

# GHANA WASH PROJECT

success story



## Bringing a Focus to Women and Girls: Challenges and Contributions to Water, Sanitation and Hygiene

The  **Ghana Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) Project**  is a four-year USAID-funded initiative to improve rural water, sanitation, and hygiene in Ghana. The Ghana WASH Project is implemented by Relief International, Winrock International, and the Adventist Development Relief Agency (ADRA). Working with local actors and community members, the Ghana WASH Project is engaged in five regions, 22 districts, and more than 160 communities to assist in the achievement of Ghana's national WASH goals.

Relief International provides emergency, rehabilitation and development services that empower beneficiaries in the process. Relief International employs an innovative approach to program design and a high quality of implementation performance in demonstrating deep and lasting impact in reducing human suffering worldwide. ADRA was established by the Seventh-day Adventist Church to provide humanitarian relief and welfare. The agency's work seeks to improve the quality of life of those in need through emergency management as well as community development initiatives. Winrock International is a non-profit organization that works with people in the United States and around the world to empower the disadvantaged, increase economic opportunity, and sustain natural resources.



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## Improved Sanitation Enables Better Education Experiences for Girls

*Primary school girls stand near their school's wooden latrine facility. The school will soon receive a new institutional latrine care of the Ghana WASH Project.*

Adua Municipal Assembly Primary School, located in Ga West municipality, in the Greater Accra Region, is one of the schools targeted by the Ghana WASH Project to receive an institutional latrine to improve its sanitation situation. The school, with more than 600 students at the primary and junior high school level, has lobbied unsuccessfully for years to the Municipal Assembly for additional sanitation support.

For more than a decade, the school and administration had sought additional support from both the Municipal Assembly and townspeople without success, said Mrs. Peace Kumordzie, the assistant head teacher, who has been at Adusa M/A for 15 years.

The Municipal Assembly had provided one pit latrine in 1995. It has fallen into disrepair; even the assembly's name is now barely discernable on the latrine's semi-collapsed roof.

Finally, a few years ago, the school took it upon itself to build a latrine. Enlisting the help of a dozen male junior high school students and two male teachers, a latrine structure was completed. Unfortunately, the craftsmanship was not sound. Very soon after, the structure collapsed.

Three years ago, a nearby church that was holding activities in the area provided a small, wooden latrine. "This is the one we are using now, Mrs. Kumordzie said, "but it's not in good condition. She motioned toward the wooden structure behind the school.

At present, there are three structures on the school grounds: one makeshift, semi-open latrine assembled

of wood, and two small pit latrines, one constructed by the Municipal Assembly and another by the nearby Assemblies of God church, both of which are now dilapidated or collapsed. The only viable facility at the school for the administration and students is the wooden latrine.

Although the Municipal Assembly was unable to provide additional support directly to the school, it did work with the Ghana WASH Project to identify this school among those most in need. The administration and students eagerly wait for the construction on the GWASH-provided latrine to be completed.

For the female students at the school, the current situation has particularly challenging ramifications. For these young girls, when they feel the urge to relieve themselves or urinate, they simply hold it until the end of the day. When the end of the day comes, they go as fast as they can in search of somewhere private – those who live nearby can rush home quickly; but for those who live further away, their option will be the bush.

When asked about whether trying to "hold it" during school hours interfered with their lessons, the girls said it made it more difficult to concentrate in class. "We'll be shaking!" said Abigail, a primary student. She trembled from head to toe as she mimicked the physical challenge. The girls around her laughed at her imitation, but nodded their heads in its truth. Some boys also hold it, they said, but not as many as the girls.

