

EVALUATION OF THE MOLE CONFERENCE SERIES (2014-2023)



Submitted To:

**Ghana Coalition of NGOs in the Water and Sanitation Sector
(CONIWAS)**

By :

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PREFACE

The Mole Conference Series, spearheaded by the Ghana Coalition of NGOs in Water and Sanitation (CONIWAS), has been a cornerstone in advancing the Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene (WASH) agenda in Ghana since its inception in 1989. Over the years, the conference has evolved from a platform for non-governmental organizations to a dynamic multi-stakeholder forum that engages policymakers, government institutions, civil society, private sector actors, and development partners. It has become a vital space for dialogue, knowledge exchange, and advocacy in the WASH sector.

As we commemorate the 35th anniversary of the Mole Conference, this evaluation marks an important milestone in assessing the conference's contributions to Ghana's WASH sector. Situated within the past 10 years (2014-2023), this study evaluates the impact of the Conference Series on policy development, sector coordination, service delivery, and knowledge management. By analyzing stakeholders' experiences and identifying gaps and challenges, this evaluation also aims to provide actionable recommendations for enhancing the relevance and effectiveness of the Mole Conference Series in the years to come.

This evaluation is not only a reflection of the successes achieved but also a commitment to continuous improvement, ensuring that the Mole Conference remains a pivotal platform for driving sustainable progress in the WASH sector. We hope that the insights and recommendations in this report will inspire all stakeholders to redouble their efforts toward achieving equitable and climate-resilient water and sanitation solutions for all.

Dr. Beata Awinipoka Akanyani
Chairperson, CONIWAS



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Background

CONIWAS periodically assesses the contribution of the Mole Conference Series. This year marks the 35th anniversary of the Conference Series, and CONIWAS sought to evaluate its impact on the WASH sector. The evaluation focuses on measuring the contributions of the Mole Conference, its relevance to the sector, and identifying any gaps that need to be addressed to enhance its effectiveness. The objectives of the evaluation are to:

1. Evaluate the impact of the Mole WASH Conference Series on the WASH sector in Ghana, focusing on areas such as policy, sector coordination, service delivery, and knowledge management;
2. Assess stakeholders' experiences with the Mole WASH Conference and its influence on their work;
3. Analyse the challenges encountered in sustaining the Conference;
4. Assess the gaps in the Conference; and
5. Recommend strategies for improvement.

Methods

The study was guided by evaluative and historical designs, and it employed the sequential qualitative mixed approach comprising desk review, interviews and open forum which was implemented in phases. The first phase involved a desk review of relevant documents of the Mole Conference Series such as background paper/concept notes, conference reports, and communiqué. The review enabled us to fully understand the nature and scope of the conference activities to establish the theory of change and contextualise the key issues. The second phase comprised the use of purposive sampling to select stakeholders such as conference participants, past and present executives of CONIWAS (the conference organisers), and past and present members of the Planning Committee of the Mole Conference Series for in-depth interviews on issues related to the objectives of the study. The final phase involved an open forum and information session at the 35th Mole WASH Conference held in Ho, Volta region, where participants provided further information on the thematic areas of the interview guide.

The transcripts were analysed manually based on the predetermined themes of the study objectives and other emerging themes. The study adhered to all relevant ethical considerations in conducting social science research such as informed consent, anonymity, and confidentiality.

Findings

The following are some of the key findings from the evaluation:

- The study revealed that the Mole Conference Series has significantly shaped Ghana's WASH sector by providing a platform for policy advocacy, capacity building, and collaboration.
- The Conference has also influenced key policies such as the National Environmental Sanitation Policy and the Ghana Water Policy while harmonizing approaches like Community-Led Total Sanitation (CLTS).
- Its workshops and mentorship programmes have professionalized the sector, fostering innovation and best practices.
- The Conference Series has further strengthened partnerships among NGOs, donors, and government agencies, improving WASH interventions and funding access.
- Additionally, its themes have emphasized inclusive WASH systems, participatory approaches, and resilience-building in underserved communities.
- Participants generally report positive experiences with the Mole WASH Conference, citing valuable networking, resource mobilization, and visibility for local NGOs. These benefits have translated into new funding opportunities and strengthened WASH systems.
- However, stakeholders noted areas for improvement, including logistical issues, dissatisfaction with concurrent sessions, and limited thematic diversity.
- Recommendations include integrating more training workshops, refining thematic focus, and improving logistics to enhance the conference's relevance and accessibility.
- Despite its successes, the Mole WASH Conference faces challenges threatening its sustainability.
- Funding constraints limit planning, branding, and pre-conference activities, raising concerns about its future viability if donor support declines.
 - Limited engagement from policymakers, particularly outside Accra, reduces opportunities for meaningful policy discussions.
 - Late planning also hampers efforts to attract influential speakers to address critical themes, affecting the conference's impact.
- Several gaps limit the conference's potential, including inadequate implementation of recommendations, with only 12 of 109 commitments achieved between 2014 and 2023.
 - Insufficient follow-up and feedback mechanisms, along with weak grassroots engagement, further hinder sustained impact.

- High costs restrict participation by marginalized groups, youth, and smaller local NGOs, while the private sector and youth leadership remain underrepresented.
- Additionally, weak publicity and limited capacity at the CONIWAS Secretariat reduce the conference's visibility and professionalism.
- To address these challenges and ensure the long-term sustainability and impact of the Conference, participants proposed the following strategies:
 - Rebranding the Conference to attract high-profile speakers and sponsors,
 - Engaging professional fundraisers, and fostering collaboration with policymakers to enhance policy influence.
 - Partnerships with CSOs and development partners can broaden the conference's reach, while improved media presence and branding will elevate its profile.
 - Supporting smaller NGOs financially and integrating participant feedback mechanisms can enhance inclusivity and sustain momentum.

Conclusions, and Recommendations

The Mole Conference, established in 1989, has significantly influenced Ghana's WASH sector, by influencing policy development, fostering innovation, and promoting stakeholder collaboration. It has also served as a vital platform for capacity building, knowledge sharing, and strategic advocacy, contributing to sector-wide progress.

Despite these achievements, challenges such as logistical inefficiencies, thematic limitations, and insufficient engagement with key stakeholders have restricted its impact. Sustainability concerns, including financial constraints, weak follow-up mechanisms, and limited inclusion of youth and private sector actors, further underscore the need for reform.

