



Effectiveness of extension services in Ghana

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THE COMMUNITY WATER and Sanitation Agency (CWSA) was instituted to facilitate the implementation of the National Community Water and Sanitation Programme (NCWSP). The National Community Water and Sanitation Program aims at assisting rural communities and small towns to plan, construct and operate their own water supply and sanitation facilities.

The overall objective of Community Water and Sanitation Sector is to assist communities (a) Improve their access to improved water and sanitation services (b) Maximise health benefits by integrating water, sanitation and hygiene education interventions (c) ensure the sustainability of these facilities through Community Ownership and Management

The NCWSP is therefore anchored at the community level and supported by the District Assembly. The District Assembly will create the enabling environment for communities to own and manage their water supply and sanitation facilities. The District Assemblies would also assist in ensuring recognition of community based water and sanitation committees and water boards to function as autonomous and accountable entities.

The key elements of the National Strategy include:

- Communities to show their demand for improved services by contributing to the capital cost
- Community management ownership and maintenance
- A central role for the district assemblies in supporting community management
- The government is to focus on a facilitative role by promoting service provision
- A role for formal and informal private sector in the provision of goods and services
- Ensuring equity and widespread coverage through targeted subsidies supporting basic service levels
- Demand driven programme where the communities have an informed choice and clear management commitment to enhance sustainability, and
- A special focus on women as both the users of water as well as planners, operators and managers of community level systems.

In order to ensure as far as possible that communities get the type of facilities that best suit their needs and their physical and financial ability to operate and maintain, they play a major role in the planning and design process. As

eventual owners of the facilities, the communities also contribute towards the construction costs; at least 5% for water supply facilities, labour for digging and materials for superstructure for domestic latrines, 10% for institutional latrines. They are additionally responsible for 100% operation and maintenance cost.

Most communities have neither the organisational nor technical abilities to discharge these responsibilities unaided. Hence, Community Water and Sanitation Agency contract Partner Organisations (PO's) to assist the communities in developing their own capabilities, provide technical assistance and deliver hygiene education. The POs are private consultants with teams of community development field workers. The teams are usually made up of one coordinator and two other persons for ten communities. The main skills required of the POs are in the areas of community development and hygiene education. The POs activities are beset with problems that undermine their effectiveness and the sustainability of their activities. These problems include high turnover of staff, staff capacity, inadequate and unreliable transport, mismanagement of finances and poor administration. All these problems culminate in poor performance of the POs. With this as backdrop, a better alternative to the POs could not be overemphasised. The option could be the use of Environmental Health Assistants/Officers (EHA/Os).

The EHA/Os are trained in community development, environmental sanitation and hygiene education for extension services in the communities. They are staff of Environmental Health Unit, a decentralised department of the District Assembly. (The District Assembly has the legal responsibility for the development of the district that is the focus of all development efforts in the district)

Background

The nature of extension services provided by POs

The POs activities in the communities are grouped under the four phases of the project cycle viz Mobilisation, Planning, Construction and Follow up phases.

Mobilisation phase

The object of this phase is to rouse interest in community members to appreciate and take action on their water, sanitation and health situation. The communities are supported to build commitment to the process of acquiring and managing improved water supply and sanitation through the following activities;

- Community Sensitisation – building community awareness about existing water supply, sanitation and health situation
- Baseline data collection
- Community Ownership and Management Concept
- Review of WATSAN Committee Formation/Assessment of their Training Needs
- Fundraising
- First Water And Sanitation (WATSAN) Committee Training
- Hygiene Education
- Training of Women’s groups for hygiene education

Planning phase

The main aim of this phase is to encourage the involvement of community members in the planning of the development of their own water supply and sanitation facilities. The WATSAN Committee members are prepared to understand their leadership and other roles in respect of

- Operation and Maintenance- fund mobilization and management
- Site selection for new facilities
- Preparation of draft Facility and Management Plan (FMP) for the new facility
- Participatory review of community plans and actions on maintenance
- User education on household latrines

Construction phase

The major activities under this phase are

- WATSAN/Community inputs towards construction
- WATSAN- led Hygiene Education and latrine promotion
- WATSAN-led construction supervision
- Preparation of Final FMP
- Supervision of latrine construction/caretaker training
- Third WATSAN Committee Training

Follow up phase

The activities of this phase focus on reinforcement of community –led activities, including problem solving like

- On -site education of use and care for water facility
- WATSAN Accountability
- Building the required network among WATSAN Committees

The partner organisation (PO) experience

Staffing

The POs recruit staff for the extension work at a particular time and pay them off after completion of the work. The

staff are not permanent. Some are even fresh from school without working experience. As a result of job insecurity there is a staff attrition or high staff turnover. The educational background and working experience of most of the staff are mainly average. The capacity of the staff is a problem. Staff salaries are sometimes in arrears.

