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ACCESS TO SANITATION AND SAFE WATER: GLOBAL PARTNERSHIPS AND LOCAL ACTIONS

Decentralised strategy setting and action planning for environmental sanitation in Ghana

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This paper shares the experience in the preparatory activities carried out for the preparation of a National Environmental Sanitation Strategy and Action Plan for Ghana. The procedures and framework for preparing the comprehensive strategy and action plan are described including national, regional and district-level management and quality assurance of the process. This initiative is different from the usual sanitation limited to "hygienic disposal of human excreta" as the strategies and related action planning elements cover all aspects of environmental sanitation including solid waste, human excreta, sullage conveyance and drainage, environmental sanitation education and enforcement management. An important proposition of exercise is that where effective collaboration, sharing and peering can be forged amongst sector institutions and coordinated well it is possible to bring diverse expertise at national level to tackle each and every issue of environmental sanitation adequately.

Background

Ghana published its Environmental Sanitation Policy in 1999 but services in the sub-sector have not seen the expected changes due to lack of effective implementation of policy measures and/or actions. Through a highly participatory approach a new Revised Environmental Sanitation Policy (2007)¹ has been drafted. In the revised policy, care was taken to separate strategy and implementation issues from the policy: the issues have been fed into the National Environmental Sanitation and Strategic Plan as a response to the revised policy focus areas and also the GPRSII (Growth and Poverty Reduction Strategy).

The main reason for separating strategy from policy actions is to ensure that the preparation of strategy to meet the policy measures emanates from the appropriate decentralised levels of administration and governance in the country, i.e. Metropolitan, Municipal and District Assemblies (MMDAs). This process follows the stipulated procedures by the National Development Planning Commission (NDPC) for preparation of medium term development plans are developed and implemented at the 138 MMDAs.

Defining a framework for preparing national strategy and action plan

The need for strategy and action planning is influenced by practical considerations and experiences from other sectors, particularly health and water that have achieved significant progress by developing national-level plans and programmes but delivered through decentralised structures.

The specific examples for health and water are as follows:

- the launch of the National Community Water and Sanitation Programme in 1999 has seen access to rural water improve from below 30% to around 58% currently, through decentralised delivery of services;
- the health sector is currently implementing the third round of Five-year Programme-of-Work (2007-2012), through harmonised procedures and implementation by decentralised structures and making steady improvements;

An important observation is that while the water sector only had its sector policy approved recently (July 2007) the health sector is in the process of finalising its policy, yet these sectors have achieved progress surpassing the environmental sanitation sector which had prepared a policy since 1999. While other factors such as low human capacity and poor financial resource allocation could be reasons for the slow or no progress of the sector, the overwhelming evidence is that without a plan or programme, systematic improvement and progress can not be achieved.

Elements and processes for preparing the National Environmental Sanitation Strategy and Action Plan (NESSAP)

In preparing the NESSAP framework, a comparative assessment of the processes for preparing the programmes for the water and health sectors as well as other examples of national-level plans and programmes implemented at district-level was carried out. The analyses of the contents of the above programmes influenced the elements of the national strategy and action plan and its content (see Table 1).

Elements of preparation process	National environmental sanitation strategy and action plan	
	Available elements	Proposals
Reference document	Revised environmental sanitation policy; GPRSII	
Responsible institution	MLGRDE/Environmental health and sanitation department (EHSD)	
Guidelines for preparation of plans and programmes	Not available for national-level(guidelines for preparing DA-level waste management and environmental sanitation plans)	
Spatial coverage definition		All districts
Form/Type of facilitation		Consultant facilitation Regional-level facilitation of districts
Time-frame		8 months
Duration of plan		1998 – 2020
Focal (component) areas		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Solid waste management • Excreta (Liquid Waste) management • Storm water drainage and sillage conveyance • Environmental sanitation education and enforcement management (incl. food hygiene and sanitary inspections and law enforcement) • Health-care and special industrial wastes.
Thematic sub-committees		Component-specific working groups
Issue-specific consultations		Component-specific situation assessment, identification of key issues, prioritisation
Oversight arrangements		Regional – Regional Coordinating Council (RCC)/Regional Environmental Health and Sanitation Units (REHSUs) National – National Environmental Sanitation Policy Co-ordinating Council (NESPoCC)
Peer review/Quality assurance		International experts, National professionals
Participatory public consultation		District/Regional-level consultations
Harmonisation and/or alignment		Two-tier harmonisation at regional and national; and alignment to national development strategy
Priority setting		Criteria to be developed based on the vision of the strategy.

