

Ghana and Malawi: Improving access to clean water and sanitation facilities

IN Ghana, a sweeping water reform programme introduced by the Government in the early 1990s led to a dramatic overhaul of a top-down system that was unresponsive and failed to deliver, especially in rural areas. As a result of the reform process, responsibilities for water supplies were transferred to local governments and rural communities, and new political structures for water governance have been developed. Village structures are now part of the system. To apply for capital grants, communities must form village water committees and draw up plans detailing how they will manage their systems, contribute the cash equivalent of 5 per cent of the capital costs and meet maintenance costs. This participatory approach has resulted in a dramatic increase in access to an improved water source, from 55 per cent in 1990 to 75 per cent in 2004, and access continues to expand.

In Malawi, sanitation coverage for rural communities is estimated to be 30 per cent or less, and water coverage stands at 62 per cent, although this figure may mask a significant percentage of non-functioning facilities. In many communities, sanitation facilities consist of traditional pit latrines, which are often inadequate to protect against faecal-oral disease transmission. Cholera, typhoid fever and other water-related diseases remain prevalent.

Water for People is a North America-based non-governmental organization working with communities to provide more than 150,000 people with improved sanitation and access to water. The organization partners with local non-governmental organizations and district governments to support community-based efforts to enhance the quality of water and sanitation facilities. Typical water projects include borehole wells, hand-dug shallow wells, rainwater catchment tanks, community tap stands and simple pit latrines covered with sanitary platforms. Each project benefits 200 to 1,000 people, the organization says.

See References, page 51.