

Transparency International. 2008.  
Global corruption report 2008: Corruption in the water sector.  
Cambridge University Press, New York, USA  
Water Alternatives 2(3): 481-482



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## BOOK REVIEW

**Transparency International. 2008. Global corruption report 2008: Corruption in the water sector.** New York, USA: Cambridge University Press. ISBN 978-0-521-72795-2, 367 pages.

(URL: [www.transparency.org/publications/gcr/gcr\\_2008](http://www.transparency.org/publications/gcr/gcr_2008))

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Transparency International's flagship publication, the *Global Corruption Report*, devoted itself in 2008 to exploring corruption in the water sector. With water influencing virtually every aspect of life, ineffective project outcomes due to corruption stand to have serious consequences on a country's socio-economic-environmental health. The impact can be seen most clearly in terms of access to safe water supply and sanitation services, with infant mortality rates a tragic indicator of ineptitude or indifference. Therefore, the specific spotlight on water management and development, afforded by this report, is welcomed.

The report will be of interest to water professionals and academics examining the effectiveness of aid projects around the world. With opening remarks by Huguette Labelle, the Chair of Transparency International, and the 2004 Nobel Peace Prize winner, Wangari Maathai, the report sets itself the ambitious task of "exploring how corruption corrodes the foundations of our societies and to suggest what we can do to reverse this course" (p. xvii). In proffering solutions, by drawing on a wealth of authors, the report promises to recognise the complexity of water use and how corruption can impact access to the resource at different scales and contexts. Divided into three sections, the report explores how corruption is enacted across the different faces of water such as irrigation, hydropower and water quality. The second section gives snapshots of corruption beyond the water sector in rich and poor countries including Europe and North America. The final section examines the research underlying the report.

To its credit, the report highlights the interplay between the growing water crisis and corruption, with climate change potentially exacerbating the disruption in water supply caused by corruption. It is reasonable to surmise that with diminishing resource availability the exercise of power exerted illegitimately, or legitimately, will further constrain access. In describing this interplay, the report gives a good overview of the issues involved.

If the overview is in its favour, the report's authors lose an opportunity to deepen the corruption debate. Since the late 1990s, when corruption was formally acknowledged to exist by the development community, the debate has centred largely on recounting how people are corrupt, and the solutions to stop them. This endless re-telling of the opportunities that exist for corruption and how people utilise them, originally served to bring attention to corruption's breadth and the ingenuity involved. However, more than a decade later, by merely recounting the opportunities, the report lost a chance to delve into *why* people choose to be corrupt. There are allusions to it. Scattered throughout the document are references to 'incentives', 'understanding the social context' etc. But the authors veer away from the personal decisions of an individual to a description, yet again, of the existing opportunities for corruption. An example that illustrates this is the corruption risk map (pp. 7-9). It is billed as a "framework for identifying these stakeholder incentives, potential conflicts of interests and the points

along the water value chain that are most vulnerable to capture" (p. 14). If the map did fulfil all three aspects it would be a valuable tool. However, it only tackles the third aspect, the points where a person can alter events if they choose to. It is silent on why this person would choose to do so, and does not suggest how to explore their conflict of interests.

Similarly, in repeating solutions that have been suggested before, the report does not seem to acknowledge the past attempts at implementing them, nor the shortcomings and difficulties arising from implementation. For example, no-one will argue against greater transparency, accountability and other virtues; however, without the political will to implement and enforce any anti-corruption policies, nothing will change on the ground. The report would have served the water community well had it delved into these questions more.

Another problem arises in the promulgation of corruption as being centred on public officials and their interaction with public, private and non-governmental organisations. The report in footnote 12 goes so far as to claim that illegitimate interactions between non-public organisations are "defined as corruption only if the firm/organisation has been entrusted with public office" (p. 7). In other words, the act of a commercial company employee bribing the employee of another company would not be seen as corruption. Though reiterating the long-held definition of corruption as the abuse of public office for private gain, the report loses another opportunity to update the definition by exploring and possibly expanding it. For example, what role do cartels and monopolies, created by the private sector, play in permitting access to resources.

For all its flaws, the report remains useful for its overview of corruption in the water sector, and is worth having as a reference for the empirical evidence it cites. Unfortunately, it is not at the cutting edge of research or implementation, and this is disappointing given Transparency International's focus on corruption and the opportunity presented by the report.