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Anna Bohman and Kaisa Raitio

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How frames matter –

Common sense and institutional choice in Ghana's urban water sector

Anna Bohman*

Department of Thematic Studies - Water and Environmental Studies, Linköping University,
581 83 Linköping, Sweden. * Corresponding author

Kaisa Raitio

Department of Urban and Rural Development, Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences,
P.O.Box 7012, 75007 Uppsala, Sweden.

Abstract

Ideas on what is best practice to provide more people in rapidly growing low- and middle income cities with adequate water supplying services have changed during the 20th century. By applying a frame-theoretical approach, this article analyses institutional choice in Ghana's urban water sector. Special attention is paid to two major events: first, the establishment of the state water utility, Ghana Water and Sewerage Corporation, in 1965, and secondly the reform process in the 1990's and early 2000's which aimed at private sector participation in urban water management. By unravelling the arguments and taken for granted assumptions underlying the two reforms, the article shows how the perceived space for policy alternatives available to decision makers at a certain point in time has been largely constrained by the dominant frames in a particular historical context. This conclusion is supportive of the argument that rationality is a highly contextual and time dependent concept.

Keywords: Frame analysis, Institutions, Ghana, Water Supply, Sewerage

1. Introduction

In environmental social sciences, there is an increasing interest in the ‘argumentative turn’ (Fischer, 2003) or ‘turn to ideas’ (Schmidt, 2008), that holds that the perceptions of the actors involved are crucial to the nature and direction of policy development. When searching for solutions to complex policy problems, prevalent or dominating frames tend to affect the perceived space for policy alternatives available to decision-makers at a certain point in time (Arts and Buizer, 2009; Bacchi, 2009, Wedel et al, 2005;). Besides being affected by direct economic incentives or contextual political and material factors, decision makers may get captivated by development policies in vogue and therefore, what appears as a rational response to a given policy problem varies over time.

This article wishes to contribute to our understanding of how policy choices are made and how rationality is constructed as “implicit assumptions are turned into common sense” (Fairclough 2001). We do this by analyzing and contrasting two separate sector reforms in Ghana’s urban water sector informed by theories on policy frames.

Water supply and sanitation (WSS) service provision for rapidly growing low- and middle income cities is one of the world’s most pressing sustainable development challenges. The impact of improved water and sanitation services on all of the Millennium Development Goals (<http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals>) is well documented as it has a direct effect on combating child mortality, increasing school and work attendance, household and national income and on the empowerment of women and girls (WHO & UNICEF, 2008; Black & Fawcett, 2008; UN, 2003). However, in Ghana and elsewhere, there are and have been diverging views on how to best organize production of these life-sustaining services in order

to increase access for those in need. The first reform analyzed here, the establishment of the national state water utility in Ghana in 1965, rested on a highly centralistic governance model both in terms of decision making power and the broad mandate of managing and regulating all aspects of water and sewerage services. In contrast, the second reform, the introduction of private sector participation (PSP) in urban water delivery, was guided by principles of decentralization and the devolution of decision making power to local authorities as well as to customers and private operators. This highly contested reform continues to generate debates on urban water services management in present day Ghanaian politics.

Water sector reforms in Ghana have attracted some previous scholarly interest due to the debates and controversies generated by the PSP reform in Ghana's urban water sector. Previous studies have addressed the nature and direction of these more recent reforms and their associated governance and democratic aspects (see for example Yeboah, 2006; Whitfield, 2006; Suleiman, 2011, Hirvi 2012). Bohman (2012) and McCaskey (2009) make efforts to historicize contemporary policy debates in Ghana by examining discussions on urban water management during the colonial era. Yet, no previous attempt has been made to analyze the meaning-making part of policy formulation by placing urban water reforms in Ghana in a longer time perspective.

Rather than focusing on the issue of privatization of water services as such, our article uses historical as well as more recent reforms in Ghana's urban water sector to illustrate the more general issue of how frames may constrain the perceived space for policy alternatives available to decision makers at a certain point in time. By shedding light on the taken for granted assumptions behind political decisions and actions, this article captures changes in the

frames that have underpinned official statements and “shared understandings” in Ghana’s urban water history. Within this setting we ask:

- What was regarded as critical issues during the different time periods?
- What were the arguments and reasons that generated different solutions and what was the basis for the decisions made?
- As for the larger story, what can the urban water history of post independent Ghana reveal about the role of frames for explaining institutional choice?

The article begins by introducing the reader to the general theoretical approach of the study where we present the analytical tool: frame analysis. After describing data and methods in section three, we lay out the Ghanaian post-independence historical context and analyse the frames and resulting policy shifts in Ghana’s urban water history in section 4 and 5. We then compare, contrast and contextualise the frames as well as discuss the impact of frames on institutional choice in section 6. Lastly, we conclude by commenting on the power dimensions of changing frames as well as the role of frame reflection for creating more reflective policy dialogues in section 7.

2. The role of frames in policy analysis

A central starting point of this study is that institutional choice is not an automatic and beforehand given response to changing resource realities, but is also affected by the way actors perceive and define the situation at hand. Institutional choice in this article is referring to decisions taken regarding the design of formal institutions i.e. formal “rules of the game” such as laws and regulations set up to steer society. (North 1990). Here, we use frame analysis as a tool for identifying the socially constructed, often taken for granted structures that

influence the perceived space for policy alternatives and the following institutional choice. (Arts and Buizer, 2009; Bacchi, 2009). Framing entails drawing boundaries in order to reduce the complexity of an issue (Entman, 1993): by focusing attention on some parts of the problem other pieces of the picture fall outside of the frame. In doing so, frames normalize certain ideas and practices while excluding others (Schön and Rein, 1994).

