



“I WOULD LIKE TO ENVISAGE A WORLD WHERE HUMAN NEED AND NOT HUMAN GREED DIRECTS DECISIONS THAT IMPACT HUMAN LIVES.”

AN INTERVIEW WITH JON LANE (WSSCC) AND TEUN BASTEMEIJER (WIN)

ON CORRUPTION IN SANITATION

The International Anti-Corruption Day takes place annually on 09 December to commemorate the adoption of the United Nation's Convention Against Corruption (UNCAC) and aims to raise society's awareness of corruption. Corruption is a big issue in every sector and must be fought in order to combat inequity. It is often the driving force towards instability, failed institutions and poverty. No country is immune to it.

The UNCAC was adopted by the UN General Assembly in 2003 and entered into force during 2005. It is a global treaty signed by 140 countries to date and provides a legally-binding framework against corruption. It is perhaps unique in that it provides a clear mandate for the participation of civil society for monitoring and accountability purposes in interactions with both government and the private sector and in this sense forms very much the backbone of WIN's efforts in the water and sanitation sector.

On this year's occasion of the International Anti-Corruption Day WIN has collaborated with the WSSCC to bring to bear a special interview between Teun Bastemeijer, WIN Manager and Jon Lane, Executive Director of WSSCC. The purpose of the interview is to raise awareness of the nature of corruption in the sanitation sector, which we hope will bring to light some of the basic and pertinent issues in the sector. It is hoped that this contribution will be a means by which you can also take action today to raise this awareness amongst your peers and friends in order to recognise it and help fight it.

WIN: WHAT IS CORRUPTION IN THE WATER SECTOR AND WHY WAS THERE A NEED TO FOUND THE WATER INTEGRITY NETWORK?

Teun Bastemeijer (TB): Defining corruption brings you to some fairly complex discussions that touch upon forms of unethical behaviours that are commonly called 'corruption'. In the water sector corruption has many faces and commonly manifests in planning processes, policy choices, technology choices, as well as large corruption, regarding for instance, dams. Corruption can also touch upon small issues such as service connection fees for water supply, or illegal payments related to obtaining water rights or licences.

The WIN initiative was needed because the effect of corruption on the daily lives of people in certain countries is dramatic. WIN is not only about promoting water integrity to prevent corruption, but also to bring in more equity. WIN is unique – perhaps the first kind of initiative where people from the sector itself (water and sanitation, hydropower, irrigation etc), realised that something needed to be done.

WIN: WHAT ARE THE RISKS AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR CORRUPTION IN SANITATION?

Jon Lane (JL): The sanitation sector like many others is prone to corruption, particularly due to complex planning and construction requirements and since provision of facilities and services involves large amounts of public money and involves many different actors at different stages. This process provides opportunities for diverting public funds for personal gain and the effects of corruption can be devastating, for example in southern India 20 to 30% of funds and materials are diverted from sanitation programmes due to corruption. Funds can be diverted from those in need, by re-allocating funds for remote rural areas towards richer city constituencies, overcharging for construction works, or simply poor construction using inferior materials. Subsidy-driven programmes can be particularly prone to corruption. A problem we face in the sanitation sector is that sanitation is often fragmented between different ministries which greatly complicates and often jeopardizes action-oriented decision-making and budget allocation. Responsibilities, decisions and money are often hard to track to hold people accountable.

WIN: WHO IS MOST SEVERELY AFFECTED BY CORRUPTION IN SANITATION?

TB: There are two ways of looking at sanitation: household sanitation and environmental sanitation. With household sanitation, there is often an interest to promote technologies that have a higher cost than that which poor people can afford and therefore often require subsidies to get to a solution. Such subsidies can be diverted and tend to benefit higher income groups. Corruption thus mostly affects equity and access to sanitation facilities for poor and vulnerable people. The lack of hygiene and sanitation affects children, families and therefore women more than men.



Pattabi Raman, finalist of the *Water Integrity - Visualized Photo Competition 2009*

Household sanitation cannot be seen in isolation from environmental sanitation, certainly not in a world where urban areas are growing fast and where pollution and contamination issues are very important at the wider scale. To cope with these wider issues considerable investments are needed, not only in household latrines or toilets, but also in ways to deal with the waste products. Many processes of public investments will soon be on their way in order to cope with the effects of high density population and to some extent, for adaptation to climate change. Again in these complex processes there are multiple opportunities for corruption. In this case it is likely that poor peripheral urban people will be most affected and it is fairly clear that their health will be put into danger. Environmental sanitation goes well beyond toilets.

