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Environmental sanitation assessment aids town environmental sanitation planning

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ACCESS TO SANITATION AND SAFE WATER: GLOBAL PARTNERSHIPS AND LOCAL ACTIONS

Environmental sanitation assessment aids town environmental sanitation planning

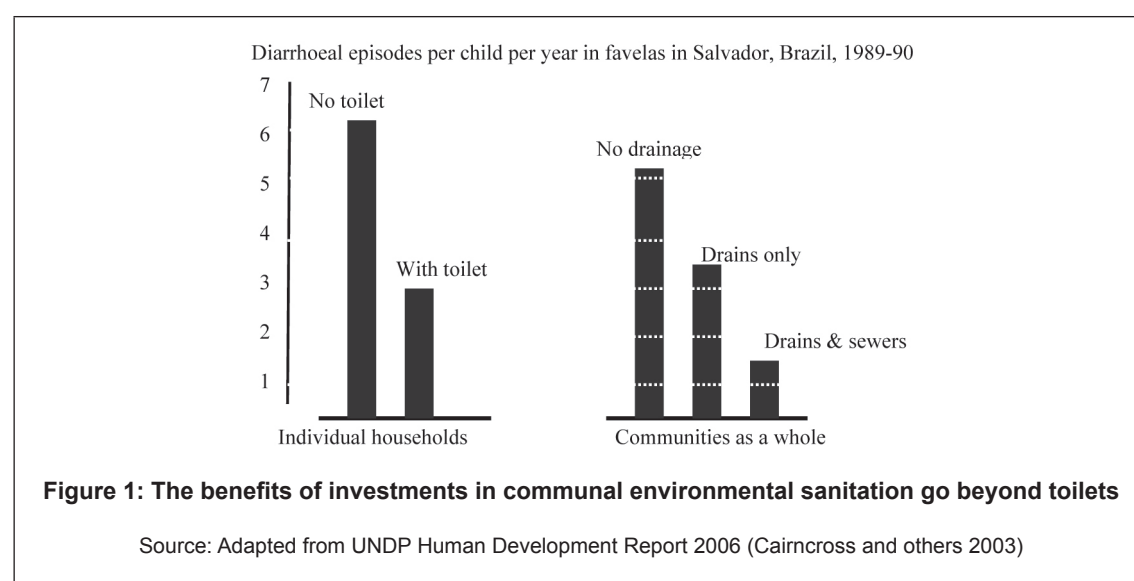
L. Y. Salifu, K. M. Afful & E. Darko-Mensah, Ghana

This paper presents, mainly the processes followed and a number of key outputs achieved after carrying out environmental assessment and audits in a number of towns in the Greater Accra and Central regions of Ghana. While there are efforts to address environmental sanitation problems in a number of towns, the absence of town environmental sanitation plans to address all the core components of environmental sanitation in a strategic manner undermines these efforts. The processes if followed show how town environmental sanitation planning is enhanced and how resulting plans cover the main deficits in environmental sanitation services in small, medium and large towns of Ghana.

Background

Environmental sanitation assessments and audits in selected towns was sponsored by the Community Water and Sanitation Agency (CWSA) as part of the District Based Water and Sanitation component under the second phase of the Government of Ghana/Danida-supported Water and Sanitation Sector Programme Support (WSSPS II).