There are many different approaches to frame analysis, as it has been applied within the fields of sociology, policy analysis, conflict studies, cognitive psychology as well as media and communication studies (Goffman, 1974; Entman, 1993; Schön & Rein, 1994; Snow & Benford, 2000; Gray, 2003; Raitio, 2012). Our analysis builds on the concept of policy frames developed by Schön and Rein (1994). Analyzing policy frames entails asking, as Bachhi, (2009) puts it: what is the (policy) problem represented to be? Frames organize attention and bias for action by affecting how actors understand a problem, how they choose to act upon it, and how they view themselves and their role in the process (Perri 6 2005). We argue that frames thus affect power relations between actors, as certain “implicit assumptions are converted into common sense” (Fairclough, 2001). In this process, the omission of potential problem definitions may be as critical as the inclusion of some others because it represents a form of non-decision-making and agenda-setting power (Bachrach and Baratz 1970; Lukes, 1974, Entman, 1993, 54).

One of the dividing lines between different approaches to frame analysis concerns intentionality and the extent to which frames are consciously produced and reflected upon. While frame analysis as carried out in media studies and social movement studies (Snow and Benford 2000, Entman, 1993; Gamson, 1995) emphasizes the conscious construction of frames (actors using frames), we share Schön and Rein’s (1994) argument that frames may

also be unreflected upon (frames using actors). Actors are not necessarily aware of the discursive filters that make them think and act in a certain way until those frames are explicitly highlighted and discussed through a conscious effort of frame reflection.

Furthermore, although actors (whether organizations or individuals) may be considered as driven by rational self-interest, what is *perceived* as a rational response to certain challenge and what is perceived as lying in one's interest is partly shaped by the frame through which actors construct and analyze reality (Schön & Rein 1994, 29). Schön and Rein (1994, 29) conceptualize the relationship between frames and interests as reciprocal, but non-deterministic: frames shape interests, and frames can be used to promote certain interests.

In empirical analysis, however, it is many times difficult to determine how conscious or strategic actors are in their framing. Therefore studying intentionality as such falls beyond the scope of this study. Regardless of the intentionality among players however, the dominating frame will affect power relations and constrain the perceived number of policy options available to decision makers, since arguments and discussions that do not conform to the dominant frame are more easily excluded from the debate.

For the purpose of this paper, we will analyze frames from three dimensions, in a modified version of the categories developed by Snow & Benford (1998) and Gray (2003). The dimensions used in this analysis are as follows:

- 1) *The rationale*: why does the issue deserve a place on the agenda?
- 2) *The diagnosis*: what is the underlying problem that needs to be remedied?
- 3) *The solution*: through what means should we solve the problem?

Finally, we argue that ideas and material realities are mutually reinforcing. While frames affect how we interpret – and seek to change – our contexts, their emergence is also affected by the same contexts: not just any new frames are likely to emerge – or persist – at any point in time at any location. The material, historical, economic and political settings constitute the framework within which more or less acceptable and expectable ideas and discursive interactions develop (Schmidt, 2008). This highlights the need to accompany frame analysis with adequate account of the contemporary context, as applied in the following chapters.

3. Materials, methods and delimitations of the study

The subject under study here is the role of frames for institutional choice in Ghana's urban water sector during the post-independence era 1957-2005. The starting date, 1957 marks the year of official independence from the British imperial power when Ghana was to establish its own public administration. The empirical investigation ends in 2005 when a contract was signed with a Dutch-South African joint venture company to operate and maintain Ghana's urban water services for a five year period. During the study period we look at how common sense in Ghana's water sector has been framed in the intersection between national and international policy trends. To this end the article draws on primary sources such as archival material from the Public Records office in London and the Nordic Africa Institute in Uppsala, Sweden. In addition legislative documents, annual reports etc. have been collected from the Assembly Press in Accra and at the library of Ghana Water Company Ltd. Other sources consist of official policy documents and Parliamentary Acts as well as reports from international donor agencies and consultancy firms. The collected documents cover the time period expanding from 1957 to 2002.

The study is also informed by interviews with a broad span of stakeholders working actively within the water and sanitation sector in Ghana as civil servants and sector professionals within the water administration, related ministries, international donor agencies and non-governmental organisations. The interviews were carried out in November to January 2004/2005 and December to February 2006/2007 and provided contextual information on political debates regarding the water sector reforms for the later time period, as well as an opportunity to gain deeper insight into the thinking and acting among those who were actively involved in the events under study. The article is based on of a larger historical study (see Bohman 2010) where the first round of interviews was instrumental in defining the research questions for this paper. All interviews are not accounted for or referred to as footnotes in this article nevertheless they all contributed to developing our understanding of more recent water sector reforms in Ghana and so, for reasons of transparency, we include the complete list of interviews in Annex 1. For the later time period interviews have also served as important empirical material. In selecting the respondents a conscious effort was then made to cover different actors with different perspectives to allow for data triangulation.

In highlighting the frames and reasoning behind reforms the three dimensions of frames mentioned in Section 2 have guided our data analysis. We looked in the data for the types of *rationale*, *diagnosis* and *solutions* that were connected to the WSS challenge in the documents and by the informants. We formulated the subcategories to the three dimensions bottom-up, based on the different types of answers found in the material. Combining main categories from theory with sub-categories derived from the empirical material offered an opportunity to maintain theoretical relevance while at the same time securing sensitivity to the material (Dey 1993:96).

