

## MOLE XXXV CONFERENCE THEME ADDRESS

### LOOKING BACK ON SDG SIX IMPLEMENTATION IN GHANA: PROGRESS, CHALLENGES AND WAY FORWARD

HAROLD ESSEKU, DEVELOPMENT PARTNERS LEAD FOR WASH

#### 1. INTRODUCTION

I found it interesting when I was invited to present the theme address this year. Over the years, I have facilitated several of the Opening Ceremonies of the Mole Conference series. If I am right, only the former chair of CONIWAS Martin Dery has facilitated more, and we did it together several times in the past. Each year, CONIWAS has been looking at the WASH Sector in Ghana and coming up with relevant themes to evaluate, guide and provide direction into the future. The Mole Conference Series which is the longest continuously running Annual Civil Society Conference in the world needs to be highly commended.

##### 1.1 Context

Mole conferences have been running since 1989, when I was still a student. This year, we are commemorating the thirty-fifth in the series of Mole Conferences (Mole XXXV). The organisers have chosen a really interesting Theme for the conference. “**Looking Back on SDG Six Implementation in Ghana: Progress, Challenges and Way Forward.**” In many situations in life, it is important to pause, reflect and decide on the way forward to ensure that what we are doing is acceptable and relevant and we will arrive at our expected destination.

The baseline for the Millenium Development Goals was set back to 1990, but looking at what countries would be able to achieve from the year 2000 to 2015 with the target of halving the population with no access to water and sanitation. This was championed under the leadership of Mr. Kofi Annan of blessed memory, the UN Secretary General. Sector stakeholders would recall that initially, sanitation was not included in the targets but the water target was expanded to included sanitation and to some extent hygiene and handwashing to be precise.

## 1.2 Background

According to UN Water:

“Water and sanitation are at the very core of sustainable development. Safe drinking water and adequate sanitation and hygiene are pillars of human health and well-being. In addition to domestic purposes, water is needed for food, energy and industrial production – uses that are highly interconnected and potentially conflicting.”

On August 28, 2024, the president of the Republic signed the “The Ghana Presidential Compact on WASH!” The preamble of the Compact states as follows:

**NOW IT IS THEREFORE, DECREED THAT THIS HIGH-LEVEL PRESIDENTIAL COMPACT ON WASH**

**Positioning Sustainable Access to Improved Water, Sanitation and Hygiene Services to Stimulate the Achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals and Socio-Economic Development.**

**Is hereby assented to: On behalf of the Government of Ghana**

**His Excellency, Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo**

The effort put in by the Honourable Minister, Madam Lydia Seyram Alhassan and her predecessors, the Chief Director, Mr. Noah Tumfo and the team at Ministry of Sanitation and Water Resources together with IRC, UNICEF etc. for the signing of the Compact is highly commendable! With six years left for achieving the SDG targets, this is a laudable achievement.

## 1.3 Establishment of CONIWAS

The Mole Conference Series had been running from 1989 and twenty years ago, it became necessary to have a formal organization. CONIWAS was born. Many thanks to all Partners who supported the initial setting up and the constant support received over the years. In the years before the setting up of CONIWAS, there was a lot of acrimony between Government (especially when CWSA was set up) on the policies and strategies for WASH. This situation has changed drastically. CONIWAS is at the table of all major WASH programs today. Indeed, the chair of CONIWAS was part of the program and spoke at the signing of the Presidential Compact.

Togbe Chair, I would like to mention the people who were the trail blazers and some who have worked to make CONIWAS what it is.

The first Executive Committee was chaired by Ben Arthur and Thomas Imoru Shaibu. Their contribution to CONIWAS is etched in platinum. May they both Rest-in-Peace. The Vice-Chair was Victoria Tettey who acted briefly in the transition between the two. The Zonal Coordinators on the first EC are with us today. Our MC, Mr. Martin Dery for the North, A. Y.

O. Modoc, seated in front here with us and the current chair of the Council of Elders for the Middle Zone and for the South, Bishop Nathaniel Adams, who graciously ushered us into the program today with a prayer as he has done many times.

