

Abstract

The provision of potable water and sanitation (WaS) facilities is of major concern to governments and development actors in Africa and many other developing regions of the world. This is based on the assumption and recognition that, water and sanitation are sine qua non to good health and poverty alleviation, especially in rural and agrarian communities. Adverse climatic changes with the attendant reduction in the quantity and quality of water supplies, however, require concerted efforts to ensure provision and access to safe water and good sanitation. The need for improved WaS facilities cannot therefore be underestimated. The access to these facilities is no longer a luxury but a necessity.

This study addresses issues of accessibility to WaS facilities mainly by women and girls in underserved rural communities in Ghana. The study delved into the contribution of local stakeholders (CBOs) in WaS. To investigate access to WaS services by rural dwellers and the contribution of local government structures and CBOs in the provision of these facilities in Northern Region, Ghana, a mixed methods strategy was employed. Using a mix of observation, interviews and questionnaires in a cross sectional survey in six (6) rural communities, the study found that CBOs are established to complement the activities of international organizations and donors. This is done through different partnership arrangements, mostly on short term basis. CBOs depend on financial resources of international and donors whereas donors rely on human resources of CBOs to implement projects.

The study also revealed that, besides the construction of physical facilities, CBOs are actively involved in providing services such as animation and capacity building in communities. This is dominant in the provision of sanitation facilities where there are attempts to reorient and emphasize change in attitudes through trigger effect methodologies.

Access to alternative sources of water (besides boreholes) remains a major challenge while rain harvesting and storage is not highly patronized because of the nature of roofing materials of houses. Furthermore, water facilities are highly patronized and better managed than sanitation facilities owned and managed by individual households. This is however, in contrast with the norm of the Ghanaian society that manages individual properties or facilities efficiently to that of community facilities. Besides, there are challenges with sustainability of facilities both WaS. Women are less pragmatic than men, in managing these facilities. This conforms to low women involvement in managerial positions in Ghana. On the other hand, there are no significant differences in the status of poverty of households in communities with access to WaS as against those with less access to these facilities.

Based on these and other findings, I recommend institutional restructuring whereby CBOs are integrated into District Assembly Systems through their representatives. International partners and donors should engage in medium to long term partnership arrangements with CBOs for easy access to professional advice as well as capacity building to develop long term plans for projects.

Finally, women who are recognized as effective financial managers should be encouraged through mass media publicity and affirmative actions. This will encourage their compatriots to be active in the management of these facilities to ensure sustainability. Furthermore, spot fines especially for poor sanitation practices should be introduced to deter recalcitrant citizens and ensure compliance with improved sanitation practices in the region. This would generate income for local authorities (DAs) to undertake other infrastructural projects. Rural electrification should be extended alongside WaS to effectively reduce poverty in rural communities.