Important to note is that government of Ghana is by no means the only actor/frame articulator being studied here but that frames are seen as shaped in the intersection between national and international policy trends. The dependent variable being studied is the policy outcome and here international as well as national actors are involved in negotiating common sense.

The contextual analyses have been limited by the lack of reliable data on coverage, consumption and production of WSS services over time. Different sources give different figures and sometimes even contradict. This means it has been difficult to substantiate trends regarding urban conditions and utility performance over time.

Finally a note on definitions. The main focus in this study is put on urban water supplying services; however decisions concerning wastewater collection and treatment (i.e. sewerage) as well as rural water have been included when it was addressed in relation to legislation on urban water supply and to underline the argument connected to development within this sector. Sanitation in broader terms () is also discussed when relevant, however institutional change in this sector falls beyond the scope of this study.

4. Building the nation – water in the cities

4.1 Rationale

At the wake of independence from the British colonial power in 1957, Ghana was, in a regional context, considered a prosperous nation. Independence brought great expectations for the future and it was believed that Ghana's rich human capital stock in the form of a well educated population and large foreign currency reserves from the cocoa trade would facilitate a rapid transition into middle income status. President Nkrumah commonly considered the

flag-bearer of Pan-African Socialism, strongly believed in state-led modernization through Big Push investment strategies as a means to industrialize the economy, all in line with contemporary economic development theory. The general perception, in Ghana as well as internationally, was that the state was the motor of development in society. As Killick commented: “the state was seen as undertaking tasks which the private enterprise could or would not do” (Killick, 2010, p. 235). In addition, as Killick notes, Nkrumah and his followers “were deeply suspicious of foreign capital and neo-colonialism” (Killick 2010, p. 235). From this perspective bringing water into Ghana’s urban centers and creating water justice was framed as a step away from colonial mismanagement.

During the dry season of 1959 Ghana suffered from a major drought. Rainfall during the year had been unusually small and in February River Densu, the main water source supplying Accra with water through the Weija water works ran dry and new rains could not be expected until mid-March. The Government decided on emergency measures such as transportation of water in mobile tankers into the Accra city center and strict rationing where water was only available a few hours a day (PRO DO 35/9400). This situation also spurred the Government to turn to the international community for help and government of Ghana entrusted the World Health Organization (WHO) with the task of carrying out a study on the development of the country’s water sector. The study would focus not only on technical advice and the development of new water resources, but on the organization of a national water and sewerage authority as well. (WHO, 1961, p. 2).

Whereas nowadays it may appear peculiar to consult the WHO on specific matters regarding *governance* of the water sector (an alternative could have been to turn to an organisation more specifically specialised in management and organisational issues), this can be partly explained

by the fact that WSS development within the international donor community at the time primarily framed as humanitarian health intervention. From this followed a general recognition of the WHO as the lead agency with the alleged expert knowledge needed for the overall sector development. (Bohman, 2010; Grover and Howarth, 1991).

This can also explain why the WHO required a prominent role in technical assistance as Ghana was to institutionalise a new organisation for the country's water supply and sanitation sector after independence

During these early years of development cooperation, the World Bankⁱ, nowadays a major funder of WSS projects worldwide positioned itself as an investment bank rather than as a development institution. Accordingly, loans were primarily issued to what was considered as “creditworthy” and productive sectors such as industry or agriculture, as the economic theory of the time framed industrialization as the central building block of economic development. In contrast, the World Bank considered water and sanitation as “social investments” which did not qualify for Bank support (Alacewich 2009).

Consequently, for the post-independent Ghanaian Government, WSS development was carried out in the spirit of independence, modernisation and national development. In this context, water was not regarded a business opportunity or a sector that could be exposed to international competition. The alternative of involving foreign private companies to act in the sector and to gain control over strategic assets such as WSS systems and services was not even discussed as a viable option; it was a non-issue that simply fell outside the contemporary WSS development frame. Likewise, as mentioned, the humanitarian health frame was the dominating rationale for engaging in WSS projects from a donor perspective. Thus, WSS was not primarily talked about in relation to economic productivity or fiscal balances of utilities,

but the approach was to invest in expansive development strategies to tackle public health concerns in the world's growing cities (Bohman, 2010).

4.2 Diagnosis and solutions

In their final report, the WHO advisors stressed the lack of hardware infrastructure and manpower, especially well-educated engineers as a major bottleneck to Ghana's water sector development. The WHO recognized a lot of vacancies in the Water Supplies Division of the Ministry of Works and Housing, and therefore strongly recommended that the situation be improved by 'filling the gaps' in the organization. Moreover, the report argued that the supplies constructed and operated by the Water Supplies Division so far were seriously understaffed especially with regard to engineers (WHO, 1961, p 42; WHO, 1964, p 8). The infrastructure in place, it is argued, was unable to meet the ever increasing demand. As migration into the cities increased, serious expansions of the systems were needed and the WHO advisors recommended capital investments and expansions within the WSS sector, both in terms of staff and infrastructure (WHO, 1964, p 10).

Regarding the administrative structure of the water sector, the WHO advisory panel recommended the government to establish a separate authorityⁱⁱ in charge of the construction and maintenance of water and sewerage systems in different parts of the country. This was proposed to be a broad organization, responsible for all different steps of water management from raw water abstraction to billing and revenue collection "to enable a coordinated planning" (WHO 1964, p 45). The WHO team also recommended a national central office rather than decentralised branches in order to limit overhead costs for setting up and running authorities and to minimize the risk for work duplication. With the same argument, rural and urban water were proposed to be under the same water division. In addition, the reason given

for a common water and sewerage authority was that water and sewerage are closely related sectors and therefore, it was stated, they require joint planning (WHO, 1961, p 50). This was a typical characteristic of the time where centralized state bureaucracies were the norm and in this case, economies of scale – rather than management efficiency itself – were emphasized as the main argument behind organizational structures.

