

A young girl with braided hair, wearing a red and white floral patterned dress, is smiling broadly. She is holding a metal water tap handle with both hands, positioned as if to turn it. The background is a lush green outdoor setting with large leaves, possibly banana leaves. To the right, a person wearing a yellow shirt is partially visible.

# IRC

## Strengthening Local Government Capacity to Deliver Water Services

Documenting the process  
of transformation

Peter McIntyre and Vida Duti

Supporting water sanitation  
and hygiene services for life

At IRC, we believe that turning on a working tap should not be a surprise or cause for celebration. We believe in a world where water, sanitation and hygiene services are fundamental utilities that everyone is able to take for granted. For good.

We face a complex challenge. Every year, thousands of projects within and beyond the WASH sector fail – the result of short-term targets and interventions, at the cost of long-term service solutions.

This leaves around a third of the world's poorest people without access to the most basic of human rights, and leads directly to economic, social and health problems on a global scale. IRC exists to continually challenge and shape the established practices of the WASH sector.

Through collaboration and the active application of our expertise, we work with governments, service providers and international organisations to deliver systems and services that are truly built to last.

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Documenting the process of transformation

Peter McIntyre and Vida Duti

To Chris Dunston, senior programme officer, and Andrea Jones, programme associate for the Conrad N. Hilton Foundation international programme and their team for believing in the IRC vision of transforming lives through building strong WASH systems and making the journey with us.

Special thanks to the officers at the Community Water and Sanitation Agency (CWSA), our colleagues at World Vision, Safe Water Network, WaterAid, Desert Research Institute and the district officers in the 13 districts that were part of the Strengthening Local Government Capacity to Deliver Water Services in rural Ghana project (Akatsi, Bongo, East Gonja, Gushiegu, Kintampo South, North Dayi, Saboba, Savelugu Nanton, South Dayi, Sunyani West, Wa East, West Gonja, West Mamprusi).

And finally to all of the people who made themselves available for the interviews and visits in May 2017.

Vida Duti, country director, IRC Ghana



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## Preface

In 2014, the Conrad N. Hilton Foundation dedicated a US\$ 3 million grant to Strengthening Local Government Capacity to Deliver Water Services in rural Ghana.

The project is a strategic partnership between IRC, Community Water and Sanitation Agency (CWSA), World Vision, Safe Water Network, WaterAid, Desert Research Institute and 13 district assemblies.

Its aim has been to coordinate efforts to maximise resources and improve systems for service delivery in districts and build on work done between the CWSA, IRC and District Assemblies, notably in the Triple-S project.

Between 2015 and the end of 2017 the project expanded efforts to plan and deliver sustainable services in 13 largely rural districts in five regions of Ghana.

It has proved a remarkable exercise of cooperation and learning, involving interventions at regional, district and community levels, partnership work at national level and the building and strengthening of learning platforms in every district and region where the project took place.

It has left in place stronger planning teams, innovative use of technology, and a much improved approach to collecting and using data. But perhaps its greatest achievement has been in breaking down barriers between those who plan, provide and use services enabling them to 'walk the talk' of coordination and cooperation.

This publication records the perceptions of many of the key players in this development, from the Minister of Sanitation and Water Resources, to the Water and Sanitation Management Teams (WSMTs) at community level, and including the vital inputs of the CWSA at national and regional level, the district authority water units that are drawing up plans for 100% coverage and the NGOs that provide finance, services, infrastructure and training.

It looks in particular at how partnerships have been built and how they are working, how the district assemblies are transforming their planning process, how the learning platforms at regional and district levels are finding new ways to tackle long-standing problems, and at the impact at community level.

There is still a way to go. The Conrad N. Hilton Foundation and the partners continue to support a process of strengthening country systems and leveraging partnerships through a single-district pilot in Asutifi North in Brong Ahafo region to pool the efforts of stakeholders to drive attainment of Sustainable Development Goal 6. Through a pilot in one single district, Asutifi North in Brong Ahafo region, to achieve full coverage by pooling the efforts of all the stakeholders.

There is a growing sense that greater professionalism is needed in the management capacity at community level and that the limits of volunteerism have probably been reached. There are also continuing institutional and financial challenges to be addressed.

However, as this publication shows, the creativity, dedication and perseverance being shown at district and regional level, backed by the CWSA at national level and enriched by community involvement, suggest that Ghana is turning a corner in the provision of WASH services that will last long after the project is over.

This publication is based on a series of interviews and visits conducted in Ghana in May 2017 by IRC Associate Peter McIntyre with Petra Brussee of IRC Netherlands and Abubakari Wumbei of IRC Ghana. It was carried out at the request of Vida Duti, country director for IRC Ghana, and under the supervision of Vida Duti and Veronica Ayi-Bonte, IRC Ghana programme manager.



## Abbreviations

<b>CapManEx</b>	Capital Maintenance Expenditure
<b>CONIWAS</b>	Coalition of NGOs in Water and Sanitation
<b>CWSA</b>	Community Water and Sanitation Agency (Ghana)
<b>DA</b>	District Assembly
<b>DiMES</b>	District Monitoring and Evaluation System
<b>DLLAP</b>	District Level Learning Alliance Platform
<b>DOM</b>	District Operational Manual
<b>DRI</b>	Desert Research Institute
<b>JMP</b>	Joint Monitoring Programme
<b>MMDA</b>	Metropolitan, Municipal and District Assembly
<b>MoU</b>	Memorandum of Understanding
<b>NCWSS</b>	National Community Water and Sanitation Strategy
<b>(I)NGO</b>	(International) non-governmental organisation
<b>NLLAP</b>	National Level Learning Alliance Platform
<b>PIM</b>	Project Implementation Manual
<b>RCN</b>	Resource Centre Network
<b>RLLAP</b>	Regional Level Learning Alliance Platform
<b>SDGs</b>	Sustainable Development Goals
<b>SDA</b>	Service Delivery Approach
<b>Triple-S</b>	Sustainable Services at Scale (an IRC initiative)
<b>UNICEF</b>	United Nations Children's Fund
<b>WASH</b>	Water, sanitation and hygiene
<b>WHO</b>	World Health Organization
<b>WSMT</b>	Water and Sanitation Management Teams



## Chapter 1

# Introduction

The World Health Organization and UNICEF estimate that in 2015 more than three quarters (78%) of Ghanaian households had access to at least a basic level of safe drinking water<sup>1</sup>.

The headline figure from the WHO/UNICEF Joint Monitoring Programme (JMP) suggests steady if slow progress from 64% in the year 2000. However, in some rural areas and small towns almost a third of water facilities are not functioning properly – because they are broken, do not provide sufficient water quickly enough, or people walk more than 500 metres to reach the water point.

This is not for want of trying. Ghana has made sustained efforts to improve rural and small town water services since the 1970s during a campaign to combat guinea worm infestation.

In 1998 the Community Water and Sanitation Agency (CWSA) was formed to provide support for local Government bodies and to channel project money flowing into Ghana from development partners. In 1999, District Assemblies were given responsibility for supporting communities in the provision of water supply and sanitation, alongside a greater emphasis in small towns and rural areas on community management of resources.

Vida Duti, IRC country director in Ghana, says that in the country's eagerness to devolve responsibility to districts and promote community management the importance of building capacity was overlooked. "We moved too fast into communities, with less attention to supporting the district authority to be able to manage a technical service like water."

She sees the role of District Assemblies as a kind of midwife supporting communities to deliver services safely in a policy framework. "Our Decentralisation Acts have made the districts the highest point for delivery at the local government level. Knowing what is expected of them, being equipped to do it and being able to translate policies, plans and legal frameworks into operation is very critical to work with communities."

With almost two decades of experience, many District Assemblies have developed skills in planning and overseeing the provision of new facilities, but they have not been effective in ensuring that they develop well and are sustained. Districts have had little capacity and resources to monitor services and support community management. Until recently, they did not even properly know what water facilities existed in communities or how they were performing.

International NGOs found it easy to bypass the Assemblies and work through smaller local partners directly with communities. The result was a pattern of service provision without clear priorities and a lack of accountability for managing and sustaining services. A massive amount of investment was wasted. When facilities failed, communities expected a new donor to provide a replacement.

## WASHCost in Ghana

As the body that has oversight of water and sanitation services in rural communities and small towns, CWSA has acted as the conduit for developing numerous projects based on grants or loans from development partners. CWSA also began to set standards for services – for example that a borehole should not be expected to serve more than 300 people.

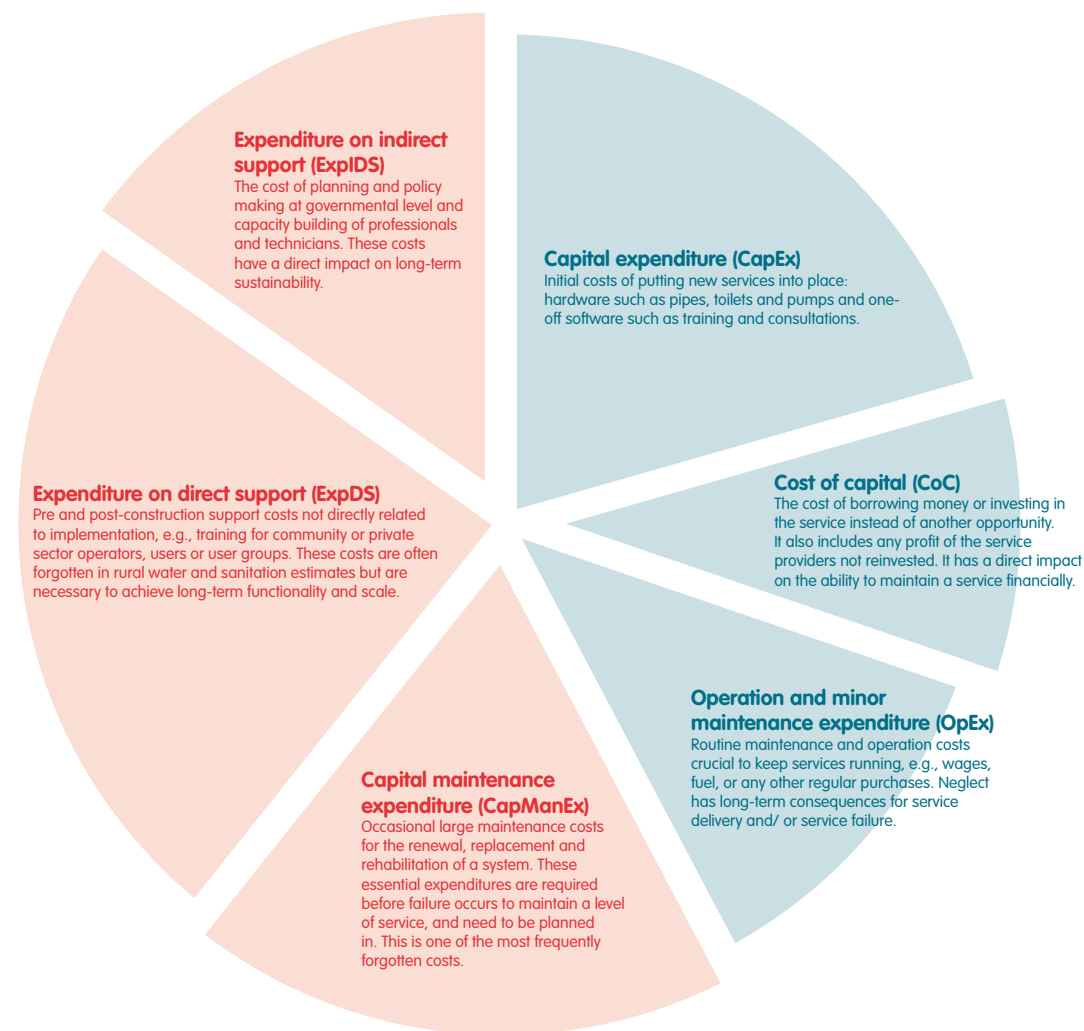
IRC has been working with CWSA in Ghana since the early 1990s (legally registered in Ghana in 2011). In 2008, IRC took the lead in a five-year WASHCost project – funded by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation – to identify the real costs of providing and sustaining water services in five countries,

<sup>1</sup> UNICEF, WHO, 2017. *Progress on Drinking Water, Sanitation and Hygiene: 2017 Update and SDG Baselines*. Geneva: World Health Organization (WHO) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). Available at: < [https://www.unicef.org/publications/index\\_96611.html](https://www.unicef.org/publications/index_96611.html)>. The basic drinking water standard is water from an improved source taking no more than 30 minutes per round trip to collect. Ghana achieves 87% coverage for the 'limited' standard of water from an improved source taking longer than 30 minutes to collect. Only 27% of households (7% in rural areas) meet the toughest Sustainable Development Goal target for safely managed water from an improved source, available on the premises, when needed, and free from contamination.

including Ghana. As part of WASHCost the Ghana research team interviewed households and sat at water points to see how water was being collected and used. Some handpumps were still working after 30 years but the research concluded that overall about a third of water schemes were non-functional.

WASHCost identified weaknesses in allocating finances for repairs as a major cause of failure. In many cases, there were no maintenance costs to record because broken facilities were simply abandoned. The CWSA began to promote the need for accurate budgeting, including planning for capital maintenance and the direct support costs that District Assemblies incur in planning and backstopping services.

In Ghana today, the WASHCost language of capital maintenance etc. is common currency in some districts even at community level, while management teams in small towns, serving populations of 2,000 and above, are mandated to keep separate accounts for capital and operational spending.



**Figure 1 WASHCost language explaining cost components have become common currency in some districts in Ghana.**

Source: McIntyre, P., et al., 2014.

WASHCost established a learning alliance that brought together leading stakeholders to share experiences and challenges in providing safe water. In October 2009, the National Level Learning Alliance Platform (NLLAP) held its first meeting hosted by the Ghana WASH Resource Centre Network. This proved to be a permanent legacy of great benefit to the sector. NLLAP has met more or less monthly ever since.

### Triple-S in Ghana

In 2009, Ghana became one of three focal countries in Triple-S, a project that brought together policymakers, technical support agencies, regulators, service providers, development partners and NGOs to focus on service delivery rather than simply extending 'coverage'. The project – also funded by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation – was again hosted in Ghana by the CWSA to ensure that emerging lessons and good practices were institutionalised.

IRC supported CWSA to build consensus around a vision of adequate water services and to develop an approach that could make this approach a reality. Service 'ladders' were agreed and approved, based on Ghana government standards, and expressed in ways that could easily be understood monitored simply by asking people about their daily experiences with water services.

Baseline data collection showed that in the three Triple-S pilot districts only a minority of facilities were providing even a basic level of service. For example, one third (34%) of point sources were non-functional for more than 18 days a year<sup>2</sup>.

IRC supported CWSA to develop a Project Implementation Manual (PIM) as part of national efforts towards harmonising approaches at district and community levels and a District Operational Manual (DOM) which serves as a reference document for District Assemblies to manage and implement sustainable WASH service delivery in rural communities and small towns. PIM provides a context for project design, implementation and management; and details key areas of the National Community Water and Sanitation Strategy (NCWSS), while DOM explains the service delivery cycle and issues such as planning, procurement, financial management and audit, infrastructure asset management, and data management. These have become essential working documents that guide District Assemblies.

