THEME ADDRESS DELIVERED BY PROFESSOR KWAMENA AHWOI, GIMPA, AT THE OPENING CEREMONY OF THE 3RD GHANA WATER FORUM HELD ON THE 5TH SEPTEMBER 2011.

THEME: WATER AND SANITATION SERVICES DELIVERY IN A RAPIDLY CHANGING ENVIRONMENT

Introduction

About twenty years ago, the urban population of Ghana was about 5.6 million or 36 percent of the total population. Today, it is about 12.2 million or 50 per cent. Clearly, systems that were designed to service a 5.6 million population will have to be modified to be able to service 12.2 million people. That represents the challenge of urban water and sanitation delivery in Ghana today.

Managing the Water and Sanitation Sector: The Problems

In those long ago days of centralized and state-controlled administration, water and sanitation services for the whole country was the legal responsibility of the Ghana Water and Sewage Cooperation (GWSC). This was understandable, because of the smallness of the population which therefore made the management of water and sanitation by a monopolistic para-statal logical response to the problem caused by the economies of scale. But those who are old enough will remember that this arrangement was wholly disadvantageous to the rural population, as the activities of the GWSC barely touched the rural communities.

It was the PAMSCAD (Programme of Actions to Mitigate the Social Costs of Adjustment and Development) of the late 1980s and the early 1990s that first alerted the country to the reality that the rural community was being shortchanged in the area of water provision by this arrangement and that it was possible for a dichotomized approach to water and sanitation services provision between urban and rural Ghana to be adopted. Thus the WATSAN projects of the PAMSCAD gave birth to the Community Water and Sanitation Agency (CWSA) of today.

But the problem of water and sanitation provision has not been attributable to the monopoly of the GWSC only. The segmentation of the sector has represented another major problem. Whilst GWSC WATSAN, WASH CWSA and other acronyms all suggested that water, sanitation and hygiene belong to the same sector, they have unfortunately been bifurcated or trifurcated between the Works and Housing, Local Government and Health Ministries. It is therefore virtually impossible to deal with the sector without calling a meeting of all three sectors, and we all know that such meetings only spawn sub committees which also spawn their own meetings leading to the establishment of Expert Groups which also hold their own meetings ad infinitum. At the end of the day, the problem is left unsolved because one is not sure as to even who is to take the final decisions.

There is yet a third problem, a problem which I choose to describe as “settlement before planning”, a phenomenon which is best illustrated with a story, ‘Numoo’ Kwamena is a hunter who hunts in the peri-urban area of Accra in the Accra Plains somewhere in the Dangbe East District. Whilst hunting one day, he chases a rat far into the Plains, kills it, skins it, and because it is night, lights a fire and cooks it, eats it,
and settles for the night. The next day, he invites his wife and children to join him to finish the rat meat. Because there is a stream nearby and the rats seem to be in abundance, ‘Numoo’ Kwamena never goes back and before you can say “Kwamena” Kwamenakope (or Kwamenakrom in Akan), a new village is born. Kwamenakope has not been planned for, and yet the settlement of Kwamekope has come into existence. Forget about the fact that it is an illegal settlement, but ‘Numo’ Kwamena and his descendants have votes and therefore come election time, politicians will go and promise them water and sanitation services. No service provider whether a monopoly, a duopoly or a ‘multi-poly’ can redeem this promise, especially if such a scenario is a regular occurrence in the spatial development sector of a country, which it is in Ghana.

All these problems point to one thing: water and sanitation are micro, localized needs which are very difficult to manage from distant, centralized locations. They point to the need to decentralize the water and sanitation sector in a way that they will be managed at the local level with the participation of the local people. They suggest that not even the bifurcation of the water and sanitation sector into urban and rural sectors will resolve the problem. They argue for a total decentralization of the water and sanitation sectors. The call for new arrangement for the provision of water and sanitation services and because of their sheer numbers, they argue especially for a new arrangement for urban water supply.

Managing the Water and Sanitation Sectors: The Questions

In responding to the identified challenges, a number of questions arise:

- Should water, sanitation and environmental hygiene continue to belong to separate sectors or should they be clustered as a single sector issue to be handled by one sector Ministry?
- Should the production, transmission and distribution of urban water be considered, as one activity to be undertaken by one agency or organization or can they be split between different agencies or organizations as has been done with electricity?
- Is it possible to at least regionalize urban water supply if decentralizing it to the district level will not be defensible from the point of view of the economies of scale?
- How can we get urban residents to be involved in the provision of water and sanitation services given the difficulty that is encountered in mobilizing especially the urban elite for any community activity whatsoever?
- Is cost recovery a feasible option in the provision of urban water and sanitation services or are there alternative options that can provide these social and human needs?

