



Gender, Water and Integrity

Why is Corruption in the Water Sector a Gender Issue?

I. Introduction to corruption in water management and the causes

The provision of water services requires huge investments in all countries involving many processes and institutions, private and public in the form of governments, contractors, utilities, etc. This scenario coupled with weak governance structures and lack of social integrity becomes a breeding ground for corruption. Corruption takes several forms which can be categorised as follows; public to public, public to private, public to consumer, and mixtures of all these.

II. Why is corrupt water management a gender issue?

Corruption leads to unsustainable projects, it leads to services that do not meet the people's needs. Across the world women carry the burden of water collection together with their daughters, and poor women suffer even more. Therefore, when corruption leads to money meant for water and sanitation is taken elsewhere, and to wrong placing of water points, and when funds are swindled the burden of women remains.

According to the World Bank, 20-40 percent of finance to the water sector is lost because of corrupt practices. The impacts of such massive losses are severe and they have a particularly adverse effect on women and children. Millions of children die by lack of clean water. At a macro level, the draining of public funds by corrupt officials commonly leads to fewer resources in social service areas such as water supply, sanitation, education and health.

In all regions of the world, women are over-represented among the poor and their capacity to pay for water, their bargaining abilities and their overall capacity to negotiate corrupt water systems is highly dependent on the power and gender relations in their cities, villages and cultures. In both urban and rural contexts, their water needs, whether for domestic purposes, or for economically productive purposes, are given low priority by water managers and decision-makers.

At the micro-level, women also suffer the negative consequences of corruption:

Firstly, since in most places women are the primary providers of water for household use, they are often at the frontlines of having to deal with dishonest suppliers of water. In cases where these vendors charge inflated prices, they have little choice but to pay. Because poor women generally have access to few resources, they are less likely to have sufficient social capital to be able to buy themselves immunity

from corrupt practices (e.g. to make a deal with a corrupt vendor).

Secondly, even if women are not asked to pay extra in monetary terms, they are often subjected to sexual harassment or even forced to provide sexual favours.

Thirdly, if women cannot afford adequate water for their families, they may have to use dirty, contaminated water and ultimately have to assume the burden of caring for family members who have become ill through exposure to water-borne diseases. They themselves will also suffer and will lose opportunities of earning an income.

III. Examples of corrupt water management on different levels in different countries.

The Mexican irrigation case:

In the rural areas, both male and female farmers are victims of corrupt practices around irrigation schemes but in many cases the prevailing patriarchal cultural structures make it more difficult for women farmers to get the water their crops need. They can't usually join irrigation schemes, which are traditionally male-dominated. Even when they do join the schemes their interests will not be heard at meetings, and as a result they are allocated water at the least convenient times, such as during night hours when it is unsafe to be working on their plots, or not at all.



Social participation in decision-making of water management increases transparency.

Ban on fishing for Kihals in Pakistan:

With the introduction of new water structures and additional Water (-by) Laws, many aspects of the life of the Kihals, indigenous people living around, with and of the Indus, the largest river in Pakistan Indus – are significantly affected. A ban on fishing encroached over peoples' right to their main source of living, affecting men and women differently. There used to be an efficient division of tasks between them, but the changing circumstances have not only made them more vulnerable as a minority but also changed the gender relations, resulting in idle men and begging women.

Water kiosks and vendors for urban poor in Kenya:

In urban areas, poor families without secure water connections may have to purchase water from kiosks and vendors who charge high prices for small amounts of water. The prices of the water are set by the water service provider but the vendors make the poor pay more, whilst the richer people pay the fixed tariff. The poor households that cannot afford to buy the water end up using unsafe sources such as streams and shallow wells which affects health. In case of public water pipes, where first women and girls would get water, now male vendors jump the queue and even finish the water supply before the others have had their turn.



Turkana women catching water from very deep and unsafe sources in North Kenya. They go even seven levels deep, which is extremely dangerous. Men remain with the livestock.

IV. Good practices of breaking with corruption in water management

The above mentioned cases show us how important it is to understand how control over water differs for women and men within certain cultural and legal systems. Social mobilisation processes are considered very important to understand the complexity of corruption in the water sector and the fight against it. The need for research is clear to understand corruption and its drivers, as also for possible solutions or best practices of breaking with the lack of integrity in the water sector. There are also some suggestions for successful approaches that proved promising in combating corruption.

Participatory approaches with a gender focus are perceived as a possible method to decrease corrupt practices. Improving ownership and participation in decision-making processes are very important for transparency, thus reducing the possibilities for corrupt practices. Nevertheless, transparency and a gender focus should not be seen as a fit-for-all solution, but have to be analysed in their context. In fact, the level of cultural and ideological acceptance of women's participation varies in different social settings. In some societies women perceive discrimination or even corruption in the water sector is normal. Consequently, due to existing structures, ideologies and cultures, social systems sometimes prohibit real partaking.

In most places women are considered subordinate to men and hardly have a channel to express their needs. Men and women have different experience, and women who do all the work know more about details of water availability. If these skills are not used, services will be much less efficient and money is lost. Hence a real participatory approach should be gender sensitive, making sure that women not only take part in meetings, but are also speaking up, so her opinion and know-how is heard. Additionally, women, because of their

widely spread responsibilities, have more holistic views and they will seek benefit for all and not for themselves only.

V. GWA's activities related to gender, water and integrity

The specific gender aspects of integrity do not yet receive due attention in the fight against corruption in the water sector. There are differences of corruption for and by women and men of different categories. Therefore the Gender and Water Alliance (GWA) moderated an e-conference on 'Gender, Water and Integrity' which has provided information, suggestions and strategies for actions to bridge the current knowledge gap between issues and policies. At the same time, this information is of intrinsic value for a gender approach against corruption in the water sector taking into account cultural and contextual differences.

GWA also convened an international workshop together with the Water Integrity Network (WIN) in Costa Rica on gender and corruption in the water sector as a second step in the formulation of a gender strategy. The workshop deepened the understanding of the involvement of women and men in corruption and of the benefits of integrating gender and pro-poor perspectives in the analysis of corruption practices. Actions were suggested for a cross cutting water integrity action programme from a gender perspective and for a joint GWA-WIN strategy and future strategy and policy paper.

GWA organised a one week workshop on Gender, Integrity, Good Governance and Water for Wives of Governors of Nigeria on the request of the First Lady. For the participating states Gender and Integrity Action Plans were developed.

VI. Further Action

In the mentioned events numerous issues were identified in water corruption that have strong gender implications. The GWA plans to explore these issues in more detail, such as examination of evidence in different parts of the world. A review of interventions is planned to identify best practices, that have been developed in different parts of the world. The GWA (preferably with partners such as WIN) will develop a set of recommended activities and interventions for governments, the private sector and civil society. We also will try to create partnerships with knowledge-based organizations to introduce the concept of gender and water integrity into broader development literature and thinking.

In case you would like to contribute with examples and good practices, please contact the GWA Secretariat:
Joke Muylwijk, Executive Director.
Email: jokemuylwijk@chello.nl



www.genderandwater.org