The girls said most of them refuse to use the urinal at the school. "The boys will peep [at us] because there's

# “We are afraid and shy, so we don’t go there.. We don’t want to expose ourselves.”

– Female student explains why she won’t use school’s latrine

no door,” one girl said. As a semi-open structure, the urinal has maximum air ventilation, but minimal privacy for its users. The lack of a door on the girls’ side further reduces any semblance of privacy they might have if they went there. From inside the urinal, one can easily see all activity on the school grounds. At recess, children are in easy view, playing ball and other games. In return, anyone inside the urinal would likely be easily viewable as well. In addition, when the girls’ side is empty, small boys also freely use that side.

“We are afraid and shy, so we don’t go there,” one girl said. “We don’t want to expose ourselves.”

When girls begin puberty and have to deal with their monthly menses, they have few comfortable options. Some girls use pullovers, tying them at their waists to try to hide the evidence, said Emily Vormawor, a teacher and School-Based Health Coordinator who co-leads the school’s School Health Education Program (SHEP) with her teacher colleague Linda Bekoe. “Many girls go home to change,” she said, admitting that this often translates into missed class time when the girls don’t return back to school.

## Institutional Latrine Providing Space, Convenience for Young Girls

In the Central Region, one school that has received an institutional latrine is seeing immensely positive impacts for its female students. Last year, Assin Kumasi Junior High School, located in Assin South district, received a latrine through the Ghana WASH Project. Today, Maybelle and Comfort, two of the school’s students, can testify to the positive change they have experienced. The young girls, dressed in their school uniform of an orange collared shirt and brown jumper, smile openly as they discuss their experiences before and after receiving the latrine.

Before the latrine was constructed, Maybelle said she and her friends would venture into the nearby bush to find a spot to go. “We would just go around and see

any convenient place,” she said. “If you want to use the toilet, there were kindergarten and primary [students] there; it was so full, so you don’t have privacy.” She said that she and her classmates would spend up to 10 minutes looking for a secluded space in the nearby bush, which stretched from the school’s immediate land boundary.

Now, these girls have an institutional latrine, which provides a convenient, private space to take care of their sanitation and female hygiene needs. The structure is divided into two sides by a cement wall; one side has two latrines (for males), and the other side has the two latrines and a changing room (for females). Typically, the side with the two rooms is allocated for males and the other side for females, but the school administration has revised this: They’ve allocated the two-room side for teachers, and left the other side with two rooms and a changing room for the girls. Boys, kindergarten and primary school students use their designated latrines, which were constructed a few years ago.

“We have more privacy now,” Comfort said. Nearly everyone uses the latrine, she continued, because there are enough stalls.

“It’s good for us,” Maybelle added. Now, she doesn’t have to worry about missing class time to take care of her needs. “It’s improved things for us.”

For many of these students, facilities such as the latrine and the hygiene education are new. “In [students’] homes, out of 10 households, just one may have a household latrine,” said Ms. Gloria Duha, a teacher and the school’s School Health Education Program (SHEP) club leader. In addition, hygiene education is an important compliment to each and every sanitation improvement. Through the SHEP club, Ms. Duha teaches her students basic hygiene, such as keeping their hands, bodies and surroundings clean, including eschewing open defecation.



*New latrines are improving young girl’s school experiences.*

*Right: Latrine currently under construction at Adusa Municipal Assembly Primary School, Greater Accra Region.*

*Left: Maybelle and Comfort in front of their school latrine at Assin Kumasi Municipal Assembly School, Central Region.*

Ms. Duha also integrates the girls' needs into the club material, encouraging them to freely talk about their experiences, challenges and questions about topics, including their monthly menses once they reach puberty.

Along with her SHEP student members, Ms. Duha is encouraging students to make proper use of the urinal and latrines on the school premises, and keep them clean in the process. From the 20 students that she works with – including 9 girls from the primary and junior high school level – she says the teachings are having a ripple effect: As she educates her students,

her students in turn educate and influence their classmates. With her students, she is also informing and educating parents about hygiene and sanitation: “We have regular Parent Teacher Association meetings,” she said. At the upcoming meeting, Ms. Duha said she is preparing the students to perform a drama that encourages hand washing.

