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# A New Face of Leadership for the Ofankor Market Association: Supporting Water Sustainability



**GHANA WASH PROJECT**

Forty-five minutes outside of the capital city of Accra is the peri-urban community of Ofankor. It's just off the main town road, down a dirt road and indicated by a brightly painted white sign pointing to Ofankor Market. The market, which sits on eight plots of land, is a commercial home to the more than 80 traders that come every day, save Sundays, to sell their goods ranging from cassava and meats to other provisions. Their customers come from Ofankor and nearby Asofa.

Ofankor Market opened in April 2010, but lacked of water facilities available to the vendors and buyers. The Ghana Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) Project partnered with Rotary International, an international service organization, to address Ofankor Market's water access challenges.

In May 2012, GWASH and Rotary international provided the market with a borehole, an important improvement for these traders. Sited in the market's center, it provides the basic service of clean, potable water to the market and surrounding community. Now with a borehole, a critical step for the market community would be its sustainable management. The relationship with Ofankor that began with a simple borehole has evolved into a capacity building partnership to ensure the sustainability of the borehole and the Ofankor Market community.

The sustainability of this market is important to the traders so that they can generate their own incomes, Margaret says. This income is a source of empowerment, and it enables these women to contribute essential funds toward the well being of their families, especially their children. Overall, the women say that they use their incomes to pay for their children's schools fees and clothing, to pay for rent, to contribute church offerings, and food. When asked, these were the top five things the women listed as their



**This borehole at Ofankor Market makes every day life just a little easier for this and the other vendors at the market. Provided to the community May 2012, this borehole provides clean, potable water for the market vendors and their customers. It's just a few feet from this young vendor's stall, and she uses the water to wash her tomatoes, green peppers and other vegetables for sale. (Photocredit: Monica Jeannormil)**

primary financial responsibilities.

With their shared stake in the market's sustainability, Margaret and the other association members do what they can to realize necessary improvements. But "since we came to start the market," Margaret says, "community heads do not come to take part in our affairs and assist to resolve any pertinent problems." So she and the other traders took that step: "So doing it ourselves is a sure way to go."

### From Market Traders to Market Leaders

The market is designated under the Ofankor Zonal Council, the administrative sub-region of Ga West Municipality, which is part of the Greater Accra Region. Day-to-day market affairs and interpersonal relationships, however, fall under the supervision of the Ofankor Market Association, with Margaret Tagoe, the Market Queen, at its head.



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Markets like these occupy an area of economic productivity traditionally viewed as a women's domain. In addition, it was Margaret's initiative – acquiring the land and starting the market – that earned her the role of market queen and president of the association, a position she's filled since December 2011. Tagoe shares her responsibilities with the market king, Alhaji Sheu Tabiru, who is a butcher by trade. In addition, the association has six other members: Lucy Yeboah, a trader; Agyei Boate-maa and Faustina Owusuaa, cassava sellers; Abena Serwaa, who sells yams; Vivian Wiafe, who sells provisions; and Henrietta Opare, the association's assistant secretary.

Only two of the association's members are men; it is a group dominated by women, not out of the ordinary, since 85 percent of the market's traders are female. This also makes it essential for the women to address and resolve mar-

ket challenges themselves, or to work directly to do so. Because the association embarks on projects, roles and responsibilities that often fall outside of the purview of women's traditional work responsibilities, having men on board legitimizes the group, especially when it comes to dealing with those unaccustomed to working with women.

Early on, the vendors developed a market association in an attempt to develop some agency and improve their immediate community. With support from the municipal assembly, the traders held a general meeting in which they formed the association. They outlined the roles and responsibilities of key management positions and voted on officers. As an association, they can streamline the process to address issues and challenges that arise in the market; it is also a structured means to make demands upon the Ofankor Zonal Council (the local council) and the

wider Ga West Municipal Assembly.

At monthly general meetings, the members discuss and determine what needs should be brought to the attention of the municipal assembly, and vote to decide on priority items. The group stands out as an association of mostly women leaders who utilize their positions to make requests of the Zonal Council and the Municipal Assembly for needed public services, such as sanitation facilities, to keep the market clean.

Unfortunately the local administrative bodies are unable to always meet these needs – even when it comes to essentials like access to clean drinking water. Ofankor Market's borehole was not previously handled by any specific entity and with this lack of ownership, the women observed inefficiencies in collecting of water fees, which would go to fund maintenance, which was



**Abena Serwaa, one of the leaders in the market's association, is all business with her customers as she sells from her selection of yams and plaintains. (Photocredit: Monica Jeannormil)**

also inadequate. The association made a decision: In the same way they rallied together to manage their market, they would rally together once again to manage their borehole, thus ensuring its sustainability.

