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From Water to Electrification, WatSan Committees Promote Development



GHANA WASH PROJECT

WATSAN COMMITTEES & HOW THEY WORK

BUILDING SKILLS

Initial five-day training and later refresher trainings build capacity in these areas:

- ▲ WatSan roles and responsibilities
- ▲ Community ownership management
- ▲ Understand how the facility works
- ▲ Water, sanitation, hygiene links
- ▲ Record keeping
- ▲ Financial management
- ▲ Community reporting
- ▲ Teamwork
- ▲ Gender in water and sanitation

COMMITTEE RESPONSIBILITIES

- ▲ Conduct watsan, community meetings.
- ▲ Brief community regularly, share ideas.
- ▲ Raise and manage funds.
- ▲ Keep records, money and repairs.
- ▲ Supervise construction contractors.
- ▲ Control pump use, water distribution.
- ▲ Organize pump maintenance, repair.
- ▲ Hire outside mechanics as needed.
- ▲ Organize site cleaning, maintenance.
- ▲ Lead hygiene, sanitation education.
- ▲ Promote open defecation-free space.
- ▲ Monitor, evaluate development.

COMMITTEE MEMBER POSITIONS

- ▲ Chairperson
- ▲ Secretary
- ▲ Treasurer
- ▲ Community organizer
- ▲ Hygiene promoter
- ▲ Pump caretakers (2)



In the still-rural outlying areas of the Greater Accra Region, lower land and housing prices attract individuals and families seeking affordable accommodations. Housing and new settlements sprout up in advance of necessary services like water, sanitation and electricity, and the irregularity and even nonexistence of these basic services create health and quality of life challenges.

The Ghana WASH Project, under the district assembly's direction, targeted 15 remote communities throughout Greater Accra for water improvements in 2011. One was Kuntunse West, a young community, and another was nearby Abensu, an older community but still in need of improved service access. In collaboration with Rotary International and a local NGO partner, the project formed and trained water and sanitation (watsan) committees, then provided a borehole, improved sanitation and hygiene education.

Watsan committees form the cornerstone of facility management in a community and require active leadership and participation. The work is voluntary. Members include women, who already have a high stake in the facility's future, existing leadership, and active community members. Women manage water access at the household level, including daily fetching, transporting and storing water for household use, so institutionalizing women's participation in watsan-level management can be essential. Leaders provide authority and communal respect, and active community members have strong experience engaging with their fellow residents. The stories of these two communities demonstrates the everyday challenges residents in communities like these experience; they also show the potential for community-level management in supporting the sustainability of water resources, as well as wider community improvements.

Abensu WatSan Committee Models Financial Management
Abensu's watsan committee has seven members, including Julianne Okine, who serves as treasurer. Active leadership, community participation and time availability were key factors for membership, Julianne says. Two current members served as leaders in the previous watsan committee when Abensu shared a borehole with its neighboring community, and one member is a community opinion leader. The rest were active community members who earned their place through community nomination and vote, she says.

Abensu received a mechanized borehole, which consists of a raised water tank on top of an existing borehole, with a submersible pump linked to a groundwater source. Using electricity, water is pumped up from the water source to the plastic tank and transferred to a series of ground-level faucets from which individuals fetch their water, about 20 feet from the overhead tank. The mechanized borehole has an electricity meter attached. The mechanized borehole can provide water for the more than 1,000 community members, but requires community investment for sustainability.

Broken-down boreholes, abandoned for lack of funds for repairs, are a common challenge in the water sector. This underscores the importance of the committee's financial management role. It requires mobilizing and sustaining community contributions and accounting for, collecting and saving these funds. It requires the perspective of planning for the future preparing for repairs that aren't needed yet, so that when they are needed, the community can afford them.

In the original training for the committee, "fund mobilization was not a very new thing," says Lawrence Ofori-

In less than two years, Abensu's watsan committee has earned more than 2,000 Ghana cedis (US\$967).

"We can go beyond that," Julianne says.



Julianne Okinne, Abensu resident and watsan committee treasurer.

Addo, Behavior Change Agent with the Ghana WASH project. "Except that perhaps they had not sat down to identify all fundraising mechanisms that were available...and the fact that they get to realize that it is necessary to raise funds."

In Abensu, residents needed to raise fees for both future borehole repairs as well as electricity costs associated with the mechanization. They settled on a pay-as-you-fetch system for their facility, and they agreed to pay 20 pesewas (10 cents) for 10 liters of water, and cheaper corresponding prices for smaller amounts. "We based the prices on the private vendors who also sell water," Julianne says. "Our price is a bit lower than [private vendors], that is one thing we considered." They also collected fees through a pay-as-you-dump system at the community refuse site.

Julianne is in charge of all financial activities for the borehole. "I collect the daily sales from the borehole and make sure to keep the records of it," she says. "I release money if there's money needed for repair works, for payment of electricity bills, and I make sure the money is also deposited at the bank."

In less than two years, the watsan committee raised more than 2,000 Ghana cedis (US\$ 967) through their

fee collection systems. In month of June, the community fees totaled 253 Ghana cedis. "We can go beyond that," Julianne says.