According to Ms. Duha, the latrine and the SHEP activities are making a beneficial impact for all students, and especially the girls. “It’s really improving things,” she said.



## Creating Forums for Women to Participate Equally in Management & Decision making

*As part of the triggering process, a community discusses existing sanitation issues, and they identify locations where open defecation is a problem. In above photo, woman draws map demonstrating open defecation locations in her community.*

Asafo Pechi is a small community tucked away in the forest in Ghana’s Eastern Region; Lucy Dei (“Aunty Lucy”) has lived here for 36 years. Like many women in her community, Lucy is a farmer who cultivates staple cash crops: cocoa, plantain, and cassava.

Aunty Lucy holds the role of Queen Mother, head of the women within the community and an assistant and advisor to the chief. When the women in the community have problems, they can go to Lucy. She either advises them herself, or takes the issue to the chief. Ultimately though, the final decision on all matters lies

with the chief.

Because of their responsibilities, women are often most aware of the WASH-related challenges within a community. Lucy explained that although her community does have some existing latrines, the pits were not lined during construction. When it rains, the pit becomes water logged, causing feces to surface and exposing it to flies and animals. The alternatives to latrines are open pits, but these pose many dangers for children. A contributing danger to community health is the garbage dump, which is located next to the com-

**“I have even been beating the bell, the town crier, so that all the community members will come and clean up the community.” Unfortunately, her authority as Queen Mother is largely limited to that over woman and children.**

munity borehole, putting the water source at a heightened risk for contamination.

Lucy is a principal advocate for improving sanitation and hygiene in her community. “I have even been beating the bell, the town crier, so that all the community members will come and clean up the community,” Aunt Lucy said in a conversation translated from Fante Twi. Unfortunately, her authority as Queen Mother is largely limited to that over women and children.

### **The Scope of Gender Roles in Community WASH Issues**

In rural households and communities, women and men often have distinct roles and responsibilities. Men oversee farming activities and make up the highest level of community leadership. Women play a central role in carrying out water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) tasks, such as fetching water. In decision-making, female leadership oversee women’s activities, while male leadership (including the chief, the head of the community) oversee male activities and also make final decisions concerning the community. These gender roles can limit women’s ability to fully participate in public decision-making. In addition, because of women’s responsibilities over WASH activities, they bear an undue burden when conditions are not adequately maintained.

Despite the fact that it is primarily women who are engaged in day-to-day WASH activities, men are customarily the decision makers on major issues such as construction and management. For example, women have a major stake in ensuring the borehole is clean and working properly, because they are the ones who fetch water from the borehole daily. If the borehole breaks down, women are still expected to fetch water, despite the challenges and dangers they may face, including walking the distance to find water and carrying it back to the household. It is critical that women actively participate in community WASH development; because of their stake, they often work very hard to ensure that facilities are maintained and proper hygiene practices are enforced.

### **“Triggering” Women’s Participation**

The Ghana WASH Project recently began Community-Led Total Sanitation (CLTS) activities in Aunt Lucy’s community. The first step is “triggering,” which involves discussion, education, and problem solving on sanitation (especially open defecation) issues in cooperation with a community. The goal of triggering is to bolster the community’s understanding of its own WASH problems and become motivated to participate



*Lucy Dei, Queen Mother in her community of Asafo Pechi where she works to galvanize the community on water and sanitation issues.*

in solutions. These activities are done in the format of a community meeting, where men and women are encouraged to participate in the discussion on equal footing. Children also participate.

As the Ghana WASH Project continues to engage the community of Asafo Pechi in WASH development, other avenues can be created for women to participate on an equal basis with men on these issues in their communities. One example is women’s involvement in water and sanitation (watsan) committees. The project works with the community to set up these committees, which are put in place to promote upkeep of facilities and proper hygiene behavior. The GWASH project makes every effort to ensure women are included in the watsan committees, including encouraging 30 percent female membership. Most importantly, the watsan committee works alongside the existing community leadership, demonstrating a respect for the existing community leadership, and respect for women’s essential role in WASH.

