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SUSTAINABLE ENVIRONMENTAL SANITATION AND WATER SERVICES

Knowledge and information gaps in sanitation: Ghana

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THE GOVERNMENT OF Ghana has since the late eighties pursued an ambitious decentralisation programme which seeks to devolve all responsibilities for planning and implementation of environmental sanitation schemes to the provincial local governments (District Assemblies). The decentralisation effort has been accompanied by a reform of the water and sanitation sector with emphasis on decentralised planning of water and sanitation projects, cost recovery, community ownership and management and increased private sector involvement in the delivery of services. However, the general perception is that efforts at improving sanitation have not been successful in ensuring a sustained development of the sub-sector. Current policies and strategies have failed to develop the required capacity and ensure the mobilisation of resources for addressing the enormous challenges within the sub-sector. Indeed the fast rate of urbanisation and population growth has worsened the situation over the years.

The WELL Resource Centre Network (RCN) is funded by the UK Government's Department for International Development (DFID). The RCN provides service and resources for DFID and its partner agencies. Within the framework of WELL activities, TREND Group, a Resource Centre located in Ghana and a partner within the WELL Network, carried out a study of the sanitation sub-sector in Ghana between May and August 2002, to highlight the information and knowledge management gaps. This paper presents a brief summary of findings, analysis and recommendations.

Objectives

The objectives of the scoping study were to:

- Examine the existing framework for ensuring safe and effective management of human excreta;
- Assess the effectiveness and impact of the existing framework in the delivery of safe and effective human waste management interventions;
- Determine the gaps in knowledge, information and materials within the sanitation sub-sector;
- Identify opportunities for future studies that will help facilitate the promotion of demand driven approaches for tackling the sanitation problem and ways that planned work activities of the WELL RCN could be shaped to address the identified gaps.

Methodology

The scoping study was based on the analysis of information obtained through review of literature and a comprehensive stakeholder consultation involving Government Agencies, District Assembly staff, NGOs, Community members and the private sector.

Findings

Demography

Ghana's population¹ is currently 18 million. GDP is around US\$ 400 and the majority of the population is poor with official minimum wage less than one dollar a day. 40% of the population live in urban areas (with a population of more than 5000) while 60% live in rural areas (with a population of less than 5000). Officially, 174 towns are classified as urban. This includes 11 cities with populations greater than 200,000 (out of which 4 are classified as Metropolitan and 7 as Municipal areas). However there is an unofficial classification of 'small towns' which includes towns with a population range between 5000 and 20,000.

Sanitation coverage patterns²

Only about 40% of Ghana's urban population has access to adequate household sanitation; 15% of households still use bucket latrines, which is currently banned by legislation. About 40% rely on public facilities; while 5% use open defecation. Household on-site facilities are the most prevalent. Only two towns in the country - Tema and Akosombo are fully sewered. In rural areas coverage figures for safe sanitation are less reliable but the total national coverage for rural areas is estimated at 15%. No reliable data is available on the proportion of schools with adequate sanitation.

Policy and legal framework

Generally the problems of sanitation have been accorded a high level of political support in Ghana. The issue of sanitation is given a high profile in the recently formulated National Poverty Reduction Strategy³. A national environmental sanitation policy⁴ has existed since May 1999 catering for both urban and rural areas. The policy document covers the broad definition of environmental sanitation including all aspects of wastes management, drainage, cleansing of public places, pest and vector control, food hygiene and so on. Generally the document is broad based, gives little emphasis to human excreta management and is tailored to the needs of urban areas.

The Community Water and Sanitation Agency (CWSA) was established by legislature in 1993 and tasked to provide support to District Assemblies in the promotion and delivery of water, sanitation and hygiene services in rural areas and small towns. The Agency has developed separate policies and strategies to promote its sanitation programmes which are not captured in the national document.

