

## Triple-S Validation Workshop highlights some of the challenges to sustainable water services for the rural poor in Ghana

What will it take to achieve a sector vision of reliable, affordable, and accessible services that provide good quality water in sufficient quantities for everyone in rural Ghana? Are there appropriate models for delivering these services? And how do we keep services running indefinitely? Can the sector be co-ordinated and strategically led to achieve this vision? These were some of the questions asked at the Triple-S project's research validation workshop which drew together members from leading sector institutions and organisations to work on, and feed into the Triple-S baseline research.

The fourth National Level Learning Alliance platform (NLLAP) took place on Thursday 4<sup>th</sup> March 2010 on the theme, "Sustainable Services at Scale". The platform hosted the Triple-S project's research validation workshop which aimed to create awareness and share information about the Triple-S initiative, confirm the findings from baseline research, identify any gaps in the research and highlight opportunities and challenges in the water sector that affect sustainability of services delivery. This communiqué is intended to share the issues brought up during the meeting with the wider WASH community.

The well attended workshop was opened by Mr. Minta Aboagye, Director of Water, followed by a short presentation by Dr. Patrick Moriarty on IRC's programme in Ghana, and the role within it of the Sustainable Services at Scale (Triple-S) project. This was followed by three presentations by consultants who carried out research as part of Triple-S inception phase. Mr. Nii Odai Laryea (Maple Consult) talked about the national level policy and the water sector; Prof. Nana Boachie-Danquah (UGBS) talked about decentralisation and water service delivery; and Mr. Benedict Tufour (TREND) discussed the main models used for service delivery in Ghana, and challenges pertaining to their implementation and sustainability. The aim of the workshop was to present the findings of the Triple-S research, and seek input and validation from the experts and practitioners present, as well as to identify and fill information gaps in the studies.

### Painting a picture of the rural water sector

The three presentations and the group work that followed allowed a broad picture to emerge of some of the burning issues affecting the sector in Ghana.

At the national level, much of the discussion revolved around the role of DPs, and efforts to bring more harmonization to the sector. It is a fact that Development Partners contribute a disproportionate amount (at least 90%) of the investment finance in the sector, and so they tend to dominate the agenda. Is this a problem? Possibly! But it is more important to consider how investment decisions are made than the source of

the finance. With clear and strong co-ordination and leadership from Government, finance (regardless of the source) can be effectively channelled not just to new capital investment, but also to planned rehabilitation and upkeep of existing systems. Without this leadership, funds will continue to be spent on building more with little planning, or thought about who pays for major repairs rehabilitation. And that will be a problem!

In terms of coordination and harmonisation, although there is a Project Implementation Manual (PIM) for the Community Water and Sanitation sub-sector, in practice there is no consistent approach to implementation procedures between different donors and projects. It is well known that there are moves toward a more strategic and better co-ordinated approach at national level (through a SWAp), but better planning and institutional alignment at district level would result in a fairer and more accountable sector.

At the decentralised levels, District Assemblies (DAs) are the devolved agencies of government, and much of the story of rural water services needs to be told at the district level. The District Assemblies are formally responsible for the overall provision of services. But who is really doing the implementation? In theory, it's the DAs, but as Prof. Nana Boachie-Danquah said, it's a 'jungle of implementers' out there and that poses serious challenges to coordination at whatever level. The trend in the rural water sub-sector is clearly towards decentralized service delivery. And this is resulting in a shift in project finance: from funding projects directly

through CWSA to funding directed to the MMDAs. This change in delivery of funds is reinforced by the introduction of the District Development Facility (DDF) as a complementary financing mechanism that puts the DAs in the driving seat with respect to direct delivery

Despite this, decentralisation has a long way to go and the blurred, changing and conflicting roles and responsibilities of different institutions and agencies (CWSA, MMDAs, DWSTs, WSDBs, WATSANs and the DA's sub-district structures) presents a series of important challenges. Some of the most important being:

- Sub-district structures specific to the WASH sector (DWSTs and WSDBs) and MMDA sub-district structures are both key players in this picture, but their roles and the links between them are unclear and ambiguous.
- Unlike other sectors such as health and education, there is no single unit at the DA level to co-ordinate water sector activity, and the institutional role of DWSTs is, in practice, ambiguous (are they DA or CWSA?) although this may change with the advent of DWSDs.

The new DDF mechanism includes an assessment of DA's performance, based on a number of administrative benchmarks. In order to ensure that DAs are making water service provision a priority, it was suggested that more service delivery benchmarks could be used in assessing the DA performance. This would move the familiar story of money being spent on revenue-generating markets, taxi ranks or lorry parks, to one where the DAs are prioritising water service delivery.

Agreeing on the mechanisms through which water services can be delivered is an important and necessary step in identifying gaps and achieving coordination. Only with a clearly illustrated description of these Service Delivery Models (SDMs), can work on addressing gaps begin. By definition the SDM must include: the service level being targeted; the management model(s) permitted; descriptions of the

roles and responsibilities of all actors (service providers, service users, service regulators, support agencies); the necessary enabling and supporting legislation such as laws, bye-laws, and regulations. In Ghana, the two main formal SDMs are community owned and managed water supply services, and utility provided water services. In addition to these, and often overlooked, are the informal private supplies or self-supply from which many people get water.

The TREND study showed that many of the failings of the SDMs were due to a lack of post-construction support services, such as capacity building and long-term monitoring. This was made worse by the District Assemblies' lack of capacity. There is also political interference, little understanding of legal and regulatory issues (at the District level) and little transparency in decision making.

#### Changing the sector paradigm

The workshop presentations and group discussions highlighted the most important challenges and opportunities in the sector and confirmed that Rural Water Service Delivery in Ghana is clearly moving in the right direction.

Nevertheless, there are real challenges, particularly in ensuring greater sustainability. To address these will require shifting the current focus on the construction of new systems (the hard and software of water supply) to the actual services delivered: the quality, quantity, accessibility and reliability of a water service. It would also require ensuring that once achieved, a given level of service can be maintained indefinitely. To achieve this change of paradigm will call for deep and long lasting institutional change that will affect all sector stakeholders.

Mrs. Vida Duti (Triple-S) emphasised that the Triples-S initiative has a lot of flexibility to support the required change process and sector dialogue, and that it is fully committed to fostering a paradigm shift in the Ghana water sector towards a service based approach.

The NLLAP is a WASH sector multi stakeholder platform with the overall goal of improving sector learning and dialogue. 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 are hosted and facilitated by the Ghana WASH Resource Centre Network (RCN), and take place on the last Thursday of every month. They are open to all interested parties. The discussions of each NLLAP meeting are summarized and shared with the wider WASH community in the form of a communiqué after the meeting. The topics of upcoming meetings are decided on by the RCN secretariat and a list of upcoming meetings can be found on the RCN website [www.ghana.watsan.net](http://www.ghana.watsan.net).

If you are interested to propose a topic for a meeting, please let us know [rcnghana@gmail.com](mailto:rcnghana@gmail.com)