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

**Benchmarking sanitation service delivery in Metropolitan,  
Municipal and District Assemblies in Ghana**

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*Benchmarking is a learning method used worldwide in businesses and governmental organizations to improve their performance. The essence of the method is the comparison of performance indicators with similar organizations and learning from the best. Thus, benchmarking leads to tailor made solutions that have proven to be effective in practice. The overall aim of the benchmark exercise in Ghana was to provide a platform for Metropolitan, Municipal and District Assemblies (MMDAs) participating in a capacity building programme funded by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs to assess their current performance in sanitation delivery and to improve upon their performance by comparing and exchanging lessons learnt. The benchmark activity facilitated a process of self-assessment, networking and knowledge exchange between politicians and local government officials of the participating Assemblies. By engaging in the exercise, the MMDAs were able to adapt knowledge and experiences to their own local context.*

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## **Introduction**

Environmental sanitation is a basic and powerful driver of human development as it affects quality of life. Furthermore, it is regarded as very crucial to the human health and well-being as such much attention has been given to this development sector for a while now in Ghana. Even though the country was able to reach the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in many sectors, the MDG targets on sanitation could not be reached. Currently, the country is lagging behind on basic sanitation services with only 14.9% of the population using or having access to improved sanitation facilities and about 19% of the population practising open defecation (WHO/UNICEF, 2014). Other sanitation issues such as waste water disposal, refuse disposal, hand-washing with soap among others are being poorly-handled and managed in the country. This is especially sad considering that other sub-Saharan African countries such as Cote D'Ivoire (22.5%), Guinea-Bissau (20.8%), Guinea (20.1%), Benin (19.7%) and Central African Republic (21.8%) among others are doing fairly well in sanitation (WHO/UNICEF Joint Report, 2015 cited in Muggeridge, 2015).

The overarching desire of the government of Ghana to boost effective sanitation delivery in the country has led to the development of various policy initiatives. The implementation of these policy initiatives in the past years has received support (both technical and financial) from multiple development partners (DPs) including the Dutch government. In 2012, VNG International (Association of Dutch Municipalities) in partnership with MAPLE Consult launched the Local Government Capacity Programme (LGCP), financed by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The objective of this initiative is to build the capacities of staff of selected MMDAs directly involved in sanitation service delivery to improve sanitation service delivery in their respective Assemblies. Currently five (5) MMDAs, Kumasi Metropolitan Assembly, Komenda Edina Eguafo Abirem Municipal Assembly, Twifo Atti-Morkwa, Hemang Lower Denkyira and Kadjebi District Assemblies are the beneficiaries of this programme.

The LGCP has a learning benchmark component which is an activity to improve the performance of the participating MMDAs particularly in the area of sanitation services delivery. The learning benchmark provides a platform for the MMDAs to learn from each other by identifying best practices of MMDAs that

perform well on various sanitation themes. Armed with this information, MMDAs involved can enhance and improve their effectiveness and efficiency in the delivery of sanitation services.

In order to broaden the scope of MMDAs involved in the learning benchmark exercise, five (5) additional MMDAs which were supported by SNV, a Dutch development organisation, were added to the LGCP beneficiary MMDAs. These included Ga West Municipal Assembly, East Gonja, Kassena Nankana West, Wa West and Asikuma Odoben Brakwa District Assemblies.

### **The concept of benchmarking**

Benchmarking is a learning method used worldwide in businesses and governmental organizations to improve their performance. The essence of the method is the comparison of performance indicators with similar organizations and learning from the practices of the best. Thus, benchmarking is a research and learning-based improvement activity (VNG-I, 2014). Benchmarking adds two elements to common research and monitoring studies: it includes the *comparison* with similar organisations and involves *peer learning*. Benchmarking therefore leads to tailor made solutions that have proven to be effective in practice.

In the Netherlands, benchmarking is widely used in the public sector and is regarded as an important tool to improve achievements of governmental organizations. In 2009, the Dutch Minister of the Interior and Kingdom Relations recommended in the Dutch “Code of Good Governance” that governmental bodies should participate in benchmark to improve public policy. VNG International makes use of the benchmarking model for local governments in developing countries and countries in transition. The model is as a result of practical experience with benchmarking and more than ten years of experience with the model has proven that it is a powerful instrument for capacity building of local governments in developing countries and countries in transition.

