

Pathways to universal WASH coverage in Ghana

Lessons from scaling Asutifi North's master planning approach

Jeremiah Atengdem, Sára Bori (IRC)

This paper provides a detailed practical reflection on the pathways used to replicate the Asutifi North district-based approach for achieving universal universal water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) coverage on a wider scale. The lessons and experiences garnered from the district-led approach will provide the blueprint to inform sector discussions on the challenges of scaling from a pilot in a district to the regional and national level. These reflections are based on an evaluation of master planning conducted under IRC's work in Ghana, supported by the Conrad N. Hilton Foundation.

The objective of this paper is to provide deeper insights into the master planning approach implemented in Asutifi North and its replication, assessing what worked, what did not, and areas for improvement. Lessons from this process will guide stakeholders at all levels looking to adopt and scale this innovation in their respective areas. Ultimately this will contribute to the goal of Ghana to enhance access to safe water, sanitation, and hygiene services, promote the sustainable management of water resources in Ghana by 2030, in alignment with with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG).

BACKGROUND

The first master plan for WASH in Asutifi North District, Ghana, was launched in 2018. The master plan united local government, NGOs, traditional leaders, private sector, and communities around a common vision and set out the steps to achieve it.

Since then, Asutifi North has been on a path towards accelerating the achievement of SDG6 in the district. Master planning as a key element of a district-based approach has seen considerable buy-in and scaling in Ghana.

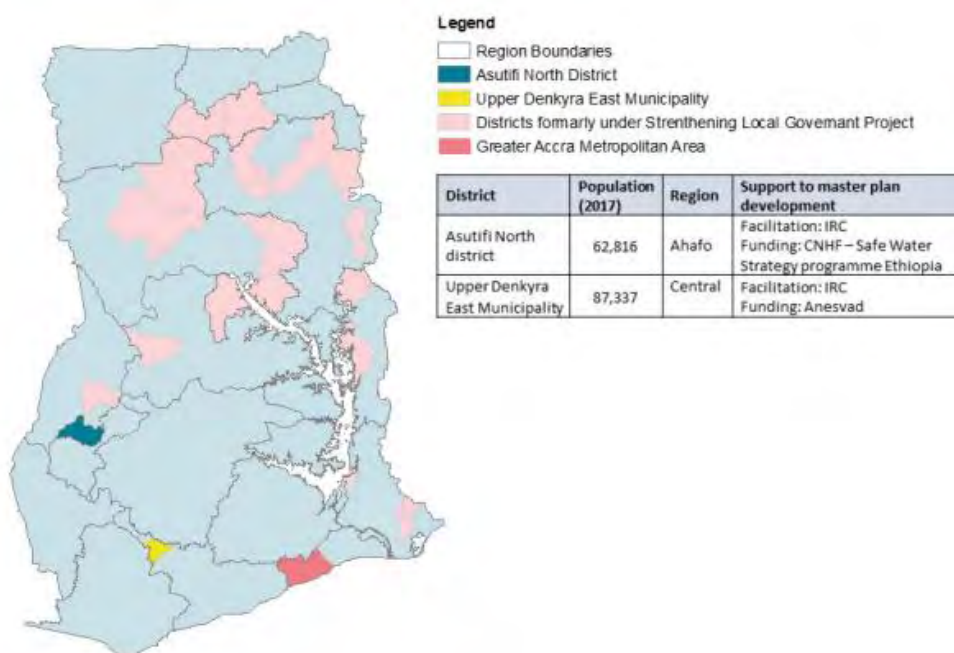
IRC's work in Ghana has been pivotal in the emergence of the master planning approach. From 2007 to 2011, under the [SWITCH project, strategic directions for integrated urban water management](#) were developed in the Greater Accra Metropolitan Area. Between 2014 and 2016, efforts were focused on strengthening local government to deliver water services, including the creation of long-term district WASH plans in 13 districts in collaboration with Community Water and Sanitation Agency (CWSA) and Conrad N. Hilton Foundation grantees, World Vision and WaterAid. The process involved mapping water facilities to create a water asset register, assessment of water service levels, a study of what it takes to reach full coverage, and training in the life-cycle cost approach (LCCA). The district WASH plans were later incorporated into the District Medium-Term Plans.

