

# Whole system change: capturing the change process in the Ghana rural water sub-sector

Harold Lockwood and Vida Duti

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The paper seeks to analyse and describe the processes and actions undertaken by IRC and its partners to create large-scale change in Ghana's rural water sub-sector. The paper sets out the context and offers a brief analysis of progress. It then outlines how change in sector thinking and practice is being achieved through a collaborative process of action research, reflection and on-going learning.

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# Foreword

I am delighted to provide a prelude to this narrative on a transformational programme that I have witnessed first-hand from multiple perspectives:

- from years of interaction with various aspects of the Sustainable Services at Scale Project (Triple-S), related preceding projects and concurrent studies that have fed into the Triple-S initiative;
- as a participant; as a user/beneficiary of project results; in my position as Chief Executive of the project host organization, CWSA; and by virtue of serving on the advisory committee of the project for over four years.

This note is also my testament of gratitude to IRC for the initiative and the collective appreciation of CWSA for the effort of Mrs. Vida Duti and her staff and associates. Their dynamism has made meaning of seemingly nebulous ideas, transforming them into a set of concrete 'do-able' actions and tangible results that are captured between the pages that follow this fore note.

May these accounts refuse to be just historical notes of collective learning, reflection, innovation and adaptation but should catalyse further action and spur on all who subscribe to sustainable development. We should all take a cue from the lessons of action research carried out in real live district 'laboratories' that this project provided.

This document should serve to broaden knowledge in both academia and real life field work.

**Clement Bugase**  
**Chief Executive Officer, Community Water and Sanitation Agency (CWSA)**

# Acknowledgements

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**Advisory Committee.** The Advisory Committee was formed by the Ministry to provide policy direction, to ensure that the projects interventions are relevant to the country context, and to promote replication of learning and scaling up of the interventions in the relevant agencies. Members: the Hon. Alban Bagbin and the Hon. Alhaji Collins Dauda, Ministers of Water Resources, Works and Housing; Dr. Sulley Gariba, then Development Policy Advisor, Office of the President; Mr. Fred Addae, Director, Water Directorate, Ministry of Water Resources, Works and Housing (MWRWH); Mr. Clement Bugase, Chief Executive, CWSA; Mr. Emmanuel Gaze, Director Technical Services, CWSA; Prof. Mrs. Esi Awuah, Dean, School of Engineering, KNUST; Dr. Kwabena B. Nyarko, Snr. Lecturer, KNUST and Country Director, WASHCost; Dr. Esther Offei Aboagye, Director, ILG; Mr. Jonathan Azasoo, Snr. Planner, NDPC; Mr. Jonas K. Amanu, Regional Director, EHSD-MLGRD; Emmanuel K. Baza, Senior Engineer, LGSS; Mr. Othniel Habila, Chief of WASH, UNICEF; Ms. Aoife Gibbons, WASH Specialist, CIDA; Mr. Emmanuel Nkrumah, Senior WASH Specialist, World Bank; Mr. David Duncan, Development Partner Lead; Dr. Patrick Moriarty, Country Director, IRC Ghana; Dr. Afia Zakiya, Country Representative WaterAid in Ghana; Mr. Ben Arthur, Executive Secretary, CONIWAS.

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**East Gonja District Assembly:** Hon. Mohammed Aminu Lukumanu, District Chief Executive; Alhaji Abdul-Karim Yahaya Iddrisu, District Coordinating Director; Mr. Bashiru Shahadu, DWST Leader; Mr. Khalid Abubakar Giwah, District Planning Officer; and Mr. Mahama Zakaria, District Finance Officer. **Sunyani West District:** Mr. Owusu K. Mintah, Planning Officer; Mr. Daniel Nnebini, Assistant Planning Officer; Mr. Benjamin Atsutse, Budget Analyst; Mr. Kyei Asare Bediako, Water Engineer; and Mr. Joseph Tang, Deputy Coordinator. **Akatsi South District Assembly:** Mr. Seth Damasah, District WASH Engineer and Mr. Attigah Wisdom, District Planning Officer.

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# Acronyms and abbreviations

AAA	Accra Agenda for Action	SDI	Service Delivery Indicator
AFD	Agence Française de Développement	SMS	Short Messaging Service
AfDB	African Development Bank	SSDP	Sector Strategic Development Plan (also WSSDP)
BMGF	Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation	SWA	Sanitation and Water for All
CEO	Chief Executive Officer	SWAp	Sector Wide Approach
CONIWAS	Coalition of [local] NGOs in Water and Sanitation	SWG	Sector Working Group
CWSA	Community Water and Sanitation Agency	UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
DA	District Assembly	USAID	United States Agency for International Development
DAC	Development Assistance Committee	WASH	Water, Sanitation and Hygiene
DDF	District Development Facility	WASHBAT	Water, Sanitation and Hygiene Bottleneck Analysis Tool
DFID	Department for International Development	WD	Water Directorate
DiMES	District Monitoring and Evaluation System	WHO	World Health Organisation
DOM	District Operational Manual	WSMT	Water and Sanitation Management Team
DP	Development Partner	WRC	Water Resources Commission
EHSD	Environmental Hygiene and Sanitation Directorate	WSSG	Water and Sanitation Sector Group
EIB	European Investment Bank		
EPE	End of Project Evaluation		
GLAAS	UN-Water Global Analysis and Assessment of Sanitation and Drinking-Water		
GoG	Government of Ghana		
HLM	High Level Meeting		
IFAD	International Fund for Agricultural Development		
INGO	International Non-Governmental Organisation		
KfW	Kreditanstalt für Wiederaufbau		
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation		
MDBS	Multi-Donor Budget Support		
MDG	Millennium Development Goal		
MLGRD	Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development		
MMDA	Metropolitan, Municipal and District Assembly		
MWRWH	Ministry of Water Resources, Works and Housing		
NCWSP	National Community Water and Sanitation Programme		
NCWSS	National Community Water and Sanitation Strategy		
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation		
NLLAP	National Level Learning Alliance Platform		
NWP	National Water Policy		
ODA	Official Development Assistance		
PIM	Project Implementation Manual		
PPP	Public-Private Partnership		
PSC	Public Service Commission		
RCN	Resource Centre Network		
RLLAP	Regional Level Learning Alliance Platform		

# Executive summary

Over the past five years IRC and its partners have sought to bring about a systemic change in Ghana's rural water sector – change that will enable the sector to deliver safe water reliably to people in rural communities around the country. Most of this work has been conducted under Triple-S (Sustainable Services at Scale), a learning initiative carried out from 2009-2014 in Ghana, Uganda, and at the international level.

One of the reasons IRC chose to implement the initiative in Ghana was that it was typical of many countries striving to meet the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs): it had made significant progress in increasing geographical coverage, but it had significant problems, particularly in its rural water sub-sector, with lack of financing for repairs and replacements, weak supply chains for spare parts, and poor support from local government to community-based service providers. As a result many hand pumps had fallen into disrepair and piped networks deteriorated so that many people supposedly 'covered' by an improved service had gone back to using distant, unsafe sources.

The sector was characterised by weak leadership and lack of coordination. Donors financed 95% of activities in the sector and nearly all capital investment. This investment had helped to boost coverage. Yet the governance and management structures needed to ensure quality services over the long haul remained weak. IRC introduced Triple-S at the right time and was able to build on efforts by the government and donors to get to grips with this challenge and strengthen the sector.

## THE TRIPLE-S APPROACH

In dealing with complex environments it is clear that no one single action, or indeed any one single actor, is able to unlock these dynamics and achieve meaningful change in a linear fashion. From the outset this was recognised by IRC, which took the explicit approach of working in partnership at multiple levels, and with a particular emphasis on collective learning and reflection, based on its work with learning alliances.

It was also clearly recognised from the outset that change processes take time and therefore IRC predicted a ten-year time frame for change, although direct funding for the Triple-S initiative was only made available for the first six years.

A further three years of funding has now been secured from the Conrad N. Hilton Foundation.

## TRIPLE-S GHANA: PHASED APPROACH TO CHANGE AND SECTOR STRENGTHENING

The progression of the initiative can be broken down roughly into three main phases.

Phase 1 was about establishing partnerships with key organisations, ensuring government leadership, heightening awareness of the sustainability challenge, and diagnosing the specific gaps and problems in the sector.

Phase 2 homed in on the weak points identified in Phase 1. It focused on specific actions to improve sector performance and test potential solutions in the districts with the aim of providing evidence that would enable the sector to make informed decisions.

Phase 3, where the initiative is now, targets systemic sector changes required to institutionalise and scale-up new ideas and pathways to providing sustained water services.

In its approach to supporting a change in the sector toward service delivery, IRC has focused on four core elements, namely learning, action research, facilitation and communication, and partnerships.

**Joint learning and reflection:** this is a core activity focussing on systems and organisational development of Community Water and Sanitation Agency (CWSA) that will enable it to be well grounded and equipped with the necessary policy instruments and tools to lead the drive towards service delivery in the sub-sector. In practice this has involved regular reflection meetings between CWSA and IRC, and external reflection meetings with representatives of the pilot districts and other sector organisations who share in the vision and undertake complementary activities.

**Action research to develop alternative approaches and solutions:** action research is key to the Triple-S approach as a method to jointly identify areas of service delivery that need improvement. CWSA and local governments are supported in diagnosing the underlying causes of failure of water systems; and, in consultation with sector stakeholders, co-generating alternative solutions and testing ideas. These have been applied in the form of experiments in three pilot districts across Ghana to establish their effectiveness in addressing barriers to sustainable water services.

**Facilitation and communication:** it has been of critical importance to IRC in Ghana to embed the work of Triple-S action research – the experiments – into the broader sector dynamics and dialogues, so that they do not remain as isolated efforts, however interesting or relevant in their own right. To this end, IRC has put a strong emphasis – and committed significant resources – to both communicating the results of its work (and that of others) and to facilitating sector dialogue around these experiences. IRC identified the need for a continuous process of learning, communication, and feedback as critical to making progress towards a common vision of improving service delivery.

**Partnerships:** the Triple-S initiative in Ghana was hosted by the Community Water and Sanitation Agency, which was responsible for both operational and content management, including the project governance arrangement, alignment with country processes and coordination of field activities. This core partnership extended to the district level (in the three pilot districts) and with broader sector players, including UNICEF, SNV, WSA, the World Bank and others.

## SIGNS OF CHANGE

In broad terms there has been strong progress across six areas:

- Policy commitments to service delivery and political statements of intent (both national and international) to change the current 'business as usual' approach.
- Changes in the strategy and planning frameworks of CWSA, including a revised corporate plan putting service delivery, knowledge management and capacity building at its core, as well new budget lines to support the same.
- Revision and 'up-grading' of key sector tools and guidelines, most notably the adoption of the service delivery indicators under the District Monitoring and Evaluation System (DiMES) and the up-dating of both the national and district level implementation guidelines to include, for the first time ever, an extended life cycle for service delivery going beyond the construction phase.
- Revision of the water and sanitation planning and budget frameworks of the pilot districts to comprehensively address needs of new investment, major rehabilitation, expansion and logistics, and operational costs, with an attendant increase in budget allocation of over 20% compared to the situation before the intervention.
- Shift in approach to sector monitoring: from counting pumps and pipes to monitoring services and conditions for sustainability; from unstructured ad hoc data collection and analysis to establishing government systems for continuous data collection and structured analysis; from limited availability of monitoring data to real time monitoring data available on-line; and from monitoring as an end in and of itself to monitoring as a means to inform planning and provision of sustainable service.
- Development Partners aligning support to CWSA in pursuance of its vision to establish a rural water monitoring system "to ensure that data on existing and new water, sanitation and hygiene facilities is up to date and useful for ensuring WASH services that last forever for the rural population of Ghana. Nine donors, NGOs, foundations and private sector partners have realigned partnerships to support this effort and to scale up service monitoring in seven out of the ten regions of Ghana under the leadership of CWSA.

Of course, the ultimate measure of success is physical improvements in service delivery on the ground (i.e. more reliable, better quality water flowing for more of the time in rural communities). These take some time to manifest as systemic improvements take hold and the actors involved at multiple levels begin to work together more effectively.