The subsequent chairs of CONIWAS include Auntie Victoria of ADRA, the first lady chair who went to be with the Lord in the middle of her tenure. Farouk Braimah acted in her stead and was elected to take over. He was followed Marian Don-Chebe, then by Martin, then Yaw Attah Arhin who handed over to the current chair Madam Beata Awinpoka Akanyani.

The Executive Secretaries of CONIWAS from the pre-inception phase Thomas Imoru Saibu, then Patrick Apoya (co-MC for today). Then Captain acted briefly before Little Ben took over. Ben Arthur of Blessed memory was followed by Martin Dery, who I was not exactly sure his position at times since he was Chairman, Executive Secretary and Executive Chairman, I believe. Finally, our first lady Executive Secretary Basilea Nanbigne took over from him. They have each played monumental roles in making CONIWAS what it is today.

## **2. PROGRESS ON SDG 6 IMPLEMENTATION**

### **2.1 Institutional Home for WASH**

The WASH Sector has had a fragmented institutional history. At the beginning of the fourth Republic, Sanitation was with the Ministry of Health and Water was with the Ministry of Works and Housing. In 1995, during the sessional address by the president, it was announced that what we now know as the Environmental Health and Sanitation Directorate was being moved from the Ministry of Health to the then Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development. The president stated that he wanted to decentralize environmental sanitation services to all district assemblies in the country. The Schools of Hygiene where the Environmental Health Officers were trained remained with Health until the Ministry of Sanitation and Water Resources was created in 2017.

The main agency for water was the Ghana Water and Sewerage Corporation which was under the Ministry of Works and Housing. With the creation of the Water Directorate, some advocacy led to the change of the name of the Ministry to Ministry of Water Resources, Works and Housing. The CWSA came out of GWSC in 1998 and GWSC became GWCL and recently GWL.

With the coming together of Water, Sanitation, Hygiene and Schools of Hygiene under the Ministry of Sanitation and Water Resources, the WASH Sector became relatively more coordinated with respect to Institutional arrangements. There is however the need for strong collaboration with other allied sectors like Finance, Local Government, Education, Health, Gender and Environment. As it is said, majority of the SDG targets will not be attained unless SDG 6 is attained.

### **2.2 Policy Framework for WASH**

The WASH Sector has had many policies, strategies, guidelines and frameworks developed over the years. I shared an experience I had on another platform and received mixed responses. About twelve years ago, a Consultant was engaged to undertake preparatory activities for a new WASH project. One of the tasks included a review of WASH Sector policies, guidelines and frameworks developed in Ghana over the preceding ten years. At the end of the Inception Phase of the assignment, the consultant indicated it would not be possible for them to undertake that activity. When pressed further, they indicated they had come across over one hundred of such documents! I was skeptical. I opened my laptop and carried out a quick search. In less than five minutes I had located more than eighty of them. Some in draft form, but most of them completed. I had been part of the preparation of most of them or at least I had been part of the consultative processes during preparation. It was decided on that project not to develop any new policies or guidelines, but to try and work with the existing policies and guidelines.

### ***Environmental Sanitation Policy***

A lot of work has gone into developing a strong policy framework for the WASH Sector. In the late 1990s under the Project Wide Capacity Building Support to the Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development under the Urban Environmental Sanitation Project. The first Environmental Sanitation Policy, the green book as it was called by some, was developed. A lot of credit goes to the then Chief Director of the Ministry of Local Government, Mr. S. M. Y. Zanu and the first head of the EHSD Mr. Henry Noye Nortey after it was transferred to that Ministry. The review of the policy was started during the tenure of Mr. William Asinowa Marfo and was complete in 2010 during the time of Naa Lenason Demedeme to align the policy with the MDGs and to bring on board the experiences and challenges encountered during the implementation of the first policy. Key additions were the inclusion of the National Environmental Sanitation Strategic Action Plan (NESSAP) and the Sanitation Investment Plan. Cosmas Kambozie acted as head of the EHSD briefly before Mr. Anthony Mensah took over. Mr. Joseph Obeng Poku also acted for a while before the current head Mr. Akwetey Sampson, under who the Environmental Sanitation Policy is currently under revision again to align to the Sustainable Development Goals.