A 2015 review concluded that the Triple-S project had resulted in a clearer collective vision of sustained service delivery but that more time was needed to see a direct impact on rural communities.<sup>3</sup> "The functionality of facilities continues to fluctuate, even deteriorating in a minority of cases. Greater attention will need to be paid to identifying and addressing the reasons for slower than expected improvement in the pilot districts. Despite generally respectable support for the Service Delivery Approach (SDA), it will require more time, hand-holding, reflection and 'proving the concept' to sustain the momentum, persuade remaining sceptics and fully institutionalise the shift."

The review noted that sector financing remains a major challenge, due in part to a decline in development partner funding once Ghana attained lower middle-income status and government resistance to seeking commercial loans to finance water. "Such constraints in financing without a clear alternative public finance to bridge the gap in donor funding, threaten the sector's ability to fund relevant post-construction activities that assure the expected improvements in service delivery."

<sup>2</sup> IRC, 2017. Smart Solutions with SMARTerWASH: Stories of the project and its successes, 2013-2016. The Hague: IRC. Available at <<https://www.irccwash.org/resources/smart-solutions-smarterwash-stories-project-and-its-successes>>

<sup>3</sup> Duti, V., Korboe, D. and Ayi-Bontle, V., 2015. Facilitating change in a complex environment: delivering rural water services in Ghana. Accra: IRC. Available at: <<https://www.irccwash.org/resources/facilitating-change-complex-environment-delivering-rural-water-services-ghana-0>>



Triple-S baseline data collection showed that in the pilot districts only a minority of facilities were providing even a basic level of service. Caretaker checking a handpump in Savelugu Nanton district in the Northern Region.

## SMARTerWASH

A closely related project built on the monitoring framework. SMARTerWASH (2014-2016) was a combined effort to scale up and consolidate the monitoring system by developing ICT monitoring tools and systems for data collection, processing and analysis at scale, using the CWSA District Monitoring and Evaluation System (DiMES), Akvo's FLOW (a smartphone platform for data collection) and an SMS-based system for tracking functionality and ordering spare parts developed by SkyFox Ltd.<sup>4</sup>

After training, staff in 131 districts in 8 regions collected data from 23,000 handpumps, more than 900 piped schemes, almost 15,000 Water and Sanitation Management Teams (WSMTs) and 131 service authorities. Data was processed and made available in the form of regional and district level factsheets and an online atlas<sup>5</sup>.

Despite success in showing how monitoring could be scaled up, no improvement in functionality was seen in the two districts where data can be compared between 2012-14 and 2015-2016. IRC programme officer Marieke Adank concludes: "Just having the data is not sufficient to ensure improved services. Although it is an essential part of the puzzle, districts also need human, financial and logistical capacity, motivation and incentives to be able to use the data for improving services."<sup>6</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Information from IRC, 2017. Smart Solutions with SMARTerWASH: Stories of the project and its successes, 2013-2016. The Hague: IRC. Available at <<https://www.ircwash.org/resources/smart-solutions-smarterwash-stories-project-and-its-successes>>

<sup>5</sup> CWSA, 2017. CWSA Water atlas of rural and small towns water services in Ghana. [online database] Available at: <<https://cwsawateratlas.org/map/>>

<sup>6</sup> Adank, M., 2015. Data collection, data use and (monitoring) systems building: the SMARTerWASH experience [blog] 08 May 2015. The Hague: IRC. Available at <[www.ircwash.org/blog/data-collection-data-use-and-monitoring-systems-building-smarterwash-experience](http://www.ircwash.org/blog/data-collection-data-use-and-monitoring-systems-building-smarterwash-experience)>

Indeed, a user satisfaction survey conducted in six districts in 2015 by the Community Water and Sanitation Agency with IRC support found that fewer than one in five households (19%) were satisfied with the reliability, quality, quantity and accessibility of their supply.<sup>7</sup>

## Strengthening Local Government Capacity to Deliver Water Services

The Conrad N. Hilton Foundation has been supporting water initiatives in Ghana and other African countries for more than 25 years, starting with efforts to eradicate guinea worm. Its 2017-2021 Safe Water Strategy focuses on achieving sustainability in Ghana, Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, Mali, Niger and Uganda. The Foundation is prioritising investments in three areas:

- advancing proven and promising solutions and models,
- strengthening water governance and in-country systems, and
- building and disseminating credible and actionable evidence.

Chris Dunston, senior programme officer for Hilton Foundation international programmes became convinced of the need to build capacity after ten years working in Madagascar, first as a technical adviser to the mayor of Antananarivo and then working to build public private partnerships.

Understanding that national governments make laws and regulations and then devolve responsibilities and authorities to organisations responsible for delivery of services and systems, Dunston became convinced of the need for governmental institutions and administrative structures to build relationships with private sector and civil society. Too little effort was focused on supporting local government bodies "where the rubber hits the road". In Ghana, "the District Assembly is the point of contact with civil society and that is where investments should be made."

Failures were not simply those of governments. Donors talk about sustainability and the enabling environment but often fail to pay attention to institutional capacity building. In many donor organisations, including the Hilton Foundation, success was measured largely in outputs – the numbers of wells and other infrastructure installed.

Four years ago, Dunston visited Ghana and came across Triple-S and IRC and found a partner that the Foundation wanted to work with. "I wanted to build on all the good work and something that has been set in motion through Triple-S and the use of the WASHCosting. I wanted to build on that because I know that it takes time to do what we are talking about. It is not just a 3-5 year project; you have got to stick with it. Finally I met an organisation that is really trying to figure out what systems change and strengthening sustainability are all about."

In 2014, the Conrad N. Hilton Foundation gave a US\$ 3 million grant for Strengthening Local Government Capacity to Deliver Water Services, a project that builds on the work of the past decade, extending the Triple-S work for a further three years and expanding the three Triple-S districts to a total of 13 districts in five regions. (Figure 3)

<sup>7</sup> IRC, 2016. (unpublished) Water services user satisfaction in six districts in Ghana. Study undertaken in 6 districts (Bongo, Wa East, Gushegu, Kintampo South, North Dayi and South Dayi) in 2015. Accra: IRC.



### Ghana districts participating in the Strengthening Local Government Capacity to Deliver Water Services project

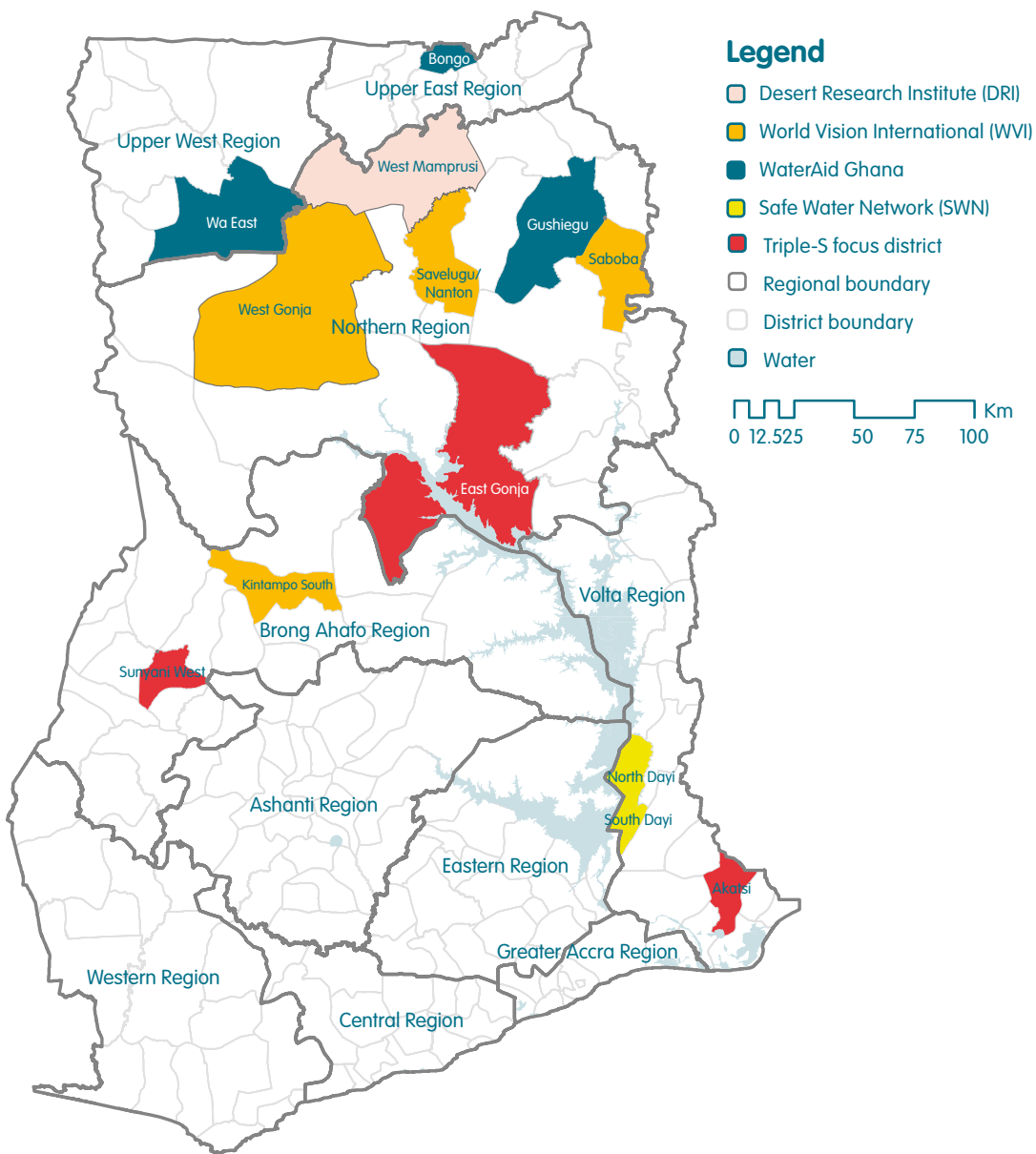


Figure 3 The Strengthening Local Government Capacity to Deliver Water Services project covers supporting district local government in a total of 13 districts in five regions.

The challenge, as Chris Dunston sees it, is for district authorities with devolved responsibilities to oversee informed decision making, when they have multiple responsibilities for education, agriculture, markets and other critical services in addition to water services. Engagement meant ensuring that the district authorities were fully involved in discussions, planning and decisions about priorities, rather than the previous (or even current) practice “where NGOs or government would come in and just look at maps and say we need 20 more wells over there”.

Vida Duti welcomed this approach: “The Hilton project complements a number of initiatives that IRC pursues in this sector to support the sustainable delivery of water services. The [Triple-S] project was about to come an end. We had developed tools for monitoring; we had developed a framework for asset management. We provided capacity to the three districts where we had worked. We had also incorporated the knowledge that we have acquired through the Triple-S to improve some of the sector documents.”

The aim was to build the capacity of the Metropolitan, Municipal and District Assemblies (MMDAs) and transfer knowledge acquired through Triple-S to help major Hilton grantees, WaterAid Ghana, World Vision Ghana, Safe Water Network and DRI (Desert Research Institute), work more closely with District Assemblies and align better with the Government’s approach.

IRC continued to work with CWSA to improve its internal capacity to drive the delivery of water services more effectively in an era when donor-driven projects were less available, and to link more effectively with the Ministry for Sanitation and Water Resources. CWSA regional offices were supported to better promote the service delivery approach with the District Assemblies.

This publication looks in more detail at what has been done – in partnerships, in learning, in training and capacity building. It looks at the experiences of the NGO partners, the approach of the CWSA nationally and in the regions, and at efforts by water and sanitation teams in District Assembly Works Departments to plan, monitor and support services. It reflects on the challenges faced by community-based Water and Sanitation Management Teams and efforts being made to meet them.

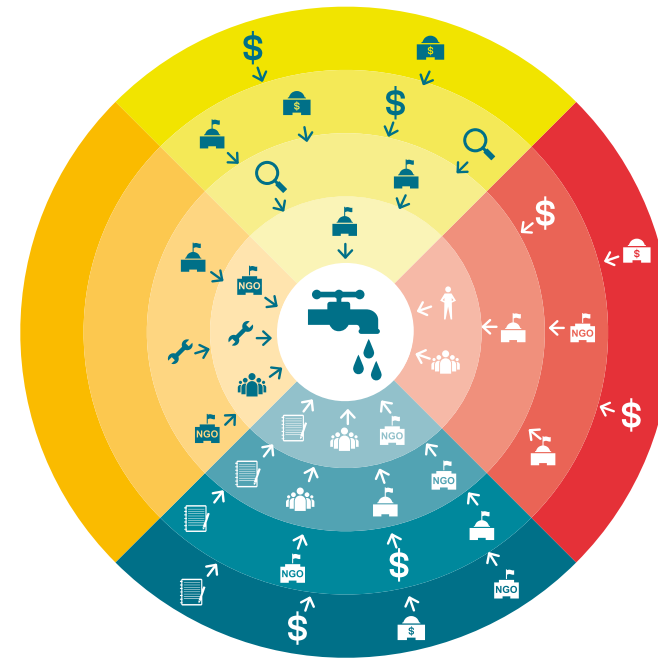
The importance of this approach is underlined by Joseph Kofi Adda, the first Minister for Sanitation and Water Resources in the new Ministry, when he spoke to IRC in May 2017. “There is no question at all about the role of the local government authorities in implementation,” he said. “The sector ministry has been created by Government simply to fashion the policy direction from the central aspect. That programme ... will require that the local authorities now do the actual implementation for specific activities... they are an essential part of this whole exercise in terms of implementation.”



## Chapter 2

# Partnerships

Developing country systems for water service delivery depends on many things going right – (See figure 4) Government policy and leadership commitment, financial and human resources, technical expertise, data collection and use, planning, communications, and community enthusiasm and commitment. There are many ways to fail and one way to succeed: everyone has to buy in to the system. If one link in the chain is weak, a water service is put at risk.



**“We cannot work in isolation in achieving universal coverage”**

**Cynthia Fosuah, software and behaviour change coordinator, WASH programme, World Vision**

**Figure 4** Developing country systems for water service delivery depends on many things going right.

Source: IRC, 2015.

Even if the water technology is simple, the water system can be highly complex. In a country that historically depended on assistance from many donors and NGOs, the number of different players who have to understand and accept the “rules of the game” is greater than in a system provided by one or a few suppliers who are regulated through government and scrutinised by consumers, regulators and the courts. Ghana can be seen to be making the transition from a kind of free for all where each provider did their own thing to a unified system that works to a single set of policies, standards and guidelines. The different actors who have a role in providing infrastructure, services or support have to work in partnership or this transition will prove impossible.

Partnerships, of course, include formal structures that bring organisations together to share information and to tackle problems jointly. In the Ghanaian context, partnerships are also about the informal exchanges vital to ensure that the complex web of facilitators, planners, providers and monitors work in harmony. Strengthening Local Government Capacity to Deliver Water Services has built on both approaches.