In order to sustainably improve WASH in communities like Asafo Pechi, project staff engage with women as equal partners in WASH activities. This can expand and cement women’s voice in community decision-making and management. The hope is that by the end of the intervention, the authority of Aunt Lucy and other women on WASH-related issues will be upheld by the entire community. The project has found that this can lead to improved management of facilities, and sustainable improvements for the community.



## Women Mobilize Their Communities for Household Latrine Construction

*To help her community get household latrines, Aunty Juliana Okine motivated her neighbors to commit to provide materials, and she fed the latrine artisans who constructed the facilities. Her community now has 20 latrines.*

In the community of Abensu, located in the Greater Accra Region, women have been at the forefront of addressing sanitation issues by mobilizing their community to work with the Ghana WASH Project to build household latrines.

Juliana Okine is one such example. Popularly referred to around the community as “Aunty Juliana,” she is a food vendor and wife to the community chief’s assistant, and she played a central role in helping her community get household latrines through the Ghana WASH Project.

In a conversation translated from Ga, Aunty Juliana said that she first learned about the initiative when staff from the Ghana WASH Project visited her community to talk about working with households to build latrines. She was happy, she said, because she didn’t have a latrine for her family.

Before, the closest facility was the public latrine, located at the edge of the community. It could be an uncomfortable experience, especially for women, she said. For example, on approach, one would have to shout to alert the current user and verify whether it was a man or a woman. When someone approached the latrine but the current user was of the opposite sex, custom requires that the person wait until the user finished. So Aunty Juliana made up her mind to ensure her community received the latrines, no matter what it took.

In each community, the Ghana WASH Project aims to

work with households to construct a minimum number of latrines. In Abensu, a community commitment of at least 20 households was required, but at first only 15 households expressed interest. Working with her husband and Aunty B, another prominent woman in the community, Aunty Juliana went to each and every household. The group visited and informed families of the plan, and they strongly encouraged them to participate. In the end, they finally reached the goal of 20 households. Even then, Aunty Juliana said that much of the community didn’t take the idea seriously. But once the latrine artisans arrived and began constructing latrines, they realized the initiative was a serious one.

In order to receive a latrine, each household had to commit contributions to latrine construction, from providing their own labor, digging the pits, collecting rocks, sand and other materials, to providing daily meals for the latrine artisans who build the latrines. For her own household, Aunty Juliana Okine worked with her husband to collect heavy rocks, which they crushed into smaller stones, and she fed the artisans who worked on the household latrines.

At first, she said she began just cooking for the two artisans who were constructing her household’s latrine. Soon, others joined. Other households weren’t feeding the artisans well, she said. At times, a family would provide local food to the artisan, but because it was foreign to him, he refused to eat. Aunty Juliana said that her role in feeding the eight artisans was a somewhat easy task to take on. As a food vendor, she

**Even with her own latrine and the success of motivating 19 other households to get latrines, Aunty Juliana hasn't stopped working. In fact, she and her husband have lobbied and worked with more community members to commit to getting household latrines, and the Ghana WASH Project will provide 15 more latrines in a second wave of construction.**

was used to cooking meals for a large number of people at a time, and that because she cooked so much, she always have food left over. It was a small price to pay to have this assistance in building the latrines, she said.

Aunty Juliana's household latrine, completed in October 2011, was the first finished in the community. Not only did the her family serve as an example to other community members, but they also shared their leftover materials, such as the stones, with other households.

Today, Aunty Juliana and her household enjoy not only a latrine, but an additional toilet that they constructed. One side has a pit latrine and the other side has a toilet seat for those who are unable to squat. She said that having their own household latrine has made a world of a difference, and she even brought in her elderly mother to stay with her.