### ***National Water Policy***

The Water Directorate under the Ministry of Works and Housing was created in 2003. The first Director for Water was Mr. Minta Aboagye, the current chair of the Board of the Water Resources Commission. During his tenure, the first National Water Policy was developed in 2007. After Mr. Aboagye, Dr. Suleman Alhassan held the fort as director briefly before Mr. Fred Addae Took over till 2017 when the MSWR was created. Mr. Donnan Tay was the first Director for water when the MSWR. The current acting director is Mr. Kwabena Gyasi-Duku. The National Water Policy was revised and launched in July this year to align with the SDGs and to ensure the lessons learnt during the implementation were incorporated.

### ***Ghana WASH Sector Development Program***

The Ghana WASH Sector Development Program was developed by the Ministry. The main purpose of the GWASHSDP is to provide a framework for coordinated implementation of activities to deliver the vision, policy objectives and targets set for the Ghana WASH Sector. It also aims to guide the sector in the planning, development and management of national water resources, and in the delivery and management of sustainable WASH services.

### **Other Policies**

As I indicated earlier, several policies, guidelines and strategies have been developed. Without going into detail, I will highlight a few:

- National Drinking Water Quality Management Framework
- National Community Water Supply and Sanitation Program Strategy
- Ghana Water Limited Standard Operating Procedures
- Rural Sanitation Model and Strategy
- Hand Hygiene for All
- Liquid Waste Management Strategy
- Solid Waste Management Strategy
- WASH in Schools Guidelines
- WASH In Healthcare Facilities Guidelines
- Water and Sanitation for All Agenda

### **2.3 Sector Coordination**

The relationship between the various actors in the Sector is the envy of some other sectors. Gathered here today at Mole XXXV organized by Civil Society and being held outside the capital are representatives of Government, Academia, Private Sector and the youth. The youth are represented by the Child Sanitation Diplomat Master Wumbei. CONIWAS has been working closely with government, academia and Development Partners. Indeed, it is funding from DANIDA under the Policy Monitoring and Management Support (PMMS) 2003 to 2008 that supported the setting up of CONIWAS twenty years. The same project supported the Water Directorate and the EHSD.

In the last four years, the Ministry for Sanitation and Water Resources has revived the Annual Joint Sector Review. There have been Sector Working Group Meetings held every year, at least once. The Technical Working Groups have been quite active. It is gratifying to state that, the Ministry usually takes cognizance of decisions of the Technical Working Groups in decision-making. Just last Friday, The Technical working Group for Water met at the MSWR to deliberate on actions to ensure the National Water Policy is implemented successfully.

### **2.4 Scaling-up Good Practice**

Togbe Chair, In Ghana, so many initiatives have been implemented successfully and showcased at the global level. I recollect taking some colleagues from the Francophone countries to visit the Teshie-Nungua Sewerage Treatment and Compost Recycling Plant.

They were very impressed and went back to implement same. My French is very limited so we had a tough time communicating but Engineering-Speak is universal. The next time I met one of them at an international conference, his English had improved drastically. He shared experiences on how the plant has impacted a local government area. When he asked about the state of the plant he had visited, I sadly told him it had been closed down. Togbe Chair, till today, the road leading to the Plant is called Fertiliser Road. Any GPS will tell you same.

There have been many initiatives with efforts to reach the unserved. There have been approaches for delivery of WASH services in hard-to-reach communities (overseas areas), communities in the saline and flouride belts etc. District-wide WASH Interventions have been piloted. Low-income urban communities have been targeted. WASH-in Schools and Healthcare Facilities have been implemented. These need to be coordinated very closely with the Ministries of Education and Health and the Ghana Education Service and Ghana Health Service. The goal of reaching every Ghanaian living everywhere including children and people living with disabilities.

It is time we scaled up the good practices that have been implemented. It is a well-known fact that there are modifications to improve on performance of any system. We thought Windows XP was the ultimate Operating System some twenty-odd years ago. There have been modifications, improvement and several updates including an update I had last month which has an enhanced predictive text mechanism.

