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Institutional challenges to RWSS sustainability in Ghana



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Introduction

Currently, most of the Rural Water Supply and Sanitation (RWSS) programmes in Ghana are funded by external support agencies (ESAs) and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs).

Notable among the ESAs operating in the sector are the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Danish International Development Agency (DANIDA). Some of the NGOs are Water Aid, World Vision and the Adventist Development Relief Agency, (ADRA), Catholic Church.

Since these Rural Water Supply and Sanitation programmes are donor-propelled, it is now deemed necessary to examine the institutional framework within which Rural Water and Sanitation projects are executed at both the National and Local Government levels.

This, it is expected would pre-empt complete dependency of the sector on ESAs and more importantly, ensure the sustainability of existing and future programmes.

This paper therefore examines some of the institutional challenges of the sustainability of Rural Water Supply and Sanitation programmes and prescribes some recommendations.

It is significant to point out from the onset that the issue of sustainability after the withdrawal of donor support has been an issue of concern not only to donors, but to government and personnel working on these projects.

Dapaah (1989) recognises the significance of institutional challenges to the sustainability of all donor aided projects and advises that a critical look be taken at institutional support for the management of these projects.

Institutions at the national level

In recognition of the significance of Rural Water and Sanitation in the attainment of the objective of providing safe and reliable water, the Ghana Water and Sewerage Corporation (GWSC) created a Rural Water Development (RWD) Division to plan, monitor, coordinate and evaluate RWSS programmes in the country. Even though the division is effectively administered, it is the contention of this writer that in order to make it function at an optimal level, there is the need for a few changes. At the moment, the staffing pattern in the division is heavily slanted towards

engineers and hydrogeologists; in fact the only Community Development Officer was recruited in 1992. It is recommended that a multi disciplinary team made up of engineers, hydrogeologies, management specialists, economists, community development experts/sociologists, accountants etc be recruited.

The status of the division should be enhanced beyond the current level where it is headed by a line Director. It is heartening to note that both the Kokrobite (1991) declaration and the proposed 1993 structure for the division, recommend the upgrading of the status of the head of the division to that of a Deputy Managing Director. This, if implemented would give the head of the division and his staff, the necessary leverage, flexibility and finite autonomy to manage the division.

Dapaah (1989), Baum and Tolbert (1985) identify effective coordination as being central to the sustainability of externally funded projects. In this vein, it is suggested that the RWD of GWSC should be strengthened not only to plan, monitor and evaluate RWSS programmes, but to also coordinate the activities of the many donors operating in the sector. This is particularly important in view of the transition from centralized management to community management of handpumps. As part of the coordination mechanism, there is the need to standardize not more than three handpumps so as to ensure a positive level of responsiveness of the private sector towards investment in the spare parts distribution system.

The staff of RWD must ensure that all existing and future RWSS programmes dovetail into the National Policy and Sector Strategy as formulated by Government.

The capacity of RWD to undertake the planning, monitoring, coordination and evaluation functions must be strengthened through continuous human resource development and the provision of adequate administrative infrastructure.

Regional and local level institutions

The absence of fully-fledged RWD units at the Regional level of GWSC's operations equally hampers the monitoring and evaluation of RWSS programmes. The proposed establishment of RWSS units at the Regional level is welcome and should be implemented immediately.

As part of the need to establish, nurture and develop institutions at the local level to support the implementa-

tion of RWSS projects, an institutional framework has been created. To this end, District Management Committees (DMC) and Community Water and Sanitation (WATSAN) Committees have been established for the UNDP RWSS projects in the Eastern and Volta Regions and for the DANIDA RWSS project in the Volta Region. Structures akin to these have been created by the CIDA and Caisse Centrale sponsored projects in Northern Ghana and the Central Region respectively.

At the end of these projects, the responsibility for the day-to-day management of the projects would rest on the District Assembly and the local communities. Recognising the low level of existing capacity of the District Assembly and the communities to implement the RWSS projects on a sustainable basis, training workshops have been organized geared towards equipping DMC members with adequate skills in planning, decision making, monitoring, evaluation and communication. With respect to the WATSAN Committees, training workshops have been organized to equip participants with skills in planning, decision-making, communication, leadership, book-keeping and record keeping.

Equipping the DMC and WATSAN Committees with these managerial skills is to enable the local people participate in project identification and demonstrate acceptance and commitment to the projects being implemented in their communities. Lethan and Cooper (1983) and Dapaah (1989) discuss the relevance of local people's involvement in project identification to sustainability.

Despite the success of these workshops, the crux of the matter is: would there be adequate resources to sustain these capacity building interventions at the end of the project duration?

The District Assemblies as currently structured and resourced do not however look potent to be able to provide the wherewithal to finance these programmes (see Dotse 1990). The gloom is not however going to persist in perpetuity. It is envisaged that the functioning of the District Planning and Budgeting Unit (DPBU) should strengthen the DMCs. The funds to be provided to the District Assemblies under the District Assemblies common fund as stipulated in the 4th Republican Constitution would provide modest financial resources to the District Assemblies. It is argued that each District Assembly should have separate budget lines to support the programmes of ongoing donor-funded RWSS projects and the programmes of the District RWS units.

Dapaah (1989) recognises the need for financial adequacy in sustaining donor projects when she states:

"..... it is essential for an implementing agency to develop a sound financial base to enable it to sustain projects after the withdrawal of foreign financial support" (Dapaah 1989: 113).

Since the DMCs, and the other structures akin to them have been tried and tested in a few districts, it is strongly being recommended that the concept be adopted, institutionalized and nurtured in all District Assemblies. In other words, each District Assembly should create a DMC for the planning and management of RWSS projects. The DMCs should function as a sub-committee of either the Social Services or Technical Infrastructure sub-committee of the District Assembly. The DMC should superintend the work of the proposed District Rural Water and Sanitation (DRWs) units.

The rationale for the establishment and strengthening of the DMC is the non-decentralized structure of GWSC within the District Assembly structure. The DMC and the DRWS unit would take over the Rural Water and Sanitation functions of GWSC at the district level. In this way, the GWSC district office could concentrate on the urban water operations.

Conclusion

In the execution of RWSS programmes, donors and NGOs bear huge financial outlays towards the physical provision of facilities, purchase of equipment and human resource development. These are supplemented by counterpart funds provided by the Central Government to support programme activities during the project environment. In order to reap the maximum benefits of these investments, adequate steps should be taken, principally through institutional capacity building so as to make the externally funded RWSS programmes show cases of success. That way, sustainability of these programmes would be attained.

References

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