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**ACCESS TO SANITATION AND SAFE WATER:
GLOBAL PARTNERSHIPS AND LOCAL ACTIONS**

**Challenges in the implementation of district water
and sanitation plans in Ghana**

Ampadu-Boakye Joseph, Dotse Francis Mawuena & Laryea Nii Odai Anidaso, Ghana

The preparation of District Water and Sanitation Plans (DWSPs) is a requirement by water and sanitation (watsan) sub-sector players especially among Development Partners (DPs) led by the Danish International Development Agency (DANIDA) and the World Bank to facilitate the implementation of watsan activities. This requirement is borne out of the marginalization of watsan interventions in the allocation of resources at the national through regional to district levels. Consequently, DAs in four (4) out of the 10 regions in Ghana (Greater Accra, Volta, Eastern and Central Regions) have been assisted to prepare and implement their DWSPs under the DANIDA funded Water and Sanitation Sector Programme Support Phases I and II. Independent of this assistance, there are some DAs outside these regions who have also prepared and implemented DWSPs. The implementation of the DWSPs generally over the years has been fraught with considerable challenges both internal and external to the DAs. This paper examines these challenges and proposes recommendations to enhance the implementation of DWSPs in Ghana.

Introduction

Water and sanitation planning at the district level in Ghana appears to be a relatively new responsibility of District Assemblies¹ (DAs) and constitutes one of their key responsibilities. Under Section 10 of the Local Government Act of 1993, Act 462, DAs have been assigned key roles as managers and planners of the overall socio economic development of communities within their jurisdiction. The preparation of DWSPs is a requirement by water and sanitation (watsan) sub-sector players so as to facilitate the implementation of watsan activities given the marginalization of watsan interventions in the allocation of resources at the national through regional to district levels. Under the Local Government Act of 1993 (Act 462), District Assemblies (DAs) are mandated to prepare and implement District Medium Term Development Plans (DMTDPs) which should transcend all sectors. However, to ensure that watsan interventions are highlighted, Development Partners (DPs) led by DANIDA and the World Bank have championed the preparation of DWSPs. To date, DAs in four (4) out of the 10 regions in Ghana (Greater Accra, Volta, Eastern and central Regions) have been trained and assisted to prepare and implement District Water and Sanitation Plans under the Danish International Development Agency (DANIDA) funded Water and Sanitation Sector Support Programme Phases (WSSPS) I and II. Under the DANIDA funded DBWSC of WSSPS II, DAs are required to prepare sub project proposals based on the DWSP for submission to a Regional Approval Committee (RAC) for vetting and approval for funding to be released for implementation. Plans are also afoot to provide support to DAs in the remaining six (6) regions in the preparation of their DWSPs. Notwithstanding this situation, there are some DAs in the remaining six (6) regions who have prepared and implemented DWSPs. The implementation of DWSPs over the years has been fraught with considerable challenges. This paper discusses the challenges and makes recommendations to enhance the effective implementation of DWSPs in Ghana.

Importance of district water and sanitation plans

The preparation of DWSPs helps elaborate on the water and sanitation needs of the district as a whole and communities in particular. It provides an opportunity to identify the potentials of stakeholders in both the public and private sectors including civil society organisations with a view to promoting partnerships for the delivery of sustainable water and sanitation services. The DWSP makes it easier to identify specific communities with water and sanitation needs. In addition, it defines and assigns roles, relationships, responsibilities between the DA and other stakeholders in addressing challenges in the delivery of potable water and safe

sanitation. The DWSP could also be used as a tool to solicit funding for water and sanitation projects in addition to serving as a budgeting tool for sector delivery at the DA level.

Challenges in plan implementation

Inadequate funding

DAs are unable to raise adequate internal revenue to meet development expenditure outlined in the DWSP. District assemblies are by law mandated to impose taxes and levies to generate financial resource to implement development programmes and projects in their districts. There are two main sources of funds to District Assemblies. These are internally generated funds (IGF) and funds from external sources. A comparative study of one district each in the Ashanti and Eastern regions of Ghana revealed that the proportion of IGF as a percentage of the total revenue of DAs was on the decline. IGF as a percentage of total revenue in Fantakwa and Asante Akim South districts declined from 16.8% and 22.9% in 1998 to 8.9% and 4.8% in 2001 respectively (Ampadu-Boakye, 2005). Currently, most DAs are over dependent on the District Assemblies Common Fund (DACF) in the financing of development projects at the district level. The DACF also comes along with predetermined areas of expenditure. In effect, DAs are unable to raise and allocate considerable financial resources to meet the programmes and projects outlined in the DWSP.

