



Annual WASH Systems Award: Hamzari / Niger

World Water Day 2024

HAMZARI

The Sahel is a region that experiences major **water stress**. Niger also faces armed conflict, worsening drought cycles, desertification, and climate change. Surface water relies on one permanent river and seasonal rivers, rainfall, and runoff. Despite significant underground water resources, only 20% is currently used (Water Action Hub). Most of the population relies on agriculture or pastoralism as a livelihood and climate change and unsustainable use and degradation of land and water resources pose extreme risks to the region. Over **13 million people in Niger lack access to water** and only **23% of rural households have access to a toilet** (UNICEF/WHO Joint Monitoring Program 2022).

The BHA/USAID-funded Hamzari project seeks to reduce vulnerability and improve adaptive capacities in 3 communes of the Maradi region. As part of an integrated approach to tackle challenges, the Hamzari WASH team uses a **systems strengthening approach** to increase access to sustainable and quality **WASH services** and **protect and conserve water resources**. This includes increasing the capacity of commune governments, activating private sector investment, and using an integrated water resource management (IWRM) approach. The WASH component is led by **WaterAid** and **DEMI-E** in partnership with **CARE's Water+ Team** and serves as an example of a successful collaboration and partnership model that extends to other countries like Malawi and Madagascar. **The Water Team is proud to award its Annual WASH Systems Award to the Hamzari WASH team for their hard work and success to increase access to WASH services and strengthen water security in Niger!**

Interview

This year, the Water+ team interviewed **Moussa Abdourahaman**, the WASH Manager for Hamzari. Moussa has over 9 years of experience in emergency and development WASH. Prior to WaterAid, he worked with Catholic Relief Services and Action Contre la Faim. Moussa leads a team of 3 WASH specialists, 4 WASH supervisors and 15 field agents and is supported by the **WaterAid Niger** team and their Country Director, **Oumarou Hamani**.



Project Overview: Hamzari

Dates: 2018-2025

Donors: BHA/USAID

Budget: \$34 million

Consortium partners: CARE, WaterAid, DEMI-E, GRET, AREN, and ANBEF

Objectives: Reduce vulnerability; Improve nutritional status in children under 5, adolescent girls and women of reproductive age; sustainable WASH services; and sustainable diversified livelihoods opportunities and adaptive capacities

Q: What challenges does Niger face in improving access to water and sanitation in rural areas? What are the threats to the quality and quantity of water resources?

Niger faces a two-pronged challenge to deliver WASH services: population growth and **finance challenges** coupled with **weak sector governance**. The sector is consistently underfunded with most of the resources allocated to the water sub-sector – leaving the sanitation and hygiene sub-sectors even more critically underfunded. The private sector has also made limited investments despite a legal framework. Population growth then magnifies the scale of investments needed to ensure sustainable WASH services.

Although responsibilities have been transferred to communes as part of decentralization, commune teams still struggle with **limited capacity, tools, and resources** to operationalize WASH strategies and fulfill sector functions like planning, monitoring and evaluation and accountability. There is also limited understanding of roles and responsibilities among commune-level management structures, including Water User Groups (AUSPE), Water Point Management Committees (CGPE), and village and communal CLTS committees.

The quality and quantity of water is threatened by **climate change**, conflict and **insecurity**, and population growth that increases **stress on water** resources. There is also an absence of appropriate studies and up-to-date databases, and, in the case of quality, an absence of water safety plans and water quality monitoring plans in almost all local authorities.

Q: The Hamzari project has a governance-forward approach to water, which has enabled more than 58,000 people to gain access to water. The team tested three service delivery models: community management, a federated community management model and multi-village public-private partnerships. What are the successes and innovations? What are the challenges?

The three management approaches and investment in strengthening the WASH system contributed to the following key gains:

-  Improved operationalization of **municipal water and sanitation technical units (SMEA)** in the three intervention communes. This ensures communes fulfill their role and responsibilities and provide adequate oversight for WASH activities. Before Hamzari, the SMEA agents were not operational.
-  Active stakeholder involvement at village, commune, and department level creates a **dynamic of feedback, coordination and collaboration** supported by accountability and transparency.
-  Regular monitoring of water quality, including **water safety and water monitoring plans** in each commune. This ensures risk assessment and risk management actions from catchment to consumer.
-  Increased revenue from **water sales** from improved collection systems. Communes have more financial resources in their FREIA and SMEA¹ accounts through fees and taxes, community-managed water points have needed funds to cover repair and maintenance, and private operators have viable businesses.
-  Private operators under the multi-village PPPs **comply with most contractual clauses**. This means operators understand their roles and responsibilities and communes conduct effective oversight.
-  Reduction in breakdown rates that **improve reliability** of water supply systems managed through the federated community management approach and multi-village PPP – a key factor in **service quality**.

