

PROVIDING MODERN TOILETS TO SCHOOLS IN GHANA:

EXPERIENCES FROM THE GAMA PROJECT

GAMA SWP
TECHNICAL
Brief
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GAMA SANITATION AND
WATER PROJECT



INTRODUCTION

This project learning brief highlights the provision of toilet facilities to schools in Ghana through the Greater Accra Metropolitan Area Sanitation and Water Project (GAMA SWP). The main objective of the brief is to share project experiences and the emerging challenges with regard to the provision of toilets to schools with like-minded projects and stakeholders. The current phase of the project is running in both Greater Accra and Greater Kumasi until the end of 2024.

BACKGROUND OF GAMA SWP

The GAMA SWP is a partnership between the Government of Ghana, represented by the Ministry of Sanitation and Water Resources (MSWR), and the World Bank, which provides financial and technical support. The project is implemented by the beneficiary Metropolitan and Municipal Assemblies (MMAs), with coordination and technical support from the Project Coordinating Unit (PCU) of the MSWR. The project focus is on low-income urban communities. However, provision of WASH facilities in schools is not necessarily low-income biased. As at the end of June 2024, the project had constructed 598 toilets and handed them over to beneficiary schools. A hundred and twenty-nine of them had been provided in Greater Kumasi and 469 in Greater Accra.

WHY THE NEED TO PROVIDE SCHOOLS WITH MODERN TOILETS?

Available data from the Ghana Education Service (GES) indicates that about 25% of all public basic schools in the country do not have a toilet facility at all, while there is no clear statistics about the state and adequacy of the available WASH facilities in the schools. Baseline information about almost all WASH facilities in selected schools for intervention by the GAMA SWP in both Accra and Kumasi indicated that existing toilets had one or more of the following traits: inadequate, gender insensitive, disability insensitive, unhygienic, wrongly sited, overaged, no handwashing component, and lacked water connection. Interactions with

teachers and pupils revealed that some of them resorted to going back home to use a toilet or practised open defecation during school hours. Other studies on the issue by WaterAid indicated that lack of clean toilets in schools kept some menstruating girls out of school during their period to avoid potential shame and trauma associated with menstruation. With imminent negative effects on children's health and their education, the GAMA SWP seeks to provide possible solutions through the provision of modern toilet facilities that correct all the above-listed wrongs to schools within the project locations.

WHO ARE THE MAIN STAKEHOLDERS?

Several stakeholders are involved in this particular component of the project. They include the Ministry of Sanitation and Water Resources represented by the Project Coordinating Unit, which coordinates project implementation. The World Bank, which provides funding and technical support, the Ministry of Education represented by the respective Municipal Education Directorates and school authorities, the Municipal Assemblies, which are the custodians of the schools and for that matter the toilet facility, and the Parents Associations, who support in managing the facilities. The PCU is also supported in project implementation by consultants who support in designing and supervising the construction of the facilities, and Contractors, who construct the facilities.

WHAT TYPE OF TOILETS ARE PROVIDED AND WHY?

The GAMA SWP provides toilets that meet all the minimum standards set by the Ghana Education Service. The toilets are modern, neat, and accessible

to all intended users. All toilets provided are water closets with squat plates for pupils and seats for teachers and users with disabilities and located within the school compound.

WHAT ARE THE MAIN COMPONENTS AND ATTRACTIONS OF THE TOILETS?



The GAMA SWP modern toilets have separate chambers for males, females, and teachers. The toilets are also provided with separate chambers with access support for persons with disabilities and changing rooms with showers for menstruating girls. To enhance privacy of users and ventilation, each chamber has a door and a window. Most toilets have squat plates for pupils and toilet seats for teachers. Hand-washing basins and mirrors

are also provided in each toilet. A storage room is provided for toiletries, cleaning materials and tools. Every toilet also comes with a water source with water storage tanks. Due to absence of sewerage systems, most toilets are provided with septic tanks for containment. To facilitate cleanliness and hygiene, the interior floors and about 80% of walls are tiled. To minimize intrusion and vandalism, the main entrance has a fortified metal door.



HOW ARE SCHOOLS SELECTED FOR MODERN TOILETS?

The GAMA SWP works through the MMAs who provide a list of schools that lack toilet facilities. A consultant is selected to do a general assessment of the WASH situation in each school on the list and other necessary information. The assessment considers the school population size, availability of space, availability of a water source and power source, social and environmental safeguards issues, among others. The PCU, the MMA, and the Consultant will then collectively develop a shortlist based on the information generated.

WHAT FACILITY MANAGEMENT STRUCTURES ARE PUT IN PLACE TO ENSURE SUSTAINABILITY?