To ensure the continued relevance and effectiveness of the Mole WASH Conference, strategic improvements are essential. Securing sustainable funding through diversified and transparent sources is critical for long-term viability. Enhancing branding, publicity, and professional practices will improve visibility and stakeholder engagement. Also, strengthened collaboration with policymakers and development partners during planning and execution can foster greater ownership and policy influence.

Improving feedback mechanisms, such as participant surveys and regular updates, will ensure accountability and responsiveness. Moreover, expanding the thematic scope, introducing capacity-building workshops, and addressing logistical challenges will enhance the quality of participant experiences. Additionally, targeted initiatives to engage youth, marginalized groups, and private sector entities will promote innovation and inclusivity, ensuring the conference remains a leading platform for shaping Ghana's WASH sector.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.0 Background

The Annual Mole Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) Conference Series, organised by the Ghana Coalition of NGOs in Water and Sanitation (CONIWAS), serves as a platform for advocacy, knowledge sharing, and networking in Ghana's WASH sector. First held in 1989 by a group of NGOs, the Conference has seen consistent growth in interest and significance among civil society, policymakers, ministries, departments and agencies, local government, the private sector, individuals and development partners. It has transformed from primarily an NGO forum into one of the most significant multi-stakeholder platforms in the WASH sector in Ghana. Over the years, the conference has brought together various players and stakeholders annually to discuss critical issues affecting the sector.

CONIWAS periodically assesses the contribution of the Conference Series. This year marks the 35th anniversary of the Mole Conference Series, and CONIWAS sought to evaluate its impact on the WASH sector. This evaluation focuses on measuring the contributions of the Mole Conference Series from 2014 to 2023 to ascertain its relevance to the sector and identify challenges and gaps that need to be addressed to enhance its relevance and effectiveness.

1.1.0 Objectives

The objectives of the evaluation are to:

6. Assess the impact of the Mole WASH Conference Series on the WASH sector in Ghana, focusing on areas such as policy, sector coordination, service delivery, and knowledge management.
7. Assess stakeholders' experiences with the Mole WASH Conference and its influence on their work.
8. Analyse the challenges encountered in sustaining the conference.
9. Assess the gaps in the conference series and
10. Recommend strategies for improvement.

CHAPTER TWO

OVERVIEW OF THE MOLE CONFERENCE SERIES

2.0 Introduction

This chapter presents the general overview of the Mole WASH Conference Series, focusing on its brief history and objectives.

2.1. The Mole WASH Conference Series

Ghana's WASH sector has undergone significant improvements, especially with sector coordination, knowledge management, and service delivery since the inception of the Mole Conference Series in 1989. The evolution of the sector has been accompanied by notable changes and achievements, including major reforms to address existing weaknesses.

From humble beginnings with what started as a little forum for NGOs in the water and sanitation sector, the Mole Series has undoubtedly become the single largest advocacy platform in Ghana, over the years. The objectives of the Mole Series are:

1. Influence sector policies and practices for inclusive WASH service delivery;
2. Enhance networking and partnerships in the WASH sector;
3. Learning, knowledge sharing, and sector monitoring;
4. Enhance sector capacity, especially among CSOs;
5. Improve sector coordination, collaboration, alignment, harmonization, and mutual accountability between government and non-state actors.

The Mole Conference Series was initially expected to provide the basis for NGOs in the Water and Sanitation Sector in Ghana to work together, and to give them the needed voice to articulate and spearhead pro-poor advocacy in the sector. It has since evolved to become the leading and longest-running multi-stakeholder platform for the WASH Sector to deliberate on issues affecting the delivery of WASH Services to the people of Ghana, especially the poor and the marginalized. It is a one-stop shop for discussing sector issues and developing ideas. The platform has resulted in increased consultation of policymakers with civil society on new policy proposals, and increased input of civil society in sector policies.

One of the recent accomplishments includes the signing of the Presidential Compact on WASH, which has pledged to allocate \$1.7 billion annually to WASH programs until 2030, with the aim of improving public health and enhancing climate resilience across the country.

The Compact is not the beginning but rather a continuation and strengthening of ongoing efforts—a decisive step to ensure that every citizen, regardless of their location or circumstances, has sustainable access to essential WASH services. At its core, this initiative underscores the belief that with effective WASH services, sustainable development becomes a reality.

Furthermore, the launch of the Ghana WASH Week in 2022 by CONIWAS, as an outcome of the Mole Conference Series, aimed to trigger national consciousness about the need for improved WASH, particularly sanitation, and the importance of maintaining a clean, healthy environment. This is expected to result in greater prioritisation and action toward addressing the country's sanitation challenges.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODS

3.0 Introduction

This chapter presents the research design, the target population, and techniques used to select the participants of the study. It also describes the instruments used for data collection, data collection procedures, data management and ethical issues.

3.1. Study Design and Approach

The study was guided by evaluative and historical designs, and it employed the sequential qualitative mixed approach comprising desk review, interviews and open forum, the details of which are presented in sections 3.2 and 3.3.

3.2. Desk review

During the first phase, we undertook a desk review of relevant documents of the Mole Conference Series such as background paper/concept notes, conference reports, and communiqué. The desk review ultimately enabled us to fully understand the nature and scope of the conference activities to establish the theory of change, design, and contextualise the key issues. The review also informed the design of the instruments for the empirical data collection that followed. That is, we collected qualitative primary data using an in-depth interview guide we developed based on the initial findings of the desk review.

3.3. Primary data collection

In the second phase, purposive sampling was used to select stakeholders such as conference participants, past and present executives of CONIWAS (the conference organisers), and past and present members of the Planning Committee of the Mole Conference Series for in-depth interviews on issues related to the objectives of the study. The interview guide was divided into five sections, which included participants' background information, the impact of the Mole WASH Conference Series on the WASH sector in Ghana, (focusing on areas such as policy, sector coordination, service delivery, and knowledge management), stakeholders' experiences with the Mole WASH Conference and its influence on their work, challenges encountered by the organisers in

sustaining the conference, gaps in the conference series and recommendations for improving the conference series.

With expressed permission and at the convenience of the respondents, handwritten notes were taken during the interviews and later typed. On the average, each interview lasted for about 45 minutes.

The third phase of the data collection was an open forum and information session where the preliminary findings of the desk review and the key informant interviews were presented at the 35th Mole Conference held in Ho, Volta region, and participants provided further information on the thematic areas of the interview guide.

3.4. Data analysis, management, and quality assurance

The transcripts were analysed manually based on the predetermined themes of the study objectives and other emerging themes.

