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## Supporting operation and maintenance financing

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## Supporting operation and maintenance financing

*John Baidoo, Ghana*

COMMUNITIES PATRONAGE OF O & M cost has been a crucial cornerstone in ensuring sustainability in water and sanitation efforts.

The Department for International Development (DFID) funded project in Ghana called the DFID - South East District Water Supply Project (DFID – SEDWSP) faced a lot of challenges with regard to beneficiary communities' misunderstanding in providing their full support in meeting O & M cost.

The DFID – SEDWSP aims at providing potable water to 139,075 people in three districts, by extracting and treating water from the River Volta.

These comprised 93 communities; 68 in the Volta Region and 25 in the Greater Accra Region. The scheme, which was installed by Biwater, is owned by the Ghana Water Company Limited (GWCL).

Owing to the rapid transformation taking place in the water sector, a policy statement indicated that all new schemes in small towns and rural communities must be managed by the District Assemblies and communities themselves through the Community Water and Sanitation Agency (CWSA). However, GWCL retires its responsibility for water supply to the small towns and villages. This was not the initial arrangement; however with the invitation of CWSA of their investment, a plan of implementation to involve the smaller communities was drawn; hence including all the small towns and many villages.

The aim of CWSA is to develop capacity at community level to manage the water supply as well as to promote

better hygiene and sanitation through the community-based water and sanitation (WATSAN) committees and the community volunteers. These have to manage the water systems beyond the GWCL installed metres to the stand-points; they were to collect tariffs and pay to GWCL. Failure to meet tariff cost will lead to disconnection.

Contrary to the ideal situation, communities started refusing to pay their tariffs. This led to a mass disconnection exercise by GWCL; and that it was observed that the community management concept was being threatened. A study had to be launched to investigate the causes.

### Objectives

The objectives of the field verification were to investigate the reasons for the non-payment of water tariffs by the beneficiary communities and to recommend strategies to address the issue.

### Methodology

The beneficiary communities visited were selected on the basis of their standing on the payment of tariffs.

The target groups were:

- The water and sanitation (WATSAN) committee members
- Opinion leaders in the community
- Vendors and community members

**Table 1. Selected study communities**

Region	District	No. of communities not in arrears	No. of communities in arrears
Greater Accra	Dangbe-East	2	6
Volta	Keta	3	3
Volta	South-Tongu	5	2
<b>Total</b>		<b>10</b>	<b>11</b>

## Synthesis of report findings

Having considered the findings from the two regions, it has been found that some specific reasons for non-payment of bills were common to all. These were as follows:

### Poor siting

It became clear that the siting of standpipes in some cases were not appropriately done, for instance in situations where they were too far from the community. These were prone to a lot of vandalism and inability to implement the cash and carry system there.

Imposition of water vendors on community members.

In several situations, water vendors have been imposed on communities by GWCL, and that most of these vendors were rejected by the communities. These were evidenced by frequent misunderstandings, which arose between the watsan committees and the imposed vendors. Thus, the communities were not involved in the selection of them, hence, their refusal to report to the watsans, but rather to GWCL. GWCL was also of the view that their vendors should be in control. Communities often felt that they have been alienated from the planning and implementation of the water systems.

Inadequate remuneration for vendors

The vendors receive 20% commission on sales of water. This is reflected in the submission of water bills less 20% as commission to the vendors by GWCL. This has been found to be inadequate.

### Absence of, or poor records keeping on sales of water by WATSANS and vendor

The study also revealed that watsans and vendors either did not keep records of sales of water or what existed were poorly done. This situation led to misappropriation and mishandling of the collected monies, which often led to community arrears, which GWCL often found it very difficult to retrieve.

Astronomical billing system

It was found that, the bills submitted by GWCL kept on increasing the prices of a bucket of water was thirty cedis (\$0.4 cents; May 2000). The situation is being worsened by the charging of communities of metre maintenance fees as are being charged in Greater Accra region. This situation has led most communities to charge over and above the stipulated prices.

Weak collaboration between two key Stakeholders

The initial failure by GWCL and CWSA to collaborate to build community ownership and management (COM) did not help communities to honour their bills. Both organizations talked differently, and there were no frequent dialogues and co-ordination.

## Inadequate monitoring support to beneficiary communities

Communities criticized the District Water and Sanitation Teams (DWSTs) for their irregular visits to help the watsan committees to resolve issues. A case in point was that the Kasseh community in the Greater Accra region needed the DWST to frequent the community to help resolve issues on irregular flow of water from the Keseve Headworks. More importantly, the DWSTs were supposed to carry out continuous education on the need to pay regular bills, and thus support the cash and carry system.