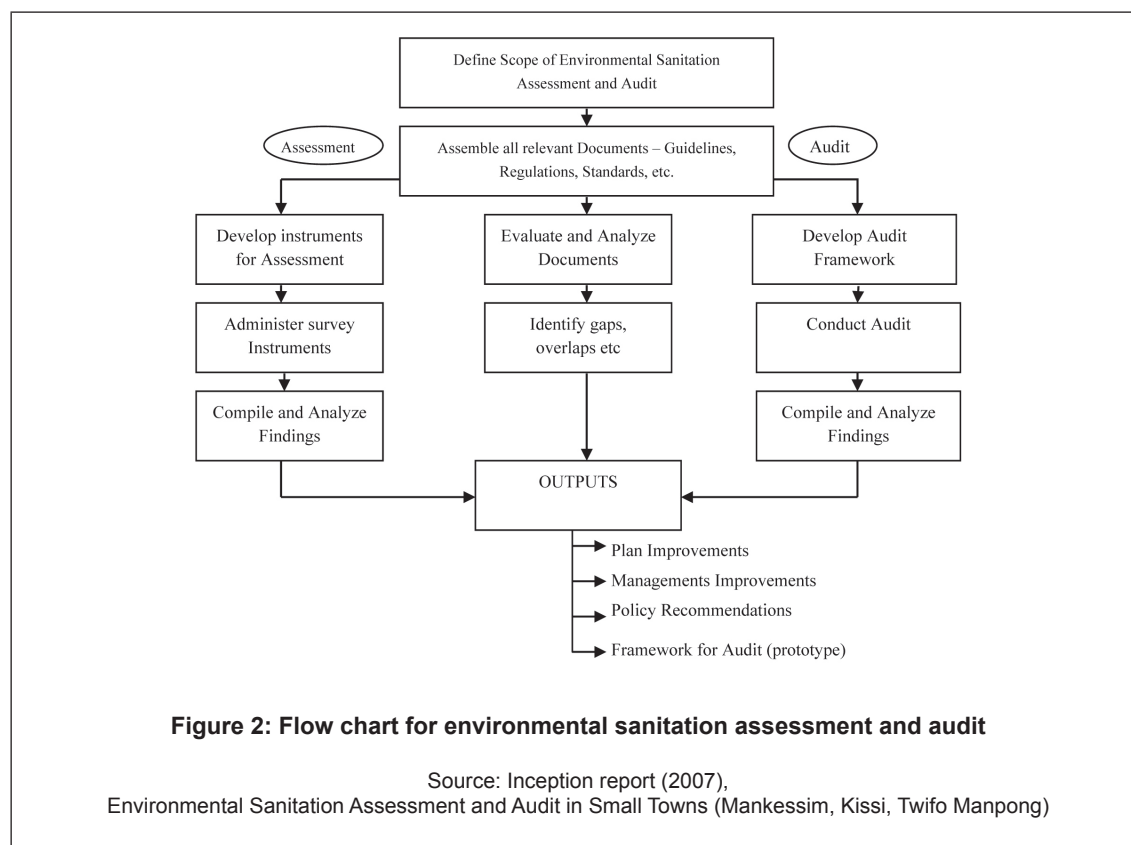
This paper presents the processes followed for field assessments and community environmental profiling that covered seven towns in six districts of two regions (Greater Accra and Central) in Ghana. The resulting Town Environmental Sanitation Plans covered all the main components of environmental sanitation including solid waste, drainage and sullage conveyance, human excreta management, wetlands and institutional management and financing arrangements. The focus on all the components of environmental sanitation is supported by the need to do more than focusing narrowly on promoting hygiene and improved latrines alone as evidence show that community-level interventions in environmental sanitation significantly reduces common diseases such as diarrhoea (see Figure 1).



Environmental sanitation assessment and audit process

A basic challenge in carrying out the assignment is developing a framework that will meet the objectives of the assignment in the absence of defined procedures for carrying out environmental sanitation assessment and audit. The process adopted is shown in Figure 2. The three-part approach followed is:

- assembling and reviewing of all relevant documents;
- defining the assessment and audit process; and
- carrying out field assessments and audits and developing accompanying Town Environmental Sanitation Development Plans.



Assembling and reviewing of relevant documents

A review of various documents including sector policies, manuals and guidelines was carried out. The review and analysis of procedures for carrying out closely related assignments such as environmental impact assessments and environmental profiling informed the development of the assessment and audit tools as well as related procedures.

The assessment process

This involved situational assessment of each town comprising field observations and surveys. Household and community interviews were carried out through appropriately structured questionnaires. Results were validated through community focus group discussions involving chiefs, opinion leaders and elders.

The audit process

This was conducted along with the situational assessments to find out the extent to which laid down policies and regulations, guidelines and/or procedures are followed and adhered to by respective District Assemblies (local governments).

The definition for Environmental Sanitation Audit adopted for this process is: *environmental sanitation audit is a systematic, documented, periodic and objective process in assessing activities and services in relation to:*

- Assessing compliance with relevant statutory and sector policy requirements;
- Facilitating management control of environmental sanitation practices;

- • Promoting good environmental management;
- • Raising awareness and enforcing commitment to environmental sanitation policy; and
- • Exploring opportunities for improvement.

