 2000. UNICEF estimates that only 56% of the population in Mali are using safe water and 36% are using safe sanitation facilities (UNICEF 2008).

WaterAid Mali works through local organisations to improve access to safe water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH). With a strong focus on sustainability, WaterAid Mali and their partners support communities to help ensure WASH interventions are owned and managed locally. Since 2000, WaterAid Mali has helped nearly 60,000 people gain access to safe water and sanitation.

**Unrest in Mali**

On 21 March 2012 a coup d'état began in Mali, which escalated rapidly. Governance characterised by corruption, nepotism and impunity are all believed to have led to the post-election mutiny, causing a break in the constitutional order. Under pressure from the national and international community and mediation of the Economic Community of Western African Countries, the National Committee of Democrat's Recovery and the State's Restoration, the perpetrator of the coup d'état, promised solemnly – on 1 April 2012 – to restore the constitutional order and to put in place the institution of the Republic. Despite this promise, constitutional order is yet to be restored, with rebel groups occupying areas in the north of Mali, seen in figure 1 below.

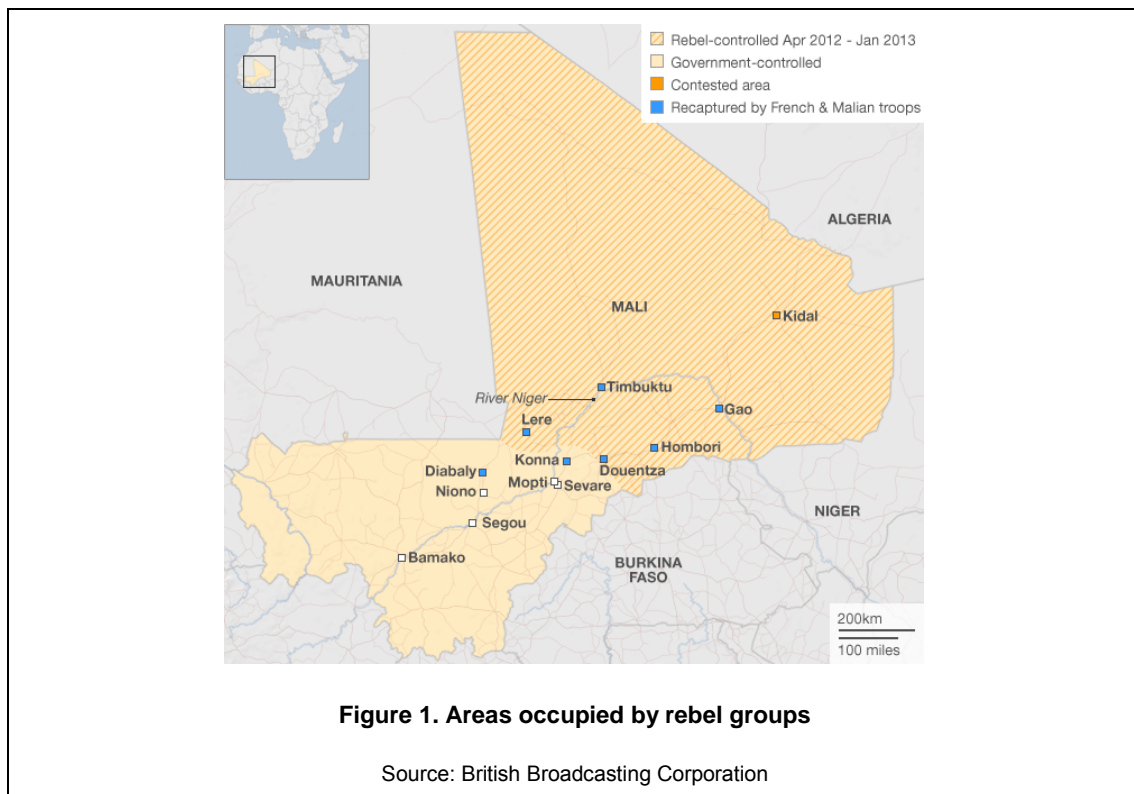
The perpetuation of the political unrest has led to the withdrawal of international donors including USAID, the Swedish Government and the Danish Government.

