

Stakeholders call for proper decentralization of urban water supplies

Why have investments in the urban water subsector not yielded the desired results all these years? Who is responsible for ensuring delivery of urban water services to the unserved? For now, the answer does not seem to be clear. GWCL, which is the central agency, could collaborate effectively with Metropolitan, Municipal and District Assemblies (MMDAs) to ensure service delivery to unserved areas. What stops GWCL's regional branches from collaborating with MMDAs? Is there a legal barrier? Can GWCL not perform more effectively in ensuring urban-wide uninterrupted service delivery? These were important questions on the minds of WASH stakeholders at the seventeenth (17th) edition of the National Level Learning Alliance Platform (NLLAP) in Accra.

The 17th NLLAP took place on Thursday 30th June, 2011 on the theme, The State of Urban Water Management in Ghana: Challenges and Way forward. Ben Arthur, Executive Secretary of Coalition of NGOs in Water and Sanitation (CONIWAS) gave the first presentation on "The State of Urban Water Management in Ghana" Ms Bertha Darteh, SWITCH Project Facilitator presented highlights of a recent SWITCH/RCN publication titled: "Towards Integrated Urban Water Management in the Greater Accra Metropolitan Area: Current Status and strategic direction for the future." This publication was launched by Mr. Mintah Aboagye, former Director of Water, MWRWH. To stimulate discussions and obtain views from key stakeholders, there was a panel discussion preceding the open forum. This WASHReflection is intended to share with the wider WASH community the most important issues brought up during the meeting.

Presentation: Civil society perspective of state of urban water management

In his presentation, Mr Ben Arthur of CONIWAS traced the history of urban water management, highlighting reforms that had taken place since the 1970s to the current attempt to incorporate another water company to take over from where Aqua Vitens Rand Limited (AVRL) left off. In summary, he pointed out that these reforms had failed to meet their aims and objectives.

According to him, in 1957, there were 35 pipe-borne water supply systems in the country. In 1961, the number of systems rose to 69. In 1979, there were 194 pipe-borne and 2,500 hand pumped borehole systems in the country. And by 1984, additional 3000 boreholes had been drilled and fitted with hand pumps.

But by the late 1980s and early 1990s, 33% of the piped water supply systems had deteriorated greatly or completely broken down due to inadequate funding to carry out maintenance and rehabilitation. These were then managed by the Ghana Water and Sewerage Corporation (GWSC).

This was so even though sector reforms and projects were implemented in 1970, 1981, and 1988 to reverse the decline in water supply services. The reforms continued through the decade of 1983 to 1993. During this period tariffs were increased and subsidies were removed for urban water supplies.

Specific examples of the reforms include the 1987 "Five-Year Rehabilitation and Development Plan" of the sector which resulted in the launching of the Water Sector Restructuring Project (WSRP). 140 million dollars was provided to support the implementation of the WSRP. The reforms were aimed at reducing unaccounted for water, introducing rationalization through the reduction of the workforce, hiring of more professionals and training of the remaining staff. A strong focus in the WSRP was also put on improved management and increased efficiency through organizational change of the water sector.

Subsequently, there was the 1990s Organizational Reform or the "The Korkrobite Declaration" during which comprehensive organizational reforms within the Sector were initiated, i.e. the decoupling of Rural Water Supply from GWSC, establishment of Community Water and Sanitation Department (CWSD), leading to Community Water and Sanitation Agency (CWSA); the establishment of Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) in 1994; and the establishment of the Public Utility Regulatory Commission (PURC) in 1997.

Fast forward, the AVRL came onto the scene till June 2011. Now, a new company called Ghana Urban Water Limited (GUWL) has been conceptualized and though it is yet to be incorporated, its job description has been defined: To take over the responsibilities of AVRL.

In between, civil society has grown from obscurity to a prominent force, providing constructive criticism and calling for wider stakeholder input. Today civil society's view is that despite all the investments and reforms since the 1950s, Ghana's urban water management is still beset with the following challenges:

- Inefficiency in operation and management of water systems;
- Inefficiency in the use of resources; Inadequate investment for infrastructure development, rehabilitation and expansion;
- Increase in demand for water supply as a result of population increase and expansion in water-based economic activities;
- expanding urban communities.
- Ineffective management practices, systems and structures (Dual Management Structure);
- Lack of performance-based management systems within Ghana Water Company Limited (GWCL);
- Attitude of some staff of the Company;
- the systems are too many, too huge for a single company to efficiently manage;
- Loss of revenue through Non-Revenue Water; and the inability to collect revenue from MMDAs (almost 20% of total revenue)

Now civil society is asking the following questions about the Ghana Urban Water Company:

- What is the organizational structure of this Company?
- Who will this company report to?
- Who are the managers of the Company? How will these people be constituted?
- Will the company operate under the same conditions as AVRIL? Will it use seconded staff? Will it operate under a performance contract?
- How much is the fee for the company and who determines the fees?
- How would the birth of the new company solve the challenges enumerated above?

Overview of Integrated Urban Water Management in the Greater Accra Metropolitan Area (GAMA)

Presenting an overview of the SWITCH/RCN publication titled, "Towards Integrated Urban Water Management in the Greater Accra Metropolitan Area", Bertha Darteh of the SWITCH Project said it consisted of stakeholder interactions

and literature review which were also validated through the Accra Learning Alliance Meetings.

According to her, the publication, jointly authored by Marieke Adank, Bertha Darteh, Patrick Moriarty, Henrietta Osei-Tutu, David Assan and Daan van Rooijen, presents options for solving challenges in Integrated Urban Water Management and gives some ideas for Strategic planning, especially by MMDAs.

Bertha also added that the publication gives insight about successes and challenges of water management in GAMA, as well as the state of sanitation, including waste treatment facilities.

Discussions and recommendations

Discussions were generally centred on the need to improve urban water services through proper resourcing of the GWCL and allowing them to operate independently – without political interference. The role of the PURC was also deemed critical in getting water services extended to unserved areas.

The following points constitute a summary of recommendations:

- Decentralize the Management and Operation of some of the Systems to Local Area Management – Using the Bulk Water System. For instance, allowing gated communities to handle water supply to residents; they should buy the water in bulk from GWCL and distribute to residents. This can be done for MMDAs.
- Strengthen GWCL regional branches; they must be allowed to run independently – produce, transport and distribute water for sale; should not be prevented from using the private sector's services.
- Institute Performance-based management for GWCL (Accountability regime across the company)
- Invest in system expansion and rehabilitation
- Look at mechanisms for recovering cost
- Intervene across the sanitation chain
- Synchronize town planning with water sector infrastructure systems
- GWCL must see the need to participate in sector events such as NLLAP to gather inputs of stakeholders
- CSOs must not create a hostile environment

Following these discussions and recommendations the NLLAP 17 session came to an end.

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 take place on the last Thursday of every month and opened to all interested parties. The discussions of each NLLAP meeting are summarized and shared with the wider WASH community. 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.washghana.net.

If you are interested to propose a topic for a meeting please contact us on, Tel. (233-302)/ 769552; Fax: (233-302) 769583; Email: rcn@washghana.net