

Improving Sanitation in Poor Urban Areas: The Role of Non-State Actors in the Sanitation Service Delivery in Ashaiman Municipality, Ghana

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3. Abstract

This paper presents a study on sanitation service delivery in an urban poor locality in Ghana, Ashaiman. Ashaiman is a sprawling urban settlement in Ghana and suffers from poor sanitary conditions. Close to 80 per cent of households in the Tulaku area, a suburb of Ashaiman, do not have toilet facilities in their homes because landlords did not deem it necessary to construct toilet facilities (Ashaiman Medium Term Development Plan, 2008-2011). Most public toilet facilities are also in a deplorable state. As a result of these inadequacies, there is over dependence on the few public toilet facilities and this has further led to indiscriminate defecation in open spaces and bushes. Compounding the problems discussed above, is the poor attitude of residents who indiscriminately dispose of refuse, and again, most residents refuse to pay refuse fees. The poor attitudinal problem has made it increasingly difficult for city authorities to maintain good sanitation in the communities despite several interventions adopted by the government, as well as, civil society organizations to improve the appalling sanitation situation.

The study sought to discuss the role played by non-state actors' sanitation service delivery. The study identified some challenges confronting the sanitation delivery in Ashaiman as; Inadequate budgetary and financial allocation for implementing sanitation action plans, lack of sanitation byelaws at the municipal level, thus, weak or no enforcement of laws, Deficient capacity of civil society to mobilize the community to engage in sanitation exercises, the Lack of coordination between local authority and other stakeholders, and the lack of community engagement in the sanitation service delivery.

A major finding that emerged from the study was that there were a range of community actors in sanitation delivery, notwithstanding, they were not recognized as important stakeholders and local authorities hardly partner with them in the process of change.

The study has discussed measures of improving sanitation in the poor urban localities of Ghana and recommends that if local authorities collaborate with non-state actors, especially informal service providers and community based groups, it would enhance improvement in the sanitation situation in poor urban localities.

4. Introduction

Urban Local authorities in Ghana are grappling with the growing sanitation crisis in their localities. Ashaiman, a sprawling 'urban slum' and the fifth largest settlement in the Greater Accra Region of Ghana is one of such municipalities. Despite various interventions adopted by the Government and civil society organizations, the problems continuously persist. Current sanitation delivery approaches are not able to integrate effective pro-poor community partnerships in a meaningful way.

The question to ask is, how can communities' be engaged to improve the sanitation situation in their vicinities?

The objectives of the study were;

- To identify the range of significant community actors in the sanitation sector at Ashaiman and to find out what each can do to bring about improvement in sanitation;
- To suggest appropriate ways of engaging community actors in supporting sanitation service delivery in the sanitation situation in Ashaiman Municipality; ;
- To provide adequate information and basis to guide communities and local authorities in the efficient delivery of sanitation services especially in poor urban communities of Ghana.

5. Main body: Analysis and Discussion

Current Conditions and Practices

In most parts of Ashaiman, drains have been used as waste receptacles, and residents often do so especially at night. During rains too, residents often dump refuse in the drains. The Waste Management Officer reported that,

“Residents do so as if the collector has come”.

Non-state actors play a significant role in sanitation service delivery in Ashaiman. The study revealed that over 400 informal service providers popularly called the “truck pushers” operate in house to house solid waste collection in Ashaiman. They offer quick services, and their charges are comparatively cheaper. Most residents prefer this option because they pay small amounts on daily basis and charges are flexible and negotiable. Charges are based on the quantum of refuse and are determined by the service provider. However, there is little recognition of their roles by local governments. In an interview with a truck pusher, he said,

“I have been working for the past 2 years and I am satisfied with the work I am doing because it is good. I earn at least not less than GH¢25 (\$20) a day. Apart from the money, I contribute a lot to keep the communities clean. The Zoomlion alone (private service provider) cannot do this work. The Assembly must not drive us away since we are willing to pay our license”.

Plates 2 and 3 below show truck pushers on their daily routine

Plate 2: A Truck Pusher Carting Refuse Collected



Source: Field Survey, 2009

Plate 3: After a Successful Day's Work, a truck pusher



Source: Field Survey, 2009

Other non-state actors identified were Community Based Groups such as the youth associations and religious bodies. However, they are also beset with problems.

The San Diego Youth Association Group members interviewed reiterated that the group faces a lot of challenges, especially getting the support and maximum cooperation from local authorities.

The Chairman of the Association said,

“We want to erase the bad perception from people’s minds that Zongo Community is noted as bad and dirty place to reside. Therefore, as part of our activities, we organize annual clean up exercises. On the other hand, we lack support and cooperation from our own people. When we need the support of our leaders, they do not turn up. We ask that they open their doors to us when we call on them. They often think we are too young and have nothing good to offer”.

The study revealed that civil society organizations (CSOs) recognize their community empowerment role but do not have the capacity to carry them out.

The study also revealed that Municipality has not embraced the idea of mainstreaming other actors in the sanitation service delivery. Informal service providers are perceived as a nuisance in the community by the Assembly. Again, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in sanitation delivery also operate as voluntary workers and their activities are not incorporated in the development plans of the Assembly.