**Impacts on access to safe water and sanitation**

The withdrawal of international donors is reported to have resulted in a 94% decrease in the national budget for WASH in 2012, which is heavily reliant on international aid (Groupe De Suivi Budgetaire 2012). It is estimated that this decrease has resulted in a funding gap of more than CFA 200 billion (Groupe De Suivi Budgetaire 2012). The combination of donor withdrawal, insecurity in the north and the increasing number of internally displaced peoples (IDPs) has all impacted on access to safe water and sanitation in Mali. According to le Société Malienne de Patrimoine de l'Eau Potable (SOMAPEP) the political situation,

stemming from the March 2012 coup, has resulted in the deterioration of water supply services and the adjournment of planned WASH programmes. The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) reported in November 2012 that there were 1,630,000 conflict-affected people in the north of the country, 203,843 IDPs and 150,000 affected people in hosting areas. These areas have reduced access to basic WASH services and the incidence of diarrhoeal disease, including cholera, increased to 216 cases in September since the first reported case in June 2012 (OCHA September 2012).

In the north, there have been reports of damage to distribution pipes and simple water supplies, as well as contamination of wells, resulting in populations reverting to traditional unimproved water sources. In addition, community management mechanisms for water points, such as water user committees, have been rendered inefficient following the displacement of some of their members.



### Addressing the changing WASH needs

WaterAid Mali has made programmatic adjustments to meet the changing WASH needs. The section below outlines some of the key changes that have been made in order to improve the WASH situation within camps for IDPs and within host households in existing WaterAid target communities.

### Reallocating resources

Like most development or non-humanitarian organisations, WaterAid Mali did not have the capacity to work in a conflict situation. After the onset of the unrest, WaterAid Mali’s partners quickly ceased activities in Gao and Tombouctou districts, where rebel groups had taken over, as it was no longer safe. As the situation failed to improve decisions were made to suspend funding to partners working in these area, although the partnerships still remain. The suspended funding made up 20% of WaterAid Mali’s total budget and the remaining 80% has been spent in the south, as per our existing plans.

Shortly after the unrest began WaterAid partners in the south also began to feel the impact and changing WASH needs as a result of an increasing number of IDPs arriving into the areas where they were working. The changing WASH needs in southern target communities meant that WaterAid partners were unable to go about business as usual. As the situation continued to escalate, budgets and activities were revised; reallocating funding and resources to the new WASH needs in Mopti and Bamako districts. After approval from the WaterAid regional team, partner organisations working in these districts expanded their WASH activities.

### **Coordination**

The humanitarian response in Mali has been coordinated by OCHA, of which WaterAid are a member of the WASH cluster. Through the WASH cluster WaterAid Mali has worked with UNICEF, Catholic Relief Service (CRS) and the Oxfam to conduct a rapid assessment of the WASH needs in Bamako district and Mopti region. Following the assessment, WaterAid and their partners have been able to respond to the WASH needs of 30,000 IDPs who were not previously target beneficiaries. Responding to the needs WaterAid adjusted their activities, for example by supplying hygiene and sanitation kits through the coordination of the WASH cluster that included the following:

- Sanitation equipment: broom, shovel, rake, bucket, rubbish bin, brush with handle, basin funnel, squeegee, kettle and gloves.
- Cleaning products: liquid soap and solid soap, ash.
- Surface water treatment: Aquatab, vessels for drawing water from water storage tanks.

### **Partnerships**

In times of crisis, coordinated efforts are essential. WaterAid Mali has developed new partnerships with organisations such as Malian Red Cross, UNICEF and International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) through the WASH cluster. While these partnerships will mostly likely not continue once constitutional order returns, they have helped to strengthen the ability of WaterAid Mali to respond most efficiently within their scope. Through these partnerships, WaterAid staff and partners have been able to receive training from UNICEF on how to communicate during a crisis, water treatment and the protection of small children.

### **Advocacy**

As a result of the country's changing WASH needs, WaterAid Mali has shifted its advocacy efforts. With such a large gap in the WASH budget, due to the departure of international donors, WaterAid has been working with parliamentarians to advocate for funds to be released to resource the emergency humanitarian WASH needs. At present, NGOs are working with civil society to write a position paper for funding to be disbursed by international donors.

