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STRENGTHENING COLLABORATION BETWEEN CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS AND THE STATE IN GHANA:

Indicator Tracking and Strengthening

Strengthening Collaboration between Civil Society Organisations and the State in Ghana:

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ACCRONYMS

AfDB	African Development Bank
CLEAR-AA	Centre for Learning on Evaluation and Results – Anglophone Africa
CSOs	Civil Society Organisations
GoG	Government of Ghana
INGO	International Non- Governmental Organisations
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MoME	Ministry of Monitoring and Evaluation
NES	National Evaluation Systems
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisations

FOREWARD

The CLEAR-AA/ Twende Mbele project titled **"Building effective collaboration between Government and Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) to improve performance monitoring and evaluation systems,"** is part of a phase II initiative being implemented across four African Twende Mbele partner countries – Ghana, Uganda, South Africa and Benin.

RATIONALE: Civil society is meaningfully engaged in evidence generation and use; from sub-national to national to global levels. Their skills and expertise have the potential to significantly contribute towards national development, through the collaboration with the state to achieve mutual goals.

PROCESS: (i) To identify a sector in four countries where State and CSO engagement is vibrant. (ii) Key stakeholders in the identified sector to pinpoint a significant problem in monitoring and evaluation within the policy planning cycle, which may be mitigated through effective collaboration between CSOs and the state. (iii) The recognised problem to be addressed through proposed intervention (s).

OBJECTIVE: The primary motivation of the project is to encourage an inclusive approach to strengthening government monitoring and evaluation systems through the representation of CSOs, and in doing so, improve service delivery within a targeted sector.

Ghana was identified as the pilot intervention country for numerous reasons. Ghana has increasingly demonstrated high levels of commitment to the use of evidence for decision-making; evident in the establishment of the Ministry of Monitoring and Evaluation (MME) to oversee the implementation of government priority programmes at the sector level. The country has a recently approved National Monitoring and Evaluation Policy. In addition, the in-country partner, the Ghana Monitoring and Evaluation Forum (GMEF), has a profound understanding of the evidence landscape within Ghana and drives advocacy for evaluation use across the country.

Twende Mbele, CLEAR-AA and GMEF, through the process mentioned above, identified a consistent challenge in tracking performance monitoring indicators within the Sanitation sector in Ghana. The challenge lies in the inability of the state to tap into existing sources of evidence generation where administrative data or census figures are lacking in the sector. This constraint may be attributed to government systems lacking effective mechanisms for fostering relationships with a broader set of stakeholders, such as universities, the private sector, VOPEs and civil society.

The project explored the opportunities for the use of CSO generated evidence to increase the capacity of government to monitor the Sanitation sector in Ghana through the strengthening and widening of performance indicators. The following working paper offers insight into the methods, tools and processes required to foster collaboration between government and CSOs to strengthen and widen performance monitoring indicators.

INTRODUCTION

Research shows that National Evaluation Systems (NES) have been emerging in various African countries, differing in maturity, capacity and effectiveness (Porter and Goldman 2013). African governments are implementing evaluation systems to measure outcomes and impacts of their investments in social services, infrastructure and other public goods. Civil Society Organisations contribute significantly to the social and economic development of countries. CSOs cover a wide range of institutions and mandates, and include work at a community level – known as Community-Based Organisations (CBO) and professional Non-Government Organisations (NGO), as well as advocacy, lobbying and research organisations Ghaus-Pasha (2004:3). CSOs come with varying human and financial capabilities, and serve on issues ranging from basic social services to the protection of human and environmental rights. In addition, internal systems are well established and there is coordination of activities such as data collection and synthesis, analysis and dissemination. As such, CSOs represent a wealth of knowledge and potential influence, and have much to offer in the process of national development (Khan, Waheed, and Iqbal 2003: 910).

There is a dearth of literature, which encourages the inclusion of multi-stakeholders, particularly CSOs, in contributing towards Government Wide Monitoring and Evaluation (GWM&E). Through the better utilisation of evidence in policy and practice, policy makers can make informed decisions by identifying the problems, consider their causes, improve policy solutions, advance policy implementation and monitor performance (Court, J et al: 5). Participation can be used as an instrument and an approach for involving stake holders and actors in decision-making concerning issues affecting them. Participatory Monitoring and Evaluation (MP&E) differs from the conventional monitoring and evaluation in that MP&E attempts to include all the stakeholders throughout the policy planning cycle. PM&E gained popularity in recent years as it recognises that stakeholders should not only be involved in defining the problem but also in collecting, analysing and interpreting data for programme/policy development and evaluation (Matsiliza, M; 74).