The opportunity to manage this borehole provides a new face of leadership for these women in the market and their community. As part of their taking effective steps to manage their water resource, these leaders have taken on the added responsibility of creating a formal water and sanitation (watsan) committee, a group of community members who voluntarily manage water and sanitation facilities and issues in their community. They understand the challenges, they say, but are eager to take on them because they observe the decreasing presence of community officials in resolving their community issues. The members say they believe that managing the borehole themselves is the sure way to go and ensure the borehole is in service for a long time.

#### Women Leaders in WASH

Forming and training a watsan committee is a key step in ensuring sustainability when siting a community borehole. Left on their own, it's possible that a community's watsan committee would not have any female members. This is a challenge that GWASH seeks to address, ensuring women's involvement through the requirement of at least 30 percent female member representation in watsan committees.

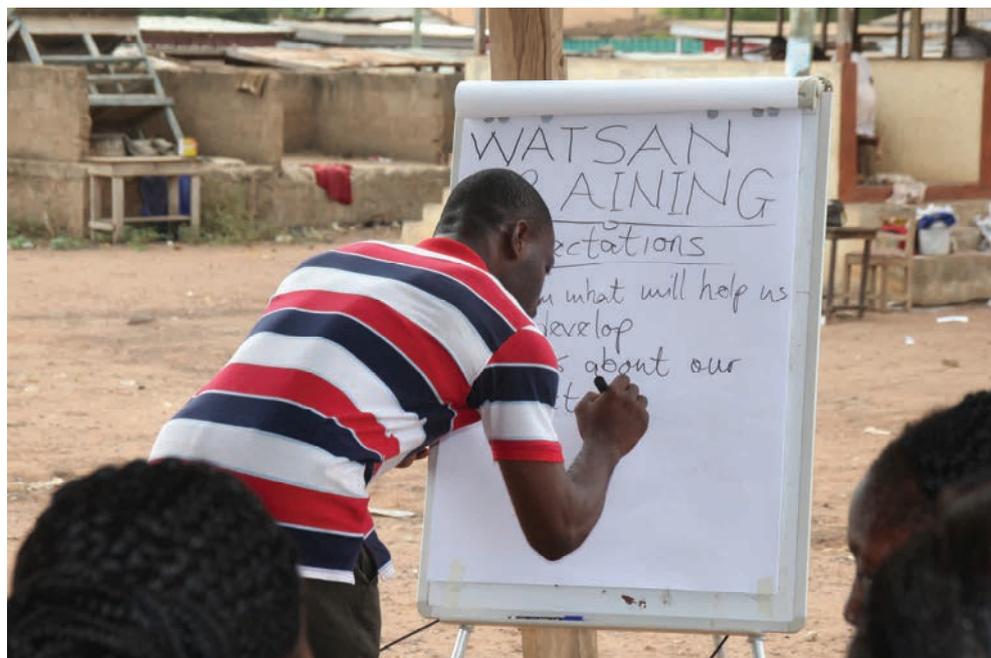
Women are traditionally responsible for the day to day operations of home which generally includes managing finances. With this knowledge, they can easily transition into effectively managing the borehole through accurate recordkeeping, water fee collection, and savings. For the Ofankor Market Association, this previous experience came in handy when it came to responsibilities for their watsan committee.

As a formal watsan committee, the executives of the Ofankor Market Association had to formalize their savings in a savings account with the bank. The funds saved here would be used to pay for future mainte-

**These leaders took on the responsibility of creating a formal water and sanitation (watsan) committee, a group of community members who voluntarily manage water and sanitation facilities and issues in their community.**

nance and repairs for the borehole. The association already had 100 Ghana cedis saved in its informal savings coffer, thanks to each member paying dues of 1 Ghana cedi (\$0.53) each month.

With the assistance of the Ga West Municipal Water and Sanitation Team (MWST), an Environmental Health Assistant helped the association with the required steps and supporting documents needed in order to set up the account. First, the group leaders had to determine three account signatories who would have access the bank account. They also had to prepare a WATSAN committee constitution, which formalizes their roles and responsibilities, and draft a letter of resolution which specifies their intention as an organization to open the bank account to open an account. On Friday, 15<sup>th</sup> February, 2013, these combined efforts culminated in the opening of their bank account at the Amasaman branch of the Ga Rural Bank, with an initial balance of 50 Ghana cedis (\$26.45) (with the remaining 50 Ghana cedis (\$26.45) to be kept on hand as petty cash).



