

# EFFECTIVE OPERATION AND MAINTENANCE OF SCHOOL TOILET FACILITIES

GAMA SWP  
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## CASE STUDIES FROM SELECTED BEST PERFORMING SCHOOLS WITHIN THE GREATER ACCRA METROPOLITAN AREA IN THE FACE OF CONFUSION OVER SOURCE OF FUNDING.



### INTRODUCTION

This field note, developed through case studies conducted in August and September 2023, describes how some public basic schools that have benefited from institutional toilets from the Greater Accra Metropolitan Area Sanitation and Water Project (GAMA SWP) have been successfully operating and managing their facilities. This breakthrough is against the backdrop of seeming national confusion over who should manage these facilities and how they should be managed to achieve maximum benefits from them.

## BACKGROUND

About 25% of public basic schools in Ghana do not have any toilet facility at all as at 2020 (GES/EMIS 2020). For the schools that have, it is not clear how many of them are effectively managed and therefore safe for the school children, teachers, and other workers to use. Poor operation and maintenance of these facilities usually lead to the facilities being abandoned and the resultant resort to open defecation by school children.



*A typical well-maintained interior of a school toilet facility*

## OBSERVED CHALLENGES

The following challenges have been observed through the implementation of Component 1B of the GAMA Sanitation and Water Project:

1. Government allocation to the operation and maintenance of school sanitation facilities through the Capitation Grant (approximately one cedi per pupil per year as at 2024) is inadequate.
2. School authorities are forbidden by the government to levy parents for operation and maintenance of sanitation facilities, while at the same time, they are unable to raise the needed finances to effectively operate and maintain their toilet facilities.
3. Some Municipal Assemblies are unable to respond quickly to issues with maintenance of school toilet facilities and do not support with supply of consumables.
4. Public basic schools do not have janitors to maintain cleanliness on the school toilets, leaving the work in the hands of inexperienced children and sometimes exposing them to infections, while the facility itself deteriorates.
5. Some school authorities have challenges with community members wanting to forcibly use the school toilet and, in the process, vandalizing the facilities.
6. In extreme cases, school heads are compelled to lock up their toilet facilities, compelling pupils to either resort to open defecation where possible, or to skip lessons in search for toilets elsewhere during school hours.

## KEY OBSERVATIONS

The following observations were made during a case study on three beneficiary high-performing and one averagely performing public schools in Greater Accra. They are Gbawe Gonse Basic 1 in the Weija Gbawe Municipal Assembly, Opah MA Basic 2 in the Ga West Municipal Assembly, Ofankor MA Basic 3 in the Ga North Municipal Assembly, and Ashaiman No 4 Basic School in the Ashaiman Municipal Assembly.

### Facility management structures

Each of the four study schools had a Facility Management Committee comprising mostly the head of the school, a representative of the pupils, a teacher's representative, and a parent representative. This committee is usually tasked with the responsibility of always thinking about how the facility is managed and operated sustainably. They come up with most of the ideas needed to better operate and maintain the facility.



**Main components of sustainable operation and maintenance**

### Fund mobilization strategies

The schools adopted similar fundraising strategies through calling upon parents, through the respective Parents Associations, to make voluntary financial contributions to support the operation and maintenance. Even though there was a government directive not to levy parents, they had all managed to get parents to make voluntary contributions through which the toilet facilities were being operated and maintained. It was learned, however, that not all parents made the contribution since they knew that their wards could not be penalized for defaulting.

#### **COST OF USING SCHOOL TOILET INDUCES EARLY SCHOOL ATTENDANCE AT OFANKOR**

It was learnt that since public toilets at Ofankor were charging one Cedi 50 pesewas per use, the 20 pesewas that the Ofankor MA Basic 3 was charging was enough incentive for the children to come to school early so that they could make a lot of savings by avoiding the public toilet. Some pupils were seen coming to school as early as 5:30am.

For the sake of transparency, parents were directly involved in collecting the contributions and accounting for the amount raised. In Gbawe Gonse MA Basic 1 for instance, a teacher, who also doubles as the Secretary to the Parents Association, collects the contributions on daily basis and accounts to the headmaster, who also deposits it in a designated PA bank account. Withdrawal can only be made by designated signatories including a parent. While Gbawe Gonse MA Basic 1 parents contributed 12 cedis per term, Opah MA 2 parents contributed ten cedis per term and both schools accepted instalment payments. At Ofankor MA Basic 3, each pupil paid 20 pesewas per day, amounting to one cedi per week and about 12 cedis per term.

### Communicating with parents

Parents are not obliged to make any financial contributions to maintain public school facilities. To be able to convince them to contribute towards maintaining the new toilet facilities, these schools adopted effective communication strategies including meetings to explain the intended benefits of the toilet to parents, the challenges with raising funds to operate and maintain the facilities, implications of the toilets not being properly maintained, and government's inability to fully finance the operation and maintenance. They never merely send letters to parents!

#### THE SEEING-IS-BELIEVING COMMUNICATION APPROACH AT OPAH

At Opah MA 2 for instance, parents were invited to inspect the new modern toilets, how clean they looked, and why the facilities had to be properly maintained at all cost. Upon seeing for themselves that kind of ultra-modern toilets that the GAMA SWP had provided for their wards to use, and what their monies would be used for, the majority of them were adequately convinced to make contributions to support its maintenance.

### Managing a cluster situation

Ofankor MA 3 faced a peculiar challenge of having to share their facility with three other schools in the cluster. It was difficult to deny pupils from the other schools, access to the facility. At the same time, it was difficult to put the operation and maintenance burden on the MA 3 parents alone. The headmistress therefore mobilized all the other heads to agree on a common cost-sharing approach. A proposal was therefore collectively made to parents of all the schools, who agreed and determined the 20 pesewas per pupil per day. Through this common agreement, MA 3 was able to raise enough funds to operate and maintain the facility effectively.