Hence, in line with the recommendations of the WHO, a national water and sewerage authority, the Ghana Water and Sewerage Corporation (GWSC), was established in 1965. As a centralized organisation, all aspects of urban water and sewerage management were to be handled by the one and same authority. GWSC was to be responsible for water supply and sewerage in rural as well as urban areas (Act 310:1965). The corporation was also in charge for the conduct of research related to water and sewerage as well as for making engineering surveys and plans, for the construction and operational aspects of water and sewerage works, the setting of standards and prices as well as for billing and revenue collection (Act 310:1965). On a formal political level, a state monopoly in the provision of water services in Ghana had now been created. According to the Parliamentary Act (Act 1965:310), the six members of the GWSC Board were to be appointed by the President himself. Apart from the general perception that a large and strong central state was the motor behind progress in society, this also mirrors the powerful position held by President Nkrumah at the time and the general centralisation of the state bureaucracy during his time in office. Undeniably the idea of central state bureaucracies matched well with Nkrumah's power aspirations. However, apart from a pure rational calculation from the part of Nkrumah, prevalent ideas on how development is achieved (i.e. through the central state machinery) also set the limits as for what was possible to do.

The establishment of the Corporation was also commented on in Parliament. It was argued that whereas different aspects of water management previously had been splintered up on several governmental agencies and ministries, it was now time for a “concentrated action” (Parliamentary debates 1965, 14th of September: p.776). The public utility character of the new corporation was emphasized in the debate and it was regarded as very positive that the business of the corporation was not going to be “a revenue earning concern; it is required to provide services for the people...” (Parliamentary debates, (1965), 14th of September, p.776.) The implicit assumption here was that there would be an inherent contradiction between profit making and the public services management.

As a newly formed Water Utility, GWSC faced great development challenges, and expectations on the Corporation were high. As an illustration, the Government's seven-year development plan for 1963-1970 stated that only one-sixth of the Ghanaian population enjoyed good drinking water, whereas the rest mainly relied on natural sources of uncertain quality (Government of Ghana, Seven Year Development Plan, 63/64 – 69/70: 130). At the same time, the Government aimed at high standard solutions and the official goal was to gradually phase out the public standpipe system which was considered inconvenient and replace this with in-house connections for all urban citizens (ibid). As for sanitation, the Government remained with the official policy goal to construct city-wide underground and water borne sewerage systems to all urban areas (Ghana Year Book, 1974 p. 142). All this reflects the enormous challenges that GWSC chose to tackle by going for very expensive and high standard technical solutions.

In summary, during the immediate post-independence years in Ghana, the WSS challenge was primarily framed as issue of *development and independence* where the state was seen as the

motor behind progress. The Government was committed to expansive economic development strategies and therefore large scale and capital intensive development plans were initiated. In line with these expansive development strategies, primary focus was put on “*hardware aspects*” such as the technical know-how needed to enhance WSS sector development. Critical issues discussed were usually perceived as either limitations in financial resources, manpower, technical equipment or physical water scarcity. Therefore, to ‘*fill in the gaps*’ and make large investments in water and sanitation sector development was seen as the way forward. The official argument for the preferred centralized management model was partly to save costs for the setting up of regional offices, thus best practice for management itself was not a critical issue discussed in its own right.

Whereas the need to increase access to WSS services would remain urgent in Ghanaian cities, ideas and strategies as for how to tackle this problem however would be reassessed in the near future.

5. The road to Private Sector Participation

5.1 Rationale

During the 1970’s international development theory and policy gradually turned to a “basic needs” approach, which suggested that aid be targeted towards pure poverty related projects instead of waiting for welfare to “trickle down” from above. Along these lines the World Bank also reframed its own role and mission from an investment bank towards a development institution (Alacewich 2009). This reorientation provided the World Bank with a new rationale and mandate to engage in water and sanitation investments in developing countries as it was gradually recognized that social investments could be productive.

Due to this new framing of the development challenge and the role of the Bank in relation to it, the bank's lending policies were adjusted towards the broader social development agenda, and projects concentrating on inter alia health and education were brought to the fore (Alacewich, 2009; Bohman, 2010). Along these lines donor assistance was also made available from the International Development Association of the World Bank as well as the African Development Bank for investments in repairs and expansions of both water and sewerage infrastructure in Ghana (Bohman, 2010 with references).

During the 1970's and 1980's the Ghanaian Government's ability to invest in WSS services was also severely constrained. GWSC had been set to carry out its business in what turned out to be a turbulent economic and political environment. Repeated coup d'états, changing governments between civil and military rule, unstable economic conditions and debt crises, followed by a turn around to structural adjustment in the 1980's, meant an unpredictable environment for planning and development of large scale and capital-intensive water and sanitation infrastructure in the country. A steady decline in GDP also affected the deterioration of WSS infrastructure in Ghana's urban areas as this largely minimized the space available for investments. In addition, accelerated urbanization put increased pressure on the water systems and GWSC managed neither to deliver reliable services to its customers nor to expand the piped water systems to uncovered parts of the town. In 1985 it was estimated that a third of the systems were inoperable whereas the capacity of the remaining systems was reduced (GWSC, 1985, p 56).