We adopted various mechanisms to guide the implementation of the study and ensure quality data. That is, the researchers were involved in the data collection and analysis to ensure that the data collected was of optimal quality. Also, all the data gathered were fully anonymised (as much as practicable) before analysing and archiving them.

3.5. Ethical Considerations

The study adhered to all relevant ethical considerations in conducting evaluation research such as informed consent, anonymity, and confidentiality.

CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS

4.0 Introduction

This chapter presents the findings based on the specific objectives of the study.

4.1. Impact of the Mole WASH Conference Series on the WASH sector in Ghana

The evaluation revealed that the Mole Conference Series has had a significant impact on the WASH sector in Ghana within the period under review (2014-2023). Some of the key achievements of the conference series are discussed in the sections below:

Policy Advocacy and Development: The Mole Conference Series has been pivotal in advocating for policy changes within Ghana's WASH sector. It has provided a space for key stakeholders to engage with government officials and influence the development of national policies on water, sanitation, and hygiene. For instance, the conference has contributed to shaping policies such as the National Environmental Sanitation Policy, the Ghana Water Policy and the Ghana WASH Compact. The conference platform also allows for advocacy and the alignment of sector priorities with national development agendas. The following excerpts from the interviews with stakeholders are illustrative:

The two main objectives of the Conference are to influence policy and remove barriers to inclusive WASH service delivery in Ghana. Generally, I can confidently say that over the past 10 years, the conference has been quite successful in this regard. The WASH Compact which was recently signed by the President of the Republic of Ghana was greatly influenced by the Conference Series. Also, most of the policies in the section such as the Revised Water Policy (2024), Revised Environmental Sanitation Policy (yet to be published etc) have all benefitted from the inputs of members and stakeholders who attended the Mole Conference Series.

The Conference has also helped to improve the realignment of WASH approaches in Ghana. For instance, various NGOs were using different approaches in the implementation of the Community-led Total Sanitation (CLTS). However, when these approaches and their respective findings were presented during the Conference Series, stakeholders raised concerns about the need to harmonise approaches for sustainable service delivery.

In recent years, there has been remarkable growth in how CONIWAS presents its advocacy. It has evolved into a dialogue rather than a confrontation. Progress is consistently initiated through the conferences and communicated to the ministry via communiqués, resulting in a significant impact. The communiqués are devoid of partisan positioning; they are objective and do not antagonize either the ruling party or the opposition.

Capacity Building: The conference offers a platform for capacity building among WASH practitioners. Through workshops, presentations, and networking opportunities, participants gain knowledge and skills that enhance the implementation of WASH projects. This has contributed to the professionalization of the WASH sector in Ghana. The following statements from the participants provide further insights:

For the past four or five years, the organisers of the Conference have introduced capacity-building and mentorship programmes during the conference. For example, in the 2019 conference held in Ho, senior sector practitioners were invited to have a mini workshop with young and smaller NGOS on grantsmanship and how to stay successful in the sector.

The youth have been taken through mentorship programmes and they have been given roles to play during the conference such as serving as rapporteurs at breakout sessions and reporting at the plenary session. They have also been put on some committees of the Conference.

Knowledge Sharing: Through side events, panel discussions, and presentations, the Mole Conference Series has enhanced the capacity of WASH professionals by sharing knowledge on best practices, research findings, and technological innovations. This has helped improve the implementation of WASH projects and programmes across the country, particularly in rural and underserved communities.

For me, one of the most visible impacts of the conference is the platform it creates for stakeholders to share their experiences, innovations and best practices in the WASH sector. Apart from the Mole Conference, there is no major multi-stakeholder event in Ghana where almost all the various categories of stakeholders are represented and committed to sharing knowledge and learning from others.

During the conference, many innovative approaches and programmes are shared which is very important for the sector. My only concern is that the government has not been able to drive evidence synthesis and support the scale up some of these initiatives.

Collaboration and Networking: The Mole Conference Series has fostered collaboration between various WASH sector stakeholders, including international development partners, NGOs, and local governments. This networking has led to partnerships that have supported more effective and coordinated WASH interventions. It has also provided opportunities for local organizations to connect with international donors and access funding for WASH initiatives. Here are some of the views expressed by participants in this regard:

Through the conference, my NGO has gained visibility in the sector, which has resulted in collaborations among different international NGOs. I work for a local NGO but my participation in the conference and the roles I have been playing have helped my organization to secure collaborations on several assignments which has also improved the profile and financial health of my organization.

The conference created an opportunity for the then UNICEF Country Director to meet with the Vice President at Mole 30 in 2019 for a crucial sector advocacy discussion, which had been pending for over six (6) months.

The conference has fostered an extensive collaborative space for the ministry and sector players to develop strategic plans and visions. A notable example is the ministry's involvement in planning various Mole Conferences, where they present their strategic plans, policies, and frameworks for participants to review and provide feedback.

Community Engagement and Inclusion: The Conference has highlighted the importance of involving local communities in the planning and implementation of WASH projects. It has promoted participatory approaches that ensure the needs and preferences of communities are considered in WASH interventions. Additionally, the Conference has been a platform for addressing gender and social inclusion within the WASH sector, ensuring that vulnerable groups have access to water, sanitation, and hygiene services. This is revealed in the various themes of the conference that specifically target inclusive WASH services delivery such as the theme for the 2023 MOLE Conference held in Jirapa, Upper West Region with the theme: ***Building Inclusive and Resilient Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) Systems to Reach the Unserved***

The Mole Conference has been intentional about involving the youth in its roles and activities. In 2019, the youth wing was inaugurated to ensure they have a special role in the upcoming Mole Conferences, empowering the next generation to contribute actively to the discussions and initiatives.

The theme of the 2023 Conference speaks volumes about the need to involve all stakeholders, especially the youth and marginalised groups.

Sector Coordination: The Mole Conference Series has improved coordination among various actors in the WASH sector. It has fostered collaborations between the government, private sector, NGOs, and international partners, leading to more integrated and effective WASH interventions. By bringing together all stakeholders, the Conference Series provides an avenue for discussing and sharing strategies for effective and efficient coordination in the WASH sector.

The collaboration between NGOs, development partners, the government and the private sector has been strengthened because evidence of their investments in the sector is always showcased during the conference.

Similarly, the Conference Series has been at the forefront of the push for the establishment of the National Sanitation Authority and the National Sanitation Fund.

The Mole Conference Series has consistently pushed for the establishment of the National Sanitation Authority (NSA) and the National Sanitation Fund. This call has appeared in conference communiques on several occasions. It is our belief that the NSA will strengthen WASH sector coordination.

