

1.0 Introduction

The paper will highlight corruption in the water sector, the water situation in Uganda, management of the water resources, tackling corruption through public expenditure tracking, monitoring and capacity building, the role of Civil society and the legal framework.

2.0 Transparency and Accountability in the Water Sector in Uganda

Water is life. As such water and sanitation are key priority areas through out the world and in particular for the Government of Uganda whose mission is to ensure the integrated and sustainable management, development and use of water resources for the present and future generations. However, as is in other sectors of life in Uganda, Water and sanitation is also greatly affected by corruption which eventually determine who gets water, when and where.

Generally in Uganda, both urban and rural poor have enormous challenges related to accessing clean, safe water and appropriate sanitation services. Much as the elite and rich can maneuver to access water by all means (including paying bribes to access such services); the poor hardly access any such coping mechanisms and are usually negatively impacted by such corrupt practices.

In Uganda, corruption in the water sector manifests itself in several ways. According to the survey on people's perception on corruption conducted by the Steadman Group in December 2007¹, 'The common forms of corruption are taking bribes, (63%), tribalism (47%), nepotism (26%) and favoritism (21%). Other forms of corruption include giving bribes to influence the award of Government contracts (21%), looting by Government officials (19%) and taking commissions (12%)'.² It is worrying that the most common forms of corruption is the payment of bribes to facilitate getting services, and in most cases these are public essential services like water and health which should be free in the first place and a right in principle.

It is important to realise that because of the desperate need for services, payment of bribes to access water is not only an act by the rich but also by poor people who usually do not have any such resources. In rural areas, the commonly identified corruption tendencies usually occur in inflated prices for water supply. This kind of corruption slows down provision of water supply points as well as a distorted price regime. As such there is an artificially induced inflation in the cost of small water sources especially boreholes, hence only limited numbers can be accommodated in a financial year.

At a higher level, corruption manifests itself in biased decisions on the allocation and location of water service points, pipe systems and wastewater treatment facilities through connivance by either politicians or even water engineers. Increasingly, corruption has also been documented at the procurement stage where expensive but low quality contractors are awarded tenders. Therefore, ACCU together with partners is timely ensuring that there is improvement in governance of water so that accessibility does not remain on paper but it becomes a reality.

3.0 Water Situation in Uganda

Provision of Water and Sanitation is one of the priority programme areas of the Government of Uganda. Access and equitable supply of clean and safe water is also a millennium development challenge. Whereas the average safe water coverage in Uganda has improved from about 30%³ in 1986 to 63%⁴ as at June 2008, there are still areas that need adequate clean and safe water. Credit goes to the current Government in Uganda and the donor community that have spearheaded this improvement. However, the Northern and Karamoja Sub-regions still need great attention where there are sub-counties with water coverage as low as 5%.⁵

4.0 Management of the water Sector

¹ Steadman Group in December 2007; public perception of corruption in Uganda

² Ibid

³ President Museveni, Sowing the Mustered Seed

⁴ The Government of Uganda, Water and Sanitation Sector Performance Report (June 2008)

⁵ Ibid (2)

The hierarchy for planning and provision of water and sanitation services in Uganda is clearly stated in the water and sanitation guidelines. The key stakeholders include; Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development, Ministry of Water and Environment, the Water and Sanitation Working Group, the Donors, the Local Governments, Civil Society (Advocacy) Water management groups, the Water users and National Water and Sewerage Corporation for Municipal and Urban Town. These work in collaboration to ensure adequacy of allocation and management of water and sanitation sector funds.

5.0 Public Expenditure Tracking Survey (PETS) for the Water Sector in Uganda

PETS is a survey that lays out processes and instruments for proactive budget monitoring and evaluation of resource utilization by local government institutions. It intends to strengthen an in-built system of monitoring and evaluation of all processes of the planning, budgeting and implementation. The findings of such survey should inform planning, budget (resource allocation) and ensure focused development within the framework of the National Development Plan (NDP) and Poverty Reduction Strategy Plan (PRSP).

Anti Corruption Coalition Uganda (ACCU) through the support of SIWI commissioned a PETS at the Central level and selected districts in the different regions to;

- i) Analyze the national budgeting process;
- ii) Establish and track the chain flow of funds and budget support to water and sanitation sector from the centre to the end-user.
- iii) Analyze local government accountability mechanisms in selected districts and adherence to set policies in implementation of water and sanitation projects at user level.

Further, enhancing the capacity of the ACCU's regional coalitions comes at the time when corruption is threatening social sector services like water and as a strategy there will be a strategy to remain focused in water for a longer period.

It has also piloted a project aimed at empowering civil society to improve governance and advocate for resources in the water sector. Building on the universal monitoring tool, two specific tools sponsored by Stockholm International Water Institute (SIWI) have been developed; one for the ACCU community monitors and the other for regional Anti-Corruption coalitions as a follow up tool. ACCU membership has been trained to apply the tools to monitor governance and corruption in the water sector and engage stakeholders to improve water governance at the District and Community levels.

To mitigate corruption and to ensure that there is value for money in the massive investments in the water sector made by the government and the donors, it is important that ACCU and its regional coalitions continue to play the role of a watch dog in ensuring transparency and accountability and whistle blowing cases of corruption.

It is envisaged that monitoring the water sector will contribute to improved governance in the sector and will enable Government achieve set targets of 100% coverage for all citizens by the year 2015. Civil society will however need a combined effort of the Government of Uganda in enforcing policy and standards, development partners to provide resources and the citizens whose civic competences should be raised to demand social accountability.

Civic competencies will be raised through participatory approaches by ACCU and its regional coalitions through Public Accountability Forums. This has enabled citizens to demand for better services and for public official to explain their actions.

6.0 The role of Civil Society

Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) in Uganda are in a process of providing a consolidated and coherent framework for monitoring resource utilization in local governments. It is built on and recognizes other monitoring initiatives by Local Governments (LGs) and other government led monitoring initiatives. Its central theme is proactive budget and expenditure monitoring which is a departure from the existing *ex-post* expenditure tracking

systems that have hitherto been employed in Uganda. It emphasizes demand driven monitoring of government expenditures at various levels.

7.0 Legal Framework

Uganda has one of the best legal frameworks to fight corruption but sadly, enforcement mechanisms and political will is lacking. In order to ease to work of CSOs, some legislation like Access to Information Act (2005) have helped in accessing government official records. Other policies in the water sector encourage contractors and local government administration to display publicly how much funds have been received, disbursed and paid to the contractors.

8.0 Conclusion

Corruption in the water sector in Uganda is still an issue that affects planning and delivery of water and sanitation services in Uganda. It hurts mainly the vulnerable and most especially the rural citizens. Fighting corruption will mean improving the chances of rural people to access safe and clean water. It calls for concerted efforts and collaboration among all stakeholders to close loopholes used to misappropriate water and sanitation sector funds. Most important it calls for bottom up participatory approaches and civic education that will make the citizenly demand for accountability and value for money of funds injected in the sector. The Civil society also need to be facilitated to further their advocacy roles as we drive towards providing “water for all” by 2015.

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