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**TRANSFORMATION TOWARDS SUSTAINABLE
AND RESILIENT WASH SERVICES**

**Recent performance of a national-scale rural sanitation
programme in Ghana**

Z. White & Niall Boot (UK)

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This paper documents recent successes and challenges in a national scale rural sanitation programme implemented by the Environmental Health and Sanitation Department (EHSD) – Ministry of Sanitation and Water Resources and UNICEF in Ghana. It highlights recent successes and challenges in programming, with special attention paid to the district-level enabling environment factors that support and hinder successful implementation. The programme began in 2012/13 and was rolled out in five of Ghana's ten regions. Disappointing initial results led to substantial adjustments in programme approach followed by a rapid acceleration in results. Qualitative research was conducted in a mixture of high, medium, and low performing districts to identify the enabling environment and factors that have supported and hindered progress. The paper concludes by presenting a summary of the key differentiating factors that explain some of the difference in performance.

Introduction

This paper summarises some of the key reflections arising from the first year of a two-year operational research programme focused on rural sanitation implementation in Ghana. Though this paper does not detail all findings of the research it summarises elements drawing on: a detailed review of the approaches taken in the sector; interviews with key sector actors; a secondary analysis of programme monitoring data; and an assessment of the district-level enabling environment factors that supporting and hinder rural sanitation implementation. Primary research was conducted in six focus districts in GoG/UNICEF programme areas; including workshops at the district level and group discussions at the community level.

Please note, this paper reflects the views of the research team (OPM, MAPLE, and IRC) and not the Government of Ghana. The research on which this paper is based is also ongoing, and this paper summarises early emerging findings.

The GoG/UNICEF programme approach and implementation structure

The GoG/UNICEF sanitation programme has been running since 2012/13. The programme is operating in five of Ghana's ten regions (Central, Northern, Upper East, Upper West, and Volta), with implementation taking place in 57 districts and over 3,000 communities within those districts.

At the district level the key government programme functionaries are the Environmental Health Officers and Assistants (EHO/As) who are responsible for field facilitation and monitoring in the communities. The EHO/As are managed by the District Environmental Health Officer (DEHO) within the district's Environmental Health Unit (EHU). ODF verification and certification is undertaken by a Regional Inter-Agency Coordination Committee on Sanitation (RICCS) who also perform functions related to coordination at the regional level. Recently, additional human resource capacity has been provided both at the district and the regional levels. At the district level UNICEF has recruited District Resource Persons (DRPs) from local NGOs, who are supporting the district authorities on all aspects of programme implementation. Similarly, at the regional level UNICEF has recruited Regional Consultants who work within the regional institutions in supporting programme implementation.

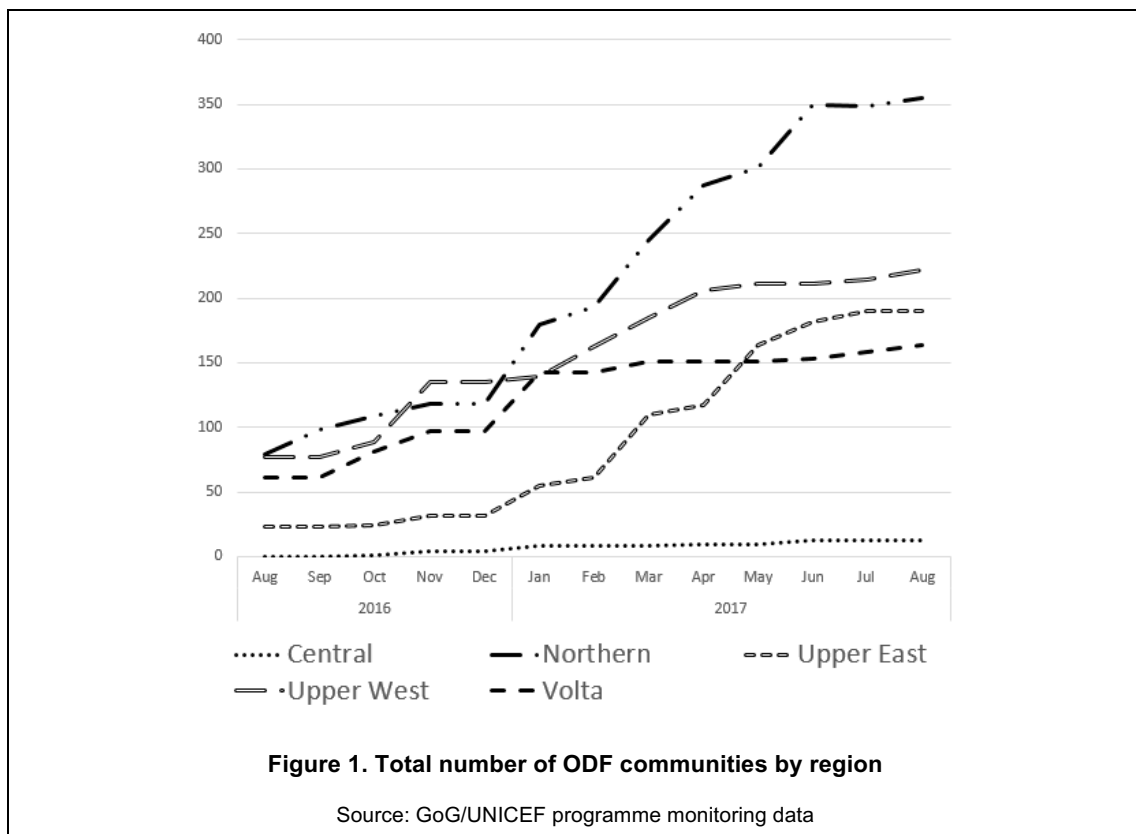
The main approach used in the programme is based on Community Led Total Sanitation (CLTS) principles, including zero subsidy. In many districts there have also been training programmes conducted for latrine artisans. UNICEF provides financial and technical support directly to the district administrations for implementation and additional support at the regional and national levels. Fund transfers are just for implementing programme activities (such as travel for field activities); the salaries of the EHU staff and other resources (such as vehicles) are provided by the districts themselves.

