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POLICY BRIEF

Water and Sanitation in Ghana and the impact of COVID-19

INTRODUCTION

Water and sanitation are indisputably non-isolating; their roles are pivotal to development, healthy ecosystems, and the production of energy and food. However, 785 million people lack basic drinking water services, with 579 million depending on unprotected wells, springs, and surface water (WHO/UNICEF, 2019). A global estimate of about 2 billion people lack access to basic sanitation facilities such as toilets or latrines, with a population of 673 million engaging in open defecation (ibid). Future projections show that a global population of 50 percent will be living in water-stressed areas by 2025 (WHO, 2019).

Despite Ghana being among the leading countries in Africa to have achieved water coverage of nearly 80 percent delivery, there is still an investment gap. Nearly three million of the population lack access to potable water. The WHO/UNICEF defines drinking water as water drawn from an improved source that is located on premises, available when needed, and free from faecal and priority chemical contamination. In generic terms, it is described as a basic service[1]. There have been several interventions by past governments toward the achievement of the SDG Agenda 6, yet many people still lack adequate access to water and sanitation, as seen in figure 1.

The situation became more worrying with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, with experts advising that water and sanitation are critical pillars in the fight against the pandemic.

This brief is extracted from the Ghana Social Development Outlook (GDSO) 2020. It employs secondary data to discuss the state of water and sanitation in Ghana and examines government interventions during the COVID-19 pandemic, and provides conclusions and recommendations.

The state of water and sanitation in Ghana

In general, about 60 percent of Ghanaian households get water from both the Ghana Water Company Limited (GWCL) and the Community Operated and Managed Water Systems (COMWS), with GWCL and COMWS supplying about 39 percent and 21 percent respectively. Other suppliers include Community Water Sanitation Agency (CWSA) (4.0%), NGOs (6.8%), others (12.9%) and own-household production (5.2%). In addition, there are other households (about 11%) that get water from sources other than any of the above-listed (GSS, 2019). Reports show that piped water is used by 27.3 percent of Ghanaian households, while 28.5 percent consume well water, 8 percent depend on water from natural sources, and 36.1, on other sources (GSS, 2019), as seen in plate 1.

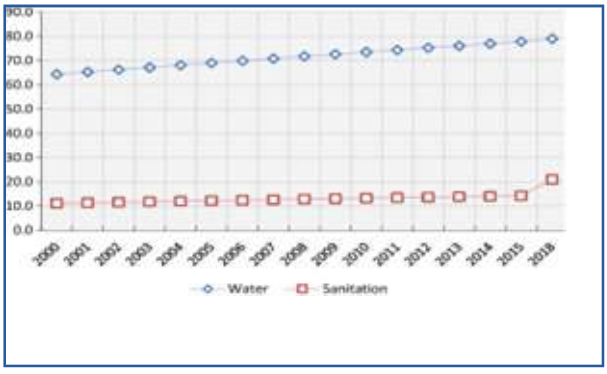
1 A basic service is an improved drinking-water source within a round trip of 30 minutes to collect water (WHO/UNICEF, 2017)

Plate 1: The looming water crisis in Ghana and the way forward

Source:http://ghheadlines.com/agency/news-ghana/20170405/38751627/the-looming-water-crisis-in-ghana-and-the-way-forward

The proportion of the urban population using improved water supplies are: safely managed (57%), accessible on premises (57%), available when needed (83%), free from contamination (63%), piped (40%) and non-piped (58%) (WHO/UNICEF, 2019). Similarly, the proportion of the rural population using improved water supplies shows safely managed (11%), accessible on premises (11%), available when needed (72%), free from contamination (45%), piped (24%) and non-piped (57%) (WHO/UNICEF data, updated 2019).

Figure 1: Trends of improved water and sanitation coverage in Ghana



Sources: WHO/UNICEF (2017) and GSS (2018)

Though water coverage for rural communities and small towns experienced a slight decline from 62.13% in 2017 to 62.06% in 2018, representing a 0.07% reduction (CWSA Annual Report, 2019), the sector increased the number of boreholes by 136 and rehabilitated about 20 of them in the country (CWSA Annual Report, 2019). Service was also extended to 3,740 households in low-income urban communities within the Greater Accra Metropolitan Area (GAMA) and 214km pipelines were laid within GAMA to improve service delivery in 2018 (MoF, 2019a).

Sanitation is still lagging behind the Millennium Development Goal (MDG) target of 54%, achieving only 4% increment at the end of the MDGs (Appiah-Effah et al, 2019). The current coverage of 21% gives a rural coverage of 17% and urban coverage of 25% (Ibid). These figures show that following the MDGs, there has been an increment of 6% (from 15% in 2015 to 21% in 2018) leaving 79% of the population to find solutions to their sanitation needs (GSS 2018; Appiah-Effah et al, 2019). The financial and socio-economic impacts of this situation is said to be significant. According to the Water and Sanitation Programme (WSP), poor sanitation causes an annual economic loss of US$290 million, equivalent to 1.6% of Ghana's GDP (WSP, 2012). In many areas, sanitation facilities are non-existent leading to open defecation, with about 22% of Ghanaians engaging in the practice. Though this practice is more common in the rural areas where 4.2 million people, representing 31% practice open defecation, about 1.8 million people representing 11% of the urban population also engage in the practice.

