



Policy brief

**WATER-RELATED CHALLENGES IN RURAL GHANA: INSIGHTS INTO THE PLIGHT OF COCOA
GROWING COMMUNITIES IN GHANA**

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1. INTRODUCTION

One of the surest ways of tackling rural poverty is the fiscal empowerment of local government units that are close with the local people and can therefore better ascertain the socio-economic challenges of the rural population. Recognizing this logic, the 1992 Constitution makes provision for decentralization and confers on District Assemblies deliberative, legislative and executive functions or powers.¹ Beyond the Constitution, the Local Governance Act, Act 936 of 2016 make the District Assembly “... responsible for the overall development of the district.”² This legislations further specifically require District Assemblies to, among other things:

“...initiate programmes for the development of basic infrastructure and provide municipal works and services in the district...”³

It is therefore expected that basic but vital infrastructure such as water facilities are made readily available to rural population by the District Assemblies in order to alleviate the struggles most rural dwellers endure in the absence of clean drinking water. However, while most District Assemblies in Ghana have and are still delivering on their mandates, there are serious challenges that sometimes prevent them from undertaking needful life-saving interventions such as water projects and other municipal services. Majority, if not all, of the District Assemblies in Ghana are financially constrained because the District Assemblies Common Fund (DACF) which ought to be the main wherewithal for development programmes and projects in the districts are often not forthcoming.⁴ It is not clear why the proceeds from the DACF are not forthcoming but some have blamed it on “...the emerging tendency among politicians and public servants to collaborate to ‘create, loot, and share’...”⁵

This challenge inevitably affects the overall well-being of rural communities with regard to access to basic infrastructure critical to meaningful living. Whereas all districts in Ghana have one challenge or another concerning provision of basic infrastructure, this policy paper focuses on acute water-related challenges in three communities drawn from Juaboso District and Awutu Senya District in Ghana.⁶ The paper starts off with an insight into the water-related challenges. The

¹ See Chapter 20 of the 1992 Constitution of the Republic of Ghana.

² See the Local Governance Act, Act 936 of 2016, p. 20

³ Ibid. p.20

⁴ Interviews with district officials in Juaboso, Bia West and Awutu Senya District Assemblies suggest that rarely do these districts receive the four quarterly instalments of DACFs. These districts either do not receive certain quarterly instalments at all or sometimes the four quarterly instalments are put together and paid to the districts in the third or fourth quarter of the year which make effective programme and project implementation very difficult. Moreover, the instalments paid in a given year are often payment in arrears.

⁵ Ghanaian Chronicle (2013). Payment Of Common Fund In Arrears Is Unhelpful. Available at <https://www.modernghana.com/news/494853/payment-of-common-fund-in-arrears-is-unhelpful.html> [Accessed 18th October, 2017]

⁶ Juaboso district is located in Western Region of Ghana while Awutu Senya District is found in the Central Region of Ghana. These districts are cocoa producing districts and currently benefiting from the interventions of the Cocoa Life Program, a program holistic in nature, drawing on the expertise of several

impacts of water challenges on these three communities are outlined. The paper then makes some recommendations to address some of these challenges.

1 INSIGHTS INTO ACUTE WATER CHALLENGES OF COCOA GROWING COMMUNITIES

Access to good and safe drinking water should be a right rather than a privilege. In point of fact, Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs underline water, security and safety as basic needs of humans⁷ and thus presupposing that the absence of these needs has serious implications on livelihoods. Ankamase, Nyamebekyere and Nsonyameye are among cocoa growing communities with acute water challenges that deserve urgent attention by government (national and local), non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and philanthropists alike. It must be said that these communities have great potential as they contribute significantly to the country's economy growth through their cultivation of cocoa, an important foreign-exchange earning commodity in Ghana.

1.1 Ankamase

Ankamase is one of the several hundreds of communities in the Awutu Senya District in the Central Region of Ghana that has no access to potable drinking water. The major and only source of drinking water for this community is a stream popularly referred to as River Ankama. The extent of daily pollution of this stream is palpable in that community members walk through this stream in their quest to cross the river to trade in other major neighbouring communities. The same stream is also the source of drinking water for cattle and other domestic animals while children frequently swim in it. These variables together make the stream very unsafe for human consumption and therefore threaten the very survival of the inhabitants of this community. It must be emphasized here that while the District Assembly had in the past attempted to drill a borehole for this community, the perennial floods prevented the officials of the Assembly from getting access to the community thereby compounding their miseries.

