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**ENSURING AVAILABILITY AND SUSTAINABLE MANAGEMENT  
OF WATER AND SANITATION FOR ALL**

**Supporting sanitation and hygiene in prisons: WaterAid's  
support for Bolle detention centre in Mali**

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*The Bolle detention centre in Bamako is a unique prison for women and girls in Mali with an average of 150 inmates. WaterAid's intervention started in 2014 to improve the living conditions and health of women prisoners by providing water, hygiene and sanitation. The project involved constructing and rehabilitating sanitation facilities, and providing training and sensitisation for inmates and prison managers in improved hygiene behaviours and maintenance of the facilities. This is consistent with WaterAid's principle of "equality, non-discrimination and inclusion" in the provision of WASH services. As a result of the intervention more than 130 women and girls now have access to improved toilets and live in a healthier environment. The Ministry of Justice as well as other stakeholders such as United Nations Mission for Mali inspired by the results, have committed themselves to extending the same action in other prisons in Mali.*

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**Introduction**

**Sustainable development goal 6.2** aims, by 2030, to achieve access to adequate and equitable sanitation and hygiene for all, and end open defecation, paying special attention to the needs of women and girls and those in vulnerable situations. The requirement to focus specifically on women and children and on prisoners is also set out explicitly in the principle of equality and non-discrimination which is an essential element of the human rights to water and sanitation: "Some places, persons and groups will often require particular attention in the realization of the rights to water and sanitation, as they are often marginalized and excluded or are potentially vulnerable. This includes for example people living in informal settlements, indigenous peoples, refugees, traveller communities, internally displaced persons and returnees, victims of natural disasters, prisoners, older persons, people with disabilities, people with serious or chronic illnesses, children, women and transgender and intersex individuals" (UN nd).

**Bolle Detention Centre**

The detention centres in Mali are facing difficulties, including prison overcrowding. The United States Department of State (2015) reports that as of September 2014 the Bamako Central Prison held 1,832 prisoners, including 1,066 pre-trial detainees, in a facility designed to hold 400 persons.

Women constitute nearly 3% of the inmates at national level, most of whom are in the women and girls' Bolle detention centre (Bamako). Inmates can often remain in jail for two years or more before trial. Slow procedures and non-compliance with legal detention time are also a cause of this situation. There are serious challenges related to sanitation, access to safe water, and emergency health care particularly among pregnant women prisoners and newborn babies. Mismanagement of menstrual hygiene is also a common problem for female inmates in prisons

WaterAid Mali, in line with its vision of a world where everyone has access to safe water, sanitation and hygiene, and in order to contribute to achievement of the sustainable development goals and the realisation of the human rights to water and sanitation initiated a project to support the women's and girls' Bolle detention centre in the district of Bamako, thereby focusing on the needs of women and girls in a particularly vulnerable situation.

The Bolle detention centre is located in the district of Bamako in commune VI. It is a unique prison for women and girls in Mali with an average of 150 inmates. Before the intervention, hygiene and sanitation conditions were very bad at the centre which had been facing poor hygiene conditions for years. Because of the bad condition of latrines, some inmate women and adolescent girls would relieve themselves outside at night. Also, their menstrual periods were difficult to manage, evidenced by the used tissues thrown on the floor in the latrines (see Photo1) and parts of the centre compound. Water-related diseases were very common including diarrhoea and malaria. According to a baseline study carried out by WaterAid Mali in 2014, more than 20 cases of disease were reported each month despite the lack of access to quality care.

In July 2014, WaterAid Mali decided to intervene in the centre to improve the living conditions and environment of women prisoners through the provision of water, hygiene and sanitation in Bolle prison. This is consistent with WaterAid's principle of "equality, non-discrimination and inclusion" in the provision of WASH services. WaterAid's intervention in Bolle detention centre is the concretisation of its mission which is to change the lives of the most vulnerable and marginalised communities through safe water, hygiene and sanitation.

### **Objectives of the project**

- Improve access to water, hygiene and sanitation in prisons and particularly for imprisoned women and girls in the Bolle detention centre,
- Influence policies and practices at national level for the improvement of prisoners' life conditions through better access to WASH in prisons
- Produce evidence and documentations to influence decisions makers at national level and other stakeholders

The project activities implemented were:

- Rehabilitation of latrines, septic tanks and rain water drainage systems
- The installation of washing basins with drainage systems
- The arrangement of the inside of the yard to improve the living conditions of women and girls inmates.
- The organisation of a workshop on menstrual hygiene management.
- Sensitisation on hygiene
- Provision of hygiene kits to the detention centre including trash bins, hand washing kits, wheelbarrows, shovels, brooms, gloves, and soap.

