

Building trust and sustainability through integrity: Focus on citizens and communities.

**Summary report on session during the Stockholm Water Week in 2015**

**Date of the session: 26 August 2015**

**Conveners:** Water Integrity Network (lead convener), Transparency International-Bangladesh, Helvetas and IRC (co-conveners).

*Report compiled by: Teun Bastemeijer, Session moderator*

## **1. Introduction**

The session explored how higher levels of sustainability and trust can be achieved in a context where citizens and communities have lost trust in politics, in UN institutions, in their governments, and in water sector institutions. This phenomenon is global but most acute in countries with a large proportion of people living in poverty. Together with high urban growth and scarcity of water resources, water pollution and intermittent or failing domestic water supply services, this situation presents a risk for stability in many countries. During the 15 years of MDG implementation, a top-down approach from the international level has prevailed. Voices from the bottom were hardly heard. Monitoring of MDGs showed an enormous gap between officially reported progress and the situation on the ground. Most strikingly, monitoring implementation of MDGs did not make the connections between different goals at local, regional, and even national levels. As a result, monitoring has not really been used to inform policy and reduce the gap between policy intentions and implementation at levels where it matters most.

Three cases presented during the first part of the session provided arguments for both bottom-up promotion of integrity (demanding integrity) in combination with international and national efforts to establish favourable conditions for citizen's participation from the top down. During the second half, the moderated panel debate was characterised by an informal format allowing lively interactions with the other participants during second half of the session. The debate evolved around the question of how participatory bottom-up approaches could be scaled up in combination with the promotion of a political and institutional environment conducive to transparency, integrity and participation for higher levels of accountability.

## **2. Presentations**

- 2.1 *Transparency and integrity in management of water resources in Nepal: The communities-local government interface by Yogesh Pant, Coordinator Water Integrity Programme, HELVETAS, Nepal*

This presentation concerned experience with step wise local development planning, participation of user organisations in decision making process, public hearing and joint monitoring in three districts in the Far-West of Nepal.

Key messages emerging from this experience were:

- A bottom-up approach is necessary in promotion of integrity
- An effective community and local government interface contributes to promoting integrity: It brings the community and the local govt. closer, instigates better responses and corrective actions from the local government, and supports deepening Transparency Accountability and Participation (TAP) practices
- Proactive efforts are needed to mainstream international level declarations and goals such as MDGs, SDGs and HR2WS into the local development agenda
- The Post 2015 SDG framework should focus more on creating enabling environment at the local level

*2.2 Citizens monitoring approach in Bangladesh (including video presentation) by Sanjib Biswas Sanjoy, Coordinator BAWIN, Transparency International, Bangladesh*

This presentation was around citizens' monitoring of a climate change adaptation project, in Satkhira, Bangladesh. Bangladesh has two climate change adaptation funds and given the vulnerability of large parts of the country to flooding, a large proportion of which are used in the water sector. There is broad evidence of misuse of funds when the first projects were commissioned. A bottom-up approach to monitoring project implementation was piloted in Satkhira. Citizen's monitoring was aiming to prevent corrupt practices. The video shows that in spite of considerable efforts including capacity building of the community, project implementation was partial and most funds were side-tracked. The video can be viewed on the web site of the water integrity network and the water channel:

<http://www.waterintegritynetwork.net/2015/08/25/resisting-corrupt-practices-in-climate-change-adaptation/>

<http://thewaterchannel.tv/media-gallery/6221-resisting-corrupt-practices-lessons-from-bangladesh>

As shown in the video, monitoring by citizens was only partially successful as corrupt practices could not be prevented and the project aiming to decrease vulnerability to flooding was ineffective due to this. This lack of result could perhaps have been avoided by ensuring support from, and engagement with, politicians and other decision makers in the planning stage of the project, but this remained difficult in an institutional and political environment where corruption is systemic and where fighting corruption can be life threatening. The international process of monitoring water related SDGs and targets could make a positive difference if the integrity perspectives are strongly included and if the target on community involvement (target 6b, relating to how to implement the SDG and its various targets) is made clearer and smarter, and explicitly supported at the highest levels.

