



Strengthening citizen's oversight of Water, Sanitation and Hygiene, and Integrated Water Resources Management in rural communities of Ghana

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Executive Summary

Management of WASH systems in Rural Communities: citizens can make a change.

The Government of Ghana embarked on local government reforms and a decentralization programme in 1988 to delegate power and responsibilities to local people through local democracy¹. This afforded citizens of Ghana the opportunity to participate in local governance including the development and implementation of the Medium Term Development Plans in their local assemblies. However, approximately 25 percent of water and sanitation infrastructure established in Ghana becomes non-operational after just five years. Lack of citizen's initiative to sustain water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) facilities remains a challenge for all WASH stakeholders in Ghana².

This briefing note strongly advocates that citizens' monitoring through social accountability mechanisms is the way forward to improve

sustainability of WASH facilities and Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM) for rural communities in Ghana.

What is social accountability?

Social accountability refers to a broad range of actions and mechanisms that citizens can use to hold duty bearers accountable as well as district assemblies/local government and other social actors. Social accountability processes also take into consideration gender equality and social inclusion.

The process of social accountability provides an opportunity for duty bearers and rights holders on the following:

- Information sharing and consultation,
- Standard setting and regulation,
- Performance monitoring with feedback,
- Redress and recourse.

¹ PNDC Law 207, of 1988 constitution of Ghana

² Ghana Water Access, Sanitation and Hygiene (G-WASH) <https://www.globalwaters.org/HowWeWork/Activities/ghana-water-access-sanitation-and-hygiene>

Introduction

In the Tarkwa-Nsuaem Municipal Assembly, mapping of WASH facilities and water resources in fifteen communities under the Watershed programme indicated that 66.7% of WASH facilities have broken down. The perception among the communities is that water resources management is the responsibility of the Municipal Assembly/Local Government. However, the findings showed that community level monitoring and maintenance of WASH and IWRM by designated committees/authorities hardly takes place. The survey indicated that citizens lacked the necessary information to effectively play their roles and manage the responsibility of other duty bearers in WASH and IWRM at the community level.

Citizens also lack the knowledge to effectively handle water/sanitation issues and demand for improvement in WASH services. The communities' ability to evaluate their actions on common practices that affect WASH and IWRM was lacking in all the 15 communities. A sensitization and training of community opinion

leaders on self-evaluation using the community scorecard as a social accountability mechanism has since been carried out.

