

District-focused Initiatives for sustainable WASH development – an emerging development approach for universal access

Organizers of a National Level Learning Alliance forum held in Accra on 12th December have called for district-focused or district-wide approaches to bring full WASH coverage to districts. Through this approach, according to various speakers at the forum, all partners and collaborators will support one district plan and one district at a time. Ensuring universal access to safe and affordable drinking water and sanitation for all by 2030, according to the RCN, requires collective effort, finance and cooperation to deliver the targets. This paper presents some of the learning points shared at the 76th edition of the National Level Learning Alliances Platform (NLLAP 76) in Accra on 13th December 2018.

WaterAid and IRC, in collaboration with the Bongo and Asutifi North District Assemblies and the Resource Centre Network (RCN), organized a learning and sharing meeting using the National Level Learning Alliances Platform (NLLAP 76) on Wednesday, 13th December, 2018 in Accra. The purpose of the session was to advance better understanding of various district-focused approaches and how local governments and partners were fulfilling their roles and responsibilities in supporting the provision of WASH services in different contexts. The session was chaired by the Director of the Environmental Health and Sanitation Directorate, Mr. Anthony Mensah, while presentations were led by representatives from the Bongo and Asutifi North Districts. Other presentations were made by IRC, WaterAid, and Access Development/Water4, while a Public Health Physician/Health Systems Consultant, Dr Gilbert Buckle, made a presentation on a Systems Thinking Approach for full WASH coverage through a District-focused approach.



Introductory remarks by Chairman

In his introductory remarks, the chairman for NLLAP 76, Mr Anthony Mensah, said that Ghana did not fare very well under the MDGs for sanitation, while the SDGs even present a greater challenge. He said if MMDAs can effectively deliver their WASH mandate, then their capacities must be enhanced. He said it was therefore refreshing to learn that some partners like WaterAid, IRC, Access Development and Water4 were promoting a new paradigm in WASH interventions targeting entire districts.

Defining a district-focused approach for WASH interventions

Setting the scene for further discussions, the Country Director of WaterAid, Mohammed Abdul-Nashiru, together with his counterpart from IRC, Vida Duti, explained a district-wide or district-focused approach as 'working together in an organized and coordinated manner to implement shared plans based on agreed principles and priorities within a

specific geo-political space.' They said this approach aims to strengthen the sector for efficient service delivery, effective targeting, sustainable services, research/advocacy and policy influence so that everyone, everywhere would have access to sustainable WASH services. The DCE of Bongo District, Hon Peter Ayamga Ayimbisa, also simplified the definition as a programmatic approach that shifts from Service Delivery to Sector Strengthening and collaborating with more and differentiated strategic partnerships, with the district as the geo-political space for change towards universal access to WASH. He said the District Assembly plays the leading role in planning and coordinating WASH activities and actors in the district through the implementation of one district WASH plan.

Building blocks for a district-focused approach

The Country Directors listed accountability, long-term planning, realistic financial planning, roles and responsibilities, monitoring and evaluation, a working model on service delivery, communication and dialogue as the building blocks for district-focused approaches.

General assumptions about local government entities

The Country Directors of WaterAid and IRC outlined a couple of assumptions that various partners usually make about Local Government entities: that they want to lead; that they have a plan; that they have resources to lead; that they have the managerial/technical capacity; and that they know their context and can easily make the link to resourcing. The challenge to the district-focused approaches, according to the Directors, are that these assumptions are sometimes wrong.

Lessons from the districts

Bongo District Assembly

In a presentation by the Bongo District Chief Executive, Hon. Peter Ayamga Ayimbisi, promotion of the District-Wide Approach (DWA) spearheaded by WaterAid has helped to reduce duplication of resources since all partners are working from One District Plan. He said it had brought about increased knowledge sharing among stakeholders and partners in the WASH sector and the District Assembly is able to monitor and evaluate activities of various stakeholders and partners in the WASH sector in the District. He said it has also promoted participatory planning and decision making, while structures for participatory strategic planning on WASH had also improved. He said the approach had also introduced financial mechanisms which include cost recovery and innovative and sustainable financing methods. Another remarkable change in the district, according to the DCE, was the introduction of more capacity building programmes for local WASH institutions.

Asutifi North District

In a presentation led by the Asutifi District Planning Officer, Peter Ata-era, the district believes in the Collective Impact Theory, which, according to him, represents the commitment of a group of actors to a common agenda for solving a specific problem, using a structured form of collaboration. He said the collective impact theory had five main pillars, namely: a shared agenda and common vision; implementation of mutually reinforcing activities; a shared framework for measuring progress; continuous communication; and a backbone organization.

Mr Ata-era said on account of the above, each of the seven main partners working in the district had an assigned role that works toward the common vision they had set: the District Assembly provides leadership for the masterplan implementation; IRC serves as a backbone organisation, providing hub support and strengthening systems; Safe Water Network establishes small water enterprises in urban and peri-urban areas; World Vision provides WASH services in rural and deprived communities, and schools and healthcare facilities; Centres for Disease Control (CDC) conducts assessment of WASH in schools and Healthcare facilities; Netcentric Campaigns facilitates advocacy and networks; and Aquaya Institute develops approaches for drinking water quality management.

He said the partners had set the common vision: “Every person in Asutifi North District will have access to sustainable safe water, sanitation and hygiene services in a conducive environment where water resources are sustainably managed by 2030,” and a district masterplan had been developed to guide all interventions. Targets had

been set and a joint monitoring, evaluation and learning framework had been developed to track implementation of masterplan.

Wassa East District Assembly

Access Development and Water4 were also partnering the Wassa East District for a paradigm shift from community managed point sources to a professionally managed, market-driven branded water systems targeting the entire district. This, according to the presenters, were being done in partnership with the Wassa East District Assembly. The partners were promoting a service delivery approach with scalable technical options tailored to community needs and market conditions, which provides the best opportunities to ensure district-wide coverage of safe, reliable and sustainable drinking water.

Understanding the WASH System

Dr Gilbert Buckle defined a WASH system as all the individuals, households, communities, and organizations (public and private) whose actions and intentions influence the universal availability of quality water, sanitation and hygiene facilities. He said a system is perfectly designed to produce the results it delivers and that to get a different result, the system must be changed accordingly. He said to expect a result of universally available quality WASH services (Safe, Equitable, Meeting User Needs, Timely, Effective, Efficient), the WASH system must be able to ensure ownership, technical capacity, leadership and management (governance), partnerships and sustainability. He said the underlying success factor is always selecting who is best suited to carry out the requirements at the different levels.

Conclusion

Key messages from the various presentations and opinions indicated that there is need for a shared agenda to build momentum and support for district-focused approaches and how to scale up the lessons generated so far from the on-going efforts. Districts, with support from partners, should target developing a WASH system that meet all the pillars of ownership, governance, sustainability, technical capacity partnerships. Stakeholders should also not always assume that District Assemblies have everything it takes to manage a WASH system. In partnering to establish a WASH system, therefore, roles and responsibilities should be clearly spelt out to ensure that the right partner is at the right place and at the right time.

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 (with modifications when necessary) and are open to all interested parties. The discussions of each NLLAP 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,

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