Strategic focus of the plan

The main thrust of the strategies and action plan is implement interventions that will gradually tackle the deficits in all aspects of environmental sanitation including institutional strengthening and capacity enhancement of front-line actors, particularly environmental health officers.

In the *short-term* it is proposed that the strategy should focus on addressing the following:

- Capacity enhancement, focusing on retaining and upgrading of key staff including provision of logistics, short-courses and improved scheme of service with well-defined career development path;
- Implementing effective awareness raising for behavioural change;
- Emphasising promotion and provision of improved household-level sanitation facilities;
- Vigorous enforcement of bye-laws for improved household-level facilities;
- Improving private sector waste management through enhanced revenue mobilisation at all levels, including levying of households to recover service-fees;
- Dealing with the plastic waste menace including mobilising financing for sustainable 4Rs (reduction, re-use, recycling, recovery);
- Strategic location of final disposal facilities for clusters of districts; and
- Preparation of drainage development plans and immediate intervention of drainage infrastructure as a critical component of improving environment sanitation services

In the *medium-term*, the strategic focus will include;

- Upgrading Schools of Hygiene to tertiary institutions under the Ministry of Education, Science and Sports (the schools are currently under the Ministry of Health and therefore does not qualify for funding from the Ghana Education Trust Fund);
- Attracting higher calibre staff into the environmental health and sanitation sub-sector;
- Implementing segregation of refuse at primary storage and collection points;
- Developing and managing engineered disposal facilities for material recovery;
- Vigorous promotion of alternative household and communal level technologies;
- Expansion of simplified sewerage infrastructure for existing sewerage networks and peri-urban areas;
- Country-wide implementation of drainage improvement plans;
- Harmonised institutional planning and programming; and
- Focusing enforcement of environmental sanitation bye-laws linked to quality of life – health, well-being and improved productivity

In the *long-term*, the strategies will include;

- Increasing waste reduction, re-use, recycling and recovery options;
- Improving wastewater re-use; and
- Increasing simplified and condominal sewerage infrastructure in municipal and district capitals

Conclusions

Important recommendations and conclusions from the analyses that led to developing the strategy and action plan as well as the process for preparing national-level strategy and action planning include the following:

1. Paying attention and effort to prepare strategies and action plans is as important as preparing policies particularly in an environment of decentralised system in the delivery of services with limited national and intermediate (regional entities provide only coordinating and facilitating roles) capacity as prevails in Ghana
2. A useful corollary is that a sector which runs only on programmes or plans without a comprehensive policy framework will soon reach its plateau of progress and may become characterised with high incremental costs of operations as the same investment areas will tend to be revisited
3. National-level frameworks for strategies and action planning are important as these provide guidance to district-level planning, assessment and evaluation of sector performance as well as provide national-level perspectives useful for overall financial planning and funding prospecting
4. The efficacy of collaboration and partnering amongst sector institutions and agencies to harness different expertise as used at regional-level and in Issue-Specific Working Groups holds great promise. It will help tackle issues beyond the usually narrowed focus of sanitation (hygienic disposal of human excreta) as held by many development agencies
5. The above point calls for fostering global partnerships and pooling of expertise and resources to begin to look beyond 2015 and consider town environmental sanitation issues on broader frame than MDG 7, Target 9.

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