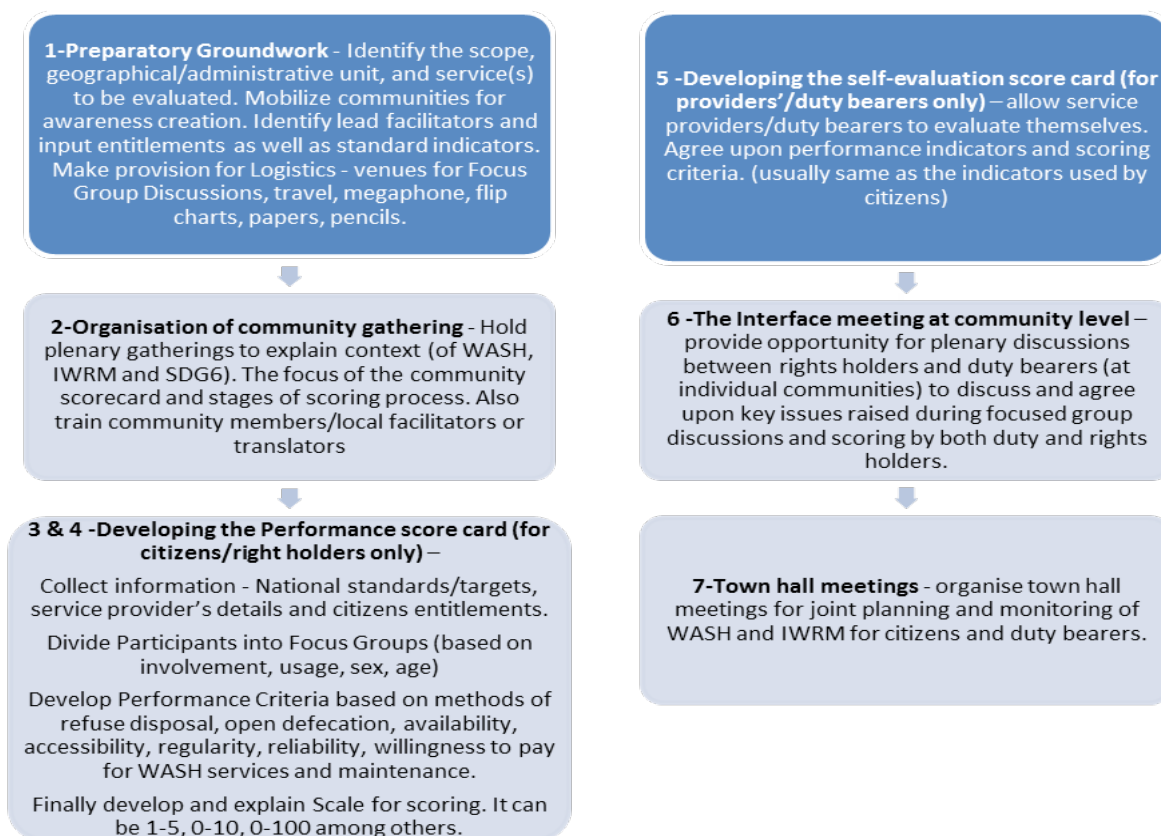
Approach

Both primary and secondary data were collected on water, sanitation and hygiene and water resources in the Tarkwa-Nsuaem Municipal Assembly to understand the baseline conditions. This was done using paper-based and mobile phone-based surveys, and face-to-face interviews.

Community members were selected and trained on WASH and IWRM. Fifteen people from each of the 15 communities were drawn from various community groups/structures and trained on the use of the community scorecard. The community scorecard is used for citizens' self-evaluation and performance monitoring of WASH and IWRM within the communities.

The focus was to empower targeted audience/ community structures with accurate information on existing WASH policies including SDG 6. The

Steps for the implementation of the performance score card



training was also to initiate social accountability measures such as citizens scoring of WASH services in their respective communities for evaluating the effectiveness of WASH service providers, community's attitude towards WASH, water resources management and maintenance of WASH facilities.

The CSO3 implementing the Watershed programme and the community opinion leaders agreed on common indicators to evaluate the WASH situation in their respective communities. At the end of the training, opinion leaders drawn from the various community groups scored their respective community's attitude towards WASH services with respect to the following indicators very low:

- Maintenance of WASH facilities at community level by WASH committees,
- Accessibility of water for most community members – women, children, persons living with disabilities,
- Quality of water (colour, taste, closeness to refuse dumping/open defecation sites),
- Disposal of refuse (solid and liquid),
- Regularity of water flow.

In addition, community dialogue and sensitization exercises, municipal stakeholders' interactive meetings and community level mapping of WASH facilities were conducted to:

- assess the perceptions of communities on their rights, entitlements and responsibilities to WASH services delivery and water resources management in the rural communities,
- promote community participation in the monitoring and evaluation of WASH services and performance of service providers,
- provide the Watershed programme with the opportunity to have first-hand information on key WASH and IWRM issues through citizens engagement processes and to suggest ways for improvement,
- contribute to policy advocacy reforms at the level of service providers and District Assembly for improved and sustainable WASH service delivery.

Results

Citizens understanding and involvement in WASH and IWRM is key for attainment of SDG 6.

The survey conducted in 15 communities under the Watershed programme revealed key areas for strengthening. The findings from the surveys were shared with key stakeholders in the communities and the district to stimulate dialogue on common practices that affect wetlands, rivers, and water quality negatively in their communities.

The **Community Score Card (CSC)** is a citizen-driven accountability approach for the assessment, planning, monitoring and evaluation of service delivery. It is designed to bring together community members, service providers and government officials to identify barriers to effective, high-quality service delivery and develop a shared plan for improvement. The tool also aims at empowering communities to influence the quality, efficiency and accountability of services provided to them.