Programme performance

In 2012/13 a large number of the communities in the programme were triggered, though this large scale triggering of communities had limited success as few converted to becoming ODF. As of August 2016, 240 communities were declared Open Defecation Free (ODF) of a total of roughly 2,800 in the programme – this equates to roughly a 9% conversion rate. This low conversion rate and the little progress the programme was making led to a re-evaluation of the approach which culminated in the introduction of the “incremental approach” in 2015/16.

The ‘incremental approach’ was developed and piloted in the Volta, Central, and Northern Regions (one district in each) in 2015 by UNICEF, and then, following slow uptake and success further refined in 2016 and rolled out more widely. The incremental approach encourages the district authorities to focus on a fewer communities, getting them to become ODF first through more intensive follow-up and moving to trigger the next set of communities surrounding those ODF community, making the next batch of communities ODF, and so on. The communities in which the Incremental Approach is implemented is a sub-set of the total communities on the programme – hereafter these are referred to as Priority Incremental Communities (PICs).

Following the introduction of the incremental approach the programme saw a rapid rise in the number of ODF communities. From the programme start to the August 2016 over 2,700 communities were triggered and of these 240 were verified ODF (roughly 8%). Since August 2016 there was a rapid acceleration of results. Between August 2016 and January 2017 a further 285 communities were declared ODF. That is, progress in those 6 months alone was greater than the previous 3-4 years. That rate of results was sustained in the first 6 months of 2017, though has slowed recently, and as of October 2017 a total 975 communities were declared ODF within the programme.



Progress has not been evenly distributed over regions, or within the districts. Notably, with the Northern Region clearly far outperforming other districts and extremely limited progress in the Central Region. **Error! Reference source not found.** presents the total number of communities triggered in each region along with the total number of ODF communities and the ‘crude conversion rate’. The crude conversion rate here is the proportion of those ODF of those triggered; it does not consider a particular timeframe as this was not possible to do within the confines of the data.

These numbers are also presented separating ‘priority incremental communities’ (PICs) from the non-PICs. This is done as PICs represent the sub-group of the total number of communities in the GoG/UNICEF programme where the incremental approach is being implemented and as such is a better representation of current programme implementation. This analysis highlights that both the Upper East and the Upper West regions have a high crude conversion rate, signalling good performance masked when only looking at the overall number of ODF communities. Similarly while the Volta region has a similar number of ODF communities as the Upper East and West Regions the conversion is much lower.