As the international debt crises hit the world in the 1980's the World Bank/IMF stepped in as important actors in the management of the national economies of many developing countries through the structural adjustment programs. As a consequence, considerable cuts in state

expenditure as well as deregulation and privatisation of public services became standard policy advices across the developing world, also in Ghana. In this context a number of attempts were made during the 1970's and 1980's to restructure the water sector in Ghana aiming to improve the efficiency and quality of the utility's operations.

5.2 Diagnosis

As the World Bank got involved in Ghana's water sector it brought along a concern for fiscal balances and sound financial management in the urban water sector. This aggravated GWSC concerns over cost recovery, as the utility was not able to collect the revenues needed to cover expenses but continuously operated at loss. GWSC repeatedly sought Government authorisation for water tariff increase, however a general unwillingness from the Government side to increase tariffs resulted in late approval, and as the tariff increase was finally approved it was usually already out of date. With time, the situation put GWSC in severe debt (Bohman, 2010).

Generally, during the 1980's and 1990's main concerns shifted from having dealt with hardware issues such as technical choices and engineering capacities towards software matters i.e. creation of the right institutional environment for increased efficiency and improved management. Along those lines, the World Bank hired a UK based consultancy firm, Sir William Halcrow & Partners Ltd, to evaluate five different contract arrangements in Ghana's urban water sector. The study was carried out in 1994-1995, a time when private sector involvement in water services provision was a common policy advice on an international level. (Kessides 2004) As for the Halcrow study, PSP was a pre-defined option in the terms of reference, the underlying assumption being that public sector management *per se* was a problem to water services development in Ghana. This reflects a clear shift in framing, with

state ownership turning from being represented as the solutions into part of what was represented to be the problem.

Indeed, the Halcrow report stated that GWSC suffered from too much government intervention, insufficient revenue generation and poor customer relations. Institutional responsibilities, they argued, remained fragmented and poorly designed and the regulatory mechanisms that were in place had not been rigorously applied under government ownership (Halcrow, 1995, p. 60). Despite several earlier efforts at decentralisation, GWSC retained a centralized and top steered corporate structure with all major decisions taken at the head office (Halcrow, 1995, p. 61). Moreover, the Halcrow report stated that the corporation suffered from over manning and associated problems of indiscipline and low labor productivity. The report also contended that GWSC had problems with its “corporate image” and that the corporation had to put more effort into improving its customer relations (Halcrow, 1995).

The economic vocabulary used in the report assumed that the utility was to act as a business enterprise, and therefore needed to become more customer and market oriented. As the Halcrow report emphasized the importance of business orientation, the public utility identity of GWSC was downplayed, and *water users* were instead talked about as *customers*.

Respondents interviewed for this study also framed the problems of the corporation *as a managerial challenge related to staff competence*. A World Bank employee stated that “[M]ost of the staff was hard core engineers. Almost no one had an advanced degree in business management” (World Bank, Washington office, November 29th 2007). The importance of business mindedness was further underlined by another respondent who claimed that “[I]t is all about mentality [...] we are used to produce something that is for free” (GWCL, Project Management Unit, November 23rd, 2004). The quotes above refer to public

sector mentality as a problem, which is the implicit assumption is that more business mindedness would help improve the situation for those in need.

5.3 Solution

Based on this diagnosis, the suggested solution was to foster a more commercially oriented institutional culture through incentivization along more economic lines (Project Management Unit, GWCL, November 23rd m, 2004, February 7th 2007). To this end PSP was expected to lead to “greater operational efficiency, cost-effectiveness and market responsiveness, reduced financial burden on the Government and increased benefits to consumers” (Halcrow, Annex 1). As for the institutional structure of the water sector, the Halcrow report suggested that rural operations be separated from the larger urban systems with the argument that urban and rural water sectors were steered by two differing cultures; one humanitarian and another commercial and that “it is unlikely that management of two such differing cultures can be successful under the same entity” (Halcrow, 1995, p. 7). Rural systems, it was argued, “are unlikely to be viable in the foreseeable future” and “would have to be supported by public subsidy” (Halcrow, 1995, p. 6). Notably, the shift from framing water as a humanitarian issue to an economic issue brought along the rationality of economic thinking, according to which it was necessary to distinguish between economically viable and non-viable activities. In contrast, according to the previous policy urban and rural water were kept under the same organisational entity to enable a coordinated planning.

Hence, in line with international policy trends, new agencies with more clearly defined responsibilities were established during the 1990’s in Ghana. Encouraged by the World Bank, the government embarked on a program to separate responsibilities for urban water, sewerage, and rural water, and to reform GWSC towards a more commercially oriented operation. The

central bureaucratic model of GWSC was now dispersed into smaller independent sub-units, its mandates were gradually downsized and hived off to other institutions and agencies with beginning in the mid 1990's. This, as mentioned was also a move to prepare the sector for private sector involvement.

Responsibility for the sewerage aspect, which had remained poorly developed under GWSC ownership, was also formally hived off from the central water utility organisation and decentralised to district assemblies, which were already formally mandated with sanitation tasks. The official argument for this reform was that other sanitary aspects were already taken care of by these local institutions (Act 462:1993, Ghana Environmental Sanitation Policy 1999). Rural water, the other unprofitable headache to water sector managers, was transferred to the Community Water and Sanitation Agency, an institution mandated for rural development issues (Act 564:1998, Community Water and Sanitation Agency Act). The urban water utility was now prepared to become a commercially viable sector suited for international bidding procedures. GWSC was also relieved from the burden of coordination, regulation and management of water resources that was now done by the Water Resources Commission and the Public Utilities Regulatory Commission (Act 522:1996, Water Resources Commission Act, Act 538:1997 Public Utilities Regulatory Commission Act). Finally on the 1st of July 1999, GWSC was converted into a 100% state owned Limited Liability: the Ghana Water Company. Unlike its predecessor, the downsized GWCL could now concentrate on one core business – the supply of water to Ghana's urban residents.

