



PROGRAM ON  
WATER GOVERNANCE



EDGES

ENVIRONMENT & DEVELOPMENT  
GENDER, EQUITY, SUSTAINABILITY

# Analyzing participatory urban water governance in Accra, Ghana

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## KEY MESSAGES FOR DECISION MAKERS

- **Local Water Boards (LWBs)** have been established in several communities in Accra, Ghana, and offer a mechanism to **involve residents** of impoverished communities in **making decisions regarding water access and governance**
  - LWBs can be examined as a case study to study their potential with respect to **adaptive and participatory water governance**.
- Citizens suggest that they are **interested in participating in water related decisions**, however they **do not always understand the pathways** that will facilitate engagement. A survey conducted in 2012 (EDGES and AOW survey, 2012) reveals:
  - **86%** of survey respondents from Teshie and Ashaiman (Accra) responded that they do not presently participate in water management groups or committees
  - **57%** of our survey respondents said that they would like to participate more in water governance
- If carried out with sensitivity to local concerns, **community engagement** offers a pathway to **promote more equitable and sustainable water governance**. Such engagement mechanisms must be designed in a way that ensures citizens' voices are represented. As such, it is important to evaluate LWBs as one existing mechanism for participation, in light of these possibilities.

## WHAT WERE THE HIGHLIGHTS OF THE RESEARCH RESULTS?

- **Key potential of LWBs. In several communities, LWBs have served to:**
  - Extend access and fix the price of water: LWBs aim to extend coverage to underserved areas and sell water at established prices, which reduces the potential daily stress of having to negotiate water access and price.
  - Infrastructural legacy: Through partnerships with development organizations and NGOs, LWBs have facilitated infrastructural development for communities.
- **Key Limits of LWBs. LWBs are limited in that:**
  - Burden on communities: LWBs rely on volunteer labor, thus present heavy opportunity costs for members due to time sacrifices.
  - External influence: All LWBs surveyed were established in partnership with external agencies, leading to complex challenges, including top down agendas and the inflexible nature of external agendas and timelines
  - Formal and informal participation: Discrepancies between definitions of “participation” can lead to situations where members or users feel discredited in terms of their involvement and contributions.

## WHAT WAS THE RESEARCH METHOD?

- **Five underserved communities** in Accra were involved with this research. Methods included 43 expert interviews, observations, community debrief sessions and a 243 household surveys conducted in two communities. Specific research sites included:

- Teshie: Survey site, active LWB (1<sup>st</sup> to be established in 2007) that is responsible for water tankers and several water kiosks
- Ashaiman: Survey site, no LWB, and no active mechanisms for participatory governance.
- Nima: Active LWB (est. 2008)<sup>1</sup> responsible for water kiosks directly connected to water main and recently adding two boreholes
- Ayidiki: Active LWB (est. 2010)<sup>1</sup> responsible for water kiosks directly connected to Ghana Water Company Limited (GWCL) water mains
- Sukura: Engaged in informal dialogue with the public utility, GWCL, no current LWB

## WHAT ARE THE IMPLICATIONS FOR DECISION MAKERS?

- LWBs implemented in Accra hold potential for improving water access and fostering more inclusive and adaptive water governance processes by:
  - Serving as a communication channel and accountability tool between communities and the water utility (GWCL)
- LWB schemes in Accra also face significant limits that echo the critical literature surrounding participation and development:
  - Formal participation mechanisms can also sideline other mechanisms for engagement, and can serve as a vehicle for external influence in communities.
  - Water-related development comes with complex obstacles and a frustrating multi-scalar governance landscape, which can deter participation in LWBs

## WHAT UNDERLYING CONCEPTS AND INSIGHTS DOES THE RESEARCH EXPAND UPON?

- **Adaptive governance**: a framework that targets social-ecological dynamism by establishing a clear monitoring system of decision-making feedback loops
- **Participatory governance**: goals related to engagement and inclusion of citizens in water governance, including rule establishment and enforcement
- **Water access statistics in Accra** are murky at best, with best estimates suggesting:
  - ~50% of urban residents have direct access to the municipal water supply (Adank et al 2011)
  - Only 25% of residents having continuous water access (Ainuson 2010)
  - **The majority** of residents have **intermittent supply**, and access water through a combination of sources, with heavy reliance on vendors
- The **broader political context in which community participation in water governance is embedded** is likely key to evaluate participatory potential. For example:
  - Sukura, which does not have a formal LWB, implemented a Community Scorecard project with GWCL that assesses the discrepancies in service delivery

<sup>1</sup> Established through a partnership with the Cooperative Housing Foundation International Ghana (CHF), an NGO operating in Accra

between the community and the utility

## REFERENCES

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- Ainuson, K. G. 2010. Urban water politics and water security in disadvantaged urban communities in Ghana. *African Studies Quarterly* 11(4):59-82.
- EDGES and AOW survey, 2012. Water Access and Governance in Accra, Ghana and Cape Town, South Africa, [www.edges.ubc.ca](http://www.edges.ubc.ca) for details.

## FURTHER PROJECT INFORMATION

This research was conducted as part of a multi-year project conducted by the EDGES collaborative team (<http://edges.ubc.ca/>) and the Program on Water Governance ([www.watergovernance.ca](http://www.watergovernance.ca)). Further project information, including survey data, is available there.

The EDGES Comparative Water Access and Governance in Urban African Sites is a comparative and collaborative project based at UBC with partners at the University of Ghana-Legon and at the University of Western Cape, South Africa. The project investigates water access and governance, with particular focus underserved settlements.

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