

Water Aid Partnership Experiences:

TRACKING THE MILESTONES



Introduction:

Partnerships have been the mainstay of the operations of the Water Aid Ghana (WAG) since the 1980s. For WAG the term “partnership” refers to many different constructs used primarily to denote “generate and distribute funds; implement projects, build capacity, derive knowledge and advocate positions”. Uniquely a facilitating organization, WAG does not run its programmes directly but rather supports schemes initiated by local NGOs and civil society organizations. It builds partnerships with these local organizations, empowering them to support communities to provide, use and maintain water and sanitation facilities.

WAG has been in partnership with 8 local NGOs (Rural Aid, New Energy, APDO, Pronet-North, Pronet Accra, BACH, ORAP and ACDEP, for the past 15 years. This has many advantages - the flexibility to expand projects in response to emerging and existing issues from an ongoing programmes and the opportunity to share experiences and synergize activities that lead to collective achievement of objectives. Despite significant successes, there are doubts about the effectiveness of and an added value the partnership brings to the work of WAG. It was therefore important for Water Aid Ghana to document its successes and failures, with the view to improve and build sustainable, effective and efficient partnerships in the future.

Background:

The study was commissioned by the Water Aid Ghana to examine and document experiences of its partnerships with three distinct groups- eight local NGOs, the Coalition of Water and Sanitation Bodies and the Association of Water and Sanitation Bodies. The overall objective of the study therefore was to assess in detail the performance of the WAG partnerships with the above groups and providing policy recommendations towards improving the partnerships.

The study was done in accordance with the Partnership Project Appraisal (PPAS) and at the Local Government and at institutional levels.

Methodology:

Indepth interviews were conducted with the management of the 8 local NGOs, the key staff (Coordinating Directors, Planning Officers, Budget Officers, Assistant Coordinating Directors) and the District Water and Sanitation Teams of the Tamale Metropolitan and District Assemblies of Bolgatanga, Afram Plains, Bongo and Gushiegu. Representatives of the Association of Water and Sanitation Development Board, the coalition of NGOs in Water and Sanitation as well as management of two non-partner organizations, Amasachina and CALID were also interviewed. Field visits helped to ascertain partners' achievements, processes used and their institutional capacity.

Key Findings:

Partnership and Value Addition

Water Aid Ghana was seen by local partner organizations as a major partner that represents and negotiate on their behalf at both national and international levels. The partnership, fed on consistent dialogue and active participation by local organizations has grown strong. It is unique in many ways. It provides enough time for local organiza-

tions to conceptualize, forecast, follow up on and evaluate time tested strategies. An added advantage of long term internal and external economies of scale enables local organizations to build strong goodwill in their constituencies as it fosters deep rooted trust among partners and prospective donors.

Partners cited the nurturing of a gradual yet healthy transition from almost a "dictatorial" era to a relatively "democratic" era where partners freely and actively take part in most decision making processes of WAG, as an added value. For example, the Partner Round Table that brings partners together to discuss and strategize on issues affecting the poor was highly recognized.

The Mole Series, that created the Coalition of NGOs in Water and Sanitation (CONIWAS), has gradually built a cordial and respected environment for critical decision- making in the area of water and sanitation. The recognition of hand-dug wells as portable water source; NGOs participation in the development of the National Community Water and Sanitation Programme; the formation of the Community Water and Sanitation Department now the Community Water and Sanitation Agency, and the 5% community contributions to water and sanitation services are some of the critical outcomes of the Mole Series. The Mole Series was described as sustainable platform for building a collective voice and a stronger policy level consultations and advocacy.

Partnership Achievements

All local organization described the partnerships as effective and impactful. This is reflected in the considerable expansion in their programmes with significant coverage and the ability to influence policy transformation in favour of poor communities. Their institutional capacity has grown impacting favourably on the quantum and quality of service delivery. In addition, the partnership has promoted a free flow of information and efficiency in the operations of the local organizations.

Dynamism of the Partnership

The dynamics of the partnership was described as a movement from "birth through infancy and adulthood", a journey which saw WAG initially as the

controller of everything, driven more by its own interests, to gradually granting autonomy to its partners to operate. It now works in full participatory relationships with its partners.

Focus of WAG's support has also changed from the provision of facilities to community hygiene education, challenging local organizations to facilitate the formation of community structures to manage such facilities. Factors influencing change were seen to include changes in WAG's organizational strategic aims (for example focus on MDGs instead of water and sanitation alone), the operational principles of the organization, proactiveness of local partners and political influences at the regional level. Such dynamics has benefitted local partners- improved administrative efficiency and capacity building in the areas of fund raising, proposal writing, monitoring and evaluation, organizational development, management and networking.

