

Citizens' Engagement for Transparency & Accountability in Decentralised Water and Sanitation Service Delivery

Mohammed Abdul-Nashiru
WaterAid Ghana
P.O. Box 16185, K. I. A. Accra, Ghana

abdulnashiru@wateraidghana.org

Abstract:

The expression of public policy in many African countries calls for both supply and demand side accountability. Even though the establishment and operationalisation of transparent and accountable mechanisms for service delivery have been accepted as critical, expression of such position at the policy and operational levels are yet to become evident. There is indeed substantial challenge with respect to water and sanitation service delivery, accountability of service providers and citizens' engagement for improved local governance of these services.

This situation has served as one of the bottlenecks for achieving the MDGs for water and sanitation. Though local governments are well placed to deal with these obstacles and challenges by virtue of having been given the clear-cut¹ quasi-legislative and administrative powers enshrined in the Local Government Act 462 of 1993 of the Republic of Ghana, they have been constrained due to low capacity and competencies.

The overall aim of the Local Millennium Development Goals (MGD) Initiative (LMDGI) is therefore is to localise the MDGs by emphasizing the leadership role of local governments in capacity development. It provides local authorities the competencies and means to lead expected change processes towards accelerating access to safe water and sanitation to meet the MDG targets. The LMDG initiative enhanced the local governments' capacity through various initiatives to improve delivery of water and sanitation services.

A number of lessons and results have emerged from this initiative which includes: citizens engaging with local governments at general assemblies to demand water and sanitation facilities; availability of realistic data obtained through citizen-led methodologies; participatory local government planning, poverty targeting; transparent and equitable distribution of services to communities. The initiative has triggered transparency in resource allocation (Ghana), improved quality and quantity of services delivered to many poor communities (Mali), equity in resource allocation (Afram Plains Dwarf Island in Ghana), targeting of the poor with improved services (Burkina Faso) and mainstreaming capacity of LGs (Nigeria).

¹ Kwabena S. & Kodjo M: Small Water Enterprises in Africa 4: Ghana, WEDC-UK:

In summary, the LMDGI process, on the basis of the evidence to date, is agreed to be an extremely useful tool in moving forward towards sustainable and equitable achievement of the water and sanitation targets within MDG 7 and providing a basis for subsequently progressing to universal access to safe water and sanitation². The LMDGI process is one which seeks to bring these global targets to the local level, as a basis for positioning local governments strategically for improved service delivery

Keywords:

- Citizens' Action and Engagement
- Local Development Plans
- Local Millennium Development Goals Initiative
- Social Accountability
- WaterAid Ghana
- Watsan Mapping

Introduction

Brief on WaterAid and Participating Countries

WaterAid (WA) is a UK-based international charity organisation dedicated exclusively to the provision of safe water, sanitation and hygiene education for the world's poorest people. One of the strategic goals pursued by WaterAid is to strengthen local governments' ability to provide equitable and pro-poor water and sanitation services on a large scale³. To respond to this global call, WaterAid West Africa, catalysed an effort dubbed the LMDGI in six (6) African countries namely: Ghana, Mali, Nigeria, Burkina Faso, Senegal and Mauritania covering a total of twenty-nine (29) local governments.

Background and Rationale

Whilst many countries in Sub-Saharan Africa have placed considerable emphasis on decentralised delivery of water and sanitation (WSS) services, in practice, the definition, planning and design of interventions to meet the targets have seen very little involvement of the local level structures. *This raises questions around transparency and accountability in the resource decision-making, targeting of services, citizens' voices and social accountability with respect to planned vrs. actual provision and quality vrs. quantity of services to be provided.*

Clearly, the principal role of local governments in whose jurisdictions lay the numerous communities with low or no access to water and sanitation has not been well-appreciated. In working with local governments, it is critical to establish transparent and accountable mechanisms on the basis of their:

² Ghana: First LMDGI Conference Communiqué, 10-12 May 2006

³ WaterAid Corporate Strategy, 2005-2010

- Mandate for decentralised service delivery;
- Proximity to User levels;
- Routine resources from central government and development partners;
- Potential for raising more funds internally;
- Decision making prerogatives especially with respect to the *principle of subsidiary so as to recognise 'local voices'*

Overarching Aim

The overall goal of the initiative is to *'localise the MDGs by emphasizing the leadership role of local governments in capacity development, realistic planning, transparent decision making and accountability to service users or citizens'*⁴. The initiative stimulated and ensured the collection, collation and analysis of data on water and sanitation to facilitate programme design, implementation, management and sustainability from the most basic or decentralized units/level to the district level which is responsible for total development of the local government area.

