

Leveraging partnerships for a professionalized public utility in Ghana

At the Mole XXXIII in Elmina Beach Resort, IRC Ghana and partners - Community Water and Sanitation Agency (CWSA), Safe Water Network (SWN) and Water and Sanitation for Urban Poor (WSUP) on the Rural Water Utilization Project (RWUP) project organized a side event to share the project framework, facilitate discussions, share experiences, and elicit stakeholder input to provide insights for the project implementation. The side event took place on 2nd November 2022 under the theme leveraging partnerships for a professionalized public utility in Ghana.



Project partners (CWSA, IRC, SWN and WSUP) engaging participants

1.0 Background and Context

The Community Ownership and Management (COM) model has been applied for over 20 years and water coverage has improved from 27% in 1990 (World Bank, 2010) to 62% in 2020 (CWSA, 2021). While first time access increased, many of these systems have not been managed sustainably and suffer from:

- frequent breakdowns,
- poor water quality,
- high Non-Revenue Water (NRW), and
- high energy costs,
- poor accountability for revenue,
- inadequate cost recovery and high levels of indebtedness of service providers.

Since 2017, CWSA initiated a policy reform to expand its mandate to include the management of piped water systems in rural areas, and to become a rural utility. The reforms seek to improve operational efficiency and sustained water service delivery of piped supplies in rural communities and small towns. Some progress has been made in the reform process, but much remains to be done in order to transform into a viable rural utility. There are some key challenges that must be dealt with to ensure CWSA smooth transition to a well-functioning utility.

The reform represents a significant change for CWSA and there

are organizational capacity gaps within CWSA to manage the internal and external change processes. The piped water supplies in rural and small-town areas that CWSA would need to start managing are faced with operational inefficiencies. Limited investments to ensure design and construction of pipe water systems that provide comprehensive and equitable access to safely managed water. As CWSA transitions into a rural utility, it is unclear how issues of sector monitoring, coordination of actors, and oversight of other service providers in the rural subsector will be addressed.

2.0 Rationale for Partnership

The Rural Water Utilization Project (RWUP) which is funded by the Conrad N. Hilton Foundation brings together like minded core partners which includes the IRC, SWN and WSUP. The partnership aims to support the CWSA in its growth as a professionalized public utility in Ghana and playing a stronger regulatory role within the sector in the context of rural water reforms in Ghana. The project is poised to support the CWSA to establish an effective rural and small-town water utility model/approach in the Western Region, with strengthened capacity at the national level, which can be replicated across the country.

The partnership brings on board experiences and lessons from partners in Ghana and from the African continent with respect to

utility strengthening, managing safe water enterprises and supporting sector reforms and dialogue.

Each of the partners is unique in its pursuit of universal access to WASH by 2030 for everyone everywhere in Ghana. The approaches used in driving universal access include service delivery, advocacy and policy influencing, charity-orientation, market-based solutions, capacity building, scaling-up successful models and innovation. The unity in diversity and singleness of purpose to eradicate WASH poverty has perhaps motivated these partners into this partnership.

3.0 Key Actions so far

A number of activities have been implemented so far by the partners. These include:

- Rapid research to assess the current situation of the CWSA
- Context/situation analysis conducted
- Business and operational data collected and analyzed.
- Staff engagement survey concluded.

A utility diagnostic tool, with a 7-step wheel of key parameters was also used to assess the CWSA processes. The assessment report is meant to develop a utility strengthening framework capable of supporting CWSA transitioning to utility. Governance and mandates issues, commitment, and engagement, planning and investment, attitude and behaviours, capacity and performance, financial management as well as sustainability constitute the 7 elements of the framework.

The SWN has tested its various technologies and ready to deploy smart prepaid meters, as well as ensure 100 percent household connections with two new proposed water systems to be constructed in five (5) hard-to reach communities. There



Member of parliament of the Republic of Ghana making a point at the side event

is the likelihood of adding two additional communities to the initial proposed five communities to make it seven (7) communities in all.

4.0 Contributions and Comments

Participants at the side event made useful contributions and asked/made critical observations.

A participant advised the CWSA to intensify efforts at communicating its current experiences with its ongoing reforms to give community members and WASH sector actors at the national level confidence and ensure general acceptability.

With respect to leveraging on large scale investment, a participant indicated the need for clear enabling environment (laws, policies, and process) on private sector in WASH service delivery. The participant indicated that an enabling environment should incentivise private sector investors to build more water systems in communities and be able to recoup their investments with high rate of return on investments.

A participant wanted to know whether the CWSA is now a utility or a facilitator. He lamented that the poor communication by CWSA on the status of the reforms is making stakeholders confuse about the entire reform process.

5.0 Next Steps

IRC promised to keep stakeholders informed on progress, achievements, and challenges of the partnership. Mrs. Vida Duti indicated that outcomes of implementation would be documented and shared with key sector stakeholders to keep them abreast with outcomes, successes, and challenges of activity implementation in this partnership. The National Level Learning Platform (NLLAP), Mole Conference Series and key sector meetings would be used to share project implementation outcomes.

6.0 Conclusions

The partnership for a professionalized public utility in Ghana would contribute to accelerate Ghana's quest for universal access to WASH by 2030 latest. It is building on the uniqueness and experiences of each individual partner to promote good practices of service delivery approach to WASH implementation. It would combine good approaches and models and use training, capacity building, service delivery, policy advocacy and influencing, knowledge management to promote successful implementation of project actions.

Mole WASH Conference is one of the biggest multi-stakeholder annual platforms in the Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) sector in Ghana. The Platform, named after the venue of the maiden edition, Mole in the Northern Region of Ghana, is organised by the Coalition of NGOs in Water and Sanitation (CONIWAS) and brings together civil society organisations, national and local government, development partners, private operators and practitioners to review progress, dialogue, learn and share information on specific themes that affect the sector.

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