### **Rationale for the Learning Benchmark in Ghana**

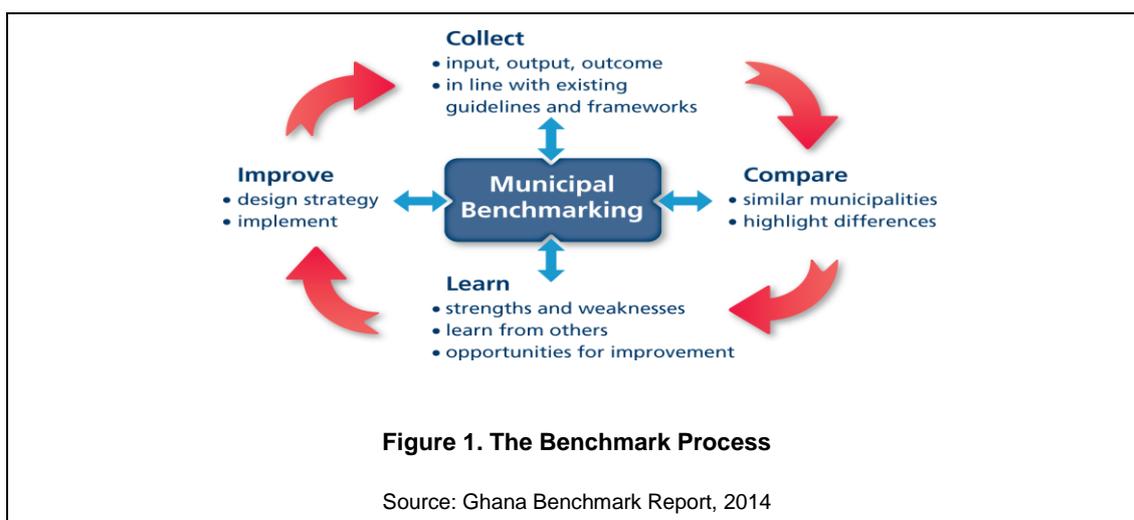
The overall aim of the benchmark exercise under the LGCP was to provide a platform for the participating MMDAs to assess their current performance in sanitation service delivery and to improve upon their performance by comparing and exchanging lessons learnt and good practices. The benchmark activity facilitated a process of self-assessment, networking and knowledge exchange among staff of the participating Assemblies. By engaging in the exercise, the MMDAs were able to adapt knowledge and experiences to their own local context.

### **Methodology**

Being a novel concept in Ghana and to ensure government buy-in of the benchmarking strategy under the LGCP, a high level meeting involving various stakeholders was organized in September, 2013 in Accra. Participants at the high level meeting included the Deputy Minister of Local Government and Rural Development, Head of Local Government Service, Chief Executives of the participating MMDAs as well as representatives from the Embassy of the Kingdom of The Netherlands. After the high level meeting, a kick-off workshop was organized to begin the benchmarking process. The benchmarking model used consisted of four (4) stages viz. *Data Collection, Comparison, Learning and Improving Stages*. The process is shown diagrammatically in figure 1 below.

The kick-off workshop provided the opportunity for the MMDAs to discuss and make inputs into a set of structured questionnaires which had been developed by experts to collect data on sanitation from all the ten (10) MMDAs. The questionnaires focused on eight (8) thematic areas on sanitation viz.:

- Financing and Funding of Sanitation Services Delivery
- Planning, Coordination and Budgeting of Sanitation Services Delivery
- Awareness Raising and Behavioural Change
- Law Enforcement
- Waste Collection and Management
- Public Private Partnerships
- Monitoring and Evaluation and
- Knowledge Management



A number of indicators were identified for each of the thematic areas but for the purposes of this paper, the following indicators have been adopted under the thematic areas;

- Financing and Funding of Sanitation Services Delivery (Sources of funds for sanitation activities, plans/strategies for raising sufficient funds for sanitation, challenges encountered in funding the implementation of WASH plans)
- Planning, Coordination and Budgeting of Sanitation Services Delivery (Percentage of planned sanitation activities funded, percentage of funds budgeted which are actually released for sanitation activities)
- Awareness Raising and behaviour Change (Communication tools and target audience for behaviour change campaigns, type of communication and behavioural change materials used)
- Law Enforcement (Strategies for dissemination of sanitation bye-laws, effectiveness of MMDA bye-laws, processes adopted to enforce sanitation bye-laws, challenges with bye-law enforcement)
- Waste Collection and Management (Stakeholder institutions involved in solid and liquid waste management, percentage of solid waste generated that is collected by MMDAs, strategies for increasing the percentage of solid waste collected, challenges with solid waste management, percentage of solid waste recycled, modes of collection of liquid waste (faecal sludge))
- Public Private Partnership (coordination of the activities of private sanitation companies, plans to improve the engagement of the private sector in the service delivery system)
- Monitoring and Evaluation (funding for M&E activities, sources of data for M&E, frequency of updating M and E data, challenges with M&E)
- Knowledge Management (availability of information systems for Knowledge Management)

The MMDAs were then tasked to complete the questionnaires (*Collect Stage*). The data collected was analyzed with the differences between the MMDAs identified and comparisons made. A draft benchmark report describing the key findings from the data analysis was prepared. The analysis of the data collected was mainly qualitative. Benchmarking as concept was originally used to compare quantitative data of an organisation against competing organisations. The concept has however evolved towards a more qualitative approach. The advantage of using the qualitative approach is that it lessens the competitive nature of the benchmarking exercise and encourages knowledge sharing and learning (Ettorchi-Tardy et al, 2012).

