

PROMOTING CHLORINE TABLETS (AQUATABS) TO TREAT HOUSEHOLD DRINKING WATER IN NIGER.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In Niger, inadequate access to safe drinking water and flooding of the Niger River contributes to the recurrent outbreaks of cholera. In 2012, an estimated 4,799 cases of cholera and 98 deaths were reported in the country. Out of the total cholera cases reported, 91% were reported exclusively in the region of the Niger River, 5% in the Maggia valley in the region of Tahoua, and 4% in the area around Lake Madarounfa in the region of Maradi. To contribute to access to safe drinking water, the USAID West Africa Water Supply, Sanitation, and Hygiene (USAID WA-WASH) Program through the association for social marketing in Niger (ANIMAS-SUTURA in French) supported safe water handling and storage. The Program supported Aquatabs sale and distribution to treat drinking water at the household level in the regions of Maradi and Tillabery. The Program established Aquatabs' sales outlets at the community level, developed an intensive communication strategy for behavior change, and stimulated demand for Aquatabs through promotions.

ANIMAS-SUTURA had previously developed a sustainable distribution network of Aquatabs in the intervention regions. The experience in the area enabled ANIMAS-SUTURA to develop an integrated sustainable community to promote Aquatabs and influence behavior change in relation to water, sanitation, and hygiene. The objectives of the ANIMAS-SUTURA activities under the USAID WA-WASH Program are: (1) to improve access to water treatment products at the point of use (POU); (2) to support proper use of drinking water treatment products at the household; (3) to support the implementation of community communication for behavior change to improve water, sanitation, and hygiene; and (4) to develop a distribution network by establishing sales outlets (wholesalers and community based vendors) to ensure the availability of the product at an affordable price in each village. Overall, the objectives contribute to reduced mortality and morbidity from diarrheal diseases among children under five years in Niger.

The objectives were achieved through a multimedia communication integrated approach for behavior change. The approach included entertainment sessions by women animators, road shows, radio debates, and advocacy to inform the target populations on different topics related to water, sanitation, and hygiene. Aquatab tablets were sold through several channels such as distributors, vendors, wholesalers, roadside Kiosks, drug stores, street vendors, and community based vendors. In addition, Animas Sutura developed a community based distribution (CBD) channel in 462 villages with 44 integrated health centers, 412 support committees, and 462 listening clubs run by 1,848 community volunteers. Further, the community volunteers facilitated group discussions in every village where community based distribution was practiced according to the theme of the week and a well-defined program. For the purposes of the group discussions, each community volunteer was required to record two educational sessions per week as a working tool with skits and commercials on water, sanitation, and hygiene. In total, 11,419 group discussion sessions were held from June 2013 to August 2014 in the two target regions. These sessions saw the participations of 148,419 men and 200,382 women.

The communication effort included 29 local radio stations of which ten were supported by the USAID WA-WASH Program to disseminated water, hygiene and sanitation related commercials, skits, talk shows, and interactive quiz sessions. The radio stations broadcasted 14,353 commercials, 3,122 songs, 5,757 sketches, and 136 radio debates related to water, sanitation, and hygiene. Further, activities to improve the visibility of Aquatabs were conducted during wrestling competitions, where the Aquatabs approved logo and program branding were setup in the fighting arena. Weekly entertainment sessions in the market places were used as Aquatabs marketing strategy. The entertainment sessions demonstrated to the general public how to use Aquatabs, informed the public about the price of Aquatabs, and the available of distribution channels and sales outlets.

Before commencing the marketing of Aquatabs in Niger, the Program obtained legal authorization from the Ministry of Public Health. Regular stock taking was conducted for quality control. In addition, a monitoring plan was developed for the community-based distribution of Aquatabs to mitigate possible negative effects on the environment. Moreover, users were advised on proper use of Aquatabs through animations, skits, group discussions, radio programs, flyers and posters put up at the sales outlets. The use of Aquatabs was closely monitored through a local supervision system involving the integrated health center, hosts of the local radio stations that operated Aquatab distributors, local supervisors, and ANIMAS-SUTURA staff that made regular trips to the field.

The results within one year of implementation were satisfactory. During the implementation period, 576 sales outlets were established in the intervention regions. A total of 5,696,000 Aquatab tablets were sold from June 2013 to August 2014. Despite the free distribution of Aquatabs by other international NGOs, the USAID WA-WASH Program Aquatabs sales targets through ANIMAS-SUTURA were exceeded. This achievement was due in part to the effectiveness of the communications approach used across the country and secondly, because of different marketing strategies which also included mobile teams, vendors and all the supply chain partners (roadside kiosks, dealers, wholesalers, and retailers). The Program's sales team conducted regular monitoring of the distribution network to reflect on the successes and constraints, address the challenges, and establish new sales outlets.

The most recent data from the demographic and health studies about the prevalence of diarrhea among children under five years indicate a decrease in morbidity from diarrhea by 5.8% percent in Maradi and 3% in Tillabery between 2006 and 2012. Data from national health surveys of 2012 and 2013 showed a slight increase of 4% of diarrhea cases in children less than five years in the region of Maradi while the region of Tillabéry observed a decrease of about 8%. This finding emphasizes implementation of other complementary measures to enhance hygiene and sanitation as water treatment alone is not sufficient to eradicate diarrhea and related diseases.

In 2010, only 37% of the population in the intervention regions had knowledge on how to use Aquatabs correctly. The population with knowledge increased to 87% in Maradi and 93 % in Tillabery in 2013 as a result of the Program activities. Thanks to the USAID WA-WASH Program, the populations in the intervention regions are now knowledgeable about Aquatabs and how to use them. The Program has also made Aquatabs readily accessible in the rural villages in the intervention regions. ANIMAS-SUTURA continues to sell Aquatabs even after the end of the Program activities in Niger. For sustainability, the sales network now includes the community radio stations. The Program strengthened the existing distribution structures. In addition, sales promotion is continued through developing partnerships with other organizations and local stakeholders that have existing community structures.

The full report is available (in English) upon request via our website. For more details about our program activities and other reports please visit <http://wawash.fiu.edu/>.

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