Based on this experience the following conclusions were drawn with respect to citizen's monitoring of water infrastructure and climate change adaptation projects:

- Government anti-corruption mechanisms should be involved and addressed from the perspective of MDGs/SDGs: IMED, C&AG involvement, applying RTIA
- Blending of bottom up and top down approach is essential from the sustainability point of view

- Media should be involved more intensively and timely
- Catalysts like BAWIN-TIB needs to communicate and coordinate their advocacy efforts and lobby with peers and change makers

### *2.3 Community managed project approach promoting integrity and sustainability from the bottom up in Ethiopia, by Oona Rautiainen, IRC- NIRAS- Rambøll*

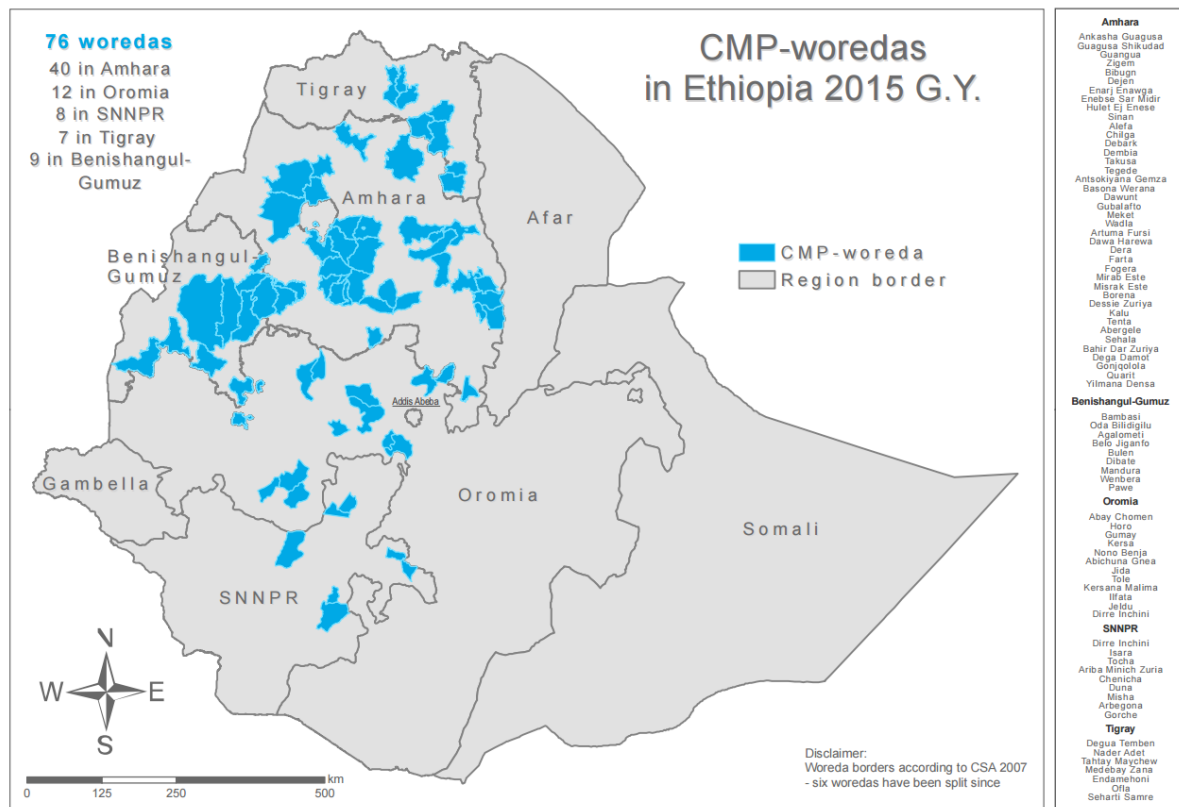
This case presentation concerned an approach to accelerating community-led WASH in 76 districts (Woredas) in highlands of Ethiopia (see map). It involves decentralisation of financial and managerial responsibilities for the implementation of water and sanitation projects to communities.

The project is under implementation since 2003 and after finetuning the approach during the first years, has reached a sufficient scale to be taken into account at national policy and sector programme level. It puts the following principles to practice:

- Community ownership – Communities are in charge of planning, implementation and maintenance. Community owns and controls the project from the very beginning. No handing over is needed.
- Local micro-finance institutions function as the financial intermediary and provide access to banking services.
- District roles change from acting as implementing body to providing facilitation, capacity building and technical support to communities who implement their own project.
- O&M planning and budgeting is introduced from the start and communities' commitment to take the responsibility of O&M is confirmed by up-front cash contributions (1-year O&M costs saved before the construction starts)
- Capacity building and technical support provided by the district officials targets the community and the local private sector. This includes training on contracting and financial management processes. Training and technical support from the districts continues to be provided after the implementation phase.
- Communities contribute at least 15% of the investment costs of their water schemes and save up first years' O&M costs in advance

As such, integrity is promoted through decentralization and participation in a process that ensures community ownership, transparency and accountability. Communities elect a WASH committee that reports throughout the implementation process. A public audit is done upon the inauguration of the scheme.