The data from the service delivery monitoring already show some marginal improvement in the quality of services. The second round of functionality and service monitoring conducted in the pilot districts in 2013 recorded improvement of system non-functionality, down from 26% to 17% in Akatsi District and from 21% to 17% in Sunyani West compared with the 2011 study results. Reliability of hand pumps has improved from 69% to 73% in the Akatsi District and from 59% to 61% in East Gonja from 2011-2013. It may be too early to confirm the trajectory of improvement in water services and to attribute the improvement to Triple-S work. However, these emerging trends are encouraging.

Although much progress has been made and the sector has moved significantly in the last five years or so, there is still unfinished business. Sector financing in particular remains a challenge.





Photo by Peter di Campo



# 1 Introduction

Over the past five years IRC<sup>1</sup> and its partners have sought to bring about a systemic change in Ghana's rural water sub-sector – change that will enable the sector to deliver safe water reliably to people in rural communities around the country. Most of this work has been conducted under Triple-S (Sustainable Services at Scale), a learning initiative carried out from 2009-2014.<sup>2</sup>

The Triple-S project stemmed from the idea that in order to ensure sustainable services, it was necessary to address the whole system of actors and institutions that make up the rural water sub-sector and the links between them.

The specific activities of the initiative varied across countries, but were focused around a set of common principles or pillars needed to support sustainable services at scale:

- **A service delivery approach** – putting into place the policy, financing and institutional structures at multiple levels so that water services are maintained indefinitely through a planned process of low intensity management, with occasional capital-intensive projects for upgrading the service level and replacing components as they reach the end of their designed lifespan.
- **A learning and adaptive sector** – building the rural water sub-sector's capacity (with government taking a leading role) to learn, innovate and adapt to changing circumstances and demands.
- **Harmonisation and alignment** – improving the harmonisation of donor efforts at both operational and national levels, as well as better coordination and alignment of these efforts behind government-led strategies.

The Triple-S initiative sought to catalyse these major changes at national and local levels in two focus

countries (Ghana and Uganda), and with more limited resources in non-focus countries (Burkina Faso, Mozambique, India, and Honduras) as well as among international actors operating in the rural water sub-sector (donors, INGOs, philanthropic organisations, etc.).

This paper seeks to analyse and describe the processes and actions undertaken by IRC and its partners to create large-scale sector change in Ghana. In particular it seeks to capture how the initiative has served as a catalyst to bring the issue of sustainability of water services to the forefront of sector actors' attention and how IRC worked with the government agency responsible for rural water supply (the Community Water and Sanitation Agency), and other stakeholders to develop tools and methodologies and influence policy and practice.

It also shows how through the engagement, the Community Water and Sanitation Agency (CWSA) and the pilot districts have been able to position themselves to champion and lead the process of cohesive water sector partnerships and programming for improved quality of water services in the rural water sub-sector of Ghana.

The paper sets out the context and offers a brief analysis of progress. It then outlines how change in sector thinking and practice is being achieved through a collaborative process of action research, reflection and on-going learning. It also analyses the approach to change taken by IRC through the lens of collective impact, a framework for change in complex systems articulated by FSG, a non-profit firm involved in facilitating sustainable social change in complex systems<sup>3</sup>. It concludes by identifying a set of critical drivers and success factors for the potential benefit of others engaged in similar processes of whole system change.

<sup>1</sup> IRC is dedicated to achieving transformative change in the WASH sector. IRC is established as an autonomous, independent not-for-profit organisation with its headquarters in The Netherlands, and local representations in the countries where IRC implements programmes. IRC has worked extensively with WASH sector stakeholders in Ghana to define problems, research solutions and implement change through its Ghana country programme. Here is it important to distinguish between IRC as a permanent organisation and Triple-S as a large-scale initiative, which it manages together with the CWSA. In the context of Ghana, it is Triple-S that has been the main platform for the sector change process described in this document.

<sup>2</sup> IRC received six years of funding from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation for Triple-S work in Ghana and Uganda, and at the international level. The work is complemented by a similar project in Burkina Faso funded by USAID under the WA-WASH program. The Hilton Foundation is providing three more years of funding to continue the work in Ghana.

<sup>3</sup> Collective impact is an approach to structuring collective action to bring about change in complex environments involving multiple stakeholders: see: [http://www.ssireview.org/articles/entry/collective\\_impact](http://www.ssireview.org/articles/entry/collective_impact)

### 1.1 THE CHALLENGE OF UNSUSTAINABLE WATER SERVICES IN THE RURAL SECTOR

The Rural Water Supply Network indicates an average non-functionality rate of 36% for hand pumps in sub-Saharan Africa (RWSN, 2009), which represents a waste of between US\$ 1.2 and US\$ 1.5 billion in investments over the last 20 years. The reality for millions of rural people is that following construction of a new water facility they have access to a given level of service only temporarily. Due to a lack of support and money for operations, maintenance and repairs, the physical system starts to deteriorate until it collapses completely leaving people with no service until it is rehabilitated or, more often, replaced with an entirely new facility, typically by another organisation.

One of the main causes for the high rates of non-functionality of water facilities is the focus on delivering water infrastructure instead of delivering water services. Governments are understandably concerned with extending services to their unserved populations and most external support agencies are focussed on building new infrastructure for new beneficiaries (WHO, 2012). International monitoring and reporting, likewise, focuses on population ‘covered’ by water facilities.

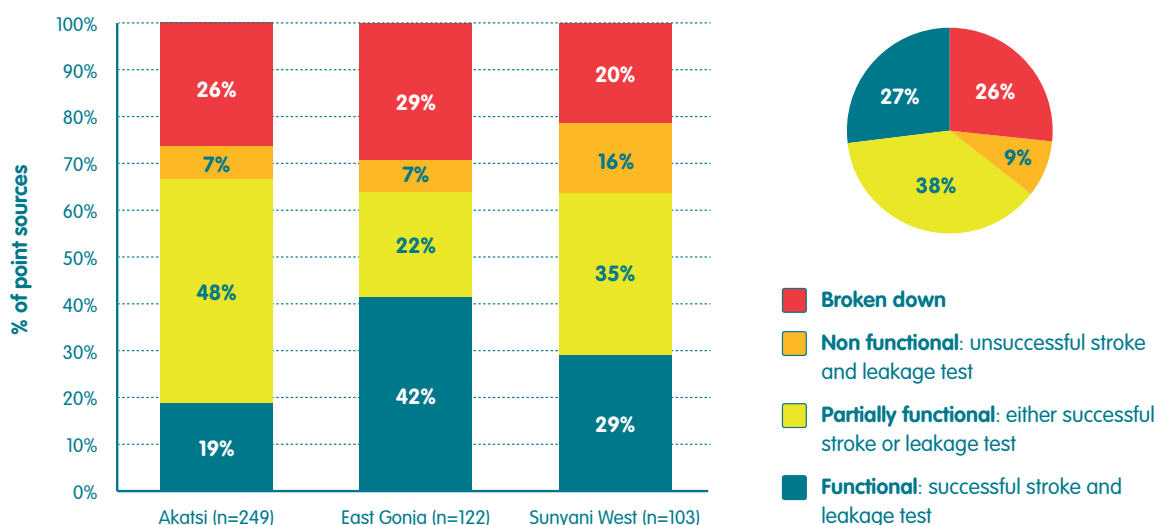
### 1.2 GHANA RURAL WATER SERVICE DELIVERY AT THE START OF THE PROJECT

At the beginning of the project, IRC commissioned studies of the rural water sub-sector in 13 countries (Benin, Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, Ghana, Mozambique,

South Africa, Uganda, Colombia, Honduras, three states in India, Sri Lanka, Thailand and the USA). The main objective of the study in Ghana was to provide an overview of the challenges to achieving scaled up sustainable rural service delivery and to establish a baseline.

**Rural water supply status and functionality:** Rural water supply had been successfully extended to 65-76% (depending on the data source) of the rural population of Ghana. When the project started, Ghana was on track to achieve the MDG target for water, but behind this success there was a complex set of challenges involved in turning newly provided water delivery infrastructure into sustainable services. Complete data on functionality and service levels were not existent. However, isolated studies provided data showing a range of functionality levels: from only 10% of all project boreholes not-functioning in surveyed villages (Bakalian and Wakeman, 2009) to 58% of water-points needing repair in a survey in Northern Ghana (Skinner, 2009). Data collected by the WASHCost project found rates of non-functionality in the region of 30% (Nyarko, 2014). The Triple-S baseline assessment in pilot districts indicated an average of only 27% of hand pumps was fully functional (see figure 1). There was a general recognition among sector actors that sustainability and lack of functionality presented very real challenges to the whole sector. However, as one report put it: ‘... as a country, there was a lack of conscious and deliberate actions to ensure that facilities keep working for as long as their designed lives’ (Dotse, 2010).

FIGURE 1 FUNCTIONALITY OF HANDPUMPS IN THREE DISTRICTS (N= 474)



Source: Adank et al. 2013. p.16.

**Investment in the sub-sector:** Control of investment in the sector was dispersed over several actors, but donors in particular influenced investment decisions. Consequently, the sector faced major challenges in terms of continuity where projects were the dominant mechanism for service delivery. The 2009 water and sanitation sector review conducted by MAPLE Consult for WaterAid Ghana found that the government's allocation to the sector between 2001 and 2006 was 3.61% of the national budget. This allocation was primarily for salaries and some operating costs. Capital investment in the rural water sub-sector was primarily from donors – approximately 99% of the total investment.

**Roles and responsibilities of key actors in the rural water sub-sector in theory and practice:** The Ghana Water Policy (2007) and the National Community Water and Sanitation Programme (NCWSP) assign defined roles to the Community Water and Sanitation Agency (CWSA), Metropolitan Municipal and District Assemblies (MMDAs) and the private sector to provide external support to communities in the management of service provision within the framework of Community Ownership and Management (COM). The NCWSP directs that legal ownership of water supply system is vested in the MMDAs, who hold the water assets in trust for the community. MMDAs exercise legislative and executive functions and are responsible for the overall development of the districts. The MMDA delegates the responsibility for the management of the water supply systems to the Water and Sanitation Management Team (WSMT) or a private operator (in the case of small town piped systems). The WSMTs contract locally trained area mechanics and pump caretakers to cover day-to-day operations and maintenance of the hand pumps. However, a number of these processes had not fully taken place as envisaged in the sector policy and strategy documents and past efforts to develop private sector capacity to fulfil its role yielded limited results. Although CWSA guidelines prescribed ways to set and review tariffs, these were seldom followed, due to a lack of commitment or capacity (technical or financial) on the part of MMDAs and WSMTs. Often, when the need for rehabilitation arose, MMDA and communities had no choice but to look to donors for support.

The multiplicity of service providers, their overlapping mandates, and the lack of provision for oversight and regulation led to problems in terms of coordination and control. Although MMDAs were formally responsible for planning, decision-making, and delivery of water services, they lacked the

necessary resources and skills to fulfil their mandate. The lack of clarity on functions coupled with a perceived widespread lack of capacity led to CWSA fulfilling the role of DAs in the identification, planning and implementation of water supply projects. The Regional Coordinating Councils were supposed to harmonise and coordinate the programmes, projects and activities of the District Assemblies but lacked the resources to do so. As a result other actors took on some of these functions, for example CWSA. However, CWSA also did not have sufficient resources to adequately fulfil the district functions. What was more, MMDAs, DWSTs, and WSMTs often lacked the skills and resources needed to perform their mandate. The resulting disorder led to inconsistency, waste, and a duplication of effort.

**Sector harmonisation and coordination:** Although donors had subscribed to the Paris Declaration for Aid Effectiveness, in Ghana's water and sanitation sector, harmonisation was a major challenge, particularly because of its donor dominated landscape. The Ghana Joint Assistance Strategy (G-JAS) midterm review (2009) found that more than 95% of activities in the sector, and nearly all capital investment, was donor financed, with projects being the predominant modality. The country study, found that the Government of Ghana (GoG) appeared content to allow the sector to be financed and led by Development Partners (DPs), and without more effective GoG leadership it was questionable whether the sector would be able to scale up funding and reach the water and sanitation targets. In an attempt to address the various challenges of the sector, donors had advocated for a rural water and sanitation Sector Wide Approach (SWAp.)