Institutional arrangements

The national policy on sanitation sets out roles and responsibilities of the key institutions. Generally the institutional framework is clear but complex. Overall leadership responsibility is vested in the Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development (MLGRD). The Local Government Act (which promulgated the on-going sanitation policy) empowers the local government institutions (metropolitan, municipal and district assemblies) to assume responsibility for environmental sanitation and water services in rural areas and small towns. A host of other agencies play strategic roles, notably the CWSA which is responsible for provision of support to District Assemblies in the promotion and provision of sanitation and hygiene services. CWSA, in principle, balances all these three issues, however most of the funds for physical infrastructure go into water supply rather than sanitation. An inter-Ministerial Coordinating Committee hosted by the MLGRD is tasked with ensuring the harmonisation of the effort of all the sector agencies. This Committee has so far not been very effective and more effort is required to sort out the issues of inter-agency co-ordination in the sub-sector.

Technology issues

CWSA Projects have clearly defined technology⁵ choices with the Mozambique slab and rectangular slab VIP latrines considered as the basic level of service options. The costs of these adopted designs are beyond the affordability of most rural households. There exist a wide range of sanitation systems in use within the country including several varieties of VIP, dry composting toilets, biogas units, septic tanks and isolated sewered systems. However urban Projects have often limited the choice of options to more expensive technologies.

The Kumasi Sanitation Project⁶. (KSP) which spanned from 1989-1994 promoted the concept of strategic sanitation planning in urban areas. This KSP promoted a wide range of technologies to suit different housing areas and piloted various institutional and financial models. Though the KSP was considered a successful pilot project, effort to replicate the Project has not yielded the required results due to lack of technical expertise and financial resources. The evacuation of filled pit latrines in densely populated areas is also an area of major concern. The MLGRD is actively supporting efforts to get the private sector more actively interested in investing in this area.

Financial issues

Financing of sanitation projects is mostly addressed as part of wider infrastructure improvement schemes especially within the urban context. Mobilisation of funds for sanitation investments in rural areas and small towns is the responsibility of the CWSA who operate through District Assemblies. Financial support in CWSA projects is generally based on a policy of 50% subsidy of capital costs. In urban areas, the national policy recommends full cost recovery but this is rarely achieved. Instead, a 50% subsidy is often applied.

On-going operation and maintenance costs are generally borne by households. Generally there is little appreciation of the financial benefits of investing in sanitation from both communities and District Assemblies. School sanitation schemes attract 90% subsidy – with Parent Teacher Associations providing the remaining 10%.

Capacity building issues

Most senior professionals are trained by the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology through a postgraduate course in Water and Waste Engineering running since the mid-nineties. Regional polytechnics provide training for the technical personnel who directly supervise implementation of projects. The training provided at both levels does not adequately address the issues of low-cost technologies and management issues related to sanitation development. The CWSA has well-developed curricula for training and development of artisans whose selection is based on requirements of basic education and some training in masonry or carpentry. Training has been carried out for several years, but no effort has been made to monitor the effectiveness of artisans following training.

The key personnel for delivery of sanitation in the municipalities and Districts are the Environmental Health Officers and their Assistants. These personnel are trained in Schools of Hygiene, which are run by the Ministry of Health. However the thrust of training for these personnel is on enforcement of environmental health regulations rather than sanitation promotion and hygiene promotion.

Advocacy and marketing

The high profile of sanitation as a key development issue in political circles has not translated into increased funding and investment in the Sector. Coverage levels continue to be very low and the general situation continues to worsen, especially in the urban areas. As Ghana's government moves away from narrow sectoral planning towards a broader development agenda of poverty reduction, it will be important for relevant government institutions to be made aware of the importance of sanitation and hygiene as crucial factors in sustainable development and poverty reduction. Increased support for the sub-sector could be enhanced through a coherent evidence-base that links improved sanitation to sustainable development and poverty reduction.

Government agencies have devoted little attention to the marketing of sanitation. The responsibility has, in line with national policies, been delegated to independent contractors and artisans. Generally, the marketing efforts of these private sector personnel have not proven effective. The training does not adequately equip them with the strategies and tools required for this role.