The period from 2017 to 2018 saw the development of Asutifi North's WASH master plan, which was launched in 2018 and has been implemented in the Asutifi North District since 2019. This approach was further extended to the Upper Denkyra East Municipality from 2021 to 2022, with implementation ongoing. Since 2023, master plan development has been underway in three additional districts in the Ahafo Region: Tano North, Asunafo South, and Asunafo North. In 2024, the Regional Coordinating Council (RCC) started the development of a regional integrated plan and facilitated the scaling of the district WASH master planning approach to the two remaining districts in the region (Tano South and Asutifi South). IRC has also worked with the National Development Planning Commission (NDPC) to develop and pilot the district WASH planning toolkit, which aims to support the scaling of master planning to other areas in the country.

This paper aims to provide a comprehensive reflection on the pathways employed for replicating the Asutifi North district-based approach for universal WASH coverage, drawing on experiences and lessons learned to inform sector dialogue on the challenges of moving from pilot to country-wide scale.

The reflections build on an evaluation of master planning conducted as part of IRC's work in Ghana, funded by the Conrad N. Hilton Foundation. The main objective is to deepen the understanding of the master

Figure 1: Visualisation of IRC Ghana's work on long-term planning in Ghana.



planning work in Asutifi North and the replication process, highlighting what worked, what did not, and what could be improved. This includes adopting best approaches and innovative solutions to significantly enhance WASH service delivery, aiming to achieve SDG6 in Ghana and beyond.

ABOUT MASTER PLANNING

MASTER PLANNING: A DISTRICT-BASED APPROACH

The global background and experiences with master planning in the context of district-based approaches highlight the importance of collective action among various actors at the district level to align behind a common vision and strategy. This approach is based on the premise that service authority functions are vested in the district. The district master plan serves as an instrument for developing a joint vision, setting targets, and strategic directions. It also acts as a vehicle for mobilising local-level political and financial support, including local public finance, national public financiers for WASH development programmes, and funding from INGOs, development partners, and the private sector. Additionally, the district master plan provides a framework for strengthening systems at the district level.

