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What is corruption in the water sector like in reality? Corruption forces the poor to pay bribes to connect to water pipes or tankers, helps inflate the cost of needed small-scale infrastructure like boreholes, and diverts irrigated water away from poor villages. Corruption leads to biased decisions on the allocation and location of water supplies, wastewater treatment facilities, service points and pipe systems.

Breaking Corruption's Grip on the Water Sector

Corruption is increasingly recognised as one of the major challenges facing the water sector. The World Bank estimates that corruption undermines efficiency in the water sector by 20-40%. This scale is significant. In sub-Saharan Africa alone, with its USD 6.7 billion annual price tag to reach the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), a 30% leakage is more than USD 20 billion in losses over the next decade. Research published by Transparency International shows that if water utilities in Africa would operate in a corruption-free environment, efficiency would increase by 64%. Put another way, nearly two-thirds of the operating costs for providing water in Africa are due to corruption.

In addition, corruption jeopardises the democratic principles of equal access in public decision making by turning agencies meant to serve the public into instru-

ments for individual gain. Social injustice is a third consequence of corruption because corruption undermines the rule of law while breeding discretionary and unpredictable law enforcement. The UN Global Programme Against Corruption links corruption to national and international security as it undermines government security institutions, increases the gap between rich and poor, and at the same time fosters a social culture of crime and illicit behavior which can upset social and political stability and spark social unrest.

In short, corruption affects not only who gets what water, but also when, where and how they get it. Corruption also determines how costs are distributed between

individuals, society and the environment. Corruption worsens the world water crisis and research suggests that the costs of corruption are disproportionately borne by the poor and the environment.

Corruption: an intricately woven web

Corruption comes in many different forms and the scope varies substantially across types of water practices, governance structure, and the perceptions and values of actors involved. Falsified meter reading, distorted site selection, embezzlement of water and utilities for resale, unqualified procurements resulting in overpayment and under supply, and favoritism in allocation of public offices are but a few examples. Whereas

World Water Week Anti-Corruption Seminar

Fighting Corruption for Sustainable Water Use: Linking Global and Local Strategies is the name of a seminar set for August 22 at the World Water Week in Stockholm

This seminar takes stock of ongoing efforts in fighting corruption by linking anti-corruption in the water sector to global processes for poverty alleviation.

indications of the frequency of corruption are hard to come by, a recent case study from India's water sector indicates that side payments occurred in 50% of all transactions.

Corruption in the sector and society at large is steered typically by actors with a vested interest in status quo. From an outside perspective, corruption can be seen as a breakdown of systems, but seen from the inside it works according to a stable logic of reciprocity; corruption thrives where political competition is weak, public administration dysfunctional and civil society toothless.

Anti-corruption measures exist

The long list of anti-corruption measures can be sorted into three main categories: (i) legal and financial reform, (ii) reform of public institutions and (iii) increasing public awareness and capacity. Each category contains a variation of concrete policy instruments, project forms, and tools, but, unfortunately, none of these have a particularly strong track record at cracking corruption. Whereas solid knowledge on how to tackle corruption nowadays is in high demand, the supply is disappointingly low.

Recent years has seen an upsurge in activities and policies designed to tackle corruption. Behind these initiatives stand some of the most well renowned global institutions including OECD, the Council of Europe, the UN, the UNDP, World Bank, the International Chamber of Commerce, and, of course, Transparency International. These initiatives are important but they all have quite a general scope without a clear application to the water sector. Moreover, few, if any, derive their strategy for a firm understanding of the dynamics of corruption and what anti-corruption activity is likely to obtain the desired effect. In fact, it is widely acknowledged that research on corruption is still only in its infancy. Notwithstanding some scattered islands of knowledge, the level diagnostics on corruption and a systematically developed understanding of anti-corruption measures is only beginning to develop.

So while there is no shortage of initiatives to curb corruption, the current level of

understanding of the problem leaves much to be desired, particularly since most existing strategies are not directly linked to the water sector.

A Water Integrity Network

This is the rationale for the Water Integrity Network – WIN – which is being set up to fight corruption in the water sector worldwide. WIN is an open and inclusive global network that promotes anti-corruption activities and coalition-building at local, regional and global levels between actors from civil society, private and public sectors, media and governments. An initiative of the International Water and Sanitation



Photo: Shagun Mebrata

To fight corruption in water, communities can learn to monitor services and construction; transparency and access to information in communities and utilities can be developed; and the water sector itself can reform its public institutions and regulatory and financial arrangements.

Centre (IRC), Stockholm International Water Institute (SIWI), Swedish Water House (SWH), Transparency International (TI) and Water and Sanitation Programme (WSP), WIN will be launched on August 22 during the World Water Week in Stockholm, in connection to the presentation of a series of publications on corruption in the water sector.

WIN's number one priority is to reduce poverty through fighting corruption. Given the current low level of understanding of the dynamics of corruption and indeed the lack of reliable indications of its scope, WIN will work to increase awareness and knowledge of corruption in the water sector. This will be used to develop effective anti-corruption methodologies for the sector. Existing experience and emerging lessons from other sectors and contexts will play an important role in this process.

Besides generating knowledge and sharpening the tools to combat corruption, WIN is devoted to support practical action and to enhance capacity within governments, civil society and private sector. WIN will have a small secretariat hosted by Transparency International in Berlin, but its main activities will be that of its members. WIN will work with its members to support, coordinate, share knowledge, and provide start up funding for strategically selected projects on the ground.

Breaking with corruption is a gradual, long-term process that involves identifying and changing corrupt values and practices, increasing public awareness of the consequences of corruption, and restructuring institutions. This process demands firm commitment, institutional capacity and resources. Unilateral measures against corruption have a low chance of making an impact. Indeed, the current level of knowledge suggests that chances to curb corruption increase if the action involves all key stakeholders, including the people actually engaged in the corrupt activities as well as the people that are its prime victims i.e. poor and marginalised groups. Setting up WIN thus seems

to be an unusually timely and well founded initiative.

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