Discussion of findings

The study revealed that there have been numerous sanitation initiatives within the country. However the experiences have not translated into any significant improvement in the level coverage. Even the well-resourced rural water and sanitation programme has not made an impact as a successful national programme. The evidence is that there is a lack of information and knowledge on how to develop successful sanitation programmes. The key problems that have prevented the required accelerated growth of the sector have included the following:

Weak policy and regulatory framework: Existing policies have not effectively ensured the accelerated development of the sector. Existing regulations governing the sanitation sector are hardly enforced by local government structures, largely due to a lack of capacity. The lack of clear policies on school sanitation has prevented focused development of this area.

Complex and ineffective institutional structure: A key problem with institutions is the fragmentation of responsibilities for urban, rural/small towns and schools sanitation. These three key areas of sanitation are all handled by different Government Agencies. The situation has resulted in the lack of a co-ordinated approach.

Ineffective financing options: Current financing policies have failed to attract investments for the development of the sanitation sub-sector. Access to finance is a difficult issue and while this is not adequately addressed in policy. Little is known of the effectiveness of financing options such as revolving funds, taxes and cross subsidies.

Inadequate human capacity: Current capacity of districts to plan and support delivery of sanitation is very weak. Pre-service training of decision makers, project designers and implementers are not well suited to the challenges of the sector. The private sector, which is tasked with promotion and delivery of sanitation facilities, is neither adequately trained nor equipped for their role.

Inappropriate technology: The general view gathered from stakeholders is that information on sanitation technologies has become outdated. Available technologies are largely unaffordable without subsidy and little research is on-going to develop lower cost technologies which are essential to ensure sustained delivery of sanitation services in poor areas.

Weak capacity in knowledge management: There is little information on sanitation coverage, current trends and technology application. Generally there is no culture of documentation or learning from experiences. The knowl-

edge management capacity of institutions in the sub-sector is very weak.

Conclusion

The scoping study clearly established that sanitation is indeed an intractable problem within Ghana. After more than a decade of increased investments and the enactment of a national policy in May 1999, coverage levels in both urban and rural areas have remained unacceptably low and the situation is not improving.

At the heart of the problem regarding the slow development in the sanitation sector is the lack of knowledge and information – on effective policy tools, strategies for scaling-up successful localised projects into national programmes, and implementation management aspects such as technology, financing and capacity building. New approaches are needed to inject some impetus into the development of the sub-sector and more attention should be devoted to collating available information –both at local and global levels in order to promote learning within the context of the overall challenge of “going to scale”.

Within this context, the future planned work activities in applied research of the WELL RCN over the period up to March 2004 will be very relevant. WELL RCN activities over the period will aim at packaging the outcomes of the scoping studies into information products with national and sub-national relevance. The RCN will also carry out further case studies that will help to ensure better understanding of cost effective strategies for addressing the challenge of scaling up sanitation programmes.

Recommendations

- There is need for increased advocacy aimed at raising the ranking of sanitation as a development priority among policy makers at national and district levels. Level planners and decision makers need to be influenced to better appreciate the economic implications of poor sanitation and its impact on sustainability of development and poverty reduction.
- The national policy document should be reviewed and updated to enable it to serve as a unified document that will guide all aspects of rural, urban and school sanitation and stimulate private sector investment.
- Government agencies at both national and decentralised levels should strengthen their capacities for formulating and enforcement of regulatory and monitoring arrangements.
- Inter-sectoral collaboration between key agencies needs to be strengthened. This will involve clarification of roles and strengthening of the partnership between the many institutions involved in promotion and development of sanitation and hygiene education.
- There is need for strengthening of human capacity at all levels through training. There is need for particular emphasis on developing capacity of districts to plan for

sanitation development and private contractors/artisans to market and deliver quality services.

- The costs of current available technologies are beyond the reach of the poor. Research should be stepped up on development of lower cost technologies which are essential to ensure sustainable development of the sector.
- There is need to place greater emphasis on documenting experiences and reviewing options for sustainable financing of sanitation schemes.
- There is the need to develop capacity within the institutions with responsibilities for sanitation with regard to information and knowledge management.

References

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