

Delft Statement on Water Integrity

Water is a fundamental resource for sustainable development. It is essential to eradicate poverty, to secure water, food and energy for a rapidly growing population and to maintain life-sustaining ecosystems for future generations. In most countries water crises are not due to resource scarcity but primarily to governance failures. Fragmented institutions obstruct accountability in a sector with high investment and aid flows, making it particularly vulnerable to corruption. Lack of water-related integrity incurs huge cost for societies, in lost lives, stalling development, wasted talent and degraded resources.

The importance of water and good governance has been recognized in preparations on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), as well as in numerous declarations and conventions.¹ The Report of the High-Level Panel of Eminent Persons on the Post-2015 Development Agenda and the 6th World Water Forum both linked effective governance to integrity and control of corruption. Water Integrity embodies the transformative shifts identified by the High Level Panel, by incorporating a global partnership for the equitable, sustainable, and accountable management of water resources and the services these provide to all societies. It is part and parcel of the illustrative goals on Water, Good Governance, Natural Resource Management and Food Security. Eliminating corruption across water-related sectors and building integrity into policies and action plans will be essential to these ambitions.

To take action on promoting water integrity, the Water Integrity Network (WIN), UNESCO-IHE Institute for Water Education and the Water Governance Centre (WGC) joined forces to organise the first International Water Integrity Forum in the Netherlands from 5 – 7 June 2013. It was attended by more than 100 water and integrity experts from over 75 organizations across the world.

Taking stock of water-related integrity issues, the conference finds that

- Water Integrity includes, but extends beyond, control of corruption. It encompasses the integrity of water resources, as well as the integrity of people and institutions. Integrity challenges come in many forms, involving financial transactions, manipulation of knowledge and information, discrimination in all forms, illegal or irresponsible water abstraction and waste discharge, as well as biased rules and processes that favour power and short-term interests over equity, fairness, societal welfare and long-term sustainability.
- Building integrity and overcoming corruption are global concerns. Water management is complex, capital-intensive and often involves monopolies, providing systemic incentives for abuses of power. Decision making is dispersed across policy domains and jurisdictions, allowing rampant exploitation of loopholes. These characteristics create the need to actively promote integrity on all levels, from local to global, for national and transboundary water systems. Clear and comprehensive results frameworks, combined with transparency, form the basis of accountability and stakeholder participation. Free and easy public access to relevant, reliable and consistent data and information, including legal documents, is recognized as a key requirement.
- Promoting water integrity requires expanding the base, recognizing the fundamental interconnectedness between water, food production and energy supply; between water, sanitation and human health; and between poverty, informal settlements and vulnerability to corruption. Expanding the base also refers to more inclusive water management. Multi-stakeholder approaches are crucial to ensuring water integrity. Such approaches have to bring the debate to weak stakeholders including the poor, to the strong but often disengaged business community, and include the environment and future generations as the 'silent' stakeholders.

¹ Including amongst others the UN Millennium Declaration, the UN Conventions on Rights of the Child (CRC), on Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), as well as the UN Convention against Corruption (UNCAC), the OECD Convention on Combating Bribery in International Business Transactions and several regional anti-corruption conventions.

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- Promoting water integrity also requires increasing the pace, recognizing that complex new challenges posed by fast population growth, urbanization, rapid destruction of productive aquatic ecosystems and climate change all threaten to overwhelm existing structures. Large-scale funding becoming available to pay for climate change adaptation and ecosystem services creates additional integrity challenges. Increasing the pace includes efforts to scale up systems to provide data and evidence on water-related integrity, establishing effective regulatory bodies and overcoming institutional fragmentation. It also requires building trust between stakeholders, raising awareness through credible information and developing professional capacity based on clear codes of conduct.

The costs of inaction are too high to remain passive. The Forum and its partners call on governments, UN and international organizations, the corporate sector and civil society to promote water integrity. Fighting corruption is an essential first step, but not sufficient. We need to facilitate the recommended transformational shifts, and start changing personal and institutional attitudes and behaviour.

Working towards water integrity requires concrete actions, including to

- use and expand existing networks and build new alliances between sectors to develop a broad consensus on water integrity, and use multiple communication channels to raise awareness for issues and available solutions;
- encourage organizations, including our own, to consider water integrity in the development of organizational policies, strategies and action plans;
- invest in inclusive multi-stakeholder processes that foster collaboration beyond the water sector, engaging user organisations, investors, planning authorities and core governance institutions at country level to join reform agendas;
- incorporate issues of water integrity, including standards to effectively manage integrity², into capacity development, professional training and teaching;
- advocate in international and regional fora, including the Budapest Water Summit 2013 and the 7th World Water Forum, for the incorporation of water integrity into post-2015 development goals related to water access, water use, good governance and natural resources management;
- make more data available in the public domain, freely accessible and easy to understand so as to promote informed engagement in decision-making by citizens;
- move decisively towards a universal code of conduct for individual and institutional behaviour based on ethical principles, values and competence.

Delft,
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² Building on the established ISO standards 9000 for quality management, 14000 for environmental management and 21500 for project management