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Sanitation challenges for a new Municipal Assembly in the Greater Accra Region, Ghana

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Accra, the capital of Ghana, is one of the fastest growing cities in West Africa and the boundaries of urban Accra have long since expanded beyond the administrative borders of Accra Metropolitan Area. One way to deal with the fast growing population in some areas has been to create new administrative units, i.e. divide large administrative enclaves into smaller ones. Consequently, Adenta Municipal Assembly (AdMA) is since February 2008 a municipality in its own right. An interview-based study was performed with stakeholders from the Assembly and sanitation providers in the Municipality to understand perceptions of sanitation challenges in the area. From the stakeholders' perspective, one of the greatest challenges is the attitude of residents, making public education and awareness raising regarding the connection between sanitation, behaviour and health pertinent in remedial actions. Capacity building, logistics and human resources are mentioned as challenging areas that the new Assembly need to develop further. More efficient service delivery and competitive involvement of the private sector is also asked for.

Introduction

Accra, the capital of Ghana, is one of the fastest growing cities in West Africa. In 2000, the city had an estimated population of 1.7 million with a population growth rate of about 3.4% annually (GSS 2002). The estimated physical expansion of urban Accra was 25 km² per year for the period 1991-2002 (Yankson *et al.*, 2004). Outside the official (and now largely outdated) city boundary, the adjoining districts of Ga and Tema are growing at an even faster rate, 6.4 and 9.2% respectively, leading to urban sprawl and uncontrolled physical expansion beyond the municipal boundary of Accra Metropolitan Area (Twum-Baah, 2002). Many institutional challenges arise when cities grow outside the municipal area. Truly rural programmes offer inappropriate services when rural settlements develop urban characteristics, and at the same time, urban utilities lack the mandate and skill to serve them. Like the vast majority of the dwellers of central Accra, the houses in this fringe area are not attached to a main sewerage system and the dependence on tanker delivery for water supply is high. Consequently, access to sanitation and water is dependent on the household income level, which makes equity a crucial issue. In short, managing water supply and sanitation is a major challenge for administrators and planners in developing countries, and involves more than just technical solutions.

Accra is part of the Greater Accra Region, which is the smallest of the ten administrative regions in Ghana (Figure 1). The administrative regions are further subdivided into areas of distinctive metropolitan, municipal and district assemblies (MMDAs).¹ It is stated in the National Water Policy (MWRWH, 2007), that the Ministry of Local Government, Rural Development and Environment (MLGRDE) is responsible for implementing the Environmental Sanitation Policy, including management and regulation of solid and liquid wastes, by local government bodies, i.e. the MMDAs. In 2007, new districts and municipalities were created by President J. A. Kufuor. The need for this adjustment arose as a result of the large sizes of some of the then 138 MMDAs which was in one way or the other hampering efforts by the government in fully implementing its policies of decentralising and strengthening local governance. In the Greater Accra

Region, four new assemblies were inaugurated on February 29th 2008 and presently the region is divided into ten districts². This paper focuses on one of these districts, the Adentan Municipality (Figure 2). It should, however, be noted that the boundaries for the new municipality are not yet finalized (Head of Planning Unit, *personal communication*). Hence, Figure 2 shows only preliminary boundaries where area 3 shows the actual Adenta Township and area 2 depicts all the smaller communities that are also included in the municipality. Both areas used to be part of Tema Metropolitan Area.

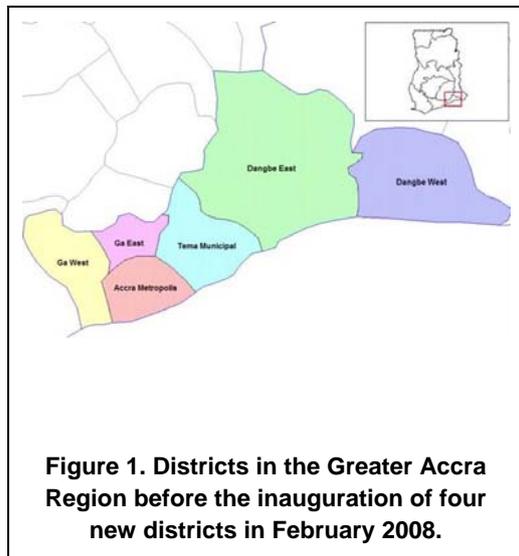


Figure 1. Districts in the Greater Accra Region before the inauguration of four new districts in February 2008.

