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Strengthening the Institutional Framework for Community-Led Total
Sanitation (CLTS) in Liberia to Trigger Progress

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CLTS arrived in Liberia in 2009, but it was only after the 2011 “re-engineering” that the relevant institutional infrastructure has developed in a significant way. CLTS is now spreading throughout the country, in part to the Accelerating Sanitation and Water for All in Liberia programme, which kicked off implementation of its CLTS component in May 2013 through relevant training and triggering in four counties; the programme includes capacity development of government.

Liberia is complementing the shift from project-based interventions to a sustainable nationally-supported sanitation approach most importantly through the creation and support of the National Technical Coordinating Unit (NTCU), an inter-ministerial body responsible for providing overall coordination and technical support to CLTS activities in Liberia. The NTCU was formed in 2012 and is chaired by the Ministry of Health & Social Welfare. The body has made progress in establishing its authority over CLTS in Liberia, most notably through the designation of staff from two ministries and the release of the Guidelines for CLTS Implementation in Liberia. However, the NTCU faces several challenges, including an unclear goal and workplan; lack of budgetary support; and insufficient capacity to manage country-wide scale-up and related information.

Based on my direct support of the NTCU for a year, this paper will cover the history of the NTCU with a focus on the progress and challenges, as well as next steps, for the body; this will tie into the broader question surrounding the potential for CLTS scale-up in Liberia.

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Context

Liberia is a low-income country in West Africa with a population of just over 4 million² comprised of sixteen major ethnic affiliations throughout fifteen counties. Its 43,000 square miles are rich in natural resources. The water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) sector has shown some progress since the devastating civil war that decimated social institutions and delivery services, but as of 2011, an estimated 44% of the national population still practiced open defecation³; for comparison, neighboring country Sierra Leone stands at 27%. Though the number of triggered communities remains in the hundreds in Liberia, the government has shown effort to strengthen the institutional framework for CLTS, most notably through the establishment of the National Technical Coordinating Unit (NTCU).

The initiative

In March 2009, UNICEF in collaboration with WaterAid organized a CLTS workshop for Anglophone West African countries in Nigeria, to which Liberia sent a delegation. As part of its action plan, the Government of Liberia (GOL) invited Kamal Kar and Robert Chambers to conduct a Training of Trainers in-country, which took place in the capital city of Monrovia in April 2009. Though the workshop heightened the awareness around sanitation in Liberia and led to a pilot in two counties, CLTS continued to be implemented solely on a project-based approach for two years.

In June 2011 the Ministry of Health & Social Welfare (MOHSW) in collaboration with the Ministry of Public Works (MPW) and partners re-strategized to enhance the CLTS approach in Liberia due to slow progress. The modified strategy, termed “re-engineering,” aims to give counties some level of autonomy while also harmonizing all CLTS projects under one set of procedures. It includes county consultative meetings and setting up county steering committees.

Liberia is complementing the shift from project-based CLTS interventions to a sustainable nationally-supported sanitation approach through gradual institutionalization at various levels of government through inclusion in key policies and plans and establishment of CLTS-specific bodies; perhaps the most important step has been the creation of the NTCU for CLTS, an inter-ministerial body responsible for providing overall coordination and technical support to CLTS activities in Liberia.

Since the introduction of CLTS in Liberia it has been embedded in key policy documents including the Water and Sanitation Policy (April 2009); Guidelines for Water and Sanitation Services in Liberia (October 2010); WASH Sector Strategic Plan (SSP), 2012-2017 (2011); and WASH Compact (2012). In all of these documents CLTS is prioritized as a government-supported, community-led approach to rural sanitation.

The NTCU was formed in 2011 and is chaired by MOHSW and co-chaired by MPW. This body falls under the Water, Sanitation & Hygiene (WASH) team of MOHSW/ Division of Environmental and Occupational Health (DEOH) and its organizational structure is based on designated staff from DEOH and MPW/ Community Services Department (CSD); though NTCU staff has been recognized by each ministry, those from MPW have not been officially seconded. The NTCU is overseen by the National Steering Committee (NSC) for CLTS in Liberia.

The NSC is responsible most importantly for oversight of the NTCU, mobilizing financial and human resources for CLTS, facilitating inter-ministerial dialogue and interacting with donors. It has only met once since the idea was proposed in 2011 but the Assistant Minister for Preventative Services at MOHSW has recently demonstrated leadership for the group.

² World Health Organization and UNICEF. (2013). Joint Monitoring Programme for Water Supply and Sanitation/ WSS Info Documents.

³ World Health Organization and UNICEF. (2013). Progress on Sanitation and Drinking Water – 2013 Update.