The SWAp had been on the drawing board since 2004, and was also recognised in the National Water Policy (GOG 2007). In 2009 a SWAp roadmap was developed to map out what needed to be done to put a SWAp in place for the sector by 2010. Sector support remained almost entirely a bilateral affair (between sector agencies and DPs). While most players expressed strong verbal support for harmonisation, progress was mixed. Some government officials were lukewarm towards the harmonisation agenda because the status quo allowed them to 'shop around' among the different DPs to address different requirements. There was also a lack of demonstrated commitment at the senior political level to achieving harmonisation. Nevertheless, there was a genuine desire by some donors to move towards a more genuinely harmonised and coordinated approach. This had taken place through ad-hoc pooling of funds between

some donors. Examples of the pooled funding included Danida, KfW and DFID co-operation in financing the '3 Districts Water Supply Project' and the 'Damanko-Kpasa Piped Water Project'. Both Danida and KfW had provided seed money for the establishment of a national spare parts distribution system. KfW and IDA had also jointly co-financed borehole drilling in the Western, Ashanti and Northern regions. A document produced by the DPs under the Water and Sanitation Sector Working Group that provided an update on the budget and targets for 2011 noted that coordination, harmonisation and alignment needed attention and there was an urgent need to develop a comprehensive Sector Strategic Development Plan (SSDP) with a monitoring and evaluation framework. There was agreement by both the GoG and DPs to take concrete steps to move from a project-based to a programme-based approach in line with the SWAp roadmap.

An **organisational change process** in CWSA was initiated by the Water Directorate of the Ministry of Water Resources, Works and Housing (MWRWH) with financial support from Danida. The change required of CWSA was that it move away from its role as a project implementation agency to its initially intended role as a facilitator, supporter and regulator of the rural sector. In response to the change process, CWSA appointed an internal change management team (CMT) to drive the change process within the organisation. With the assistance of a local consultant, CWSA undertook a series of training activities with a view to sensitising all staff in the organisation and to internalising the process. The institutional reassessment resulted in full integration of CWSA into the public service, restructuring of the various units and development of the administrative procedures and a manual governing the operations of the Agency. However, the objective of refocusing CWSA on its core mandate of facilitation and regulation to ensure sustainable service delivery could not be fully implemented. A critical flaw was the lack of ownership of the process by CWSA itself and inadequate government financial support to sustain the change management interventions outside the initial project support from Danida.



## 2 Effecting whole system change in a complex environment

### 2.1 THE TRIPLE-S APPROACH TO SECTOR CHANGE AND STRENGTHENING IN GHANA

The scale and complexity of the rural water sub-sector in Ghana, and the seemingly intractable nature of the problems it faced – with competing priorities, political influence, lack of resources and un-coordinated organisations – made the prospect of positive, systemic change seem almost impossible. And yet of course this ‘real life’ complexity, or messiness, is precisely what faces many organisations as they seek to achieve positive change in sectors all over the world.

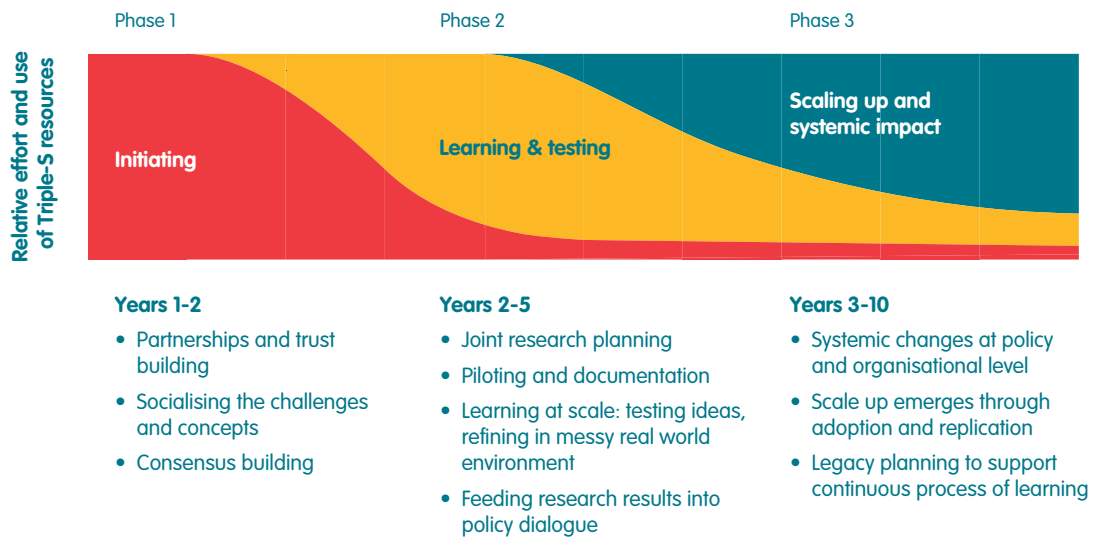
In dealing with complex environments it is clear that no one single action, or indeed any one single actor, is able to unlock these dynamics and achieve

meaningful change in a linear fashion. From the outset this was recognised by IRC which took the explicit approach of working in partnership at multiple levels, and with a particular emphasis on collective learning and reflection, based on its work with learning alliances<sup>4</sup>.

It was also clearly recognised from the outset that change processes take time and therefore IRC predicted a **ten-year time frame for change**, although direct funding for the Triple-S initiative was only made available for the first six years. A further three years of funding has now been secured from the Conrad N. Hilton Foundation.

The progression of the initiative can be broken down roughly into three main phases (see Figure 2).

**FIGURE 2** TRIPLE-S GHANA: PHASED APPROACH TO CHANGE AND SECTOR STRENGTHENING



<sup>4</sup> See Smits, S., Moriarty, P. and Sijbesma, C. (eds) (2007). Learning alliances: Scaling up innovations in water, sanitation and hygiene. Delft, The Netherlands, IRC

## 2.2 PHASE 1: INITIATING

Much of the first year or so of Triple-S in Ghana was about establishing partnerships with key organisations, ensuring government leadership, and heightening awareness of the sustainability challenge.

CWSA was judged to be best positioned to provide the necessary leadership in developing innovations, engaging other stakeholders, and ensuring up-take and was therefore approached to host Triple-S. Under the hosting arrangement, Triple-S staff sat within CWSA's offices and CWSA provided operational and content input into the initiative. Being embedded within CWSA allowed day-to-day interaction and encouraged CWSA ownership, with Triple-S staff becoming part of the team, whilst at the same time retaining a degree of neutrality precisely because of their not being directly involved in service provision.

Advisory and technical committees were established by the Ministry of Water Resources, Works and Housing (MWRWH) to provide technical input into the action research agenda, policy direction and scaling-up. It was agreed with the technical and advisory committees to anchor the initiative at three main levels, namely national, regional and district, to maximise its impact and legacy. To this end, the Northern, Volta and Brong Ahafo regions were selected to represent the three ecological zones of Ghana and to bring to bear a mix of experiences with rural water project implementation. In consultation with the respective regions, Akatsi district in the Volta region, Sunyani West in the Brong Ahafo region and East Gonja in the Northern region were selected for the pilot work. Triple-S learning facilitators were stationed in the regional capitals and operated from CWSA regional office. From this base, they were able to form close relationships with members of the District Water and Sanitation Teams/District Works Department, the administrative staff of local government, the regional CWSA staff and other sector stakeholders in the region.

Underlying all this partnership building was work to create awareness of the problem of sustainability and catalyse the desire to do something about it within organisations such as CWSA and District Assemblies. While technical staff were aware that failing infrastructure was an issue, it was less well known at the political level where concern was squarely focussed on expanding coverage to the unserved. That so few of those supposedly served were receiving an acceptable level of service according to national standards came as a surprise to everyone. It was not only important to move the issues of low

functionality and low services up the agenda, but also to help partners to see a clear path to correcting it.

The views expressed by Mr. Gaze, Director Technical Services, CWSA and Mr. Atsu Dartey, Director of Administration and Human Resources, sums this up: 'the realisation of the sustainability challenge was there prior to Triple-S, and CWSA had sustainability requirements in their standards. But CWSA was not progressing in coverage. There was drilling, re-drilling and rehabilitation of existing facilities. The problem was simple: we were doing the same thing year after year and not getting any better result. This was clear evidence of wasted investment. There was therefore need to drive the internal change of the way we had operated to ensure that investments were not wasted. IRC then triggered the need for the internal change to move from talking about the problem to finding solutions and actualising the thoughts, ideas and concepts by researching and learning and introducing improvements to arrest the situation.'

Sector diagnoses and dialogue processes led by CWSA with Triple-S support helped to unearth critical bottlenecks to sustainable water services and foster consensus on collective actions for addressing them. Triple-S studies generated evidence that helped stakeholders to interrogate the underlying assumptions, beliefs and values behind how water services were delivered in the past.

### Some of the key bottlenecks identified during this phase:

#### **Incomplete and largely unavailable sector**

**operational documents:** Although an overarching programme framework was in place, the National Community Water and Sanitation Programme (NCWSP 1994), effective implementation had been constrained by the lack of commonly agreed tools and instruments. For example the Strategy and Project Implementation Manual (PIM) linked to the NCWSP was incomplete and largely unavailable. In the absence of such instruments, districts were left without guidance and donors and implementing NGOs had no common framework to direct their efforts and investments.

#### **Limited utilisation of government procedures and**

**systems:** Different DPs applied different sets of procurement modalities, technical standards, monitoring and reporting requirements and calendars, accounting systems and other administrative arrangements. DPs attributed their limited utilisation of government procedures and systems to a number of hurdles, including

cumbersomeness of the bidding process, weak capacity to manage procurement and perceived fiduciary risk.

**No sub-sector regulatory framework:** Adding to the general confusion had been, until relatively recently<sup>5</sup>, the absence of any regulatory framework for the rural sub-sector, which again allowed a relatively free hand to both external donors and implementers, as well as local governments.

**Fragmented interventions:** Harmonising investment plans among the various sub-sector agencies and with other ministries continued to be a challenge, despite concerted attempts by the Ministry of Water Resources, Works and Housing to address the problem and various commitments in national policy and development cooperation partnership agreements.

**Weak capacity of District Assemblies:** A key element of the NCWSP is the central role of District Assemblies (DAs) in the delivery of water and sanitation facilities to communities in line with the government decentralisation policy. However, District Assemblies' capacity and technical knowledge of water issues had not developed as rapidly as expected, thereby limiting their ability to provide long term support to Water and Sanitation Management Committees in managing water facilities.

**Divergent definitions of monitoring indicators:** Even though the NCWSP included an explicit sustainability objective, the sector lacked a tradition of monitoring the sustainability of services. As a result, there was little agreement on what the priorities were and how to address them. Sector actors often applied divergent definitions, monitoring indicators and methodologies in their work, making it difficult to harmonise sector data or to piece together a clear comprehensive picture. A District Monitoring and Evaluation System (DiMES) was set up by CWSA after several attempts at establishing project-based monitoring systems had failed, but in reality the system was only partially populated and not rolled out to all districts. The system also did not include fields for reporting the dynamics of service functionality and had no framework for monitoring the service cycle. Despite these divergent systems and lack of evidence, the general assumption was that the solution to the problem of rural water access was to expand infrastructure to remaining populations through a major infusion of funds.

## 2.3 PHASE 2: LEARNING AND TESTING

Phase 2 homed in on the weak points in the sector identified in Phase 1. It focused on specific actions to improve sector performance and test potential solutions in the districts with the aim of providing evidence that would enable the sector to make informed decisions.

Three desired outcomes were agreed upon with CWSA and other sector stakeholders:

- Rural water sub-sector monitoring, planning and financing in pilot districts and at national level is guided by clearly defined indicators, models and guidelines and frameworks for service delivery.
- A learning agenda is strengthened and service delivery concepts, policies and best practices in rural water are being promoted through strategic partnerships and learning platforms.
- Rural water services delivery is based on nationally agreed sector operational documents and guidelines and government provides leadership in coordinating the subsector. (An important part of this work has been supporting processes for adapting the sector operational framework including revision of sector operational documents and guidelines.)