WIN: COULD YOU PROVIDE AN EXAMPLE OF THE NEGATIVE EFFECTS OF CORRUPTION IN SANITATION TO ORDINARY PEOPLE?

JL: Let's take the example of a woman living in a rural area in India or Burkina Faso. Her husband is a subsistence farmer and they have five children, one of them being a girl. The nearest water source is an unprotected water pond half an hour walking distance from their home, and open defecation is the rule in the village. The reality of that woman is the following: she wakes up at five o'clock to relieve herself in the bush, enduring stomach cramps and being afraid of a sexual assault. She is the one that walks an hour everyday,

together with her daughter who often misses school to help her, to bring water home from the pond, unsure of the water quality. She is the one caring for her children sick with diarrhoea. Her daughter's future will be identical to hers as she will leave school once her menstruation starts, because the school doesn't have toilets for girls. Basic human dignity and safety, good health and economic income are all concepts that she will not get to experience during her lifetime. That might be because the village committee official diverted public funds that were dedicated to providing safe wells and water pumps to the people, or because the activities of a CBO working on hygiene education and demand creation for sanitation were prevented from taking place because national government officials diverted aid money towards a city's neighbourhood where voices were needed for the upcoming election. For the Indian or Burkinabe family, poor sanitation and lack of clean water, is a matter of life and death.

WIN: WHAT ARE THE TOOLS AND MECHANISM THAT CAN REDUCE CORRUPTION IN SANITATION?

TB: The most important mechanism is people. In spite of a lot of good work done, people are not yet their own allies. This requires a wider communication effort where the link between integrity, honesty and prevention of corruption can gradually be made. Sanitation has a strong cultural element and the link between poor sanitation and disease needs to be realised better, especially where cultural beliefs mask this reality. There is a need for communication and education that continues, to see what can be done better. But the most important mechanism is people themselves, including decision makers – who are toilet users themselves.

There are of course other tools. The WASH campaign is for example, an excellent vehicle for communication with a long track record on these issues, but there are others too, including UNICEF. Another tool is to link up with professional education. I believe that because sanitation has not been dealt with as a priority, it is also low on the priority of many educational institutes, or among professional capacity-building organisations analysing where the corruption risk in sanitation have been and might be, occurring in the future.

JL: Taking into account the human dimension of corruption, and the quest for its true victims, meaning those that can the least afford it but still bear the highest cost, is crucial to meet the sanitation target of the Millennium Development Goals, and ultimately to achieve sanitation for all people. Targeted and clear communication is key at all levels, from people themselves who must be aware that they have the right to demand accountability, to government decision-makers and private sector providers, as well as the alliances between anti-corruption, human rights and sanitation sector stakeholders.

WSSCC is a strong advocate of software approaches to sanitation, meaning interventions towards behaviour change, hygiene education and demand creation, as opposed to hardware approaches mostly based on infrastructure and technical only solutions. The same is true when it comes to combating corruption in the sector. Information, people's awareness of what they need and want and small scale entrepreneurship that promotes competition and innovation make up the tools and mechanisms to reduce corruption in the sanitation sector.

WIN: WHAT DO YOU PERCEIVE IS THE RESPONSIBILITY OF GOVERNMENT, PRIVATE COMPANIES, COMMUNITIES AND MEDIA PROFESSIONALS TOWARDS IMPROVING INTEGRITY AND TRANSPARENCY IN SANITATION? WHAT IS THE ROLE OF THE UNCAC IN FIGHTING CORRUPTION IN THE WATER SECTOR?

TB: The UNCAC plays only a small role as a convention. It is those who have signed the convention who commit to applying its rules and principles and should also expect that their compliance is monitored. This is not really happening and the link between UNCAC and the water and sanitation sector is not well defined and thus the link remains rather loose because the UNCAC is not really affecting behaviour in the water sector. There might be an anti-

corruption commission or other mechanisms in place with often little capacity. They may succeed in ensuring that certain UNCAC rules and principles are gradually applied in the country, but what we see so far is that it hardly seems to touch the water and sanitation sectors. Where it might become more important is in greater state reform processes, such as decentralization. If the UNCAC starts to be applied in such a way that it touches on decentralized bodies that have mandates to deal with water and sanitation services issues, then it might have certain value.



Gregory Wait, winner of the *Water Integrity - Visualized Photo Competition 2009*

Communication and media professionals, communities and civil society, ideally speaking would have a role to play on the demand side to create noise about its application and verification mechanisms, which for the moment are not adequately in place. In countries where there is high resistance against the UNCAC principles, or where it is perceived as something from

the outside, or that there are other ways to deal with the issue, the only way to proceed might be for people to take responsibility to mobilize through a wider coalition of organisations, CBOs, local authorities and service providers, who really share the principles of WIN and who jointly work together to make transparency and integrity principles apply to the water and sanitation, as well as parts of the health sector.