GOL is making efforts to support CLTS through its organizational structure at subnational level as well. At county level, existing Environmental Health Technicians (EHTs) are designated as CLTS Focal Persons and provided with CLTS-specific job descriptions; this position currently exists in seven counties. District EHTs are involved in routine monitoring activities. CLTS at both county and district levels are supported by steering committees, which are formed with direct involvement from the NTCU. The Natural Leader Network pilot in three counties will bring government involvement down to clan level.

The Dutch Directorate General for International Cooperation (DGIS) programme, which is part of a regional effort to accelerate progress towards the Millennium Development Goals targets in water and sanitation, expects results in five areas including sustainable access to improved gender sensitive sanitation facilities and capacity development of national, county and district stakeholders including those involved in the implementation of CLTS. UNICEF, partner on the DGIS programme, has supported various CLTS workshops and trainings and funded a consultant to work directly with MOHSW with a focus on supporting the NTU.

Success and Limitations

The NTCU has strengthened considerably over the past year with improvement shown through the development of an annual workplan, enhanced coordination at central level, standardization of national guidelines and an application form, and incorporation of CLTS into job descriptions.

Recently the 2013/14 workplan was finalized; it builds on the 2012 plan, which was limited in detail, and has been improved through the addition of a clear statement on the program goal to improve the health status of Liberians on an equitable basis through the attainment of environmental health protection; objective to increase demand for sanitation services and promote community ownership by triggering 2,500 communities by 2017; and four intended results focused on capacity development, increased access to the program through triggerings in additional areas, information management and financing. The workplan is aligned with key policies and plans, consists of 23 activities, and outlines both CLTS-related staff and coverage by partner and administrative district.

At central level, the NTCU hosts regular monthly coordination meetings that follow organized agendas; reminders are sent out in advance and posted on the WASH Liberia website, on which the NTCU has a dedicated tab. This group has been meeting specifically on CLTS issues since February 2012, before which it was part of a larger hygiene promotion group. Attendance remains moderate compared to the number of implementers in the country, but DEOH has made progress in increasing the number of participants and plans to make it a requirement for implementing CLTS in the 2nd version of the national guidelines. Minutes from April 2013 onwards are available online as are other relevant documents, such as the national guidelines.

The *Guidelines to CLTS Implementation in Liberia* were released in December 2012 by the NTCU and cover several topics including the institutional structure of CLTS in Liberia with roles and responsibilities at each level; requirements for implementers; steps to implementation; ideas around capacity development and post-ODF activities; reporting and documentation; and monitoring forms. This first version was a good attempt to harmonize the approach to CLTS in Liberia but will soon be enhanced with much more detail. The second version, expected December 2013, will include initial results for scale-up and a framework for a certification system; as of October 2013, no communities in Liberia have been officially certified as ODF, only verified. It will also include an estimated budget per community, updated monitoring forms and the standardized application form.

CLTS has been incorporated into job descriptions of eleven MOHSW staff. Those positions that include CLTS-specific responsibilities that are currently filled are DEOH WASH Team Lead (1), NTCU National Supervisor (1) and National CLTS Focal Persons (2) at national level and County

CLTS Focal Persons (7) at county level. Ideally the two MPW staff recognized as the CLTS leads would be officially seconded to the NTCU and one EHT in each of the remaining eight counties would be designated as a County CLTS Focal Person.

Though the NTCU has strengthened recently, it faces several challenges, some of which stem from its designation as a “unit” as it holds no official mandate. Challenges include a lack of budgetary support; insufficient capacity to manage country-wide scale-up and related information; inadequate number of standardized documents; and scarce communication with subnational structures.

Program funding has been provided on an ad-hoc basis through DEOH which receives an insignificant amount (USD\$ 20,000 in 2012/13) divided between six teams, and partners. No dedicated funding line for the NTCU exists and that is not likely to happen soon as funding is requested and allotted only down to division level; the NTCU falls two ranks below a division if it can be included on an organigram at all given its status.

The NTCU has submitted requests to DEOH in the past but most of these are denied given limited funding; the WASH team only had USD\$ 2,500 in its program budget for 2012/13 (salaries run through a different line item). In October 2013 the NTCU submitted a request to the DEOH for \$3,500, but this has yet to be addressed as the division awaits budget allocations for the 2013/14 fiscal year; it is hopeful that the program budget will be increased from last year. The effect of such limited funds is highlighted through a situation in which some NTCU staff do not have a computer, many are often out of cell phone credit and without internet access and all rely on partners to carry out necessary monitoring field visits.