Aunty Juliana said that another woman, Beatrice Teteh (called "Aunty B" in the community), likewise made important contributions for the household latrines. "Aunty B was in charge of two households' construction when they weren't around," she said. "She saw to it that everything was done." In addition, Aunty B also shared her leftover materials to support other households in their construction.

When asked why she hadn't just built her own latrine

instead of trying to mobilize the entire community, Aunty Juliana said she knew that if her was the only household in the community with a latrine, that it would become a "public toilet" – people from all over would come to use it. So she had to encourage households to work with the Ghana WASH Project to build their own.

Even with her own latrine, and the success of motivating 19 other households to get latrines, Aunty Juliana hasn't stopped working. In fact, she and her husband have lobbied and worked with more community members to commit to getting household latrines, and the Ghana WASH Project will provide 15 more latrines in a next wave of construction.

By providing certain materials for latrine construction, the Ghana WASH Project presents these households with an opportunity that otherwise would likely be impossible. According to Evelyn Cofie, a Field Officer for the Ghana WASH Project for the Greater Accra, Volta and Eastern regions, the household contributions for these latrines are also significant. "What they are contributing is so much," she said. At the same time, her conversations with community members have reinforced that the project support is key. She recalled a conversation she'd had with Aunty B, asking her why she hadn't just constructed her own latrine. "It's expensive," she was told. "We couldn't have done it on our own."



Left: Aunty Juliana at home cooking.  
Center: Evelyn Cofie, Ghana WASH Field Officer, displays the Abensu community's visitor book.  
Right: Mounted on the wall of Aunty Juliana's house is the Ghana WASH Project poster displaying information on the household latrines.



## Women Caretakers of Water and Sanitation Facilities: Leading by Example

*Maame Esi Duma is well-known and respected in her community for her work caretaking for water and sanitation facilities. In above photo, Maame Esi works to clear the path leading to her community's borehole.*

Maame Esi Duma is a mother, a wife, a farmer and a custodian in her community. At 56 years of age, she has given birth to nine children, seven of which are still living. She has lived in the Fanti community of Mempeaseam, in the Bia District of Ghana's Western Region, for nearly 40 years. She came to the community in 1974 after she married her husband, and today, they live together and farm cocoa.

Mempeaseam is a small rural farming community with a population of about 500 people. When GWASH staff first visited the community, they found that the majority of the people relied on the nearby stream for their drinking and household needs. The community has two hand-dug wells, one dug by the community itself and another by a local cocoa-buying company. While both wells were closer to the community than the stream, one well has become spoilt over time. The other well, which still functions, emits a bad smell. Many people were using the stream exclusively for their drinking and household needs, while some still sourced water from the functioning well.

In Mempeaseam, women's everyday management, operation and maintenance responsibilities include fetching water and regular cleaning of the well and the community's latrines. On average, the women walk 15 minutes to fetch water and climb hills before they finally reach the stream. They regularly clear the path to the well to prevent overgrown bush, the area immediately surrounding the well, and the well itself.

The women in this community have faced a number of

challenges when it comes to water and sanitation issues. For example, the community has a public latrine designed for public use, where five people can visit or use it at the same time. The women had no privacy when visiting the latrine. During the dry season, there was not enough water for household chores.

The GWASH Project is providing one borehole, a 4-seater KVIP latrine and household latrines to the people of Mempeaseam. The people have begun using the borehole. They can use it for potable drinking water and household activities, and the project is encouraging everyone to fetch water from the borehole. They are also using the latrine, which is divided into two sides: It has two stalls on one side for men and boys, and two stalls on other side for women and girls. This side also has a changing room. So now, women and girls have more privacy. The project is also working with 20 households to build individual household latrines; this is ongoing.

