



# ANAM WASH REFLECTIONS

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ASUTIFI NORTH DISTRICT LEVEL LEARNING ALLIANCE PLATFORM: PAPER 6

## COVID-19 and Government Free Water Policy – Assessing effectiveness, responses and opportunities in ANDA

On Thursday May 28, 2020, the Asutifi North District Assembly (ANANDA) in the Ahafo Region of Ghana together with Hilton Grantees organised a webinar under the Asutifi North District Level Alliance Platform (DLLAP) – AN-DLLAP to discuss Ghana's government free water policy for communities since the outbreak of COVID-19.

*Addressing the nation in a televised broadcast on Sunday April 5, 2020 Ghana's president Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo announced free water for Ghanaians for the months of April, May and June 2020. He said the decision is part of additional measures being taken by government to mitigate the impact of the outbreak of the virus on the public especially at a time when handwashing has become a critical part of the fight against the virus.*

Since the announcement by the president, the Community Water and Sanitation Agency (CWSA) which oversees the rural water sub-sector including ANDA, issued guidelines for the implementation of the directive. The AN-DLLAP provided opportunity to **assess progress of implementation, identify challenges, and propose solutions** to optimise the programme outcomes and secure the sustainability of the water service provision.

The panelists and discussants included – James Ata-era, District Planning Officer, ANDA, Alhaji Eng. Ahmed Ewura, Regional Director, CWSA, Bono, Ahafo and Bono East Regions, Mr. Joseph Ampadu-Boagye, Programme Manager, Safe Water Network, Mr. Innocent Boadi, Water Supply Officer, World Vision Ghana, Hon. Richard Boamah, Chair, Ola Resettlement Small Town Scheme WSMT and Mrs. Vida Duti, Country Director, IRC Ghana.

### **ANANDA mobilizes support for free water**

Since 2017, IRC Ghana, World Vision, Safe Water Network, Netcentric Campaigns, Aquaya Institute and the Centre for Disease Control, CDC (Otherwise known as the Hilton Grantees) together with the Asutifi North District Assembly have collectively developed and are implementing a masterplan to achieve universal WASH access in ANDA by 2030 with funding from the Conrad Hilton Foundation.

The plan contains the broad vision, programmes, and strategies of the Asutifi North District government and its key development partners for the implementation of a 12-year initiative to provide universal access to safe water, basic sanitation, and hygiene services to about 84,423 people by the year 2030. The shared motivation of the Hilton grantees to ensure the smooth operationalization of government free water policy was highlighted by ANDA District Chief Executive, Anthony Mensah in remarks delivered by Mr. James Atta-era, ANDA Planning Officer.

Mr. Atta-era said ANDA has been building partnership with key stakeholders including CWSA, private water operators and Hilton grantees to identify key strategies and challenges in operationalizing the free water policy and that, the partnerships and strategies have proved useful in ensuring communities have access to water during this critical period.

He noted that since the outbreak of COVID-19 and subsequent announcement by the president for the free water, ANDA has instituted measures to implement guidelines issued by CWSA and mobilized local support from all water systems operators in the district to provide water to people in communities to ensure effective hand-washing to limit the spread of COVID-19 in the district

### **CWSA issues guidelines for free water**

Alhaji Eng. Ahmed Ewura, Regional Director, CWSA, Bono, Ahafo and Bono East Regions said, as soon as the announcement was made CWSA issued instructions to guide the Agency's Regional Directors and Water System Management Staff on the implementation of the directive in the CWSA managed piped water systems in small towns and other schemes operated by the private sector and under Community Ownership and Management (COM) including ANDA.

He explained that, as part of the guidelines, Systems Managers and WSMTs were to ensure that there is continuous free flow of water to facilitate good hygiene and handwashing in communities, public and health institutions including community clinics, police posts. This however does not include industrial and commercial users of water. He said whilst implementing the free water policy, Water Systems Managers and water users at standpipes are advised to observe the social distancing protocols.

“Water Vendors should serve one consumer at a time and ensure the observance of the social distancing protocols in force to avoid crowding at all times; where consumers fail to observe the social distancing protocols and mass up at the stand pipe, the vendor must temporarily close the tap until order is restored to save lives” He explained that as part of the guidelines, drums and barrels exceeding the size of the usual containers (buckets, basins and the 'Yellow gallon') are prohibited at the public standpipes.