The COVID-19 pandemic

Since the report of the first cluster of coronavirus on 31st December 2019, the virus has spread massively and affected around 218 countries. In Ghana, the case count stood at 55,168 with 335 deaths between 12th of March and 31st December 2020 (Badu et al, 2021). Greater Accra was earmarked a hotspot region with 30,668 cases, followed by Ashanti (11,171) and Western (3,096). In halting the spread, the government put in measures such as border closures, lockdowns, ban on public gatherings, and encouraged frequent hand washing under running water and the use of hand sanitizers. However, several loopholes were highlighted in the

Water, Sanitation and Health sub-sectors (WASH). The most pressing issues surrounding water and sanitation during the peak of the pandemic were accessibility, availability and adequacy in rural, peri-urban, and urban communities.

Government Water Relief Programme

Various types of water suppliers, both public and private were engaged to supply water to vulnerable communities[2]. The Accra Digital Centre was used as a call center to assist peri-urban dwellers who lacked water during the lockdown to call for assistance and send alerts.

According to the 2020 Annual Budget Statement report, GoG "through the Ministry of Sanitation and Water Resources (MSWR), supplied 3,447,612 cubic metres of additional potable water, representing a 37% increase over and above pre-COVID levels, to 522,864 and 10,763 domestic and commercial customers of GWCL, from April to June, 2020" (MoF, 2020b). Additionally, "630 Rambo 10,000-litre polytanks were mounted across the country to supply free water to underserved communities through the deployment of 118 privately-owned and GWCL-owned water tankers. Public standpipes managed by GWCL within communities increased by 531, reaching 11,038 as at end of June 2020" (MoF, 2020b).

The report further stated that "the Community Water and Sanitation Agency, through this intervention, provided 174 piped-water systems to serve 268,861 persons between April and June 2020. A total of 1,755,907.82 cubic metres of water was delivered at no cost to beneficiaries as part of the relief programme. In terms of monetary value, the total cost to Government of the Water Relief Programme is projected at GH¢275.5 million, out of which GH¢199.3 million was paid by end June 2020" (MoF, 2020b). The water relief intervention was extended until the end of 2020 (MoF, 2020b) and was further extended to the end of March, 2021.

During the period, the country saw a growth in household waste production thus deepening the already precarious situation. Government deployed 5,100 litter bins to various MMDAs in the country. Several hand washing stands, including Veronica buckets, were also distributed, especially in open spaces. The MSWR in partnership with Zoomlion Ghana Limited organized cleanup activities in selected public places in the country. Similarly, the Ghana Armed Forces and other security agencies in collaboration with MMDAs organized clean up exercises in the Central Business Districts of Accra, Tema and Greater Kumasi Area.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This policy brief has highlighted the existing challenges in the water and sanitation sector, despite government's efforts at closing the gap. In the water sector where government has made progress, nearly three million of the population still lack access to potable water, particularly in rural areas. The outbreak of COVID-19 has brought to light the need to expand infrastructural investment to increase access to adequate quality water supply, toilet facilities and waste management facilities to improve the sector and ensure good health. Though attention has now been drawn to the sanitation sector with some level of intervention by government, NGOs, and other Community-Based Organisations (CBOs), access to sanitation is still inadequate. Extensive use of shared toilet facilities coupled with the practice of open defecation needs more attention.

Based on the above, the following recommendations are provided:

- Some measures that the government put in place, particularly the provision of litter bins in public places, need to be continued. This will not only improve the sanitary conditions of the country, but it will also play an important role in reducing the annual flooding in the cities.
- There is a need for more commitment and strong stakeholder collaboration among state institutions, NGOs, the private sector and other relevant institutions as was observed during the pandemic.
- There is a need for rigorous reforms at the institutional level accompanied by well-planned policies that will not just be on paper but which will be enforced to curb open defecation.

2 public-water-covid-19_chapter_15.pdf (tni.org)

- Recognising the complexities of the rural-urban divide and the dynamics of poverty is important so that interventions can be directed at the poor, given the health implications and the economic and social cost to the government and families.

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A full version of the content of this policy brief can be found in the 'Water and Sanitation' chapter of the Ghana Social Development Outlook 2020

Researcher
Martha Adimabuno Awo (PhD)
ISSER, University of Ghana, Legon
maawo@ug.edu.gh/ martawoadi@gmail.com

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Vicentia Quartey
vquartey@ug.edu.gh