For Vida Duti, country director of IRC Ghana, improved collaboration between the Community Water and Sanitation Agency (CWSA) and the NGOs that provide infrastructure and services in Ghana has been one of the major gains.

“Prior to this programme, there was an unintended distance between the NGOs and Government. Governments have always been suspicious of NGOs, and NGOs have always been a bit reluctant to get too close to Government because they think they may be constrained by the way they work. When we started this programme, you could sense that in the relationship.

“With time we have noticed that the Community Water and Sanitation Agency has come to understand the agencies better; their models of operation and what they set out to deliver and what they are working on at the moment. The NGOs have also come to appreciate this relationship because this has enabled them to understand Government’s requirements better. They have also enhanced their capacity and their skills to be able to work using the guidelines that Government has provided.”

NGOs and the CWSA work together to support the district assemblies in training area mechanics and the community level water and sanitation management teams. There are examples of joint projects between NGOs with and without the CWSA. World Vision and Safe Water Network are exploring models for collecting payments for water to ensure that schemes can be sustained. The World Vision laboratory in Savelugu has been designated as the water quality testing laboratory for WaterAid in the Northern regions. World Vision International is working with CWSA on a UN Habitat project to provide capacity support to districts for planning and for area mechanics. WaterAid uses IRC data to identify areas where mechanics need support and training.

Theodora Adomako-Adjei, CWSA extension services coordinator, agrees that there has been a fragmented relationship with partners and too much focus simply on the number of facilities.

“The Hilton project is different because it focuses on partnerships - the soft aspects of delivering water and sanitation services which is also the underlying key factor for sustainability. Delivering facilities alone does not result in sustainability; you need people to be able to understand what they have to do and what steps they have to undertake to ensure that the facilities are sustained.”

CWSA brings experience and a multi-disciplinary approach to training and supporting District Assembly staff, communities and area mechanics. The NGOs bring resources and the ability to build capacity. In the Upper West Region for example WaterAid has used CWSA guidelines to establish a spare parts shop and to train area mechanics.

“The NGOs have changed the way they work,” says Adomako-Adjei. “Previously, they could just get to the communities and do whatever they like. This time we are working together and their application of sector processes and operational documents has been enhanced. It is no more like a boss and a subordinate. We are able to identify the strengths of each partner and define how we want to work together.”

The project has also strengthened the CWSA leadership role. “It has resulted in transparency and accountability. Previously we did not even know who was supporting the NGOs. This time we know. We have avoided duplication of efforts and together are maximising resources in the sector. Yes, Government has that legitimacy to lead development in this country, but Government alone cannot do it and therefore there is a need for effective partnership.”

Adomako-Adjei acknowledges the role that IRC has played in helping to revise operational documents and to disseminate them to NGOs and district staff. “CWSA has benefited a lot from its relationship with IRC. IRC has always brought to the fore the fact that the Government should position itself to lead the rural sub-sector activities. IRC also brought in a new direction for the delivery of water services and that is the service delivery approach. That is how come now you get to the communities and you hear them talking about CapManEx!”

Veronica Ayi-Bonte, IRC Ghana programme manager, sees partnership between the NGOs and CWSA as the missing link. “In our previous programme in Triple-S we worked with the District Assembly and with CWSA and we had all these tools. We did the monitoring; we knew what the problems were.



Theodora Adomako-Adjei, CWSA extension services coordinator

But we did not really see much service level improvement. If you are looking for improved functionality you need partners who are providing the services as well.

“People were going directly to the districts to work with them but it was not in a coordinated fashion and sometimes information was limited.

“We all acknowledged that none of us could make much of a difference alone.”

District Assemblies are now demanding to know in advance more about what NGOs are planning to do, so they can include those plans in their budgets, even if the money is not passing through their hands. “If you know that you are going to do one water scheme costing X amount in that district and you give the district the heads up, they can include it in their budgeting process and divert their own money elsewhere.”

## Why NGOs welcome this partnership

NGOs have been working in Ghana for a long time - World Vision started working on guinea worm eradication in 1979 while WaterAid has had a presence in the country since 1985. Today the NGOs express satisfaction that they are no longer working in isolation.

World Vision Ghana puts the wellbeing of the child at the centre of what they do and this demands that working with others must become a core value, says Attah Arhin, WASH technical coordinator. “If you are going to achieve life in all its fullness for children, then you have to do a lot of partnerships. Definitely we don’t see ourselves as competitors or rivals.”

In the past partnerships were not reflected in the everyday work of NGOs. “We were doing our individual activities in our own silos. World Vision sitting down with WaterAid or CWSA or IRC or Safe Water Network never happened. But because of this project there are many things that we now share.”



Attah Arhin, WASH technical coordinator, World Vision Ghana

One practical example has been making the World Vision water quality testing laboratory accessible to partner organisations – in the Northern Region this is the only lab used and recognised by WaterAid. In turn, World Vision uses the SMS mobile phone platform developed by SkyFox Ltd for monitoring and is scaling up its use in other projects.

However, Attah Arhin feels there is still room for improvement in sharing – especially through the learning alliance structures that have been established in each of the project districts and regions. “I think we can still do more. We are a very big international organisation with more than 300 staff doing different activities across the country. If you take the scale of World Vision, WaterAid, Safe Water Network, and if we share all our experiences, I believe that sector players may be able to upscale it to a much bigger level than we have been doing.

“It was only recently that I got to know about many of the things that IRC, WaterAid or even Safe Water Network have been doing. Because of the partnership if you ask me where Safe Water Network is, I will be able to tell you. If you ask me about their new model of working with the private sector, I have been part of their engagement, so I will be able to tell you. Previously it wasn't like that.”

For Mohammed Abdul-Nashiru, country director of WaterAid Ghana one attraction of working with partners is that it enables districts to address the needs of whole populations, rather than pursuing isolated projects. “Local government in Ghana is very, very critical to the delivery of services. We believe as an institution that we cannot be everywhere at the same time and for us to be efficient it is critical to work with these local structures.”

He applauds the project ambition to transform lives, not just in the short term but in the long term, by strengthening organisations and communities to institutionalise services and managing them by themselves.

“Times were when you just go in and provide one service for 350 people and move to the next district or next community and so on. But that is changing. At a sub-national district level we are committed to what are referred to as district-wide approaches. If you go to Gushegu district in the Northern region, or to Bongo in the Upper East Region, you find the district leadership mobilising actors to deliver one particular plan. They are throwing out a challenge to institutions. If there is a gap of 55% you need to work with us to bridge that. So we stay in a community or a district and work until they hit a full 100% before we move out.”

This is challenging for a number of reasons. If one provider fails to meet a commitment this affects all the partners. The district also has to demonstrate its commitment by putting up financial resources, even if it is only 10% of the total requirement. Nashiru contrasts this partnership of commitment to the old focus on quantity of infrastructure. “We have learnt from things that did not work in supply-driven approaches.”

For Joseph Ampadu, Safe Water Network Programme Manager, the most important benefit from the Conrad N. Hilton Foundation supported partnership has been the ability to work with the governmental organisations.

The Safe Water Network promotes an enterprise approach to encourage people to buy into a water service which can be sustained and expanded, working with District Assemblies to develop services that reach “the missing middle”. In small towns and peri-urban areas where a piped scheme attracts those who can afford to pay something for water, Safe Water Network establishes “water ATMs” where people buy credit and can collect water when they like.

“Having CWSA on board for us was a key attractive point because we were entering a market where CWSA had worked over the years in building capacity and setting up the guidelines that are required in order to be able to deliver water services. Having CWSA was an opportunity to make our model known to them and explore opportunities for us to work together.

“Ultimately what we are providing is a role that we expect the local authorities to be able to do in future; not just building water facilities or water solutions but also being able to manage them more professionally over the long term. We could not have had a more major route into achieving this than this particular initiative from IRC and the Hilton Foundation.”

The partnership has enabled the Safe Water Network to reach an agreement with World Vision to roll out the use of water ATMs in other areas.

Safe Water Network uses data made available by local assemblies, the CWSA and IRC, to explore areas where they believe the enterprise approach can work. “They have been generous enough to share a lot of this information based on work they have done in the past, and that has been our entry point,” says Ampadu. In return, Safe Water feeds back the results of its research on the extent of need, and community ability and willingness to pay for water.

“We track our operating expenses, our customers, and the volume of water that they are fetching. We track the expenses for each of our water stations. We track down times and non-revenue water that is not accounted for, reserves that are accumulating, contributions they are making to operating expenses, maintenance and all that. And we don't just keep this information to ourselves.”

Safe Water Network produces four page “field insights”, that describe initiatives and the lessons learnt. They also hold an annual Beyond the Pipe Forum, to look at barriers to the enterprise approach and at emerging solutions. “We share this extensively with the sector and the information is also available on our website.”

Financial information is also shared quarterly with local water “stations”, members of the water and sanitation management teams and with local assemblies.

Increased collaboration with CWSA led to funding from the Ministry of Finance. “Through a partnership with CWSA we set up one small water enterprise in the Eastern region using our model [with support from UNICEF]. I think it couldn't have happened without us being in the Hilton partners' platform with them.”

## How the partnerships were formed

For all the enthusiasm that now exists, it was not easy to set out on this road. NGOs want to work together, but they do not want to lose their identities and each has a history, method of working and autonomy.

Veronica Ayi-Bonte, programme manager IRC Ghana, admits that the initial stages of creating the partnership were tricky and they all needed to identify and amalgamate their strengths. “We had multiple interests and our first meeting actually had to be facilitated by an external facilitator so that everybody would lay their cards on the table and we would find where we match.”

IRC agreed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with each partner detailing what added value each would bring and how to move forward.” “Putting it together we were able to get much more traction than we would if we had gone in alone with the districts.”

It was also important to underline that IRC was not there to ‘supervise’ NGOs or manage their projects: each NGO reports directly to the Hilton Foundation for their direct funds. “We needed to understand the dynamics and that people will still be different and we have to respect each other. Each organisation still wants to maintain their unique identity and they don’t want to be merged as one. We don’t agree on everything but it is better than when we started.”

The CWSA instituted quarterly partners’ meetings to discuss strategic objectives. Theodora Adomako-Adjei says this has helped to build mutual confidence. “We plan together, we update each other, we discuss common issues relating to all partners and through that we build trust. Where previously CWSA could hear of an NGO working somewhere and you don’t even know what they are doing, now they come to the meeting with their programmes and their work plans. We buy into each other’s

activities. We discuss how we are going to support each other. Through the partnership round table discussions we are able to build each other’s capacity.”

In addition, a quarterly technical group of CWSA technical and regional directors and IRC synchronises activities and training, keeps the project on track and ensures there is no duplication.

Martin Dery who is president of the ProNet North NGO covering the three northern regions of Ghana, and who chairs the national Coalition of NGOs in Water and Sanitation (CONIWAS) says that stronger partnerships benefit smaller local NGOs as well as international organisations. “Partnerships have developed quite nicely, I must say, and the coming of the district plans is a very important dimension to that.

“For us as actors in the sector this is a massive jump. I believe this will lead to more effective use of resources, greater coordination, eliminate duplication and remove the tendency of the past where people could run parallel plans in the same district. Groups like IRC who are leading on learning are very important because we were working in the past blindly, just operating as individuals.”

Cynthia Fosuah, WASH programme software and behaviour change coordinator, for World Vision, says simply: “One of the sustainability drivers is to work with the district authorities, and so we are happy to work with them. We cannot work in isolation in achieving universal coverage.”



Martin Dery, president, ProNet North



## Chapter 3

# Districts planning for success

A water system that meets the needs of its population and that can be sustained financially and technically requires well-functioning organisations at every level – national, regional, district and community. In Ghana, a critical part of the governance mosaic is the Metropolitan, Municipal and District Assembly (MMDA) structure which has responsibility for water and sanitation services outside the big cities and which in a rural area is known simply as the District Assembly. It is here in the words of Chris Dunston of the Hilton Foundation that “the rubber hits the road” and the policies and procedures drawn up at national level are put to the test.

Districts have traditionally been under-resourced with people and finance, while water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) services are just one of several competing development priorities for which they are responsible.

Among other functions, districts assemblies are responsible for the preparation of the District Water and Sanitation Plan (DWSP), which forms part the district medium-term development plan. They are required to ensure the formation of Water and Sanitation Management Teams (WSMT), who are the day to day service providers, and to provide them with support. District Assemblies play a role in regulating and approving water tariffs set by community-based water service providers. They also contribute to the creation of an enabling environment at local level.

The Local Government (Department of District Assemblies) Commencement Instrument (LI 1961) was designed in part to integrate responsibility for water under the District Works Department (DWD) and to fill staffing positions in Water Units within these DWDs. However, the instrument has never been implemented in full and although these positions exist in theory and on District Assembly organograms, in practice the units remain weak and usually cannot fulfil the assembly mandate. The Local Government Service estimates that around 80% of Water Units are either under-staffed or have ‘sub-professional’ technicians, rather than qualified engineers, who have little influence in district authority decision making.

These weaknesses were a factor in the tendency for NGOs to bypass districts and work directly with communities, resulting in a piecemeal pattern of facilities that never became sustainable as communities saw their infrastructure as being someone else’s responsibility.

Godwin Kotku, CWSA Northern Region Extension Services Specialist, says that donors who responded to the guinea worm crisis in Northern Ghana three decades ago scarcely thought about the longer term. “Virtually our entire country became the area for new facilities, and when these facilities broke down, we ignored them and built new ones. So when the Sustainable Services at Scale (Triple-S) project came on board we had to find a way around this. Why haven’t we focused on the services provided by these facilities rather than the hardware aspect?”

The CWSA produced its district operational manual (DOM) and project implementation manual (PIM) to reflect the service delivery approach and set service benchmarks covering quantity of water, quality, distance to travel to fetch water and the durability and functionality of the water facility. “These indicators came about as a result of a country wanting to focus more on the services delivered rather than just providing and re-providing infrastructure,” says Kotku.

Mohammed Abdul-Nashiru, country director of WaterAid Ghana, agrees that things have changed for the better. “Times were when international NGOs provided services without recourse to expressed needs of communities. Now international NGOs go to the district to identify the expressed needs reflected in the district water and sanitation plans and then pick those as priorities that will shape their interventions, investments and so on.”

He describes the way the Community Water and Sanitation Agency, District Works Departments and community Water and Sanitation Management Teams work together as fantastic. “We have seen a lot of difference in communities now that they themselves indicate what their needs are and present these to the district authorities. District authorities then capture them in their plans. Once that is done whoever goes to that particular district is expected to work within the district plan.”

Nashiru stresses the importance of sustaining the new infrastructure, since in some districts only one in six water facilities were functioning optimally and almost a third were non-functional. “In areas where that is happening it simply means that people are reverting to unsafe sources. Children fall sick. Women cannot be productive. Schoolchildren don’t go to school or they cut classes and so on. That is quite serious. What we want to see is that services provided run for a very long time.”

## What makes a good plan?

The National Community Water Strategy directs that legal ownership of water supply infrastructure is vested in District Assemblies that hold them in trust for communities. Beneficiary communities, through their respective Water and Sanitation Management Teams (WSMTs), take responsibility over day-to-day management.

