

Accra citizens suffering lack of services due to poor coordination and no overall strategy

Money exists to extend water and sanitation services to Accra's long suffering citizens, and donors are keen to help. But the lack of a clear strategic plan for rolling out services, and poor coordination between different stakeholders are hampering progress. To move forward, urgent action is needed to create a city-wide coordination platform, and to develop an integrated strategic development plan.

The second National Level Learning Alliance platform (NLLAP) took place on Wednesday November 25, 2009 on the theme, "Strategic Planning in Urban Water Supply". The meeting coincided with the 5th SWITCH General Learning Alliance meeting which started a day earlier under the above theme. The stage of the NLLAP was set to enable SWITCH to share with the wider sector stakeholders the results of ongoing activities and the way forward for the development of Accra City Strategic Plan. SWITCH activities over the period were recapped and an overview of SWITCH planning process, vision, scenarios and challenges were shared. This communiqué is intended to share with the wider WASH community the most burning issues brought up during the meeting

These are amongst the most important findings of the recent NLLAP meeting on Strategic Planning in Urban Water Supply. The well attended meeting of experts and practitioners from Ghana's WASH sector heard presentations that described the problems faced by Accra's poorest citizens in accessing water and sanitation services; and in dealing with water related problems such as flooding and poor drainage. A long list of familiar problems were reported and discussed, including the high prices paid for water by the poor and access to often poor quality public sanitation services. These prices can be up to 25Gp per bucket as compared to just over 1Gp for the same quantity paid by those fortunate to be enough connected to the Ghana Water Company Limited (GWCL). At the same time the poorest of the poor are forced to pay some 10Gp per visit to squat in unsavory surroundings – or some 50Gp per day for a family of five. At the same time, huge amounts of water are unaccounted for in the system, and no single waste water treatment plant is functioning in the entire city. Many of the poorest parts of town are subject to frequent rainy season flooding.

All of these problems are well known, and have been much discussed. What has been much less discussed is the underlying reason for this unfortunate state of affairs.

Bertha Darteh, city coordinator of the SWITCH project in Accra, pointed to the lack of a single overarching strategic plan for the development of the city's water and sanitation services, and wise management of water resources. Perhaps linked to this is a failure of the some

of the key stakeholders in the city to coordinate effectively with each other, leading to situations where large sections of the city have been effectively abandoned to their own fate simply because they fall between competing institutional mandates.

Mr. Emmanuel Nkrumah of the World Bank made it clear that there are donor funds available for projects in the coming years and that it is time to concretize the research findings into actual projects that can be accommodated under these development fund.

Why is planning and coordination so important?

In a city the size of Greater Accra, suffering from such a high growth rate, it is impossible to provide services in isolation of each other. Improved toilets require a functioning water supply. Extending the water network requires laying of pipes through densely populated urban areas. If space is not preserved for these vital services it is almost impossible to put in the necessary infrastructure later on. Yet with planning laws frequently flouted the GWCL is finding that space it had thought preserved for water supply infrastructure is no longer available.

A more strategic and coordinated approach is also necessary to allow for prioritization of different activities, and clear and transparent decision making. While no one can argue with the vision of serving every single citizen of Accra with a modern water service in their house, or an on-site toilet, these are the Cadillac of the water and sanitation world. And it will take time to supply everyone with a Cadillac – not until 2025

according to even the most optimistic estimates. But what happens in the meantime? Who will ensure that everyone gets some level of service – if not a Cadillac then at least a sturdy bicycle? A coordinated medium term development plan for Accra would talk not just about the final vision of a tap and toilet in every house – but of the intermediate steps on the way: good quality communal water sources and toilets at a fair price that does not disadvantage the poor. It is surely a great injustice that currently the poorest pay more for a lower quality of service!

Who needs to coordinate? While there are a great many stakeholders working in the sector in Accra, pride of place goes to the GWCL and CWSA for water, and the Metropolitan Assemblies (and sub-metros) for Sanitation. The primary recommendation of the meeting was that there should be a permanent city level coordination platform, incorporating all those actors in the Greater Accra area where the issues raised during the meeting could be dealt with in a more structured manner. Such a platform will require

support and facilitation, and the SWITCH project has offered to provide this in the short term until a more permanent solution can be found.

Creating a coordination platform under the appropriate leadership will not solve all Greater Accra's problems in one go, but it will be a good start. Developing an integrated strategic development plan for the entire city's water and sanitation services, as well as a roadmap for rolling them out will be a second important step and building monitoring and reporting capacity to follow progress the third step. With such a plan in hand, city stakeholders can confidently approach both national government and donors, sure that they are in control of their own development. Those present at the NLLAP meeting therefore implore the relevant authorities to waste no time in establishing this important structure so that the plight of the unserved and under-served citizens of Greater Accra can be met in a timely fashion.

The NLLAP is a WASH sector multi stakeholder platform with the overall goal of improving sector learning and dialogue. It is hosted by the Ghana WASH Resource Centre Network (RCN). The platform offers learning and sharing opportunity for sector players as one of the practical approaches to improving sector engagements/sharing with the long term aim of achieving a knowledge driven WASH sector that delivers quality and sustainable services in Ghana.

NLLAP meetings are organized and facilitated by the Ghana WASH Resource Centre Network (RCN), and take place on the last Thursday of every month. They are open to all interested parties. The discussions of each NLLAP meeting are summarized and shared with the wider WASH community in the form of a communiqué after the meeting. The topics of upcoming meetings are decided on by the RCN secretariat and a list of upcoming meetings can be found on the RCN website www.ghana.watsan.net.

If you are interested to propose a topic for a meeting please contact us on,

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