



WATER, SANITATION, ENVIRONMENT and DEVELOPMENT

Institutional problems in waste management

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Introduction

The government of the Republic of Ghana has, as a national policy, adopted Primary Health Care as a concept that will enable all its citizenry to have available good health services by the year 2000. The deprived rural or remote communities and the urban poor should have available basic health facilities which they can apply for the improvement of their health situation at affordable costs. The strategies for the prevention of disease-causing situations lie in the practice of good sanitation and personal hygiene.

But since sanitation is a way of life expressed in clean surroundings, Primary Health Care connotes everyone doing his little effective bit as a cheerful contribution towards the achievement of the desired goal of good public health.

Waste management constitutes obviously an important factor in our strategies for disease prevention and enhancement of Primary Health Care. This preventive element of health care in the urban settlement becomes illusive as a result of sheer numbers and area coverage. Indeed in the strategies for Urban Primary Health Care, waste management services pose formidable obstacles in our efforts for the achievement of a clean habitat and therefore good and healthy urban dwellers.

Effective and efficient waste management service delivery is realised when solid and liquid waste collection services are available to all at an affordable cost, and what is collected is treated and finally disposed of without any adverse effects on the environment; insanitary conditions are created by indiscriminate disposal of waste, choked drains, stagnant pools of water and overgrown grass and hedges.

Instruments for waste management

The Local Government Law 1988 or PMDC Law No 207 and its predecessor legislations placed responsibility on the provision of this vital municipal infrastructural service on Local Government agencies. These are, in our constitutional arrangements, the Metropolitan, Municipal and District Assemblies numbering one hundred and ten (110). This legal instrument is but one of other instruments necessary for the promotion of waste management. The other important instruments are the technology (system and equipments), the institutional arrangements, financing and community co-operation and participation.

This paper will address mainly the problems of institutional arrangements for the delivery of waste management services. In Ghana, these have from experience been found to be very crucial. No doubt financing and the availability of a system and its accompanying equipment and other paraphernalia cannot be disregarded without causing the urban dweller to feel justifiably unsatisfied with the services.

An effective institutional arrangement will be shown to enhance the mobilisation of funds and therefore the acquisition of the wherewithall for a sustainable waste management services.

Institutional arrangements in force

National level

The Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development is responsible for the activities of the District Assemblies and therefore the Sector Ministry for waste management and other sanitation activities.

Thus, while at the National level the overall institution with first line responsibility for this component of primary Health Care, there is no machinery in place to effectively supervise, monitor, guide and direct, and above all evaluate the waste management programmes and projects. The lack of technical direction and supervision at the national level has meant the absence of national policy and guidelines. District Assemblies therefore are left with no other choice than to rely on their own estimates and do the best they can in furtherance of a satisfactory waste management.

Considering the multi-disciplinary nature of waste management, there should be linkages with other allied sectors particularly the Ministries of Works and Housing, Health, Science and Technology, Finance and Economic Planning and the recently created Ministry of Environment. A Technical Body embracing these sectors should eliminate this gap and consequently support the Assemblies.

From my information, this issue may soon receive attention by government and may be implemented sooner than later.

Regional level

It has been recognised over the years, that it is absolutely necessary for developments to be regionally integrated for

cost-effectiveness. This position has been further buttressed by the rapid growth of our urban settlements spatially and in population density. In some cases, the urban sprawl has stretched disposal facilities to the limit that it has become necessary to look for new landfills and liquid waste treatment sites outside the borders of the individual Assemblies.

Fortunately, PNDC Law 207 anticipated this situation and made provision for joint utilisation of such facilities and structures. This can best be implemented under a regional co-ordinating agency. The institution expected therefore to perform this function is the Regional Co-ordinating Council. While these Councils exist, the issues of co-ordination, monitoring and supervision of District programmes into a meaningful regional integrated projects have not been fully realised in view of lack of definitive guidelines and policy.

District level

The institutional problems in waste management services at the District level loom large and need addressing with all urgency. Given that the implementation of programme and activities takes place at this level in the hierarchy, lapses in the structures at the local level directly result in the low performance of the waste management function of a District Assembly. Incidentally the performance rating of the District Assembly in the eyes of the urban dweller is measured by the standard of services delivery and the environmental situation of the town or city.