I will share a few of my own thoughts on some of these difficult questions.

A Disparate or a Single Sector?

Water, sanitation and environmental hygiene are so closely related that they are best treated as a single sector. The common thread running through them is water. Lack of or too little of water causes the sanitation and environmental hygiene problems. Water is therefore the cause of the problem; the others are merely symptoms. It is therefore necessary to treat the cause by making the entire sector the responsibility of the agency responsible for water which to me would be the ministry of Water Resources, Works and Housing (MWRWH). But that only means responsibility for
water and sanitation policy. Responsibility for water provision should be decentralized to the Metropolitan, Municipal and District Assemblies (MMDAs) which will continue to be overseen by the Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development (MLGRD). Environmental hygiene training will continue to be the responsibility of the MOH, but that would not mean a transfer of the responsibility from environmental health back to the MOH. Environmental health is the decentralized responsibility of the MMDAs and it should remain as such.

Within the framework of these proposal, and consistent with my proposal elsewhere that local government should not continue to be a line Ministry, policy responsibility for water, sanitation and environmental health would be the responsibility MWRWH; training of environmental health personnel would be the responsibility of the MOH; but the provision of water and the implementation of sanitation and environmental health policies would be the decentralized responsibility of the MMDAs. After all, the Ghana Medical School which trains our doctors is under the Ministry of Education, but the doctors who are the products of the school are under the MOH.

**Production, Transmission and Distribution of Urban Water**

There seems to be an unquestioned assumption in Ghana that production, transmission and distribution of water should necessarily be undertaken by the same agency or organization. We used to think the same for electricity. But once we decided to allow Independent Power Producers (IPPs) into the sector, the VRA, GRIDCo and the ECG emerged as three distinct entities in charge of production, transmission and distribution of electricity respectively.

Similarly with urban water, because of the large cost and investment outlays, it is possible to have different agencies or organisations handling the different aspects of the water operation. In South Africa, for example, water is produced by one agency which sells it in bulk to the local authorities which are responsible for its distribution within the cities. This does not mean that the local authorities have to do the distribution by themselves by all means. They can also contract out that responsibility to private companies under public-private partnership arrangements. Is private participation in any of these aspects of the water chain an option in Ghana and specifically is MMDA involvement in water distribution also an option in Ghana? This Forum must interrogate that possibility.

**PPP in Urban Water Supply**

Even if the water production-transmission-distribution chain will not be fragmented, it is still possible for a public private partnership system to be introduced into the urban water supply sector. Not only will this introduce a spirit of competitiveness into the urban water supply sector, it is also likely to introduce efficiency into the system. Currently, not only is there a lot of inefficiencies leading to a lot of leakages, but the inefficiencies have led to many customers boycotting GWCL water and relying on their own privately-provided bore-hole supply of water.

The most cursory of researches in Accra will reveal that for many middle and upper middle class families, GWCL water has become a supplement to private bore hole supplied water that they have
dug in their homes rather than vice versa. For an initial investment of some GH¢10,000, one can have a permanent bore hole pumped water system installed for which there are no monthly or periodic payments. After installing the system in my house at East Legon some four years ago as a result of the irregular supply of water by the GWCL in the area, my monthly average GWCL metered water bill is less than GH¢5 from the previous over GH¢100 monthly bill that I was paying, and I am not alone in this. What that means is that we are tapping natural resource - underground water - for which we pay nothing, thereby depriving the GWCL of substantial revenue it would have been earning if it was more efficient and regular in supplying us water and we had been forced to rely on their water supply.

Other houses in the middle and upper middle class areas have one, two or more poly tanks. Once the GWCL taps flow, these polytanks are filled first and therefore the GWCL has to pump a lot more water than is needed since the polytanks serve as "water warehouses" for as long as the taps keep flowing during the short period that they flow.

I am sure that a private independent contractor would have spotted this weakness in the urban water supply chain long ago and even if he or she could not supply us with water regularly, would have gotten into the borehole drilling business and possibly found a way of ensuring that we pay some periodic fee for what is after all a Ghanaian natural resource - underground water- which we are currently tapping for free.

