

# Case Information Sheet

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## West Africa

### Mass media to solve WASH challenges of the urban and rural poor

#### Background

Failure of good governance, or even the lack of governance, is a serious issue in many sub-Saharan African countries, and this is often caused by a high incidence of corruption. The 2011 Corruption Perception Index published by Transparency International ranked several West African countries as 'highly corrupt'. Out of 182 countries ranked, Equatorial Guinea was ranked 172nd, Guinea 164th, Cote d'Ivoire and Guinea Bissau 154th, Togo and Nigeria 143rd, Niger, Cameroon, and Sierra Leone 134th, Mali 118th, and Senegal 112th.

The effects of poor governance fuelled by corrupt practices include endemic poverty, decaying infrastructures, inefficient and in some cases near absence of essential services to mention but a few. Poor governance also results



Hanging toilet in West point, an Urban slum in Monrovia, Liberia  
Photo credit: Mustapha Sesay

in poor service delivery, which is symptomatic across all sectors in the West African region, and the WASH sector is not an exception. In fact, it is a critical issue. Access to water supply and sanitation is generally poor throughout Africa. In 2006, this was estimated to be 64% for water supply and 38% for sanitation, which compares unfavourably with corresponding world averages of 87% and 62% (AFDB). The WHO/UNICEF Joint Monitoring Programme for Water Supply and Sanitation also states that, with 86 million in Western Africa practicing open defecation in 2008, the region is not on track to meet the MDG sanitation target. Moreover, even within each country, the challenge of accessing improved WASH services mostly affects the poor. Plans to develop the sector and to improve service delivery are often targeted at the middle and high income groups, not the poor inhabiting rural communities and urban slums.

As a response to this challenge, the West Africa WASH Journalists Network (WASH – JN) was formed late 2010 with the support of the Water Supply and Sanitation Collaborative Council and WaterAid in West Africa. Its objective is to leverage the voices of the poor and to influence policy change and accountability through the collective power of media in the region.

#### Project Information

The West Africa WASH Journalists Network is a network of networks, comprising national WASH Media networks from 14 West African countries – Benin, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Guinea, Liberia, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Togo, and Guinea Bissau.

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“you [the WASH-JN] are taking the creation of awareness of the challenges associated with the delivery of WASH to a very high level”

Joe Lambongang, country representative, WaterAid Nigeria

## Project Activities

The strategic objectives of the network are:

- To increase participation of the poor by amplifying their voices to make them heard at national, regional and international levels;
- To ensure enhanced quality and flow of information on WASH service delivery coming from a wide range of sources;
- To ensure better targeting for enhanced influence and increased awareness on WASH for all citizens and decision-makers.

The regional body has over the years encouraged its members to implement initiatives that promote water integrity and transparency. Some examples include:

In **Nigeria**, the Water supply and Sanitation Media Network partnered with the National Task Force on Sanitation to organise a political dialogue on sanitation in the run up to the 2011 general elections. The idea was to increase the prioritisation of sanitation issues in political party's manifestoes (<http://www.wsscc.org/resources/resource-country-materials/political-party-dialogue-sanitation-run-nigerian-general>).

In **Liberia**, the WASH Reporters & Editors Network of Liberia (WASH R&E) held a WASH Media Forum with Legislative and Presidential Candidates in the run up to the 2011 General elections; and played a leading role in the intensive media advocacy that resulted in the signing of the Liberia WASH Compact [www.wash-liberia.org](http://www.wash-liberia.org), by President Madam Ellen Johnson (<http://allafrica.com/stories/201111071138.html> and <http://sanitationupdates.wordpress.com/2012/01/26/liberias-president-signs-wash-compact/>)

## Integrity Impacts

### Transparency:

- WASH-JN members regularly publish stories on call for proposals, bidding processes, and contract awards ensuring openness, competitiveness, and strict observance of rules.
- WASH-JN members publish analytical articles on budgetary allocations and expenditure to National, State and Local governments to ensure people follow the money.

### Accountability:

- WASH-JN members publish stories on past budgetary allocations to the WASH sector that has not yielded tangible results to increase access.
- Through features and articles, public awareness is raised on the cost and impact of corruption in the sector.
- Some of the network's members organise training workshops for journalists on WASH budget tracking and monitoring to enable them follow WASH funds.
- Through the WASH story competition, network members are encouraged to investigate and report WASH stories on transparency and accountability.

### Participation:

- WASH-JN facilitated dialogues on WASH issues for political parties and aspirants to mainstream WASH issues into political campaigns.
- There is an increase of public awareness of their Right to Water, through the WASH-JN's monthly Dialogues on Right to Water and sanitation.

## Lessons Learned

→ **Capacity Building:** WASH Journalists require training on sector issues including Transparency and Accountability.

→ **Replication:** There is an expressed need for the formation of WASH media networks in other regions.

→ **Funding:** Increased funding is needed for national platforms to implement activities.

→ **Strategic partnerships:** more are needed between media and other stakeholders in the sector - including CSOs and donors.