

UNRESOLVED CHALLENGES WITH LOW-INCOME URBAN SANITATION DELIVERY IN GHANA: EXPERIENCES FROM THE GAMA SANITATION AND WATER PROJECT

GAMA SWP
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GAMA SANITATION AND WATER PROJECT



INTRODUCTION

The Greater Accra Metropolitan Area Sanitation and Water Project (GAMA SWP) is a World Bank funded project by the Ministry of Sanitation and Water Resources (MSWR). The project, which started in 2015 and has since 2021 been scaled up to the Greater Kumasi Metropolitan Area (GKMA), has largely been adjudged as very effective, especially due to its ability to meet all and exceed most of its intended targets in GAMA as at the end of 2020. The overall project development objective is to increase access to improved sanitation and improved water supply, as well as strengthen the management of environmental sanitation in the GAMA and the GKMA, with

emphasis on low-income urban communities.

As against a target of 19,000 household toilets by the end of 2020, the project achieved more than 28,000 with the same resources within the same implementation period. However, the project has experienced a number of unresolved challenges with the promotion of sanitation in low-income urban communities (LIUCs), but for which reason the results could have been even more phenomenal. This brief summarizes a few of the observed unresolved challenges with the aim of provoking increased stakeholder analyses of the situation and stimulating innovative ideas to address the challenges.

UNRESOLVED CHALLENGE #1: LIMITED TOILET OPTIONS



The bio-digester toilet is fast gaining popularity as one of the most effective systems in LIUCs

As public investment in off-site toilet systems is virtually negligible in Ghana, available toilet options do not adequately address the needs of low-income urban communities. Therefore, there is widespread resort to on-site toilet systems throughout the country. Three major constraints have been observed in LIUCs in GAMA and GKMA with regards to reliance on on-site toilet systems:

Space constraints

Most of the houses within the LIUCs in GAMA and GKMA have space constraints within and around the houses and this sometimes makes it impossible to site the toilet, no matter which technology, within or around the house. In the end, the inhabitants may be willing but there is simply no space to site the toilet and they may have to be left behind without being served. Due to the same space constraint, it is not

always possible to target individual households to provide them with toilets. The architecture and space will not permit that, so it means targeting multiple households in a compound house for shared toilet facilities, which are also not considered by the United Nations among the safely managed or improved toilet facilities, thereby always keeping Ghana's statistics on sanitation comparatively lower than many other countries.

Dense population in dwelling places

Most dwelling places in LIUCs have large populations that require toilet technologies that can accommodate several people. Meanwhile space is also a constraint to accommodate such technologies, which require more space. Though the bio-digester requires smaller space, there is usually the need for multiple units in the same compound to serve the

entire household population in the dwelling place and space once again becomes a constraint.

Access for emptying

Closely related to space constraint is access to individual houses for both construction and for emptying of sludge. Houses are usually so close to each other

that no form of three or four-wheeled vehicle can access certain houses to facilitate construction or emptying services. This has compelled the GAMA SWP to rely mainly on the bio-digester technology due to its small size, but which may also not always be compatible with the nature of the soil.

UNRESOLVED CHALLENGE #2: UNFAVORABLE TERRAIN



A flooded urban community (file photo)

Terrain conditions have direct impact on the choice of appropriate toilet technologies for communities and localities. Experiences gained through implementation of the GAMA SWP is that terrain conditions are a major determinant of a successful sanitation promotion programme in LIUCs. Observed adverse terrain conditions include regular flooding. Many LIUCs are located around or within waterlogged areas and/or lack reliable drainage facilities leading to frequent

flooding. There is also the issue with rocky soil conditions. These terrain issues make management of effluent from water-based toilet systems difficult and discourage installation of most of the available on-site toilet facilities. Ideally, such communities should be connected to a sewer system to provide off-site solutions. However, investment in sewers in LIUCs in Ghana is negligible.

UNRESOLVED CHALLENGE

#3: FINANCING

The cost of constructing a toilet in urban communities in Ghana is high. Unlike in rural communities where very basic latrine structures may be acceptable, a toilet in an urban community must meet certain minimum standards. This means that there must certainly be the need to use standard construction materials like cement, roofing sheets, wood, and plumbing materials. As there are currently no controls in prices of these materials in favour of household toilets in the country, the cost to an average low-income urban dweller is too high. Again, the average low-income household size is bigger than the national average of

five, meaning that many of them would need bigger toilet systems at a higher cost. Financial institutions have so far not demonstrated much interest in providing loans for low-income urban household toilets. It is even not clear how many low-income urban dwellers would also be interested in loans for a toilet. There are still sector debates on whether there should be subsidies for low-income urban household toilet promotion or not because subsidies may not be a sustainable approach. Yet, how many low-income urban dwellers would install a standard toilet at full market price? Simply put, finding the most suitable financing models for low-income urban household toilet promotion remains an unresolved challenge.

CONCLUSION

There is need to consider and address all issues impacting on the adoption of toilets in low-income urban communities. Till now, these challenges outlined above have no solutions in sight. Any household toilet related project targeting low-income urban communities in Ghana should be ready to find a workable strategy within the given context before it can make a meaningful impact.

“For every complex problem, there is a solution that is simple, neat and wrong.”

(H. L. Mencken)



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