## Recommendations

These recommendations are basically suggestions on how best the problems identified with communities' non-williness to pay bills could be solved. These are outlined below:

### The need for proper education

There should be proper education to beneficiary communities on the need to pay for water used. This should be done by the District Assemblies (DAs) and the DWSTs.

### Flexibility in fund mobilization methods

Cash and carry methods could still be adhered to. However, community members can resort to other traditional modes of fund-raising to augment whatever they get from the sales of water. They could even choose to sell the water at a more lower and cheaper price, since the entire community can subsidize it. The District Water and Sanitation Teams (DWSTs) should intensify extension strategies on the beneficiary communities to foster more understanding.

### Lower tariff setting

On the other hand, the Community Water and Sanitation Agency (CWSA), could send petitions to GWCL to consider lowering the tariff setting for these communities in the three (3) districts, namely, Dangbe East, in Greater Accra; Sogakope and Keta in the Volta Region.

### Opening Bank Account

All WATSAN committees should be encouraged to open bank accounts and ensure that whatever monies accrue from the sale of water are deposited at the bank. DWSTs should always inspect these bankbooks anytime they are on their monitoring visits. Communities without accounts at the bank should be assisted immediately to open one.

### Intensification of community campaigns

Cognizance of the initial weaknesses in the promotion of community ownership and management of the water system, the DWSTs, assisted by the Regional Water and Sanitation Teams (RWSTs) should re-launch a COM campaign. Communities who still have the notion that, per-

haps they are being deceived to pay for water should be monitored critically for a radical change in their perception about the facility provided.

### **Transparent O&M arrangements between the District Assemblies and Communities**

The establishment and Institutionalization of a transparent operation and maintenance (O&M) arrangements should be given a priority. The actual facilities and other supportive roles the DAs should play have not been made transparent apart from the roles of the DWSTs.

### **Revision of designs**

The designs of the water facility should be looked at again to make it user friendly, and also save community members on some expenses. The distance between the spout and the apron should be bridged to avoid waste. GWCL should also make sure that all the spouts are changed and replaced by more effective and hygienic ones. CWSA could impress on GWCL or even the Ministry of Works and Housing to look at these faulty phenomena for prompt rectification or remedy. Furthermore, all faulty meters should also be replaced and meter maintenance fees charged by GWCL should be drastically reduced for the communities.

### **Siting problems need be rectified**

Siting problems should be looked into again, and that this problem should be rectified immediately. Here too, CWSA should contact GWCL on possible changes to be effected. There should be dialogue at National, Regional, District and community level and explain the COM concept for community to take up facility or disconnect.

### **Strengthening all water and sanitation committees**

There is the need to visit all communities to find out whether all water and sanitation (WATSAN) committees; are in place; who is taking care of the systems and who takes action in cases of embezzlement. There is also the need to carry out a re –orientation of all existing vendors on the importance of co-operating with watsan committees and their community members.

All vendors should be responsible to watsan committees, and thus render daily accounts to them.

To lessen communities' burden on billing, GWCL should remove the maintenance fees charged them.

### **Re-orientation and strengthening of Extension Teams**

Even though DWSTs claim they pay frequent visits to the beneficiary communities to monitor operation and maintenance of the facility, community members assert that they do not see them frequently, some surprisingly declared their ignorance about the existence of the team. It could be true that the visits are made, but the question is what approaches are being applied at the community level? Are these approaches able to persuade each and everyone to be

fully involved and participate in the entire O&M issues affecting the facility? Has the understanding on COM been adequately captured through relevant participatory methods and approaches adopted in the communities? The DWSTs should not take this for granted. The RWSTs should critically look at this and act immediately to rectify the situation through a more effective participatory means. Going to the communities alone and coming back does not mean any effective mobilization of the entire community. The District Assemblies should be brought into this, and that a sub committee could be established and strengthened to augment the efforts of the DWSTs.

Many of the watsan committees if not all, should be re-organised and strengthened, through effective community involved refresher training and orientation programs. Other Local committees should be allowed to participate in these re-organization processes. This is to forestall recent WATSAN committees' conflicts, which exist in some of the communities with other committees, hence retard the performance of some of them.

### **Conclusion**

The study has revealed that, even though the twenty-one (21) communities visited have problems with regard to effective operation and maintenance of their water systems and the payment of bills, they cannot be blamed too much, because all other stakeholders are contributing forces to these problems. Team work among stakeholders has not received adequate strengthening.

Significantly, it has also been established that, even though these problems exist, the performance of the beneficiary communities in the payment of bills has far more improved than it used to be in the early part when the systems were handed over to them.

There is the indication that if all the issues raised in the recommendations are given the due attention by the relevant authorities, the community ownership and management (COM) concept will be a sustainable reality. For, these stand out clearly as the motivating factors in support of operation and maintenance financing.

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