Without underestimating the importance of any of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), the achievement of water and sanitation related MDG has the potential of leading to the attainment of other non-water targets since 'water, sanitation and hygiene deliver outcomes across the MDGs'⁵. This interdependence of the MDGs equally calls for multi-layered and a multi-stakeholder approach thus involving a wide range of actors to ensure these lofty goals are achieved.

The rest of the paper describes social accountability mechanisms, concrete results, a detailed methodology which describes different cases from different countries, analysis and discussions, the accountability gap and a key moment.

Social Accountability Mechanism

At the heart of the LMDGI process is **Citizens' Engagement** in ensuring that transparent and accountable systems or mechanisms are established to support service delivery to the poorest of the poor communities. The purpose of citizens' engagement in this effort is, among others, for:

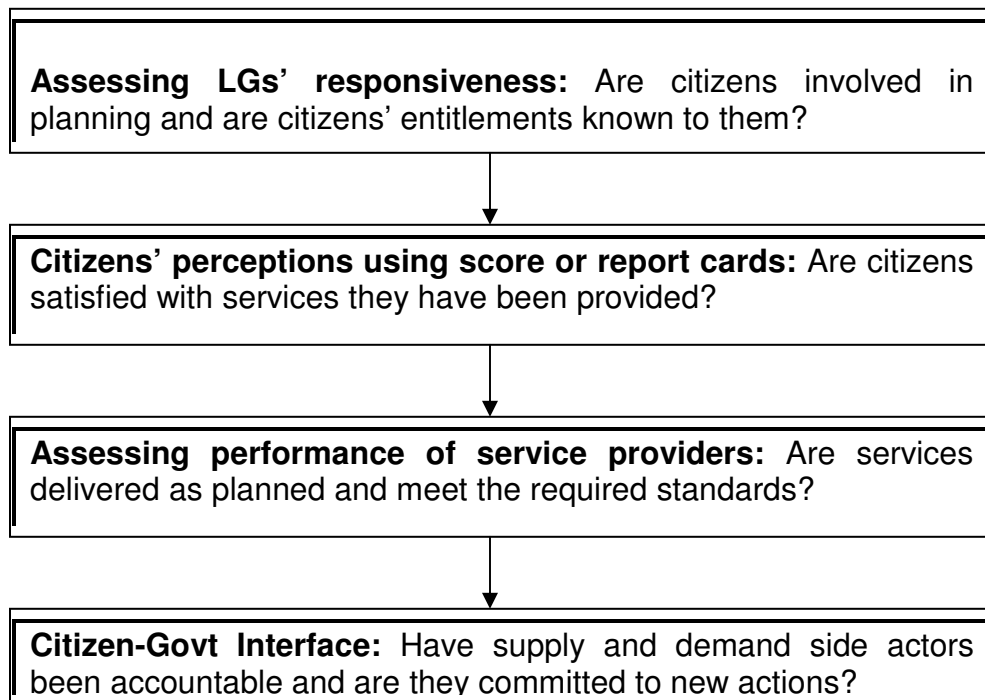
- Ensuring that relevant and realistic data is collected to establish status of the water and sanitation sector as an entry point for scaling up;
- Advocating the prioritization of water and sanitation at the district level among other competing sectors for resource allocation;
- Participating in local planning processes and better targeting of services to the most needy and deprived areas within the local jurisdiction;
- Assessing service delivery in relation to: Quality, Quantity, Timing, Levels of satisfaction, etc

⁴ WaterAid Ghana, LMDGI Concept Paper: 2004

⁵ The Poverty Millennium Development Goal, Briefing Note 1, WELL 2004

- Interfacing with Local governments and other service providers (public and private) for provider-citizen engagement toward improving service delivery in a transparent and accountable manner; and promoting public hearing to the level of communities such that every child, woman and man is conversant with local decisions and plans annually.