Despite the move towards a more open and accessible policy cycle, CSOs continue to fail to influence policy processes in developing countries (Court, J et al: 14). The question that this project aims to address across four African Twende Mbele Partner countries, is, *what are the roles of CSOs in the monitoring and evaluation function throughout the policy cycle?*

FRAMEWORK: *Figure 1: Integrating evaluation into the program/policy lifecycle*

The Australian Research Council (ARC) provides a valuable framework to understand how the Monitoring and Evaluation cycle integrates into the programme/policy cycle (Figure 1).

Through embedding evaluation into the early stages of the policy cycle, government officials are able to discern the data and information needs required to gain meaningful insights which can inform future decisions. The evaluation cycle supports the process of continuous improvement to programmes/policies.
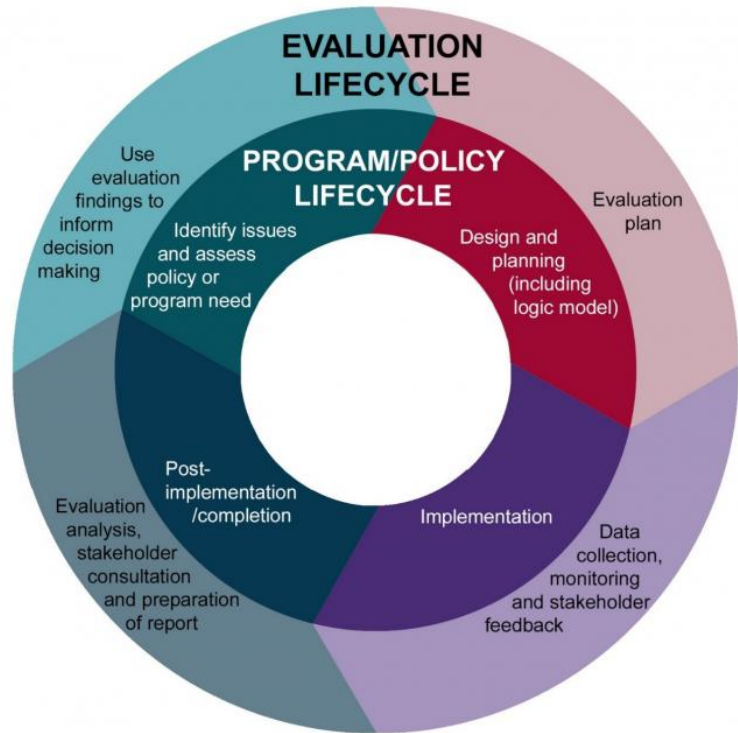
Country	Sector	Policy Cycle	Evaluation Cycle
Ghana	Sanitation	Implementation Phase	Data collection, monitoring and stakeholder feedback

Problem Identified: At present, the national indicators that look at liquid waste treatment in Ghana only indicate, in basic terms, whether a district is open defecation free as well as coverage statistics. It is not clear what the targets are for this. The current indicators fail to reveal critical information like how much a household is paying for the transport of liquid waste, the form of transport that is being used and how this waste is being treated.

Solution Proposed: To include CSO generated evidence into framing a wider set of indicators that could feed into the Ghana administrative data system through the collaboration of government and CSOs.

The primary **activities** undertaken were the following:

(i)   Stake holder engagement (s)

(ii)   Conducting a baseline study

(iii)   Mapping of CSO generated data

(iv)   Identifying barriers to CSO and State Collaboration

(v)   Platform Analysis

CSOs ROLE IN THE POLICY PLANNING CYCLE

Throughout international development debates, it is observed that policies formed on the foundation of reliable evidence are likely to be more effective. The political will to make public services more evidence based has contributed to the development of both research and practice in the field of "knowledge mobilization". The array of approaches to encourage the creation, distribution and use of research-informed evidence is abundant in the evaluation space (Powell; 36). However, unfortunately it is not always the best research and evidence, which is the most influential. High-quality evidence seldom reaches its potential to solve difficulties and improve people's livelihoods. 'Researchers' and 'policymakers' are often seen to inhabit parallel spaces – debating on similar issues but never fully engaging with each other's work (Court, Hovland and Young, 2005). There is an abundance of qualified researchers working within NGOs, INGOs, universities and think tanks, trade unions etc. who could be used as an asset by the state to inform decision making.