Financial resource allocation to the water and sanitation sector

Even though inadequate funding is a challenge in the implementation of DWSPs, it appears one of the biggest problems facing DAs and the nation as a whole is that we have not been able to identify our most basic needs. As a result, fewer resources are channelled at the national and district levels towards water and sanitation delivery. Development partners currently finance about 95% of investments in the rural water and sanitation sub-sector (AFD, 2007). Government of Ghana (GoG) funding as a percentage of total funding to CWSA for instance fell from 9.9% in 2001 to 3.8% in 2006 and averaged 6% over the period 2001-2007 (Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning, 2007). A comparative study of the proportion of budgetary support to the water and sanitation sector in eight (8) African countries revealed that only 3.8% of budgetary support under the country's Poverty Reduction Support Programme (PRSP) was given to the sector by the Ghana government (Country Policy Dialogue. Entebbe, November 2004). This has implications for the implementation of DWSPs in the sense that channeling of funds from the national level to support the implementation of watsan activities at the district level will be reduced.

Unpredictability of funds flow

The disbursement of funds from the DACF is often unpredictable likewise the flow of funds from development partners for the implementation of water and sanitation projects outlined in the DWSPs. This situation affects payments to drillers, contractors, suppliers and consultants and other service providers working on water and sanitation projects at the district level. This poses a great challenge to the implementation of projects according to schedule and often derails the attainment of targets set in the DWSP.

Adequacy and quality of staff and logistics

District Assemblies are expected to play key roles in the implementation of the DWSPs. However, the existing capacity at the DA level points to the contrary. Some of the DAs lack the required complement of staff and logistics. Where staff are available, they often have inadequate knowledge, experience and exposure on water and sanitation issues. An assessment of the capacity of District Water and Sanitation Teams² (DWSTs) in five (5) districts of the Ashanti Region under the KfW financed Rural Water Supply Programme (RWSP) Phase IV revealed that with the exception of the Adansi South district which had the full complement of the DWST, the other districts had problems with the composition of their DWST (MAPLE Consult, 2005). The problems ranged from inadequacy of staff to low technical knowledge and experience on water and sanitation issues. Amansie Central and Atwima Mponua districts had no DWST at all save the Planning Officers who are desk officers for the DWST (ibid).

Linkage between planning and budgeting

Generally, the preparation and implementation of budgets at the DA level are often not linked to programmes and projects outlined in the DMTDPs and for that matter the DWSPs. There are indications that most DAs carry out planning and budgeting activities independently. This phenomenon can be attributed to the fact that DAs are overly dependent on the DACF of which expenditure allocations are predetermined and may not necessarily address the programmes and projects outlined in the DWSP. DAs have also had to raise funds

which they allocate as contribution to capital cost to other on-going or upcoming donor-funded projects. These situations do not allow for the DAs to strictly implement programmes and projects outlined in their DWSPs.

Weak monitoring of plan implementation

Monitoring of the implementation of the DWSPs is generally weak. Efforts at monitoring water and sanitation projects at the DA is to a large extent only carried out during the implementation of donor-funded projects where some financial support is made available to DWSTs to undertake routine monitoring exercises. For most DAs, monitoring of communities ends upon the completion of the implementation of projects for lack of support from the DAs to the DWSTs.

Influence of development partners

Since DAs are unable to raise internal funds for the implementation of DWSPs and have to rely on development partners (DPs) often operating through CWSA, they have to succumb to the schedule and terms of the DPs. This is akin to the saying that “he who pays the piper calls the tune”. Most DP-funded projects are time-bound with tight schedules while some are not tailored to suit our socio-cultural milieu. For example, as part of the Community Ownership and Management (COM) concept underlying the national sector strategy and policy, rural beneficiary communities are expected to make a percentage contribution to the capital cost of acquiring facilities. Even though the principle is good, rural communities have had to contend with sometimes making this payment over a short period of time and sometimes during the lean season when money is hard to come by. In the case of Small Towns, these monies are relatively high. Under GoG/DfID/DANIDA financed three districts water supply project being implemented in the Greater Accra and Volta Regions of Ghana, Lolonya, a beneficiary community with a population of 288 people is expected to contribute ₵161,363,564 (US\$ 17,166) as contribution to capital cost. Failure to pay up by deadlines set by the donors often result in losing out on the project. These situations have often thrown the implementation of programmes in the DWSP out of gear.