4.2. Stakeholders' experiences with the Mole WASH Conference and its influence on their work

The experiences of the conference participants and their perceptions of how the conference impacts their work are critical for the sustainability of the Conference Series. As a result, the second objective of the evaluation sought to assess the experiences of the participants. The findings from the interviews revealed that there were mixed experiences of the participants as shown in the following subsections.

Positive experiences

Some of the participants shared some positive experiences of their participation in the Mole Conference Series over the years. The following excerpts from the interviews are illustrative of the general positive experiences of the participants:

Beyond the influence on sectoral and national policies, the conference has profoundly impacted individual organizational strategic thinking, policies, and capacity building. My organization can attest to the significant changes inspired by the insights gained at the Mole conferences.

I personally attend conferences to learn more about what others are doing in the sector. Also, I attend conferences to connect with people of similar

interests for possible collaborations, and this Mole Conference Series provides me with these opportunities.

We have received funding by joining the “Agenda for Change initiative” (a WASH climate resiliency program) through the partnership with CONIWAS, World Vision, IRC, and PATH. This opportunity was initiated from the Mole conference a few years ago and the funding was approved last year.

Through our consistent participation in the conference, we have gained the necessary visibility to collaborate on strengthening the WASH system. Additionally, we identified appropriate partners to form consortia and bid for various funding opportunities.

Negative experiences

Despite the positive experiences, some participants also shared some negative experiences that need to be addressed. Participants expressed dissatisfaction with the concurrent sessions at the conference, stating that it limits participation in thematic discussions and can lead to missed opportunities for engagement. Others expressed frustrations experienced during the conferences, particularly with the food service, which was poorly managed leading to long queues and dissatisfaction among participants. Some of these experiences are below:

The conferences seem one way and boring to me. The WASH sector is broad and the stakeholders are diverse. However, most of the sessions of the conference focus on water, sanitation, and hygiene, with limited coverage for solid waste or healthcare waste. I suggest that the various thematic areas of the sector should all be covered.

The thematic areas of the conference do not address the current, pressing issues of the WASH sector in Ghana. There is wholesale acceptance of abstracts and as a result, some of the presentations are too boring. Some of the side events should have been pushed to poster sessions.

Also, the plenary sessions are based on the ability to pay rather than focusing on its relevance to the diverse stakeholders in the sector. In my view, some of the plenary sessions should have been sent to send events and vice versa.

I attend conferences to learn but there is limited opportunity for training workshops. I expect the organisers to integrate training programmes into the conference. For example, the last day should be reserved for training sessions so that interested organisations can pay for the slots.

I have concerns about logistical issues, such as accommodation capacity, sharing of meals, and other logistics that negatively impact attendees' experiences. Participants should be informed beforehand which hotels are available or allocated to them.

Also, poor transportation arrangements for participants from the conference centre to other hotels are a major source of concern which significantly affects the overall participant experience.

Accommodation arrangements should be tied to registration and payment of fees. Participants should first register before making payment and payment should be done before the conference so that we do not face accommodation challenges. The organisers should leverage technology for registration and payment of fees and should avoid the cash payment system.

4.3. Challenges encountered by organisers in sustaining the conference

Although the conference has been recognised as very important to the WASH sector in Ghana, significant challenges exist which have the potential to threaten the sustainability of the conference. This section presents some of the challenges identified by the conference organisers (CONIWAS executives and Planning Committee members) when it comes to organising this important annual conference.

Expectedly, the most significant challenge was funding for the conference. All the key informants who were interviewed mentioned that mobilising funds for the conference and subsidising for smaller local NGOs have been a challenge as illustrated by the following excerpts:

We rely on two main sources of funding for the Conference: sponsorship from corporate institutions and development partners and conference fees paid by participants. The fees are never enough to organise the conference and sponsorship is gradually dwindling. Most of the participants are expected to come from the local NGOs so that they can network and learn from each other and from the international NGOs. Unfortunately, these local NGOs are underfunded and they usually find it difficult to even pay for the subsidised conference fee.

The low funding for the Conference has resulted in weak planning, poor branding, and inadequate pre-conference advertisement and activities. For instance, if you have not secured funding, you cannot adequately plan some activities, so our conference programme and activities always come late.

Due to insufficient funds, we are unable to engage in many pre-conference activities and advertisements. We mostly rely on our social media handles which have not been very effective in promoting the conference.

One of the key questions to ask is whether CONIWAS will be able to sustain the Mole Conference Series if funding support from international NGOs and development partners ceases. This concern arises because membership dues and participation fees are insufficient to cover the costs of organizing the conference. Currently, we are also leaving local NGOs behind, as many are unable to afford the event

Another challenge was the difficulty in attracting policymakers to the conference as revealed by some of the present and past executives and planning committee members as follows:

As I have mentioned earlier, the main focus of the Conference is to influence policy and remove barriers. These can be achieved only when we are able to bring policymakers to the discussion table during the conference so that they can listen to the issues and also provide feedback. WASH affects and is affected by actions and inactions of multiple sectors of the economy, so we need all the relevant stakeholders to be on board. However, in most cases, we only manage to get the sector Minister but the core policymakers from the other Ministries are always missing. Some of them cite the timing of the conference as the challenge but if they really want to be part of the discussion, they can send senior delegates, but they don't.

Involving the policymakers is always difficult especially when the conference is organised outside Accra. You see, most of them (policymakers) are in Accra and they are mostly engaged in multiple assignments, so moving them for more than one day is difficult. As a result, they only come for the opening of the conference and leave right after, which prevents them from being part of the core discussion and shaping the discourse.

Another notable challenge was the difficulty in attracting renowned and influential speakers to address the various themes and sub-themes of the conference.

In an important conference like Mole, we always need influential speakers who have the clout and the voice to get the attention of policymakers but sometimes we find it very difficult to get them. The problem is not a lack of expertise in the sector but their availability for the conference. Like the policymakers, most of these speakers are always busy and because we don't plan the conference early enough, we mostly miss out.

We have almost the same or similar faces of speakers all the time. It appears that we are talking to ourselves, which is not helpful.

Moreover, the conference organisers expressed grave concern about the difficulty in tracking the conference communique.

Tracking the communique has always been a challenge for us, perhaps because we do not have a dedicated team with budgetary allocation after the conference to track the communique. I think we need a dedicated team and funds to engage the stakeholders who were assigned responsibilities in the communique on progress and challenges.