The findings were presented to the participating MMDAs at a second benchmark workshop organised in February, 2014. The workshop gave participants the opportunity to critique the analysis, provide further explanations to peculiar issues and best practices identified in the data analysis. The explanations and elaborations were further developed into a fine-tuned benchmark report. The second draft report incorporated and harmonized best practices from the beneficiary MMDAs (*Comparison Stage*). The final draft report was made available to the participating MMDAs at a final benchmark workshop in August, 2014. At this workshop, participating MMDAs were expected to, as part of the *Learning Stage*, pick up and adapt the practices of best performing MMDAs. At the *Improving/Final Stage*, the MMDAs are required to implement the learned practices in order to improve their performance in sanitation services delivery. With the assistance of VNG International and from the LGCP, the five (5) LGCP beneficiary MMDAs have been

provided with a token grant of €2,500 to implement any of the best practices identified in the learning benchmark report. During coaching sessions the MMDA's were able to receive additional technical support to implement the best practice selected.

### **Key findings and lessons learnt**

MMDAs play an important role in the implementation of national policies relating to water, sanitation and hygiene in Ghana. The MMDAs implement these national policies through the development of District Environmental Sanitation Strategy and Action Plans (DESSAPs). The DESSAPs are developed in line with the National Environmental Sanitation Strategy and Action Plan (NESSAP) with the involvement of a wide range of stakeholders.

One of the main problems that MMDAs identified when they implement WASH activities is the lack of funds as there are no special provisions on the financing and funding of activities identified in the DESSAP. The provision of funds for the implementation of activities mainly depends on the will and commitment of the political leadership of the MMDAs to sanitation in determining what percentage of the Assembly's budget is spent on sanitation issues. Participants of the benchmark were of the view that sanitation is the lowest on the list of priorities of MMDAs. An analysis of data provided by the MMDAs showed that in 2012, only two (2) MMDAs had funds allocated for 50% or more of their planned activities. One (1) MMDA had less than 1% of its activities funded. Furthermore, it was only in three (3) out of the ten (10) MMDAs that between 50% and 67% of the budget for sanitation was actually released. The benchmark showed that the officials responsible for sanitation delivery in the MMDAs are however unrelenting in finding ways of extracting additional financing for the implementation of sanitation activities including lobbying the political leadership for increased allocation of resources to sanitation activities and putting in place measures to increase internally generated funds.

Awareness raising is an important tool for changing the behaviour of citizens. In this connection, it was agreed that public education activities of MMDAs on proper sanitation practices should start from an early age and continue throughout their lives using different tools and methods, depending on the target groups. For instance, one (1) MMDA alluded to the use of puppet shows and drama to educate the youngest citizens of the Assembly on acceptable sanitation and hygiene behaviours. Other methods of communication adopted by the MMDAs include the use of jingles, one-to-one communication, radio talk shows on sanitation, "gong-gong beating" (traditional means of communication in some parts of rural Ghana) and education during community meetings.

Law enforcement was identified during the benchmark as one of the vital tools in the promotion of sustainable environmental health programmes and projects. Proper dissemination of MMDA bye-laws on sanitation to citizens is therefore very important in ensuring compliance to the laws. The MMDAs enumerated some methods for effective dissemination of bye-laws which included the use of community durbars, radio talk shows, town hall meetings and making copies of the bye-laws available to Assembly members who are responsible for development at the sub-structures of the MMDAs. The majority of the MMDAs reported that their bye-laws have become ineffective due to poor implementation. This situation has widely contributed to the upsurge of preventable sanitation-related diseases such as cholera and diarrhoea. The bye-laws of the various MMDAs have become ineffective due to political interference in the enforcement of these laws, failure of most MMDAs to appropriately enact their bye-laws (including non-gazetting of bye-laws) and make them operational as well as the lukewarm attitude on the part of citizens towards compliance. In order to ensure effective implementation of bye-laws, it is important that management of the MMDAs show commitment and provide budgetary support to law enforcement processes. Besides, MMDAs should engage in dialogue with security agencies such as the Police for the arrest of sanitation offenders. The MMDAs must also collaborate with the Judicial Service for the establishment of "Sanitation Courts" and the imposition of deterrent fines.