WATSAN training with the Ofankor Market Association in session.

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**—Lawrence Ofori-Addo, Behavior Change Agent, Ghana WASH Project**

The members have also approached the Ofankor Zonal Council and local representatives of the municipal assembly in hopes of encouraging the surrounding Ofankor community to pay water fees by holding an inauguration event for the market. This would increase recognition of the association members and also communicate the need for water fees to keep the borehole operational, they say.

### Big Opportunities for Leading Women

GWASH’s Deputy Chief of Party Avril Kudzi is excited about the new lead-

ership role for these women and the initiative they have taken to address and resolve their own challenges. “I see this group [of women] as an exciting challenge and a great opportunity because culturally, women do not take leadership positions in managing a community facility,” she said. “It’s a novelty.”

Groups like these with women taking on leadership roles can break the cultural norms that circumscribe women’s potential. They can also encourage younger ladies to realize and think about their own leadership potential. It is expected that as women they will experience chal-

lenges because they are taking on leadership roles generally geared toward men; they may experience pushback from the communities with trying to collect fees, and trying to make changes. Changing perceptions and attitudes toward their roles will take time, and requires they stay focused, and on course and not be dismayed after a few attempts.

Even in her status as market queen, the reality of leading and organizing the women can be challenging, Margaret admits. While her positions as market queen and association president are regarded highly by her own family, friends and many of the market traders, some women in the market don’t recognize Tagoe’s position. “They usually don’t follow instructions,” she says of the latter. In spite of these challenges they are committed to their decision of taking on the added responsibility of managing the borehole because of its significance.

Kudzi believes that the group’s history of working well as an association and its inclusion of women are a good indicators of their ability to manage the borehole. It is typically women who sell in market and its women who go and buy from the market but entering the arena of managing a water facility is almost never done by women, she explains. The challenge for these women is overcoming the obstacle of changing others’ mindsets concerning the roles women can play in the managing of their communities; they can also apply the successes and lessons learned from managing the women’s association into their framework of managing the borehole.

“My hope is that they will function better than other watsan committees,” Kudzi says. “We can show that having women in leadership roles can result in success and prove the critics wrong.”

## Providing Continued Capacity Building Support

GWASH assists with the challenge of borehole maintenance through a structured watsan training workshop. A watsan training workshop is geared towards the sustainable operation and management of water and sanitation facilities. At the core of this exercise is the concept of community ownership and management (COM). COM is a system in the water and sanitation intervention that believes in active participation of the beneficiary community in the process. This concept ensures that the community becomes the rightful owners of the watsan facility, by becoming responsible for the facility's management, and contributing funds and savings into a formal bank account for all maintenance and repair works for the facility.

Lawrence Ofori-Addo, Behavior Change Agent for the project's activities in the Greater Accra Region, is responsible for training and supporting the Ofankor Watsan Committee. He believes it is efforts like these that can strengthen the market's overall presence and sustainability for Ofankor and its surrounding communities. "I have seen a satisfactory amount of commitment by the women towards the handling of responsibilities needed to efficiently manage the watsan committee. This commitment, coupled with the support of the district assembly and GWASH, I believe, will provide the women with a great potential for success," he says.

GWASH intends to monitor the progress of the Ofankor Market Association in the hopes of replicating the women's success. GWASH will

provide support to ensure their future success and showcase them as a model to other communities on the benefits of women taking on more responsibilities and leadership roles in their community.

The women of Ofankor Market have demonstrated their potential, and they are focused on building their market and their community. "We would like to see improved stalls, other physical structures such as lights, refuse collections and sanitation facilities," Tagoe says regarding future challenges for them to tackle. She also sees the opportunity to work more with the zonal council to help increase the legitimacy of the market. They know it's a long road but it's a road they want to take.



**Faustina, a vendor, prepares breakfast items such as fried egg sandwiches and Milo, a popular morning chocolate drink, for fellow vendors and other customers.**

**(Photocredit: Monica Jeannormil)**

The **Ghana Water, Sanitation and Hygiene Project** is a four-year USAID-funded initiative to improve rural water, sanitation, and hygiene in Ghana. GWASH is implemented by Relief International, Winrock International, and the Adventist Development Relief Agency (ADRA). Working with local actors and community members, GWASH 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 working with people in the United States and around the world to empower the disadvantaged, increase economic opportunity, and sustain natural resources.