Some of the accountability and rights issues that have often emerged focus on four major social accountability questions forming the basis for citizen-government engagement for improved service delivery. These are:



Concrete Results

In seeking to establish transparent and accountable mechanisms, the following have emerged:

- Databases on the district water and sanitation situation
- Increased capacity, skill and competence for planning and participatory decision making;
- Water and Sanitation Strategic Plans (Local Development Plans /District Water and Sanitation Plans);
- Visual digital maps reflecting facility location, distribution, functionality, etc being used as advocacy tool;

- Platforms established for citizen-provider engagement, Public hearing, and transparent resource allocation, among others;
- Mechanisms and structures for monitoring DA actions or inaction on LDPs/DWSPs towards counting the numbers to meet MDG targets using community score cards;

Methodology

The demand side leadership as well as policy or supply side leadership at the district level have jointly worked together in the establishment of transparent, responsive and accountable mechanisms toward improving local governance of water and sanitation services. Below are specific cases and the different methodologies deployed.

Transparent and Evidence-based Planning

Across four countries, specific citizen-led methodologies and other participatory approaches were adopted. It is worth noting that in the process of establishing accountable mechanisms, findings of such processes are not as critical as the reform agendas that culminate into local actions. These have the higher tendency of leading to improved service delivery and use.

Case # 1: Inclusive and participatory planning – Nigeria

There are experiences of inclusive and participatory planning and how to improve the practices in Nigeria. The issues driving the process hinged on the following:

- No consensus on what needed to be done
- Local Governments have inadequate capacity in participatory planning
- Lack of trust in Government institutions

In developing a sector-wide plan, emphasis was put on: i) adequate sensitisation of all stakeholders; ii) capacity building to ensure collection of good quality data; iii) inclusive and participatory action planning involving local government authorities (LGAs), community members, traditional rulers, LG councillors and staff. The capacities of the various stakeholders (State Water Agencies, LGA staff and WES Unit, LGA Council, Civil Society Organizations/ partners and WaterAid) to plan were strengthened. This emphasized the need to be open with the various levels of government (Local Government, State and National) at every stage of the planning process.

The Inclusive Planning process ensured that priorities were set based on equity and not vested interests. The most invisible, poorest and unserved people were given priority. Also, broader ownership of the planning process was achieved to the extent that allegiance to plans superseded vested interests. Further, to improve current practice and policy, in their actions, both Local Governments and communities should endeavour to understand statutory responsibilities and rights.

Case # 2: Pro-poor targeting – Burkina Faso

Burkina Faso's experience is in targeting poor and vulnerable communities with services. An open and participatory identification process is used in determining the poor in each Local Government community. The process provided a snapshot of both poverty levels and existing facilities as a basis for decision-making. This **poverty mapping** process involved all stakeholders in the planning phase to clarify wealth-ranking.

Rationale for this approach included:

- Lack of data on poverty, mainly at the local (community/village) level
- Lack of motivation to target the poor with services hence inadequate provision of water and sanitation facilities in the poorest areas of Burkina Faso (e.g. of the South West Region)
- Low involvement of communities in the local planning processes within LGs
- Lack of pro-poor policies at local level in relation to the provision of safe water and sanitation facilities

Case # 3: Accountability and Transparency in Planning – Mali

The establishment of transparent and accountable planning mechanisms - Local Development Plans (LDP), was driven by a number of factors. For instance, the national poverty reduction plan (PRSP), served only as a general reference document, containing only intentions and will, but no strong commitment. In addition, it created little or no space at all for civil society (citizens' groups) to fit into the objectives worsened by low capacity of sector actors especially in the public domain in mobilising internal resources for development activities and meeting community needs.

The LDP involved citizens groups, led to capacity building and empowerment of the local authorities. The Plan which spans a 5-year development plan period (2005-2009) for Water and sanitation activities serves as a tool for all sector actors to work towards achieving water and sanitation goals in relation to the MDG targets. It further halted the act of unplanned implementation of activities and rather reinforced local governance, by harnessing the technical and organisational capacities of local development partners, local actors (women, men, traditional rulers) in drafting water, hygiene and sanitation sectoral plans. The LDP also strengthened partnership between LGs, NGOs and funding agencies, i.e. attracting funding. In much the same way, it created trust between LG authorities and communities thus fostering solidarity and interaction at community levels.