PROCESS VERSUS OUTPUT

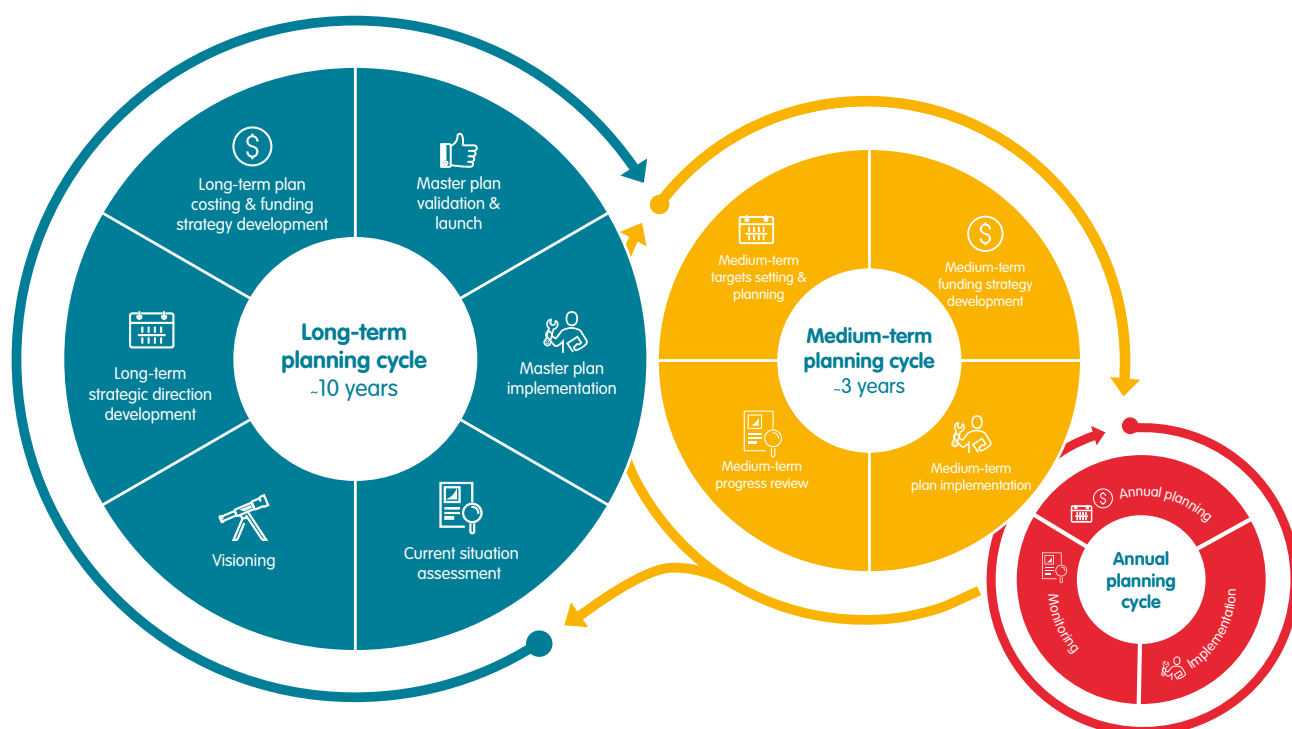
Master planning is fundamentally a dynamic and iterative process rather than a static output. It involves continuous engagement, assessment, and adaptation to evolving circumstances and needs. The process encompasses the development of strategic visions, situation assessments, costing and funding strategies, all of which require ongoing collaboration among stakeholders. Unlike a one-time deliverable, master planning demands regular updates and revisions to remain relevant and effective. While fundamentally concentrating on a long-term planning cycle, it acknowledges the need for medium-term and annual planning in support of implementation. See Figure 2.

Master planning integrates feedback from various actors, incorporates new data and insights, and adjusts to changing political, social, and economic contexts. Thus, master planning is a living framework that guides sustainable development towards a long-term, shared vision and ensures that plans are not just created but actively implemented and refined over time.

TAKING MASTER PLANNING TO SCALE

Taking master planning to scale involves integrating it into national planning and budgeting procedures. Scaling up master planning in Ghana focuses on two main areas: improving the WASH section of the

Figure 2: Visualisation of the different planning cycles and their key elements.



Medium-Term Development Plans (MTDPs) for 2026–2029 and developing a long-term WASH master plan for specific districts. Both are supported by a robust stakeholder mobilisation process.

Several scaling pathways have been pursued, building on the experiences of Asutifi North, in Ghana:

- Replication in other districts in the Ahafo Region, with some aggregation at the regional level.
- On-demand support for replication elsewhere.
- Other NGOs replicating or following similar approaches in different areas.
- Laying the foundation for a broader roll-out via the NDPC, including the development of a toolkit and large-scale capacity development.

Scaling can refer to both the master planning process itself and the broader district-based approach. It requires collective action, extensive knowledge sharing (e.g. tools, case studies, strategies) and advocacy at all levels. Together, these pathways form a comprehensive and mutually reinforcing set of strategies that align with the efforts of the Government and other partners.

IRC'S APPROACH TO PROMOTING THE SCALING OF MASTER PLANNING IN GHANA

OVERVIEW OF THE ANAM INITIATIVE IN ASUTIFI NORTH

IRC, in collaboration with the Asutifi North District

Assembly and other partners, such as Aquaya Institute, Netcentric Campaigns, World Vision, has developed and is implementing a 13-year [WASH Master Plan \(2017–2030\)](#) under the Asutifi North Ahonidie Mpontuo (ANAM) – or in English, the Asutifi North cleanliness – initiative. This initiative aims to ensure universal access to safe water, basic sanitation, and hygiene services for approximately 84,420 people by 2030.