Discussions around the role of CSOs in international development has continuously been debated, and often looks at the nature of the organisations themselves and the political context surrounding them. Historically, influencing policy has been an important part of the development and rationale of CSO agenda. It has always been a primary part of their work to mediate between 'public' and 'private' interests. (Court, Hovland and Young, 2005). For many CSOs aiming to influence policy, a crucial part of the work must be to bridge the gap between research and policy. This is the key challenge for organisations who have developed knowledge, which could be applied to solve problems in development, however do not find a way to feed this evidence into government policy-making processes.

Pollard et al, believes that CSOs need to negotiate in order to influence the policy process effectively (Pollard, v). For CSOs to effectively participate in the policy process, they need to meet a standard of evidence generation, which could be considered as reliable data. Evidence must be relevant, appropriate and timely, in an enabling social, political and economic context. Furthermore, the position that a CSO holds within a specific political system, and its relationships with other actors, affects the ways they are able to use evidence and the likelihood of the organisation achieving policy influence. CSO engagement will further be determined through the nature of the political context as well as the specific policy stance a government takes on a specific issue (Pollard, V). In summation, for the state to successfully use CSO generated evidence to inform policy and setting direction; the relationships between key stakeholders need to be fostered through continuous engagement, CSO evidence needs to meet governmental standards and regulations and government departments need to be willing to take on different opinions and agendas.

Pollard et al, identifies 7 key criteria which CSOs could use evidence to improve their chances of policy influence:

i) **Legitimacy**: Legitimacy is essential for policy influence. Evidence can be used in particular to enhance the sources of CSO legitimacy, but also representative, moral or legal legitimacy.

ii) **Effectiveness**: Evidence can be used to make CSO work more effectively. Gathering evidence can be a tool for CSOs to evaluate and improve the impact of their work, share lessons with others, and capture the institutional memory and knowledge held within organisations.

iii) **Integration**: There is often a disconnection between CSO work on implementation or service delivery and the rest of the policy process. CSOs can have greater influence if they find better ways to turn their practical knowledge and expertise into evidence that can be used to inform other parts of the policy process (agenda setting, formulation and evaluation).

iv) **Translation**: Evidence should not be used to 'trump' the perspectives and experience of ordinary people. CSOs should find ways to turn people's understanding into legitimate evidence, and of combining community wisdom with expert evidence.

v) **Access**: Access to policymaking processes is vital for CSOs. Evidence can help CSOs gain better access to policy setting.

vi) **Credibility**: Evidence must be valid, reliable and convincing to its audience. CSOs may need to adapt for different groups the kind of evidence they use – the same evidence may be credible to some but not to others.

vii) **Communication**: Evidence must be presented in an accessible and meaningful way. The most effective communication is often two-way, interactive and ongoing. (pollard; vi)

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CSOs ROLE IN TRACKING AND STRENGTHENING INDICATORS

Over the past several years, there have been significant developments in evidence methodologies, such as the improvement of systematic review methods and progressions in trial methodologies for complex interventions. There has also been greater focus on ways of joining up and cross-examining administrative data systems (Nutley, S; 312). Research-based evidence alone is unlikely to be adequately significant to determine the direction of a policy or practice, nor should it be.

There is an increasing desire to involve a wide range of actors and relevant knowledge to be used to better policy. Recently it has been recognised as an urgency in promoting forms of multi-actor involvement and effective ways of integrating diverse forms of knowledge. Organizations have become better equipped to collect, analyse and act upon locally-generated data and information. Various methods of inclusion and discussion have been explored, such as the development of citizen surveys and community based action research. However, these initiatives tend to be short-term and project-based, and there remains a need to develop longer-term, more impactful multi-actor relationships and dialogue (Nutley, S; 312). Building relationships between evidence producers and users in order to improve evidence use is no easy feat. Activities to build these relationships have taken many forms, including network-building, putting in place designated knowledge-brokering individuals and/or organizations, embedding researchers in practice settings and establishing research-practice partnerships. Funding for these initiatives has increased as well as evaluative work, but it is still relatively small scale. Overall, although relationship-building initiatives are fairly common, they still tend to be piecemeal and project-based (Nutley, S; 313).