Institutional Environment

The study revealed that the Municipal Assembly had low capacity in terms of financial, logistics and technical support to improve the sanitation situation. In an interview with the Environmental Health Officer, he reiterated that,

“Even though our plans and budget are prepared and submitted to the Assembly, we hardly receive any money to implement our plans. I can conclude that sanitation is not a priority of the Assembly and again, the District Assembly Common Fund (DACF) allocation to the sanitation unit is misappropriated for other purposes”.

In an interview with the Waste Management Officer, he added that,

“The unit has a working plan, but it is very difficult to implement. Some are achievable though, but others are not because of high cost”.

The study further identified that the Environmental Health Inspectors who conduct daily routine inspection on behalf of the Assembly had not received training for the past ten years. Again, the Waste Management Department hardly exists because of lack office space to operate. In an interview with the Sanitation Officer at the Ashaiman Zonal Council, he commented that even though annual requisition forms are submitted to the Municipal Assembly, no subvention is received to run the unit.

He narrated that

“We have not received monies from the Assembly for the past years to run the unit. Sanitation is not their priority”. We only receive support from the Assembly only on emergency cases or when there is a special programme. We are indeed practicing cosmetic sanitation”.

Further analysis revealed that there was lack of sanitation byelaws at the municipal level. The Municipal Assembly operated with in the National Sanitation Policy which is often too broad and hence, not location specific to guide residents. Sanitation bye laws were still in the process of being gazetted. It can be concluded that Assembly do not have the capacity to enforce regulations and therefore the difficulty in implementing laws.

In sum, the study revealed that was little appreciation of the financial benefits of investing in sanitation from both communities and the District Assembly level. Even though the problem of inadequate sanitation services was identified as top priority by the communities which were reflected in the Ashaiman Municipal Medium Term Development Plan (2008-2011), this was rarely translated into actual implementation because of inadequate policy and institutional environment to support the sanitation sector.

6. Major Lessons/Findings

The study identified the following as the major lessons or findings regarding sanitation service delivery in the municipality.

1. Ashaiman has organized and vibrant community groups in the sanitation sector who are willing to support the process of change. However, they lack the capacity to mobilize the community, express their needs and the lack of financial and technical support from the Assembly to carry out their activities.
2. Informal service providers in waste collection often called truck pushers are one of such groups. This “business” is dominated by the migrants’ youth and forms an important job opportunity for them.
3. The study revealed that open defecation is due to inadequate public toilet facilities. A common phenomenon which is emerging is that most residents defecate in polythene bags and indiscriminately dispose of them in open drains. These open drains also serve as defecating grounds for children and some adults especially during the night.
4. The Municipal Assembly lack the capacity to in terms of financial, logistical and technical constraints to ensure good sanitation
5. CSOs in the sanitation sector activities’ are not mainstreamed in the medium term development plans of the Assembly. They are rarely recognized as important stakeholders in local level development and local authorities hardly partner with them in the process of change.

7. Recommendations and Conclusion

It is recommended that improvement in the sanitation services especially in poor urban areas can be sustained through the co-operation and concerted efforts of municipal authorities, non-government organizations, community-based organizations, as well as, the entire community. This paper suggests successful implementation of the following actions;

- Mainstreaming non-state actors in the sanitation delivery**

If governments have interest in addressing sanitation needs, it can start by simply recognising the important roles played by community actors especially the informal private providers by mainstreaming them into the formal system. Identification and Mapping activity of Stakeholders through an inventory process in the sanitation sector should be carried out to support the process of bringing change.
- Assign Roles and Responsibilities to Community Actors**

Assemblies can assign specific roles in the sanitation sector. Different components of sanitation such as solid waste management, community public toilet facilities supervision, public dump site management, and drains cleansing should be taken care of by specific groups in the community. This would ensure community ownership and create a sense responsibility by every member of the community.
- Institutionalization of Regulatory Procedures-**

The Ashaiman Municipal Assembly must institute regulatory measures such as sanitation byelaws to ensure that people do the “right thing”. Laws must be enforced and punity measures such as payment of huge fines must be instituted to serve as deterrent to others. However, much would be achieved if the building regulation (as stipulated in the National building regulations), that enjoins every builder to provide a private place of convenience within the building is enforced by the Assembly.
- Strengthening of Monitoring Control Team**

The Ashaiman municipality monitoring task force’s capacity must be strengthened in terms of providing adequate logistics to carry out daily routine inspections. The Environmental Health and the Waste Management Department of the Assembly must be resourced and adequate capacity building training must be given to staff to help improve general sanitation in the Municipality.

In conclusion, it was recognised that the role played by non-state actors in sanitation sector is very enormous and hence, can contribute immensely to the local level development. Non-state actors including informal private providers must be seen as a fundamental first step in the process of engagement. This requires little investment and therefore less risk. More importantly, local governments must commit efforts to train and build their capacity so that they support the process of change in the sanitation sector of their localities.

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