As the conference organisers, one of our major headaches is how to track the progress of the communique. I think we need to change our approach; normally, right after the conference, we share the communique with the relevant stakeholders and follow it up from time to time. I think we need to be more aggressive with our engagement to identify progress and the challenges faced by stakeholders in taking up the issues in the communique.

4.4. Gaps in the Mole Conference Series

The Mole Conference Series has undoubtedly made a substantial contribution to the WASH sector in Ghana. By influencing policy, improving stakeholder coordination, and raising awareness, the Conference has become a key pillar in the ongoing efforts to ensure equitable access to water, sanitation, and hygiene for all Ghanaians. However, like any long-standing conference series, it has gaps and addressing them can help the Conference become a more effective platform for driving positive change in Ghana's WASH sector. Below are some of the key gaps that were identified during the document review and interviews:

Implementation Gaps: Despite its successes, the Mole Conference Series leaves a huge gap when it comes to ensuring the implementation of its recommendations and sustaining the momentum between annual conferences. Often, the discussions at the Conference lead to recommendations in the form of a Conference Communique, but there is a gap between these policy discussions and actual implementation on the ground. For example, a content analysis of the communique and the communique tracking reports within the period under review (2014-2023) revealed that out of the 109 commitments made under the five broad conference objectives, only 12 were fully or almost fully implemented (see Table 4.1). This demonstrates a clear gap in tracking the progress of the commitments made during the conferences, leading to questions about accountability and the effectiveness of the outcomes.

Table 1: Progress in achieving the commitments in the Conference Communiqué

Objective	# commitments (2014 - 2023)	# not implemented	# Partially Implemented	# fully or almost fully implemented	% not implemented	# Partially Implemented	% fully or almost fully implemented
Objective 1: Influence Sector Policies and Practices for inclusive WASH service delivery	57	19	28	10	33	49	18
Objective 2: Enhance Networking and Partnerships in the WASH sector	16	10	5	1	63	31	6
Objective 3: Learning, Knowledge Sharing, and Sector Monitoring	23	20	3	0	87	13	-
Objective 4: Enhance Sector Capacity, especially among CSOs	7	4	2	1	57	29	14
Objective 5: Improve sector coordination, collaboration, alignment, Harmonization and Mutual Accountability between government and non-state actors	6	6	0	0	100	0	-
Total	109	59	38	12			

Inconsistent structure and focus of the communicate

Also, we observed too many communicate items per conference which became overly ambitious (See Table 4.2). For this evaluation, we propose that the communicate items should not be more than 5 key points that are achievable within a year.

Moreover, some of the communicate items were too vague for measurement and tracking. Ideally, the communicate for annual conferences should be short-term because you need to report on the progress during the next conference the following year. In this regard, some of the long-term communicate items can be used as conference recommendations to be taken up by sector players.

Table 2: Mole conference series over the past 10 years

Year	Venue	Theme	Number of communicate items
2014	Ramada Hotel Accra	Mole Conference @ 25: Reflections to Define the Future.	11
2015	Ex Tee Crystal Hotel, Bolgatanga	Financing Water, Sanitation and Hygiene within the Sustainable Development Goals: Options and Strategies for Ghana	12
2016	Aqua Safari Resort, Big Ada	Repositioning CSOs Towards Achieving the WASH SDGs: The Role of Sector Partners	13
2017	Accra International Conference Centre, Accra	Ghana's lower middle-income status: implications for sustainable WASH services delivery	18
2018	Villa Cisneros, Sogakope	Reforming Ghana's WASH sector towards universal access	12

2019	Volta Serene Hotel, Ho	Thirty Years of Multi-Stakeholder Dialogue in Ghana: Reflections and Prospects	8
2020	Hillview Guest Centre, Abokobi-Teiman, Accra	Prioritizing and refocusing sustainable WASH services delivery: Lessons from the covid-19 pandemic	10
2021	Anita Hotel, Ejisu	Repositioning the WASH Sector for Emergency Response and Sustainable Development	8
2022	Elmina Beach Resort, Elmina	Ghana's Commitment to Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene (WASH): Connecting Systems to bridge service delivery gaps.	7
2023	Royal Cosby Hotel, Jirapa	Building Inclusive and Resilient Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) Systems to Reach the Unserved.	11

Limited opportunities for feedback and follow-up

The interviews further revealed that stakeholder engagement tends to peak during the conference, but sustained involvement throughout the year, especially from key decision-makers, is limited. Most of the participants are of the view that there are no updates on the decisions or communicate of the conference until the next conference. Also, it was revealed that there is a limited avenue for participants to share their views on the success or otherwise of the conference. The following excerpts from the interviews are illustrative of the general perceptions of the participants:

In fact, the Conference has not done quite well in seeking feedback from the participants. We need feedback on the experiences of the participants to inform future conferences. As it stands, only the executive committee and planning committee members do a daily review of the conference which needs to be extended to the participants.

We are all kept in the dark until the next conference. I suggest that the organisers should have something like a quarterly newsletter where information and updates about the conference communicate are disseminated to keep members informed. It does not need to be printed; to save cost, the newsletter can be a soft copy and shared on our various platforms.

There is a need for an electronic After-Event survey to be administered to participants. This would help gather immediate feedback and ideas for improvement, allowing for a better understanding of the challenges faced and how to enhance future events.

Inadequate representation of local NGOs and marginalized Groups

While the Conference brings together stakeholders from various sectors, there are concerns about whether marginalized communities, especially those directly affected by WASH issues, are adequately represented. Participants raised concerns about the inadequate representation of, and opportunities for, smaller local NGOs, the youth and persons with disability to share their experiences and preferences for designing inclusive WASH systems and service delivery. The following excerpts are representative:

Most of the conference participants are members of NGOs or from the government or development partner side, many of whom do not actually know what marginalised people go through to access WASH services daily. Even most of the participants come from the larger local and international NGOs, with the smaller local NGOs completely cut off due to the high registration cost of the conference. Meanwhile, they are those that need to learn from the experiences of the large local and international NGOs and get connected for future collaborations.

The conference is becoming an elite event, making it difficult for many potential “local/field level” practitioners to attend and benefit from the learning and networking opportunities.

The conference has not done too well with the inclusion of persons with disabilities. Their experiences, voices, and preferences are very important for the design and implementation of inclusive WASH systems.