School toilets must be effectively operated,

managed, and maintained to ensure that they adequately serve their expected lifespan. The project has recorded a few instances where newly provided facilities are poorly managed leading to breakdown of components, poor hygiene, and in extreme cases, close down. In this regard, the project coordinates development and establishment of facility management structures and procedures to ensure sustainability. This process is coordinated by a facility management specialist for the consultant, who provides education to the school management and the pupils on how to use and maintain the facility. The School Management Committee therefore signs to assume responsibility for the sustainable operation and management of the facility. To compliment government efforts in maintaining the facilities, most schools seek voluntary support from parents to raise funds to support janitorial services, supply consumables, and fix minor damages.

WHAT LESSONS HAVE BEEN LEARNT SO FAR THROUGH THIS PROJECT?

Provision of WASH facilities to schools in the course of GAMA SWP implementation has uncovered a couple of interesting lessons.

Minimum standards

It has been discovered that even though many of the schools in the project location do have toilets, majority of them do not meet the minimum standards prescribed by the Ghana Education Service. Many of them do not have connection to a water supply system; they do not have disability-friendly access, they do not have enough number of chambers to serve the increasing school enrolment, they do not have handwashing facilities, they do not provide adequate privacy, no consideration for menstruating girls, and no storage facility for cleaning tools and consumables.

Community involvement

Another lesson is the fact that providing a WASH facility to a school does not mean that community leadership structures can be overlooked. For instance, they should be satisfied with where the facility is sited before construction begins. They should also be educated on why they should stay away from the facility to ensure exclusive use by the pupils and their teachers.

Janitorial and security services

The majority of schools that do not have janitors find it difficult to ensure adequate cleanliness in the toilets. Even though some of them try to use that as an opportunity to provide practical training for the children, the end result is not enough to provide

adequate cleanliness. For instance, children would not be available during lessons to clean the toilet even though some of them would be using the facility throughout the school hours. Where there is a janitor, the facility is always monitored for abuse and cleaned after every use. Janitors also provide real time reports on any breakages to the school authorities for prompt attention. School WASH facilities also need to be protected against vandalism by community members who want to forcibly use them. In such instances, schools with a night security person have advantage in ensuring that such things do not happen to the facilities.

Inadequate budgetary allocation by government for operation and maintenance

Project analysis revealed that government allocation for operation and maintenance of school WASH facilities was about One Cedi per pupil per year through the Capitation Grant. Meanwhile experience has shown that it takes at least forty cedis per child per year to ensure adequate operation and maintenance of school WASH facilities

Support from parents

With the current level of government allocation for operation and maintenance of school WASH facilities, it takes voluntary support from parents through the Parents Associations to raise enough funds to sustain the facilities. Wherever parents

refuse to support, the facilities deteriorate.

The actual cost of a toilet

It has been learnt that the actual cost of a school WASH facilities is far beyond construction and includes the cost of operation and maintenance

over a period. It is therefore essential to budget for and be assured of a sustainable source of financing for operation and maintenance of the facility over its anticipated lifespan before sustainability can be achieved.

WHAT CHALLENGES ARE BEING FACED?

There are a number of challenges that the project has faced in providing modern toilets to schools. They include the following:

Space and siting

Finding a suitable space to locate the facility is one major challenge for schools with limited or unfavorable space. Unfavorable space includes waterlogged or rocky soil conditions and closeness to nearby houses, which usually attract community or neighbourhood resistance to siting the facility. There have been several instances of litigation by community members living close to the school who fear that a toilet of that nature would generate stench to disturb them.

Community vandalism

Several beneficiary schools have encountered vandalism by community members who want to take advantage of the modern toilet as against the total absence of same in the community or paying so much to use a public toilet in the neighbourhood as against using the school toilet for free.

Operation and maintenance

The most difficult challenge has been the inability of government to provide enough funds for operation and maintenance of the facilities after they have been handed over to the schools, as well as the inability of the school authorities to raise funds from elsewhere to perform same. This

usually results in rapid breakdown of hygiene in the toilet or some of its components.

Conclusion

It can be concluded that even though there are a number of challenges associated with providing adequate WASH facilities to schools in Ghana, the GAMA SWP experience indicates that it is possible to serve every school in the country once there is the will and a national determination to do so. It is true that 75% of public basic schools may have toilets, however, it is also true that many of them do not meet the minimum standards prescribed by the Ghana Education Service. In response to this phenomenon, the Ministry of Sanitation and Water Resources has, through the GAMA SWP, and with support from the World Bank, made a bold statement by providing relief to 598 schools over the past eight years. The project has been able to surmount most of the identified challenges and with the level of engagement made with the Ministry of Education/GES, it is hoped that there will be a favorable response with regards to finding a lasting solution to issues with operation, maintenance, and sustainability, which remain the biggest challenge.



A Typical old-fashioned sub-standard school toilet.



A typical GAMA SWP Modern School Toilet.

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