Another important feature is that of ensuring financial transparency and accountability. Micro-finance institutions (MFIs) provide transparent & timely financial reports. All funds for physical construction channeled directly to the communities through the MFIs. Only funds for capacity building are channeled through the district accounts. Specific control and safeguards measures in the use of funds are put in place before project implementation.



The approach has resulted in higher cost efficiency, faster implementation, and increased functionality of water supply systems.

In 2010 the approach was evaluated by World Bank and in this evaluation it was recommended that CMP should scaled up to national level in Ethiopia.

This case presentation(covering 12 years) highlighted the benefits of this bottom up approach in highland districts where communities can develop improved water supplies from small springs which they can protect and control. This context matters as the approach may not work in the same way where water sources cannot be controlled by the community or where pumping is needed for example. Also it would not necessarily work where rural communities are in the process of being absorbed by urban growth or where investments in industrial and agricultural development are dramatically changing land and water use patterns. While recognising these changing boundary conditions in a country with high economic and demographic growth, there was potential for learning and further scaling up under the national policy framework of 2011. However, this is only possible with the support from the federal and regional government levels. Thus there is a need to effectively communicate about the results and potential of the approach and open up dialogue about the applicability and adaptation of community management in different cultural and hydrological contexts in Ethiopia.

### 3. Panel discussion

Panel members were Aziza Akhmouch (OECD Water Governance Initiative), Nick Hepworth (Water Witness International), Mala Subramanian (Arghyam foundation, India), Jacopo Gamba (Water

Integrity Network) and his excellency State Minister Kebede Garba (Ministry of Water, Irrigation and Energy, Ethiopia).

The debate evolved around the question if the experiences with bottom up approaches could make a difference and could or should be scaled up, and how or under what conditions this could happen.

Mala Subramanian indicated that these approaches needed to be tailored and validated in given contexts. The national (federal) policy context in India was moving to establishing a favourable environment for decentralised and bottom up processes, and participation. However the interaction between communities and intermediate levels (municipalities, districts, states) are still affected by lack of openness and integrity. Thus trust is lacking. Bringing in integrity and sustainability perspectives more strongly into the monitoring of SDG targets could help make things move more quickly in the right direction.

A question brought up from the participants was if communities and civil society could actually connect to international processes and principles. Others made the point that participation in monitoring SDG's could help in demanding human rights to water and sanitation and holding politicians to account, but that this required better communication so that communities could relate international and national goals and standards to their own situation. Level of education and local languages needed to be taken into account.

This question also concerned the OECD Principles on water governance. Aziza Ackmouch made the point that the OECD principles on water governance (see: <http://www.oecd.org/gov/regional-policy/OECD-Principles-on-Water-Governance-brochure.pdf> ) underscore the role of different stakeholders and include three principles relating to building trust and engagement. Hence it could be a good tool for dialogue and action planning at various levels and in different countries. It could also provide a framework for peer reviewing of progress and learning between countries. The OECD Principles on Water Governance provide a framework to understand whether water governance systems are performing optimally and help to adjust them where necessary. They can catalyse efforts for making good practices more visible, learning from international experience, and setting reform processes into motion at all levels of government to facilitate change where and when needed. They take into account the diversity of situations within and across countries in terms of legal and institutional frameworks, cultural practices, as well as climatic, geographic and economic conditions at the origin of diverse water challenges and policy responses. As such, the Principles are relevant for all levels of government and engagement with communities, civil society and private sector stakeholders. Hence they will be translated in at least fifteen languages and disseminated widely within interested OECD Members and non-Member countries and promoted by the members of the OECD Water Governance Initiative (see: <http://www.oecd.org/gov/regional-policy/water-governance-initiative.htm> )

In reaction to this, Nick Hepworth commented that examples presented resonated the experience of Water Witness International that social accountability monitoring is a vital contribution to better water governance and greater integrity. Civil society need to be able to hold governments and other duty bearers to account against water law and international commitments like the SDGs. However the ability and incentives to fulfil these roles are very patchy. Problems include a lack of programme resources and support to deliver the work, and a narrowing of the political space for CSOs to do this work, with for example restrictive laws and authoritarian stances in certain countries. The challenge for the water community is to nurture and build this role for CSOs.

