

## The Empowerment in WASH Index

The term 'Empowerment' in the Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) Sector has always been topical with diverse interpretations and definitions. The assessment and measurement of empowerment in WASH has also largely remained a gap. It has therefore become necessary to reflect on achieving inclusive services by co-developing a novel tool that directly captures gender-based empowerment in the WASH sector and also enables local government agencies, NGOs, CSOs and Development Partners to assess and monitor gender issues related to their WASH programmes in Ghana. This was the assignment that engaged the attention and support of stakeholders at the 72nd edition of the National Level Learning Alliance Platform (NLLAP) in Accra on February 22, 2018.

*Empowering Vulnerable People to address Household WASH Security Risks (REACH) Project is a partnership between IRC, Queens University and the Stockholm Environment Institute. The Dfid-funded REACH Empowerment Project is being implemented in the Asutifi North District in Ghana within the broad framework of IRC's district based full WASH coverage initiative to reach SDG 6 by 2030. One of the objectives of the REACH project is to co-develop an Empowerment in WASH index to measure empowerment in the water and sanitation sector capturing multiple dimensions of empowerment. Its successful development will serve as a learning product for a scale up to other regions in the world. NLLAP 72 was therefore used as a consultative platform to advance knowledge relating to empowerment in the WASH sector. Presentations and discussions were led by representatives from each of the three partner institutions.*



### The REACH Project

A WASH Expert at IRC Ghana, Jeremiah Atengdem, providing a brief background of the REACH project, said it was anchored on a district WASH masterplan prepared by the Asutifi North District, IRC, Conrad N. Hilton Foundation Grantees and other stakeholders to advance a collective vision of universal access to WASH services by all in the district. He said the plan would ensure coordination and alignment of interventions and serve as basis for tracking progress. Specifically, he said, the project seeks to demonstrate what it takes to reach full WASH coverage by coordinating stakeholder's efforts towards implementation of the Master Plan and alignment with national

olicies and processes. It also aims at strengthening the district's capacity for delivering 2030 vision.

### Empowerment in the WASH

Through facilitated discussion participants reflected and identified five keywords that could provide a clearer description of empowerment. They generally agreed that each of them adequately represented a requirement in empowerment in WASH services delivery. These include:

- Power
- Participation
- Capability
- Development and
- Enable

Throwing more light on the issue of empowerment in the WASH sector, Dr. Sarah Dickin of the Stockholm Environment Institute said inequalities have often not been captured by just focusing on WASH facilities or the household as the unit of analysis. She said a scoping study had indicated that limited empowerment may, for instance, impact adaptation to climate change risks. She said the Empowerment in WASH Index

initiative is a lesson from the Women Empowerment in Agriculture Index (WEAI) developed by the International Food Policy Research Institute. She said the WEAI measures the roles and extent of women's engagement in the agricultural sector in: decisions about agricultural production; access to and decision-making power over productive resources; control over income; leadership in the community; and time use. She said the Empowerment in WASH Index would, among others, help to develop indicators to better understand the relationship between empowerment and WASH-related outcomes; provide a tool to assess and monitor gender issues related to WASH programmes and services; and provide data and research to contribute to informing policy-making related to achieving household water security in an equitable/gender-balanced manner.

### **Factors affecting empowerment**

Dr. Elijah Bisung from the Queens University said a previous fieldwork had helped the project to select and cluster a number of factors, according to household perceptions, that affect empowerment in WASH services. These, he said, were determined through the following focus question: *What are the factors that empower men and women in WASH in a household?* Below are the main clusters (broad factors) under which various factors had been identified:

- Traditions and cultural norms
- Leadership and participation
- Socio-economic
- Knowledge sharing
- Accessibility
- Participation in household roles

### **Factors identified under the clusters**

Several factors had been identified through the fieldwork. Participants helped to reorganize them

under the various clusters to support the project to develop indicators for the index. The factors include: participation, disability, religious and cultural beliefs, household ability to manage WASH, means of transportation, settlement planning, environmental health, proximity to source of water, gender roles.

After a review session, participants suggested a few more factors be added. They include:

- Level of education
- WASH laws and enforcement
- Technology and aesthetics
- Political will
- Local governance
- Supervision
- Management and maintenance
- Security and safety, and
- Affordability

### **Conclusion**

Jeremiah Atengdem said the process of developing the Index and the tools were still ongoing and stakeholders would be re-convened next year for updates. He announced that the finalised District WASH Masterplan for Asutifi North would soon be launched; and appealed for more partners to support the implementation of the masterplan.

**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 are open to all interested parties. The discussions of each NLLAP meetings can be found on the RCN website [www.washghana.net](http://www.washghana.net).**

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

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