## 2.5 Progress on SDG 6

Togbe Chairman, I need to quickly mention the progress made with respect to SDG 6. Since the Compact was signed by the President, it is one of the key source documents for the sector. A quick summary of the achievements of the major targets area according to JMP for 6.1 and 6.2 as indicated in the Compact are as follows:

6.1 Drinking Water: The target is **“By 2030, achieve universal and equitable access to safe and affordable drinking water for all.”** Basic Access is 44%; Safely Manage Access is 44% and Limited Access is 6%.

6.2 Sanitation: The target is **“By 2030, achieve access to adequate and equitable sanitation and hygiene for all and end open defecation, paying special attention to the needs of women and girls and those in vulnerable situations.”** Basic Access is 13%; Safely Managed is 16% and Limited Access is 44% Basic Access to hygiene is 42% (Page 18 of the Compact).

There have been marginal improvements and the definitions of the targets have been revised. In Ghana, we developed the golden indicators to enable us focus on some key targets.

The other targets are measured by GEMI and GLAAS

6.3 Water quality and wastewater treatment: **“By 2030, improve water quality by reducing pollution, eliminating dumping and minimizing release of hazardous chemicals and materials, halving the proportion of untreated wastewater and substantially increasing**

**recycling and safe reuse globally.”** In the urban areas, there has been some improvement in the provision of infrastructure for wastewater treatment.

6.4 Water use and scarcity: **“By 2030, substantially increase water-use efficiency across all sectors and ensure sustainable withdrawals and supply of freshwater to address water scarcity and substantially reduce the number of people suffering from water scarcity.”** This addresses water scarcity, aiming to ensure enough water for people and the economy, as well as for the environment, by increasing water-use efficiency across all sectors of society

6.5 Water Resources Management: **“By 2030, implement integrated water resources management at all levels, including through transboundary cooperation as appropriate.”** The Water resources Commission has been doing its best to deal with this.

### **3. CHALLENGES IN SDG 6 IMPLEMENTATION**

There are several challenges which must be resolved to enable the sector attain the national and SDG targets. I would like to focus on just three which I believe have impacted negatively on the sector and which when resolved will ameliorate the other challenges.

The three are:

- **Funding,**
- **Systems Strengthening and Planning** and
- **Regulation & Enforcement!**

#### **3.1 Funding for WASH**

According to Kofi Annan, **“We shall not defeat any of the infectious diseases that plague the developing world until we have also won the battle for safe drinking water, sanitation, and basic health care.”** This is a profound statement which Ghana has to consider critically in looking at the funding required for WASH. The importance of WASH is acknowledged by all. The signing of the Presidential Compact attests to this and the President of the Republic has been the co-Chair of the SDG on the global stage. However, the funding for WASH has been Development Partner led for many years. This is not sustainable. It is my sincere hope that with the signing of the Compact, Government of Ghana will commit more of its Internally Generated Revenue for funding of WASH.

In this era, the WASH Sector needs to develop innovative finance mechanisms and target sources which have hitherto not been traditional funding sources. The adoption of these new measures should always have equity and sustainability as core principles.

#### **3.2 Systems Strengthening, Sector Planning & Sector Information Systems**

Togbe Chair, Systems strengthening is critical to the WASH Sector. There is the need to align and integrate all approaches to the policies, strategies and coordination in the sector. A “one

view” by stakeholders at all levels is needed. The need to have a strong basis for planning and decision making is essential. To this end, the process of having a functional Sector Information System for the WASH Sector has travelled a long, tortuous and arduous journey. The presence of a robust information system is essential for decision making. I was involved as far back as 2010 when the concept was developed for funding of the SIS under the Sustainable Rural Water Supply and Sanitation Project. All the Directors for the Water Directorate mentioned above have been involved in the process and only the first director for the EHSD has not been part of this process. Togbe Chair, Honourable Minister, the light at the end of the tunnel is very bright at the moment. It is my fervent hope that the periodic updates in the SIS will be an integral part of sector activities in collaboration with the relevant local government personnel at the district level.