Community Level Leverage

Communities have been involved in the planning and implementation of projects as key individuals/groups/communities have been empowered to meet some of their developmental aspirations through advocacy and lobbying. The effective functioning of local institutions like WATSAN committees and Zonal Based Facilitators, serving as important human resource capacity for beneficiary communities, are outcomes of the community empowerment processes. Collectively, these have contributed significantly to the reduction in water and sanitation problems confronting rural communities. However, communities still lack the ability to engage duty bearers (DAs, CHRAJ, NHIS) when it comes to rights-based issues. Some unintended benefits were also realized:

- Creation of local jobs and strengthening of local artisans' skills
- A louder collective voice of NGOs through CONIWAS
- Improvement in the educational status of beneficiary communities, particularly that of the girl-child

Sustainability

Critical indicators for sustainability of partners' activities were also identified.

- Capacity for internal mobilization of funds through proposal writing and provision of consultancy services.
- Improved skills at partner level in key areas such as project planning and management.
- Improved community voice, commitment to and increased sense of ownership among communities for water and sanitation issues
- Availability of local structures or institutions such as DWSTs and WATSAN Committees that can be used by District Assemblies for rural development.
- Availability of trained community-based artisans to facilitate progressive facility construction and maintenance.

Collaboration and District Assemblies

WAG's collaboration with Districts to strengthen and complement their capacity for rural development, has been recent. In many situations Assemblies brought a lot of strength to such collaborations-functioning structures, technical skills, rich experiences in managing donor funds but they indirectly benefitted from WAG's partnerships with the eight local NGOs. Increased staff capacity to effectively manage water and sanitation infrastructure, increased provision of varied water sources and sanitation services, the platform to engage the private sector and increased job opportunities for the unemployed, coupled with the opportunity to build transparent and accountable relationships, are some of the benefits.

Key challenges cited by the Assemblies include, inadequate involvement of key DA professionals, rigidity in keeping to the spirit of contracts, the inability to raise required counterpart funds and political interference.

Experiences of Other Organizations

WAG was found to be using the right approach by CALID and Amasachina. Its institutional focus to engage and support local structures to increase community ownership; strengthening the capacity for effective problem definition, planning for water

and sanitation service delivery, was recognized. The assumption here is that empowered individuals, communities and local partners can effectively engage duty bearers, demand for and contribute to community development issues including water and sanitation. WAG's approach, building partnerships as against using contract and consultancy, was seen to provide opportunity for adjustments, builds longer lifespan relationships, enhances more partner credibility and allows partners to build on their contractual experiences.

Conclusions/ Key Recommendations and Next steps:

The partnership that was born in 1985 has become of age with lots of benefits to WAG local partners and recently to some selected District Assemblies. Characterized by healthy dialogue, active partner participation, dynamism, flexibility and responsiveness, the partnership has brought about a new dimension to the organizational management of partners, facilitating, among other things, strong internal control systems and improved funds mobilization. Beneficiary communities have gained improved access to water and sanitation facilities, strengthened capacity and enhance opportunity to network with other development stakeholders. The most significant change in the partnership was seen to be the change in the funding policy of WAG.

Despite the challenges WAG is viewed by local partners as a major partner whose withdrawal from the partnership can lead to reduction in the scale of their operations and, even downsizing.

These key recommendations were made:

- Work closely with District Assemblies to facilitate effective utilization and allocation of resources particularly to needy communities
- Influence a change of existing 5% upfront cash community contribution to other forms of contribution- labour, time, materials.
- Future partnerships/collaboration with District Assemblies should involve and utilize key professionals of the Assemblies, also taking into consideration the likely impact of political interference.
- Achieve clarity and better understanding of roles and responsibilities based on relative capacity of WAG and Assemblies right at the beginning of MOUs.
- Strengthen existing partnership through increased staff capacity development funding and external fund raising.
- Sustain partner interaction platforms that create opportunities for best practices sharing, design and influence major water and sanitation issues affecting community development

It is now up to WAG, its partner organizations and the District Assemblies to collectively take forward the above recommendations in the interest of the thousands of communities whose water and sanitation needs are still critical.



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WaterAid transforms lives by improving access to safe water, hygiene and sanitation in the world's poorest communities. We work with partners and influence decision makers to maximise our impact

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