The initiative has demonstrated and tested a local authority-led partnership with NGOs, including Aquaya Institute, IRC, Netcentric, Safe Water Network, and World Vision, to achieve district-wide access to water and sanitation services, contributing to universal coverage and to achieving SDG6 in Asutifi North District.

By 2024, 90% of the population continues to have access to basic water services, the highest coverage in the Ahafo Region. All public healthcare facilities and three-quarters of the schools now have basic water services.

Compared to the trajectory needed to achieve master plan targets, progress on basic and safely managed water services is slightly off-track, but ahead of national trends. In 2024, significant progress has been made toward sanitation targets, with the district achieving open defecation-free status and over 95% of the population gaining access to improved sanitation services. However, continued funding and efforts are required to sustain these achievements and stay on track.

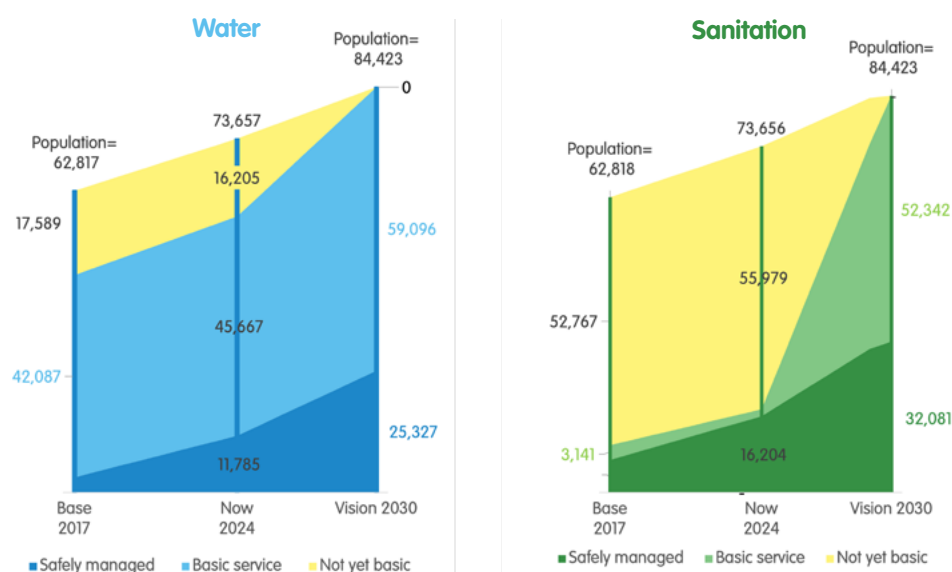


Figure 3: Progress on water and sanitation in Asutifi North district. Since 2017, 12.2 thousand people gained at least basic water supplies and 9 thousand gained at least basic sanitation.

By the end of 2022, the District Assembly and its partners had invested USD 1.6 million in Asutifi North's water and sanitation systems. By 2023, the district had taken over coordination roles of the ANAM initiatives, with IRC providing technical support. New partners, WaterAid Ghana and Easy Water for Everyone, had joined, and The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints Charities were contributing USD 300,000 to improve sanitation. Innovative projects like water kiosks and water quality testing were being expanded. By the end of 2022, the District Assembly and its partners had invested USD 1.6 million in Asutifi North's water and sanitation systems.

The district has shown strong commitment to its WASH master plan. In 2023, they allocated USD 48,000 of the district budget to water and sanitation services and 50,000 to rehabilitate the Kenyasi No. 2 water system, benefiting around 5,000 people.

However, about 7,000 people in small, scattered communities with challenging hydrological conditions remain unserved. To address this, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints Charities are funding additional drilling, and Easy Water for Everyone is using gravity technologies to capture and treat surface water.

Overall, the district is largely on track to achieve its 2030 vision as set in its master plan.

SCALING PATHWAYS FOR MASTER PLANNING BEYOND ASUTIFI NORTH

Pathway 1: Replication in other districts in the Ahafo Region, with some aggregation at the regional level

In 2023, three additional districts launched master plans in the Ahafo Region: Tano North, Asunafo South, and Asunafo North. In 2024, this effort expanded to the remaining two districts in the region, Tano South and Asutifi South. The approach pioneered in Asutifi North has been scaled up across the region, aiming to achieve universal services for 550,000 people. The Ahafo RCC, with continued support from the Conrad N. Hilton Foundation, has taken leadership to extend the approach to these five districts, working closely with the respective District Assemblies.