Transport

The work in the communities is actually facilitated by regular visits of the POs. However, some POs do not have the one or two motorbikes required for the field team. Where POs are given loans to purchase or improve upon their transport situation the money is not used for that purpose. In some cases the motorbikes are available but not reliable due to frequent breakdowns. This affects appointments with communities and as a result meetings are often postponed or not taken seriously.

Mismanagement of finances/poor administration

One of the main reasons for PO staff attrition is low salary. The staff of the POs are given low salaries coupled with delay in payment of the salaries. POs stop visiting the communities due to breakdown of vehicles and/or inadequate money for repair or maintenance of such vehicles. Reports are submitted late or delayed as a result of lack of money.

POs misappropriate monies meant for salaries and maintenance of the vehicle/transport. Some of the PO managers use the money from the project to finance other ventures unrelated to the project. There are situations where POs acquire properties with the project money thereby leaving them with inadequate funds or cash trapped at critical times. As private consultants the urge to cut down expenses has almost always been at the expense of the communities and the programme.

There is also a communication gap between the field team and the PO Manager since the manager very often lives in the regional capital or another district very far removed from the field staff. In some cases the field staff do not even know the content of the contract/scope of services and also staff meetings are not held for the PO managers to appraise or review the activities of the field staff.

These lapses affect implementation and delay activities in the communities and in the end targets are not met. This sometimes results in returning unspent project funds to chest at the detriment of the communities.

Follow-up

The POs are not community based and at the end of the project or the contract the POs will leave the communities. Consequently CWSA has to arrange for alternative intervention to continue the work of the POs. One of the alternative follow up arrangements is the introduction of EHAs at the district to the project communities.

The environmental health assistants/officers (EHA/Os) option

As part of finding solutions to problems associated with the use of POs, Eastern Regional CWSA is piloting the use of EHA/Os for extension services in two districts.

So far the use of the EHA's is a better alternative to the use of the PO option.

Staffing

The EHA/Os are permanent staff of the District Assemblies who have work experience, knowledge and skills about extension services. They are familiar with the communities and have already established rapport with the people about community development. They have job security, regular salaries and are also entitled to promotions. The capacity in terms of professionalism to deliver is assured. Above all the EHA/Os would be in the communities to support them during Post delivery operation and maintenance challenges, which is critical to sustainability.

Transport

The EHA/Os are given motorbikes under co-ownership arrangement because they are permanent staff and would also continue working in the communities at the end of the project. They are in addition given maintenance allowances and the cost of fuel is paid according to the mileage they cover each month. Transport availability and reliability is therefore not a problem. These serve as a motivation for regular visits to the communities.

Finances

EHA/Os salaries and allowances are assured and regular. Management of finances relating to the EHA/Os is handled at the District Assemblies and the Regional Office of CWSA or Environmental Health Unit. There is therefore no room for mismanagement. Stationery is provided by the project and processing of reports is done at the District Assembly. Mechanisms and guidelines like an accounting manual use of log books and regular backup support and auditing are put in place to monitor the finances at the district level.

Administrative Issues

The flow of communication is not an issue because the EHAs have an office at the District Assembly and work directly under the District Water and Sanitation Team and District Coordinating Director. The Co ordinator of the EHAs, who is also a field staff, takes up the administrative work and is therefore abreast with activities in the communities and always in touch with the team.

Follow up

The EHAs would continue to work in the communities even at the end of the project since they have been assigned to work in all the communities as their normal roles and responsibilities by their department.

The way forward

- The District Assemblies should have District Water and Sanitation Plan with well-outlined guidelines to integrate the Environmental Health Unit activities into the water and sanitation programme.
- The District Assemblies should be strengthened or create a budget line to be able to adequately support the EHA/Os with the needed resources for continuous follow up in the communities.
- The project funds used for the POs should be channeled to the support of the EHA/Os and the PO option phased out
- Awards to motivate enterprising and performing EHA/Os

Conclusion

The sustainability of extension services in the communities depends to a large extent on capacity to deliver in terms of reliable extension staff, regular and reliable transport, effective and efficient management/ administration and above all continuous follow up activities. The use of EHA/Os would ensure sustainability through continuous monitoring. The EHA/Os already work in the communities and will continue to work even after the life span of the project. They are also community based and are therefore able to reach out to many communities within a short time. The best option for effective and sustainable extension services delivery could be the use of Environmental Health Assistants/Officers (EHA/Os) as against the use of POs.

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