

# Community-led Total Sanitation in Niger: Findings from an Implementation Case Study

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## Purpose

This learning brief shares key findings from a case study of community-led total sanitation (CLTS) implementation in Plan International Niger program areas, focusing on the roles and responsibilities of local actors. Several implications are relevant for consideration by Plan International Niger and other sanitation practitioners.

The brief is part of the CLTS Learning Series, a collection of case studies on CLTS implementation, prepared by The Water Institute at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill as part of the Plan International USA project, *Testing CLTS Approaches for Scalability* (TCAS).

## Methods

In April 2014, a researcher from The Water Institute collected data in the capital city, Niamey, and in the districts of Dosso and Tillabéri. Data collection consisted of 29 in-depth interviews with government and non-government stakeholders, visits to four triggered villages (two in each district), and a review of relevant organizational documents and national reports.

## Role of Local Actors

Plan International Niger began implementing CLTS in 2010, and remains one of the key non-governmental organizations (NGOs) utilizing this approach in Niger. The Ministère de l'Hydraulique et de l'Assainissement (MHA), or Ministry of Water and Sanitation is responsible for water, sanitation and hygiene (WaSH) in Niger. At the national level, representatives from Plan International Niger coordinate with the MHA, other ministries, and other international NGOs through the "Cluster WaSH" working group.

In Dosso and Tillabéri, Plan International Niger contracted local NGOs (LNGOs) to lead triggering and follow-up activities. They also formed Technical Services Committees (TSC), comprising nine to eleven representatives from the technical services offices of départements, hereafter referred to as district government. TSCs are tasked with assisting LNGOs in triggering, and in certifying communities as open defecation free (ODF). Figure 1 illustrates an institutional map of Plan International Niger's CLTS activities.