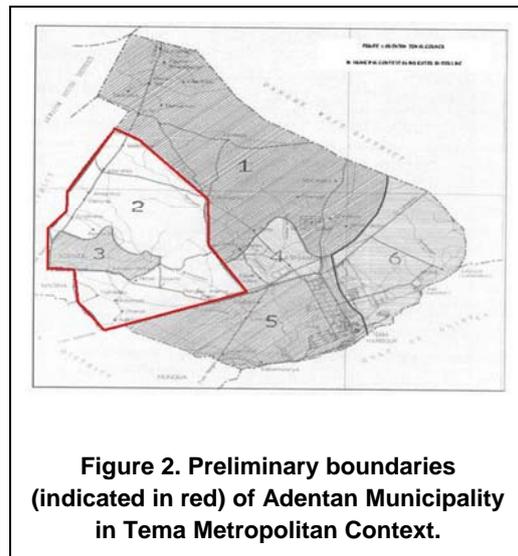


Figure 2. Preliminary boundaries (indicated in red) of Adentan Municipality in Tema Metropolitan Context.

As previously stated, access to sanitation is a major problem in many developing countries. This is especially true for the poor in rural and in more densely populated urbanised areas. Additional institutional challenges occur in areas where basic background information is lacking and where new administrations are starting up their work. This paper is presenting a scoping study aiming to gather information about Adentan Municipality and the stakeholders involved in working with and planning for sanitation, and their perceived challenges for this area. This study is part of ongoing work³, which focuses on the planning process regarding provision of sanitation in developing countries.

Methodology

Owing to limited documented information on Adentan Municipality and Adentan Municipal Assembly (AdMA), partly because of their new nature, information was gathered through personal communication with the Municipal Chief Executive and other officials. Based on preliminary information, 13 purposively-identified stakeholders within the AdMA were contacted, out of which 10 participated in the interview study. The participants' affiliation and position are presented in Table 1. These stakeholders were officials directly or indirectly involved in water and sanitation issues within the municipality. Those directly influencing decisions are unit or electoral area heads, while those influencing decisions indirectly are representatives of affiliate projects such as waste management companies. All participants were asked about their background, such as education and previous work experience. However, the main issues during the interviews were; i) the role and responsibilities of their department or company, ii) their respective position's role and responsibility within that organisation, and iii) their perceived challenges regarding working with sanitation in AdMA. The interviews were carried out during a period of three weeks in the month of August 2008.

Table 1. Stakeholders interviewed	
Organisation	Position
Adentan Municipal Assembly	Municipal Chief Executive
Adentan Municipal Assembly	Budget Officer
Adentan Municipal Assembly	Planning Officer
Adentan Municipal Assembly	Waste Management Officer
Adentan Municipal Assembly	Environment and Health Officer
Gbentanaa Electoral area	Assembly Member
Koose Electoral area	Assembly Member
Nii Ashale Electoral area	Assembly Member
Zoomlion Ghana Ltd ⁴	Research and Development Director
Amanea Waste Management ⁵	Waste Officer

Adentan Municipality and Assembly

In Adentan Municipality there are 34 communities and four electoral areas. Based on an estimated growth rate of 2.6% the current population estimate is 79,014 (AdMA, 2008). Based on the 2000 census, approximately half of the population in this area were living in the community Adentan East (GSS, 2002), i.e. area 3 in Figure 2. In Ghana, each administrative enclave is under control of a Chief Executive representing the central government but who is deriving his/her authority from an Assembly. The Assembly is headed by a Presiding Member elected by the members themselves. Two-thirds of assembly members are elected through local elections, while the remaining one-third is appointed by the Government. In AdMA, there are six assembly members, of which four are elected and two are appointed⁶. There are 63 employees in the core units of the Assembly, and the main affiliation of the staff is presented in Table 2.

According to the National Environmental Sanitation Policy (MLGRDE, 2007), waste management⁷ shall be carried out by Waste Management Department within the assemblies. They may provide the services either directly or indirectly through private contractors or franchisees. All other environmental sanitation tasks (e.g. environmental sanitation education and inspection and enforcement of sanitary regulations) shall be carried out by the Environmental Health and Management Department with private sector inputs where appropriate. In AdMA, those in charge of implementing decisions concerning sanitation are the Waste Management Unit (WMU) and the Environmental Health and Sanitation Unit (EHSU).

In practice, planning for sanitation solutions is usually done for either an existing issue or an anticipated problem. According to the Environment and Health Officer, sanitation planning starts when issues are identified during scheduled monitoring programmes or through complaints by residents either at his/her residence or at Residential Association meetings. Major decisions on sanitation, e.g. construction of drains or provision of refuse containers, are mostly initiated by the EHSU or WMU. The unit presents the issue for approval in the form of a memo or a technical report to the Municipal Chief Executive through the Municipal Coordinating Director. If the report is approved, it can be implemented by the unit. The Chief Executive explained that this approach cuts across all units in the Assembly.