District assembly staff have been trained by regional CWSA specialists and by Hilton grantee NGOs to collect and analyse data, plan sustainable finances and prepare District Water and Sanitation Plans. The training is clearly making a big difference.

Alhaji Mohammed Shaibu, chief planning officer for Savelugu Nanton district in the Northern Region, defines a good water and sanitation plan as one that addresses the needs of the population that you serve and projects their needs into the future. “You really have to touch on the needs of the people in terms of water and sanitation, so that when you collect data you are able to tell the gaps that exist and also facilities that they have and also the facilities that need replacing.”

To achieve this, he says that districts need a well-trained team comprising a planning officer, district environmental health officer, a coordinating department and where possible a community development officer involved in collecting data.



Alhaji Mohammed Shaibu, chief planning officer, Savelugu Nanton district, Northern Region

Owusu Minta Quasi, district planning officer in Sunyani West in Brong Ahafo Region, adds that assembly members also play an important role in community needs assessment. His team held meetings with the representatives and visited area councils to discuss their proposals. “We discussed what they had submitted and based on that, together with them, we prioritised which communities ought to be served in the short term, and the medium term.”

In the Northern Region Godwin Kotku, CWSA regional extension services specialist, found district staff were eager to learn how to use life-cycle costing and how to adopt the service delivery approach. “Their enthusiasm has been quite wonderful. You sense this from their demeanour when they participate in these meetings. We took them through how a WASH plan should look, the framework, and then we asked them to go and prepare these plans. Based on the framework they were able to prepare district water and sanitation plans which are very, very wonderful.

“When you take the service delivery approach, these are not tangible things that you see on the ground, but at the end of the day it should result in the sustainability of water facilities. They are improving day by day in the way they are managing water and sanitation facilities.”

That enthusiasm is reflected by district staff. Alhaji Mohammed Shaibu, chief planning officer in Savelugu Nanton, says that CWSA advised them to focus on functionality as they already have high coverage rates. “CWSA have detailed data about the water and sanitation facilities of all the districts in the region. Looking at the plan and the projections we made for the next three years, they were able to correct certain things that had gone wrong and to make good suggestions as to how to address them. Many of our boreholes and our water points are broken down and there is a need for us to concentrate on maintenance of the facilities.

“We were introduced to a methodology to determine the lifespan of some of these borehole parts and when they will need replacement so that they don’t take you unawares. If you just wait, when the borehole has broken down the community cannot buy the parts and relapses back into unwholesome water.”

He sees his district team as playing a vital liaison role between the community and the assembly – monitoring services and reporting back so that problems can be addressed.

Partner NGOs are also active in training. Sulaiman Issah-Bello, WaterAid programme manager for the three regions of northern Ghana, joined forces with CWSA to address the gap they could see in the planning and budgeting skills of district and regional authority staff.

This training helped Gushegu district staff to adjust their existing WASH plan to include rehabilitation. “In the past they were not conscious of these things at all. They were interested in planning new facilities. But this kind of training awakened them that you can do something about the existing facilities.”

He wants WaterAid to stay engaged. “The training we are giving to local and regional authorities in the life-cycle costing approach is not one off. It is something that we are going to use from now onwards. And I believe when they go for their own meetings, through their own peer interactions, they will share these lessons with their colleagues. I can see the future being so bright.”

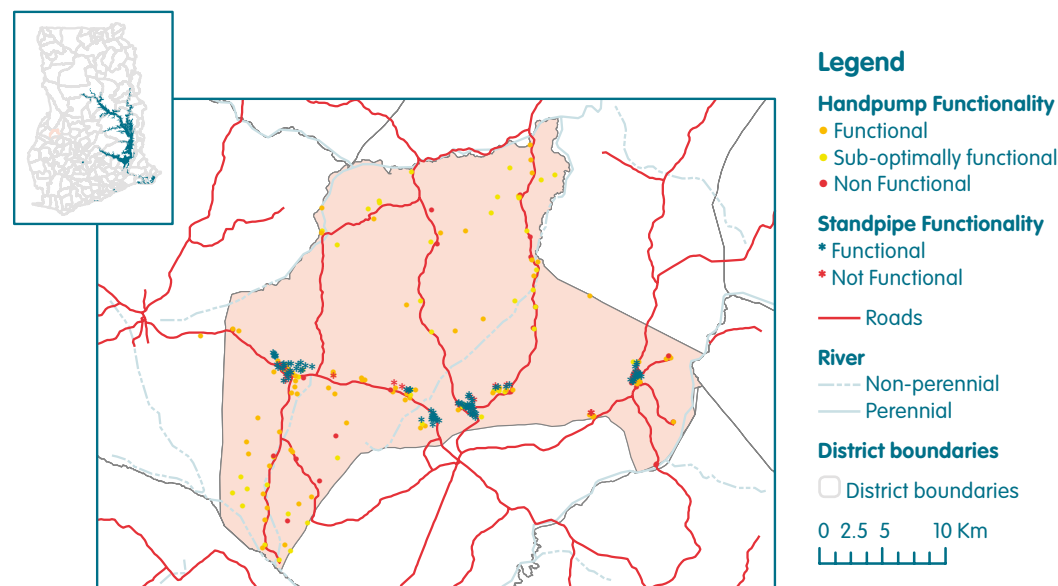
## Protecting the assets

Under the Triple-S project, IRC supported the Community Water and Sanitation Agency to translate sector standards and monitoring guidelines into an asset management framework with a simple template for cataloguing the location of water facilities, their age and their current condition. District Assemblies are able to project when routine maintenance is due and assess the cost of repairs. Vida Duti, country director for IRC Ghana says: “They go beyond just knowing the conditions of the water facilities to understand technically what is wrong with these facilities so that they will be able to do a proper costing.”

District Assemblies also use the data to engage with assembly members and communities so that, as Duti says, “communities became more aware of the conditions of their facilities and the underlying reasons why they do not have reliable services.”

By August 2017, 131 out of Ghana’s 216 districts had collected baseline data<sup>8</sup> on the location and condition of their water facilities and most had completed water and sanitation plans.

A colour-coded factsheet shows the location of facilities: green for a facility that is working well; yellow for one that is performing sub-optimally and red for a facility that is not working at all.



**Figure 5 Status of water facilities in Sunyani West district 2014**

Source: Agbemor, B., 2014. Water Service Monitoring 2012-2013-2014

Frank Tsidzi, IT specialist for the CWSA in Brong Ahafo Region, points out that all the data in the national District Monitoring and Evaluation System (DiMES) database used to prepare the national sector investment plan, is derived from what is collected in communities and has to be accurate and up-to-date. When districts are offered the chance to develop new provision, they select communities from their district water and sanitation plan. The regional CWSA, which collates local data and forwards it to national level, checks the main database to see that appropriate communities are being prioritised before they approve a scheme.

His concern is that even accurate information can soon go out of date if, for example, facilities break down. “The databases are dynamic and need to be updated. The District Assembly is directly responsible for periodic monitoring, but the challenge is that they don’t have the logistics to sustain continuous monitoring. The baseline collection that we did under SMARTerWASH was very useful because resources were provided. In our region, almost all the communities were visited and the data collected, so that exercise that we carried out in 2014 has actually enhanced the credibility of the data in DiMES.”

CWSA is now working to make DiMES a web-based tool so that data can be transferred more easily. Tsidzi said: “I hope that the District Assemblies will be able to continuously monitor the facilities in the communities and regularly update the data, so the data will always be credible, reliable for planning and decision making.”

SMARTerWASH enabled the region to collect data using smart phones with Akvo Flow software. Six staff members from each district attended a three-day workshop to learn how to conduct surveys using the phones and a further two-day workshop to learn how to clean the data and prepare for DiMES. All 27 districts in the Brong Ahafo region now have DiMES installed on their computers so they can download the Flow data.

Kyei Asare Bediako, district engineer for Sunyani West, looks forward to the day when every community uses the SMS system to report faults. “As an engineer it really helped me a lot. At first you have to go to communities and look for boreholes that are broken down. Now I just go on to the SkyFox system, log in to SMS and see the communities reporting broken down boreholes. I take that data and use it to prepare budgets to cost for repairs and major rehabilitation.”

Communities used to have problems in finding a mechanic but now they can check the price of the spare parts on their phone and send an SMS message to the area mechanic or to the district. “If I am prompted, immediately I call an area mechanic so within three days the facility is put in shape and functioning.

“It has really helped the community members; the coordination between us, (district water team), and the community. They all have our contacts and could contact us every time there is a breakdown. We have 57 SMS communities. If we could increase it, I think it will really increase our water coverage. We are working hard to get to those communities and to train them.”

Benjamin Agbemor, CWSA regional learning facilitator for the Brong Ahafo Region, was involved in training district staff to use the software and helped to conduct a user satisfaction baseline study in Kintampo South, talking to 435 water users about how they used water and what they thought about the service.

Water users had been able to participate in the formation of their Water and Sanitation Management Team, and had said they were willing to pay for their service either through monthly contributions or ‘pay as you fetch’.

Handpumps and piped water schemes were generally well used, although use was seasonal. Agbemor says that only the quantity of water gave problems. “During the wet season the quantity of water from most of the facilities is good, but in the dry season in some facilities the water level reduces and you will have to pump more, and that also has an impact on the waiting time for access to water. “In all water users were generally happy with the facilities they had. They expressed satisfaction with water they received from those facilities, and also the performance of the service providers.” He feels confident that the survey reflected real community opinions since they went out of their way to include more women than men. “Generally in the country they are more concerned with every day water use and water needs,” he said.

## Monitoring the quality of construction

A common problem in the Wa East district of Upper West Region is boreholes running dry, often because the water table falls in the dry season, but sometimes because of failures in construction. Quality control is therefore an important aspect of the work of district engineer Abdulai Baa-Ang. “Sometimes the contractors do shoddy work. The borehole is not up to the right depth, or the pipes they provide are falling short. If proper monitoring is not done, you have these problems.

“We can improve on the quality of the contractors by frequent monitoring and supervision, and by educating the contractors. The technicians that are fixing the parts need to be educated to know exactly the amount of pipe they need to solve the problem.”

<sup>8</sup> SMARTerWASH supported baseline data collection in 119 districts, ten districts were covered by the project Strengthening Local Government Capacity to Deliver Water Services and two districts were supported by UNICEF, making the total of 131.



Baa-Ang and his district works team carry out site inspections to check on the depth of boreholes, the materials being used and the size of pipes. When a well is complete they test the quality of the water. Only when he is satisfied that all the contract specifications have been met will Baa-Ang certify that the invoice can be paid.

His team also play a critical role in rehabilitating broken down boreholes and handpumps. They identify failing boreholes and send an area mechanic to assess the cost of repairs. If the costs are not high they encourage communities to use their own funds to get it working. For larger jobs they seek funds from the District Assembly.

What they don't do anymore is simply leave failing infrastructure to rust. "You cannot achieve full coverage by leaving the broken down boreholes. One of the mandates of the works department is to rehabilitate all broken down boreholes, so that we have constant flow of water throughout the whole year."

## What has changed?

What has changed through this massive effort of training and coordination? Certainly, the problems of capacity and performance have not all been solved but there is a visible improvement in the 13 districts supported through Strengthening Local Government Capacity to Deliver Water Services.

John Godson Aduakye, CWSA regional engineer for the Northern Region sees significant differences in the way that the six districts supported by the Hilton project in the region are performing.

"The six districts are able to plan their four year medium-term plans better when it relates to water and sanitation. They are able to come up with convincing documents to the chief executives and directors to get resources to address water and sanitation facilities; to be able to negotiate with NGOs



Benjamin Agbemor, CWSA regional learning facilitator for the Brong Ahafo Region

that are coming in the district to work to show them their plans and where they can fit in. They have much more confidence with the donor agencies because of their knowledge and they know where they are going.

"These districts have registered all their assets and documented which of them need improvement. They have costed for that improvement over time and know where they have to go and do maintenance. They have educated communities about how they can communicate with their office and the area mechanics to help them with the maintenance and they are able to do these things in a shorter interval than the other districts.

"They know what they are about and they know where they are going. The other districts have not been developed to that extent.

"In the six districts where we are working, you see clear changes in the way that the community handle their water and sanitation facilities. The lessons we are learning from this project are impacting on other nearby districts. Scaling up to cover the region is actually our target."

The practice of NGOs bypassing the CWSA and districts are on their way out. Alhaji Mohammed Shaibu, chief planning officer for Savelugu Nanton district, describes how closely his district and World Vision collaborate today. "Each year World Vision has a work plan. They come into the assembly and they tell us what they have and where they can provide facilities. In these communities they will provide water pumps; in this institution they will provide school latrines. If you have their plans you can zero in on other communities instead of duplicating their efforts. In preparing our water and sanitation plan, they are part of the process. They are a very strong stakeholder and they tell us what they will be doing for the next three years."

For Cynthia Fosuah, World Vision software and behaviour change coordinator, the new method of collaborative working allows the district to set goals for every intervention and brings real benefits to their programme. In the past, the district probably would not even possess a vehicle or enough fuel to visit communities, leaving NGOs with a headache about who would provide post-construction support. Now there is a smooth handover. "Once we have a collective plan, we have a MoU on what each of us is supposed to deliver. When interventions are completed, the district assembly takes up their role in monitoring the communities. World Vision does not bear that responsibility anymore."

## Remaining challenges

Vida Duti is convinced that the investment is paying off. "We provide capacity support to the districts through the Hilton grantees and through the CWSA, and by having these plans they become more attractive to other donors. We have had other donors and NGOs coming in to support the plan to fix the facilities that have broken down, train the Water and Sanitation Management Teams and support forming WSMTs where they did not exist." If she has a concern, it is about how to meet expectations on a larger scale. "If you look at the needs that have been identified by the districts, they are quite huge. If you look at the districts' own capacity, they may be able to fix some of the problems, but I believe that one of the challenges will be how to fully implement these plans."

Martin Dery, director of ProNet North NGO and chairman of the Coalition of NGOs in Water and Sanitation (CONIWAS) is also concerned about financing water and sanitation plans. "We are all excited about the fact that at least there is a plan, and there is a cost for the plan, and we are happy that the district is prioritising water and sanitation issues. That is in itself is a major step and is a result of investments over the years.

"But in practice that money is not yet coming in. We still require donor support for a while. There is widespread poverty because, especially in Northern Ghana, you have one rainy season and it is getting shorter by the year; it is getting unpredictable.

"We are hoping that over time there will be increases from community contributions. We have a new Ministry for Sanitation and Water Resources and we are all upbeat about that, and we are trying to talk to members of parliament to increase the Government allocation. But the reality is that even what



Owusu Minta Quasi, district planning officer in Sunyani West

Government has to allocate within the short term will not be sufficient to address the water supply needs at community level. The plan is a good start and over time we should see increasing investments locally from the community, from the assembly, from Government. But it is not that time yet.”

For Owusu Minta Quasi, district planning officer in Sunyani West, the challenge is convincing assembly members and communities to set aside enough money for repairs. “The cost of sustaining water facilities, if not regularly maintained, eventually becomes very high, so in all our engagements we try to impress on the elected representatives and community members to make sure that facilities that have been provided, are contributed for in terms of their usage. As they use them, they must set aside money to take care of the operation and maintenance, so that the facilities can serve them for a longer period.”

