

Why are toilets so expensive in Ghana? Experience from Kumasi

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Only 23%¹ of urban Ghanaians have access to their own improved sanitation facilities. Despite this, uptake in household toilets remains sluggish. This is due to several factors, including (but not limited to) cost which is a key focus of stakeholders. Collating data on the costs of constructing toilets in Kumasi, this Practice Note provides points of comparison for others seeking to build toilets in Ghana and beyond.

Ghana has endured a difficult macro-economic period, with rates of inflation rising to around 17.5% in 2016. Although rates have since then reduced, the impact on costs of materials, labour and credit were a constraint on sales of Round Concrete Tanks (RCTs), pit latrines and SaTo Pans in Kumasi in 2018 and 2019.

How much?

Despite sales pitches that highlighted the convenience, cost-effectiveness and safety of a private household toilet - customer attitudes, competition from public toilets, difficulties in sourcing financing, lack of enforcement of sanitation legislation and physical barriers severely curtailed the ability of Toilet Sales Agents (TSAs) to sell toilets. While a number of prospective customers expressed interest in buying toilets, TSAs reported that prices were a significant impediment to converting pitches into sales, even with a staggered payment plan and costs split between households sharing a compound.

The cost-to-customer of toilets offered in Kumasi (anything from USD 200-1000) were high compared to average monthly earnings of around GHS 250 (USD 46). This reflects the cost of construction materials in Ghana, and that few enterprises provide all components of toilet construction and installation.



Instead, those who want their own toilet must source and pay different companies to excavate land, install the plumbing and build the sub- and/or superstructure. Some companies are seeking to innovate and reduce costs, but they are not currently incentivised to offer lower margin products.

Table 1: Cost breakdown of toilet superstructure construction/installation (GHS)

Element	Sub-total % total cost
Masonry (blocks, cement, sand/chippings, miscellaneous)	608 24%
Carpentry (wood, roofing sheets, nails, ironwork, misc.)	440 18%
Plumbing (basin, toilet, pipework)	510 20%
Tiling (floor, walls, cement, misc.)	335 13%
Labour (mason, carpenter, plumber, tiler)	600 25%
Total GHS	2,493
Total USD	456.60

Table 2: Cost breakdown of RCT construction/installation (GHS)

Element	Sub-total % total cost
Pit (48" manhole ring, cover slab, toilet bowl and SatoPan)	1,050 50%
Soakaway (35" manhole ring, slab)	250 12%
Pipework (PVC pipes, sealant, clip, adhesive)	153 5%
Hand-washing (gallon container, tap, funnel, hangers)	56 3%
Labour (plumber, pit excavation, soakaway excavation, mason)	580 28%
Total GHS	2,089
Total USD	380

Demand dampers and drivers

The prevalence of public pay-per-use toilets in towns and cities in Ghana reduces demand for household/compound toilets. One tactic used by TSAs was to underline the long-term savings of investing in a toilet rather than paying for public toilets.

Public toilets charge GHS 0.3-0.5 per day, costing an average family of 5 more than GHS 900 each year, assuming each member visits only once a day and pays GHS 0.5 per use. Based on the example costed above, this family would take just under three years to see savings from constructing their own toilet superstructure compared to continuing to use public toilets.

However, messaging about potential long-term savings of the products offered by WSUP does not seem to be effective in Kumasi. This could be because incomes often fluctuate from month to month, depending on the season.

While public facilities differ in levels of cleanliness or safety, their 'little-but-often' payment schedule is in line with income streams and savings, particularly when compared to the up-front costs of constructing or upgrading a toilet. When asked about what they think about buying their own toilet, for example, Kumasi residents were more likely to highlight the importance of safety, cleanliness and proximity rather than saving money.

Few enterprises offer a full construction and installation service, so the cost of specialised labour provided by multiple companies is passed on to customers who have competing (and often more attractive) demands on their wallet. However, loans and/or credit for sanitation, while available, are hard to access.² Competing pressures and counter-acting leverage points underly the Ghanaian sanitation ecosystem, increasing the complexity of programmes seeking to stimulate the market.³

Additionally, the provision of subsidies/free toilets by governmental and non-governmental actors in some areas of Accra and Kumasi have had an unintended impact; some prospective customers reported that they planned to wait to see if they will receive a subsidy before committing to purchasing a toilet. Conversely, it can be argued that current costs are above plausible ability or willingness-to-pay, so that subsidy is necessary.

Next Steps

WSUP is funding a research project (SanCost, led by research consultancy Aquaya) which is currently collecting data on the cost of supplying high-quality sanitation technologies in low-income areas of Kumasi (as well as in Kenya and Bangladesh). Researchers are examining the costs (to households, as well as the wider costs of transport, treatment and reuse) of four sanitation options: pour-flush toilets to septic tanks, pour-flush toilets to biofill, container-based sanitation, and mechanized pit emptying. This will supply more detailed information on the economics of sanitation in Ghana and inform future programme design.

1. JMP (2015) Ghana Urban: <https://washdata.org/data/household#!/dashboard/new>
2. WSUP (November 2019) How can sanitation actors in Ghana stimulate toilet loan uptake? Practice Note
3. WSUP (November 2019) Sales glitch: Can Ghana unblock its toilet sales market? Topic Brief

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