Institutionalisation of DWST

The implementation of the DWSP is to a large extent managed by the DWST with the active collaboration of other relevant agencies/departments at the DA level. To date, the DWSTs have not been integrated into the institutional framework of the DAs and are perceived as representatives of CWSA at the district level. Most DWST members have links with their ‘mother’ departments (departments where staff have been officially recruited and assigned to work). An assessment of DWSTs in five districts of the Ashanti Region under the KfW financed RWSP IV revealed that most of the DWST members on the average spent about 30% of their working time with their mother departments (MAPLE Consult, 2005). DWST members have not been able to cut the umbilical cord with their ‘mother’ departments given their dependence on them for the payment of their salaries and career progression. The implication of this linkage is the lack of complete and total commitment to water and sanitation activities. The possibility of trained DWST members being posted out of the district can also not be ruled out and this has implications for institutional memory and capacity to implement DWSPs.

Recommendations

- DAs should strengthen their efforts at generating revenue from local sources to finance development expenditure. The districts could create a database on taxable units within the district, set targets for revenue collectors and effectively monitor the activities of revenue collectors. This recommendation is being made against the background that DAs have generally not been able to expand the tax base of their districts and often rely on returns from a few revenue items
- DAs and indeed the central government should demonstrate increasing support for the water and sanitation sub sector by allocating considerable resources to finance water and sanitation delivery
- The Regional Approval Committee instituted under the District Based Water and Sanitation Component (DBWSC) should be established in all the Regional Coordinating Councils to review and harmonise DWSPs together with planned water and sanitation projects from development partners and central government. This will harmonise interventions at the DA level and enhance the implementation of the DWSPs.
- DAs should provide support to DWSTs in both logistics and monetary terms to enable them effectively monitor the implementation of DWSPs in their districts.

- Although the transfer of personnel at the DA level is not within the domain of DAs, it is important that DAs institute an orientation programme for newly posted staff to be briefed on the progress made in the preparation and implementation of the DWSP to enhance continuity in implementation.
- As part of measures to strengthen the capacity of the DAs to implement the National Community Water and Sanitation Programme (NCWSP) and for that matter DWSPs, the District Works Departments (DWDs) are to be strengthened with the formal inclusion of issues relating to water and sanitation to their mandate. The strengthened DWDs are expected to take over the current responsibilities of the District Water and Sanitation Teams (DWSTs). In this vein, the Water Directorate of the Ministry of Water Resources Works and Housing (MWRWH) supported by CWSA should hold discussions with the Ministry of Local Government Rural Development and Environment (MLGRDE) with a view to exploring the mechanisms for integrating the DWSTs into the DWD. Issues relating to career progression and placement of staff should be thoroughly discussed with a view to reaching consensus to enhance the work of the DWD.

Conclusion

The challenges encountered in the implementation of DWSPs are not insurmountable. The DAs, in concert with the DWSTs can find solutions to those within their ambit as much as possible while central government addresses the external challenges which relate mainly to policy issues.

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Note/s

- ¹ District Assemblies are the local government authority with legislative, deliberative and executive powers to plan and execute development policies and programmes at the district level to enhance socio-economic development of the district.
- ² The membership of the DWST is drawn from three distinct departments (Community Development, Environmental Health and Works) within the District Assembly to which DWST members still owe allegiance.

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Contact details

Ampadu-Boakye, Joseph
P.O.Box CT 3700, Cantonments-Accra
Tel: 021-241155/241133
Fax: 021-241498
Email: maplecon@ghana.com

Dotse, Francis Mawuena
P.O.Box CT 3700, Cantonments-Accra
Tel: 021-241155/241133
Fax: 021-241498
Email: maplecon@ghana.com

Laryea, Nii Odai Anidaso
P.O.Box CT 3700, Cantonments-Accra
Tel: 021-241155/241133
Fax: 021-241498
Email: maplecon@ghana.com