The SIS should not be seen as an end in itself. Sector stakeholders including Development Partners, NGOs/CSOs, Private Sector and Government itself should take decisions based on data and not on other personal, social and political considerations which are mostly inimical to the sustainability of the services provided. Performance benchmarks should be published and stakeholders should all ensure that they work and meet those measurable targets. The necessary updates and revision are critical to achieving the SDGs.

Delivery of WASH Services should as far as practicable use circular economy principles. The sector must ensure in planning that Climate Adaptation and Mitigation measure are integrated. Infrastructure at all levels should be resilient to withstand the various climatic conditions and shocks.

### **3.3 Regulatory Systems and Enforcement**

The challenges of enforcement are well known. The laws are in place but our social, traditional, religious and political systems sometimes pose a hindrance. During a conference a few years ago where I was a facilitator, I asked a Chief Executive of an Assembly the Political Challenges he faces when it comes to enforcement. He started of explaining some purely administrative Stuff. I cut in and told him I prefaced my question with political. He shifted in his seat and I paraphrase what he said:

“We took a decision to charge sanitation offenders. We took a few of them to court. One Bishop called me and asked me to leave his boys who were my brothers. The next week, when we took the next batch, my Imam also called me and asked me why I was doing that to my brothers!”

He threw up his arms in frustration!

Togbe Chair, the role of Local Governments when it comes to enforcement in the sanitation and hygiene promotion. Environmental Health Officers, who are at the forefront of this need to be continually strengthened and empowered.

The Public Utilities Regulatory Commission regulates the urban water supply utility among its functions. There are however several other providers of WASH services including Small

Water Enterprises, Water Tanker Services, Vacuum trucks for emptying septic tanks, which require regulation. The Water Resources Commission has done quite a good job in the regulation of Groundwater with respect to the licensing regime for borehole drilling. The regulations with respect to abstraction of surface water are also being implemented. There are however some major challenges with the management of our water basins as seen with the harm being caused by illegal mining.

Togbe Chair, it is almost impossible these days to make a speech without mentioning the pollution of our water bodies by illegal mining. The solutions needed go beyond the WRC, but they have a strong role to play as the custodians of the Water Resources in Ghana as prescribed by the National Constitution.

#### **4 THE WAY FORWARD**

Togbe Chair, I sometimes feel the sector is in a constant state of lamentations. There have been some modest gains. Indeed, I agree there is a lot of work to be done. The sector should not rest on the modest achievements but strive to achieve the targets. In describing what I see the major challenges faced by the WASH sector, I actually prescribed solutions in the three areas of Funding, Systems Strengthening and Regulation & Enforcement. If we deal with these effectively we will almost certainly be close to achieving SDG 6. The Compact signed by the President on August 28, 2024 provides a strong avenue and direction for the Sector in achieving the SDGs.

The gains made in the WASH Sector by having the twins WATER and SANITATION in the same Ministry should be maintained.

##### **4.1 Mind Set Transformation**

I want to add one more thing which I would like to call Mind Set Transformation. This should start from the very top and should be integral in changing our knowledge, behaviours, attitudes, practices and thoughts when it comes to WASH.

Leadership at all levels beginning at the very top must appreciate the need for prioritization and funding of water, sanitation and hygiene. I get surprised when I mention no industry can exist without water and there is a look of disbelief...

The Invention of the toilet is the most significant public health measure in the last 100 years. The need to ensure the gains are maintained should be the focus of all.

At local government level, the same kind of prioritization is needed. The need to have clear budget lines and the release of the said funds should be a key indicator for the assemblies.

For each of us here, we know what must be done and how the attitudes we see on the streets must change. Start with our children, Master Wumbei and co...

Madam Chair, Honourable Minister, Ladies and Gentlemen

- Can we meet the SDG targets? Yes we can!
- Are we on track? No we are not!
- Do we have what it takes to get back on track? Yes we do!
- Are ready to take the bull by the horns? The answer is... HMMM

Thank you very much

And God richly Bless us all!