

Tackling Corruption in the Water sub-Sector in Ghana

Currently, there are no special anti-corruption policies for the Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) sector; existing anti-corruption policies are the same as those that apply for other sectors in the country. As such there is a need to strengthen accountability mechanisms and institutions of oversight and the sanctioning of violators to ensure clean infrastructure projects and water delivery. This point was emphasized at the nineteenth edition of the National Level Learning Alliance Platform (NLLAP 19) in Accra. The focus at NLLAP 19 was a report emanating from the Transparency & Integrity in Service Delivery in Africa (TISDA) project of the Ghana Integrity Initiative (GII), the local chapter of global anti-corruption body Transparency International. The report highlights the state of corruption in water services delivery.

The NLLAP 19 took place on September 15, 2011 and was chaired by Professor Audrey Gadzekpo of the University of Ghana who doubles as a GII Board Member. The forum was on the theme: “Mapping Transparency, Accountability & Participation in Service Delivery: An Analysis of the Water Supply Sector in Ghana”. As usual, there was a lead presentation and follow up interventions by WASH sector panellists. On this occasion, Minister for Water Resources Works and Housing (MWRWH), Hon. Alban Bagbin, performed the official launch of the GII report through his representative, Rev Stephen Yaw Osei. This communiqué is intended to share with the wider WASH community the key issues brought up during the meeting.

The TISDA project

The TISDA project follows a decision to focus on improved service delivery through a reduction in corruption. Subsequently, Transparency International secured funding for a three-year period from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation to undertake the project in a number of African countries focusing on Health, Water and Education. To foster ownership, participating institutions were allowed to choose the sector they wanted and GII chose to work on water. The underlying reasons for the choice of water were: Quality water positively impacts all other basic necessities of life; If water is priced at an economic rate, the poor turn to low quality sources with negative implications; Low quality water and inadequate sanitation facilities have health implications; The poor who already cannot afford quality health care face a double jeopardy; Access to water impacts enrolment in school by the girl-child; and the Water Sector is also a national policy focus – (Growth and Poverty Reduction Strategies and the Millennium Development Goals).

The project, which aimed at identifying risks related to a lack of transparency and integrity and their potential negative impacts on water supply performance, comprised two phases: the Assessment / Survey phase (2009 - 2010) and the Advocacy Phase (2011).

Overview of research findings

Presenting an overview of the report, Vitus Adaboo Azeem, Executive Director of GII, categorised findings mainly into urban and rural water challenges; and then into grand corruption, petty corruption, and user perceptions. In terms of grand corruption, the study found that:

- A single contractor could buy and price all bidding documents;
- A number of contracts were awarded to the same contractor under different names;
- Procuring entities were making payment before due dates;

- Funds for mobilization were advanced beyond the 15% allowable limit
- Over-invoicing, poor contract management were rife;
- There was poor training and working conditions of construction workers; and
- There is shoddy work through the use of poor quality materials.

Relating to Petty Corruption, the following were identified:

- Illegal connections;
- Meter tampering;
- Direct payment to meter readers;
- Under reporting of daily sales by vendors; and
- Illegal charges and/or over-invoicing of materials for new connection

And, the perceptions of users of water were as follows:

- Some interference from politicians and traditional leaders in decision making in the Watsan and WSDB.
- Revenue collectors may not deposit all the money they receive.
- Powerful board members can illegally borrow money from the account and even forget to repay.
- Vendors at stand posts without meters can under report sales
- Remote communities are susceptible to cheating - a spare part could not be procured from a regional distributor but only the Zonal center which involves significant transport cost

Notwithstanding all the challenges, the research found a number of positive things including the fact that measures for ensuring transparency in the sector were established, including regular reporting systems (financial reporting/project activities), regular meetings, and regular auditing of accounts and publications and documentation of the tendering process.

Azeem also said accountability efforts have been upwards through routine submission of monthly, quarterly, annual, project completion and financial reports required by law and project agreements. "However, processes for ensuring downward accountability are very low."

