

REPORT ON THE 4TH NORTHERN REGIONAL LEARNING ALLIANCE PLATFORM MEETING HELD ON THE 26TH OF FEBRUARY 2014 AT THE CONFERENCE HALL OF THE COMMUNITY WATER AND SANITATION AGENCY, CWSA-NR.

INTRODUCTION

The Northern Regional Learning Alliance platform organised its 4th meeting on 27th February, 2014 in Tamale under the theme “*trends and patterns in water service delivery: findings from second round of functionality and service monitoring and baseline household survey of water user’s satisfaction of water services in East Gonja District*”. The event was organised by the CWSA in collaboration with the Triple-S Project Ghana under the auspices of the Core Group of the Platform. The purpose of the meeting was to discuss findings from a second round of functionality and service monitoring of water supply facilities and household survey of water users satisfaction conducted in East Gonja-pilot district of the Triple-S project the discussions were led by a team from the East Gonja District Assembly with support from CWSA.

Information Technology Specialist, Madam Patricia Gyamfi, and chair for the occasion, remarked that the region has come a long way in WASH service delivery and it was about time functionality and service monitoring was given the attention it deserves.. She noted that, substantial progress has been made in the provision of water facilities in the region but the functionality and the services delivered by these facilities do not commensurate with the numbers on the ground. According to her, it has become rather imperative to have a paradigm shift and look more closely at the services being provided by the facilities than their mere physical presence. Miss Gyamfi observed that, the platform is a novelty in the region as it brings together all stakeholders to brainstorm on new ideas and ways of doing things differently in the rural WASH sub sector.

She opined that, lack of adequate data on WASH facilities and at the district level has culminated into uncoordinated activities by various sector players working in districts and communities. In this regard, proper and well documented information on WASH facilities and Water and Sanitation Management Teams at the district level will give a clear indication of what needs to be done, where and how it should be done. This would serve as a very useful bargaining chip for the District Assemblies when dealing with donors and other players in the sector to leverage support. She stated that the East Gonja experience has been worthwhile and called on other stakeholders to support efforts to scale-up to other districts the region.

PRESENTATION

Mr. Bashiru Shahadu the District Water and Sanitation Team leader, East Gonja District Assembly in his presentation gave an overview of the water supply situation in the district and provided comparative analysis of data collected during the the baseline and the second round of service monitoring. In the baseline, a total of 122 handpump facilities were surveyed as against 137 in the second round of service monitoring. He explained that the difference in the figures was due to some additional facilities which were provided to address

the shortfall identified in the baseline. Similarly, 8 piped schemes were surveyed in the baseline and this increased to 12 during the second round of monitoring.

Findings from Second Round of Monitoring

- A third of handpumps were found not working in during the baseline and in round 2.
- The percentage of handpumps providing services that meet all service level indicators, is still very low (12%)
- There has not been a major improvements in the performance of Water and Sanitation Management Teams for Small Communities and Small Towns since the baseline study
- The service authority performed better in budget allocation and utilization and alignment of Water and Sanitation Plan with other district plans and budget in round 2 than in the baseline.
- More than half of households in East Gonja district depend on handpumps as their major source of water for drinking and other domestic uses, except in the wet season
- More than half of households in the district are dissatisfied with the water services they are currently receiving.
- Less than a third of households were dissatisfied with the performance of service providers with about half attributing it to poor communication and maintenance culture of service providers
- About two thirds of households expressed positive emotions about the water services they receive.

Mr. Bashiru intimated that, the district assembly in conjunction with some of the community based organizations have fixed a number broken handpumps to augment the few which are functioning. In addition, the district assembly also budgeted for and actually received some funds from both the District Development Fund and the District Assembly Common Fund to undertake a number of remedial actions on some of the water infrastructure in the district. He was however quick to add that, inspite of these efforts from the assembly, the impact on the ground is very minimal.

DISCUSSIONS

Functionality of water facilities

Participants were worried that inspite of new facilities provided and old one rehabilitated in East Gonja, functionality dropped during the second round of monitoring. It was explained that water service delivery is like the “spokes of a wheel” such that all elements that contribute to a functional system must be in place to ensure sustainability. Therefore, the provision of the new water infrastructure may not necessary result in increased functionality if other factors such as financing, spare parts, and technical services are not addressed.

Performance of water service providers

Reporting and accountability

Participants generally agreed and coupled with the findings from the service monitoring in the district that WSMTs lacked the requisite training required to perform their functions effectively largely because of the absence of refresher training after their initial training at formation. It was also argued that even though these service providers could be well trained, they are not allowed to work effectively because of partisan politics. It was recommended that massive sensitization of stakeholders in the sector should be carried out to enable them better appreciate the need to do more in building the capacities of these WSMTs.

Maintenance /Spare parts

Spare availability and accessibility is a major contributory factor to service down time of water facilities as evidenced from the findings. In the case of East Gonja, there is only one dealer in the district based in Salaga. Due to the vastness of the district, many communities travel several kilometres to buy a simple part for a handpump which may cost less than the cost of transportation. In addition, the business of spare parts is not lucrative making a lot of people disinterested. To address this challenge it was proposed that the district assembly could take up this role of stockpiling spare parts at the decentralised levels of the district to make it easily accessible to communities. However, it was revealed that this has been tried before without any success as many communities would want the spare parts for free and there is lack of accountability by the district assembly in its sale.

Budgetary allocation and utilization

The Planning Officer of East Gonja District Assembly noted that an amount of GHC 143,000 and Ghc 64,000 from the District Assembly Common Fund and the District Development Fund respectively was allocated to the water sector in the district in 2013 as well as captured in the district composite budget. Participants recommended that the district should move beyond the allocations to ensuring that actual disbursements take place by having a system in place to track the actual utilisation of the funds to ensure communities benefit.

Water quality and accessibility

Participants were of the opinion that in subsequent service monitoring exercises more rigorous water quality analysis than just user perception are conducted since the elements and factors that render water unsafe cannot be seen by the naked eyes or any of the human senses. World Vision informed the house of their modern laboratory established for water quality testing and their intentions to collaborate with any organisation wishing to carry out water quality testing and analysis.

CONCLUSION

The chairperson in her closing remarks appealed to all bodies present to see the platform as a way of selling ideas and innovations to ensure conformity to standards. She stated that, monitoring of functionality and service levels has come to stay as a way of having sufficient data on the rural water sub sector for planning and strategic investment decision making.

She underscored the need for a visit by the Core Group to World Vision and Catholic Relief Services to have discussions on ways of collaborating on water quality testing and analysis in districts as part of monitoring of water supply facilities.

Ms Gyamfi expressed appreciation to the team from the East Gonja District Assembly for such a marvellous work done and prayed that, the success story of the District would not remain in their cupboard but will serve as a springboard for other districts.