Local NGOs should be extensively engaged to play a significant role in the conference. We must not lose sight of the importance of making the conference a fertile ground for harnessing the capabilities of local NGOs. This is why, in 2022, CONIWAS decided to reserve the positions of

Chairperson and Vice-Chairperson exclusively for local NGOs. This initiative presents an important opportunity for growth and collaboration for the local NGO's

Private Sector Engagement

Although efforts are made to involve the private sector, there are still gaps in effectively integrating private-sector financing and innovations into the WASH sector. The majority of participants share the perspective that

The conference has successfully attracted donors but lacks engagement with private sector entities, like those in the banking, oil and gas, and mining sectors. To address this, future conferences should actively invite these corporate institutions and provide them with a dedicated platform to discuss their interests and explore potential partnerships with implementing organizations. This could open up additional funding avenues if these corporations recognise the existing gaps and align their corporate social responsibilities with the WASH needs.

Low Youth Participation

Encouraging youth participation and leadership in WASH discussions is still an area that needs more focus. Young people, though directly impacted by WASH issues, are often underrepresented in the decision-making processes, which limits the representation of emerging leaders in the WASH sector.

The youth are the future of the sector. However, they are generally under-represented and for the few that attend, we don't have a special session for them to share their experiences and motivations. We need to take this seriously.

I proposed that the organisers should create a 'youth corner' at the conference. This would serve as a dedicated space where younger participants could engage actively, present their concerns, and foster their involvement in the WASH sector. By providing this platform, we can better support the growth and participation of the next generation of leaders.

We have a lot of young researchers in our various tertiary institutions who are doing great research on issues in the sector. We need to provide opportunities for them to participate in the conference and present their findings or even learn about emerging issues in the sector.

Knowledge Sharing and Capacity Building

While the conference is a great platform for sharing knowledge, there are gaps in ensuring that the information reaches the grassroots level, where it is most needed.

Often, we see wonderful innovations presented at the conference, mostly in their pilot stages, but we rarely hear about their scale-up. It is important to select at least three (3) key/promising innovations from each conference and prioritise tracking their progress. Where feasible, we should seek the necessary support to further develop these innovations for scalability.

There is also a need for more focused efforts on building the capacity of local institutions and stakeholders to implement WASH interventions effectively. Especially marginalized groups should be provided with tangible and measurable capacity enhancements after each event targeted toward their development. This could involve training programs, and access to resource opportunities that meaningfully improve their skills, knowledge, and overall capabilities. A substantial portion of participants share this perspective as summarised below:

Organizers should make room for a side session on hands-on value for the youth and new local NGOs to build their capacity. This could focus on proposal writing, leadership skills, and funding raising/opportunities to enhance the capacity of local organizations.

Weak publicity, brand visibility, and professionalism

Another significant gap identified by most of the participants is weak publicity and brand visibility for the Conference. Most of this hinges on human resource capacity, as shown in the following quotations from the participants:

I think the conference is too big for the three staff at the CONIWAS Secretariat. The conference has grown big but the Secretariat has remained the same. They need personnel for IT, publicity, monitoring, and evaluation, etc. Since the Mole Conference is the main event of the WASH sector in Ghana, we should invest in human resources to deliver excellently.

There is a noticeable lack of human resources dedicated to providing the necessary branding and visibility before, during, and after the Conference. Sometimes it takes an excessively long time to see pictures, videos, or proceedings from previous conferences. Once the Conference ends, everything goes quiet until the next one, and the event lacks sustained visibility.

Even just a few months before the next Mole Conference, you barely see any significant publicity on media platforms or the conference website. This

lack of visibility creates challenges when referring employers to the website for financial support for attendance—they often return with negative feedback, citing limited information about the conference.

When I pitched the conference to my new employer, convincing them to let me attend, I reached out to CONIWAS for an invoice for participation and membership renewal. To my surprise, I received a Word document as an invoice. I don't believe this is professional enough, especially when there are software solutions available that could generate official invoices online. Why are we not adopting these more professional and efficient practices?

4.5. Proposed strategies to improve the MOLE Conference Series

To address the challenges and the gaps identified and ensure the sustainability of the conference, participants of the evaluation exercise proposed some strategies for consideration. These are organised based on the challenges and gaps identified.

Funding and resource mobilization

Difficulty in mobilising funds and other resources appeared as one of the most significant challenges of the Mole Conference Series. As a result, all stakeholders including conference organisers, CONIWAS executives and conference participants proposed strategies for dealing with the financial challenge of the Conference Series as illustrated in the following excerpts:

The conference should be made much more appealing to high-profile speakers and corporate sponsors. We must rebrand the Conference to stay relevant and serve as a powerful voice in the WASH sector. This will make it attractive for potential sponsors and high-profile personalities to want to be associated with the Conference.

There should be aggressive fundraising strategies for the Conference. This should not be the responsibility of only the CONIWAS executives or the planning committee members of the conference. Prominent members and stakeholders in the sector should be engaged to support the cause. Effective fundraising is based on the corporate networks of the individuals involved. So, they have to expand the membership of the fund-raising committee.

Maintaining regular communication with sponsors and demonstrating transparency in how their funds were utilised are crucial for securing future financial support. Sponsors should not only hear from you during a conference; it is essential to provide them with detailed reports on how their

contributions were allocated and the positive impact they had on the sector after the event has ended.

We need to engage professional fundraisers who will work on a commission basis. Most of the fundraising committee members are not professionals. Fundraising goes beyond identifying potential sponsors and writing letters to them. We need people who know the art of lobbying and convince potential sponsors to invest in the Conference.

We need to also continuously build the capacity of smaller local NGOs and support them to win projects so that they can expand their businesses and therefore have the financial capability to pay for the conference fees.

Co-designing and planning the conference with policymakers

To capture and retain the attention of policymakers and other stakeholders at the Conference, participants made some suggestions as follows:

The organisers should plan far ahead of the conference and they should do so in close collaboration with policymakers on issues related to the conference themes and subthemes, dates and venues.

Co-designing the conference and planning with the policymakers will foster ownership of the process and the outcomes. This is an easy way to influence policy because most policymakers see conference communicate as a form of instruction or an order to be obeyed, which is not feasible.

Strong partnership and collaboration:

Another strategy proposed by the participants is the need to establish strong partnerships with CSOs and development partners.

We need to partner with other CSOs to organise the conference. We need to be outward-looking in our bid to rebrand and internationalise the Mole Conference.

CONIWAs is the main organiser of the Conference but they need to reach out to other relevant stakeholders and seek their input and support in organising the Conference.