Alhaji Ahmed Ewura, CWSA regional director for Brong Ahafo Region, sees the biggest challenge as scaling up successes achieved in the project districts of Kintampo South and Sunyani West to other districts in the region. “Other districts have shown interest. It is our expectation that we ourselves in our own small way will support them to build their capacity to be able to budget for these facilities. But the greatest challenge is their own initiative: unless you go to them, they don’t come; As being the custodians of these facilities, assemblies ought to budget for them even if the money has to come from central Government.”

For Mohammed Abdul-Nashiru, WaterAid country director, the project has set out pointers for sustainability. “One is that we are ensuring with our partners that wherever a service or a facility is provided they have a local structure that takes responsibility for its operation and maintenance. Two, that the district begins to put aside resources to support situations where a facility breaks down, especially if the cost of breakdown is higher than the community can afford. Three is that when we are planning and budgeting for this we should look at the whole life-cycle costs. It is a total endeavour and if we do that we will be able to have services that last.”

Benjamin Agbemor, who was Brong Ahafo regional learning facilitator under Triple-S before taking up a similar post under the Hilton supported project, is optimistic that this will be achieved. “My hope for the water sector by 2020 is that we will build the capacity of the districts so well that they will take up their service authority mandate and deliver it well, strengthening the capacity of community level structures so that the water facilities which are provided provide services that are sustainable.”

#### Box 1 What is in a plan? – The Akatsi South example

The Akatsi South District Water and Sanitation Plan for 2017-2020 shows that water coverage is a fraction over 60% leaving a gap of about 40% to close to achieve universal coverage by 2020. The district population is expected to grow by 40,000 by 2020 to a total of 130,550 people.

When tested, 32% of facilities were non-functional and only 2% of 197 boreholes fitted with handpumps met all the nationally recommended indicators for quantity, quality, distance and reliability. The biggest problems were the number of handpumps more than 500 metres from community households and the overcrowding at some boreholes.

The plan serves as a framework for detailed WASH planning and implementation based on reliable data. An annual work plan and budget for 2017 was also set.

The four year plan is to provide two piped water schemes and 99 new boreholes and to repair and rehabilitate a further 91 boreholes. The total cost would be more than GH 3.9 million (approx US\$ 875,000).

The plan sets priorities for providing for communities in need based on the following criteria:

- **A minimum population of 75**
- **The community has no facility or what it has is not adequate**
- **Past or present evidence of the water related diseases such as guinea worm, bilharzia, diarrhoea and intestinal worms**
- **Inclusion of the district in development partners’ plans**
- **Experience of community mobilisation and management experience**
- **Social cohesion/community organisation**

Depending on population size communities will be provided with a hand dug well with a pump, a borehole, a small community piped scheme, or – in the case of small towns – a larger piped scheme.

The plan notes the need to ensure the active participation of community stakeholders in identifying sites for boreholes so as to avoid a situation where some community people refuse to use facilities because its positioning offends local customs and values.

It also notes the need to prevent the proliferation of hand dug wells, storage tanks and latrines with soakaways close to underground water sources. The plan says: “This is a potential hazard and promotion of private latrines would have to undertake a vigorous public education on the location requirements in relation to ground water and other environmental considerations.”

The plan was produced in November 2016 and has been approved by the district assembly.



## Chapter 4

# Learning alliances

Nana Kwaku Boahen, chairman of the Jema Water and Sanitation Management Team, is explaining to a meeting of the Kintampo South District Learning Alliance Platform (DLLAP) about his mission to educate local people in Jema, the small town district capital in Brong Ahafo region.

“People think that when you are coming to collect money you are collecting for yourself. We have to go through the education process. Let them understand the needs and why they are paying the money. If you don’t do that and you start going to collect money they will not pay.”

Jema has a small piped scheme installed by World Vision at a cost 16 million Ghana Cedis (US\$ 3.65 million) and the WSMT had been instructed to collect a contribution from each household. “It was very difficult,” Kwaku admits. They ended up collecting only GH¢ 2,000-3,000 (US\$ 450-685).

Daniel Nyamekye, district development planning officer and desk officer for WASH came and spoke to local people and convinced them of the need to make payments if they wanted to have a service that would keep running. Jema WSMT then appointed two trainees to maintain the piped scheme.

“I am sure that if you continue educating people the money will come in”, says Kwaku. “It is simple to go to the community and talk to them and they will listen to you – that is what we have been doing. Let them understand the needs and why they are paying the money.”

In nearby Jema Nkwanta things looked worse. Ebenezer Kwarteng, the elected district assembly member for the area, admitted that their attempts at household collections ended in failure. “Some paid and others did not. They refused. And because of that they all decided not to pay at all. So we decided not to collect the money. We stopped. What we had collected we put in the bank here and it is still there. We don’t know what to do with it!”

Now they have switched to a system of pay as you fetch, and that is working. “I met the community and we told them it is not free because when it is spoiled we are going to repair it, so we should serve the water and they agreed. We have a bucket that we use to measure - that is 15 pesewas and 20 pesewas so now they are all paying as they fetch.”



Ebenezer Kwarteng, elected district assembly member for Jema Nkwanta, speaking at the Kintampo South District Learning Alliance Platform

These invaluable experiences are being shared at the DLLAP meeting – community leaders and district assembly staff are visibly strengthened by hearing how others tackle the problems they are also facing. One WSMT chairman describes how he successfully convinced the traditional chief and community leaders that the money was needed for maintenance – and they in turn convinced community members.

Evelyn Kyemeraa, part of the district authority team, emphasises the need to be consistent. “The moment you leave it open then some will pay and others won’t pay and those who are paying will stop paying. If World Vision put up a project and the community see it as a gift they will just go there and fetch. Water is not supposed to be expensive but it does not come for free.”

Payments are not the only issue at this DLLAP. One representative makes a plea for his small community which has a school but no borehole. Daniel Nyamekye tells him that every community with a school will be included in the district water and sanitation plan. “We considered the issue as an emergency and we decided to do something about it.”

Another issue is of traditional chiefs who decide to appoint the Water and Sanitation Management Teams themselves – rather than let members be chosen by the community – and who behave as if they own the water facilities. The district tries diplomacy to tell the chief or local landowner they do not own the water and cannot demand money for its use, but if this fails legal action is taken.

Ebenezer Kwarteng from Jema Nkwanta was very happy to have been invited to the DLLAP. “It is very important for me to come. I have to learn a lot here. I am going to educate my community and the chiefs and elders so that when there is any water serving the community the people there will be willing to pay any amount that is due.”

This learning alliance was established as part of the Strengthening Local Government Capacity to Deliver Water Services project. Samuel Gyamara, deputy-coordinating director for Kintampo South District Assembly, says that it fills an important gap because it is the only governance body at this level that exclusively focuses on WASH Issues. “Little or no attention was given to the progress of WASH in



Samuel Gyamara, deputy-coordinating director for Kintampo South District Assembly addressing the Kintampo South District Learning Alliance Platform

other platforms like District Assembly meetings or even our District Coordinating Planning Unit and other management engagements.

“There was a weakness owing to the absence of the concepts like the life-cycle costs approach. Service delivery indicators were absent from the planning regime. Decision making has now been given priority attention and for the first time in the history of the districts there has been an increase in our budget for the 2016-17 planning year for WASH.”

A few days earlier, money was also on the agenda of the Upper West Regional Learning Alliance Platform (RLLAP) meeting in Wa in northern Ghana. This time the issue was whether the Wa East District Assembly can afford its plans for 2017-2020, as a step towards achieving 100% coverage.

Abdulai Ali, district assistant planner for Wa East, told the meeting that the district will need 89 new boreholes and more than 100 repairs to take the district from 76% in 2015 to full coverage by 2025.

He was challenged by one of the stakeholders – what will happen to your plan if there is donor fatigue and no outside money? Abdulai Ali responded that he is sure they will succeed. “If we don’t get donor support we are sure that we will be able to carry them out as planned. We have a very systematic plan that we have put in place to achieve this full water coverage.”

Afterwards he explains that the district is committed to spending some of its own funds on the annual action plans that will flow from the three year plan. “We are committed in providing water to the communities that are under our catchment area. It is also obvious that funding is always a challenge, but the assembly is committed to ensuring that that plan is being followed and being followed very well.”

This was the ninth meeting of the RLLAP since it was formed as part of the project in 2015. RLLAP is attended by civil society partners, the Regional Coordinating Council (RCC), district water and sanitation teams, other district staff working in support of WASH, by Water and Sanitation Management Team members from communities and by area mechanics.

Emmanuel Ato Quansah, CWSA extension services specialist for the Upper West Region, describes the meeting as “an opportunity to mop up the lessons and document some of the milestones” and “a discussion on where we have gone right and where we have gone wrong.”

Why is learning so important? Melvin Tagoe, CWSA acting regional director, told the meeting: “If after so many investments we have not learnt anything or changed the way we are handling our water system and WASH sector then it means we don’t deserve to be part of any future development. But I believe that in Upper West region we have gone through a lot and there are a lot of lessons that we have learnt.”

Learning alliances are active in all 13 project districts and the five regions where they are based. They strengthen coordination, give an opportunity to reflect on progress and challenges and help to spread the message to other districts.

They are also developing a sustainable life span themselves. Daniel Nyamekye, points out that although the Kintampo South District DLLAP was started by the project, two meetings have now been financed directly by the District Assembly and another is to be hosted by World Vision. “We have actually institutionalised the DLLAP. It will not collapse with the project; DLLAP is going to be sustained.”

## How learning platforms have developed in Ghana

The learning platform idea is not new. In 2008 Abubakari Wumbei was national coordinator of the WASH Resource Centre Network (RCN) when a presentation on the learning alliance approach was made by Marieke Adank from IRC to seven WASH organisations that were sharing a base in Accra. Adank described how the RiPPLE project in Ethiopia was using learning alliance platforms to bring together stakeholders.

Wumbei, who is now communication learning and advocacy coordinator for IRC Ghana, believed that this was a concept they could usefully replicate. “I consulted with the core group of RCN and they bought into the idea and so a meeting date was then set up for the first learning alliance platform to happen.”

Up till then, sharing experiences in the WASH sector had been through one-off single organisation initiatives. The vision now being shared was different, says Wumbei. “We could bring a range of projects, a range of organisations with different backgrounds, different provisions, to all collectively focus on what we wanted to achieve and see where different projects fitted so we could move the process forward.”

The first meeting of the National Level Learning Alliance Platform (NLLAP) was held in October 2009, with a presentation on sector learning by Dr. Patrick Moriarty of IRC, who urged the sector to begin doing things together. Other introductory presentations focused on initiatives such as the RCN, the WASHCost project, the Tripartite Partnership Project by Trend Group, and the Water Integrity Network by Transparency International. Every sector segment was represented and they quickly agreed that meetings would be held on the final Thursday of every month. They also agreed that, in contrast to the culture of payments that existed at the time, nobody would receive an allowance for attending. Wumbei says that this reflected the seriousness of purpose. “We were there to learn and to collectively achieve the national target that we had set for ourselves. You are going there to learn and you are going there to share your ideas. That became the one meeting you do not expect to be paid for going.”

Initial costs of hiring a conference room and providing lunch were met by IRC through a grant from the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs (DGIS). It is significant that when that grant expired, partners in the network agreed to take over the funding and keep the NLLAP alive. It has met more or less monthly ever since and by June 2017 had held its 64th meeting.

It is implicit in the name of the National Level Learning Alliance Platform that there would also be other levels. Under the Triple-S project Regional Level Learning Alliance Platforms (RLLAPs) were established in the three project regions of Volta, Brong Ahafo and the Northern Region. Under Strengthening Local Government Capacity to Deliver Water Services new platforms were established in Upper West and Upper East regions.

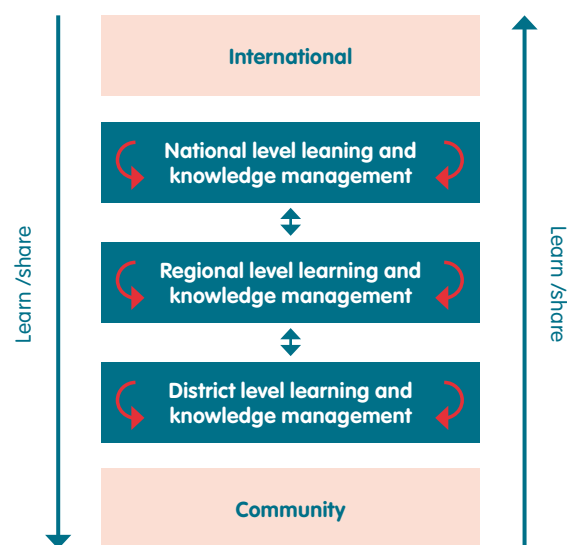


Figure 6 Learning Alliance structure in Ghana

Source: WASH Resource Centre Network, Ghana

The next step was to facilitate District Level Learning Alliance Platforms (DLLAPs) in all 13 project districts.

The logic of this structure is that lessons and experiences shared at one level can pass up and down to learning platforms at another level, helping to prevent any part of the sector from becoming isolated.

The regular high attendance demonstrates the value that stakeholders place on the learning platforms. Monthly WASH reflections with key decision points are published on the Resource Centre Network website (<https://www.washghana.net/>).

Wumbei says: “Stakeholders really do appreciate the platforms. Some use it as reference points when they are putting proposals together, some when they are looking at evidence. When you look at the district level, they also indicate the benefit it has brought.” In Sunyani West for instance, when Rotary Club (local chapter) attended a meeting and saw the enormity of the problems on the ground, they promised to provide 15 boreholes and that promise has been delivered.”

**Box 2 What makes a learning alliance platform work?**

As a pioneer of the learning alliance network in Ghana, Abubakari Wumbei knows more than most about what makes them work. A good collaborative body, he says, includes all key stakeholders who feel a sense of collective ownership rather than being ‘participants’. Five areas of capacity are needed to achieve this:

- A core group responsible for making sure that the platform is well organised and well documented so that it can achieve basic knowledge management. Documentation must reach every member of the platform and be collected in an accessible (online) repository.
- Commitment and engagement to ensure that activities take place and are followed up to keep stakeholders on board. “You need to be a driver who is able to fulfil whatever you promise to the people.”
- The capacity to balance divergent views and interests. The platform will have a range of people and interests. “There will definitely be difficult customers. How you handle all of them is so important to let them still feel a part of the process.”
- The ability to attract support and resources. To run a platform on a regular basis requires finance and people who are willing to provide support.
- The ability to self-renew. To remain relevant the platform must always focus on issues that are of benefit to its members and partners. This is so important.

To achieve all this requires skilled facilitation to bring out the best in people and to keep them involved in the process. “The core group has to be aware of this and develop capabilities along these lines to make the platform succeed and achieve the purpose for which it was set up.”

