



No 2. Anti-Corruption in the Water Sector



Photo: Dani Simmonds-SXC and Image Source

Corruption plagues water resources management, water supply and sanitation service provision, hydropower, and irrigation in agriculture. It reduces economic growth, discourages investment, violates human dignity, increases health risks and robs poor people of their livelihoods and their access to water. Yet, the systematic means to prevent and punish corruption in the governance of water are often absent.

Curbing Corruption: Concrete Steps

Opaque power structures can breed corruption. Legal, financial, public service delivery system and private sector reforms are all critical anti-corruption measures. Without the forceful inclusion of transparency in water policy reform and implementation, fair and efficient allocation of water resources and services is impossible.

Awareness raising and decentralisation are often needed but can introduce complications: increased public focus on corruption can make the problem more difficult to root out and coping strategies for the poor more expensive. It must therefore be accompanied by access to the resources and confidence to act on the information gained.

Accountability is key – without it, reforms to decentralise power can simply shift the problem from central authorities

Why Water is at High-Risk

Corrupt practices may drain as much as 30 % off the water sector every year. This translates into USD 48 billion over the next decade if counted against the estimated USD 11.3 billion that is needed each year in additional investment to achieve the MDGs on water and sanitation.

Why Water is a High-Risk Sector for Corruption:

- Water governance spills over across agencies leading to many loopholes to exploit
- Water management is viewed as a largely technical issue with limited consideration for the political and social dimensions, including corruption and its cost
- Water involves large flows of public money, and projects are complex and difficult to standardise, making procurement lucrative and manipulation difficult to detect
- Private investment in water is growing in countries already known to have high risks of corruption
- Informal providers, often vulnerable to corruption, continue to play a key role in delivering water to the poor
- Corruption in water most affects those with the weakest voice and limited ability to demand more accountability
- Water is scarce, and becoming more so leading to higher corruption risks emerging in control over the water supply

Source: *Global Corruption Report 2008*



Photo: André Breca

to local elites who monopolise services and make them even less dependable. This can be mitigated through regulation and capacity building at the local level. It should be coupled with pro-poor anti-corruption campaigns that focus on the types of service provision that matters most for them, such as public standpipes or drilling rural wells.

Practical actions to reduce corruption in water services include:

- Reduce hardware costs by sustainable use of closest possible water sources
- Keep technology and design simple, practical and relevant
- Plan water service with the community. Involve leaders, rich and poor people, men and women. Participation is not always a universal panacea for anti-corruption but can help empower the community by bringing allied interests together
- Clarify information, plans, designs, reports and accounts. Make them understandable for all stakeholders
- Simplify approval procedures so that they can be easily understood and monitored
- Make clear and agreed plans for long-term operation and maintenance.

Source: Water Integrity Network

Getting to Good Governance

The UNDP Water Governance Facility at SIWI support effective water governance to promote sustainable development of water resources, water supply and sanitation services. This is partly done through WGF providing UNDP country offices and other partners with technical assistance and access to good practice on expanding access to water and sanitation services, including community-government and private-public partnerships.

How it Works: The WGF experience

WGF can provide support to help nations in their efforts to combat corruption in the way that will work for them. We currently support activities to promote integrity and anti-corruption in water in Kenya and the SADC region. For example, in Kenya, a Human Rights-based Approach is being employed to reinforce participation, inclusion, accountability, rule of law and transparency to improve water governance, and enhance reforms and ensure implementation. A training programme on integrity and accountability in water is also being developed in cooperation with WaterNet and Cap-Net.

Transparent Tools for Clear Water Governance

The Water Integrity Network (WIN) presents different tools for increased transparency. The Community Management tool empowers individuals and communities to fight corruption through socio-economic mapping, public postings, public estimation of costs and construction times, local tendering control, spot checks, independent audits, joint signatories on bank accounts, signed receipts and creating checklists for stakeholders. Site selection and monitoring can help ensure sanitation coverage and control cost when identifying the physical location of water points. More information about these tools can be found on www.waterintegritynetwork.net. Information about general anti-corruption tools such as integrity packs, business principles for countering bribery, and an anti-corruption handbook can be found on the Transparency International website (www.transparency.org).

Learn More:

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