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Tackling Corruption in the Water and Sanitation Sector in Africa: Starting the Dialogue

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Description / Abstract

For the past three decades a substantial number of governments, donors and NGOs have focused efforts on a range of institutional, financial, technical and social interventions aimed at bringing about much-needed improvements in the delivery of water and sanitation services in rural and urban areas of Africa. Yet the attainment of the water and sanitation MDGs is unlikely in the majority of African countries – the stability, investment and capacity needed to meet significant and growing demand is lacking. But even if additional finance was to become available, the unacceptable level of leakage of existing resources brings into question current processes and, perhaps, the wisdom of increasing resource flows to the sector. Much of the funding available in ministries, local governments, utilities and village administrations is being used by public office for private gain.

Despite the complexity, leakage, and the potential impacts on the poor, there is currently only a limited understanding of the extent and nature of corruption in the water and sanitation sector in Africa, and limited knowledge of the policies and mechanisms that are required to tackle it. To address this concern, and to help the sector ‘catch up’, the purpose of this paper is to promote more comprehensive understanding of sector corruption and potential anti-corruption mechanisms among a broad audience of WSS stakeholders. The paper describes the plural nature of corruption in the WSS sector corruption by setting out, in a structured framework, the network of corrupt practices prevalent in the sector.

Emphasizing the need to build a broad-based coalition for change it collects together the many types of WSS corruption into typologies of public to public, public to private, and public to consumer interactions, and considers these interactions at each stage of a WSS value chain. It then describes the range of anti-corruption policies and mechanisms that have been developed to prevent or counter anti-corruption activity in the sector – mapping these over the corrupt interactions – and thus linking the framework of corrupt practices to the menu of existing solutions.

Notwithstanding this attempt to promote a more comprehensive understanding of corruption, the paper emphasizes the need to undertake rigorous diagnostics to identify areas of concentrated corruption, and to focus efforts in the future on improving sector understanding of what anticorruption strategies are most appropriate. While it cautiously suggests that efforts should be made in the development of greater transparency and

accountability mechanisms, supported by continuing more targeted efforts in WSS sector policy and institutional reform, it argues for more data and learning, for context specificity, and for efforts to develop appropriate methodologies and models for sector interventions in the different economic, governance, and WSS contexts of the African region.

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