On gender, he said gender issues have duly been acknowledged in the sector including the participation of women in decision making. For example, in the formation of Watsan committees, at least 3 members (7) of the watsan committees are females.

Government's perspective

The Minister, MWRWH through his representative, commended the efforts of GII. He acknowledged that to address the governance problem in the WASH sector, concerted efforts were required from all stakeholders to ensure improved transparency, accountability and integrity.

He also agreed that the award of contracts must be fair and transparent and field workers and contractors must be adequately supervised to ensure quality project execution.

Having made these concessions, the Minister assured participants that government was committed to ensuring increased investment in the sector so as to ensure adequate quality water and sanitation delivery.

In realizing its objectives, the government would emphasise the setting up of service providers/citizens interfaces within sector institutions at district, regional and national levels and the monitoring of work of the WATSAN as well as that of contractors and consultants by project beneficiaries.

In addition, there will be the promotion of codes and conducts and citizen charters aimed at ensuring integrity among staff with regard to their work. Peer reviews and downward accountability systems and other tried and tested instruments will also be encouraged to help streamline service delivery.

Insights

Arising from interventions from participants were some instructive insights, which have been summarized below:

- Delays in project execution gives room for corruption
Most project officers feel they cannot be sanctioned due to interference from higher officers, especially politicians – this goes a long way to influence corruption.

Recommendations

The first set of recommendations comes from the researchers who recommend, among other things that:

- There is the need to streamline and strengthen anti-

corruption tools and the capacity of sector agencies to implement these tools

- There is also the need for donors to introduce anti-corruption clauses in all cooperation agreements, train their own staff or local staff to put these policies into practice and communicate on related activities and progress made,
- Donors too should adhere to the highest standards of information disclosure and consultation for all water projects they support, and they should put in place adequate monitoring mechanisms and enforce effective sanctions against corrupt employees and contractors.
- There is the need to create anti corruption awareness and systems within public organizations so that they can cooperate with civil society effectively to ensure that corruption can be prevented from occurring or dealt with adequately when it occurs.
- There is also the need to institutionalize the involvement of a representative of civil society at each of the levels of public procurement.
- There is the need to increase access to information to the public on the operations of the utility providers by publicizing utility accounts, public expenditure reviews and audit information, budgets, contracting arrangements and annual report.
- Users should be involved in decision making, tariff setting etc. to ensure that beneficiaries are empowered to play a meaningful role in the management of water resources, from the design to the implementation and supervision of Water Resource Management projects.
- Complaint mechanisms for users should be strengthened and adequate provision made for whistle blowing protection to promote meaningful citizen participation.
- There is the need to strengthen monitoring and oversight mechanisms such as oversight committees, ombudsman offices, complaint offices, etc.

After lively engagements and opinion sharing, participants also made recommendations and suggestions. These have been crystallized below:

- Systems and institutions must be allowed to work
- Procedures and rules of engagement must be followed
- The award of contracts and administration of projects must be given due attention. When contracts are being executed, people must be tasked and measures must be put in place to specifically ensure quality of services and timely delivery
- Room must be made for the involvement of planners in project execution to ensure effectiveness
- Evaluation of the performance of systems at regular intervals must be encouraged

The NLLAP is a WASH sector multi stakeholder platform with the overall goal of improving sector learning and dialogue. It is hosted by the Ghana WASH Resource Centre Network (RCN). The platform offers learning and sharing opportunity for sector players as one of the practical approaches to improving sector engagements/sharing with the long term aim of achieving a knowledge driven WASH sector that delivers quality and sustainable services in Ghana. NLLAP meetings take place on the last Thursday of every month and opened to all interested parties. The discussions of each NLLAP meeting are summarized and shared with the wider WASH community. The topics of upcoming meetings are decided on by the RCN secretariat and a list of upcoming meetings can be found on the RCN website www.washghana.net.

If you are interested to propose a topic for a meeting please contact us on,
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