NGOs, including World Vision, the Aquaya Institute, Project Maji, Safe Water Network, SAHA Global, Netcentric Campaigns, WaterAid, Catholic Relief Services, and Easy Water for Everyone, are all supporting implementation. Some of these partners are new to the region, attracted by the clarity of the vision and the collaborative process.

In addition to supporting the development of the master plans, in 2023, IRC collaborated with district stakeholders to start preparing harmonised guidelines for WASH, based on experiences in Asutifi North. These guidelines will help districts understand their oversight roles more clearly and apply successful approaches. The document assists districts in interpreting national guidelines and policies, such as those covering

Photo caption: Participants at the launch of the WASH-Neglected Tropical Disease master plan.



operations and maintenance, schools, and healthcare facilities. These guidelines support service providers in professionalising their services and help different districts coordinate more efficiently.

The Ahafo RCC is responsible for coordination, monitoring, evaluation, and providing support to the District Assemblies in the Ahafo Region. The RCC organises meetings, plans agendas and programmes, and facilitates learning sessions.

IRC provides technical support for partnership management, coordination, learning, and training, including monitoring, documentation, and generating knowledge products. IRC is also assisting the region in preparing an operational partnership agreement to clarify the roles and scope of work for each partner.

With funding from the Conrad N. Hilton Foundation, the Ahafo RCC focused on the preparation of master plans for the last two remaining districts (Asutifi South and Tano South), and an integrated regional WASH plan addressing issues across all six districts in 2024.

The concept of using the region as a unit of coordination and technical assistance, while the district serves as the unit of planning, has proven to be effective. The district is the only entity with a planning mandate, while the region provides the framework, technical support, and quality control.

Hon. George Yaw Boakye, the Ahafo Regional Minister, emphasised the importance of clearly formulating the WASH components of the Regional Medium-Term Development Plan and the Regional Integrated Plan to attract partnerships needed for achieving universal access to WASH in the Ahafo Region.

Pathway 2: On-demand support for replication elsewhere

The successful implementation of the district master planning approach in Asutifi North has paved the way for its replication in other areas, such as Upper Denkyira East Municipality, where the process began in 2021. This replication effort is supported by on-demand technical assistance from IRC to facilitate the development of master plans.

In 2023, the Upper Denkyira East Municipal Assembly (UDEMA), in collaboration with the Municipal Health Department, IRC, and partners, launched the [Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene \(WASH\) and Neglected](#)

[Tropical Diseases \(NTDs\) master plan](#). The process was funded by the Anesvad Foundation, and the focus is on improving health and quality of life in the municipality by addressing WASH services in skin-NTDs-endemic areas.

Almost all regions of Ghana have one or more of the NTDs, with over 25 million people being at risk of contracting them, especially children under 15 years of age. The master plan seeks to increase the proportion of the population with access to safely managed water services from 10% to 15% by 2030, with the remaining 85% having access to basic water services. Linking WASH and NTDs has the potential to impact multiple NTDs through a single area of intervention.

Overall, the replication of the district master planning approach in Upper Denkyira East demonstrates the potential for broader application and scalability. The involvement of various stakeholders and the alignment with government targets and indicators ensure that the approach is coherent and complementary to existing planning procedures and mechanisms.

“Today’s gathering can be a turning point. The municipality has a well-developed master plan for WASH and NTDs. This master plan will enhance the partnership between all stakeholders through the implementation of a coordinated vision, strategy, and purpose. It gives us an overview to appreciate the costs for achieving the goals we have set for ourselves.”

- Hon. Ebenezer Forson Appiah, Upper Denkyira East Municipal Chief Executive at the launch event of the master plan.