A broad agenda was mapped out to achieve these outcomes, with concrete activities and research around learning alliances and development of a sector strategy and guidelines. To support the first outcome, stakeholders also agreed on three potential solutions to specific bottlenecks that were deemed promising enough to test: a model for monitoring water services; a comprehensive planning, budgeting and predictive financing framework that includes the life-cycle costs of services and asset management; and an Short Messaging Service (SMS) system for reporting water system breakdowns and sourcing repair services (see Box 1, next page). These have been applied in the form of experiments in the three pilot districts to establish their effectiveness and efficiency.

It has been of critical importance to Triple-S in Ghana to embed the work of the action research – the experiments – into the broader sector dynamics and dialogues, so that they do not remain as isolated efforts, however interesting or relevant in their own right. To this end, Triple-S has put a strong emphasis – and committed significant resources – to both documenting and communicating the results of its work (and that of others) and to facilitating sector

<sup>5</sup> CWSA Regulation 2011 (LI 2007) was passed in 2011 to regulate the rural water sub-sector.

**BOX I SUMMARY OF TRIPLE-S EXPERIMENTS AND RESEARCH STUDIES IN GHANA**

**Water service monitoring:** An experiment to develop and test a framework of indicators for functionality and service level monitoring; as well as the application of ICT tools for data collection and analysis.

**Life cycle costs and asset management:** An experiment to develop and test a framework for planning and budgeting that addresses all water service delivery related costs and a predictive tool for water system major repair and upgrading.

**Water system operational management:** An experiment to test a community-public-private partnership scheme and SMS model for reporting water system breakdown, and sourcing repair services and to document the critical factors that affect service downtime.

**Sector learning and adaptive management:** A study to assess and document the effectiveness of learning alliance approach and the significance of the learning alliance platforms at national and regional levels towards learning and adaptive management.

**Harmonisation and alignment:** A study to appraise the cohesiveness of water sector practice in Ghana, with the view to fostering greater consensus around sector programming, and improving donor alignment with state procedures and systems.

For further details on experiments in Ghana see: <http://www.ircwash.org/news/rural-water-supply-experiments>

dialogue around these experiences.

The work to define Service Delivery Indicators (SDIs) is a good example. The SDIs were developed by the CWSA Monitoring and Evaluation Working Group, in close collaboration with Triple-S, based on the existing national guidelines, manuals and model by-laws. They were tested between 2010 and 2013 in the three Triple-S pilot districts. Results were shared and validated with a cross-section of sector stakeholders, including the District Assemblies of the pilot districts and relevant government ministries, sector networks and working groups. The SDI development process also built on earlier work of WASHCost to develop scalable methodologies that create a basis for measuring the costs and service level (functionality) rates for WASH Services<sup>6</sup>.

The service monitoring framework was tested and applied for two rounds of data collection in 2011 and 2013. Over one million water users in 13 districts have now benefited from water service monitoring by district staff with technical support from CWSA and using the SDIs. Results from this monitoring have led local government to repair 20 broken down systems benefiting some 50,000 water users and to create 147 water and sanitation management teams to improve the water service provision at the community level.

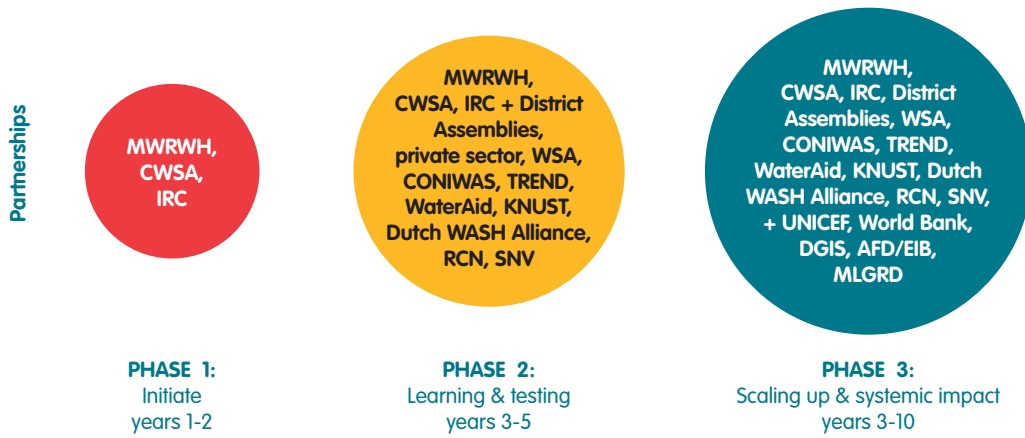
**2.4 PHASE 3: SCALE UP AND SYSTEMIC IMPACT**

Phase 3, where the initiative is now, targets systemic sector changes required to institutionalise and scale-up new ideas and pathways to providing sustained water services. The sector documents – the National Community Water and Sanitation Strategy (NCWSS), the Project Implementation Manual (PIM), the District Operational Manual (DOM), the Framework for Assessing and Monitoring Rural and Small Town Water Supply Services in Ghana and its How-To-Do Guide – were launched in March of 2014 and are now in the process of being rolled out.

Because the experiments have been collectively defined and carried out, scaling up has been a natural outgrowth of success. Service delivery indicators and service monitoring have been expanded to 13 new districts in the Northern and Upper East regions and the districts are using the resulting data for planning and to inform remedial actions. A further 131 districts in 7 out of Ghana’s 10 regions are in line to scale up the indicators. Other experiments such as the SMS system for reporting faults are still being tested and refined. Progress has not been linear. There has been a fair amount of overlap, backtracking, and leapfrogging.

<sup>6</sup> See WASHCost (2008- 2013) <http://www.washcost.info>

**FIGURE 3** EVOLUTION OF THE TRIPLE-S PARTNERSHIP IN GHANA



The size and scope of the partnership has evolved over time and across the three phases (see figure 3 above), starting with the core relationship between CWSA and IRC and growing until it is now reaching most organisations in the sub-sector in Ghana).

**2.5 SUPPORTING INSTITUTIONAL CHANGE**

Throughout all three phases, Triple-S devoted much time and attention to supporting institutional change within CWSA and the district assemblies. The shift in focus from infrastructure to services was a major transition and required change at the sector and organisational level. At the sector level, regular reflection meetings enabled stakeholders to assess signs of change together and review the effectiveness of delivery methods. The joint tracking of the signs of change not only contributed to joint learning, but also served as a means to sustain sector interest, focus stakeholders on the end state, and foster ownership over the process.

At the organisational level, CWSA had a unique place in the project as a partner and also the main agency expected to drive the change agenda. Internal reflection meetings were held with CWSA on the organisational behaviours and system changes required within CWSA to support the change process. These meetings were facilitated by the External Learning Facilitator, who is an expert in organisational and system change.

These internal reflections were critical in keeping CWSA in tune with the change process and allaying fears, uncertainty and resistance associated with the transition. It also enabled identification and development of practical decision-support tools required for them to focus on their core mandate of facilitation and setting sector standards and guidelines and ensuring adherence. The project supported CWSA to revise their corporate plan, which included revision of their mission statement to reflect sustainability



### 3 Applying the collective impact framework to Triple-S Ghana

Because of the number of activities and actors involved, and the web of interdependent relationships and incentives that drive them, water and sanitation service delivery is inherently complex. So it is not enough that one individual or organisation begins to perform better or that an improvement is made in some technical aspect of service delivery. The whole system of individuals, organisations, technologies and the institutions (political, financial, and regulatory) that link them needs to work and work more effectively.

From its inception, the Triple-S initiative has sought to deal with complexity by allowing an emergent process of learning and reflection, and by supporting collective activities and encouraging government leadership and national ownership as central to the process. Because of this, no detailed planning or rigid log frames were prepared at the start and instead country teams utilised outcomes based management to guide progress towards the agreed goal of sustainable service delivery at scale. Specific actions and steps emerged from the continuous process of reflection and learning, and at times reacted in an ‘opportunistic’ way to events in the country (and internationally) as they unfolded.

This is not to say that no planning took place or that the process itself lacked rigour or has not been monitored. Learning and measuring progress in Triple-S took place in two areas referred to as ‘narratives’. Put simply, narrative one tells the story about sector change towards sustainability, while

narrative two is about the process to enable that change. The lessons emerging from narrative two – how do you go about creating large-scale positive change in a complex sector – are potentially more valuable and have wider application than those from narrative one around the mechanics of creating a working service delivery system, which are quite context specific.

Through its broader work and thinking on complexity and whole systems change processes in rural water sub-sectors in different countries, Triple-S has investigated a number of frameworks that can be used to influence and explain change. One such framework is termed *collective impact*, which emerged from experiences in the USA education sector struggling to reverse the long-term trends of low student performance and high drop-out rates<sup>7</sup>. Researchers from FSG<sup>8</sup> captured the experiences of a collective effort in the education district in Cincinnati and surrounding schools in northern Kentucky and documented a remarkable success story in achieving results at scale. In their analysis of these, and similar experiences, they identified a number of core elements or conditions that appear to be critical to working in this collaborative way. These were subsequently described as the five conditions of collective impact (see table 1). The premise underlying collective impact is that in complex and interdependent environments, individual actors, however large, will struggle to achieve change or reach scale.

TABLE 1 THE FIVE CONDITIONS OF COLLECTIVE IMPACT

<b>Common agenda</b>	All participants have a shared vision for change including a common understanding of the problem and a joint approach to solving it through agreed upon actions
<b>Shared measurement</b>	Collecting data and measuring results consistently across all participants ensures efforts remain aligned and participants hold each other accountable
<b>Mutually reinforcing activities</b>	Participant activities must be differentiated while still being coordinated through a mutually reinforcing plan of action
<b>Continuous communication</b>	Consistent and open communication is needed across the many players to build trust, assure mutual objectives, and create common motivation
<b>Backbone support</b>	Creating and managing collective impact requires a separate organisation(s) with staff and a specific set of skills to serve as the backbone for the entire initiative and coordinate participating organisations and agencies

Source: Hanleybrown, Kania and Kramer; 2012

<sup>7</sup> See [http://www.ssireview.org/articles/entry/collective\\_impact](http://www.ssireview.org/articles/entry/collective_impact)

<sup>8</sup> See <http://www.fsg.org/OurApproach/CollectiveImpact.aspx>

The Triple-S initiative in Ghana did not set out to explicitly operate within this framework of collective impact. It drew instead on a body of IRC's existing concepts and approaches, most importantly **learning alliances** and action research, and built on other mutually reinforcing interventions of the IRC Ghana programme. Nonetheless this framework is useful in capturing the complexity of the work in Ghana and in reflecting the dynamic relationships between different sets of actors. The following sections describe how the five conditions for collective impact have been experienced by Triple-S in Ghana and the results of its work, citing specific evidence of change.

### 3.1 DEFINING A COMMON AGENDA

Triple-S in Ghana spent much time and energy in the early years on introducing and supporting a dialogue on the shared vision of sustainable services at scale.

Gaining a common understanding of the problem took place under Phase 1 and coalesced around the growing levels of poor functionality and low levels of service in rural communities revealed by Triple-S and WASHCost research. The end of project evaluation of Triple-S in Ghana confirmed that district assembly staff viewed Triple-S and, in particular, the monitoring data on hand pump failure collected and shared through the project as a 'wake up call.' The IRC 2012-2016 mid-term review established that even though CWSA had sustainability requirements in their standards prior to Triple-S, IRC through Triple-S and WASHCost provided the push and helped to spur the district assemblies and other sector stakeholders to buy in to a common agenda for action.

Triple-S worked with stakeholders to unpack the problem. This process exposed deeper challenges and dynamics, including acceptance that the existing notion of success or 'progress' based on access was not adequate: the goal is not providing first time access, but rather sustained service delivery.