The process involved activities which were meant to ensure local ownership and transparency. The pre-planning activities included the training of Communal Councils and partner NGOs in planning. Within the communities, the planning process involved:

- Information and sensitization campaign
- Village diagnostic and data analysis

- Institution of inter-community consultation day
- Planning workshop
- Endorsement by the communities
- Adoption by the Local Council
- Dissemination

Case # 4: Citizens' Engagement with Planning and Resource Decisions – Ghana

The water coverage in Ghana hovers around 44% (rural) and 61% (Urban) - 54% while sanitation lags far behind at about 11% (rural and 40% (urban)⁶. This huge shortfall is more evident at the district levels. Such concerns coupled with high water-related diseases such as guinea worm in some parts of the country compelled the need to understand the situation and possibly build on thereof. A transparent citizen-led methodology - *Watsan mapping* was employed as an effective tool to develop WSS plans at the basic community level. The pilot project is being undertaken in the Afram Plains District in Ghana, with support from one of the WaterAid partners, Afram Plains Development Organisation (APDO).

The pilot project is driven by the following realities:

- District Level Planning is based on national census figures - characterized by averages, approximations, generalizations, & assumptions.
- Citizens' participation in planning and decision making are provided for in the Local Government Act, Act 462 of 1996, but these have not been followed to the letter
- Citizens' development priorities drawn from grass-root level processes rarely make it to district level priorities

The implications are that services do not reach areas where they are most needed, citizens' voices are not fully recognized in resource allocation and service provision, services are wrongly targeted hence unserved and underserved populations abound and service/facility maintenance and sustainability remain questionable with many non-functioning facilities - 2 out of every 6 systems.

The *Citizen-led Watsan mapping* exercise has involved community level data collection, meeting with stakeholders for information on access, management of water facilities among others. Community members make a case for inclusion in the District Water and Sanitation Plan (DWSP) at the Local Council and District levels.

Key successes were that:

-Area councils (sub-structure of LGs) still maintain own priority lists and able to seek support from other sources for implementation

*“Are we not part of the Afram district? Don't we have a right to water & sanitation services like the others?”
The entire island does not have a single water facility
...Female Councillor from Dwarf Island, Afram Plains District, (pop. 20,000), asking Hon Assembly members.*

⁶ Getting to Boiling Point, WaterAid UK or National Water Sector Assessments, WaterAid Ghana, 2004

-Local policy makers including political head (DCE, appointed and elected representatives) made commitments to review resource allocation to WSS based on community priorities

Capacity Development to Deliver on Service Plans

Each step of the LMDGI process required capacity building given that an initial background assessment of decentralization in the six countries demonstrated *weak to low capacity* at best and *no capacity* at all in some cases. The study cites more specifically, the lack of capacity at the Local government level and lack of transfer of competencies in the domain of water and sanitation⁷. Below are some applied methodologies in selected participating countries.

Case 1: Getting the Human Resource Incentives right and capacity to deliver the plans – PRUWASA, Nigeria

The focus was on the human resources capacity at the various levels of government within the decentralized structure of WSS delivery in Nigeria from Federal Ministry of Water Resources to State level and its agencies to local government authorities and communities. At each level there are capacity needs, but the emphasis has been at the local government and community levels. The initiative provided training in the areas of policy, planning, implementation, fund raising, co-ordination and facilitation of water and sanitation service delivery.

WaterAid Nigeria worked with State and Local Governments in developing the human resources to address issues relating to i) accountability, ii) ownership/sustainability, and iii) capacity. Steering Committees were established at the federal and state levels, as well as Management Committees at the local government level to provide oversight. That not with standing, capacity of communities to demand accountability is still very weak in some areas thus raising the question: *How can capacity-building be institutionalized?*

Case 2: Participatory budgeting - Matam Local Govt in Senegal

Matam is a regional capital city with a population of 20,000, comprising six communities with annual budget of CFA 480m (in 2005). Some drawbacks experienced with the conventional budgeting system included the lack of involvement of communities (that bred suspicion) and overestimation of returns on expenditures and revenues (demonstration of low accountability).