The interesting thing is that the GH¢10,000 that was used as the initial investment in the bore hole system spread over time, that is, divided by the GH¢100 monthly payment that used to be made to the GWCL , would equal GH¢100 months. In other words, the house owner would have made an 8-year upfront payment to the private contractor which he does not realize because he or she is not making the payment monthly or periodically.

Regionalization of Urban Water Supply

Another option for the management of urban water is to "regionalize" the system. This does not mean that urban water supply systems should be operated or managed by the Regional Coordinating Council or from the regional capital. What is meant is that regional water management systems could be clustered around the production locations and managed by separate bodies. That could be another way of breaking the monopoly of the GWCL over urban water supply, one of the critical issues at the heart of the problem of urban water in Ghana.

Water- A Natural Right

Those options that I am asking this forum to consider are not meant to indicate support for the commercialization of water in a way that will make it unaffordable. After all, if there is one commodity to which humans must be considered entitled as a matter of natural right after the air that we breathe, it is water. Everybody needs water, and that includes criminals, prisoners, beggars, lunatics, destitute and indigents, meaning outlaws, the confined, the excluded, the marginalized and the disadvantaged. Any option for urban water supply must therefore include a safety net to cater for these categories of homo sapiens.
It is in that context that the issue of a "Water Fund" becomes most relevant. As a country, we have set up funds for all kinds of purposes which are not vital for human existence and survival. We have a GETFund, but we can exist and survive without education, even though at the great cost of ignorance. We have a Road Fund, but we can exist and survive without roads and indeed without travelling. But can we exist and survive without water? The answer to this question simply tells us what a "Water fund" to take care of those who cannot afford to pay for water at any cost is a sine qua non to any urban water supply system that we may decide upon.

**Urban Sanitation: A Neglected Sub Sector**

I have said very little about urban sanitation because the recently launched Environmental Sanitation Policy of September 2010 addresses many of the problems of the sub sector. But until the National Environmental Sanitation Policy of 1999 was launched by the second Government of the Fourth Republic; sanitation was largely a neglected sub sector in the Central Government's scheme of things. Yet we are aware of the insalubrious conditions of our urban environment that seriously affects the underground water system, creates a health hazard and increases the cost of health.

This is not a call for a centralization of the sanitation sub sector. It is a call for the channeling of more Central Government resources to the sanitation sub sector through the Metropolitan/Municipal Assembly function in Ghana, so the expertise or functionaries to deal with the function of sanitation resides in the Metropolitan/Municipal Assemblies. What is left is for the funds to be made available to the functionaries at the Metropolitan/Municipal level so that the function of sanitation can be effectively performed at that level. It is a classical case of the application of the fiscal decentralization principle of “the finances follow the functions.”

**Conclusion**

I would like to conclude by summarizing the thoughts that I have tried to share with you in this address. I have made the following points:

- Ghana's rapidly changing urban population means that we cannot continue to use systems that were designed to provide water and sanitation services to an urban population that was half the number of today's population at the time they were designed;

- The major problems of urban water supply and sanitation services include the fact that the two sectors, together with environmental hygiene, are not holistically managed and controlled, the monopolistic control of urban water supply by the GWCL; and the phenomenon of "settlement before planning" which makes it difficult, if not impossible for water providers to plan for future water and sanitation needs;

- The need to decentralize the water and sanitation sector in such a way that it will be managed at the local level with the participation of the people.

- A proposal for the production, transmission and distribution of water to be done by different bodies or organizations.
• Consequently, the novelty of independent water producers (IWPs) as an idea whose time has come;

• The possibility of "regionalizing" urban water supply and management by clustering urban settlements around the water production and treatment sources;

• The introduction of a PPP system in the water sector to allow for competition and efficiency;

• Considering water as a "natural right" and therefore ensuring that whatever option is chosen includes a "safety net" to cater for the outlaw, the confined, the marginalized, the disadvantaged, the excluded, the shunned and all other classes of persons who cannot afford to pay for water. My preference is for a "water Fund" along the lines of the GETFund and the Road Fund.

• The fiscal decentralization principle of "the finances follow the functions" must be applied in the sanitation sub sector so that enough resources are made available to the Metropolitan/Municipal Assemblies to deal with the issues of urban sanitation and environmental health.

I thank you very much for your attention.