**Lessons from a decade of learning lessons**

Almost ten years after the first platform was established in Ghana the learning alliance movement is growing. This is happening, says Vida Duti, country director for IRC Ghana, because they provide a space to find joint solutions to common problems. “This programme has helped us to close the loop between what we are discussing in Accra which is mostly high level policy stuff, to the practicalities of what is happening at the regional and at the district level.

“At regional level they bring not only the districts where we are working but districts that are not directly participating in this project. They see the beauty and potential of what is happening and approach the districts of operation to learn from them.”

Mohammed Abdul-Nashiru, WaterAid Ghana country director, welcomed the growing importance paid to learning in the sector. “You have a mix of sector actors including bilateral, multilateral INGOs, local

NGOs, community based organisations, even the private sector participating. Hitherto it would have been one single institution organising a learning platform for their staff and good friends. We have moved beyond that to the extent that now we have a lead ministry like the Ministry of Sanitation and Water Resources participating in NLLAP sessions.”

His colleague at WaterAid, programme manager Sulaiman Issah-Bello, has been active in the Northern Regional Level Learning Alliance Platform and says the meetings are invaluable to avoid duplication. “Everybody has the opportunity to ask questions. What is the goal? What do you seek to achieve? People are getting to know what we are doing and how we are working and how useful our intervention is to the people.

“People are always eager because they always are going to learn something and at the end of it all you are going to take home something that is going to benefit your organisation or information that is going to help you in your organisation.”

Emmanuel Ato Quansah, CWSA extension services specialist in Upper West Region facilitates the Regional Learning Alliance Platform and uses it to introduce new partners and bring them up to speed. “We have quarterly meetings and we try to bring the other organisations on board for them to understand the rationale behind what we have been doing. That is where we meet and cross fertilise ideas, so at the end of the day we would be on the same page.”

The same process was used to convince District Assemblies of new ways of working. “Through those platforms we let them know that the way forward is implementing activities using clear cut strategies and planning. We bring them into a meeting get them on board to buy into the steps that are recommended so far as the WASH sector is concerned.”



Emmanuel Ato Quansah, CWSA extension services specialist in Upper West Region

John Godson Aduakye, CWSA regional engineer for the Northern Region, says that stakeholders can clear up misunderstanding and gain fresh motivation when they attend the platforms. NGOs are more comfortable working in the six northern districts that are part of the Hilton project because of this strong sense of accountability and interaction. For example, in East Gonja, after hearing at the learning platform about problems with boreholes, SNV stepped in to support repairs and to train area mechanics.

For Alhaji Ahmed Ewura, CWSA director for the Brong Ahafo Region, getting data about where partners are working is a big step forward, especially for identifying communities where nobody is working and which need support. At one stage, Rotary Club were working directly with communities, health institutions, and district assemblies in the region, without CWSA knowing about it. The regional learning platform has changed that.

Benjamin Agbemor, Brong Ahafo regional learning facilitator, says that it is vital to sustain the learning platforms in the long term beyond the lifespan of specific interventions. Projects funded by development partners, such as the World Bank, generally have their own coordination meetings and structures, but these fade away once the project is over.

“The districts have shown commitment to sustaining the district learning platforms so that when projects are not there, using their own internal generated funds, they can sustain some of these avenues for coordinating other stakeholders involved in the WASH delivery. It is necessary that we keep monitoring and encouraging them. Districts and managements need to be convinced of what concrete actions and benefits come as a result of the various learning platforms and that can convince them to keep sponsoring and financing them.”

Attah Arhin, WASH technical coordinator for World Vision Ghana, would like to see these platforms develop further. “I have seen the difference they make but I think we can still do more. We are a very big international organisation with more than about 300 staff doing different activities across the country. We have not taken advantage of this platform enough and the same would go for other partners. We have a lot more to share than we are sharing.

“If you take the scale of World Vision, WaterAid, Safe Water Network, if we are to share all our experiences, I believe that sector players may be able to upscale it to a much bigger level than we have been doing.”

Abubakari Wumbei says that the learning alliance approach is sometimes criticised for being a talking shop. “There are those who say, ‘Let’s stop the talk and do the walking’. It has come up a number of times. What I tell those people is that talking in a structured manner is key to the process. We need to start talking from the beginning and we need to keep talking as we implement; to walk the talk. It is so important that you keep engaging so that you can together build that consensual effort. You can together understand exactly the direction the sector is going and understand your individual effort and what the collective effort can really achieve. The problems that the individual cannot solve; the learning alliance solves that problem.”

## Chapter 5

# Impact at community level

The purpose of strengthening local government capacity and the system of water governance is to make a difference in people's lives at community level, by ensuring a reliable and safe water supply that is accessible and long lasting. However, change at this level can be slow to take root, especially where new ways of managing and paying for water come into conflict with established patterns of water provision and use.

Communities have benefited hugely from the increased attention paid to safe water over recent decades. In the peri-urban community of Ayakomaso in Sunyani West, chief Nana Sonpremoo Aduyaw recalls how waterborne diseases were endemic before the 1990s. Catholic Relief Services installed a handpump in 1989 and transformed his community. "We were suffering from drinking dirty water that brought guinea worm, but since we got hand pumps and clean water, we haven't got all these problems and the guinea worm has gone."

### Can communities pay the price of progress?

Two years ago, Ayakomaso elected a Water and Sanitation Management Team to ensure that routine maintenance is done, that people pay when they collect water and that good records are kept. The community agreed on a fee of 10 pesewa for 25 litres, and Nana Adu-Doboaheng Gaya II, secretary and treasurer of the WSMT, said that everybody paid. "When the committee was formed by the assembly, we saw that it was perfect."

The committee was collecting GH¢ 500 to 600 a month (approx. US \$110-\$135) from the 1,100 community members, enough to keep the facility running smoothly. Then one year ago a family in this neighbourhood dug a borehole with a mechanised pump and offered water without the need for hand pumping. They charge twice as much – 20 pesewas for 25 litres – but despite the extra expense, people prefer the convenience. Collection at the community's own boreholes dropped dramatically and the WSMT now receives only GH¢ 120-180 Ghana a month, scarcely a third of what they were collecting before.

Nana Adu-Doboaheng says that it is essential to improve and mechanise their own well if they are to survive, as people have shown that this is what they want. The WSMT has only GH¢ 4,000 in the bank, less than half what they need to carry out this work.

A community that was self-sufficient is once again looking for outside help, and waiting for the District Assembly or a donor to finance improvements. "We are still saving but it is not enough," says Nana Adu-Doboaheng, "especially in the rainy season when the profit is very small."

Chief Nana Sonpremoo Aduyaw accepts that it is the community's job to keep water flowing, but says that they first need outside help. "Once somebody brings the mechanised [pump], it will come into the hands of the community to monitor how it will work and how to effect the community money and so on. I would say it would be for the community to do it."

In the Wa East District of Upper West Region, the Dupari community relied on water from a stream until the NGO ProNet North provided three borewells with handpumps.

ProNet field officer Esther Sauri says that these wells transformed prospects for local people. "Previously children used to suffer from diarrhoea and guinea worm because they were drinking from the stream. This has become a thing of the past. They don't report to the hospital as frequently as they used to with water related diseases."

The NGO is supported by the Conrad N. Hilton Foundation through WaterAid to focus on community empowerment – training Water and Sanitation Management Teams, as well as facilitating the drilling. Esther Sauri emphasises that community change takes time. "If you want to achieve something in the community, you need to be part of the community, put yourself in their shoes, and make yourself one of the community members."



A nearby small community of Viehaa – 710 people in 87 households – is an example of how services do not always progress evenly. In May 2017, the community received an award after it came together to put an end to open defecation. However, they still get water from hand-dug wells at the nearby stream, as there is no borewell.

Community members collected GH¢ 500, a fraction of what would be needed for a borewell, but WSMT chairman Issahaku Amidu says it is impossible to collect more. “Any time that we come back to tell them that they should contribute, community members say that they don’t even have water to drink let alone be contributing again. Even if they have had one borehole, they would contribute every month one Cedi. Because they don’t have any water currently, you go out and talk to them about contributions, and they will not pay.”

Emmanuel Ato Quansah, CWSA extension services specialist for Upper West, says that communities with no service will be given a high priority in the district plan.

Zaazi community in Savelugu Nanton district in the Northern Region is another having problems with payment. Here there are two boreholes for 600 people but one needs major work beyond the capacity of their own caretaker and they have appealed to World Vision for support.

Families are supposed to pay 20 pesewas for a 20 litre jerry can of water, but the facility has broken down. In the rainy season, there is plenty of water available at a nearby dam – so people have an option even though this is not a safe source. Iddi Nassam, WSMT secretary, said they tried to switch to household collections but most households refused to pay the monthly 1 Cedi charge and as a result they have only GH¢360 in their account. The last time that the pump broke down the community had to call on the local youth group – which earns money from a small forestry scheme – to cover the cost.

Iddi Nassam says it will need more work to bring about change. “Most of us don’t like paying. When you go to the house and you meet a young man with the wife, the woman will tell the husband we don’t pay, and the woman will start going to dam to fetch. The rain washes everything into the dam, so it is not good for us to be drinking that water.”



Streetview in Zaazi community in Savelugu Nanton district in the Northern Region. With Iddi Nassam, WSMT secretary walking in the background.

They have called in NGOs to help train young people in this community on how to take care of their environment and believe that the next generation will have a different perspective. “The education that we are giving them will change the people’s mind about the contribution – maybe they will come out and help themselves.”

## Small town water schemes – is volunteerism enough?

Financial challenges are not only felt in rural communities. Research conducted by CWSA and IRC under the Strengthening Local Government Capacity project questions whether the current model of community management can sustain the long-term future of piped water schemes in small towns with populations of 2,000 or more.

One study found that Akatsi South District Authority in the Volta Region had set aside less than 2% of its common fund for WASH support and that none of the four small towns had asked the district for help<sup>9</sup>. Akatsi WSMT replaced two pumps using its own revenue from the sale of water and Dagbamete WSMT bought two pumps with support from the community. If there was an expensive major repair needed, WSMTs said they would consider increasing tariffs, fund raising in the community or (as a last resort) seek a bank loan.

None of the WSMTs had followed CWSA guidelines for setting water tariffs. Only Akatsi, which charges 10 pesewas per 18 litre bucket, had set realistic fees to be able to improve, repair or expand services to meet growing demand. The others charged only 2.5 pesewas, a rate the report describes as “abysmally low”.

The study looked at the possibility of ‘pool funding’ where all the small towns pay into a common fund which can then be used to meet major repairs. However, WSMTs were concerned that most communities would be more ready to accept money from the pool rather than pay into it. The report concludes that the success of community management depends on local capacity and leadership. “It is quite clear that beneficiary communities will be unable to manage their own water supply systems without some form of external assistance in terms of technical back-stopping, monitoring and supervision from the District Assembly and CWSA.”

This support is currently not there. “The communities are pretty much left alone without adequate back-up support for sustainable management of the water systems. This lack of support to communities has become a threat to efficient management of the water facilities.”

WSMTs need regular refresher training in operation and maintenance, record keeping, management, and support to set realistic budgets and prices, using the life-cycle costs approach. The report recommends that communities consider incentive packages for WSMT members and says there is a need to professionalise the management. “The issue of volunteerism is killing the system.”

A parallel study in Kintampo South (Brong Ahafo region) looked at piped schemes in five small towns<sup>10</sup>. All five water management teams rated themselves as ‘performing well’ because they were able to keep water flowing. However, the Jema piped scheme had faced a total shutdown for almost a month and two other teams said that they wanted more support.

The Kintampo South District Assembly bought into the idea of pool funding but had concerns about the quality of community management. Vendors in some communities were unable to read standpipe meters and record the volume of water sold and amount received. Poor record-keeping made external audit difficult. Some purchases were not covered by receipts and there were delays in paying staff.

Only one of the five management structures was aware of the guideline for setting water tariffs. Rates were set on the basis of what neighbouring communities were charging and people’s willingness and ability to pay. The tariff is 10 pesewas per 18 litres but community members in Amoma refused to pay for water they collected in buckets. Three of the five WSMTs would like to raise fees; electricity prices had risen by 70% since they started operating.

<sup>9</sup> Eyramh, A. and Ahiany, O., 2017. Innovative Financing for Capital Maintenance Expenditure: Akatsi South District. Accra: CWSA.

<sup>10</sup> Agbemor, B., Taylor, M. and Amartei, G., 2016. Innovative Mechanisms for Financing Capital Maintenance Expenditure: Kintampo South District. Accra: CWSA.



Only one WSMT out of the nine that were studied across two regions complied with the mandatory requirement to keep separate operational, replacement and sanitation accounts, a failure described as “a threat to sustainability”.

The Kintampo South report says that the management teams are missing out on their obligation to share technical, managerial and operational issues with the community. There was no reliable evidence that accounts were submitted to communities for inspection. “Such meetings are expected to enable the public to hold the management structures in check, and they will in turn win the confidence of the community so that the needed support could be provided for the efficient running of the piped systems.”

This study recommends that the district steps up its support. “For the current regime of funds mobilisation and management to be sustainable, there will be a need for constant monitoring, support, capacity building and technical backstopping to the various water management structures by the District Assembly, and indeed CWSA Regional Office.

“It should not be taken for granted that district staff have the knowledge and expertise to support management structures in the operation and maintenance of the piped schemes.”

Revenue from the sale of water would continue to be the principal source of funding for capital maintenance and operational expenditure. “The management teams and the District Assembly both agreed that revenue from water sale could be sustainable and reliable if the right management structures are in place and they perform their functions well, and also receive the needed support from the District Assembly and CWSA Regional Office.”

Benjamin Agbemor, one of the co-authors of the Kintampo South report, says that community capacity is a major problem. “The use of Water and Sanitation Management Teams has its challenges. The assumption is that if they are well constituted; you get the right calibre of people, you provide the right training, we give them the right tools, and the record books they are supposed to keep, and they get the necessary monitoring support from the District Assembly and CWSA, theoretically they are supposed to perform well.

“In reality, in some communities, it is difficult to find people to perform some basic functions. For example, what is a system manager supposed to do? What is a WSMT chairman supposed to do? We have challenges with some of our facilities because we are not getting the right calibre of people to constitute our various Water and Sanitation Management Teams. In most cases, districts are not able to provide the needed oversight support in terms of regular monitoring and supervision to ensure that these WSMTs perform functions that are expected of them.”

## Changing community perceptions

It is not all bad news. Adu Kwame, water and sanitation team leader in Savelugu Nanton municipality in the Northern Region says that attitudes are changing.

“Initially all these boreholes were drilled for free, so when you tell them now to pay in order to maintain their facilities, it is difficult for some of them to accept that.

“We explain that from now on people might not come to rehabilitate boreholes for them anymore. Their populations are increasing and they need to sustain their borehole and if possible even need to provide for themselves. A lot of them are buying into that idea.”

The district works team encourages the community to appoint people they trust to form a seven member Water and Sanitation Management Team (WSMT), with women in the majority to reflect the role they play in managing water. The district trains WSMT members to service their borehole, collect payments and manage their cash book and WASH bank account.

Most WSMTs are doing well. “Those we have trained, almost all of them have bank accounts now and, depending on the facility; they do pay as you fetch and have a vendor who collects the money. The secretary does the recordings and they send the money to the bank.