⁷ Comparative Overview of Decentralisation in West Africa, 2006: By ENDA

The key principles of participatory budgeting were those of transparency and participation such as participatory diagnosis, restitution per neighbourhood, forum for neighbourhood committee and adoption of the Budget Guide by the municipal council, public approval of budget and mutual commitments by both the local authorities and communities. The opportunities provided by participatory budgeting include:

- Citizens' control,
- Linkages between MDGs, National Programmes & Budgets
- Real mainstreaming of human rights
- Resource mobilisation at local level and with diaspora
- Control and increase in the tax base

Case 3: State and Non-state Actors Partner to deliver the plan – Afram Plains District in Ghana

The methodology was to foster partnership between state and non-state actors which is quite rare at the local level. To facilitate the work of the partnership, Project Management Teams were established and the key issues driving the partnership were noted as:

- a) Lack of proper coordination between sector players in the district
- b) Apathy towards water and sanitation related issues
- c) Poor linkage and analysis of water and sanitation issues.

Improving water and sanitation became the common agenda for all to aspire to achieve. District and national level committees were formed to manage the water and sanitation mapping as well as the preparation of a District Water and Sanitation Plan (DWSP) using the data generated through the watsan mapping. At the district level, the Management Team comprised APDO, community watsan Committees, Chiefs and Assembly members, representatives of other sector Ministries (Education, Health, and Agriculture), National Commission for Civic Education (NCCE), non-resident citizens of the district and other members from civil society. An advisory team comprising WaterAid Ghana and UNICEF supported the process with technical and managerial advice at the national level.

Some of the features and benefits of involving Non-State actors included a shared and reliable database which served as a useful tool for developing realistic and effective district plans. Based on lessons gathered during the process it was recommended that non-state actors should be involved in the plan preparation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation stages.

Methodology for Monitoring and Accessing Results

The community scorecard process is an instrument to exact public accountability. It promotes greater accountability and responsiveness from service providers at the local level⁸. It is a means by which community members assess the performance of

⁸ Janmejy S. and Parmesh S.: Social Development Department, World Bank: Community Score Cards- A short Note on General Methodology for Implementation

'public' services and interact with service providers to express their concerns. The ultimate goal is to influence the quality, efficiency and accountability with which services are provided. It is hybrid of – social audit, community monitoring, and citizen report card. It serves as:

- An instrument to facilitate accountability
- A tool for community empowerment
- A 'process' not just 'scorecard'

The methodology has been applied to determine the level of compliance by the district to the plans developed which are meant to improve service delivery. Results of an assessment in Afram Plains showed that some districts which were identified for services on the basis of population and deprivation never received services (ref. in-box above on Dwarf Island in Afram).

The findings have engendered and stimulated citizen-led advocacy at the various levels - *rooted, regional & national*. It emphasized immediate feedback and reform. For instance, Area Councils (lowest decision-making units) debated on resource allocation regarding water and sanitation for the **first time**, thus *developing and using 'own' voice*.

Area council development and service priorities have been included in district medium term plans in an incremental manner from 2006 – 2009, thus *local voices being heard*.

Analysis and discussion:

Policy and practice-related issues are taking a new turning as citizens become increasingly aware and able to engage with relevant actors across all levels on rights, entitlements, transparency and accountability. This **accountability path** has been reinforced through various initiatives –some supported by external support agencies and others through local galvanising efforts championed by civil society organizations such as the Coalition of NGOs in Water and Sanitation in Ghana (CONIWAS).

Questions are: Are service providers improving their services? Are institutions with mandate performing as they should? Are users demanding and exercising rights and responsibilities? Are the desired changes occurring or being achieved?

The entry-point for establishing transparent and accountable mechanisms for improved service delivery is essentially difficult and rocky. Attempting to establish a system for any local government structures implicitly means asking the LG to present itself for scrutiny. However when this is surmounted the results are immeasurable and mutually so for the responsive LG and the user constituents. From the experiences above, the establishment of these mechanisms for

CSC Process

- **Input Tracking Scorecard**
- **Self Evaluation Scorecard**
- **Performance Scorecard**
- **Interface meeting**
- **Info in Public domain**

transparent decision-making around resource allocation and planning, created a democratic space that allowed ordinary citizens to engage with these processes for the first time.