In collaboration with other partners, WaterAid Mali has also influenced television campaigns to raise public awareness of the WASH situation. Following these campaigns, there was some increase in funding from individuals and private companies for hygiene and sanitation kits.

### **Equity and inclusion**

As WASH needs have changed, issues of equity and inclusion have been dealt with differently. Working with the IDPs in both camps and host households, WaterAid Mali has been able to support some of the most marginalised people, despite some challenges. In 2012, WaterAid provided hygiene and sanitation kits to 3,000 IDP living with HIV, whose hygiene conditions had deteriorated, making them more susceptible to infection. WaterAid Mali has also submitted a proposal to the regional team to access funds that would allow them to support the design of temporary sanitation facilities that are accessible to people living with disabilities and to older people. Women with young children were identified as some of the most vulnerable, making up about 70% of IDPs. WaterAid Mali has therefore focused on meeting the needs of women and children, including mobilising other sectors to support healthcare and education.

### **Lessons learnt**

WaterAid Mali has not previously been involved in responding to emergency humanitarian WASH needs. Most development or non-humanitarian organisations did not have the capacity to continue implementing programmes in the north of Mali after the unrest. The situation was similar in Gao, where there was a risk of a cholera outbreak. Responding to the needs of communities in these areas has been left to organisations such as the ICRC and UNICEF, who have the expertise to deal with such circumstances. However, like other development organisations, WaterAid Mali is playing a crucial role in responding to WASH needs in the south of the country, where they have the capacity to work and deliver WASH services.

A number of internal processes have been adjusted to strengthen WaterAid Mali's ability to respond to the changes. The establishment of a crisis management committee and crisis management plan has improved communication of security issues and staff movement between WaterAid offices. This has allowed rapid responses to increased insecurity, such as restriction of staff travel to certain areas. WaterAid Mali has also

adjusted its payment frequency to partners from quarterly to monthly, reducing the amount transferred to make transactions more secure.

New and innovative partnerships have been established through the WASH cluster. These have included work with Oxfam, UNICEF and ICRC, and have strengthened staff and organisational capacity to respond to the crisis. Activities carried out by WaterAid and their partners have also been coordinated more effectively within the wider response to the crisis.

WaterAid Mali has used its strengths to address new needs. Specifically, they have had an influential role in coordinating advocacy efforts focused on increasing funding from donors and the general public for emergency WASH services. However they feel that they could have been more influential in communicating the specific needs of the communities they work in to the WASH cluster and OCHA.

As funding for activities in the north were not tied to one donor, WaterAid Mali had the flexibility to divert funds which could not be spent in the north to areas where they had the capacity to respond to the needs of IDPs in camps and host households in a number of areas. However, working with mobile communities has posed challenges for monitoring. UNICEF will be providing training on monitoring activities among mobile populations for WaterAid Mali to strengthen capacity in this area. On reflection, this is something that WaterAid Mali would like to have been better prepared for.

One concern WaterAid Mali has is the potential that this change in delivery will have to create a culture of dependency. More strategic thinking about transitioning between responding to a crisis and business as usual may prevent the risk of creating such a culture.

## Looking forward

WaterAid Mali has been working with a consultant to develop an intervention strategy that will support them to return to long-term sustainable WASH activities. The focus is on the possibility that the unrest will continue in northern Mali for the next three years. Based on this assumption, activities will be delivered in line with the following strategy:

- During the first phase, in 2013, activities will focus on emergency humanitarian response in the north (as soon as it is safe to return) and development activities in some areas of the south.
- The second phase, in 2014, will focus on the actions of repair, rehabilitation, construction and reconstruction in the north.
- In 2015, the third phase will focus on consolidating achievements and drawing lessons from the intervention.

The development of this strategy has led to the development of a proposal to raise funds to meet the needs of those affected by the crisis.

As the situation is still changing, and WaterAid are continuously trying to respond, it has been near impossible for the team to take time to reflect. It is hoped that this paper will ignite discussions internally and enable them to draw out recommendations that can support other WaterAid country programmes in the preparedness for such situations.

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