

*INFORMATION SHEET 3

Sri Lanka: An Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM) Policy can reduce water sector corruption

Water Governance.

Sri Lanka though encountering some spatial and temporal problems of supply is blessed with adequate water resources. With a history of 2500 years of ecosystems built around reservoirs, IWRM was an integral part of its irrigation based agrarian society.

Decline followed emergence of plantation agriculture in source areas under colonial stewardship followed later by sector based development initiatives led to a multiplicity of institutions with competing and sometimes conflicting interests.

Currently 51 Acts and over 40 Agencies deal with

water at various levels resulting in duplication, confusion and inaction, an ideal environment for corruption. This compounded by the fact that State holds rights over almost all water and nearly 83% of land resources results in political imperatives coupled with the free water services syndrome promoted actively as an ideology, including by several agencies, enabling the state to control the allocation, use, management and distribution albeit in the public interest. Other stakeholder interaction indecisions is practically non existent, other than in irrigation where farmers have some say in water distribution.

The response of the state to increased pollution and illicit resource mining has been to introduce more punitive regulations which in an environment of selective enforcement provides

even greater opportunities for corruption.

Monopoly and Corruption.

Experience has demonstrated that without safeguards both state and private monopolies are bad. In the water sector the bogey of privatisation

has been used as a red herring to prevent unbundling of services and separate regulation to enable better accountability to the other stakeholders and beneficiaries. The concept of free irrigation water which accounts for 85% developed water is

dangled by agencies and politicians alike as an incentive to obtain public support to retain the power inherent in allocation when not paid for, with quality of service based on goodwill of agency staff or political imperatives..



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Sri Lanka Water Partnership

“ Promoting Integrated Water Resources Management In Sri Lanka”

“Monopoly Monopoly + Discretion Accountability = Corruption”

- Klitgaard

Community Mobilisation to overcome corruption in water sector

While at farmer level organisations exist to articulate their interests in irrigation systems, there is little organised local level organisations established to highlight community needs and opinions with respect to sector based issues other than through the local political representatives who may, by and large be directly or indirectly involved in the exploitation of such resources. In recent times community interest groups/CBO have emerged to tackle such issues due to severe impact on their livelihoods and the local environment.

National level NGO such as the Network of Woman Professionals and the Sri Lanka Water Partnership (SLWP) have helped raise awareness and issues at various forums at local, provincial and national level. Formation of issue based and sector based organisations such as the Area Water Partnerships (AWP) formed by SLWP helped keep the momentum and alertness alive.

Some Strategic Options

In Sri Lanka’s context water remains a free public good with the state as trustee and custodian. This prevents exploitation by external interests as has happened in many countries where full water privatisation hastaken place and can occur here as well as seen in the monopoly status of some services. Nevertheless, while allocation decisions remain the prerogative of the state, there is no

Lessons Learnt.

- While political imperatives drive water agenda to the back burner continuous pressure build up needed at local , provincial and national level to realize an IWRM policy and overarching water law.
- Use the Media as an important ally to raise public awareness and consciousness on water issues including Corruption.
- Promote concept of Water Messengers and Cells in important water institutions.
- Use water related disasters to reawaken policy initiatives.
- Develop coalitions and alliances at all levels to promote IWRM and lobby for new policy and law.

More Governance is not Good Governance

rationale for not allowing distribution services to be unbundled and handled by CBO and the private sector if well regulated. It is well known that while corruption at the allocation level has significant socio economic impact, corruption at the distribution level is more pervasive and affect the poor. Therefore outsourcing distribution can reduce to a large extent the rampant corruption tied to free services and allow other stakeholders a voice as well. ,

The Current Need is for...

An Overarching/ Enabling Law for Water.

Umbrella /Apex Coordinating Body.

Tribunal/Institution for Water Conflicts.
Basin Based Allocation and Management.

Stakeholder Management and Decisions.

Principles of Subsidiarity and Transparency maintained.

Social/Economic Value to Water and Social Accountability.

Governance/Custodian/Allocation/Regulation by the State.

Water Services by CBO/Local Authorities/Private Sector.