



Monday 20th March 2017 | 8:15 to 9:30 am | Room 7, United Nations Headquarters, New York | wsscc.org/events

WATER SANITATION AND HYGIENE IN THE INFORMAL SECTOR

Experiences of active women in West and Central Africa - Findings from Cameroon, Niger and Senegal

A high proportion of women work in the informal sector

In sub-Saharan Africa, the informal sector represents 89.4% of work, including 44% of employed women. Called the popular economy, the informal economy includes various food-related activities (distribution, preparation, catering) personal services, repairs, recovery and recycling. Commerce and distribution represent the major part of these activities. With an average monthly income in 2012 of 54,850 francs, that is, 1,828 FCA francs

per day (ILO, 2012), the loss of earnings is significant for these women who, due to a lack of access to sanitary facilities during their periods, are forced to stay away from their commercial or professional work. This is all the more harmful due to the informal economy being a means of living, or rather, surviving, for the urban female population, for which it is a way of meeting basic needs: food, housing, clothing, education, health and travel.

Like other countries in the region, the populations of Cameroon, Niger and Senegal are characterized by relatively high proportions of women (table 1). This female population is an undeniable force in countries' development. Women are, to varying degrees, particularly active in the economic life (table 2) and are mainly represented in the informal service sector, such as street food selling, retail, etc. (table 3).

Table 1: Women as a proportion of the total population

Country	Proportion of women (%)
Cameroon	52
Niger	51
Senegal	50.1

Table 2: Women's activity rates in their countries' economies

Country	Activity rate (%)
Cameroon	61.0
Niger	40.0
Senegal	30.0

Table 3: Sector of activities

Sector	CMR	NIG	SEN
Food and drinks	32.0	18.0	20.0
Food processing	11.0	12.0	18.0
Retail	21.0	48.0	39.0
Office work	36.0	22.0	23.0

Insufficient or unequal access to WASH services for women working in the informal sector

These women spend the majority of their time in public spaces. And yet, in many African countries, the lack of basic public services such as access to water and individual and collective sanitation services such as toilets and public showers is garish. This lack, exacerbated by unequal access, is seen all the more in public places such as markets, stations, hospitals and schools, prime sites for women to carry out informal work (table 4).

Table 4: Numbers of public toilets in Yaoundé and Maradi

Public places	YDE /CMR	MARADI /NIG
Markets	9	3
Bus station	7	6
Hospitals	13	4
Schools/colleges/universities	45	11
Administrative offices	27	15

Sources: Nguendo Yongsí and Amadou Ousmane, 2014; Nguendo Yongsí et al., 2016; IFORD/ONUFemmes/WCCSS, 2016

The services offered are close to non-existent, translating as a low rate of access to sanitation facilities. The

sub-Saharan countries are among those States where access to toilets is extremely difficult. In these countries,

more than 60% of the population has no access to toilets. In Sudan, this figure reaches 93% (table 5).

Table 5: Proportion of the population without access to sanitation facilities in some African countries

Cameroon	Niger	Senegal	Togo	Burkina Faso	Nigeria	Mali	Côte d'Ivoire	Ghana	Namibia	Chad
55	90	54	89	81	71	76	78	85	66	88

Source: Water Aid 2015, page 21

In some places, toilets are impossible to find. In others, they are unhealthy or dangerous due to being built in a very precarious way and being in danger of collapsing at any moment.

Thus, in the absence of access to toilets and effective arrangements for changing during their periods, a good proportion of women simply stop going about their usual occupations

(table 6). They miss two to three days (table 7), essentially from commercial and professional activities that generate income for them (table 8).

Table 6: Proportion of women stating that they have not taken part in their activities because of their periods

Country	Proportion of women (%)
Cameroon	31
Niger	51
Senegal	16

Table 7: Number of days lost due to period

Country	2-3 days' absence (%)
Cameroon	33
Niger	40
Senegal	---

Table 8: Types of activity affected by women's absence due to their periods

Type of activity	CMR	NIG	SEN
Commercial activities	52	33	51
Professional activities	11	20	---

The state of public facilities

Research conducted at community level shows that there is little by way of WASH services in all three countries.

1. Relatively high reliance on ground water: Research shows that the main source of water is boreholes, albeit to degrees that vary between countries

and sites. While in Cameroon, Minawao site is where boreholes are most used, in Niger it is Zinder region where they are most common.