One key innovation in Hamzari is the **federation of water management committees**. This is a hybrid community-based management model in 79 villages that delegates repair and maintenance to the commune and sends water tariff revenue to a centralized commune account. This helps professionalize maintenance and repairs and reduces breakdown rates and repair times – which means the water points are functional longer and faster. This model works better than traditional community management.

¹ Funds for extension and repairs of water supply network (FREIA) and funds for community WASH activities (SMEA)

Other key success factors are the focus on accountability using **communal consultation structures** and a **dialogue framework** between the mayor and municipal council to discuss management of water supply systems. The team also worked with communes to strengthen their capacity and increase availability of tools and data. This included the set-up of **WASH databases** that provide data on infrastructure characteristics, water quality, and sanitation coverage and feed into regional and national management information systems. We also helped kick off the recruitment of the **SAC/SPE service** and improved understanding of their role by communes. The SAC/SPE are Niger's decentralized independent support structure that provides technical, financial, and accounting monitoring for communes and water operators. However, their role has been poorly understood and the SAC/SPE had withdrawn services in our intervention communes before Hamzari.

Most of the **challenges we face are at the governance and stakeholder level**. Although commune teams now understand the importance of the SAC/SPE, the contracting process is still ongoing and is challenging given the competitive bidding nature. AUSPEs and CGPEs still require ongoing support to ensure effectiveness. Unlocking SMEA funds to finance AUSPE action plans has been difficult due to mayors' limited knowledge on how to use the funds.

There are also challenges in helping SMEA agents master the process of analyzing drinking water facility management performance. Lastly, spare parts are still hard to find, and communes could benefit from a spare parts store to further reduce the duration of breakdowns. To address challenges in water management, our team conducted an analysis and developed a **corrective action plan** with the commune to address shortcomings, including how to equip and finance SMEA agents, capacity needs for the different stakeholders and metrics to review operations and management functions.

Q: Hamzari collaborated with USAID's PRO-WASH project to introduce and test market-based sanitation under the *Mutunci* product brand. The team also uses Community-Led Total Sanitation, behavior change and governance approaches. As of 2023, 22,240 people have access to basic sanitation, 3 sanitation SMEs are operational and over 1,000 toilets have been sold. What makes Hamzari's sanitation approach so effective?

Hamzari uses a **combination of approaches** sequenced through a gradual introduction of one approach after the other, based on the principle of cause and effect. Each approach was introduced following a **pilot process** before being scaled up. All pilots were informed by **formative research** (e.g. WASH study, market assessment, and behavioral determinants of hygiene) to better understand the environment, opportunities, and challenges.



As a team, we review and update implementation strategies according to feedback from the community and field staff. This led to a more desirable latrine model for customers and collaboration with other local non-WASH committees to promote and scale the sanitation approach. We also focused on progressive capacity building of stakeholders and updated trainings and tools based on needs and results. For example, working with the 3 sanitation enterprises to tailor trainings on selling, tools to monitor the market and building networks with supply chain actors.

Q: Water security is a major challenge in the Sahel. How has Hamzari promoted sustainable watershed management and reduced conflict?

One of our key intervention pillars is **integrated water resource management (IWRM)** based on a **watershed approach**. This type of approach allows us to have a holistic vision of water resources and WASH for better understanding of the landscape and users, smarter and more integrated planning and governance, and reduced conflict. To strengthen IWRM, the project provided **support to the people and platforms involved in watershed management** through: 1) development of a **local planning document for water resources** (SAGE - Schéma d'Aménagement et de Gestion des Eaux); 2) the establishment and training of the **Guidan Roumdji Water Agency**, the watershed authority responsible for monitoring and regulation of water resources and planning, coordination, and resource mobilization for protection and conservation of water resources; 3) **training** of local water point management committees and water user groups; and 4) completion of a **study on the laws and texts governing IWRM** to inform the Water Agency, government and communities on how to regulate the abstraction of water resources and ensure good integrated management. As part of this approach, we also led the identification, risk analysis and risk management actions around drinking water facilities.

To further reduce conflict, the project's focus on **advocacy at communal forums** on WASH seeks to encourage the mobilization of financial resources and their proper distribution across geography and sub-sectors and thus increase the leadership of local authorities in the management of WASH facilities.

To read more about Hamzari, please visit <https://www.care.org/our-work/food-and-nutrition/nutrition/hamzari/>

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Hamzari

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From left: Kabirou Badamassi (Hamzari) & the Mayor of Chadakori © Hamzari