Publicity, Brand Visibility, and Professionalism

Publicity, brand visibility, and professionalism are critical elements that define the success and impact of any large-scale event, including the Mole Conference. Ensuring that the

conference maintains a strong presence in the media, digital platforms, and within its network not only builds the reputation of the event but also fosters trust and engagement among participants, sponsors, and partners. A more professional approach to branding and communication will also make it easier for potential attendees and sponsors to find relevant information, evaluate the value of the conference, and commit to participating.

Also, enhancing the visibility and professionalism of the Mole Conference Series will help elevate its status as a premier platform for the Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene (WASH) sector in Ghana. Participants shared the following recommendations to help strengthen engagement and enhance the conference experience:

The organisers should conduct a post-conference survey to gather valuable feedback from participants. This will help assess what went well, areas for improvement, and future expectations, which can inform the planning of upcoming conferences.

The organisers should send personalized invitation letters via emails a few months before the conference to frequent attendees—both individuals and organisations. This early outreach can build anticipation, solidify their attendance, and encourage early registration.

Immediately after the conference, the organisers should send a thank-you email to all participants. This email should include relevant information, such as key takeaways from the conference sessions, links to slides or materials presented, and a note of appreciation for their engagement. This helps maintain a connection with participants and keeps the momentum after the event.

The organisers should send pre-attendance emails a few weeks before the conference to gauge participants' expectations. This can include questions on what they hope to gain from attending, specific sessions of interest, or networking opportunities they are looking for. The insights from this survey can be used to tailor certain aspects of the conference to meet participants' needs.

The organisers should issue a quarterly bulletin to update participants of the previous conference, keeping them informed on progress made since the last event, upcoming opportunities, and new developments in the WASH sector. This keeps the Conference and its value proposition top of mind throughout the year.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.0 Introduction

This chapter presents the summary of key findings, conclusions, and recommendations for enhancing the sustainability of the Mole WASH Conference Series.

5.1. Summary of key findings

The following are the key findings from the evaluation exercise. This is organised based on the objectives of the evaluation as follows:

5.1.1. Impact of the Mole WASH Conference Series on the WASH sector in Ghana

The Mole WASH Conference Series has made a significant impact on Ghana's Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene (WASH) sector since its inception in 1989. It has served as a platform for collaboration, advocacy, capacity building, knowledge sharing, and networking among stakeholders such as government agencies, NGOs, international organizations, and community-based groups. Key impacts include the following:

- **Policy Advocacy and Development:** The conference has influenced the development and alignment of national WASH policies, including the National Water Policy, the National Environmental Sanitation Policy and the Ghana WASH Compact.
- **Capacity Building:** Workshops and mentorship programmes during the Conference have enhanced skills and professionalized the WASH sector.
- **Knowledge Sharing:** Innovative practices, research, and strategies are disseminated during the Conference, thereby fostering improved WASH service delivery.
- **Collaboration and Networking:** The Conference facilitates partnerships among stakeholders, enhancing visibility and securing resources for local NGOs.
- **Community Engagement and Inclusion:** Themes and activities emphasize inclusivity, particularly for vulnerable groups, and empower youth participation.
- **Sector Coordination:** The Conference has improved collaboration and integration among the government, private sector, and NGOs have been achieved, with

advocacy for institutional frameworks like the National Sanitation Authority and the National Sanitation Fund.

5.1.2. Stakeholders' experiences with the Mole WASH Conference and its influence on their work

The Mole WASH Conference has received mixed reviews from participants regarding its implementation. While participants appreciate the platform for networking, collaboration, and visibility, logistical and thematic concerns hinder its effectiveness. Some of the positive experiences of the participants include the following:

- **Networking and Collaboration:** Opportunities to form partnerships and secure funding for initiatives like the Agenda for Change.
- **Visibility:** Consistent participation boosts stakeholder visibility and access to funding opportunities.

On the other hand, some of the negative experiences are:

- **Concurrent Sessions:** Participants noted the limited thematic discussions and participant engagement.
- **Thematic Limitations:** Others also reported insufficient focus on pressing issues, such as solid and healthcare waste.
- **Logistical Issues:** Problems with accommodation, food services, and transportation negatively impact participant satisfaction.
- **Limited Training Opportunities:** A lack of training workshops integrated into the Conference was reported to limit opportunities for young practitioners.

5.1.3. Challenges encountered by organisers in sustaining the conference

The key challenges faced by the conference organisers are as follows:

- **Funding:** Reliance on dwindling sponsorships and insufficient fees limits planning and execution.
- **Policymaker Engagement:** Difficulty attracting policymakers and ensuring their active participation.
- **Speakers:** Challenges in securing renowned and influential speakers to enhance conference discourse.
- **Tracking Progress:** Inadequate resources to follow up on the implementation of the communique emanating from the conference.

5.1.4. Gaps in the Mole Conference Series

The MOLE Conference series has significantly contributed to advancing Ghana's WASH sector by influencing policies, fostering stakeholder coordination, increasing awareness, and driving investment. However, the following gaps limit its impact and effectiveness:

- **Implementation Gaps:** The translation of conference recommendations into actionable results is limited. A significant portion of commitments remains unfulfilled due to vague communiques, lack of tracking, and overly ambitious agendas.
- **Limited Feedback and Follow-Up:** Stakeholder engagement peaks during the conference but diminishes thereafter. Feedback mechanisms are weak, and participants are often uninformed about progress until the next conference.
- **Inadequate Inclusion:** Marginalized groups, smaller local NGOs, and persons with disabilities are underrepresented. High registration costs and a lack of targeted sessions exclude grassroots voices.
- **Private Sector and Youth Engagement:** The Conference struggles to integrate private sector innovations and financing, and youth participation is insufficient, with no dedicated spaces for their engagement or contribution.
- **Knowledge Sharing and Capacity Building:** Information dissemination and innovation scaling remain weak. Opportunities for grassroots capacity building and tangible outcomes are limited.
- **Weak Publicity and Professionalism:** The Conference lacks strong branding, sustained visibility, and professional resource management. Human resource constraints and outdated administrative practices hinder its operational excellence.

5.1.5. Proposed strategies to improve the Mole Conference Series

Participants of the evaluation exercise identified key challenges and proposed strategies to address them, ensuring the conference's sustainability and growth. These challenges included funding, collaboration, visibility, and engaging policymakers. Proposed solutions focused on enhancing resource mobilization, improving collaboration with stakeholders, strengthening partnerships, and boosting professionalism and branding.

Key recommendations emphasized proactive planning, engaging professional fundraisers, fostering partnerships, maintaining regular communication with sponsors, and adopting a strategic approach to visibility and participant engagement.