It therefore goes without saying that the structures of the District Assembly should be such as to address most if not all the crucial issues of waste management.

Waste must be collected on a regular basis and treated and finally disposed of satisfactorily without any hazards to health. To do this well, it is necessary to have an organisation, systems and equipment, funding to sustain the service, and a motivated community that will accept, appreciate and participate in the service.

District level structures

The prevalent practice of fragmenting the waste management function amongst several divisions or departments of the District Assembly has been identified as a contributory factor that accounts for the low level of services. District Assemblies must restructure and relieve the Health Department of this function. The Accra Metropolitan Assembly's experience in the establishment of a Waste Management Department solely responsible for the waste management function has by and large yielded good results and should be replicated with modifications to suit the various categories of District Assemblies in the Country. The Department has established linkages with other departments within Accra Metropolitan Assembly and other agencies in other sectors relevant of waste management.

Thus, the Advisory Committee on waste Management of the Waste Management Department of Accra Metropolitan Assembly, comprising representatives from the Ministry of Health, Town and Country Planning Department, the University of Science and Technology School of Engineering, Health Department, Treasurer's and Engineer's Departments of Accra Metropolitan Assembly and two representatives of Accra metropolitan Assembly (Politicians) have provided the Waste management Department with the multi-disciplinary approach in the implementation of programmes and activities. This arrangement indeed enables the varied expertise and expectations to be given the proper consideration in the waste management function of the Assembly. This is further consolidated under the provisions made in the Legislative Instruments (L.I's) of establishment of the District Assemblies for a Board of Municipal Services.

The good intentions of these Legislative Instruments have not been realised because the utilities do not owe any allegiance to the municipalities and therefore are not committed to comply with the arrangements under the Board of Municipal Services.

Indeed, the utilities, namely Electricity, Water and Sewerage, Roads, Post and Telegraph, have so far not appreciated the need for harmonisation of programmes and projects for the enhancement of delivery of municipal infrastructural services, including waste management. The occasional blockage of an access road preventing solid waste to be collected from premises because a drain is being repaired without prior notices to the waste management agencies is sometimes the result of this lack of co-ordination and co-operation between the institutions.

The Board of Municipal Services recognises the need for institutional link-up for municipal services to be delivered without any impediments from one agency to another. These Boards have been established less than 3 years now and will need time to make their establishments felt. However, it is necessary that all agencies should make the efforts to make the Boards functional and effective.

Local/community level structures

It is a well-known fact that any programme or project stands the greatest chance of success only when the beneficiaries are involved in all stages of planning, design and implementation. So that not only should the aspirations of the recipients be met, but opportunities must be specifically created to enable them to participate meaningfully. At the local or community level therefore, a conscious effort should be made to establish local channels for information dissemination and education, and activities within project objectives geared towards the active participation of members of the community, identifiable groups and non-governmental organisations (NGO's). Participation and co-operation induce the payment of fees for services.

These are particularly desirable and the Waste Management organisation, with the assistance of the Assembly must establish these local structures as vehicles for development. Experience has shown that cost has to be incurred to organise resident/community/social groups, Non-Governmental Organisations and others for public education on systems and facilities available for waste management and their proper usage. Other activities may include communal labour in clean-up activities, forums and rallies. The benefits will no doubt outweigh the cost.

Conclusion

Appropriate structures are a sine qua non for an efficient and effective waste management. These should be linked into firm institutional framework and be responsive to the demands of the services delivery. It should be recognised that an important aspect of a good institutional is the availability of qualified and highly motivated admixture of personnel in adequate members and with functional linkages with all allied agencies in the sector.

Above all, the political climate must be conducive to the promotion of waste management so that the basic inputs necessary for sustaining the service are provided for at all levels of policy formulations.

Ghana will receive a boost in its drive for high level or Urban Primary Health Care if we endeavour to eliminate the institutional problems or reduce them to the minimum; thus we must support the Accra Health Care Project under the World Health Organisation's network of Health Cities Project to make an impact on preventive health care.