To expose the challenges and identify solutions and the actions required around both, Triple-S and CWSA conducted a series of joint analyses and diagnostic studies to understand the underlying causes of poor sustainability and to develop a vision for sustainable water service delivery that builds on experiences in the past (IRC-CWSA, 2012 and 2013). These included investigating how the project cycle had been implemented across different projects to assess the relevance of the phases of the cycle and the impact on long-term sustainability and an analysis of the management mechanisms in place and implications

for functionality and service levels. These studies were instrumental in capturing and documenting the differences in approaches and the lack of coordination.

These, and other investigations, were jointly agreed upon and supported by key sector players and facilitated by IRC, acting in the role of 'backbone' organisation. The findings provided convincing and rigorous data to underscore the relevance of the concept of service functionality, and the relevant 'ammunition' with which to negotiate more effectively with funders and with the government.

The information gathered also provided a basis to question some of the underlying assumptions, values and beliefs behind how the concept of the Community Ownership and Management model has been implemented and to jointly examine whether the sector was applying the right approaches in delivering water services. These reflections on whether the sector was 'doing the right things right' were instrumental in establishing a compelling reason for change and jolting people out of their inertia. Issues that became central in these reflections included the number of competing approaches to delivery of water services, the focus of sector monitoring, how sector planning and finance had been conducted, and the role of district assemblies in delivery water services.

Armed with a better understanding of the problem, stakeholders were able to identify and agree on a suite of practical interventions that would strengthen sector coordination and provide a framework for on-going action, such as: mapping out a sector strategic plan that actors could unite behind and align to; developing a framework of indicators for monitoring services; developing mechanisms for comprehensive planning that covers the life-cycle costs of water services and water infrastructure asset management; developing a mechanism for enhanced public, private and community partnerships for post-construction technical services; investigating the drivers of and barriers to sector harmonisation to foster consensus around sector management and improving donor alignment with national systems and procedures; and completing and publishing sector operational documents to harmonise the divergent approaches to delivery of water services.

The joint approach to solutions has been greatly facilitated by a reporting regime with short feedback loops – which included monthly meetings of the technical sub-committees supporting the work of the experiments; quarterly meetings of the CWSA

Technical Committee; bi-annual meetings of the Triple-S Advisory Committee; bi-annual hosting of the National Learning Alliance Platform; annual reflection meetings with CWSA, pilot districts and regions and sector stakeholders; annual participation in the Mole NGO conference, and participation in the biennial Ghana Water Forum. All these engagements ensured that influential stakeholders were involved in the on-going work of sector change and their interest sustained throughout the change process.

Engagements between the IRC-CWSA team and stakeholders are discussed in more detail in section 3.4.

### 3.2 SHARED MEASUREMENT SYSTEM

Over the course of the last five years there has been an evolution in shared measurement taking place in Ghana with the most significant change in the common measure of progress of water supply through the testing and development of a set of Service Delivery Indicators (SDIs) as part of Triple-S work in the pilot districts. This has also included the refinement of a methodology to assess and monitor the national agreed standards for water services in Ghana, namely: reliability, distance, coverage, quality and quantity. Together these have been adopted as the new measure of the overall quality of a water service in rural areas (CWSA, 2014). Monitoring is carried out by district assembly (local government) staff with technical support from CWSA. The importance of this change should not be understated; monitoring in Ghana for the rural water sub-sector has gone from a piecemeal assessment of functionality, to a much more comprehensive measure of quality of service over time, which is being scaled up rapidly across the country. It is interesting to note that creating shared frameworks for measurement emerged independently as a critical area of work in all Triple-S (and WASHCost) focus countries.<sup>9</sup>

### 3.3 MUTUALLY REINFORCING ACTIVITIES

Since its inception Triple-S has worked on a range of activities together with CWSA, partner districts and an increasing number of other organisations that have started to join the 'service delivery movement' (see figure 2 above). Original planning was directly informed by a joint mapping exercise carried out in late 2010 and early 2011 with national and district representatives and service providers (District Water and Sanitation Committees), implementing NGOs and

the main development partner organisations. This exercise used an analytical framework developed by Triple-S<sup>10</sup> and resulted in a broad landscaping of which actors were working on different aspects of sustainable service across three main strategic areas:

- support for a service delivery approach,
- building learning and adaptive capacity, and
- improving harmonisation and alignment.

Over time and with the growing credibility of CWSA as a sector leader and its support for service delivery, the initial set of actions outlined under 3.1 above evolved to become a more coordinated set of activities broadly contributing to the shared vision of improving sustainability and reaching scaled up populations.

IRC started out with the explicit position that the initiative alone could not effect change across all aspects of the rural water sub-sector and that it would require partnerships and champions to push through its change objective. Over the course of the project, government leadership behind Triple-S grew and became more vocal, which in turn attracted a growing number of organisations behind a shared vision of sustainable services. In broad terms these activities are designed to strengthen government systems.

Many collective actions and mutually reinforcing activities have evolved in pursuance of sector changes in policy, legal, institutional, financial, and governance frameworks to drive the shift from focus on infrastructure to services. At the policy level, the government of Ghana adopted the Service Delivery Approach in the Sanitation and Water for All (SWA) High Level Meeting (HLM) commitment for 2012. UNICEF through support from the Dutch Government is implementing the Accelerated SWA initiative which includes strengthening the enabling policy environment for delivering sustainable water services through actions such as the development and signing of a Sustainability Compact with the Government of Ghana and periodic sustainability checks to foster dialogue, partnerships and accountability for sustainability measures.

A number of mutually reinforcing measures have been initiated to improve efficiency in sector partnerships and greater alignment behind government policies

<sup>9</sup> Burkina Faso, Ghana and Uganda for Triple-S and additionally Mozambique and India for WASHCost.

<sup>10</sup> See 'A principle-based approach to sustainable rural water services at scale: moving from vision to action', Triple-S/IRC, Working Paper No. 1, 2012 <http://www.ircwash.org/resources/principle-based-approach-sustainable-rural-water-services-scale-moving-vision-action>



and procedures. The Ministry of Water Resources, Works and Housing with support from the European Commission, IRC and other development partners drafted the Sector Strategic Development Plan (SSDP) in 2012 to provide a framework around which sector interventions will coalesce. The SSDP provides a vision and clear strategies to provide sustainable water services to all people in Ghana by 2025. The SSDP, along with the revised National Strategy for Community Water and Sanitation and sector operational documents published in 2014, are making it easier for sector actors to coordinate their activities and contribute effectively to the common goal of sustainable services.

The work of Triple-S to improve coordination and alignment was complemented by various other initiatives. CIDA in collaboration with other development partners undertook a comprehensive risk assessment to inform agreement with the Government of Ghana on a future sector SWAP. The World Bank also financed a study through CWSA to establish a database on NGOs in the WASH sector to facilitate coordination of NGO activities in the sector.

To improve sector performance monitoring, better planning and sector investment, the World Bank is supporting the Ministry of Water Resources, Works and Housing to establish a sector information system including facilitating agreement on a core set of indicators for monitoring and reporting on sector performance. In addition, the Dutch Government, the World Bank, UNICEF, IRC and SNV are supporting CWSA to improve its system for monitoring water services and to establish an inventory of all existing water facilities and their functionality and service levels in 131 districts in Ghana.

To improve overall performance of the water sector learning and knowledge management, the Resource Centre Network (RCN) which hosts the national level learning alliance platform in partnership with Triple-S and 32 organisations, extended learning alliances to three more regions in Ghana. In addition, to replicate learning in the sanitation subsector, UNICEF and the Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development in cooperation with a consortium (IRC, KNUST, RCN and TREND) are implementing the Sanitation Knowledge Management Initiative to document best practices for sharing and learning including establishment of district learning alliances.

Furthermore, UNICEF and the Ministry of Water Resources, Works and Housing led the process to apply a WASH bottleneck analysis tool for assessing

drivers of and barriers to delivering sustainable water services. Some collaborative research initiatives were also undertaken to provide decision support tools for adaptation of existing practices: the WASHTech project developed the technology assessment framework to support sector decisions on introduction of new technology, the Water and Sanitation for Africa inter-governmental agency conducted a looking back study to assess system functionality and underlying causes of failure, World Vision International is contributing to the sector debate on sustainability through initiatives in the Great Afram Plain region of Ghana, the WASH Alliance Ghana undertook a community empowerment study and developed a sustainability framework for monitoring based on its FIETS (Financial, Institutional, Environmental, Technical and Social) sustainability framework.

To further deepen the work of Triple-S, the Conrad N. Hilton Foundation is providing resources for further research work on institutionalising a service delivery approach in the three pilot districts and to develop internal capacity within CWSA and Hilton's grantees in Ghana (WaterAid, Safe Water Network, UNICEF and World Vision International) to scale up Triple-S in ten districts of operation.

### 3.4 CONTINUOUS COMMUNICATION THROUGH LEARNING ALLIANCES

Communications around learning and reflection has been central to Triple-S's approach to change from the beginning – largely guided by IRC's work on learning alliances.

The learning alliance approach as developed by IRC explicitly aims at tackling the complex area of institutional behaviour change that is required to drive collective impact and to implement and replicate new models. It is a process of organising multiple stakeholders (key individuals, groups, organisations and projects) to undertake joint research and learning, and to implement concerted actions aimed at addressing commonly identified problems towards a desired outcome in which each participant has a stake. A learning alliance is composed of platforms at different institutional levels consisting of individuals and organisations.

The learning alliance in Ghana includes a large number of inter-connected learning alliance platforms at the national level, and a relatively small set of emerging platforms at the regional and district levels. The platforms bring together representatives

from government, civil society, universities, research institutions, private sector actors and development partners to jointly explore solutions and innovations, and agree on actions to achieve identified changes and improvements in the sector.

**National level:** Monthly meetings of the national level learning alliance platform are organised by the Resource Centre Network (RCN) Ghana. They bring together almost all key sector stakeholders to share research results, new technologies and approaches. The learning alliance platform was initiated by IRC in partnership with the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, CWSA, WaterAid and TREND in 2002. IRC funds the RCN secretariat from its core funding and with contributions from projects, while individual organisations pay for the cost of hosting an event on the platform. Triple-S hosted four of the monthly meetings to conceptualise and determine the pathways to piloting an approach to service delivery in Ghana, define a core set of indicators for monitoring service and functionality, review the project cycle and its impact on sustainability of water services, and assess the findings of service monitoring and its implications for policy and practice.

The Triple-S engagement also extended to other complementary national level learning and policy dialogue and coordination platforms such as the annual Mole Conference organised by CONIWAS for civil society and NGOs to advocate for policy changes and the adoption of new approaches; the Ghana Water Forum organised by the Ministry of Water Resources, Works and Housing to assess sector performance and reach consensus on key policy issues; the National Environmental and Sanitation Conference organised by the Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development to review progress on sanitation and share new approaches; and the Government of Ghana and Development Partners water and sanitation sector working group for policy dialogue and coordination.

**Regional level:** There are three regional platforms that were established by CWSA/Triple-S in collaboration with the Resource Centre Network. The regional learning alliances are supported by 32 core institutional members, including government, DPs, NGOs and academic institutions. Technical support for facilitation of the meetings has largely come from Triple-S with members paying for the cost of meetings hosted by individual organisations. Triple-S has hosted the regional platforms six times at which

district assemblies benefited from the sharing of service monitoring results and information on how these are informing planning and investment decisions in pilot districts. These experiences have sparked debate on what is needed to improve the current situation and encouraged participants to question whether the underlying assumptions behind the norms and standards are realistic. The insights from the regional debates have contributed to national debates on service functionality and provoked a shift in sector thinking and provided alternate solutions in defining the future framework of monitoring in the water sector of Ghana.

**District level:** The district level learning alliance platforms are being established in the three pilot districts together with the respective local governments and some local NGOs. These are at formative stages and yet to be firmly rooted. However in the absence of fully-fledged district learning platforms, Triple-S has capitalised on existing local legislative and citizen engagement platforms such as district assembly and sub-committee meetings to conceptualise and share results of the pilot work. These have informed district level dialogues on improving quality of water services and are leading to more remedial actions such as rehabilitation of broken down systems and training of water and sanitation management committees (WSMTs) by local governments.