The institutional rebuilding process was paralleled with efforts to find the most appropriate arrangement for PSP in the supply of urban water. Based on the Halcrow report, a stakeholder workshop was held in Accra in 1995 to discuss different PSP options including management

contracts, concession and service contracts in different combinations (Halcrow, 1995: Chapter 21). The participants at the Accra workshop agreed to adopt the lease option and an advisory committee with representation of different stakeholders was formed in 1996 to oversee and advise the PSP process.

Interestingly, as mentioned, the Halcrow report presented and analysed five different PSP contract arrangements, but none of them considered a public reforms option. The adopted frame had already predetermined what was the basic problem and how to act upon this problem. As mentioned the implicit assumption was that more business mindedness was needed and that this could and should be brought in by private actors.

Efforts at decentralising and privatising parts of urban water management did not however pass unquestioned in the public debate. In May 2001, a national Coalition Against Privatisation of Water (N-CAP of Water) was formed to join the forces and efforts of those critical to the privatisation of water services. Whereas the process of institutional reform in the urban WSS sector had been carried out without any remarkable debate in the 1990's, the formation of a coalition now brought the question on urban water reform out to the general Ghanaian and international public. This, as Whitfield (2006) has pointed out, pressured the government to scrutinise the bidding documents more carefully and probably to some extent affected the final contract arrangement. In addition, private actors were no more willing to bring finances in at the end of the period, and accordingly the contract arrangement changed from a lease to a management contract, where the private operator did not bring in any investments (World Bank Ghana office, December 10th 2004). Discussions, however, were still carried out within the productivity frame, suggesting that a private partner had to be brought in to solve the problems of the public utility.

As of November 2005, a Dutch-South African joint venture company, Aqua Vitens Rand Ltd, was finally contracted to operate and maintain Ghana's urban water systems for five years with beginning in 2006. GWCL was however to remain as asset holder, still responsible for investments, development and expansion of the urban water systems. The signing of the contract marked an end to a ten year period characterized by discussion and political conflict, preparations of contract frameworks, launchings and drawbacks of new initiatives which were repeatedly discussed and reformulated.

In summary, during the 1980's and 1990's, challenges to the water sector became increasingly understood as a governance issue where scarcity was seen as a consequence of mismanagement. Over-centralisation, lack of business mindedness and entrepreneurship etc. were given as main reasons for the problems in the Ghanaian urban water sector. Consequently, from being an initially much centralised organisation, power and responsibilities gradually moved out from the GWSC in several different directions. Subsidies were gradually taken away, water tariffs increased and reforms of decentralisation of responsibilities within the water sector were prepared.

6. How frames matter to institutional choice

Analysing the two time periods in Ghana's WSS sector development, we have in the above identified how the WSS challenge has been framed, as well as how frames, besides direct economic incentives and material contextual factors have affected institutional arrangements. The two dominant ways of framing the WSS challenge are summarised in Table 1 in terms of their rationale (i.e. why does the issue deserve a place on the agenda?), diagnosis (what is the underlying problem that needs to be remedied?) and proposed solution (through what means

should we solve the problem?). It should be noted that frames have coexisted, lingered on or overlapped between phases. However, in table 1 and the discussion below, each frame and the ideas therein are connected to the time period when it was given most weight. This following chapter will compare, contrast and contextualise the frames, as well as discuss the role and impact of frames on institutional choice.

Table 1: Dominating frames in Ghana's urban water sector 1957 – 2005

Rationale	Water for independence and development Humanitarian Health frame	Water for productivity
Diagnosis	Lack of <ul style="list-style-type: none">• water• investments• engineers• technical equipment	Lack of <ul style="list-style-type: none">• appropriate institutional arrangements• accountability and clear division of responsibilities• business mindedness
Proposed solution	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Expand infrastructure• Fill in the gaps in investments, technical equipment and manpower.• Develop new water sources• Focus on hardware knowledge and engineering capacity	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Manage scarcity• Good governance• Introduce more business orientation and commercial thinking• Privatisation, unbundling and decentralization

As Ghana's urban centers continued to grow, the need to expand physical infrastructure remained absolutely urgent throughout the study period. With is in mind, it could be argued that a filling the gaps" approach, to some extent was natural response to a material reality where a water administration was to be put in place and pipes had to be laid into the ground. However, the lasting impact of the expansive development frame also made government focus less attention on managerial questions as well as issues of cost recovery that with time put the utility in severe debt. We argue that frames play an important role in explaining the choice of centralizing the management of GWSC and to care less about cost recovery of services. This was partly due to the spirit of the time where development was framed as something to be

achieved through the central state machinery. Business management was, according to this frame, something to be separated from public sector management.

However, during the 1980's and 1990's a new thinking gained ground which suggested that more than trying to fill in the gaps by adding more staff, more resources and more equipment to the sector, the prime challenge was about managing existing resources more efficiently. In other words, there was a shift in diagnosis and proposed solutions from expansive development strategies to a "managing scarcity" approach. This did not only imply a neutral and technical transfer of responsibilities, it also meant a shift in thinking about public services management in general.