Godwin Kotku, CWSA extension services specialist, Northern Region

“Communities are beginning to accept the fact that you need to pay for water and maintenance of their facilities. We are getting used to that and I think that is a good way to go.”

Emmanuel Ato Quansah, CWSA extension services specialist in the Upper West Region, says that communities have learnt how to finance maintenance. “What this project has actually done, which is very phenomenal, is that it has really brought the community together collectively to mobilise funds to fix their boreholes.”

Godwin Kotku, his CWSA colleague in the Northern Region, agrees that training is showing results. “My greatest satisfaction has been the fact that our rural communities are now able to take up the mandate of fixing their water point whenever they break down. If you look at the volume of pressure on the District Assembly coming from these communities it’s minimal compared to when I first started with the agency. You are able to go into communities and they tell you, last week our facility was down but we have been able to mobilise resources, we have bought these parts, we have fixed it and the facility is providing service.”

However, there is still a journey to be completed. “There are still gaps that we need to fill. We should not forget that this whole thing we are doing borders on behaviour change. It is a gradual process but I hope sincerely that we are going to get there.”

Behaviour change is also what concerns Martin Dery, president of ProNet North. “In the past, water was considered a right to everybody. It is still a right, but the manner of supply in those days was that people just collected water, especially in rural areas, and you didn’t have to pay anything.”

The new pattern of community management, private sector provision and government support does not come naturally to every community, he says, and civil society has to go through a process of engagement. ProNet starts this process through a community meeting (durbar) with the chief, the women leaders, opinion leaders and children. “People begin to see there is a shift in the paradigm from ‘we used to collect free’, to ‘we need to make a contribution towards construction and take care of operation and maintenance’.”

Vida Duti of IRC agrees that the changes must include a change of mind-set, particularly as Ghana no longer attracts so many concessional loans or favourable grants. However, pockets of poverty continue

to need support. “It may require that we will have to completely re-look at how we have framed the delivery of water services in the context of becoming a lower middle-income country, so we will be able to provide for those who genuinely cannot afford it.”

Small town scheme management also need to become more professional. “We have more than 500 small town water schemes. How do you ensure that these run efficiently; that they don’t break down and we go back to Government for more money?”

## The road to full coverage

One key question the project set out to answer is what it takes in terms of service improvements and resources to reach 100% water coverage.

Thyra Kumasi, senior research officer at CWSA, says that every district has its own barriers to overcome. Some have issues with water quality, or with management, the governance structure or poor record keeping, while in other districts difficult hydrogeological formations made drilling a challenge.

There were also issues of equity and how to include the poor, especially in small communities. “Where do you draw the line? Would you say that because a population is just 70 or 75 you would not give them water? And that raises issues of sustainability. How are they going to take care of the operation and maintenance and for the long term, capital maintenance expenditure?”



Thyra Kumasi, senior research officer at CWSA

District Assemblies worked with the CWSA to identify resources, existing infrastructure, access to water and unmet demand. They determined how much infrastructure they would need to achieve full coverage by 2025.

They calculated the total cost by 2025, including what needed to be invested in capital maintenance each year and the cost of monitoring and supervision, a process that Kumasi admits was “problematic and sometimes even a bit scary”.

“Direct support is a critical element of sustainability,” says Thyra Kumasi. “If you put in all these investments and you don’t monitor the Water and Sanitation Management Teams to ensure that they discharge their responsibilities as they are supposed to, then nothing gets done. They might not manage the finances well, set the right tariffs, and do things they are required to do, and at the end of the day sustainability is undermined.”

East Gonja, the largest rural district of 135,450 people spread over a wide area in the Northern Region, is a challenging example. Water coverage is only about 30% and hydrogeological conditions make drilling difficult. The cost to reach 100% coverage was calculated at GH¢ 49 million (approx. US\$ 11 million).

The CWSA organised a validation workshop for the district chief officers and coordinators. “Far from being daunted the District Assembly was ready to meet the challenge,” Thyra Kumasi said. “The district were saying we should have had this information a very long time ago, because our district water and sanitation plans could have staggered this, phased it, so that this is the investment we need, but not an investment we need to do just within two or three years.”

The data will also help districts to work with NGOs. “They know that these are the communities where we need to provide these facilities, it serves as a marketing tool for them to leverage some support to do it.”

## Area mechanics just a phone call away

The Community Water and Sanitation Agency (CWSA) guidelines for rural water provision require that handpumps are fixed within three days, a deadline that is often missed as it takes longer for communities to report faults, seek technical assistance and purchase spare parts.

The tools, skills and spare parts needed to repair water facilities are often beyond what can be achieved by the community caretaker who takes responsibility for day-to-day maintenance. An important element of the Strengthening Local Government Capacity project and of Triple-S has been to develop a network of area mechanics who are skilled and motivated and who are known to community WSMTs.

Sulaiman Issah-Bello, WaterAid programme manager for northern Ghana, says that without this capacity, water points often fail without good reason. “It could be just a small nut that needs to be tightened. Or it could be some screw that you need to provide and the thing is working again, but because they don’t have the skills and knowledge to do so, they abandon the facility.”

A local private company SkyFox Limited has developed a portal that allows communities to use a smartphone to report on the status of handpumps, to check on the cost of spare parts, and to call the mechanic. In a pilot scheme, communities report by SMS whether their facilities are working so that districts can monitor functionality and the CWSA can update the DiMES database. In the case of a breakdown, the community can check the price of a spare part and order the repair within the portal.

In Ayakomaso community, Jack has been trained in SMS use and for the first time can find the cost of a repair before contacting the mechanic. “I would send an SMS to report first and then send an SMS to ask for the price of the part, and the SMS will return the price to me. We send the cash to them with mobile money, and they bring the part by the next vehicle that is moving to this place. It takes about two days.”

Kyei Asare Bediako, district engineer for Sunyani West, is enthusiastic. “The SMS experiment has really helped me. If we could enhance it, I think it will really increase our water coverage. It has been a really nice experiment. I really love it.”

In northern Ghana, WaterAid trained mechanics and provided them with tools. It also helped to establish a spare parts shop in the Upper West Region.

The SMS system can work well but it relies on faults being reported in good time and the timely availability of funds. Some communities have difficulties in getting a phone signal or understanding the system. By December 2016, SkyFox reported that only 46% of communities that had the service had used it to make reports. In Sunyani West, less than a quarter of spare parts had been ordered via SkyFox – the rest had been ordered through voice calls. Samyuri Mumin from SkyFox said that it seemed that communities prefer to make verbal reports and only use the automated service to check prices. “Communities need constant reminders and practice before they can use the phone for their reporting purposes.”

Dawood Alhassaeem is one of three area mechanics in Wa East selected because he used to repair motorbikes and so was seen to have the skills that would be needed. As the most experienced mechanic in the district, he advises his colleagues, and helps them out if a repair is too complex. However, Dawood has developed his own spare parts shop so he does not use the SkyFox system but gives out his own telephone number to communities to call him directly.

Sunyani West District works team recommends providing greater support to communities to help them understand and use the phone app.

The Northern Region is beginning a trial of a “circuit rider” system – devised by the Desert Research Institute from Nevada USA – whereby area mechanics will tour their areas to spot trouble before it arises and carry out preventative maintenance. John Godson Aduakye, CWSA regional engineer for the Northern Region, welcomed the initiative as communities often fail to see early warning signs that facilities are about to fail. “The area mechanics have to sit and wait until they are called. We want to cut down that time.”

## Community feedback

One of the aims of community management is for water services to become demand-led. To achieve this, communities must be willing to provide feedback on services and able to make demands on relevant authorities and providers.

Some NGOs and communities use community scorecards to feed back to their districts while the CWSA has carried out user satisfaction surveys in the Northern and Brong Ahafo regions.

Mohammed Abdul-Nashiru, country director, WaterAid Ghana says that citizens’ voices are central to accountability. “Citizens themselves are able to determine what needs to be provided, raise questions and target duty bearers. They go to the District Assembly and tell the political leadership that you are supposed to do this and you are not doing it. Jointly they agree on a reform agenda.”

Benjamin Agbemor, CWSA learning facilitator for Brong Ahafo Region, was part of a team that trained enumerators to interview 435 community members in Brong Ahafo (60% of them women), using the Akvo Flow app on their smart phones. As described in Section 3 (Districts planning for success) generally water users were happy with their facilities and the performance of service providers, but there was dissatisfaction with the amount of water they could get in the dry season.

John Godson Aduakye says that it is only when you start asking questions that people open up about what they think. “They will end up telling you that this one borehole is not enough. In some circumstances, they tell you the water does not flow well in the dry season. These community members have really been able to understand what it requires to satisfy them and they have been able to take the initiative to demand what they need.

“We want the demand to come from them. Then we shall have the opportunity to explain to them – you demand it OK – you manage it yourself. You have to pay tariff when you get it. You have to have a committee, you have to respect your leaders, and you have to keep your environment clean. If you don’t have a toilet in your household there could be disease. We have these opportunities to interact with the community and often the kind of response we are giving motivates other communities to do better.”

## Are goals achievable?

Are the goals for full and sustainable coverage achievable? Thyra Kumasi thinks so. “Personally I think that full coverage can be achieved on condition that a few things are met. We need some political commitment especially on the part of politicians, for the continuation of projects. That has always been a major problem, when there is a change of government and projects are not continued.

“We also need a very strong commitment from the District Assembly. We need them to own the whole process of achieving full coverage for their districts. Once these are in place, I believe strongly that we can achieve full coverage.”

This optimism is largely shared at District Assembly level. Daniel Nnebini Nyamekye, district development planning officer and desk officer for WASH in Kintampo South, Brong Ahafo Region, believes that the process of making a district water and sanitation plan has opened a path to achieving full coverage by 2020. In Sunyani West, district planning officer Owusu Minta Quasi, believes full coverage to be feasible by 2021.

Veronica Ayi-Bonte, IRC programme manager, says that the studies have clarified the challenges in each district. “We don’t have a silver bullet yet but what we have done is to widen the discussion beyond just the infrastructure. Communities and Water and Sanitation Management Teams have a role to play in the sustainability of the facilities after construction and we need to make sure that the mechanisms that we have set in place are adequate.”



Sunyani West District engineers Kyei Asare Bediako and Seth Jaim working with the water sanitation and management team of Ayakomaso community



## Chapter 6

# What has the project achieved – and what remains to be done

Strengthening Local Government Capacity to Deliver Water Services has been a project of continuity, radical change and consolidation. Continuity in that it has continued and expanded the work of the Triple-S project in Ghana in changing the country focus from new infrastructure to delivering WASH services that last. Radical change in that it attempts to create a new era of harmonisation and cooperation between government (national and local), NGOs involved in the delivery of water schemes and local communities who are charged with managing their services. Consolidation in that it is catalysing all the lessons of delivering WASH services that last and of harmonisation and cooperation to leverage partnerships and build country systems for delivering Sustainable Development Goal 6 (SDG6). The Conrad N. Hilton Foundation that sponsored the project has encouraged its grantee NGOs to work more closely together with each other, with the Community Water and Sanitation Agency (CWSA) and with the District Assemblies that are responsible for services in rural areas and small towns. IRC has managed the project and while acting as a catalyst for change, has deepened its strong links with the CWSA, a wider range of District Assemblies and with the NGOs.

The 13 project districts have not only improved their own governance of water services but also act as exemplars for replication in their regions.

A spirit of collaboration and cooperation has been achieved. There has been widespread praise for the aims and achievements of “the Hilton Project”, from NGOs, from the CWSA in Accra and in the regions and by the 13 District Assemblies that responded to the challenge. Learning platforms have been established or continued in all five regions where the project is based and in all 13 districts and most are functioning and have a life of their own. This has put WASH on the agenda for District Assemblies which in the past hardly discussed priorities. The fact that NGOs and districts are stepping in to fund learning meetings suggests that these collaborative platforms will live on beyond the lifespan of this project.

There is a growing sense within communities of their rights and responsibilities – rights to an adequate quality of service and their responsibility to manage that service with an eye on sustainability. Communities often struggle to fulfil these responsibilities because of the challenges of resources and capacities, but they are addressing them. It is not uncommon to hear people at district and even at community level refer to the “life-cycle costing approach” and “the service delivery approach” as proven elements in achieving sustainable water services. The service level indicators for water quantity (20 litres per capita per day), quality in line with the Ghana Standards Authority standards, accessibility (a borehole serving no more than 300 people and no more than 500 metres distance) and reliability (functional for at least 347 days of the year) seem well understood by Water and Sanitation Management Teams at community level.

The infrastructure and outcome measures adopted for this project were ambitious – 90% of the population expressing satisfaction with the service, 90% of water supply infrastructure provided by Hilton grantees functional at July 2017, providing a service to at least 60% of the population served; while for other project areas 75% of infrastructure functional and providing a basic level of service to at least 40% of the population. There are also targets for a 10% increase in budget for rural water (including for recurrent expenditure) and a 10% increase in overall coverage. At the time of this documentation these outcomes were not yet known. However, one target that has certainly been achieved is that all 13 district authorities in the project have compiled water and sanitation plans which set out investment plans for a four-year period. All 13 districts know what infrastructure exists in communities, the condition it is in and what are the gaps they need to fill. They have an annual plan and a budget. These significant advances are unheard of in many other districts of Ghana. One of the key questions that the project set out to answer is what it takes in terms of service improvements and resources to reach 100% of the population. Research into the drivers and barriers to full coverage has informed reflection on key issues in districts which are using the data to plan improvements and to leverage additional funding from development partners.

## The challenge of funding the plans

A central challenge is funding in a climate where development money is flowing at a much reduced rate, now that Ghana has achieved the status of a lower middle-income country. Vida Duti, IRC country director, says that new sources of funding have to be found. “It is possible for us to achieve full coverage of water, if we set ourselves to it and prioritise it.

“What we see as a major challenge going forward would be how to finance these plans within the mix of the multiple issues that a district has to deal with.

“What we need is for us as a country to collectively set the vision of how we would get to full coverage, accepting the challenge that water is a basic human need that everybody prioritises. We need also to review the mechanisms of how we provided water services in the past. It is said that the mind-set that we used to create the problem cannot be the same as we use to solve it. So what is it that we can do differently?”

Duti believes there should be a greater focus on bringing in finance from the private sector and from Government resources. “Sometimes people get a bit worried that we don’t get the concessional loans and the grants that we used to get, but I think that being a lower middle-income country also suggests that your country has matured, that you can even go in for private capital. So it provides an opening up, a lot more opportunities for us.” However, any new arrangements will also have to make provision for those who genuinely cannot pay.

It is also essential to have strong systems in place, including for monitoring “so that at every point in time we will be able to track and know what we require to reach those who have yet to be reached and those that already have water services but require improvement.”