In relation to private sector engagement and its potential role in driving better governance and integrity, and the risks, Nick mentioned the AWS standard for water stewardships ([http://www.allianceforwaterstewardship.org/Beta%20AWS%20Standard%2004\\_03\\_2013.pdf](http://www.allianceforwaterstewardship.org/Beta%20AWS%20Standard%2004_03_2013.pdf)). This standard requires disclosure and third party certification of claims. The integrity guide for water stewardships will also be important in guiding collective action.

(see: <http://www.waterintegritynetwork.net/2015/08/26/new-guide-to-manage-and-increase-integrity-of-companies-water-stewardship-initiatives> and/or

<http://ceowatermandate.org/blog/resource/guide-to-managing-integrity-in-water-stewardship-initiatives> )

The discussion then addressed the question of complementarity of national processes to encourage participation of communities and civil society to build trust and sustainability with respect for human rights to water, and how that related to principles of good governance and integrity in the water sector.

State Minister Kebede explained how principles of integrity and transparency for high levels of accountability of government and its institutions were applied in Ethiopia, where ministers, state ministers and high level civil servants travel to all districts to communicate about government plans and achievement and face the people to explain not just that but also why certain expectations cannot be met without active involvement of the people and the communities and water user groups for example. This provided a good example of a combination of bottom-up and participatory processes with a national political will to communicate.

In relation to the question on how participatory monitoring could help to build trust and sustainability with regards to the SDGs and national sector programmes, Jacopo Gamba of WIN pointed at the need to develop and contextualise tools and indicators in relation to different water related SDGs and target. A strong integrity perspective could be part of monitoring target 6.2, which relates to the means or methods of implementation of the SDG on water and sanitation.

But participants commented on the integrity and real inclusiveness of processes in many countries where actual practice is the opposite. How can trust be built when the national politics and institutions are perceived as ineffective and corrupt with those holding positions of responsibility behaving like rent seekers rather than serving the people? The succeeding discussion evoked the sadness and emotion, and the loss of hope and trust in Greece and hurricane affected disaster zones in the USA for example, but also confirmed that interaction with communities and dialogue combined with openness about what was done wrong, what should be done and what can actually be done realistically is key to restoring trust from the bottom up and not just from the top down which has been common practice.

#### **4. Conclusion**

Bringing this challenge of restoring trust into the political discourse is essential but requires openness and truthfulness about certain governance and integrity challenges in different cultural, political and economic contexts. A clear and broadly supported intent is just as important. The session raises doubt about the quality and integrity of international processes, as well as in how far these are relevant for communities and civil society. The responsiveness of local behaviour and practice to international norms and principles as have been set out in the SDGs and the OECD principles for

water governance can be questioned. But vested interests make such questioning politically or socially less acceptable. Nevertheless the case presentations and debate suggest that accepted/recommended universal principles and goals have limited practical applicability and that what they really mean needs to be determined contextually in a participatory way and with honesty. A change of paradigm will not come from the international institutions, but from stakeholders who are gaining recognition at various levels, and are now called upon as partners where the gaps between policies and their implementation become evident.

A special effort is needed to link up processes making SDC targets actionable and smart when it comes to integrity and sustainability in a local context, and translate and simplify international post 2015 documents into something everyone can understand.

The case of Ethiopia evokes the importance for duty bearers to meet right holders.

Quotes in relation to the session:

Stef Smits, the IRC (session co-convener) representative:

*“For me, it has become very clear that the point of bringing duty bearers and right holders together is absolutely key to improve transparent decision-making”*

Henk Oving, special envoy for water affairs for The Netherlands:

*“The world is changing quickly with future’s risks, uncertainties, their interdependencies, but moreover the opportunities to mitigate and adapt. To encounter, we need to touch upon the transformative capacity of collaborations. Transformative capacity starts with an inclusive process, building trust and capacity, and embracing complexity. Developing a common understanding and trust paves the way to an enabling environment where long term strategies can be met with short term innovative interventions. But for such processes to be effective these should be rooted in a culture of transparency and accountability. This entails a change of culture which is a human thing. It starts with connecting the hearts and minds of the public and professionals.”*