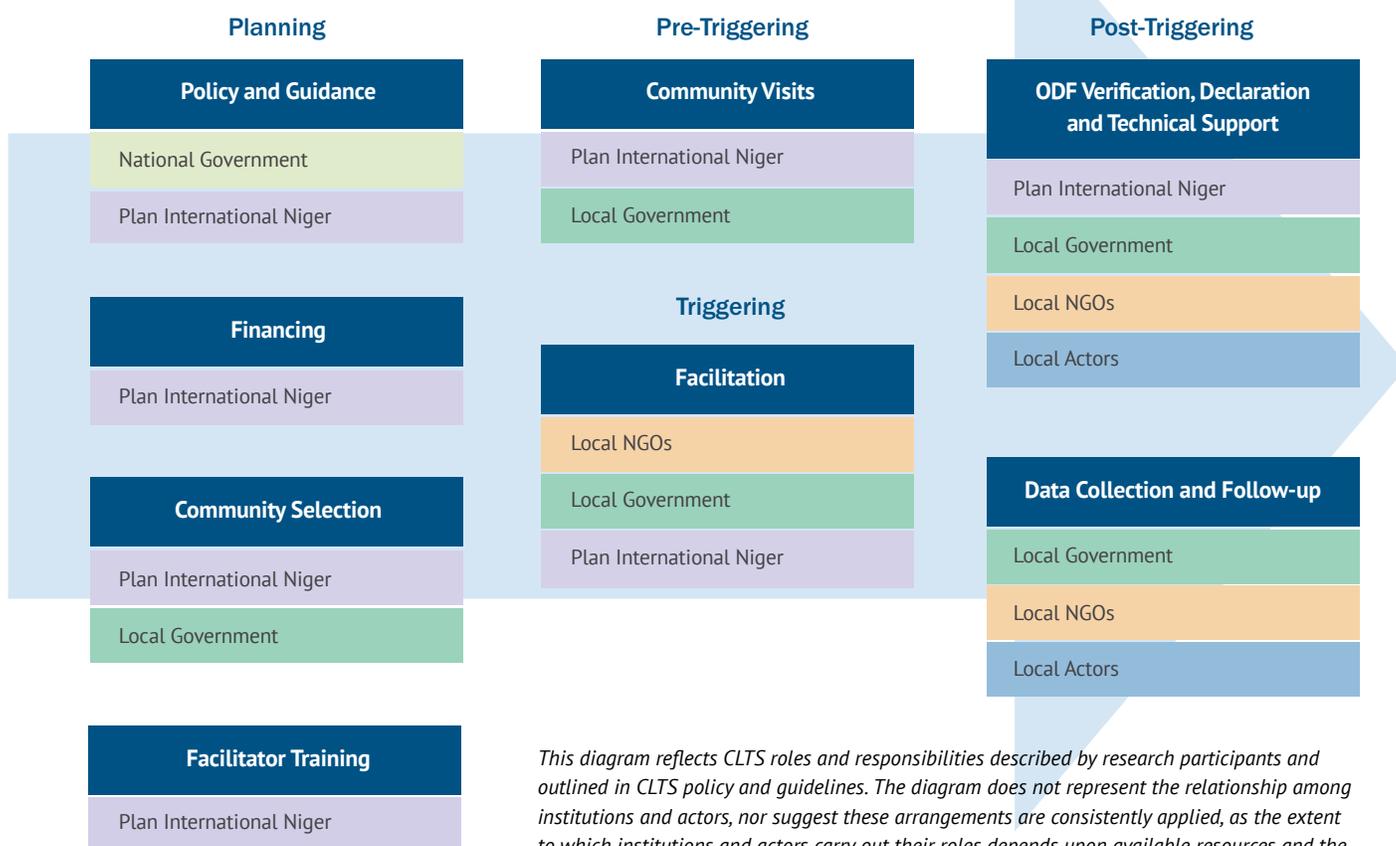
## Key Findings and Implications



*Sign Declaring ODF Village in Dosso District  
Photo by Vidya Venkataramanan*

- 1. Although CLTS has been incorporated into the national sanitation policy, district governments have yet to take ownership of the approach.** Formalizations of TSCs into government entities with a dedicated budget could build further buy-in and accountability.
- 2. Community leaders, including natural leaders, have been trained to build village-level capacity for CLTS.** This approach keeps leaders engaged and motivated to influence behavior change and monitor progress in their communities.
- 3. ODF verification is challenging due to a lack of benchmarks and standardized verification criteria.** This may lead to different interpretations of ODF status, and could make it challenging to compare results across districts.
- 4. Access to and affordability of durable latrines remain a significant concern.** Plan International Niger can influence the nature of post-CLTS support to communities by training masons, advocating for locally-decided financing mechanisms, and targeting financial assistance to those that need it most.

**Figure 1. Lead Roles in Plan International Niger's CLTS Programs, 2014**



*This diagram reflects CLTS roles and responsibilities described by research participants and outlined in CLTS policy and guidelines. The diagram does not represent the relationship among institutions and actors, nor suggest these arrangements are consistently applied, as the extent to which institutions and actors carry out their roles depends upon available resources and the context of a specific project. Furthermore, these actors play lead roles in CLTS but may not be the only actors involved in a particular CLTS stage or activity.*

## CLTS Progress

Table 1 highlights the most recent data obtained from Plan International Niger's CLTS projects. By the end of 2013, they had implemented CLTS in 87 villages. Triggered villages in Tillabéri saw a much higher improvement in latrine coverage compared to Dosso; eight villages in Tillabéri had 100% latrine coverage after triggering, while no village achieved higher than 50% latrine coverage at the end of the project in Dosso. This disparity between the two districts may be explained by the fact that in Tillabéri, fewer villages were triggered, so activities were more manageable, or because baseline latrine coverage was higher there at the outset of CLTS activities.

In addition, implementers have noted positive behavior change with the introduction of latrines as part of a bride's dowry, which is a cultural practice that is now spreading throughout Tillabéri.

## Key Findings

**Finding 1: Although CLTS has been incorporated into the national sanitation policy, district governments have yet to take ownership of the approach.**

Advocacy by NGOs through the Cluster WaSH group led to the integration of CLTS in the National Plan. The government's policy of decentralization of rural sanitation therefore places the responsibility for CLTS on district governments. National recognition of CLTS as one viable approach for sanitation behavior change has enabled Plan International Niger to engage closely with district governments to form TSCs that supervise CLTS activities and certify ODF villages. This has the potential to create greater government accountability and ownership of sanitation.

**Table 1. Outcomes of Plan International Niger's CLTS projects, 2013**

District	Tillabéri	Dosso	Total
No. of villages triggered	35	52	87
Total no. of households (HH)	4,141	6,827	10,968
Average no. of HH per village	118	131	126
Median latrine coverage before triggering (baseline)	11%	7%	8%
Median latrine coverage after triggering (end-line)	61%	15%	33%
No. (%) communities certified ODF	19 (54%)	12 (23%)	31 (36%)
No. (%) of villages with >= 50% latrine coverage	10 (29%)	0 (0%)	10 (8%)

Source: Plan International Niger, 2013

Note: By June 2015, 22 (63%) of villages in Tillabéri and 35 (67%) of villages in Dosso were certified as ODF.

However, the district government has not yet taken ownership of the CLTS approach, possibly because Plan International Niger still plays the lead financial and programmatic role. For example, TSCs were unable to make ODF verification visits without guaranteed financial assistance from Plan International Niger, suggesting that the government has not yet internalized CLTS as part of its sanitation programming, treating it instead as an NGO project.