JL: If you look at the reality of developing countries, there is a strong correlation between lack of access to sanitation, a low rating on the human development index and a high rating on the corruption perception index. These three strong indicators of unacceptable living conditions for poor people in these countries have at least one solution in common: political will. It is the government's responsibility towards its people to create an enabling environment for the provision of sanitation services to all, free from corruption. A legal framework is necessary to restrict corruption's operating space, for example by legalizing informal service providers instead of ignoring them and letting the poorest people bear the cost or forbidding them and jeopardizing the only access that the poor have to water supply and sanitation services. Protection must be guaranteed for 'whistleblowers'. A free media and strong civil society can expose corruption practices and contribute to create awareness at all levels, from slum dwellers to the highest level of government decision-makers, are also sine qua non conditions. In order to achieve tangible and sustainable economic benefits, public revenues and access to adequate sanitation, a long-term vision must be the driving force. Corruption must be reported, and it must be resisted.

My colleague Teun Bastemeijer answered the question about the UNCAC. The only thing I would have to add is that until the 1990's corruption was perceived on the international arena mostly in economic terms, and often as an inevitable part of development work. To take an example, in the World Bank it was only referred to as the 'C word'. It is not until James Wolfensohn's reference to corruption as a question that had to be tackled to reach equitable development and poverty reduction, that the latter was included as an integral part of the Bank's programmes. This institutional shift is characteristic of the general evolution of

perception of corruption from a pure cost-benefit analysis to the inclusion in the debate of its human rights and social development dimensions. The road from the OECD convention to the UNCAC also demonstrates a shift from a narrow economic approach to a rights-based one. The creation of Transparency International by a former World Bank employee, and later the creation of the Water Integrity Network are very strong examples of this trend that, in my opinion, is going in the right direction towards improving transparency and integrity in general, and in the sanitation sector in particular.

WIN: WHAT IS YOUR ORGANIZATION DOING TO PROMOTE ANTI-CORRUPTION PRACTICE?

TB: WIN tends to focus on water and sanitation integrity practice to help prevent or reduce corruption. So far, WIN has done a mix of advocacy and communications at the international level, to make it possible for people in countries to talk about corruption in the water and sanitation sector. We have succeeded to quite an extent in changing the situation, in a sense that there is now a lot more discussion about these issues. We are also in the process of implementing a wider set of communication activities: visualizing corruption through different means (photos, artist expressions).

WIN is a young initiative with limited capacity, so we do the maximum with the few resources that we have. Of course we also have an important focus on developing ways to promote water integrity action, which includes sanitation. That is a whole process we are testing at present and we are gaining experience in a number of countries and continents.

JL: WSSCC is a membership based organization, whose raison d'être is to foster knowledge and information flows and partnerships to achieve safe water supply and sanitation for all people. Through networking and knowledge management work, together with advocacy and communications activities, we produce and share information and concrete messages with field actors directly working with communities and with media professionals for example, while also targeting ministers and advocating for leadership in the sanitation sector at the global and national levels. WSSCC's vision is to be a collaborative platform and to ensure the flow of information within its membership and networks in countries where the sanitation need is the greatest, and to work through collaboration and coordination, and not duplication of efforts and initiatives. Anti-corruption messages are therefore integrated in our work through our partnership with WIN, and milestone events such as the International Anti-corruption Day are an example of joint efforts. The latter are also happening at the national level between WSSCC's National WASH Coalitions and WIN's network in the same countries. Talking about corruption and talking about shit have an essential thing in common: it is way too often taboo and politically incorrect. Communications and advocacy work linking these issues can provide tools to sanitation and anti-corruption advocates and potentially have a very powerful outcome.

WIN: HOW DO YOU ENVISION A WORLD FREE OF CORRUPTION?

TB: A world without corruption seems difficult to envision because corruption is not easily defined and doesn't present the same face everywhere and may change over time. Therefore what I would envision is a world with reduced corruption and enhanced ethical behaviour for the betterment of human beings, with a special focus on the poor and the vulnerable.

JL: Corruption means different things to different people. But one thing that can't be questioned is that corruption is the opposite of good governance. When there is no good governance and no accountability in place, poor people are sidelined and their voices are not heard. So I would like to envisage a world where human need and not human greed, directs decisions that impact human lives. 2.5 billion people, that is one in every four human beings, don't have a safe place to relieve the most basic of human needs and politicians reading their newspaper in a safe and clean toilet must remember that before accepting a bribe or turning a blind eye.