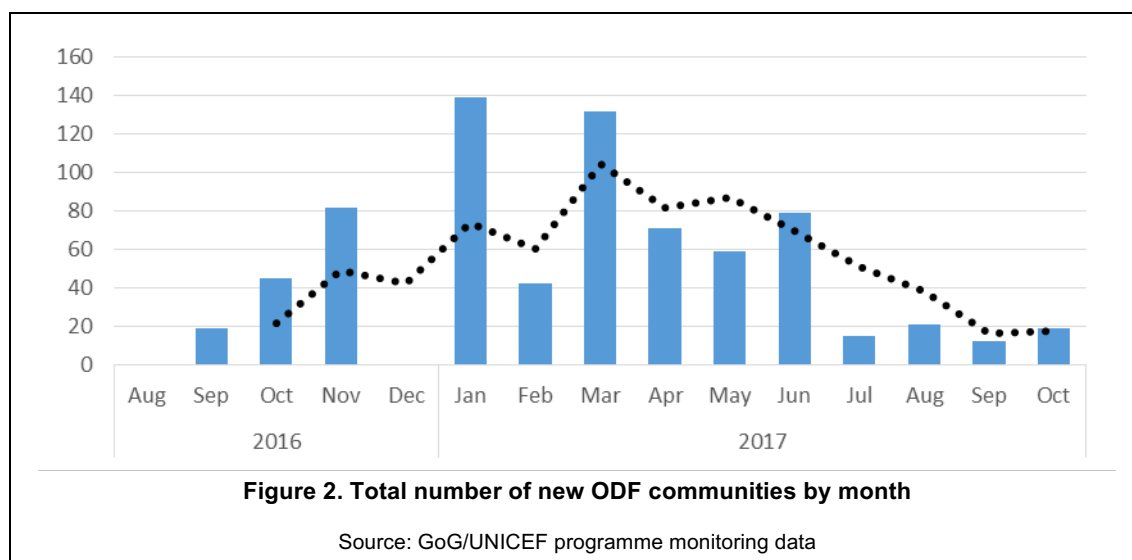
Region	Region and community type	Communities triggered	Communities verified ODF	Crude conversion rate
Central	All communities	403	15	3.7%
	<i>PIC communities</i>	89	15	16.9%
Northern	All communities	965	377	39.1%
	<i>PIC communities</i>	456	305	66.9%
Upper East	All communities	565	192	34.0%
	<i>PIC communities</i>	360	183	50.8%
Upper West	All communities	467	227	48.6%
	<i>PIC communities</i>	280	196	70.0%
Volta	All communities	799	164	20.5%
	<i>PIC communities</i>	256	138	53.9%
Grand Total	All communities	3,199	975	30.5%
	<i>PIC communities</i>	1441	837	58.08%

Source: GoG/ UNICEF programme monitoring data

Similarly, the progress is not evenly distributed between the Districts within regions. Of the 57 districts the top performing 10 account for over half of the number of ODF communities in the programme, and the top performing 3 districts account for over 20%. Furthermore, across regions we see quite stark differences within similar geographical areas. The pattern of the distribution between and within districts hints at administrative boundaries as having a significant impact on progress; something that was investigated more thoroughly enabling environment assessments at the district level.

Seasonality emerges as a key driver of results. It is well known that rural incomes vary seasonally (GLSS 6 2014); and that sales are lowest at the time of harvest. Broadly the harvest season for key crops (Maize, Rice, Sorghum, Millet and Yam) is between Aug/ Sept and December. While other key crops (Cassava, Plantain and Cocoyam) are more stable throughout the year. Besides incomes construction of latrines is also more challenging during the rainy seasons (June-Oct in the northern regions and March-Nov in the southern regions) **Error! Reference source not found.** shows the distribution of results throughout the year. It should be noted that UNICEF programme activity is most intense in in Q3 and Q4 to coincide with the end of the rainy season and when incomes are higher. Assuming a short lag in the achievement and verification

of ODF status these seasonal implementation patterns are broadly reflected in the data. Though the surge in results also coincides with and management push. Particularly UNICEF devoting more resources to the programme through hiring the DRPs and regional consultants to support the districts and regions in implementing the programme.



A second key feature of the data is looking at the characteristics of ODF communities. Here the data supports the widely held sector notion that smaller communities are more receptive to ODF. As has been documented in the literature these data highlight that on averages the communities that are declared ODF are considerably smaller than the average community in the UNICEF programme; for all regions ODF communities are on average 60% the size of the average of all communities in the programme. There is also considerable range between the regions; in the Volta and Central regions the ODF communities are roughly a third of the size of all communities targeted; while in the Upper West and Upper East regions, the difference is considerably less.

District-level enabling environment factors that support successful implementation

During Q1 2017 a series of workshops were held at the district level to explore the enabling environment factors that support and hinder successful implementation. An adapted and simplified version of the WASH-BAT tool was used to collect and analyse the data. This was conducted in 6 focus districts of the 57 UNICEF support the GoG implementation in. These were purposively sampled from two regions by first dividing districts into three groups based on performance with regards to achieving ODF. The communities were randomly sampled from within these strata.