1.2 Nsonyameye

Nsonyameye is among the most deprived communities in the Juaboso District at least in terms of access to clean and safe drinking water. Hand-dug well is the only water source currently sustaining the community. However, this is a rickety well dug right in middle of a cocoa farm and thus exposed to great menaces. Since the well have no coverings, chances are high that they may be polluted by the application of all sorts of poisonous chemicals including insecticides, fungicides, and fertilizers in the cocoa farms.⁸ This serves as a major health hazard that could, in extreme scenario, result in death.

It is worth mentioning here that the Juaboso District Assembly did provide one solar-powered borehole for this community in 2008⁹ but as of June 2017 this borehole had broken down and thus

development organizations and sponsored by Mondelez International, a reputable American confectionery, food, and beverage company.

⁷ See Poston, B. (2009). Maslow's hierarchy of needs. *surgical technologist*, 41(8), 347-353.

⁸ Interviews with community members in both communities during fieldwork conducted in June, 2017

⁹ Interviews with Assistant Planning Officer and Budget Analyst of the district.

not functional¹⁰ The amount of money raised from the sale of the water in this community was not commensurate with the cost of the repair of the boreholes.

2 IMPACT OF WATER-RELATED CHALLENGES

The communities mentioned in this brief suffer similar consequences which is predominantly health effect. Typhoid and bilharzia are among common illnesses in the communities which affects the health budget of victims. Given that revenue accrued from cocoa production is seasonal since the crop is itself a seasonal crop, additional demands on the meagre incomes of farmers through illness constitute severe strain on their livelihoods.

Moreover, the health implications on the lives of residents of these communities have resulted in some of the residents relocating to other major communities where clean and safe water is easily and readily accessible. This does have some implications on cocoa production regardless of how insignificant those implications may appear to be.

In the case of Ankamase community, the water-related ordeal that the community suffers goes beyond the absence of safe drinking water to encompass perennial flooding of the River Ankama especially in the rainy seasons. The uncontrollable flooding of the river threatens the very existence of the community in that it traps the residents for more than two weeks and thus inhibits them from crossing to neighbouring communities where most of their economic activities are transacted.

3 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Whereas decentralization promises to solve, inter alia, the basic challenges of communities across Ghana, this brief has shown that there are communities in Ghana that are still battling with access to safe and potable drinking water. Scholars such as Inanga and Osei-Wusu highlight Ghana's tremendous achievement of political and administrative decentralization but at the same time observe that fiscal decentralization has been lagging behind.¹¹ This brief corroborates Inanga and Osei-Wusu's thesis and argues that the infrequent release of the DACF, the main development fund for the District Assemblies, is among the key reasons for which most districts are unable to deliver on their mandate of providing basic infrastructure to communities. The brief brings under limelight the increased vulnerability of two cocoa communities – in the Central Region and Western Region of Ghana respectively – as a result of a lack of what Abraham Maslow considers basic needs (i.e., safe and clean drinking water).

The brief makes the following recommendations as part of measures to address the water-related challenges faced by these communities:

- a. The Awutu Senya District and Juaboso District Assemblies should consider it, as a matter of urgency, to provide decent drinking water for the communities of Ankamase and Nsonyameye. Perhaps a further assessment of the situation could be done by the district Planning Officers and the community development officers to ascertain the best possible

¹⁰ Interviews with community members during fieldwork conducted in June 2017

¹¹ Inanga, E. L., & Osei-Wusu, D. (2004). Financial resource base of sub-national governments and fiscal decentralization in Ghana. *African Development Review*, 16(1), 72-114.

solution to this challenge. Provision of new boreholes or repair of broken ones would, however, be helpful to these communities.

- b. Given that District Assemblies remain ineffective in the face of inadequate financial resources coupled with the manifold planned development activities to be rolled out annually, it is crucial that central government prioritizes the earliest and fullest release of the DACF to enable the District Assemblies tackle basic but life-supporting projects such as provision of boreholes.
- c. In the case of Ankamase community in the Awutu Senya District, the District Assembly must find it necessary to construct a culvert over the River Ankama in order to prevent the perennial flooding with its enervating effects