Core units	No. employees
Central Administration	8
Environmental Health, Sanitation	11
Waste Management	3
Planning	2
Budget	1
Internal Audit	1
Finance and Revenue	13
City Guards and Task Force	11
Works	8
Transport	5
Total	63

When it comes to solid waste management, the focal department is the WMU. The officer described a typical urban community in AdMA as having slum-like characteristics at the centre but nicely planned infrastructure at the periphery. The planned areas have their waste collected by contractors who provide house-to-house service for a monthly fee. Poor households who cannot afford the monthly fee are provided with a skip container by the Assembly. When it comes to solutions for liquid waste, this is generally between the residents and the service providers. Here, the Assembly only comes in when an individual or an institution is about to construct a building. In this case the Planning Unit ensures that there is provision of septic tanks since the Municipality lacks a central sewage system.

Results

Several of the interviewed stakeholders argue that the greatest challenge towards realising good sanitation is the attitude of the residents. The practice of open defecation and indiscriminately throwing of solid waste is common, and there is lack of knowledge concerning the link between sanitation, behaviour and health. In areas where waste is collected by contractors, some residents have not registered with the waste contractors, which has resulted in dumping of solid waste on unoccupied lands and in open drains. One Assembly Member states that there is a perception among parts of the communities that since they pay taxes, it is the responsibility of the Assembly to provide services. Some Assembly Members think that residents should be encouraged and/or persuaded to register, and the Amanea representative even says that residents should be forced to register and that failure to register must be punishable. On the other hand, the absence of dumping sites within the municipality as well as the ineffectiveness of some of the contractors in charge of waste collection were also pointed out by one Assembly Member and the Planning Officer as being significant contributing factors to the prevalent situation of poor sanitation.

The same Assembly Member argues that for the Municipality to ensure a good healthy environment there is a need to change behaviours and attitudes towards sanitation in general. He believes one way is to make people aware of the link between diarrhoea and loss of school and labour days, i.e. societal costs. He also believes that there must be an understanding between the stakeholders, for example regarding the kind of services demanded by the residents, and the likely fees charged by the service providers in line with effective and efficient service delivery. As a way to address this issue, the Assembly plans to carry out a project where households will be issued questionnaires to indicate the kind of service they want and how much they are willing to pay for such services. They should also be asked to report contractors who are

not working effectively. Proper monitoring of contractors' performance is supported by the Amanea representative, but he also thinks that the Assembly should involve the contractors in fixing waste collection fees since fees being charged today are inadequate, which, he argues, is crippling the business.

The Planning Officer says that regarding service provision to the communities, there is a high possibility of misconception on the part of the Assembly relative to residents' conceived needs, and that the latter are likely to have better knowledge of the status quo. Hence, she believes that the local residents are key stakeholders who should be consulted and involved in problem identification and problem reporting. The Assembly encourages this dialogue by attending Residents Association meetings. The Waste Management Officer mentioned another process that is about to start, the preparation of a Medium Term Development Plan during which the Assembly's WMU will visit each community to help them identify their prioritised environmental or sanitation issues. Based on this information, a plan for providing sanitation solutions will be prepared. This is a substantive task, and capacity building, i.e. human resources and logistics, is mentioned by the Waste Management Officer as another major challenge for a newly formed assembly.

As mentioned earlier, prominent sanitation issues identified in the municipality are open defecation and indiscriminately throwing of waste. Currently, according to the Environmental and Health Officer, the Assembly does not have written policies regarding sanitation provision but are in the process of developing such guidelines. They will, however, be in line with the Government's lean towards more private sector participation, and advocates for private provision and supervision of waste management services. A 5-year action plan is being developed by the EHSU that advocates the provision of toilet and bathroom facilities in all public places with intense activities, e.g. lorry parks and markets in all communities in the municipality. However, according to the officer no public toilets have been constructed in Adentan Municipality since its inception, and all existing places are either privately owned or publicly inherited from Tema Metropolitan. One Assembly Member argues that these issues can be addressed if the Assembly could soften its stance on building public toilets only in commercial areas, and build public toilets at communities where open defecation is a major sanitation issue. He believes that even though there are problems connected with public toilets, such as inadequate maintenance, long queues in the mornings in some places and the need for improving health aspects and incentives for using the latrines, this is an option to consider when centralized systems are not feasible.