Pathway 3: Other NGOs replicating or following similar approaches in different areas

Additionally, other organisations, including World Vision and WaterAid, are adopting similar approaches, further demonstrating the potential for district-based approaches, their scalability, and the adaptability of the district master planning model. It is important to note that these NGOs are not necessarily replicating IRC’s processes. Some have started similar processes on their own and have learnt from their interactions with IRC to improve their processes, and vice versa. This section explores the strategies and outcomes of these replication efforts, highlighting the lessons learnt and the potential for broader application.

IRC Ghana collaborated with the National Development Planning Commission (NDPC) to document best practices in WASH across selected districts, drawing lessons to support evidence-based, innovative development approaches towards achieving SDG6 in Ghana. Among the documented lessons was the WASH master planning approach piloted in Asutifi North, which is now informing WaterAid's programming in Bongo. WaterAid, in collaboration with stakeholders, is developing a WASH master plan for Bongo District, to drive progress towards universal access to WASH services. The District Assembly has assumed the responsibility for creating a MTDP and a District Water and Sanitation Plan in collaboration with stakeholders, adhering to the guidelines established in the National Medium-Term Policy Framework.

World Vision, in partnership with Global Communities under the USAID Enhanced WASH Activity project, has drawn on best practices from the Ahafo Regional WASH Programme to support 16 districts in five regions, including Nadowli-Kaleo District, Yendi Municipality, Bawku West District, Mion, Gushiegu, Karaga, and Zabzugu District, in developing WASH investment plans. These plans aim to advance the delivery of universal WASH services, enabling the districts to leverage partnerships and secure funding for their implementation.

The districts are hopeful that this approach will provide renewed impetus to their efforts to address the many WASH challenges they face.

Pathway 4: Laying the foundation for a broader roll-out via the NDPC

IRC has also worked with NDPC to develop and pilot the [district WASH Planning Toolkit](#), which supports efforts to scale master planning to other areas in the country.

This toolkit is designed to support the scaling of master planning to additional areas across the country. As a result of these efforts, NDPC is now replicating the approach in 10 more districts, including Ellembele, Nanumba South, Sekondi-Takoradi Metro, Shama, Nzema East, Tarkwa Nseuam, North Gonja, Agortime Zoipe, Guan and Krachi Nchumuru.

The [NDPC WASH toolkit](#) includes a checklist for districts to improve the WASH section of their MTDPs and facilitates dedicated WASH master planning.

In 2022, NDPC used the WASH Toolkit developed together with IRC to assess the compliance of District MTDP in 140 districts (covering half the country) to the elements of WASH.

In 2023, the toolkit informed capacity development sessions for different regions on improved planning for WASH and Training of Trainers of WASH focal persons, using IRC's WASH Systems Academy course materials. Trainers will support their districts and other WASH practitioners to adopt the WASH master planning approach.

Replication via this toolkit was preceded by a collaboration between NDPC and IRC in 2020, which focused on [documenting good practices for improving WASH in Ghana](#) and sharing them via the National Learning and Leadership Programme (NLLP), enabling others to adopt improved planning methods. Asutifi North's master planning success story was one of the three cases celebrated in the resulting booklet.

In addition to this documentation exercise and supported by the development of the toolkit, IRC has facilitated stakeholder engagement around the revision of the national WASH policy, ensuring that the voices of districts are included in the process. IRC has also provided technical inputs into the revised Ghana WASH development plan. As a result, NDPC has incorporated elements of the WASH master planning approach into the national planning guidelines for the next cycle of the MTDP. The guidelines include a focus on how to do planning, and proper costing and budgeting to improve water, sanitation, and hygiene services. IRC will support tracking how districts implement these guidelines.

This pathway demonstrates the importance of integrating district master planning elements into national planning and budgeting procedures. By doing so, it ensures that local-level insights and needs are considered in national strategies, leading to more effective and sustainable WASH service delivery across the country.

