



STATEMENT ISSUED AT THE END OF THE 2<sup>ND</sup> NATIONAL WATER CITIZENS FORUM HELD AT THE UNIVERSITY OF DEVELOPMENT STUDIES GUEST HOUSE IN ACCRA ON THE 29<sup>TH</sup> OF NOVEMBER 2016

COSPE, ISODEC, CICMA and the Water Citizens Network of Ghana organized the 2<sup>nd</sup> Water Citizens National Forum in Accra on the 29<sup>th</sup> of November 2016. The organization of the forum was supported by the European Union and the Water Rights Foundation.

The theme for the 2016 forum was “Deriving full benefits of Citizens Participation for improved WATSAN Services; confronting the unfinished business of decentralization”. Main speakers at the forum included Mr. Aboagye Minta a former Director of Water at the Ministry of Water Resources Works and Housing; Dr. Chaka Uzundu the Head of Policy and Campaigns at WaterAid Ghana and Mr. Benjamin Arthur a former Executive Secretary of the Coalition of NGOs in Water and Sanitation.

The forum focused on the objective of bringing WATSAN governance closer to the population and detailing out with the assistance of main speakers, discussants and participants the means to achieve this goal. The sub themes of the forum to realize the goal were;

- History of WATSAN Decentralisation; Vision and Current Reality
- Relationship gaps between Local Government and district WATSAN agencies and impact on citizen participation
- Strengthening Local Government and District WATSAN agencies Ties for functional participation)

In the very active discussions that ensued in the three sessions of the forum the main issues that emerged that in the view of the participants require projection and active as well as continuous follow-ups included the following;

**Capacity building for District Assemblies on long term planning**

It was observed that capacity-building for local governments had received a lot of attention and resources in Ghana. Participants were however of the view that, often the capacity building activities were not applied to the real and strategic needs of the local governments. It was explained that, often the fault comes from the district assembly when they lightly present not very well considered training needs to donors. Participants acknowledged that one area which is lacking and receives very little assistance in the local governments is the area of training on long term planning and coordination.



### **Continuous Challenge of Rural water**

It also emerged and was acknowledged by participants that the fortunes of rural water have been declining since its separation from urban water. Some participants were of the view that there is the need for Government, after two decades of the reforms, to review and assess whether the considerations that informed the separation of rural and urban water management are still relevant in present time.

### **Classification and prioritization of WATSAN needs by districts**

It came up in the discussions that the coordination of plans and resources between local governments and WATSAN agencies operating in their jurisdictions remains a challenge because District Assemblies do not classify and prioritize their WATSAN needs such as makes it possible for them to readily share such information with the agencies and other partners operating in the districts in a way that coordinates different sector interventions.

### **Low investment into the water sector**

The perennial challenge of the sector i.e. lack of adequate financing to the sector was mention and extensively discussed. It was observed that very little Government of Ghana budgeted resources were applied to rural water compared to urban water, particularly after the water sector reforms.

### **Expenditure on behalf of local governments by central government**

It was also discussed that the reason why local government is financially handicapped to meet some of its responsibilities including that of WATSAN is because about 50% of the district assembly's revenue is spent on its behalf by the Central Government. It was explained that procurement for most goods and services for the various District Assemblies is made in Accra by the Central Government and the local governments only receives goods and services whose contracts were drawn with the Central Government and not with the Local Governments. The example was given of a sanitation service provider (Zoomlion) in the districts whose contract is with the Central Government, a situation which makes reporting of the service provider to the Local Government difficult.

### **Structural displacement of power from District Assemblies**

It was observed that, structurally, the District Assembly as it is currently constituted and the appointment of its Chief Executives by the Head of State do not feel any obligation for



accountability to citizens. The allegiance of the entire bureaucratic structure of the Local Government whose Chief Executive is appointed in Accra and whose key staff are posted from

Accra; is to the President and the Government bureaucracy in Accra and not to the citizens in the local Government area. It was observed that this situation also contributes to the challenges of citizens' participation to influence WATSAN policies in the Districts.

### **Recommendations of the Forum**

1. The Ministry Local Government and Rural Development, Donors and CSOs should work with the District Assemblies in the determination of training needs in long term planning and coordination targeting coherence between plans of the Local Government and those of WATSAN agencies operating in their jurisdiction.
2. After two decades of water sector reforms in Ghana there is the need for the Ministry of Water Resources Works and Housing to review and assess whether or not the considerations which informed the separation of rural water from urban water are still relevant at present.
3. District Assemblies should develop and incorporate into their planning systems a template that allows them to properly classify and priorities WATSAN needs of their respective Local Governments.
4. Civil Society Organizations should continue in its engagement with Government for more financial resources to the water sector and also increase its focus and push for the required amendments to the local government law to give greater autonomy to District Assemblies over their expenditure.
5. Civil Society Organizations should also work together to realize the constitutional amendment which will make it possible for citizens to elect their District Assembly Chief Executives.
6. CSOs, Donors and the Government should consider the organization of a special conference on WATSAN decentralization for further focus and work on the numerous challenges surrounding the subject