With these funds, the community has been able to pay for necessary repairs for their borehole. They fixed the borehole pump once already and the standpipe four times (due to regular wear and tear), costing 1,300 Ghana cedis (about US\$ 628.50).

In a large notebook, Julianne details line by line each financial gain and expenditure. She collects each day's pay-as-you-fetch earnings from the pump caretaker, and records it against any allowances or expenses, along with the day's balance. At the bottom of each page, she totals the revenue for that month. She also manages the bank deposit book, with each deposit evidenced by a pink-colored carbon copy sheet.

The committee has held two community meetings to present its accounting records. The next community meeting is planned for August 2013 as part of the community's Homowo festival, an annual thanksgiving celebration.

Bringing Light to Kuntunse West Richard Agbenyo and his wife were the first to call Kuntunse West home. That was eight years ago, and he was

a firefighter with the National Fire Service. The proximity of a new home to his station in Nsawam meant a shorter commute. Land was cheap; Kuntunse West was still undeveloped land, Richard says, with fields separating his home from the Accra-Nsawam main road. His home, a two-room house, was the first. "At that time, there was nobody at the area, nobody around, there was no building around here," he says.

Homes weren't the only thing missing. "There was no water in the area," he said. He sought assistance from the municipal assembly, but to no avail. After a few years, he dug his own well. "I had to [dig for] my own water," he continued. "It hadn't gone so deep, because [we] hit stone. Though there is water inside, there was not enough for us."

The Ghana WASH Project provided a borehole for the community in 2011, and since then, Richard and the rest of the watsan community have managed its operations. The watsan committee, with Richard at its head, is active, and the committee uses a fee collection system to raise funds for future repairs.

Unlike Abensu, Kuntunse West didn't have electricity access. "Around us, there was electricity, but in our area, there was no electricity," Richard says.

"We also wanted to also have electricity." Getting electricity means connecting the community to the national electricity grid, and installing individual household connections. The process requires a formal request to the Electricity Company of Ghana (ECG), the nation's power utility, and the process can take years.

Last year, they started organizing just as they'd done to manage their water.

"We organized the people in the meeting," Richard says. Almost all of the 360-member community resident association came together and decided they wanted light. They requested that members of the watsan committee like Richard and his grandson Muhammad be involved; they even made Richard the chairman of the new "electricity committee." They joined, and immediately went to work.

"We went to the ECG project office

Kuntunse West now not only has water access but also two transformers that bring light to the community. It is an immense success demonstrating the community and the committee's commitment to improving their space.

on Nsawam to get their view on how best we can do this," Richard said. Muhammad adds that theirs was just one of more than 120 communities at the time that was appealing to ECG to be added to the electricity grid, but they still submitted the community's application. They had to collect contributions to pay for the fuel to transport the ECG officials and engineers back and forth between their offices and the community, and to set up the electricity infrastructure, Muhammad explains.

"It's a very long process," Richard says. There were fits and starts. The

ECG officials and engineers first came out to map and chart out the whole community. Then there was a delay. On one occasion, the community was enticed by "private workers," Muhammad says, who offered to shortcut the lengthy formal process.

"Some people came in, some private workers, and said 'Oh, give us this job, we'll do it in three months' time,'" Muhammad recounts. The private workers asked for 300 Ghana cedis (US\$ 145). The community paid, but after a few days of work the engineers disappeared. "We paid them, they brought two poles, then they



Kuntunse West's watsan committee members, including Richard (white), his grandson Muhammad (in brown, second from left), are excited to talk about their work supporting water and power improvements for their community.

took the money, they ran away," Muhammad said.

It was in October 2012 that their contributions and perseverance began to yield results. That month, ECG sent officials to site a dozen electricity poles. In early 2013, ECG installed two 100-watt electricity transformers, linking the community to the electricity grid.

In order for individual households to have electricity, each has to purchase a prepaid meter. At a minimum, "it's 300 Ghana cedis [for ECG to install one household meter]," Richard says. For unplanned houses that aren't listed on ECG's site plan of the community, the cost is even higher.

Kuntunse West now not only has water access but also two transformers that bring light to the community. It is an immense success demonstrating the community and the committee's commitment to improving their space. They have the electrical poles in place throughout that suspend the electrical wires overhead, and a growing number of individual households are investing in the pre-paid meters.

"If you don't have the courage, you can't do it," Richard says. In fact, out of the 350 households, only 15 so far have been able to pay to have their house directly connected to the community's transformer. Richard's prepaid meter, which he uses to check his family's usage and can top up by making payments using his card, is set up at the back of his house. More and more residents are seeing the results and working to invest in bringing light to their part of the community.

Not every watsan committee formed and trained is able to sustain results like these, and that's part of a wider lesson for Richard and his fellow committee members. We learned that we have to work together, Richard says. "By a love for all mankind ... [the project is] giving us water – free," he says, spreading his arms to emphasize the enormity of the contribution for the community. "We should also extend that sort of love to our fellow human beings who are around us, you see...we always come together as one family."