### **Results**

After the intervention, there is today a great improvement in the living conditions of the inmates of the Bolle centre. More than 130 women and girls have access to improved toilets and live in a healthy environment.

Not only has this project helped to improve the living conditions of women and girls in Bolle through access to safe water, hygiene and sanitation, it has also influenced decision makers and other stakeholders to pay more attention to conditions in prisons in Mali. Advocacy activities, meetings and sharing project results have attracted the attention of the Ministry of Justice and the direction of the detention centre of Bolle highlighting the need for actions in prisons. The direction of the centre has committed to properly maintaining the facilities built in the centre. As for the Ministry of Justice, they have committed to extend similar interventions to the other prisons in Mali to clean up the environment of inmates and thus improve their living conditions.

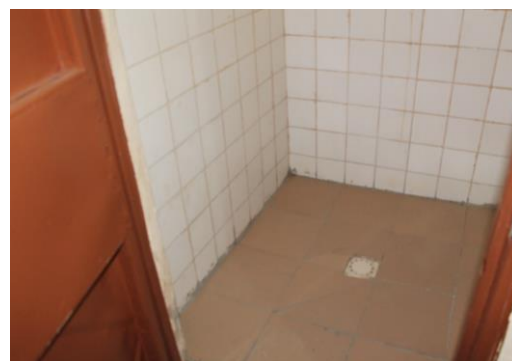
### **Specific outputs of the project**

- Facilities constructed through the project include (32) cubicles (16 WC and 16 toilets) for minor girls, convicted women and lactating mothers; (03) Septic tank systems and Sumps for the management of waste water from these cubicles, which have helped to improve the living conditions of the inmates and preserve their dignity.
- The development of knowledge about good hygiene practices of 131 imprisoned women and adolescent girls on hygiene and sanitation practices which has led to the reduction in diarrhoea rate and malaria cases in the centre.
- Project results were shared during a workshop with the management of the centre and the Ministry of Justice. This made the Ministry realise the significance of water and sanitation issues faced by the inmates of the centre and other prisons in Mali in general. The Ministry then committed to improving

access to safe water, good hygiene and adequate sanitation in all prisons of the country. A health committee was created by the Bolle Detention Centre, a budget was provided by the centre for maintenance of the latrines constructed and to maintain hygienic conditions throughout the centre.



**Photograph 1. Latrine in detention centre before intervention**



**Photograph 2. Latrine after intervention**

## Challenges

The construction of latrines and other health facilities was of course accompanied by a sensitisation process and training for inmates. Sustainability is a key issue insofar as a committee was put in place amongst the inmates to ensure compliance with the standards of hygiene and cleanliness in the whole establishment. The major challenge is the question of sustainability. As inmates are constantly being released and new ones are entering the centre it is necessary to continually renew the committee and train new inmates coming in. The centre should ensure there some continuity to maintain the improvement in hygiene conditions. In response to this situation, the project supported the centre to make an action plan which provides activities and maintenance costs to be planned by the centre.

Prisoners are also initiated into income-generating activities, such as market gardening and dyeing to support the centre to cover the maintenance costs of the facilities and renewal of consumables such as towels, soap, dustbins, brooms, etc.

## Lessons learned

- The project's success depends largely on the involvement of the central administration and the Ministry; this is essential to ensure sustainability and be able to extend the actions to other prisons across the country. The involvement of authorities in the design, implementation and sharing of results helped lead the ministry and the management of the centre to commit to improving the conditions of women prisoners of Bolle centre and other prisons of Mali.
- Women and girls in the prison have adopted good hygiene practices; they have changed their behaviours and improved their environment thanks to the training and awareness raising activities. They will be able to transmit these experiences and practices once they are released. The spreading of such practices after the release of inmates is a valuable asset;
- The documentation of results and the sharing with stakeholders were an opportunity for WaterAid and other stakeholders to take into account the conditions of vulnerable and marginalised groups such as inmates through the application of the principle of equity, non-discrimination and inclusion as regards the provision of water, hygiene and sanitation services.

On the basis of the results of this project, we would like to call on other partners working in the field of WASH, to initiate a big project called "WASH in prisons" building on experience of WASH in schools and

communities. Such a project will help us reduce inequalities in access to water, hygiene and sanitation services, and will be necessary for the achievement of SDG 6.2

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### Acknowledgements

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