Collaborative evidence use requires a great deal of further investigation and testing. Only of recent has there been a greater advocacy dialogue for a more 'whole systems' approach to

improving evidence use, where systems are seen as complex and interconnected networks that cannot be understood in terms of linear relationships but are instead conditional, contextual and relational (Davies, Powell, & Nutley, 2015). There seems to be a lack of practical tools and detailed guidelines, which makes it extremely difficult to institutionalise these ideas into innovative strategies aimed at improving evidence use (Holmes et al., 2017). The Centre for Learning on Evaluation and Results (CLEAR-AA), has taken a specific interest in the establishment of M&E evidence ecosystems. CLEAR-AA believes that M&E systems evidence used to inform national priorities should not be exclusive to government systems and quantitative monitoring data.

PROCESS TO ASSESS INDICATOR TRACKING GAPS AND OPPORTUNITIES: GHANA SANITATION SECTOR

Initial Stakeholder Engagement	The initial stakeholder engagement was an opportunity for key stakeholders in government and Civil Society to build relationships and find consensus on what the collaboration aims to achieve. The stakeholders identified key indicators that were currently being tracked in the Sanitation sector. The participants acknowledged emerging challenges around these indicators and noted some of the data gaps; suggesting where additional efforts were needed to widen the sector's current approach to monitoring sanitation provision.
Baseline Study	The stakeholder engagement thereafter formed the foundation of the baseline study. The comprehensive study aimed to provide an overview of the current monitoring and evaluation processes and functions within the Sanitation Sector in Ghana. The study explored the background information on the sanitation sector, key stakeholders and their roles, the processes of generating data and policy formulations, the types of indicators necessary at various levels used to assess evidence and the various policy making platforms.
Second Stakeholder Engagement	The second workshop held with civil society players and some government representatives had three outputs. First, the engagement scoped out which organisations were generating evidence in the Sanitation sector and if so, how this evidence is was being utilised by the state. Secondly, the workshop identified barriers in evidence generation and use in the sector and the key advocacy activities needed to address them. Thirdly, participants critically assessed key CSO and government collaboration platforms that are currently discussing evidence in the Water and Sanitation sector. From here, the facilitators expected to gain an understanding on the effectiveness of current CSO/government collaboration platforms and whether or not a new platform for engagement needed to be developed. Lastly, the workshop explored what approaches worked best in CSO and Government collaboration in promoting greater state use of civil society-generated evidence in Ghana.
Mapping Exercise	The mapping exercise required sector stakeholders to critically think about what evidence is being generated and used within the sector. Each organisation/member of state was asked to pinpoint where they are currently using evidence and where they are generating evidence in the sector. This information was mapped out in accordance with the desired set of Sanitation indicators. The excercised failed to have civil society actually list the projects the

	evidence they were referencing was linked to and whether these operated at a local or national level.
Barriers to Effective Collaboration	Stakeholders were asked to list barriers to effective collaboration between CSOs and the state. Thereafter, a list key advocacy activities were explored to combat these challenges. The barriers were lengthy and expressed the inability for CSOs to contribute towards indicator tracking due to differing data collecting methods and the lack of a system to uptake CSO generated data. In addition, Civil Society projects are often short-term and are not often implemented on a national scale. The incompleteness of CSO data poses a challenge for organisations to be included in the administrative data system.
Platform Analysis	Stakeholders identified, shortlisted, assessed and prioritised the most important platforms of CSO and state collaboration. Out of 8 important platforms, four were shortlisted and assessed. At the end of the assessment and with the aid of a six-point-criteria, these were discussed regarding which would be most appropriate, if any , for addressing the key gap identified in needing to expand the existing indicators that are being collected through administrative data to move monitoring beyond open defaecation free communities. **(ANNEXTURE A ATTACHED)**
CSO and Government Collaboration	Stakeholders were provided with the chance to reflect on what successful collaboration between CSOs and the state in Ghana looks like. These insights provided valuable information around what works and what doesn't in effective collaboration.