Since international policy actors have been deeply involved in Ghana's WSS sector development, this piece of urban history can be best understood if situated in the context of international policy trends where public services were increasingly provided on a commercial basis during the 1980's and 1990's. (Kessides, 2004, Bakker, 2003). PSP reforms in Ghana were carried out in an era of New Public Management which implied a redefinition and reinvention of the state, following the logic of contractualism rather than Weberian ideas of bureaucratic public administration (Lane, 2000). As for the urban water services provision context globally, the 1990's have been termed "the privatisation decade", which saw the state adopt a new role from being the direct provider of services and goods to acting as a regulator (Nickson and Franceys, 2003). Moreover, the general trend was to split larger bureaucracies into smaller units, and unbundling of tasks previously centralized under state authorities. From this perspective what happened in Ghana was not surprising, and to many of those involved, the reforms appeared as common sense. However, the historical perspective

provided in this article shows that what appears as common sense in a particular historical situation indeed differs according to the prevalent frames.

We argue that the idea that a business-oriented thinking was desired was due to the productivity frame that suggested that public sector failure could and should be eased by private sector involvement.

It could also be argued that in a situation where the tax base was shrinking and welfare state/system was considered exhausted, PSP was a way of bringing in investments. Correctly, this was initially an explicit aim of the reform. In the final contract arrangement, however, the private operator did not bring in any investments but the bulk of capital for expansion and rehabilitation came from a World Bank grant. This also shows that there was more commitment to the idea of bringing in a private partner than simply bringing in extra capital.

Furthermore, it was the shift at the international level in how WWS issues were framed that caused the access to external capital to emerge in the first place. As long as interventions in the WSS sector were primarily backed up by a humanitarian frame at an international level, willingness to invest in the sector remained less pronounced within the international donor community. As water services development was included in the productivity frame, which emphasized that WSS could have a catalytic effect on economic growth, this made sector investments appear as more attractive to investors such as the World Bank.

A conclusion here is thus that it has been a productivity frame rather than a pure humanitarian health frame that has attracted external – i.e. non-domestic – funds to sector development.

Even if pricing and revenue collection as such were not new issues in Ghanaian water policy dialogues (Bohman, 2012), we argue that speaking of water development in terms of its importance for productivity and using a more economic language created policy space and opened up for the possibility of inviting foreign private companies into the sector.¹ This, as mentioned, was a radical break with the independence frame and a step that more recently has also provoked resistance.

Similarly, we suggest that the persistent large gaps in WSS service access between rural and urban areas in Ghana can be partly explained by the fact that rural water interventions are being framed as humanitarian interventions whereas urban water, by being more commercially viable, is regarded as investments in productivity and growth. This has made sector investments in urban areas appear as more attractive to those who look at the problem through a productivity frame. The same holds true for sanitation; we argue that the focus on productivity and commercial viability have made decision-makers focus more attention on the economic gains that can be made from supplying water to the population at the cost of taking the disastrous public health effects that can follow from a lack of wastewater runoff into account. Decision-makers generally seem more enthusiastic to engage in the development of water supplies, while they have remained reluctant to deal with the tougher questions of handling wastewater and sanitation. Sanitation has been framed as less prestigious, less profitable and still to a large extent looked upon as a humanitarian intervention rather than a business opportunity. In addition, at an international level, sanitation has also in the past been neglected to the extent that this has been termed the invisible side of water or even “the last taboo” (see Black and Fawcett, 2008).

¹ We are aware of all the commercial actors in the informal water sector, however here we are mainly dealing with changes in formal sector policies and strategies.

Yet, from a public health point of view water and sanitation are closely linked sectors. A hypothesis generated here is therefore that if the public health/independence/development frame had remained more influential, it would have contributed to a more holistic view of water and sanitation services as part of the same loop, which to some extent could have prevented sanitation from lagging behind. Alternatively, framing sanitation as a business opportunity or a sector of immense importance for economic development would probably contribute to an increased focus on this sector. We see indications that such a development may be underway. An example is a newly published World Bank report by Sittoni and Maina (2012): “Ghana loses GHC420 million annually due to poor sanitation. Economic impacts of poor sanitation in Africa.” The future will show what potential such an economic framing of sanitation will have for producing greater outputs for those most in need.

7. Negotiating Common Sense: Whose frame whose agenda?

To an outside observer, the development in Ghana's water sector to a large extent seems to mirror international policy trends. Policy advice from the World Bank certainly played an important role as for why the PSP debate was first introduced as an issue on the agenda in Ghana. As is common practice and as Whitfield (2006) has shown, World Bank reforms were also tied to financial assistance. It could be argued that the Government of Ghana strategically aligned itself with the analysis presented by the productivity frame to access World Bank loans. This direct economic incentive naturally served as a trigger for the Government to rethink and redefine best practices in this sector.

Nevertheless, we postulate that frames play an important role for explaining why things finally turned out as they did. As discussed in Chapter 5, development theory was during the 1970's internationally reframed towards a basic needs approach, which was essential for placing greater emphasis on water supplying services on the international development agenda. Along those lines the World Bank also reframed its own role and interest to engage in social development issues of poverty reduction in the developing world. Without a shift in development theory and in how the World Bank perceived its own role in WSS issues it would most likely not have engaged in the sector in the first place. At the same time it maintained a strong legacy of "productivity thinking", and from this followed a gradual move towards a productivity oriented frame also in Ghanaian WSS policy. The point here is to highlight that frames, whether they were formulated at the international or national level, in the end motivated different institutional arrangements and carried with them different implicit assumptions about development strategies.