Besides the poor living in the centre of communities, there are also low-income settlements in the more remote peri-urban areas. Logistics was earlier mentioned as a major challenge for the Assembly, and the Environmental and Health Officer stresses that this certainly applies to his unit. As an example, complainants from distant communities are asked to provide transportation for officers to address their problems, which of course will impact on the complainants possibilities to get support. Some remote areas are not covered by services, and one Assembly Member comments that there is a need for waste contractors to extend their services to include these areas.

Discussion

It is interesting to note that most sanitation service provision is through contractors, both for liquid and solid waste. Hence the responsibility for the local environment is shifted from the Assembly to the residents who can afford these services. At the same time, septic tanks are considered as the solution for liquid waste, but there is no discussion about where the discharge is taking place, and the responsibility for the overall environment is unclear. Focus on sanitation issues are of course varied between the different units, but in general solid waste and open defecation seems to get the most attention. It seems quite typical that only the Environmental and Health Officer argues that the most prominent sanitation issue in the municipality is the disposal of wastewater.

For the poor in the community, the provision of services is less straight-forward and more emphasis is laid on education. One proposed strategy is public education, especially for school children and the youth in general, on the dangers of poor sanitation. Emphasis is also on the mobilisation of communities to improve their own sanitation situation by stressing the advantages of sanitation solutions defined by the local residents themselves. There seems to be almost a consensus that active community participation in

community-led sanitation activities is paramount if the ‘war’ on poor sanitation is to be won. For example, effective waste disposal cannot be achieved by only one method. Separation of waste at the source, recycling, and composting are all mentioned as possible alternatives, but for this to work on a large scale more people need to do their part. However, how this public education is supposed to be carried out to reach a significant part of the communities is not yet defined. It is also not clear how the communities will be educated and informed about the wide range of available alternatives for sanitation solutions, how they will be supported in implementing their choice of solution, and how these systems should be sustained.

In this study, the voices of the residents in the communities have not been heard, except in the cases where the interviewees happens to be local residents as well. However, they don’t represent a majority of the population, and above all, they do not represent the poor in the communities. Therefore, it will be very interesting to follow up on the Actions plans that the Assembly are preparing, in the light of the several planned investigations with the aim to identify the actual needs of all the residents in the Municipality.

Future work

Much is still unclear on sanitation in Adenta, mainly due to the new status of the Municipality and the Assembly. Information from this study will need to be updated when decisions are finalized. A dialogue with the assembly officers to receive updates, and thus to provide a stronger and broader background about the area is ongoing, and will continue during the year to come.

According to the latest JMP report (WHO/UNICEF, 2008), Ghana stands out as an exception with a considerable large proportion of households, both in urban and rural areas, that share sanitation facilities with more than five households. With more available detailed knowledge about the actual sanitation situation in Adentan, it would be interesting to compare this peri-urban/urban area with the existing situation in downtown Accra.

In this paper, challenges regarding provision of sanitation as seen by stakeholders representing the Assembly and service providers are presented. The next step should be to look into the needs and challenges from the perspective of the residents. Another group of people that has not been included in this study are active small-scale sanitation entrepreneurs. Therefore, an extended interview study with the aim to compare the views on service provision and sanitation challenges of these different groups is highly desired.

Recommended technologies are included in the final draft of the Environmental Sanitation Policy. However, they do not necessarily reflect on the wide range of solutions available today. Considering the local context and varying conditions in the communities, different feasible ways of improving the sanitation situation could be proposed, preferably in collaboration with all stakeholders: assembly members, residents and service providers.

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Notes

1. Generally, the domination and power of the District Assembly depends on the settlements population. Metropolitan Assemblies have more than 250,000 inhabitants, Municipal Assemblies more than 100,000 and District Assemblies less than 100,000 inhabitants.
 2. www.ghanadistricts.com/districts (Accessed 2 April 2008)
 3. This work is performed by CIT Urban Water Management, with support from IWMI Accra-office.
 4. Zoomlion Ghana Ltd is a private company appointed by MLGRDE through the MMDAs to provide services. In AdMA, Zoomlion is involved in the collection and haulage of waste, and is active in delivering door-to-door services to individual clients.
 5. Amanea Waste Management is a privately owned company that works with solid waste management and management of land fills. Amanea Waste worked under Tema Municipal Assembly and by virtue of operation within the boundary of what is now Adentan Municipality, had their contract maintained by AdMA.
 6. Before the new assembly was created, the electoral areas now belonging to AdMA were part of Tema Metropolitan Assembly which had 84 elected assembly members compared to the four elected members currently at AdMA.
 7. Waste management, in this case, refers to collection and sanitary disposal of wastes, including solid wastes, liquid wastes and excreta.
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