## CWSA plays a pivotal role

Formal responsibilities for owning and managing water services are shared between the District Assemblies and community WSMTs, but a crucial role is played by the Community Water and Sanitation Agency (CWSA) nationally and through ten regional offices. The CWSA was established in 1998 and coordinates and facilitates implementation of the National Community and Sanitation Programme in rural areas. It coordinates and facilitates implementation of the National Community Water and Sanitation Programme (NCWSP) in rural areas. The Agency provides support to District Assemblies (DAs) to promote sustainability of safe water supply and related sanitation services in rural communities and small towns and encourages the active involvement of communities, especially women, in the design, planning, construction and community management of water supply and related sanitation services. The other major role of CWSA is to formulate strategies to mobilise resources for safe water development and related sanitation programmes.

Over the last two decades, CWSA has become closely identified with the concept of community management as the principal approach to delivery of rural water services and has refined this through the Community Ownership and Management model which it has promoted nationally. Over recent years, CWSA has led the process of creating and promoting the operational tools and guidelines necessary to turn rural water policy into practice, and has developed a cadre of qualified, competent and motivated staff.

An organisational assessment of the Agency was undertaken in 2017 by a team of IRC Ghana staff and external consultants, focusing on CWSA’s ability and capacity to lead the rural water sub-sector and deliver sustainable services at scale in the context of a rapidly changing sector landscape for financing and partnership.

The assessment underlined how markedly the environment has changed over the past two decades. The country’s status has been re-classified as lower-middle income with implications for both development assistance and public financing of social sectors, including a general withdrawal of development partners from the rural water sector. The Government has pursued a policy to strengthen

decentralisation frameworks and the status of the District Assemblies (DAs). There is a continuing trend towards urbanisation and the emergence of small towns and more densely populated rural areas has led to increasing demand for piped networks. The CWSA is re-evaluating its place in the sector, particularly in finding an appropriate balance for interfacing with District Assemblies while developing strong institutional capacity to keep the sub-sector on track.

The assessment points out that recent funding constraints and a move to channel public and overseas aid resources directly to District Assemblies has seen a decline in CWSA’s operational profile, with about one-quarter to nearly one-third of the organisation’s technical personnel (e.g. engineers, hydrogeologists and extension staff) having left in the past five years without being replaced. Nevertheless, CWSA is still widely regarded as a technically competent organisation with a valuable body of expertise and knowledge in technical and social aspects, as well as project management capabilities.

A number of options for the future pattern of service provision and support were identified. The three main options are:

- Utilisation: a transition towards rural water services provided by utilities similar to small town water schemes;
- Decentralisation: CWSA regional capacity would be absorbed into the Regional Coordinating Councils to provide technical support and oversight to the District Assemblies. A reduced scale CWSA at national level would then form the (technical) agency for water, alongside a similar agency for sanitation, to provide policy support to the Ministry of Sanitation and Water Resources. Direct support for service delivery would continue to rest within the Works Department of the MMDAs or an enhanced department at the district level to support water service delivery;
- Combination: a hybrid between utility provision and an enhanced status quo with combined elements of the first two options. CWSA would take direct responsibility for managing and running small town and larger, more complex water rural supply schemes and continue its facilitation role in support of MMDAs and WSMTs for the smaller schemes and point sources, with enhanced operating approaches.

With the changing nature of the rural areas in Ghana, expansion of large piped networks and small-town piped schemes, a model based on voluntary committees is no longer adequate to meet expectations and demands for a more professionalised and higher quality of service. Therefore, the assessment recommended that the scenarios outlined above need to be considered alongside broader sector development to improve access and to drive up service quality. The assessment concluded that a number of vital functions in the value chain for rural water need to be strengthened:

- Professionalising the management of water supply schemes, especially for small towns and larger piped networks, moving away from purely voluntary approaches;
- Building strong regimes for asset management and maintenance;
- Providing better access to financing on affordable terms that can be used by asset holders and operators to (re)-invest in schemes, alongside surplus income from tariffs.

## Working within renewed national ambitions

The creation of a Sanitation and Water Resources Ministry for the first time has brought together the national focus on these sub-sectors, providing a new impetus to reform and progress.

The first minister, Kofi Adda was appointed in January 2017 to oversee efforts by the Government of Ghana to achieve its long-term vision of universal access to safe drinking water by 2025 and eliminating open defecation by 2030. He has stressed the importance of inputs across the sector, including the private sector, NGOs, local government and communities<sup>11</sup>.

<sup>11</sup> See interview with Minister Kofi Adda: McIntyre, P., 2017. *Ghana’s first minister for WASH pledges sector wide consultation* [online]. Available at: <[www.ircwash.org/news/ghana%E2%80%99s-first-minister-wash-pledges-sector-wide-consultation](http://www.ircwash.org/news/ghana%E2%80%99s-first-minister-wash-pledges-sector-wide-consultation)>.

Minister Adda said that the lack of a unified ministry had hindered effective sectoral supervision. “Many things have been scattered and spread about. It is time for us to bring them all together under one umbrella as it were and set a very clear path through which we can deliver on our mandate.” In an interview with IRC Ghana, the minister said his aim would be to get everyone working together “be it Government, the private sector, the other participating partners such as the NGOs or the development partners”.

Metropolitan, Municipal and District Assemblies would play an essential role in implementation. “The sector ministry has been created by Government simply to fashion the policy direction from the central aspect. That programmes ... will require that the local authorities now do the actual implementation for specific activities.” Effective community level governance was also needed “to ensure that the benefits of the service delivery really come to the doorstep of every citizen.” The Government’s Water for All agenda aims to secure funding for 25,000 handpump boreholes and 300 small town piped schemes, which would require investments by the CWSA of almost US\$ 750 million to achieve SDG 6 by 2030.

In an overview of the rural water and sanitation sub-sector in Kumasi in May 2017, the CWSA Chief Executive Worlanyo Kwadjo Siabi, said that the CWSA has developed a programme to deliver on this promise and will discuss with the new ministry how to attract the funding. However, he gave a warning about reliance on a shrinking pot of money from the Government’s consolidated fund and on a declining number of development partners working in rural WASH.

He said that the CWSA needs a new mandate and new financing arrangements, without which, the Agency would not survive into the next decade.

Alhaji Ahmed Ewura, CWSA Regional Director in Brong Ahafo Region, agrees that reforms are needed to ensure that the CWSA can continue to provide support. “We cannot go and build systems, leave them in the care of communities, thinking that they are being run or the Assembly not playing its role. We may need to come in and work in partnership whilst we maintain our facilitation role to be able to impact more at the grassroots level, to sustainably manage these systems and generate the revenues to be able to sustain themselves.”

## District level

Since the promulgation of the Local Government Act in 1993, Ghana has been actively engaged in a devolution process, providing local authorities with legislative and executive powers within their areas of responsibility, and the power to prepare and approve annual budgets, raise revenues, borrow funds, acquire land, and provide basic services and local infrastructure. The 2016 Local Governance Act, (Act 936), harmonises and consolidates laws, including those on decentralised service delivery, and provides a clear policy framework for public sector reform with the aim of devolving powers and financing to the MMDAs.

Although the structures and legislation are in place, there are serious shortfalls in capacity, both in terms of headcount and in calibre of staff to fulfil their rural water service provision mandate. District Assemblies have a wide range of responsibilities and only a few members of the assembly staff develop high levels of expertise in WASH issues. Success often rests on the shoulders of a few individuals.

The fact that historically there has been separate funding for rural water with the bulk of financing coming from development partners has caused tensions for District Assemblies who have considered rural water as ‘being taken care of’ by CWSA and these other funding streams. Ironically, the presence of a technically strong and – until recently – well financed CWSA may have provided some disincentive for local governments to actively pursue support to the sub-sector. It will be important to define what kind of skill sets the water sector requires, the minimum requirements and what measures are in place to ensure these skills are developed. It is important to include in this assessment the other local government staff, such as community development professionals, who are well qualified and already established in rural water supply.

In the project districts that were visited for this review, district water staff showed a huge energy and enthusiasm for their work, excited by their ability to plan and budget more accurately through a district water and sanitation plan. However, capacity in the project districts, especially in those that were also part of Triple-S, certainly can be expected to be greater than in districts not included in these projects. Interest has been shown by some of these other districts that attended learning alliance platform meetings to learn about the service delivery approach and life-cycle costing. In Brong Ahafo region, Alhaji Ewura says that strengthening capacity beyond the two (of 27 regional MMDAs) in the project is vital and that donors can help to spread the methodology. “We should be able to sell the ideas out so others will support them. If another development partner sees the essence of this, that something good is coming from it, that we are building the capacity of the districts to stand alone, and communities are aware of their roles and responsibilities, gradually we will share the responsibility and we will get there.”

Government commitment in reinforcing water as one of ten key funding or budget lines (now in the local government Chart of Accounts) is a positive step to ensure that rural water is championed at local level more forcefully. The trend of decentralisation in the recent past presents opportunity for more effective decentralised water service delivery. Financing of rural water services by MMDAs will be critical for keeping the sub-sector on track. This will require further institutional adjustment within the water service delivery chain to streamline the interface between the District Assemblies and central government institutions with policy and operative mandates.

### Box 3 Catalysing the lessons

The Conrad N. Hilton Foundation continues to support a process of strengthening country systems and to leverage partnerships to drive attainment of SDG6 capacity. It is backing a pilot in one single district, Asutifi North in Brong Ahafo region, to achieve full coverage by pooling the efforts of all the stakeholders. The objective is to learn what has to be done so that these lessons can be applied to other districts to meet Sustainable Development Goal 6, building on the lessons from Strengthening Local Government Capacity to Deliver Water Services and related initiatives. The project will also build on the partnership experiences to maximize collective efforts towards universal coverage.

IRC Ghana and the Asutifi North District Assembly organised a 4-day strategic planning workshop in Kenyasi in July 2017 that brought together multiple stakeholders to brainstorm how to achieve sustainable water, sanitation and hygiene for everyone in the district<sup>12</sup>.

The key attribute of this district SDG6 initiative is that it combines a response to the long-term challenges of the sector as well as medium- and short-term interventions. A participatory process will give space to stakeholders at local level and strategic partners at national level. The planning process will adopt and improve national systems for local development planning for WASH. The project implementation process will build on partnerships and develop a sense of ownership of the process, with the leadership commitment of the District Assembly and traditional authority. Civil society organisations and the private sector will help to drive the attainment of project goals and objectives. Lessons on leveraging partnership and conjoining the interests of diverse stakeholders around a collective vision for achieving SDG6, and best practices for governance and institutional arrangements will be documented to inform replication and scaling-up.

NGO partners involved in Strengthening Local Government Capacity are fully behind this initiative. Attah Arhin, from World Vision Ghana, describes it as “an opportunity to demonstrate that together we can achieve much more than individually we have been able to achieve.”

<sup>12</sup> The workshop was attended by District Assembly members and department heads, water service operators, CWSA, the Water Resources Commission, National Development Planning Commission, Safe Water Network, World Vision, GIZ, Newmont Foundation, NADEF, WaterAid, traditional leaders, women with stalls in the local markets, CSOs, private sector entities and other WASH stakeholders.



Members of the Water and Sanitation Management Team in Duperi Community, Wa East District

## Community level

The challenges of community management were explored earlier in this document<sup>13</sup>. Many Water and Sanitation Management Teams are functioning effectively, but the community management model requires repeated and long-term support. The culture of payment for water services is not yet fully embedded and can be problematic where poor families have little access to cash, even at the low rates charged in communities.

The process of auditing facilities and finances is critical to building confidence and trust in local management. The link between functionality at community level and an up-to-date and accurate registry of facilities at district, regional and national (DiMES) level is central to good planning and budgeting and relies heavily on rapid reporting of faults and breakdowns. Even innovative systems like smartphone reporting, which intuitively seem to provide a neat solution to the problem of tracking the functionality of infrastructure, is only partly resolving the problem. It is perhaps a lesson that technological fixes work best when people are at ease with the technology. Many communities still have a preference for person-to-person interaction, which underlines the crucial role of good communications and that services require human care and attention as well as innovation.

The area mechanic model – or the circuit rider model being piloted – is dependent on communities being ready to pay for repairs when they are needed. Area mechanics are small private businesses and can only survive if communities are willing to pay. It may take time for the area mechanic business model to become settled, and there is no guarantee that those who have been trained will all be able to stay in business. Repeated training and building multiple service skills beyond water facility repairs is likely to be necessary so that they can diversify.

<sup>13</sup> See Part 5: Impact at community level

## The NGO perspective

The large NGOs that have been Conrad N. Hilton Foundation grantees and on board with this project feel that they have benefited through closer relationships with CWSA, with District Assemblies and with each other.

Mohammed Abdul-Nashiru, WaterAid Ghana country director, says that the project has made a contribution to focusing on the most significant needs towards transforming lives. “Times were when sector institutions and INGOs provided services without recourse to expressed needs of communities. Things have changed significantly. Now international NGOs go to the district to identify the expressed needs of the people reflected in the district water and sanitation plans or even the district medium-term development plans. They pick as priorities those that shape their interventions, investments and so on. We have seen a lot of difference in communities now that they themselves indicate their needs and present these to the district authorities. I think the districts still have a long way to go in terms of ensuring or enforcing that whoever comes in actually selects their communities from those particular plans.”

There is also a commitment to collecting evidence of change; something that WaterAid has always been keen to do. “Whatever we do as individual organisations, or collectively with other institutions, must aim at transforming lives. If we fail to do that then we have wasted resources, financial resources and people’s time.

“In the past there were many health centres and schools that lacked WASH facilities, affecting mothers, babies and school children, particularly girls. Now you go back to those places and you see that things have changed, so children remain in school because they don’t have to walk long hours to go and get water, girls stay in schools because the schools have menstrual hygiene management facilities. We don’t hesitate in identifying these changes and presenting them to the wider sector.”

Attah Arhin, WASH technical coordinator for World Vision Ghana, is also optimistic, if cautious about the funding picture. “I have always said that as Ghanaians and as stakeholders we know our problem. We know our challenges. We know what we should do to address the issues and we know what we should do to achieve the targets. But the first thing now is: are we going to do those things that we should do? If we are going to do that, I have no doubt that we will be able to achieve those targets. “Traditionally, funding has been a challenge. Government has not been able to commit enough funding. But I am seeing some renewed commitment which I believe should translate into the targets that Ghana has set for itself. It is going to be difficult but if we all put our hands on the desk we should be able to achieve it.”

Long-term sustainability requires long-term commitment to change Rural and small town water services in Ghana have been on this journey towards a sustainable provision for a decade or more. CWSA and IRC have joined hands on a chain of projects from WASHCost, to Triple-S, SMARTerWASH and the “Hilton project”. Despite progress, it seems that there is still a way to travel to bring about fundamental change in the culture of organisations and communities.

Martin Dery, president of Pronet North and chairman of the NGO confederation CONIWAS, warns that nobody should be surprised at the length of this journey to sustainability. “Community empowerment is beginning to take root. But that level of assertiveness that is required to see the change would need time and that is why we cannot stop what we are doing now. People have lived for 50 years plus with a particular way of doing things, and we are introducing a new way. We need to persevere. “Changing mind-sets is not something that you can achieve in five years; you may not even achieve it in ten years. We just have to recognise that to undo somebody’s thinking over a 40-year period should require quite a reasonable period of time. If we stop it too early it will not be realistic for us to expect the needed change.”

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