14 enabling environment factors were examined at the district level, in presenting these in this paper these factors are divided into two categories: those that differ consistently or substantially in relation to performance, and those that were relatively consistent across districts. The assumption underpinning the analysis is that if factors are shared by good performing districts then they are key for any district to perform well despite its context.

Key enabling factors that differ across successful and unsuccessful districts, and are taken to explain some of the difference in performance:

- **The level of senior leadership, and ownership of CLTS by Environmental Health and Sanitation Unit (EHSU), and district authorities** – Critical with regards the level of staff motivation, and the prioritisation of sanitation within district planning and budgeting. The level of senior leadership also has a strong effect of the release of funds through the government systems. The programme design is such that the DEHO is critical to how programme implementation is managed and field facilitators organised.
- **Mechanisms for recognising programme staff and community efforts** – This is strongly related to the degree to which ODF is an outcome that is owned and prioritised and where success is celebrated. Within the district administration one of the main mechanism by which recognition occurs is through annual

reporting and reviews. At the regional level district performance league tables, and the level of supervision and scrutiny by the regional institutions, are important. Community level attitudes are influenced by the behaviour of field staff and local leadership.

- **Fund availability and release** – This predominantly pertains to the extent and ready availability of external funds, as district level staff report government funds are rarely available for rural sanitation activities. This is mainly a bottleneck in poor performing districts as opposed to an enabling factor. It was noted in all districts the programme activities are almost exclusively funded externally, and delays in disbursements break the momentum of implementation.
- **Innovative advocacy, locally tailored ways of working with communities** – The higher performing districts all report using a wider range of advocacy strategies at the district level and adapting their implementation at the community level (either by effective use of local media and/or engaging local leaders such as traditional leaders, religious leaders, etc).

The second category of factors which are important with regards to sanitation but where we do not see great difference among the districts with regards to performance. This is not to say these factors are not important to the overall progress; just that they appear less important in explaining the variation across districts. These include:

- **Presence of trained latrine artisans** – Though important for high quality latrine construction the fact that all districts report similar training practices mean this is not a powerful explanation for the difference in performance. Also, widely reported that predominantly local community artisans are used for latrine construction.
- **Coordination practices within districts** – In the high performing districts there is more broad-based support and better attendance of coordination fora. Though some question the need for these mechanisms at the district level where there are not multiple DPs operating as different government department teams work closely as a matter of course.
- **Coherent policy and strategies** – Though there is some difference between the prominence of sanitation in medium term development plans (MTDPs) and annual action plans (AAPs). A broken link between planning and implementation means- this is not a powerful explanation of performance; and current implementation is not dependent on there being these strategy and planning documents in place – nor is there a link to the funding from government sources for rural sanitation.
- **Accessible and affordable materials for latrine construction** – This is generally noted as a challenge in all districts, and though critical to latrine construction doesn't explain the difference in the performance among districts as it is cited as a key challenge for communities in all of the districts
- **Monitoring and use of data for planning and reporting** – All districts are monitoring rural sanitation via the GoG/UNICEF programme monitoring with verification by RICCS as per the revised ODF protocol, and three of the six districts report beginning to use the BaSIS (the national rural sanitation monitoring system) for monitoring; though these districts report that these monitoring data are not extensively used for planning purposes. This combined with the fact that there is not significant difference across districts in monitoring practices mean this is also not a powerful explanation for differences in performance.

These findings are supported by interviews with a wider range DEHOs from successful districts. This paper has sought to document the approach taken in the joint GoG/UNICEF rural sanitation programme as well as recent successes. In doing so it also provides a review of the district level enabling environment factors that have been associated with good performance with the districts. These findings are most relevant to the implementation of the GoG/UNICEF programme; though do hold lessons for other organisations implementing rural sanitation in Ghana and similar contexts.

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Contact details

Zach White is a Consultant with OPM's Water Team. and Niall Boot is a WASH specialist with UNICEF Ghana.

Zachary White
OPM, Level 3 52 Cornmarket St., Oxford,
OX1 3JH, UK
Tel: +44 (0)1865 207 300
Email: zach.white@opml.co.uk
www: <http://www.opml.co.uk>

Niall Boot
House No. 4 - 6, Rangoon Close, Cantonments,
Accra, Ghana
Email: nboot@unicef.org
www: <https://www.unicef.org/ghana/>