On the day the project staff first met Maame Esi, Behavior Change Communications (BCC) Agent Anita Agyei was facilitating the formation of the watsan committee in the community. The committee looks after the facilities provided, and it promotes hygiene education in the community. A watsan committee is comprised of about seven members, and the project requires a minimum of 30 percent female representation. These female representatives join nominated members from other various community groups, including male leadership and opinion leaders.

**“What I have learned from this woman is that keeping the community clean is everybody’s responsibility, no matter how small your contribution will be.”**

**— David Arthur, watsan committee chairman for Mempeaseam**

In this session, the community came together and the women were to choose two of their own to represent the women folk. The community's women's leader was to be an automatic member, but the women needed to collectively nominate a second woman to serve on the watsan committee. The project had asked the women to meet in advance to select their representatives. Although they had met, the women had been afraid to mention someone, so no one was elected. When it came out that the women had met but couldn't elect anyone, the opinion leaders said they should have a separate, 15-minute meeting while the men waited for them.

Again, the women met, but they still couldn't elect anyone. Ms. Agyei described the situation: “No one wanted to voluntarily come out to nominate someone,” she said. “Everyone wanted someone to go and do it, but that person might not do the work in the end. Also, each person was afraid that if she nominated one woman, another woman would ask why she had not been nominated. So there were these two issues.”

The women asked the opinion leaders to elect any one of them to represent the women, but the opinion leaders refused. The leaders said the women should elect someone. By this time, the indecision was delaying the meeting.

A young boy by the name of Kwabena Dankwa was standing beside the BCC Agent, Ms. Agyei. He asked her, “Madam, can I elect someone to represent the women if they are refusing to choose one?”

Ms. Agyei asked the community and they said yes, he could do so. He opened his mouth and mentioned Maame Esi Duma. As Ms. Agyei recalled, everyone present for the meeting started clapping for the boy, saying that he had made a good choice for them.

“Why among all women, including your own mother, did you mention this woman’s name?” Ms. Agyei asked Kwabena.

“She does all the water and sanitation-related issues in the community,” he replied. “Especially those that are communally-owned, the latrine and hand-dug well.”

### **Community Custodian to Community Leader**

Today, Maame Esi is one of three female members on the watsan committee. According to Ms. Agyei, Maame Esi has been present in all trainings for the group. Although she is a quiet person, on her own she prompts those she finds doing unhygienic things in the community. She teaches them the right way, from the unhygienic practice to the hygienic one, Ms. Agyei said.



*Maame Esi serves leads her community by example and as a watsan committee member.*

According to Maame Esi, her major challenge now is how to gather the people for communal work. Her new approach is to inform the women’s leader (who is also a watsan committee member) of anything that requires communal labor, especially for WASH promotion in the community.

In turn, the community appreciates Maame Esi's work. Ms. Agyei recalled a community member once saying that if all women in Mempeaseam were like Maame Esi, especially on water and sanitation issues, the world would give an award to the community. Another said that when the women hear Maame Esi wants to undertake a community activity, every woman comes to support out of respect for Maame Esi.

### **A Role Model in Her Community**

When Ms. Agyei asked Maame Esi about her motivation, Maame Esi said she believes keeping her environment clean tells people who she is. She said this should relate not only to her home, but also to her community of Mempeaseam. She said she believes in being neat, that even being spiritual shouldn't just be about the clothes one wears to church, but also in the environment in which one lives.

“My biggest responsibility is to make sure that my community and our water and sanitation facilities are as clean as possible,” Maame Esi told Ms. Agyei.

“Maame Esi is a role model for most of the women folk in the community and even for the men,” David Arthur, the watsan committee chairman of Mempeaseam, told Ms. Agyei. When someone visits the water facility site and finds out that the place is dirty, the person's first concern is whether Maame Esi has travelled or is sick. “Because if she is well and in the community, she will make sure that the place is clean,” he said.

Mr. Arthur concluded by saying, “What I have learned from this woman is that keeping the community clean is everybody’s responsibility, no matter how small your contribution will be.”