There is simply not enough staff to meet the CLTS demands upon government in the next year under the current approach. When introducing CLTS to a new area, the NTCU travels with partners to conduct county consultative meetings and set up county steering committees; this is important as only government staff can introduce new government programs while partners can support the process. This leads to NTCU national-level staff frequently being unavailable as they spend a significant amount of time in the field. At the monthly coordination meetings, often there is no one with decision-making authority present, which leads to a lack of definitive action points and follow up.

The NTCU also requires capacity development for current staff. Currently no NTCU staff member is properly trained in information management and the database is still recorded in a hand-written ledger. The NTCU could benefit from improved organizational capabilities and training in Monitoring & Evaluation and computer-based skills, among other competencies.

As CLTS scales up in Liberia, activities would be improved through additional standardized, contextualized documents such as training guides and agendas, various types of budgets for different CLTS activities, and regular reports. Aside from the monthly coordinating meetings the NTCU does not communicate effectively with partners, nor does it consistently communicate with county and district level colleagues; reporting from subnational level is not enforced. Although MOHSW operates a health information management system in which counties submit weekly reports on set indicators, the NTCU has not explored the possibility of adding CLTS-related questions.

Lessons Learned and Way Forward

CLTS arrived in Liberia in 2009, but it was only after the 2011 “re-engineering” that gradual institutionalization of CLTS at various levels of government began. Even after this process the number of implementers remained low until 2013. The achievements planned under the DGIS program, combined with those under the USAID-funded Improved WASH (IWASH) program, are considered the beginning of wide-scale rural sanitation efforts in Liberia.

Lessons learned thus far revolve around planning. The NTCU did not truly operationalize for two years after conceived at the first in-country training. There was limited documentation of the group

until 2012 and the first strategic annual workplan was not regularly consulted or reviewed. This led to significant human and financial resource constraints including insufficient staffing and lack of direct financial support from partners; though partners may be willing to fund the purchase of office equipment and supplies, they will most likely not do so for a body with no strategic plan. Though the NTCU would benefit from increased financial resources from government it is unlikely that the NTCU will increase dramatically in the next year.

The NTCU has used the 2013/14 annual workplan to outline next steps, including the following: enhance the national guidelines to incorporate best practice and initial results for scale-up; standardize training materials; host bi-annual national information-sharing workshops; establish a registry of trainers; and increase and track funding. In addition, the NSC will continue to meet regularly as will partners through the monthly coordination meetings, with minutes and action points posted on the WASH Liberia website. Partners will also start using smart phones for CLTS reporting purposes.

Liberia has recently engaged AKVO, a Dutch-based NGO specializing in building open source internet and mobile software, to develop technical capacity around monitoring. The NTCU led on developing CLTS reporting forms, based on monitoring forms from the national guidelines, for the national WASH database which is managed by the inter-ministerial National WASH Promotion Committee. Paper forms will eventually be replaced by these phone-based reporting forms, to be piloted in late 2013. Through this mechanism, triggered and ODF communities will be mapped and users can monitor progress on various indicators. This technology will be especially useful given the intended scale-up in the next year.

Scale up for CLTS entails increased triggerings, broader coverage throughout the country and going beyond ODF. CLTS is poised to scale up significantly in the next year – DGIS through local partners will be implementing CLTS in seven counties by 2014; IWASH, currently the leader in the country in terms of ODF verified communities, is scaling up within its three counties through the Natural Leader Network approach; and a program under the Liberia WASH Consortium will reach five counties by the fourth quarter of 2013. These three programs will target at least 41 out of 68 administrative districts in the country. Additional partners, both international and national, are implementing on smaller scales and others have shown interest in becoming involved by incorporating CLTS into existing programs or applying for additional funding for CLTS implementation.

For those partners already at a point to go beyond ODF, the NTCU has begun exploring options for next steps. The Hygiene Promotion Technical Subcommittee of MOHSW recently recruited a hygiene specialist to develop national hygiene promotion guidelines, a priority activity under the SSP. These are expected to be finalized in November 2013 but the first draft suggests a pared down version of PHAST to follow CLTS, an idea supported by the NTCU.

Generally speaking there is large potential for scale up for CLTS in Liberia if the NTCU focuses on decentralization before the end of 2013 and partners continue to carry the major responsibility for funding. Though not explicitly stated in the annual workplan, the NTCU and partners have emphasized the importance of decentralizing CLTS by shifting certain responsibilities such as triggering and ODF verification to subnational level. The NTCU should focus on central level responsibilities such as pursuing funding, coordinating partners, serving the NSC and managing information. The designation of County Focal Persons is a step towards decentralization as is the piloting of the Natural Leader Network under IWASH. At least eight county and ten district steering committees have been formed through consultative meetings but many do not function properly. The NTCU will need to focus on making decentralization a reality soon in order to be able to support the intense scale up efforts over the next year.