



Water integrity risks in Tunisia – Priorities for action

Tunisia has greatly increased its commitment in recent years to limit corruption and increase transparency, accountability and participation in governance by developing dedicated ministries and agencies for governance and anti-corruption. Still, a number of factors, including complex water management structures; lack of coordination and staff capacity in government and an arid climate create risks for unsustainable governance of water.

A national assessment in Tunisia investigated water integrity risks in several major areas: policy making, legislation and regulation; planning and budgeting; enforcement; human resource management and procurement. A summary of the findings, and key recommendations are presented in this brief.

Policy Making, Legislation and Regulation | The primary challenges faced include fragmentation of decision-making between several actors, lack of institutional mechanisms for coordination/communication among the institutions and limited integration of research results. Another risk area relates to the implementation of the new decentralisation scheme for water governance, set out in the constitution, which will lead to major changes in institutions and legislation. Tunisia has a centralised system and low involvement of local communities and users associations. This has led to limited expertise on water management, few resources and a weak impact of the local authority on water management.

Planning and Budgeting | The allocation of funds between projects at national and local levels can trigger risks for corruption or lowered effectiveness. Fund raising, planning and management are done at the central level, which decrease the impact of investment at the local level and lead to tension and inequitable distribution between authorities. Transparency, efficiency indicators and assessment/evaluation processes need to be put in place to counter this. The allocation of water, without oversight to monitor integrity can result in inequitable and sub-optimal distribution of resources and failure to utilize water of different qualities for their most effective use.

Enforcement of Regulations | Weak enforcement of anti-pollution legislation and the polluter pays principle currently result in poor water and environmental quality. A number of causes can be attributed to this: political failure to implement the laws, corruption, lack of trust in the justice system, insufficient information on accountability procedures and rights, limited environmental awareness/responsibility, and inadequate Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) studies and enforcement done by the EPA. A second major risk area is the lack of transparency and clear planning for the permits, including requirements for monitoring, auditing, water saving and reuse. Low costs for permits and limited law enforcement result in over-exploitation of water resources by farmers and industries, including in vulnerable or protected areas, water shortages, salinity, pollution, high energy consumption, and tension between users and regions.

Human Resources Management | Nepotism in recruitment can lead to unqualified staff, low absorption and knowledge capitalisation/management, and decreased efficiency of organisations. This undermines trust in expertise and increases internal tension. Causes of nepotism are the culture of favouritism, centralised hiring system and a lack of transparency, as well as lack of management skills including communication and team building



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Procurement and Tendering | Bribery during the tendering process to influence how contracts are awarded is the most direct and damaging integrity risk. This is facilitated by: complicated administrative and financial procedures; lack of expertise in enterprises, leading to delays; improper contract execution

increasing technical risks; and low capacity in financial management of public funds. Causes are political favouritism, heavy administrative procedures and the fact that low cost is the most important criteria when awarding contracts.

Recommendations for improving national water governance

1. Empower the role of the Water Council role to further support implementation of new regulation, improve horizontal coordination between decision-making authorities, water users and other related sectors, such as energy, food, climate change etc.
2. Assess existing local water management schemes to map priorities, challenges and potential local solutions in each region that consider all actors and users.
3. Ensure priorities are planned, according to agreed national and local level strategies, when implementing projects and that they specify how they will include systems for accountability, transparency and access to information.
4. Improve monitoring of groundwater extraction and closing of operation of illegal wells
5. Support local authorities to develop a clear strategic framework for water management that sustainably utilizes available water resources, such as rainwater, treated water and well water and demand management.
6. Develop transparent procedures for merit based hiring and promotion in water institutions and expand use of online application and multi-criteria analysis for job applicants
7. Establish knowledge management processes and positions in relevant water institutions.
8. Develop continuous training procedures of human resource management staff on tendering procedures, adhering to legislation, equitable treatment of applicants, and transparency.

Access the full report at www.watergovernance.org

The Regional Capacity Building Programme on Water Integrity

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Disclaimer: This policy brief is based upon analysis done by the Centre for Water Research and Technologies (CERTE), Tunisia, and it has been edited by the Stockholm International Water Institute. The views presented here are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect those of SIWI or CERTE.

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