Table 9: Borehole use in Cameroon

Site	Percentage
Lolo	18
Mbile	19
Mborgop	16
Minawao	47
Senegal	16

Table 10: Borehole use in Niger

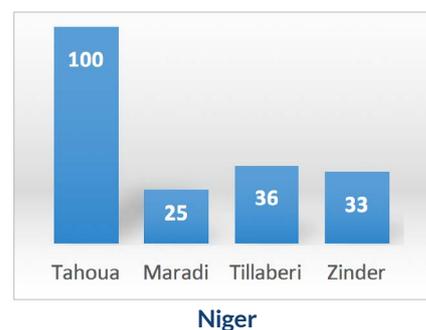
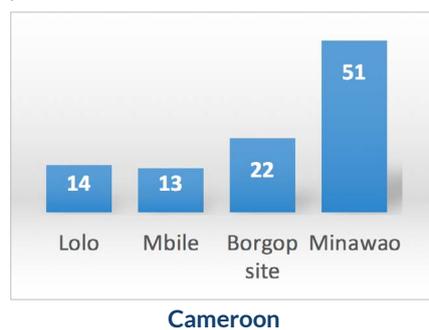
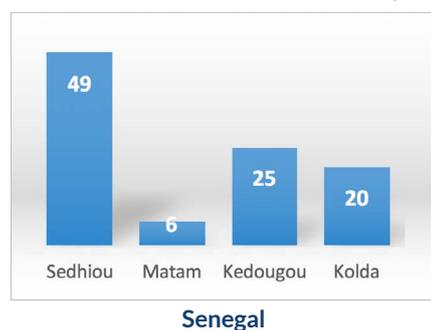
Region	Percentage
Tahoua	50
Maradi	18
Tillabéri	14
Zinder	38

2. The dominant type of toilet is the latrine: Regardless of country, those

toilets that do exist are essentially latrines, and these are insufficient as

the WHO standard of 20 persons per latrine is rarely found.

Chart 1: Level of latrine use in country of study

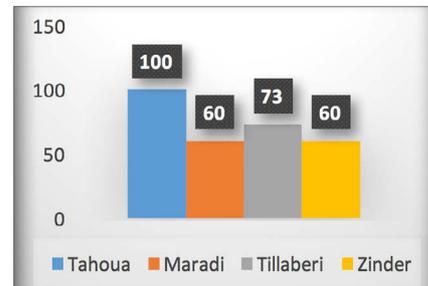
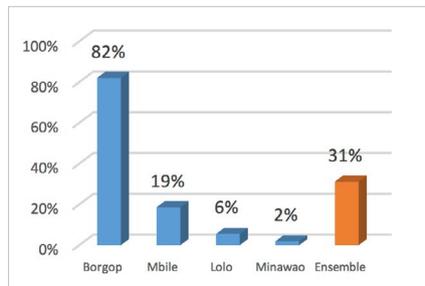
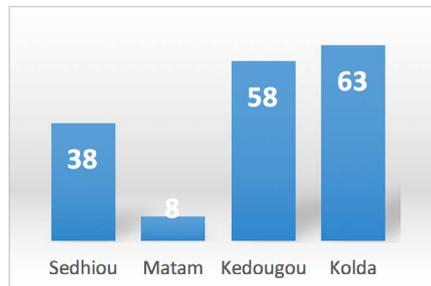


3. Low rates of operability, but toilets do offer some privacy: Whether wet or dry latrines, they only have relative

operability as they are all below 50%. Even so, they are built on a basis of respecting the privacy of their

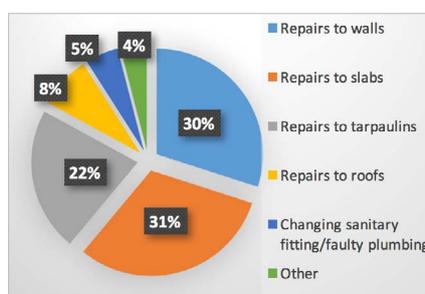
users (evidence of gender separation) to degrees that vary from country to country.