REFLECTIONS AND LESSONS LEARNT

ADDRESSING THE KEY CHALLENGE OF FINANCING THE SECTOR

One of the central issues that district master planning aims to address is the challenge of financing the WASH sector, both in terms of quantity and targeting. In the specific districts where master planning has been implemented in Ghana, it represents a consolidation step in improving long-term planning by service authorities. It also helps bring together pre-existing and parallel initiatives, and stakeholders working towards the same goal. That is why master planning as an output, without the accompanying process, is unlikely to be a relevant intervention.

COSTING AND FUNDING THE PLAN

One of the key lessons learnt is the importance of understanding the required costs for achieving the set targets, both the national ones and the SDGs. Accurately costing the master plans has been a vital aspect of the process. IRC has worked with all stakeholders to establish cost estimates covering new WASH infrastructure, capital maintenance expenditure, operations and minor maintenance, and direct support costs of local government to implement the master plan. This comprehensive costing approach has ensured that all sub-sectors of WASH are adequately funded.

IRC has provided methodological and technical support for costing the master plan, conducting annual finance tracking activities and identifying current and potential future sources of funding for WASH service provision.

By doing so, collective action around implementing the master plans has shown potential to mobilise additional resources, as evidenced by new funders and partners joining the efforts in Asutifi North and the replication of the approach in Upper Denkyira East through funding from Anesvad Foundation. The collaborative approach has increased the willingness of stakeholders to invest in and support the implementation of the master plans. By 2024, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints Charities has become another major funder, and new partners such as Easy Water for Everyone have joined the initiative. Project Maji and Catholic Relief Services have also started funding and implementing elements of master planning in new areas.

Other key new partners are the Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development, Voltic Ghana through their Corporate Social Responsibility arrangements, and Ghana Gas Company Unlimited. These partners have all invested in infrastructure improvements in Asunafo South district.

However, it is unclear whether a reduction of the finance gap is also happening through consumers (e.g. through tariffs, household investments in sanitation) - even though relevant measures are taken to reduce the gap (e.g. pay as you fetch).

There is no evidence of mobilising additional national public finance nor repayable finance. Here it is important to note that limitations with planning processes are not the primary challenge in attracting more finance to the sector, either at the national or district levels.

ALIGNMENT WITH NATIONAL PLANNING PROCEDURES

At the national level, the limitations faced in pre-existing planning procedures and financing have been addressed by master planning through its alignment with existing statutory planning mechanisms, such as the MTDP and annual plans. These plans are composite and multi-sectorial, requiring support from more detailed and specific long-term sectorial plans. Master planning provides a common basis for data and information, as well as a framework for targeting, prioritising, and coordinating available resources for WASH, including those from centralised providers like the Ghana Water Company Limited (GWCL) and, to a lesser extent, CWSA.

ADOPTING THE DISTRICT MASTER PLANNING APPROACH

The adoption of the district master planning approach has been strategically designed to enhance and integrate existing planning processes, rather than replace them. This approach complements the MTDPs by aligning with national targets and indicators, and respecting the institutional roles of authorities, including District Assemblies (DAs) and Regional Coordinating Councils (RCCs).

Initially, there was little need for advocating for master planning with the selected districts. Asutifi North's selection was set up as competition, interested districts could apply to be selected for the programme. Thus,

the process responded to the demand expressed during the selection process.

There has been minimal need for dedicated evidence-based advocacy to scale up district master planning or to demonstrate its effectiveness. The high demand from neighbouring districts and other development partners has been driven by the successful experience in Asutifi North.

Key scaling partners, including RCC, NDPC, and the Ministry of Sanitation and Water Resources (MSWR), were involved in the initial experience in Asutifi North. Their involvement has been critical in ensuring that the district master planning approach is coherent with national efforts and effectively integrated into existing planning mechanisms.

THE KEY ROLE OF A FACILITATOR

IRC has achieved significant results by continuously engaging relevant authorities. This approach has required IRC to act as a technical facilitator, leveraging its expertise in process facilitation, strategic understanding of systemic sector issues, and technical knowledge in areas such as planning, monitoring, and service delivery models.