## A district-wide approach at Weija Gbawe

A district-wide approach to involving parents in operating and maintaining the toilet facilities became very effective within the Weija Gbawe Municipal Assembly. The Municipal Chief Executive and his officials met with all heads of public basic schools to discuss how best to operate and maintain their toilet facilities. They collectively agreed to meet with representatives of all the Parent Associations in the Municipality. After an agreement was reached with the parents and a common amount per term per pupil was set, the MCE requested for a written official agreement from the parents addressed to the Municipal Education Oversight Committee (MEOC). When this was done, parents' contributions became official, exonerating the heads of schools from any accusations of collecting from parents in defiance of a government directive. By this arrangement too, every public school in the Municipality, irrespective of who provided their toilet facilities, was able to raise funds to operate and maintain their facilities. Gbawe Gonse MA Basic 1 was a beneficiary of this innovative approach, hence their ability to operate and maintain their facility effectively. It must be noted, however, that in spite of the districtwide agreement, parents are still not obliged to make contributions.

## Managing cleanliness at all times

Nobody wants to use an unclean and unhygienic toilet. In fact, this is the major first reason for people, including school children, to avoid the toilet and resort to open defecation. Maintaining cleanliness on the toilet is, however, the most expensive adventure, presenting challenges to school authorities on a daily basis. In three of the study schools, it was observed that full-time janitors had been employed to clean the toilets at all times before and during school hours. They also assisted children, especially the toddlers, to use the toilets appropriately. They were also tasked to make timely reports about shortage of detergents, toilet rolls, water, and damages to any part of the facility. Since they are not employees of the Ghana Education Service, their allowances were drawn from the PA voluntary contributions.



**A full-time Janitor at a school toilet**

### Managing regular supplies of consumables

In all the schools, funds were drawn from the PA contributions to procure toilet rolls, soaps, and all other detergents. At Opah MA Basic 2 and Ofankor MA Basic 3, however, the Facility Management Committee, with support from the Technical Skills teachers, had trained some of the pupils to manufacture their own detergents in order to minimize the cost. At Ofankor MA Basic 3, the school authorities had also occasionally sought support from some corporate entities within the municipality for the supply of some of the consumables.



*Liquid soap produced by school children at Ofankor MA Basic 3*

### Fixing minor breakdowns

None of the schools had experienced any major breakdown. However, there had been minor issues like leaky pipes and toilet seats. These minor issues had been fixed either by some of the teachers or by inviting a neighbourhood artisan and paying them through the PA contributions.

### Protecting the facilities

To ward off the public from accessing the facilities and potentially vandalizing them, Opah MA Basic 2 and Ofankor MA Basic 3 had been compelled to hire night security officers. This is because those communities do not have adequate number of communal/public toilets and the few toilets around were also expensive, for which reason they would want to use the school toilet. The security officers are also paid from the PA contributions.

## The special Case of Ashaiman No. 4 Basic School



### ***A typically poorly managed toilet facility***

The Ashaiman No. 4 Basic School is also a beneficiary of a GAMA SWP toilet facility provided in 2018. The school also initially resorted to support from the PA to operate and maintain the facility. Although the approach was initially working, with time, PA contributions started reducing, making it difficult to effectively manage the facility. The school could therefore not employ janitors and security personnel. They had to rely on the pupils to clean the facility with the belief that it would also contribute to effective training of the child for similar household chores. Pupils also had to bring toilet rolls and soap to school at the beginning of every term. It was observed that even though the facilities were very clean, there were some minor damages to some of the cisterns and handwashing facilities which had not been fixed. Some children were also using hard paper instead of toilet rolls for anal cleansing. There was also a major damage to the water reservoir which had not been fixed; it had been punctured through community vandalism to siphon water at night. Due to the damage to the water tank, the children were compelled to fetch water with cans to flush the toilet after each use.

### **Lessons learnt**

Five major lessons were learnt from the study:

1. Effective and evidence-based communication with parents is key to obtaining their commitment

to make financial contributions to manage school WASH facilities.

2. The quality of leadership by the head of the school is essential in getting the support of parents and in managing the WASH facilities sustainably.
3. Appealing to the corporate world within the respective communities and municipalities is another window to explore for more financial and material support for the sustainability of school WASH facilities.
4. Where there is weak security, community members may vandalize school WASH facilities; adequate fencing and re-enforced access points, in addition to employment of security personnel is therefore necessary.

## Conclusion and recommendations

Even though the approach was working, reliance mainly on PA contributions, (even though necessary to ensure that the facilities already provided are not abused and abandoned for now), is not a sustainable approach to operating and maintaining school WASH facilities. This is because since they are not obliged to make those contributions and some parents do not pay, there are chances that those paying may also decide to stop with time as in the case of Ashaiman No. 4 Basic School. It is still the responsibility of government, through the respective institutions (GES/MMDAs), to ensure that the facilities are maintained and operated sustainably. To adequately maintain these WASH facilities, it is therefore strongly recommended that government should:

1. Increase the allocation for facility maintenance from the current one cedi in the capitation grant to at least 40 cedis per pupil per year (about 20 pesewas per child per school day).
2. MMAs should prioritize maintenance of school WASH facilities and react quickly to major repairs and de-sludging of septic tanks.
3. The GES should employ full-time janitors and security personnel for every basic and high school to ensure adequate cleanliness and protection for not only the WASH facilities but all school properties against community vandalism.



### Contacts for further information

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