

## Stakeholders call for strong leadership to improve rural sanitation in Ghana

Strong local leadership is needed to drive change in rural sanitation service delivery. This means striving towards making sustainable sanitation gains that both generate health impact and economic returns in rural communities. This is the outcome at National Learning Alliance Platform (NLLAP) meeting in Accra, where findings from two years study of Rural Sanitation Operations research was presented to WASH stakeholders led by the OMI Consortium, comprising of Oxford Policy Management, Maple Consult Ghana and IRC Ghana. The OMI Consortium conducted the research with focus on sanitation marketing in six municipal and district assemblies (Kpando, North Dayi, Ho West, Mion, Zabzugu and East Gonja) and several WASH sector organizations to elicit their response to sanitation implementation programmes.

*The main aim of the research is to strengthen the evidence base into which implementation approaches can be adapted and scaled up to accelerate increased access to rural sanitation with an emphasis on identifying the enabling environment factors associated with good and poor progress and exploring sanitation marketing interventions employed by different WASH sector organisations in rural sanitation to respond to different demands from citizens. Even though Strong local leadership alone will not be enough to overcome all the rural sanitation challenges, most participants at the NLLAP agreed that it will help. Leadership which translates into political will as well as political commitment is a prerequisite to drive change. Strong leadership at the District Assembly level as a vital pillar towards driving decisions and steering rural sanitation forward..*

### **Intense advocacy and behavior change**

Participants also underscored the need for intensive advocacy and behavior change communication at the local level to promote the significance of key sanitation practices and hygiene behaviors and community participation with regard to safety, availability and sustainability and also influence decision makers and key influencers for their commitment and action on issues related to adequate sanitation and to increase knowledge among families and communities for the uptake of sanitation and hygiene behaviors for improving their health status.

### **Research findings**

Presenting the findings Mr. Kwame Asubonteng, IRC WASH Ghana Associate said the research

findings summarises the key findings from the two-year operational research programme in Ghana which took place between 2016/17 and 2018/19 to focus on rural sanitation programmes. He said the main aim of the operational research was to strengthen the evidence base related to rural sanitation, with an emphasis on identifying the enabling environmental factors associated with good and poor progress in rural sanitation.

He added that nationally it was estimated that over one in five Ghanaians have no access to toilet and defecate in the open, adding that between 2000 and 2015, there was only a modest reduction in open defecation rates from 22 per cent to 19 per cent for Ghana to be classified as having made “little to no progress” He said, however, more recent survey data (MICS 2017) indicated progress was

accelerating in Ghana in some regions in both rural and urban areas and across all wealth quintiles.

Zack White, Research fellow, OPM said the research therefore focused in the six districts to examine the enabling environment for rural sanitation, while a community-level study was conducted to assess the community level factors that inhibit or support progress in rural sanitation. He said data from the recent research showed a sharp acceleration in results over the last two years as compared to the early phases (2012-2016) of the programme, though participants asked for more advocacy, education and finance resources for rural sanitation implementation programme to gain more grounds. “These data suggest there is importance to building a momentum in a community through focused promotion,” he said.

He added that the team also noted a general improvement in the level of sanitation prioritization at the district level, adding that it was seen to be strongly related to the change of senior leadership in MMDA's being set in the context of rural sanitation receiving greater political prioritization at all levels.

### ***Conclusion/Recommendations***

It is possible to provide sustainable sanitation to rural communities; this can only be achieved if

the local government takes the lead. Where government leadership is weak, a likely negative spin-off is low political commitment leading to chronic budgetary shortages and a very low pledge of public funds and commitment for sanitation. Participants made the following recommendations going forward to improve rural sanitation in Ghana.

- Advocate to make rural sanitation issues top priority at all levels, making sanitation a minimum condition under the current District Assembly Performance Assessment Tool (DPAT)
- Ensure compliance of sanitation issues under the current performance contract between District Chief Executives, District Coordinating Directors and their respective Regional Coordinating Councils
- Sanitation programmes to broaden stakeholder engagement at the District Assembly level to include others such as Assembly Members, religious leaders among others.
- Sustained capacity development for District Assemblies and toilet entrepreneurs for design and installation of durable and climate resilient sanitation facilities
- Consider the critical role of subsidies for the pro-poor, vulnerable, socially excluded and people with special needs.

***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](http://www.washghana.net).***

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