Although no comprehensive assessment of the capacity for master plan implementation was conducted, it can be inferred that the capacity exists. In Asutifi North, there is a solid foundation among a range of stakeholders, which is likely to be sustained through funding from the Conrad N. Hilton Foundation. However, in other districts in the Ahafo Region, the engagement has been shorter, presenting a potential risk. Experiences from other districts indicate that capacity and leadership for follow-up on planning can be fragile, especially if there are few partners present.

The work in Ahafo mitigates this risk through the strong involvement of the RCC, which plays a crucial role in follow-up. Other NGOs, such as WaterAid and World Vision, also seek to enhance RCC involvement in other areas where they work for the same reason.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- While master planning shows clear potential as an entry point to achieving SDG6 in Ghana, scaling the process requires targeted improvements by stakeholders involved in the water, sanitation and hygiene sector of Ghana, such as:
- Use district WASH master planning as an entry point for strengthening national WASH planning systems. Establish a link between district WASH master planning and the development of national-level plans and funding strategies.
- Advocate for the use of master planning at regional and national levels.
- Encourage the scaling up of district master planning by developing process guidelines and a standard template for outputs, based on the Ahafo experience.
- Defining the capacity requirements and conducting assessments of districts. Capacities for implementing and following up on the plans are in place in Asutifi North, though they are less robust in other districts in the Ahafo Region. Experiences from other districts indicate that these capacities can be fragile.
- Roll out the process of master planning through NDPC.
- Clarify the roles of NGOs and development partners versus local government as drivers of the scaling process.
- Build on the Regional Coordinating Council's role to harmonise key stakeholders' activities in the region, fostering cross-district learning and alignment. Understanding the role of RCCs is key in mitigating capacity risks and emphasising accountability.
- Identifying the resource requirements, particularly for data collection.
- Support the development of national finance strategies to anticipate the increased resource needs from more master plans and MTDPs.

If master planning is effectively implemented and

scaled, it is likely that the finance gap will become more apparent. However, addressing this gap cannot be done locally alone. This situation provides both the need and the opportunity for national-level resource mobilisation within the framework of a broader finance strategy. By leveraging national resources and aligning them with broader financial strategies, the scaling-up of master planning can be more effectively supported and sustained.

REFERENCES

- Adank, M., 2025. [District WASH master planning: Lessons learnt and pathways to scale](#). IRC, The Hague.
- Adank, M., Darteh, B., Moriarty, P.B., Osei-Tutu, H., Assan, D., van Rooijen, D., 2011. [Towards integrated urban water management in the Greater Accra Metropolitan Area: current status and strategic directions for the future](#). IRC and SWITCH/RCN Ghana.
- Asutifi North District Assembly, 2018. [Water sanitation and hygiene \(WASH\) master plan: Asutifi North District, Ghana. IRC Ghana and Asutifi North District Assembly](#).
- Upper Denkyira East Municipal Assembly, IRC Ghana, Ghana Health Service, Anesvad Foundation, 2022. [Water, sanitation and hygiene \(WASH\) and Neglected Tropical Diseases \(NTDs\) master plan: Upper Denkyira East Municipal Assembly](#).

About this brief

This paper builds on an evaluation of IRC's work on supporting the master planning approach within the Conrad N. Hilton Foundation funded Safe Water Strategy Program in Ethiopia, Ghana, and Uganda by Stef Smits, Veronica Ayi-Bonte and Moses Asimwe. For overall insights on master planning, please read the briefing note: [District WASH master planning: Lessons learnt and pathways to scale](#).

Cite this publication as follows

Atengdem, J. and Bori, S., 2025. [Pathways to universal WASH coverage in Ghana: Lessons from scaling Asutifi North's master planning approach](#). IRC Ghana.

Address

Rivervismarkt 5
2513 AM The Hague
The Netherlands

T +31 70 3044000
info@ircwash.org
www.ircwash.org

Acknowledgements

We thank Vida Duti, Marieke Adank and Stef Smits for peer review and expert insights.

Copy-editing: Tettje van Daalen

Design: Dechan Dalrymple

Copyright 2025 IRC

This publication is licensed under a Creative Commons License 4.0 License. View the terms of the license here: <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/deed.en>