Development of CSC provides equal opportunity for duty bearers and rights holders to agree upon scoring indicators and criteria. It also takes into consideration the following issues:

- **Accessibility** - the degree to which public information/services on WASH are made available to all citizens or the ability to access and benefit from the information/services provided,
- **Availability** - refers to public information that is present and ready for use,
- **Accuracy** - refers to the extent by which public information is correct or precise, and reflects reality. It must be understandable, clear and usable to the ordinary citizen.

Functionality of water facilities – Sixty-six percent of WASH facilities (standpipe, reservoir, borehole and toilets) have broken down or are dysfunctional and there is a general lack of information by community members as to who, where and how to get those problems reported or fixed. Thirteen communities did not practice pay-as-you-fetch, but rather breakdown repair (a system where community members fetch water for free but only contribute towards repairs when the facility breaks down). However, in all the 15 communities willingness to pay for WASH services scored high.

Sanitation and IWRM - The findings showed that citizens/communities were dumping refuse in their backyards, practising open defecation, and dumping refuse and faecal matter into wetlands/rivers and streams which are sources of drinking water for them and communities located



Community level training – Kofikrom (photo by Michael Adom (HFFG))

downstream. Maintenance of WASH facilities hardly takes place. Wetlands are perceived to be free dumping/open defecation sites across the communities. Communities lack general/accurate information on water resources management.

Operation and management of facilities –

Ownership and management of WASH facilities are handed over to the community leaders/committee by the Metropolitan, Municipal and District Assemblies (MMDAs). However, community ownership, and proper management of government provided WASH facilities are declining in most communities⁴. Water and Sanitation Management Teams/Committees are not functional and where the committees function, they do not account to the communities, nor do citizens demand for accountability due to lack of understanding of their roles and responsibilities.

Capacity of management teams - Only the members of Water and Sanitation Management Teams (WSMTs – formerly WatSan and Water Board committees) get trained by MMDAs to manage WASH for small towns and rural

communities respectively. Membership of these committee members is purely voluntary, allowances are paid instead of remuneration and therefore members can opt out at any time.

Ambiguity around the ownership of facilities -

Although development of water and sanitation projects emanates from communities through development and implementation of the Medium Term Development Plans (MTDP) and the Annual Action Plan of the MMDAs,⁵ the general perception of citizens in the various communities is that WASH facilities belong to government, therefore maintenance of such facilities is the responsibilities of the MMDAs.

Furthermore, only a few selected community members, mostly adult male opinion leaders, are consulted at the initial stages of capital project construction including WASH projects. Women and youth, among others, are often not invited to pre-implementation meetings and discussions. Even though, they (women and youth) are the regular users of the WASH facilities in the communities. Because of this, most community members are denied the opportunity to understand and be part of project monitoring right from the onset.

⁴ Full Article: By Mildred Siabi-Mensah GNA <http://www.ghananewsagency.org/social/communities-told-to-own-wash-facilities-126132>

⁵ National Development Planning (System) Act, 1994 (Act 480)

Conclusion

The perception and attitude of citizens towards WASH and IWRM can be attributed to a lack of information, clarity of roles and limited capacity of management teams. Bridging the knowledge gap of citizens on WASH and IWRM in existing and emerging WASH policies will improve the WASH situation in the rural communities to ensure sustainability of WASH and IWRM service delivery and facilities.

Based on the findings, it is evident that strengthening citizens' capacity in monitoring of WASH services and IWRM through self-assessments has provided evidence for engaging with both community members and district authorities. The findings from other surveys and studies are also feeding into joint planning and evaluation between communities and the district authority, which is important for sustaining WASH services and IWRM in the project communities.

Recommendation

The current approach of training only WASH committee members who serve on a voluntary basis is not sustainable and it denies citizens/ultimate users access to participate and monitor WASH service delivery. There should be a central mandate for all WASH providers and duty bearers to include citizens' empowerment and monitoring of WASH and IWRM for improved and sustainable WASH and IWRM in rural communities.



Girl using a handpump in Tarkwa Banso (photo by Mercy Amokwandoh (HFFG))

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