COLLABORATION PLATFORMS: PRINCIPLES

A strong multi-stakeholder platform is essential to manage the complex processes and diverse actors (Kusters, K et al: 170). The focus of this multi-stakeholder platform may need to be subjected to revision and adaptation on a regular basis, to re-align all participants. Developing sustainable platforms is complex for various reasons. First and foremost, the transaction costs are high in terms of the consistent investment of participants. Secondly, most participants in the CSO sector will be aligned to their own specific rules and regulations provided by their donors. Third, there will be an issue around stakeholder power dynamics, where government officials will most likely have the highest influence over all processes (Kusters, K et al: 172). Fourth, multi-stakeholder platforms may be developed through the interests of the platform management, and not reflect the opinions of all involved. Lastly, the platform will run the risk of becoming a talk shop and little results will be reflected, unless there are action plans are put in place.

Kusters, K et al, outlines three crucial questions to be addressed when thinking about multi-stakeholder platforms (Kusters, K et al: 173):

1. **Looking ahead:** What are the priorities for collaboration in the future?

2. **Looking inward:** What is the quality of the multi-stakeholder process within the platform?

3. **Looking back:** To what extent has the platform met its objectives?

Looking Ahead:

Assessment Criteria	Requirement
Shared long-term goals and action plan	-Stakeholders have shared long-term goals for the landscape. -Stakeholders work together on the basis of a landscape action plan.
Practices and policies	-Stakeholders work together develop practices and policies. -Stakeholders work together to align conservation around practices and policies within the sector.
Improved monitoring and land-use planning	-Stakeholders jointly monitor developments. -Stakeholders catalyse more participatory processes.
Responsive institutions	-Stakeholders keep each other informed and learn from each other. -Stakeholders use information from other stakeholders to make decisions.

Looking Inward:

Effective Co-operation and good governance (Kusters, K et al, :176)

Assessment Criteria	Requirement
Representation	-The platform represents all relevant stakeholders. -Members accept the way in which platform members are selected.
Participation & equity	-All members participate and are heard in discussions. -All members can influence decision making within the platform.
Accountability & transparency	-Members can hold each other accountable for their actions and decisions. -Information and decision-making is transparent.
Capacities	-Platform members have proper knowledge and skills to realize the platform's Objectives. -Platform members have access to diverse sources of information (including local, scientific, technological and legislative knowledge)
Resources	-The platform has sufficient financial resources to operate effectively -The platform has a viable plan to secure financial resources in the future.
Adaptive management	-Platform's plans can change based on periodic reflection on its functioning. -Members are able to address complaints/suggestions/conflicts within the platform.
Leadership	-Members accept and trust the platform's leadership. -Members accept the selection process of leadership.
Theory of change	-Members agree on most of the platform's future objectives. -The platform has a clear and agreed-upon strategy to achieve these objectives.
Facilitation and communication	-The platform is effective in the organization of meetings and mobilization of agreed actions Information is widely shared among members.
Trust	-Members feel comfortable sharing information and making agreements. -Members feel welcome, informed and encouraged to contribute.
Commitment	-Members are committed to the discussions and the agreements. -Stakeholders are willing to look for compromises.

COLLABORATION LESSONS: GHANA

Stakeholders noted that many of the informal methods of collaboration indicated below make it easier to build trust between CSOs and Government, which is necessary for further engagement during formal meetings. Useful lessons from the sanitation sector collaborations are outlined below to provide guidance for future interventions and other networks. They include:

- ✓ Data and evidence are vital for all types of CSO/Government engagement in policy influencing processes.
- ✓ Both formal and informal approaches have been very useful in CSO engagements with government entities and the individuals leading the process.
- ✓ CSOs recognised the value in using special occasions like funerals, alumni meetings and relationships, wedding ceremonies and in recent times, WhatsApp platforms and email lists to build good relationships and to enhance collaboration at all levels.
- ✓ Most institutions (both CSO and Government) organise and use end-of-year review meetings and parties to also strengthen their collaboration with partners

> *"Indeed, it took more time to rebuild such relations. Sometimes they were completely lost …"*
>
> *"we need to always ask what is in it for others and strive to work along those lines. It is necessary in sliding along the continuum of confrontation through collaboration"* - some CSO Leaders.