### **Finding 2: Community leaders, including natural leaders, have been trained to build village-level capacity for CLTS.**

Natural leaders and other community leaders all mentioned that they had been trained by Plan International Niger after triggering. They were taught techniques to engage with community members, about the importance of latrines and environmental sanitation, and how to monitor progress. In addition to training natural leaders, religious leaders, and community radio broadcasters, Plan International Niger organizes routine exchange visits between leaders from triggered communities. Most respondents recalled quarterly exchange visits, where they heard about progress in other communities and shared lessons learned. This forum was described as a powerful motivational tool for communities. One religious leader observed that the meetings created a sense of competition: *"When we came back to our village, we would say, 'Be careful, the next village has gone ahead of us so we should make a greater effort, so that that village does not pass us.'"*

### **Finding 3: ODF verification is challenging due to a lack of benchmarks and standardized verification criteria.**

Nationally, ODF status is simply defined as the absence of open defecation in a village at the time of certification. However, Plan International Niger's monitoring forms list 100% latrine utilization and the absence of excreta around the village as the main criteria for ODF certification. In practice, many respondents believed that a village does not have to achieve 100% latrine coverage to be considered ODF; this is supported by data from Plan International Niger, where household latrine coverage was not necessarily related to ODF status.

In addition to differences in definitions, there were conflicting accounts of the verification process. Some TSC members reported developing their own ODF verification forms, whereas others said that the forms were provided to them by the LNGO. Villages were scored and ranked based on some of these indicators, but no benchmarks were listed, making it hard to know on what basis a community could be certified as ODF.

### **Finding 4: Access to and affordability of durable latrines remained a significant concern.**

Simple pit latrines were the most common latrine type reported in the communities visited. However, the quality of these latrines was cited as the main concern for realizing long term behavior change; for instance, a number of respondents reported that pit latrines tended to collapse during floods. According to one village chief, the biggest barriers to building

more resistant latrines were the cost and limited availability of cement and iron.

In an effort to provide access to higher quality latrines, Plan International Niger has trained 109 masons to build latrines using a combination of wood, mud, used tires, barrels, stones, and recycled wood. However, these latrines were not in high demand because they were not perceived to be of the same quality as the cement latrines that had previously been subsidized by NGOs. Although Plan International Niger staff were against the idea of providing financial assistance, the national government policy allows for latrine subsidies, and some TSC members wanted to target subsidies to ODF communities after they had demonstrated sufficient behavior change and were ready for better latrines.

## Implications

This study reviewed aspects of Plan International Niger's CLTS process with a specific focus on local actors and their roles in achieving and monitoring impact. The following implications highlight areas where government actors and Plan International Niger can improve their CLTS activities.

Plan International Niger has demonstrated commitment to strengthening local government capacity, but to build further buy-in and accountability, they need to advocate for TSCs to be formalized into government entities with a dedicated budget. TSCs could become a focal point for other sanitation projects in their districts.

The lack of benchmarks and standardized criteria for certifying villages can lead to different interpretations of ODF, making it difficult to compare progress across districts. Plan International Niger can help influence national sanitation monitoring by improving their own baseline assessments, monitoring, and verification processes to become a model for the government.

## Acknowledgements

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The engagement of community leaders and interaction between triggered villages has been novel to sanitation programming in this area. It allows communities to create linkages and to influence each other by generating a sense of competition and learning, which could help Plan International Niger realize greater progress in their triggered villages.

Access to higher quality latrines can help sustain CLTS outcomes. Plan International Niger is in a position to influence the nature of post-CLTS support to communities. In addition to training local masons, they can introduce village-based financing mechanisms through collective financing or self-help groups. In an environment where the government intends to provide latrine hardware subsidies, they can also help the district government target subsidies to those who need it most to ensure that gains made as a result of CLTS are sustained.

## Limitations

This study uses qualitative methods and a small sample size. Researchers did not evaluate program effectiveness. Although readers may connect these findings to their own CLTS experiences, they should be cautious about generalizing the findings. Furthermore, researchers visited a subset of communities where Plan International implements CLTS, which means the study may not fully capture all aspects of CLTS implementation in Niger. ♦

The *Testing CLTS Approaches for Scalability* project involves The Water Institute at UNC working with Plan International USA to evaluate whether capacity strengthening of local actors influences CLTS outcomes. Our activities span 10 countries in Africa, Asia, and the Caribbean.

More information, project resources, and news are available at [waterinstitute.unc.edu/clts](http://waterinstitute.unc.edu/clts).