Largely, the learning alliance approach has provided a vehicle for sector stakeholders at the respective levels of engagement to cooperate, learn from each other's experiences and develop a model for rural water service delivery in a step-by-step action research process. Through these processes the underlying assumptions, beliefs and values behind the delivery of water services were questioned based on data and evidence generated from research activities. Additionally, the process of learning and reflection has helped to analyse and address obstacles and objections, to galvanise sector stakeholders' interest in institutionalising and scaling up successful mechanisms across the country, and to realign partnerships around such objectives. These cascading levels of linked collaboration create a bottom-up and top down flow of information and engagement that shape ideas and makes the action research and experiment process rigorous yet flexible in efforts to deal with emerging problems.

An independent learning study<sup>11</sup> commissioned by IRC in 2014 to establish the significance of the learning alliance approach in influencing learning and adaptive capacity in Ghana's rural water sub-sector affirmed that the Ghana WASH sector has become vibrant in experience sharing, documentation and dissemination but recommended institutionalising a guiding model for a more systematic process of building up and deploying knowledge for policy, programming, and practice. The study also recommended that a sustainable financing arrangement in the long term for the Resource Centre Network and the learning alliance platforms will have to be established to enable the Resource Centre Network to hire competent personnel to undertake the necessary research, trend analysis and consultancy services that would strengthen its capacity to function as the home and manager of learning and knowledge products in the WASH sector.

IRC also established a series of **annual reflection meetings** to assess progress and to share and discuss emerging issues, starting with the core partners and later extending these to a wider group of sector stakeholders. Part of the purpose of such meetings was to review the initiative specifically. Four annual meetings were held with CWSA staff (senior management, technical and administrative units and regional directors), and from 2011 onwards more stakeholders were added, including:

- staff of District Works Departments and District Planning and Coordinating Units from the three pilot districts;
- CWSA Regional Directors and project focal persons in pilot regions;
- development partners, such as AfD, CIDA, World Bank and UNICEF;
- NGOs, such as the Coalition of NGOs in Water and Sanitation (CONIWAS), Water and Sanitation for Africa, WaterAid, SNV and Dutch WASH Alliance;
- private sector companies, such as SkyFox; and
- staff and partners from other projects, such as WASHTech and WASHCost.

Fourteen such learning or reflection meetings, involving some 120 people, were held during the course of the project.

#### Informal communication and networking

As well as the formal learning platforms and times set aside for communication, Triple-S has devoted

significant energy and effort to on-going informal communication and networking between partners and with a wide range of stakeholders both inside and outside the WASH sector. This has been a vital set of activities for building trust, shifting thinking, and influencing practice – both at national level (primarily through the IRC Country Director) and at regional level through the Regional Learning Facilitators. It is difficult to quantify the amount of time or resources spent on these types of activities, but it is a significant investment and a critical one.

#### Political and executive champions

IRC made an explicit attempt to identify and work with influential political and executive leaders from inside and outside the WASH sector who have been able to push the issues and vision and keep them front and centre in national (and international) dialogues. The primary individuals and allies in this regard have been:

- The then Minister for Water Resources Works and Housing, Hon. Alban Bagbin
- The then Government Policy Advisor, Office of the President, Dr. Sulley Gariba
- The Chief Executive Officer, CWSA, Mr. Clement Bugase
- The Chief Director of the Ministry of Water Resources Works and Housing, Alhaji Ziblim Yakubu
- The ex-Director Technical Services, CWSA, Mr. R.K.D Van-Ess

Even though CWSA is not strictly speaking a 'knowledge organization', it has demonstrated throughout the life of the Triple-S project its willingness to engage and actively participate in a learning process and champion a service delivery agenda at the national and regional levels. This has been possible through the able leadership of Mr. Clement Bugase, the Chief Executive of CWSA; Mr. Emmanuel Gaze, the Director of Technical Services and CWSA Focal Person of Triple-S; Mr Atsu Dartey, the Director of Administration and Human Resources; and Mr. William Nunoo, Director Finance. They drove the project implementation within CWSA from the head office. The CWSA Regional Directors of Northern ( Mr. Ofori -McCarthy), Brong Ahafo (Mr. E.F.K. Boateng) and Volta Regions (the late Mr. Wigbert Dogoli) have been instrumental in driving learning within the regions.

<sup>11</sup> See <http://www.ircwash.org/resources/learning-alliance-approach-final-report>

### 3.5 BACKBONE SUPPORT ORGANISATION

IRC Ghana has been providing long-term technical guidance, facilitation and ‘behind the scenes’ support to CWSA, and by extension to many other organisations, through Triple-S since the beginning of 2009. IRC is a global organisation with long-experience in supporting sector processes, but the Triple-S initiative has afforded it a unique opportunity to do this in a well-resourced manner and at scale. IRC is headquartered in the Netherlands, but has a legal representation in Ghana and was active and well-respected in the sector prior to Triple-S.

The backbone support was provided by a mix of IRC staff assigned to the project and Triple-S project staff hired specifically for the project and hosted by CWSA. A much larger number of people also provided support to the project on a part-time basis, including both Ghana-based staff and international staff. The Triple-S team in Ghana was made up of:

- 1 team leader who also doubled as the IRC Ghana Country Director
- 1 lead researcher
- 1 national learning facilitator
- 3 regional learning facilitators, who were located in the CWSA regional offices in each of the three target regions
- 2 administration and finance positions

More detail on the type and level of support can be found in Annex 1.

In its role as the backbone organisation, IRC Ghana has carried out the following types of functions:

- facilitation of dialogue among sector stakeholders;
- management and execution of action research and data collection;
- coaching staff from CWSA and other national, regional and district levels of government, including capacity development and training in service delivery concepts, life-cycle cost approach, and asset management;
- documentation, packaging and dissemination of knowledge products;
- convening and networking and enabling the coordination and collaboration process;
- providing (small amounts of) un-earmarked funds to support critical one-off events and small pieces of work and incremental cost of CWSA; and

- providing technical expertise – national and international.

While IRC was instrumental in getting the change process off the ground, CWSA has been critical to its continuance. CWSA’s legitimacy and convening power to rally the sector around a common agenda helped establish sector confidence in the process and sustain commitment. Furthermore, the physical presence of CWSA at various levels of the service delivery chain enabled it to serve as a springboard for linking stakeholders at all levels. It could be said that part of the work of Triple-S has been enabling CWSA to effectively take up many backbone organisation functions.

As the backbone organisation IRC has deliberately taken a view that change is non-linear and long-term. This means its role is one of an ‘outsider-insider’ providing support in a flexible and iterative way. The permanent presence of IRC in Ghana has allowed for day-to-day interaction with partners, which means shared problem-solving and continuous dialogue. This long-term, stable approach is the antithesis to the short-term international ‘expert’ coming in at a single point in time, completing a study and then leaving with recommendations for others to take up.

#### Costs

The long time frame – at least six years and potentially up to ten years – does have cost implications: from 2009 to the end of May 2013 the total costs of running Triple-S in Ghana for IRC have been US\$ 3,469,924. This price tag includes all international staff support, but does not include other investments made by IRC Ghana through activities under WASHCost and the Tripartite Partnership Project – investments which Triple-S built upon. At close to **US\$ 1 million per year**, this may seem like a hefty price tag, but when compared to the costs of infrastructure investment in rural water in Ghana, it’s a negligible investment considering its long-term impact.



## 4 Emerging evidence of sector change and strengthening

### 4.1 CHANGES AT THE ORGANISATIONAL LEVEL

**CWSA is gradually moving towards a more structured focus on its core mandate.** In the view of the director of technical services: ‘the mandate of the Agency per se has not changed but there have been changes in the internal processes. For instance, CWSA’s Act established it as a facilitator but when CWSA was ready to trigger the facilitation process, most of the partners such as the MMDAs did not have the capacity, so CWSA took up some of the MMDA’s role as an implementer. Currently, CWSA is doing about 20% implementation and 80% facilitation compared to 90% implementation and 10% facilitation previously. Under Triple-S, most of the change process were things that the CWSA mandate required the Agency to do but there were constraints and also because there was no catalyst to assist the Agency to execute the mandate effectively.’

**There is high level of buy-in and greater effort to replicate the project best practices within the Agency and in other projects.** In the view of the Extension Service Coordinator, the fact that at the CWSA head office and regional level everyone is conscious of sustainability and working towards it is commendable. As she stated it: ‘There has been a change in focus to look at both coverage and functionality of facilities. Again, the CWSA has also endorsed the service monitoring and is currently scaling-up the collection of baseline data. The successful launch of the sector operational documents to guide the scaling-up process and ensure sustainability of the facilities in Ghana is a step in the right direction.’

**The management of CWSA is already seeing the results and benefit of real time data.** The Chief Executive of CWSA had this to say about his personal experience of how the service monitoring data is enhancing efficiency of his work: ‘Hitherto, I had to send my team to the field to collect data any time I needed specific information or travel to the field [myself] to see what is happening or read reports after the fact, but now in the comfort of my office, I am able to track on a daily basis what is going on.’

CWSA intends to continue to build on the change process through new projects. It is already scaling up service monitoring – using pooled development

partner funds to collect baseline data throughout the country. Other initiatives such as the scaling-up of Triple-S, supported by the Conrad N. Hilton Foundation, presents an excellent opportunity for instructional capacity building related to the new guidance documents and to support district assemblies and sector practitioners in their application more broadly.

The Agency as a matter of urgency has commenced the introduction of budget lines in new projects to ensure the continuation of the change. However, all these intentions are project dependent. Over the years, CWSA core activities have been largely funded through management fees charged to execute development partner projects, whilst government covers personnel salaries. Focusing the Agency on its core mandate will require adequate funding from GOG to fill the funding gap that will be created. Without this support, the Agency runs the risk of relapsing to implementation.

### 4.2 STRONG SIGNS OF CHANGE IN POLICY, STRATEGY AND PRACTICE

Evidence of the strengthening of the sector, changes in policies, strategies and instruments has become more readily available, and indeed has been accelerated in the last twelve to eighteen months of the project. As part of the regular monitoring, Triple-S has been collating and documenting evidence of such change.

In broad terms there has been strong progress across six areas:

- Policy commitments to service delivery and political statements of intent (both national and international) to change the current ‘business as usual’ approach.
- Changes in the strategy and planning frameworks of CWSA, including a revised corporate plan putting service delivery, knowledge management and capacity building at its core, as well as new budget lines to support the same.
- Revision and ‘up-grading’ of key sector tools and guidelines, most notably the adoption of the service delivery indicators under the District Monitoring and Evaluation System (DiMES) and the up-dating of both the national and district

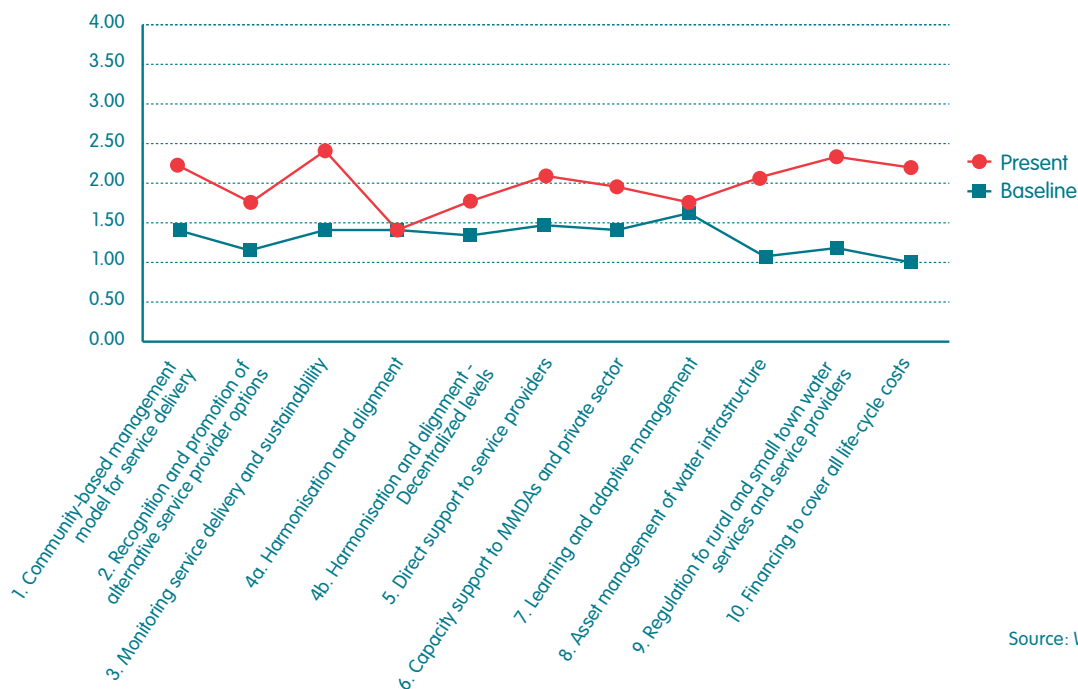
level implementation guidelines to include, for the first time ever, an extended life cycle for service delivery going beyond the construction phase.