Methodology and tools

The processes and instruments adopted for the field assessments were highly participatory, in conformity with Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) principles. Three instruments were applied:

- • A structured household questionnaire for gathering data on environmental sanitation facilities and services;
- • Focus group discussions and key person interviews; and
- • Environmental Profiling form.

Preparation and scoping

Discussions were held with district officials, traditional authorities and opinion leaders on the assignment and process to be followed, and their contributions taken into consideration prior to commencement. District Planning Officers, District Water and Sanitation Teams (DWSTs), Regional and District Environmental Health officers were involved in the planning and identification of relevant issues in each town, including mapping of towns and drawing up of enumeration areas.

Field study

In order to get a general overview of environmental sanitation facilities in the towns, each town was segmented into sampling areas based on housing density and characteristics.

The survey was designed for gathering information from households on:

- • Watershed management-including wetlands, surface water embankments, etc.; Water supply – types of systems, access, quality, quantity etc.; Wastewater disposal – practices, effluents, ponding etc.; Liquid (faecal) waste management – types of facilities, location, access levels, final disposal and management; Solid waste management – households, communal facilities, medical/health wastes, industrial wastes, communal container sites, management, etc.; Storm water drainage – types of drains, adequacy, capacity, flooding, etc.; Health and Hygiene practices – hand washing, cleanliness; Bye Laws – availability, compliance, enforcement, etc.; and other significant features of interest – irrigation activities, commercial farming, community mobilisation, public spaces, green areas, markets, lorry parks etc.

Data collected were analysed to determine the state of environmental sanitation in each town and provided a basis for profiling.

Focus group discussions and key persons interviews

Focus group discussions were conducted with men, women, elders and key local leaders in each of the towns to validate findings of the field study. The endorsement and validation from “town hall” and “palace” meetings resulted in communities selecting priority areas of interventions and thus contributed to defining the key elements of the Town Environmental Sanitation Plans.

Stakeholders workshop

After preparation of draft reports a stakeholders workshop was held involving representatives from Community Water and Sanitation Agency, official of the various district assemblies, Environmental Health Officers, traditional and opinion leaders and all other relevant stakeholders.

Main outputs

The reports produced from the assignment include:

- *Environmental sanitation assessment and audit report*; covering the processes followed, findings of the assessment and audit and town environmental sanitation profiles;
- *Town Environmental Sanitation Development Plans*; this is a strategic short to medium term plan which proposes interventions for the various components of environmental sanitation as described above. The plans also propose institutional and management support for its implementation; and
- *Summary of sub-projects and financing package*; this provides specific interventions (sub-projects) for components of environmental sanitation allotted to the key institutions according to their mandates

(e.g. institutional latrines carried out by CWSA and Drainage by District Assemblies with support from Hydrological Services Department) and the sources of financing for the interventions.

Conclusion

On the assessment and audit process

The assessment and audit process resulted in a number of important conclusions:

- The process of developing Town Environmental Sanitation Development Plans can be enhanced more if town layouts are available for easy demarcation of sampling areas, particularly into statutory areas such as area and town councils as this would have facilitated designing the plans to lower administrative tiers and deepen decentralised planning of environmental sanitation services.
- The exercise also brought to the fore the absence of relevant statutory and sector standards against which the level of environmental sanitation services can be assessed and audited.
- The process followed presents a unique means of participatory “bottom-up” approach in developing Town Environmental Sanitation Development Plans.

On institutional arrangements

The issue of effective collaboration among central-level agencies is key to facilitating environmental sanitation interventions in districts without in-house capacity.

There is potential for collaboration among agencies from different ministries with different mandates. The assessments and audits were commissioned by the Community Water and Sanitation Agency (CWSA) whose sanitation mandate is limited to promoting hygiene and “hygienic disposal of human excreta” The Town Environmental Sanitation Development Plans cover all key components of environmental sanitation and depend largely on coordinated collaboration for implementation.

The institutional audit brought to fore the gap between the Environmental Sanitation Policy which proposes the establishment of Environmental Health and Management Departments in District Assemblies and the Local Government Act, 1993 (Act 462), as amended by the Local Government Service Act, 2003 (Act 656) which does not provide a department for environmental health.

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Keywords

environmental sanitation assessment, institutional audit, town environmental sanitation plans, sub-projects.

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