- ✓ Some CSOs sponsor Government officials to attend courses to foster better relationships with these individuals and their organisations
- ✓ Taking short breaks and informal "discussions over coffee and beer with high ranking officials" also worked well for some CSO representatives.
- ✓ The use of avoidable confrontation in the early days of CONIWAS sometimes created mistrust and contempt, which impaired relations that took a lot of time to rebuild. These often resulted in deadlock and breakdown in communications.
- ✓ Key stakeholders stated the need to meticulously map out stakeholders and assess the needs and aspirations of all stakeholders.
- ✓ Capacity building is essential for NGOs/CSOs to influence sector policies. Beyond the evidence, CSO actors need to understand the issues, learn how to use credible evidence and be able to play by the rules of engagement. There are situations where inadequate capacity negatively affects the core issues. These have tended to limit the extent of engagement with government actors on WASH-related policies.
- ✓ Transparency and accountability, whether real or perceived are essential to building credibility for CSO-government engagements.

Asked if they were successes or failures and why, stakeholders came up with the following common features:

Successes:	Failures:
1. Consistency in advocacy and dialogue with government.	1. Financial sustainability.
2. Financial and technical support to countries/government by both internal and external members.	2. Relevance of the issues at hand/addressed.
3. Credibility of CSOs e.g. MOLE/CONIWAS	3. Leadership failure at all levels.
4. Unity of purpose of CSO members.	4. Expertise of leaders.
5. CSOs abiding with government policies and guidance.	
6. Open support for including government in the CSO group.	
7. Existence of a technically competent secretariat, with an Executive Secretary, Finance Officer, Programme Officer and a strong, voluntary Executive Committee (leadership and coordination)	
8. Effective collaboration at the local level/grassroots	
9. Technical expertise in budget analysis (SEND Ghana).	
10. Establishing an MOU between partners and CONIWAS.	
11. Inclusion of local citizens' in the national policy and budget debates	

NEXT STEPS/OUTPUTS/CONCLUSION

The Ghana pilot project was complex in nature and required an in-depth understanding of the processes, functions, politics and actors involved in the Sanitation sector. The project aimed not only to tackle challenges of M&E in the sector, but the intricacies around stakeholder engagement. Government Monitoring and Evaluation systems are exclusionary in nature and do not often allow for different actors to challenge or contest their progress and decision making. The first step towards an inclusionary M&E system lies within the development of an enabling environment.

The project succeeded in fostering relationships between key actors in government and CSOs, which developed a pathway for future trust and communication. In addition, the engagements allowed for key stakeholders to discuss important concerns in the sector and provided the opportunity for the development of appropriate solutions. The outputs of the engagements have been documented to be used as a valuable tool to lobby for sector change at future engagements and conferences, with the intention for eventual government uptake. In addition, the project investigated the principles required for successful

collaboration platforms which can be used as a guideline to navigate multi-actor relationships.

ANNEXURE 1

Questions: 2 Working Groups

1. Is the list presented exhaustive of existing platforms and if not, what are they?

2. Assess existing platforms and their effectiveness based on key criteria (to be printed out).

3. Discuss which platform, if any, could achieve this goal of adopting a set of indicators that would be used to generate evidence to influence policy reform in the sector (Matrix of indicators discussed earlier), and what would be needed to improve the platform to address this goal.

4. If going with a new platform, what would it look like and how would it address some of the barriers above?

5. Which institutions can support this process to make it work?

Questions for Group Work II (Group 3)

Identify a GENERIC model of what works in CSO and Government collaboration in promoting greater state use of civil society-generated evidence

1. What are some CSO and government collaborations that you know of/or have experienced?

2. Were they successes or failures? Why?

3. What are some of the tools for promoting CSO and government collaboration in evidence generation and use?

4. What doesn't work in CSO and government collaboration?

5. What are some of the strategies (formal and informal) for promoting CSO and government collaboration?

6. What are some of the tips for other countries, from your experiences?