Citizens' participation in planning and decision making are provided for in the LG Act: 1996 Act 462 of the Republic of Ghana but these have not been followed to the latter. In the first place this means denial of citizens' rights and failure of the supply-side to be accountable. However by involving citizens in data collection and understanding their water and sanitation situation, they were able to obtain and use critical information in various ways. For instance, citizens' development priorities drawn from rooted level processes hitherto did not make it to district level priorities. After the engagements, their priorities are now planned for in a more strategic manner. Provision of services is no longer based on averages, approximations, generalizations, & assumptions. Evidence-based planning using citizen-led processes and methodologies provided basis for realistic targeting of services

Services now reach areas where they are most needed as Citizens' voices are fully recognised in resource allocation and service provision.

Improving policy and practice especially regarding the delivery of water and sanitation services is now more critical than before. By mainstreaming citizens' roles and establishing such transparent and accountable mechanisms, policy engagements are deepening, ownership is gaining root and there is more information in the public domain to catalyse demand for **more and better services**. Information in the public domain is empowering and citizens can now dialogue with policy makers and other practitioners to get the right things done.

The transfer of competence from central to local governments without corresponding technical resources and capacity compromises the establishment and functionality of transparent and accountable processes. If this persists, as is happening in a number of African countries, decision making prerogatives will continue to hang at the central and middle levels when in fact institutions of local governance should be promoting the **principle of subsidiarity** - that decision making is closest to the user communities.

Several challenges are apparent in the process of establishing mechanisms at the local level for improved service delivery. One of the main challenges is ensuring the commitment of DA staff to facilitate community-citizen assessment of LG service delivery for improved performance, as they may see this as an affront to their long-established authority.

LGs can perform the role of advocates. In fact, local governments have a huge potential for advocating more resources to the water and sanitation sector but are yet to explore that opportunity. In order to accelerate progress towards meeting the sector MDG targets LGs need to be more proactive and innovative.

Why must we bother?

There are discrepancies between words and action; policy and practice; responsibility and action. This is the **Accountability Gap** that Citizens' Action through transparent and accountable mechanisms seeks to bridge. A new source of momentum or movement is required to ensure that agencies and service providers stick to their commitments

Key Moment 1:

A Female Councillor prevailed upon honourable Assembly members saying:
I come from the Dwarf Island Area. Our population is 20,022 people yet we don't have a single water facility. Our first option is an unsafe source and the alternative is also an unsafe source.

- Are we not part of the Afram district?
- Don't we have a right to water & sanitation services like the others?

Key Moment 2:...If people have open minds, do not mind being criticized, and can see the process as a way to improve services, for those of us who are willing to listen to the voiceless, the services can improve. We are so used to telling the poor what they need and what they should do, now we need to listen, we need to turn it around the other way... Ms. B. B. Batir, Reg. Dir. of CWSA (UWR)⁹

⁹ Bridging the Gap: Citizens' Action for Accountability in Water and Sanitation, March 2006.

References

Bridging the Gap: Citizens' Action for Accountability in Water and Sanitation, March 2006. www.wateraid.org/citizensaction

'Community Voices': Annual Score Card, 2005-2005, Institute for Policy Alternatives, Ghana. www.ipaghana.org

Comparative Overview of Decentralisation in West Africa, 2006: ENDA, and contained in: Ghana: Draft Report of First LMDGI Conference enda@enda.sn and www.wateraidghana.org

Getting to Boiling Point, WaterAid UK www.wateraid.org

Ghana: Draft Report: First LMDGI Conference Communiqué, 10-12 May 2006 www.wateraidghana.org/penlib

Janmejay S. and Parmesh S.: Social Development Department, World Bank: Community Score Cards- A short Note on General Methodology for Implementation www.worldbank.org/participation/web/webfiles

Kwabena S. & Kodjo M: Small Water Enterprises in Africa 4: Ghana, WEDC-UK email: <http://wcdc.lboro.ac.uk/publications/>

National Water Sector Assessments, WaterAid Ghana, 2004 www.wateraidghana.org

WaterAid Corporate Strategy, 2005-2010, www.wateraid.org

WaterAid Ghana, LMDGI Concept Paper: 2004 www.wateraidghana.org/

The Poverty Millennium Development Goal, Briefing Note 1, WELL 2004 www.lboro.ac.uk/well/