“Filling of such big receptacles by one person during the normal fetching hours has the potential of stirring controversy, creating agitation over the time used by that one person in filling his or her receptacles, as others wait in the queue.”

### **Increased demand for water**

As part of the free water policy, Safe Water Network, a key partner in the ANAM initiative has been working with all the partners to implement the directive. Highlighting their role in response to COVID-19, Joseph Ampadu-Boakye, Programme Manager, Safe Water Network said since the announcement was made there has been about 15% to 30% increase in the demand for water at their water stations in ANDA.

He said they had swiftly adapted to meeting the increasing demand for water by communities even though they did not expect “blanket” free water for all directive. “we had expected an increase in demand for water because of the central role water plays in response to COVID-19; what we did not expect was a blanket free water for all, that notwithstanding, we have had to adjust our programme to respond to the increasing demands.”

“We had to provide this free water service to communities without any revenue; the expenses remain the same and have indeed shot up in some areas because we are pumping more water for communities and this is putting a lot of pressure on our systems and maintenance reserves.” He quipped.

“Government has asked us to provide them some information on the free water policy and we are expecting government to absorb some of the bills.” Mr. Ampadu-Boakye said there is a need to properly communicate with communities to ensure they do not continue demanding free water from their systems once the free water policy elapses.

### **Lessons of free water policy for the rural water sector**

Reflecting on the discussions, Mrs. Vida Duti said it was encouraging to hear of an increased demand for water now especially given the role of water in response to COVID-19. At the same time, she was worried about the other segments of the population who still do not have access to water. She encouraged partners to continue working together to ensure everyone has access to water.

“The government agencies, CSOs and private sector have done their best under the circumstances to provide free water for all, but this also throws more light on a number of issues we should not gloss over as a sector; it will be a missed opportunity if we just finish free water and go back

to business as usual without looking at these issues critically to inform how we work as sector beyond the free water” Mrs. Duti added.

Mrs. Duti noted that even though the discussion was happening at the district level, she believed there is a need for a national discussion on the free water policy to inform future guidelines in dealing with such pro-poor measures by government.

### **Recommendations**

WASH has become more important than ever before in this COVID-19 times because of its critical role in handwashing to limit the spread of the virus. It is for this reason the ANAM partners have been working together to address challenges that revolve since 2017 to build a resilient WASH sector and provide 100% WASH services to the everyone in Asutifi North District by 2030. COVID-19 will not be the last emergency where water will be critical, as to when and how, no one knows. Considering the above, panelists and participants proposed the following practical opportunities and recommendation for government and CSOs in handling pro poor interventions on water and dealing with future emergencies.

- Government Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MSWR, MLGRD, CWSA) must strengthen their coordination to be better prepared to handle future emergencies as far as water is concerned.
- Government must develop cutting-edge data system that captures various segments of the population and their water access to make targeting of vulnerable populations for free water subsidy or other pro-poor interventions easy.
- Government must work with CSOs to develop and implement a communication plan or strategy for consumer reactivation beyond the free water policy.
- Government must leverage on technology to increase transparency, reliability, and accountability on the pro-poor water policy.
- Establishment of a robust monitoring system to capture reliable and accurate real time data on a timely basis to inform decision making at all levels within the rural water sector.

#### **ABOUT AN-DLLAP**

*The Asutifi North District Learning Alliance Platform (AN-DLLAP) is a WASH sector, multi stakeholder platform with the overall goal of improving sector learning and dialogue. It was established in July, 2018, and is being hosted by the Asutifi North District Assembly. The platform offers learning and sharing opportunities for sector players as one of the practical approaches to improving sector engagements with the long term aim of achieving a knowledge driven WASH sector that delivers quality and sustainable services in the district and beyond. AN-DLLAP meetings take place quarterly (or more frequently, when necessary) and are open to all interested parties. The discussions of each AN-DLLAP meeting can be found on the ANAM WASH website [www.anamwash.com] or RCN website [www.washghana.net]*

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