- Revision of the water and sanitation planning and budget frameworks of the pilot districts to comprehensively address the needs for new investment, major rehabilitation, expansion and logistics, and operational costs, with an attendant increase in budget allocation of over 20% compared to the situation before the intervention.<sup>12</sup>
- Shift in approach to sector monitoring: from counting pumps and pipes to monitoring services and conditions of sustainability; from unstructured ad hoc data collection and analysis to establishing government systems for continuous data collection and structured analysis; from limited availability of monitoring data to real time monitoring data available on-line; and from monitoring as an end in and of itself to monitoring as a means to addressing planning and provision of sustainable service.<sup>13</sup>
- Development Partners aligning support to CWSA in pursuance of its vision to establish a rural water monitoring system ‘to ensure that data on existing and new water, sanitation and hygiene facilities is up to date and useful for ensuring WASH services that last forever for the rural population of Ghana’.

Nine<sup>14</sup> donors, NGOs, foundations and private sector partners have realigned partnerships to support this effort and to scale up service monitoring in seven out of the ten regions of Ghana under the leadership of CWSA.

These changes in policy and practice are confirmed by the Qualitative Document Analysis (QDA), a method of assessing documents in a rigorous and reliable manner through identifying the presence or absence of particular themes or issues, conducted by IRC and Aguaconsult. The analysis assessed policy and practice documents from before and during Triple-S to investigate how sustainability of rural water service delivery is addressed. The analysis found that both quantitatively and qualitatively, the sample of current documents shows a clear improvement over the baseline for nearly all building blocks for sustainability, especially **regulation of rural and small-town water services and service providers, asset management of water infrastructure and financing to cover all life-cycle costs**. The change is largely due to the documents published in early 2014. All median scores are at benchmark level or above, which reflects an increased level of service delivery concepts throughout the majority of documents. The comparison is illustrated in Figure 4.

FIGURE 4 SCORES FOR BASELINE AND CURRENT DOCUMENTS, BY BUILDING BLOCK



Source: Ward, 2015.

<sup>12</sup> A budget tracking study report on the three pilot districts (East Gonja, Akatsi and Sunyani West) will be published in 2015.

<sup>13</sup> See CWSA presentation on vision and plan for rural water monitoring presented at Ghana Water Forum in November, 2013.

<sup>14</sup> The government of the Netherlands, World Bank, UNICEF, IRC, SNV, Akvo FLOW, Skyfox, Rabo Bank and Conrad N. Hilton Foundation.

Highlights from the report include:

- References to monitoring service delivery and sustainability significantly increased (though a unified system remains to be implemented).
- Community management, which is now firmly established, is discussed in detail in current documents.
- Scores for **harmonisation and alignment** show no real improvement—a potential cause for concern.
- Most-improved areas are **asset management of water infrastructure, regulation of rural and small-town water services and service providers and financing to cover all life-cycle costs**.
- The 2014 District Operation Manual makes a strong contribution to achieving **asset management of water infrastructure**.
- Regulation and the regulatory functions of the Community Water and Sanitation Agency are evolving in practice as a critical institutional function.
- Reference to **financing to cover all life-cycle costs** has improved greatly, especially in the 2014 District Operation Manual and the Community Water and Sanitation Agency Strategy.

Annex 2 provides a more detailed summary of some of the most important advances made under Triple-S in the rural sub-sector in Ghana by comparing 'pre-Triple-S' conditions against the situation at the end of 2013.

#### 4.3 SIGNS OF IMPROVEMENT IN PERFORMANCE OF SERVICE PROVIDERS AND DISTRICT ASSEMBLIES

There is evidence of change in planning and budgeting practices by the pilot districts and renewed commitment to undertake remedial actions for long term service improvement. The pilot districts have adopted the life cycle cost approach (LCCA) concept and revised their budgeting practices, disaggregated their planned expenditure, and included specific lines for support activities such as monitoring. As confirmed by the Triple-S Ghana end of project evaluation field report, this example set by the districts has started to influence budget practices in their wider regions. The pilot districts are being more proactive and are undertaking technical assessments of broken down facilities, constructing asset registers, and using the monitoring data for budgeting and investment decisions. They also allocated resources for a second round of service monitoring.

#### 4.4 ENCOURAGING EARLY SIGNS OF IMPROVEMENT IN PHYSICAL SERVICE DELIVERY

Of course, the ultimate measure of success is physical improvements in service delivery on the ground (i.e. more reliable, better quality water flowing for more of the time in rural communities). These take some time to manifest as systemic improvements take hold and the actors involved at multiple levels begin to work together more effectively.

The data from the service delivery monitoring already show some marginal improvement in the quality of services. The second round of functionality and service monitoring conducted in the pilot districts in 2013 recorded improvement of system non-functionality, down from 26% to 17% in Akatsi District and from 21% to 17% in Sunyani West compared with the 2011 study results. Reliability of hand pumps has improved from 69% to 73% in the Akatsi District and from 59% to 61% in East Gonja from 2011-2013. It may be too early to confirm the trajectory of improvement in water services and to attribute the improvement to Triple-S work. However, these emerging trends are encouraging.

## 5 Conclusions

### 5.1 A CHANGING SECTOR FINDING ITS WAY IN THE WORLD

The rural water sub-sector of Ghana is at the end of the beginning of a journey towards finding solutions to the twin challenges of full coverage and poor sustainability of water services. Even though the results of the change process are still emerging and have yet to fully solidify, positive and consistent progress is evident in terms of the appreciation of the scale of the sustainability challenge; better understanding of what it means to provide sustainable services; a more forward looking approach to planning and costing of water services in pilot districts, backed by renewed interest by District Assemblies to undertake remedial actions; and better performing management entities and more aware and proactive district authorities. If all this translates into sufficient funding to address the problems and maintain the successes, then functionality rates will improve and agreed service levels will be achieved.

The individuals, professional staff, units and geographical levels within the Community Water and Sanitation Agency and other organisations and sector practitioners are all working together more effectively to adopt new solutions and are providing a unified voice for policy and practice change towards a more sustainable water service delivery approach. CWSA is continuing the process of reflection and required organisational and behaviour change catalysed by Triple-S. The pilot districts of Triple-S are emerging as islands of learning and success that can be packaged and showcased to support a systematic scale-up to other districts.

The sector is beginning to leverage resources through collective doing and learning and alignment of mutually reinforcing activities, thus enabling a scale up of effort across the entire rural water sub-sector. For example financing for the scale up of service delivery monitoring comes from various donor projects, but it is being coordinated and driven by the CWSA, eager to establish one nation-wide system for monitoring.

Sector stakeholders are demanding a shift to a sector wide approach to programming and concrete steps are being taken to improve harmonisation and coordination, albeit slowly. The Ministry of Water

Resources, Works and Housing undertook a study to assess the cohesiveness of water sector practice in Ghana with support from IRC and in collaboration with Development Partners<sup>15</sup>. The explicit goals cited by the Ministry with regard to the study are to foster greater consensus around sector programming and improve donor alignment with state procedures and systems. Additionally, the Ministry of Water Resources, Works and Housing and CWSA have completed and published a set of sector operational documents to guide delivery of water services in the rural water sub-sector. Development Partners for their part have collaborated in undertaking comprehensive risk assessments and capacity assessments in order to define a Memorandum of Understanding with government on a harmonised sector agenda. Development Partners are also aligning behind government efforts to establish a national sector information system that will harmonise sector monitoring and performance reporting.

The sector is shifting. What started with a small core group, struggling at times to galvanise the sector around a common cause, has now expanded and more organisations and individuals are joining the process. CWSA is more confident and more able to 'push-back' against divisive interventions, but runs the risk of returning to old behaviours, particularly when there is no longer a backbone organisation to facilitate the process of change.

### 5.2 SUCCESS FACTORS AND LESSONS LEARNED

Throughout Triple-S a number of lessons have emerged, particularly around the conditions for success in a change process across a complex and dynamic web of issues, organisations and individuals.

- **The urgency around the issue of poor sustainability of rural water services provided a common driver for change.** The success of Triple-S in Ghana lies in the heightened awareness and shared interest by multiple organisations looking for solutions to the causes of failure of water supply facilities to deliver lasting water services.
- **Influential champions and dynamic leadership is key.** The passion to solve the problem by the then

<sup>15</sup> See <http://www.ircwash.org/resources/water-sector-harmonisation-and-alignment-study-assessment-sector-partnerships-ghana>



Minister of Water Resources Works and Housing, the CEO of CWSA and a group of senior managers in the organisation was a critical success factor. These champions provided political and technical leadership and created space for sector stakeholders to figure out the solutions. Such champions are not only critical for external audiences, for example in raising the profile of the initiative both nationally and internationally, but also to galvanise interest of other directors and staff within CWSA to form a critical mass to drive the sustainability agenda in the water and sanitation sector.

- The hosting arrangement for the project implementation in Ghana was fit for purpose and effective. The Community Water and Sanitation Agency was the right choice given the institutional context and proved effective in delivering the project results. Embedding most of the project staff within the agency at the national and regional level gave them a strong and unique position within the organisation, which other NGOs do not typically have. The Triple-S Project and IRC staff were seen as a 'coach' and a 'critical friend' by CWSA staff. This enabled CWSA to appreciate the concepts and approaches developed through Triple-S and therefore provided a strong basis for the sustainability of the approach. Others have however argued that a potential draw back of the hosting arrangement was that the hands of Triple-S staff were partially 'tied' in that they were potentially less able to question some of the more entrenched approaches of the sector and organisational behaviours of CWSA itself. In the end Triple-S staff feel strongly that the pros of the arrangement by far outweighed the cons.
- The governance arrangements of the project proved effective in promoting a constructive culture of co-generation, co-creation and joint learning amongst sector actors. The three committees made of up WASH professionals set up to oversee project activities – namely the advisory committee at the ministry and policy level and the technical and management committees within CWSA – provided policy direction, critical review of the content of innovations and products and replication of learning. This approach ensured an effective technical interface of local and international knowledge that produced quality products suited to the Ghanaian context but also interesting for the international water community. Again, the process ensured ownership by CWSA and resulted in most of the products being adopted and institutionalised for sector use.
- The External Learning Facilitator proved to be effective in challenging the project thinking and provoking alternative thinking. The External Learning Facilitator supported the team in evaluating progress and assessing whether the methods and activities chosen were having the intended results. Describing himself as the one who 'stirs the pot' he encouraged the IRC team to think outside the box and provoked critical reflection within CWSA. The annual report submitted by the External Learning Facilitator on the evolution of the project, following the sector reflections and organisational change reflection with CWSA, was critical in steering the course of the project and facilitated organisational behaviour and system changes within CWSA.
- **Dedicated, predictable and yet flexible funding.** The Triple-S funding from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation provided dedicated seed money to heighten awareness of the sustainability challenge, socialise the concept of the service delivery approach and to galvanise collective support and interest from sector stakeholders. Un-earmarked funding allowed for flexible and opportunistic support to inputs such as workshop meetings, sector diagnostic studies and the testing of ideas in pilot districts.
- **Supporting a change process is not cheap but it can lead to big impacts.** The overall cost of supporting Triple-S at some US\$1 million per year may seem like a lot initially, but when compared to the tens of millions of dollars spent each year and the poor results of the existing paradigm it is in fact a good value. Relatively small amounts of financing used in a flexible way, have been extremely important to maintain momentum and for the progress made to date. The outcome of these processes is now influencing additional funding from other organisations of around US\$190 million for mutually reinforcing activities towards achievement of this goal of sustainable rural water service delivery.
- **Treating the past with respect by letting people take a piece of the old way with them.** Presenting innovations as developments that build on past progress minimised resistance and helped stakeholders to manage emotions associated with transitions. The period of diagnostic studies and dialogue during the start-up phase provided space to clarify the foundation and intent of the Triple-S initiative – what it was and what it was not and to jointly agree on sector culture, beliefs and

practices that must be upheld and those that must be changed.