Waste management is an important part of sanitation service delivery. In terms of solid waste management, both the private sector and the Assembly are responsible for solid waste collection. It was concluded during the benchmark meetings that none of the MMDAs collect 100% of the waste generated within their Assemblies. The result is the ever-mounting heaps of waste in communities and waste ending up in drains and gutters. The MMDAs shared the plans they have in increasing the percentage of solid waste collection which included increasing the number of skip containers and collection points, adoption of a mix of systems (e.g. communal collection for closely knit communities and door-to-door waste collection for well laid out communities), intensifying door-to-door waste collection and the acquisition of final disposal

sites. A major problem identified with solid waste management was the creation of appropriate dump or sanitary landfill sites. Only one (1) out of the ten (10) Assemblies has an engineered landfill site for final disposal of waste. Some MMDAs managed to solve this problem by involving traditional authorities and opinion leaders in the creation of such sites and also paying the appropriate compensation to landowners. Recycling is still a new concept in Ghana as a lack of appropriate facilities, technology, funds and expertise are hampering its implementation. However, by collaborating with other Assemblies, one (1) of the MMDAs has managed to start working on recycling. All MMDAs have households using septic tanks for the collection of liquid waste; one (1) MMDA also has sewers. The majority of the MMDAs do not use sewers because of poor settlement layouts which do not allow for the construction of sewers as well as the rural nature of some settlements.

The responsibility over solid and liquid waste collection and disposal was identified to be well beyond the capacity of MMDAs hence the need to involve private companies in the management of both liquid and solid waste. Given the involvement of private waste companies through Public-Private Partnership arrangements, the waste management capacity of the MMDAs is expected to be strengthened to meet the required levels of waste collection and disposal. The MMDAs agreed during the benchmark that developing and enforcing concrete performance indicators (standards), regulating and coordinating the activities of companies and creating an enabling environment for private companies (institution of a pay as you dump system and the intensive sensitization of residents on the need to pay for waste services) will result in effective and efficient waste management within their areas of jurisdiction. Similarly, introducing competitive bidding as well as contracting several private companies will help to create healthy competition between companies and as a result decrease the cost of providing services particularly to the poor.

The importance of monitoring and evaluation of projects, programmes and policies were clearly stated and emphasized throughout the benchmarking process. All MMDAs reported having some systems in place for collecting data using a set of indicators. However, the frequency of updating the data varies from MMDA to MMDA, mainly due to resource challenges regarding data collection in the field. Also lacking in most MMDAs is a systematic approach for data analysis and reporting and communicating outcomes. The key lessons for improving monitoring and evaluation from the benchmarking exercise were the setting up of functional participatory monitoring teams, application of lessons learnt from monitoring and evaluation activities to improve planning and programming coupled with budgetary provisions for monitoring and evaluation activities within the MMDAs. Good knowledge management also prevents the need to keep re-inventing the wheel over and over again: by setting up a system where data, information, knowledge, good practices and research outcomes are easily accessible for everyone who is involved in sanitation issues. This done effectiveness and efficiency can be increased.

### **Challenges encountered**

A number of challenges were encountered throughout the benchmarking process with the most significant being the length of time taken by the MMDAs to complete the questionnaires, the collection stage. This affected the overall time taken to complete the benchmarking cycle. The benchmark process requires that the MMDAs take responsibility for the data collection and also willingly provide every information required. Another challenge had to do with the issue of the poor quality of data or 'missing data'. The analysis revealed that a number of MMDAs did not respond to some of the questions in the questionnaire. This was overcome by engaging the participants from the various MMDAs in one-on-one discussions during the benchmark workshops organized to discuss and compare results for the MMDAs to improve the data and complete missing responses.

### **Conclusion**

The sanitation benchmark report will among other things serve as a blue print for the participating MMDAs as well as other MMDAs in the country to significantly improve upon sanitation service delivery at the local level with emphasis on some best practices which were identified during the benchmarking process. The process has provided the MMDAs with insight in the achievement of their organizations' goals in comparison with that of other MMDAs and also provides tailor-made solutions to challenges based on the practices of other organizations. It is envisaged that the lessons will lead to significant changes in the way MMDAs are responding to sanitation issues in Ghana and mainstream the practice in the processes of performance assessment of MMDAs with respect to sanitation delivery in Ghana.

Lessons such as budgetary allocation for monitoring and evaluation of sanitation activities, the use of puppet shows for behaviour change communication campaigns on sanitation, adoption of a mix of systems for improving waste collection as well as setting up good knowledge management systems where data, information, knowledge, good practices and research outcomes are easily accessible can also be applied particularly in developing countries to improve the delivery of sanitation services.

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