5.2. Conclusions

The Mole Conference Series has contributed to shaping policy and practice in the WASH sector in Ghana. It has also created a platform for sharing innovation, best practices and learning. The following specific conclusions have been made based on the objectives of the evaluation:

5.2.1. Impact of the Mole WASH Conference Series on the WASH sector in Ghana

- The Mole WASH Conference has been instrumental in shaping policies, aligning strategies, and advocating for inclusive WASH service delivery in Ghana.
- Its focus on capacity building and knowledge sharing has improved professional expertise and innovation in the sector.
- By fostering collaboration, the Conference has strengthened partnerships and supported the financial health and visibility of local organisations.
- The emphasis on inclusivity and community engagement ensures WASH initiatives are tailored to the needs of all, including marginalised groups.
- The series has created a unique multi-stakeholder platform for strategic planning, advocacy, and policy review, contributing to long-term sectoral coordination and sustainability.

5.2.2. Stakeholders' experiences with the Mole WASH Conference and its influence on their work

- Despite challenges, the conference remains a vital platform for networking and collaboration, with some participants reporting significant benefits to their work.
- However, logistical shortcomings, thematic narrowness, and challenges in engaging critical stakeholders limit the Conference's potential to adequately influence the WASH sector in Ghana.

5.2.3. Challenges encountered by organisers in sustaining the conference

- Significant gaps and challenges exist that threaten the quality and sustainability of the conference. These include financial constraints, coupled with inadequate mechanisms for stakeholder engagement and follow-up, which threaten the long-term viability of the conference.

5.2.4. Gaps in the Mole Conference Series

The Mole Conference Series is a cornerstone for WASH advancement in Ghana but requires structural and strategic improvements to enhance its impact which include the following. By addressing these gaps, the Conference can become a more inclusive, impactful, and professional platform for advancing Ghana's WASH sector.

- A disconnect exists between recommendations and actionable outcomes, undermining accountability and sector progress.
- Limited representation of marginalized groups and smaller NGOs reduces inclusivity and grassroots relevance.
- Untapped potential in engaging youth and private sector entities hampers innovation and funding opportunities.
- Weak feedback mechanisms and visibility dilute the Conference's year-round influence.

5.2.5. Proposed strategies to improve the Mole Conference Series

Addressing the identified challenges and the gaps with the needed urgency is imperative for the quality and sustainability of the conference series. Therefore, the following recommendations were proposed by the participants of the study. By implementing these strategies, the Mole Conference can strengthen its role as a premier platform in the WASH sector, ensuring long-term impact and sustainability.

- Resource mobilisation is critical for the conference's sustainability. Therefore, transparent communication with sponsors and professional fundraising efforts can significantly improve financial stability.
- Co-designing the conference with policymakers and stakeholders will enhance ownership, policy influence, and relevance.
- A stronger brand presence and professional communication can elevate the conference's status, attracting participants and sponsors.
- Regular updates and maintaining connections with participants and sponsors will foster trust and ensure long-term engagement.
- Supporting smaller NGOs to grow and actively participate will strengthen the WASH ecosystem.

5.3. Recommendations

Based on the conclusions of the evaluation, the following recommendations have been proposed. These measures will enhance the Mole WASH Conference's relevance, effectiveness, and sustainability in driving WASH sector improvements in Ghana.

1. **Secure Sustainable Funding:** The organisers should expand funding sources by engaging private sector sponsors and offering tiered fee structures for local and international participants. They should increase advocacy for financial support from governmental bodies and development partners.
2. **Invest in Branding and Publicity of the conference:** The CONIWAS Secretariat should boost its staff with expertise in IT, publicity, and monitoring and evaluation. Also, the organisers should adopt professional practices, such as automated invoicing and timely updates on media platforms to enhance publicity and visibility of the Conference. Moreover, they should increase pre- and post-conference visibility through social media campaigns and a well-maintained website. They can also use diversified promotional strategies beyond social media to attract a broader audience.
3. **Strengthen Engagement with Policymakers:** The organisers should schedule the conference to accommodate policymakers' availability and ensure their participation in core discussions. In this regard, the date and venue for the conference should be decided well in advance. Similarly, the organisers should create targeted outreach strategies to attract relevant ministries and senior representatives.
4. **Establish a Communique Tracking Team:** The conference organisers should allocate a budget for a dedicated team to track progress on communique implementation. They should also engage stakeholders actively and provide periodic updates to sustain momentum.
5. **Streamline Communiques:** The organisers should limit communique items to five actionable, measurable, and short-term goals. They can also transition long-term goals into broader sector recommendations which can be followed up by the organisers in due course.
6. **Strengthen Feedback and Follow-Up:** The organisers should introduce an electronic after-event survey for participants. In addition, they can publish quarterly newsletters with updates on communique progress and key developments in the sector that emanate from the Conference.
7. **Engage Youth and Private Sector:** The youth are critical for the future of the WASH sector. Therefore, the organisers should create a "youth corner" for active participation and leadership development during the conference. Also, they should dedicate conference platforms for private sector partnerships, aligning corporate social responsibility initiatives with WASH needs.
8. **Introduce Training Workshops:** The organisers should prioritise capacity-building side sessions for local NGOs and youth, focusing on practical skills like proposal writing and leadership. That is, they should dedicate a portion of the conference to skill-building workshops, particularly on the last day, as a value-added service for participants.

9. **Enhance Thematic Scope and Relevance:** The conference organisers should diversify sessions to address all key areas of the WASH sector, including solid and healthcare waste. They should also introduce poster sessions for less critical presentations to maintain audience engagement.
10. **Improve Logistics and Participant Experience:** The organisers should Integrate technology for seamless registration, fee payment, and accommodation arrangements. They should also address transportation and food service challenges to improve overall satisfaction.

5.4. Strength and weakness of the evaluation

Strength

The main strength of this evaluation exercise is its ability to document the perspectives and experiences of participants and stakeholders about the Mole Conference Series for the past 10 years (2014-2023). This is an important first step towards improving and sustaining the conference.

Weakness

The general weakness of the evaluation is its inability to directly attribute changes in policy and practice in the WASH sector to the Mole Conference Series. This is because multiple actors and processes are involved in the sector, thereby making direct attribution difficult. As a result, in this evaluation, since several activities and interventions have been running concurrently in the country toward improving the WASH sector, the impact of the Mole Conference Series in this evaluation is framed around *contributions* rather than *attributions*. Therefore, we focus on the *contributions* of the Mole Conference Series to the WASH sector rather than *attributing* the changes to the Conference and its related activities.