- **System- or sector-wide change takes time and requires perseverance.** It has taken six years (in the case of Ghana) to reach the current stage and there are several areas of the process that remain incomplete. Clearly, this is not a process that can be rushed or pursued in a mechanical way. Relationship building, joint visioning, sector diagnosis and planning and coordinating the required actions with key sector stakeholders all need time and risk back-firing if rushed. Many issues require revisiting over and over again and this is only possible when there is long-term commitment to the change process and where support and facilitation are on-going.

### 5.3 THE DANGERS AHEAD: UNRESOLVED ISSUES AND THREATS TO CONTINUED PROGRESS

Although much progress has been made and the sector has moved significantly in the last five years or so, there remains unfinished business.

As espoused in the IRC business plan 2012-2016 MTR (October, 2014) and the end of Triple-S evaluation country visit report (November 2014), IRC has through the WASHCost and Triple-S projects made progress in promoting the shift from focusing on building infrastructure to focusing on delivering and sustaining services. Both external assessments, however agreed that further work over the long term needs to be done to fully institutionalise the shift and consolidate system change.

Further work on defining a structured learning agenda and sustainable financing for sector learning is recommended. Learning areas that merit immediate attention include how to improve existing service delivery models in the sector, such as the community management model through professionalisation of service delivery and in-depth discussion of market structure issues. Other critical issues such as provision of a stronger framework for service level benchmarking, a concrete strategy for increasing sector financing, and ensuring the results lead to long lasting service improvement are key interventions required to make the change process stick.

The process in Ghana has been very successful in mobilising additional funding sources jointly driven by IRC and CWSA for continuation of the approach. However these funds are targeting scaling up of

specific aspects of services delivery, tied to specific projects, which means that overall system change is likely not to be sustained if the Government of Ghana itself does not increase sector funding to scale up to the rural water sub-sector as a whole.

In CWSA, the rural water sub-sector of Ghana has a competent and experienced sector support institution for setting standards, norms and ensuring better regulation. The potential loss of revenue associated with a revised mandate of CWSA to drive the service delivery agenda is a risk that needs proactive acknowledgement and attention. CWSA has largely depended on development partner projects to fund its activities at district level. However with the changing economic landscape in Ghana, development partners are moving from grants to loans, which the government may be less willing to use to finance traditional social ventures such as water supply.

Furthermore, District Assemblies have become increasingly competent and confident in implementing rural water supply projects and therefore are less likely to need the technical assistance traditionally provided by CWSA – leaving CWSA to fully focus on its facilitation and regulation roles. This gradual shift in roles and financing mechanisms will need to be carefully planned.

The organisational behaviour change process toward a focus on service delivery ignited within CWSA is largely engrained at the national level and in the three regions and districts where the project was implemented. It will be a challenge to reorient and upgrade capacities across the entire agency of over 200 professionals and key staff of some 216 District Assemblies to run with the new approach as part of the transition process. Few in the agency outside the Technical Committee are familiar with the concept of life-cycle costs, for example. The same is true of some senior district officials, even in the pilot districts. Thus, further effort is needed to secure wider buy-in and to nurture ownership of the change process across all regional offices of CWSA and to foster genuine partnerships with the District Assemblies and sector financiers to take the process forward.

An objective of the Triple-S project was to contribute to improved sector harmonisation and alignment through contribution to definition and adoption of nationally agreed sector operational documents and the definition of a Sector Wide Approach (SWAp) to improve coordination of interventions and alignment with government procedures. The sector documents published by CWSA in May 2014 have yet to be fully

rolled out in terms of providing the necessary orientation and capacity development to sector stakeholders. The sector SWAp has not materialised as yet. Progress could be undone by the failure of a couple of large – and well funded – external projects or programmes to respect hard won gains and to revert to working in silos, using their own systems and undermining the authority of CWSA. Thus, further effort is needed to sustain the momentum of the SWAp process and to ensure application of nationally defined guidelines.

Challenges in district revenue mobilisation will be another risk to the achievement of the new vision. As the District Coordinating Director of East Gonja noted at the April 2013 stakeholder reflection, ‘we see the benefits but we will find it hard to finance the additional [water] budget through our own funds.’ This sentiment was echoed by the District Planning Officer for Sunyani West.

Finally, there is a big risk in the speed of impact slowing down. Put simply, the ultimate ‘proof’ of this new approach will be in a reduction in the numbers of failing water supply facilities. If this is not evident in the relatively near future, there is a risk it will demotivate those at the frontline in the districts and those pushing for change within CWSA. Trend lines are important and early evidence that the situation is improving would represent a great resource for this movement.

#### **5.4 THE RELEVANCE OF COLLECTIVE IMPACT TO TRIPLE-S IN GHANA**

When the architects of Triple-S developed the early iterations of the initiative they were strongly influenced by their awareness of complexity theory and the need to approach change in the sector from a different perspective than had traditionally been done in the past. Although they had not come across the framework for collective impact, it has proven to be a remarkably ‘close fit’ in terms of the way the change process has been managed and rolled out in Ghana. Many facets of the five conditions for collective impact have been applied, albeit with some variation and differing language. Certainly the core principles of collective action, learning and reflection, are helping to provide better insights and understanding of the problems of water service delivery and the cause of system failure and are informing positive actions.

If anything the experiences of Triple-S, documented in this paper, demonstrate that although complex

environments may differ greatly – from the challenges of a dysfunctional education system in the USA to failure of hand pumps and piped supplies to deliver continuous water service to rural Ghanaians – the approaches to understanding and addressing complexity are remarkably similar.

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## Annex 1: Type and level of back bone support to CWSA since 2009

Category	Expertise	Level of efforts in person months
IRC Netherlands	Research	12
	Monitoring and learning	2
	Strategy development	4
	Service monitoring	5
	Life-cycle cost approach	2
	International linkages	1
	Project management	4
	Qualitative document analysis for sector change	2
	<b>Total</b>	<b>32</b>
IRC Ghana	Sector policy dialogue and networking	12
	Organisation and systems development, sector change process management	26
	National learning facilitation	24
	Communications	12
	Project management	14
	<b>Total</b>	<b>88</b>
Triple-S Project staff	1 research officer	36
	3 regional learning facilitators	192
	1 project/administrative officer	48
	1 finance officer	60
	Communications	24
	Planning and monitoring	24
	<b>Total</b>	<b>338</b>
Contracted specialised services	External learning facilitation, organisation and systems development	10
	Sector strategy and operational documents	6
	Technical advisory on WASH	2
	Asset management	1
	Life-cycle costs approach	2
	Study research-learning	1
	Study research; sector harmonisation and alignment	2
	<b>Total</b>	<b>22</b>

## Annex 2: Comparative progress against pre-Triple-S situation

	Pre Triple-S Initiative (prior to 2009)	To end 2013
<b>Policy and high level commitments</b>	<p><b>Sanitation and Water For All, High Level Meeting, Washington D.C., USA, 2010</b> Five commitment areas including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Political prioritisation and commitment</li> <li>• Linking policies to plans, programmes and projects</li> <li>• Improving investment to meet challenges</li> <li>• Strengthening ownership and leadership</li> <li>• Achieving good governance and accountability</li> </ul>	<p><b>Sanitation and Water For All, High Level Meeting, Washington D.C., USA, April 2012</b></p> <p>Minister for Finance and Economic Planning commits to ensure sustainability and scaling up of sanitation and water services through ‘adopting a service delivery approach, ... provision of adequate budget for post-construction support, capital repairs and maintenance’ (commitment 6)</p>
		<p><b>CWSA Corporate Commitment April 2012</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Adoption of service delivery approach</li> <li>• Service delivery monitoring</li> </ul>
<b>CWSA strategy and planning</b>	<p><b>Corporate plan 2010-2014</b> Responds to demand responsive approach and defines eight key strategic areas for the agency, including:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Provision of potable water, improved sanitation &amp; hygiene, sanitation, hygiene services</li> <li>2. Capacity building of stakeholders</li> <li>3. Sustaining water and sanitation as well as basic hygiene practices facilities provided</li> <li>4. Coordination of the rural water and sanitation sub-sector</li> <li>5. Resource mobilisation</li> <li>6. Research &amp; development to improve operations</li> <li>7. Human and institutional capacity of CWSA</li> <li>8. Formulation of appropriate legal framework for enforcement of strategies and guidelines</li> </ol>	<p><b>Corporate plan 2013 - 2017</b> Responds to the recent emphasis on the agency’s mandate as regulator and incorporates the new focus on service delivery. Defines five key strategic areas for agency, including:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Service delivery approach</li> <li>2. Knowledge management, research and innovation</li> <li>3. Institutional capacity development and governance</li> <li>4. Regulation and enforcement</li> <li>5. Resource mobilisation</li> </ol>
	<p><b>Community Water and Sanitation Strategies</b> Divergent project based approaches and strategies</p>	<p><b>National Community Water and Sanitation Strategy</b> Approved consolidated strategy for delivering rural and small town water and sanitation related services in Ghana including dedicated section on sustainability and scaling up</p>



	Pre Triple-S Initiative (prior to 2009)	To end 2013
Tools and instruments	<p><b>DiMES - an integrated computer based data management system:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Focus was on tracking number of systems constructed and project implementation process and facility management but not the services delivered</li> <li>• Reports generated provided coverage statics, did not include functionality, service levels and performance of service providers</li> <li>• National norms and standards for water service established but no defined indicators and methodology for assessment and reporting on progress</li> <li>• Data collection was paper based thus difficult to generate consistent and accurate real time data to populate the system</li> </ul>	<p><b>DiMES - Modules expanded to include functionality and service monitoring and real time data collection:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A more effective ICT based tool for data collection (Field Level Operation Watch) piloted and adopted by CWSA for sector application</li> <li>• Framework of indicators and a how-to guide for assessing and monitoring rural and small town water supply services in Ghana based on the national agreed norms and standards developed and adopted by CWSA for sector use</li> <li>• Service level indicators adopted that indicate degree to which service provided by the water facility is in line with the minimum standards for quality, quantity, distance, coverage and reliability of rural and small town water service delivery</li> <li>• Service provider indicators – assesses the compliance of community-based service providers to national norms, standards and guidelines for water supply as set by CWSA relating to governance, operations and financial management</li> <li>• Service authority and support indicators – service authority and support function indicators related to support from Metropolitan, Municipal and District Assemblies (MMDAs) and regional level CWSA</li> </ul>
	<p><b>Project Implementation manual</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Project specific project implementation manuals</li> <li>• Ends with completion of physical infrastructure provision</li> </ul>	<p><b>National Community Water and Sanitation Programme Project Implementation Manual (PIM)</b> A consolidation of project implementation best practices into a single source document for sector use, including a focus on service delivery further elaborated in new PIM and other complementary operational documents, such as NCWSS and DOM</p>
	<p><b>Project district operational manuals</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Project based requirements and procedures for district participation in the delivery of water services</li> <li>• Standards, guidelines, frameworks and templates for WASH services delivery existed but selectively applied and not consolidated into a single source document and endorsed for sector use</li> </ul>	<p><b>National Community Water and Sanitation Programme District Operational Manual (DOM)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reference document to guide the District Assembly (DA) in the delivery of sustainable Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) services to rural communities and small towns under the National Community Water and Sanitation Programme (NCWSP)</li> <li>• A consolidation of standards, guidelines, frameworks and templates approved for WASH services delivery</li> <li>• New DOM provides post-construction full 'service cycle'</li> </ul>

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