Chart 2: Level of gender separation in toilets and latrines

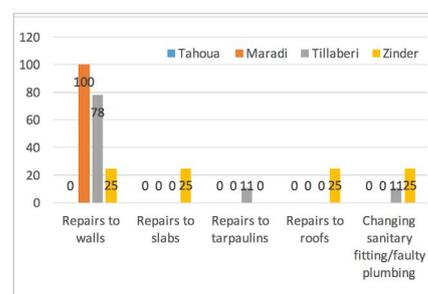


4. Poorly cleaned and partially maintained toilets: The toilets visited were poorly cleaned. Cleanliness levels (assessed on the basis of the presence of waste on the floor, flies, smells, and faeces on the edges of the hole, etc.) is largely below average, ranging from 20% in Maradi to 36% in Tillabéri (chart 3). Maintenance is limited to refurbishing the walls and, to a lesser extent, the slab. Thus, no plumbing or masonry work is done.

Chart 3: Types of toilet maintenance



Cameroon



Niger

5. Toilets in poor states of functionality: Functionality, here, means the availability of items inherent to good hygiene (soap and water). In the opinion of respondents, toilets are insufficiently functional in that

the soap needed for hand-washing after using the toilet is either little available or missing altogether. What is more, toilets do not have bins where women can dispose of used sanitary protection.

Table 11: Level of functionality of toilets

Sector	CMR	NIG	SEN
Availability of soap	---	32%	20%
Presence of bins	---	23%	08%
Toilet cleaning	16%	48.0	08%

6. Toilets with some incipient security: These toilets are beginning to show some security, as nearly all of them have

doors and have a means of fastening the doors shut from the inside, providing a degree of security (chart 4). But it is still

the fact that a proportion of respondents feel insecure when they are using the toilet, for various reasons (table 12).

Chart 4: Types of toilet maintenance

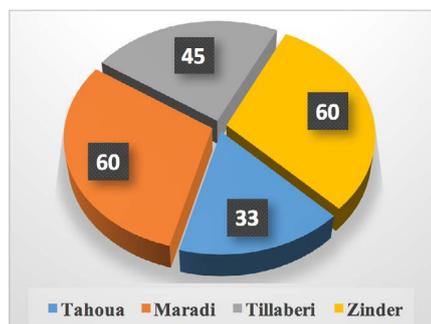


Table 12: Reasons for insecurity in toilets

Reason	CMR	NIG	SEN
Remoteness of toilets	---	55%	---
Lack of light	60%	46%	84%
Health hazards	20%	59%	---
Risk of rape	60%	55%	27%
Poor quality of construction materials	33%	59%	---
No gender separation	82%	63%	58%

Limitation of activities during menstruation due to the lack of access to wash services

A relatively high proportion of girls and women say that the occurrence of their periods is a period of psychological and physical discomfort, due to their experiencing various health problems (table 13).

Table 13: Proportion of women who have experience health issues related to their periods

	Period-related health problem									
	General weakness and tiredness	Dizziness, nausea	Headaches	Itching or spots	Fever	Cough/cold	Backache	Painful breasts	Other (stress)	Malaria
Cameroon	43	26	25	13	17	03	42	24	13	7
Niger	72	11	24	17	56	38	9	5	52	43
Senegal	---	38	49	8	30	4	56	43	---	6

Still in relation to their daily lives, some women and girls say that they are excluded or stigmatized within their families or the community during their periods.

Women say that these health and stigmatization problems and the lack of toilets and their poor working condition are harmful to them as they are forced to miss their normal occupations. The overall trend shows that 51% of women in Niger, 31% in Cameroon and 46% in Senegal (i.e. two out of three women, on average) do not carry out their normal business during their periods. As table 15 below shows, when they get their periods women's activities slow down during their periods due to the lack of operational WASH facilities.

Table 14: Psychological impacts (stress, isolation, stigmatization) of menstruation (%)

	Self-imposed isolation	Imposed isolation	Stigmatization
Cameroon	24	20	12
Niger	10	9	18
Senegal	18	9	20

This slowdown has a considerable economic impact, all the more so as women are involved in the economic development of their households and communities. In short, in a social

context marked by economic insecurity that hits women hardest, some suffer even more due to their periods generally being "dead time", from the point of view of economic activities.

Table 15: Proportion of women who did not go about their activities, by type of activity

Type of activity	% per country		
	Cameroon	Senegal	Niger
Educational activities	24	56	45
Household/domestic activities	35	51	11
Commercial activities	52	51	25
Professional activities	11	---	20

RECOMMENDATIONS

- (i) Increase the amount of WASH infrastructure in communities and households, and strengthen measures for the cleaning and maintenance of existing infrastructure;
- (ii) Develop the construction of gender-separated latrines in educational establishments and public places, especially those frequented by economically active women, most of whom work in the informal sector.

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