

### CORRUPTION IN SANITATION

#### 1. *The problem*

One basic property of corruption is that it thrives where we are not looking. There are significant social taboos around both corruption and sanitation, and both topics are preferably kept in private. This gives the issue of lacking integrity in sanitation a double disadvantage.

Discussions on sanitation often revolve around appropriate technologies. At times, the social and cultural contexts in which the technology is supposed to be put to use are taken into consideration. The focus then is on how a higher demand for improved sanitation can be stimulated.

While the above issues are worthwhile in their own right, a more fundamental question is: how can these ideas be converted into practice? How should national authorities - who carry the final responsibility for enabling access to sanitation - organise the sanitation sector? What properties should an appropriate system of decision making, planning, monitoring and refinement have to sustainably deliver sanitation according to user requirements?

The answers to the above questions vary considerably, depending on local contexts. But they have some features in common: participation, equity, transparency, accountability and effectiveness. What is needed in the sanitation sector, in short, is integrity. The current situation is, in the words of the United Nations Millennium Project, characterised by "the lack of appropriate institutions at all levels, and the chronic dysfunction of existing institutional arrangements".

#### 2. *The effects*

Little is known about the scale and effects of corruption. What is known, is that in some places school latrines cave in before even being opened. According to a study of 21 water utility companies in Africa, nearly two-thirds of their operating costs are due to corruption<sup>ii</sup>.

It is estimated that US\$6.7 billion is needed to attain the Millennium Development Goals (MDG's) in Sub-Saharan Africa<sup>iii</sup>. A conservative estimate of the average corruption costs in the sanitation sector of 30 percent, translates into the loss of a staggering US\$2 billion a year. The annual cost for providing a person with improved sanitation ranges from US\$5–10<sup>iv</sup>. Two billion US\$ a year would therefore mean a sustainable supply of sanitation for between 200 million and 400 million people.

Another way of looking at it is to estimate what this money could have generated if it had been used correctly. According to the World Health Organisation (WHO), the economic return on every US\$ invested to reach the MDG's (including sanitation) in Sub-Saharan Africa is around US\$13<sup>iv</sup>. This means that if we lose US\$2 billion intended for water supply and sanitation per year in Sub-Saharan Africa due to corruption, this region is actually bereaved of the value of some US\$26 billion. Taking into account that corruption is a transfer of resources from the poorest to the elites, combating corruption in water and sanitation is a very well targeted poverty alleviation intervention.

### 3. Possible solutions

Due to its secretive nature, corruption is often reduced just by being studied. As with water and sanitation, the light of day is a very good disinfectant.

There rarely is need for new or more elaborate laws, rules or guidelines in order to curb corruption. What is needed is to put the existing regulatory framework into practice.

Another promising finding is that even a marginal reduction of corruption can have significant effects on efficiency. According to Estache and Kouassi, a cutback of corruption by one point (from an average level of 10.2 to 9.2 on a 16-point scale) would increase efficiency by 6.3 percent<sup>ii</sup>.

In Kerala, India, a programme that used a number of simple measures for increased integrity reduced the costs of latrines by 20-30 percent<sup>iv</sup>. In addition, the quality of the work was far better and the programme became highly popular with both users and local politicians. Most of the methods used to cure corruption in this programme are standard parts of the majority of projects to increase access to improved sanitation.

Practical ways to curb corruption depend on the context in which it occurs. However, as corruption breeds and builds on the powerlessness of the poor, strengthening the participation, equity, transparency and accountability in the project has a direct impact on the level of corruption. These are fundamental aspects of all interventions in sanitation and water. Hence, as a first step towards curing corruption in sanitation, there is no need to do different things, but to do things differently. Being aware of the risks of corruption and acting against them can save billions of dollars and – much more importantly – millions of lives.

- i. United Nations, 2005, *Health, dignity and development: What will it take?*
- ii. Estache, A. and Kouassi E., 2002, *Sector organization, governance, and the inefficiency of African water utilities*.
- iii. Mehta, M., T. Fugelsnes and K. Virjee (2005) *Financing the Millennium Development Goals for Water and Sanitation: What will it take?*
- iv. World Health Organization, 2004, *Evaluation of the Costs and Benefits of Water and Sanitation Improvements at the Global Level*
- v. Socio-Economic Units Foundation, 2006, *Preventing Corruption in a Sanitation Programme in India – Process and Tools*, Presentation during the World Water Week in Stockholm 2006

#### The Water Integrity Network

The Water Integrity Network (WIN), formed in 2006, stimulates anti-corruption activities in the water sector worldwide. WIN welcomes organizations and individuals that view anti-corruption measures as central to equitable and sustainable development, economic efficiency and social equity. WIN is committed to accountability, transparency, integrity, honesty, mutual support and knowledge exchange among its members. These characteristics, to which any member should adhere, unite the network. WIN founders are the International Water and Sanitation Centre (IRC), Stockholm International Water Institute (SIWI), Swedish Water House (SWH), Transparency International (TI), and Water and Sanitation Program-Africa (WSP-Africa).