There will be winners and losers due to different ways of framing the issue of WSS development. As illustrated in the above, the diagnosis and solutions generated by the productivity frame put the blame on the managerial capacities of domestic public sector officials and undeniably provided international water corporations with new business opportunities. On the other hand, those looking at the issue through an independence frame tended to focus blame on external foreign and colonial powers as opposed to the victimhood of national governments. This, as Whitfield (2006) and others have argued, tended to obscure internal problems within utilities or in the national institutional setting. This again demonstrates the power of frames in reducing complexity by focusing attention on some parts of the problem whereas other pieces of the picture fall outside of the frame.

To conclude: Power lies in having one's interest and arguments appear as common sense.

Sector professionals, expert advisors and related stakeholders interviewed for this study, many times had clear understandings of what the problems within the sector are. They often presented the solutions to the problems as “self-evident”, “natural” or “given”. In addition, they frequently blamed their antagonists for pursuing what they perceived as purely emotional or non-rational solutions as opposed to their own value neutral, fact based and non-biased approaches. However, as this study argues, Schön & Rein (1994) stress the ability of actors to step back and reflect upon the policy frames that steer their thinking and action. This requires an awareness of the existence and influence of frames, and a conscious effort of what they call “critical frame reflection”. Frame reflection offers the opportunity to break away from old ways of thinking or to avoid getting captivated by development policies in vogue.

Frame analysis and critical frame reflection also provide a complement to traditional policy evaluation methodology by encouraging policy makers and analysts to “look outside of their boxes” and include important considerations that otherwise would fall outside of the analysis. Conventional policy evaluation responds to the question whether the policy has achieved the objectives set when the policy was formulated and is therefore limited to the “boundaries” – frames – of those policies. Therefore, to constantly strive towards a frame reflective policy analysis and dialogue can also help decision-makers to make better informed decisions for the future.

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NOTES

ⁱInternational Bank of Reconstruction and Development (IBRD) commonly known as the World Bank

ⁱⁱ At the time a water supplies Department under the Ministry of Works and Housing was responsible for water supply development in Ghana.

Anna Bohman is a post-doctoral researcher at Linköping University, Department of Thematic Studies – Unit of Water and Environmental Studies and Centre for Climate Science and Policy Research. Her research interests concerns the dynamics of institutional change with special focus on the role of ideas for policy development and implementation.

Kaisa Raitio works as assistant professor in environmental communication at the Department for Urban and Rural Development, Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences, Uppsala. In her research she combines political science, environmental law, sociology and planning theories in analyzing conflicts and collaboration in political disputes over natural resources.

ANNEX 1

Oral Sources

Interviews

Accra 2004/2005

ISODEC Integrated Social Development Centre, November 16th, 2004
N-CAP (National Coalition against Privatization of Water) November 18th 2004
PMU (Project Management Unit) Water Sector Restructuring Secretariat, November 23rd, 2004
PURC (Public Utilities Regulatory Commission), Water Inspectorate, November 29th 2004
DANIDA, (Danish International Development Agency) December 1st 2004
Water Directorate, Ministry of Works and Housing/DANIDA December 2nd, 2004
Water Directorate, Ministry of Works and Housing, December 7th, 2004
DFID (Department for International Development), December 8th 2004
Water Aid Ghana Office, December 9th, 2004
World Bank Ghana Office, December 10th 2004
ProNet (Professional Network Association) & CONIWAS (Coalition of NGO's in Water and Sanitation), December 10th 2004
Public Utilities Workers Union of TUC (Ghana), December 13th 2004
TUC (Trade Union Congress)/TUC representative in the N-CAP, December 14th 2004
PMU (Project Management Unit) Water Sector Restructuring Secretariat December 22nd, 2004
GWCL. (Ghana Water Company Limited) Corporation Planning Dept. January 6th 2005

Interviews

Accra 2006/2007

Aqua Vitens Rand Ltd December 14th 2006
Aqua Vitens Rand Ltd January 31st 2007
IMANI – Centre for Human Education, Think Tank, January 15th 2007
N-CAP (National Coalition against Privatization of Water) January 16th 2007
PUWU (Public Utilities Workers Union) January 17th 2007
City Waste Management Co. Ltd (several years of experience in the urban waste water sector in Ghana) January 17th 2007
GWCL (Ghana Water Company Limited) January 18th 2007
Water Directorate, Ministry of Works and Housing, January 26th 2007
Agence Francaise pour Development, meeting with the coordinator of donor initiatives in the water sector, January 25th 2007
138
DANIDA/Water Directorate, Ministry of Works and Housing January 31st 2007
Politician, MP for National Democratic Congress, February 1st 2007
Accra Metropolitan Assembly, Waste Management Department – February 2nd 2007
Dutch Development Agency, February 2nd 2007
World Bank, Ghana office, February 5th 2007 and February 8th 2007
Public Utilities Regulatory Commission, Water Inspectorate February 6th 2007
Lawyer, Ghana School of Law, contracted to assist with the management contract, February 6th 2007
Ghana Water Company Limited/Project Management Unit February 7th 2007
Accra Metropolitan Assembly, Sewerage Department, February 9th 2007
Politician, former chairperson of the water board under the NDC Government, February 12th 2007
Water Aid Ghana, February 13th 2007

Sanitation Directorate, Ministry of local government and rural development,
February 13th 2007
Consumer Groups Association Ghana, February 15th 2007
Integrated Social Development Centre (ISODEC) February 19th 2007

Interview Washington 2007

World Bank, Sustainable Development Department, Africa Region,
November 29th 2007