



Session Report

Please know you may design the structure of this report to better suit the session. It's important to capture the key outcomes and solutions proposed for the future.

Session Title: 10 Pathways to Empower Citizen Investigators to Stop Corruption

Date & Time: Tuesday, 06.12.2022, 5:00 pm - 6:30 pm GMT -5

Report prepared by: Georg Neumann, Head of Communications, Open Contracting Partnership (OCP)

Moderated by: Sophie Brown, Program Director, SEEK Initiative

Panellists:

- César Vega - Project Manager, Acción Ciudadana (AC), Transparency International (TI) Guatemalan chapter
- David Riveros García - Founder & Executive Director, reAcción
- Debora Peci - Project Manager, Democracy Plus
- Gaurav Godhwani - Director & Co-Founder, CivicDataLab

Share the thematic focus of the session, its purpose and corruption risks?

It has never been easier for citizens to uncover information about corruption, from spotting the expensive watches of public officials to tracking oligarchs' yachts. But these individuals and groups often lack a comprehensive, secure, collaborative and sustainable methodology to conduct investigations that produce the robust evidence and momentum needed to address systemic corruption at its core.

This session explored strategies for enabling citizen and community investigators to join the fight against corruption, including SEEK's 10 pathways for information activism. The panel also discussed why scrutinising public procurement, one of the highest risk sectors for corruption, is a powerful springboard for engaging citizens and civil society in investigating corruption, building on specific approaches from the open contracting community.

Civil society- and citizen-led investigations can be an antidote to the opacity and lack of accountability that are both symptoms and enablers of corruption. Taxpayers have a vested interest in ensuring public funds benefit the public, not those with political and elite connections. Monitoring and investigating government spending and projects empowers those who are typically most affected by corruption to follow the money, to detect risks and irregularities early, to produce evidence of systematic failures, and inspire collective action that overcomes inertia and ultimately catalyses greater change. The need for greater public oversight by citizen and civil society investigators has only become more urgent as efforts to curb Covid-19 have led to restrictions in movement, the weakening of democracy, and the failure of good governance systems.

Summary of panellists' contributions & discussion points (please be as detailed as possible)

Georg Neumann - Head of Communications, Open Contracting Partnership (OCP) noted that procurement is government's number one corruption risk. This makes it a perfect topic for diving deep into the strategies that civil society (CSOs) and citizens can use to engage with the government and investigate corruption. The Open Contracting Partnership has identified different strategies CSOs can use to engage and track government in public procurement:

- 1) from engaging citizens to improve the procurement process from planning to delivery such as in Guatemala
- 2) improving how official complaints are managed
- 3) using data-driven monitoring with open data and AI
- 4) investigating wrongdoing and corruption
- 5) to improving and lobbying for better public procurement laws and regulations.

Other reasons that citizens and communities may wish to examine procurement include that communities and issue-based activist groups often care about public contracting but many don't realise it (for example, it may not be clear that subpar school repairs are due to a poorly negotiated or rigged contract). Comparatively, there is substantial information in the public domain about procurement, as citizens have a legal right in many countries to access that data/information. And investigations into public contracting and spending lead to tangible change that citizens can see and be inspired by: savings and public funds reinvested, better service delivery, reformed laws and government tech systems that prevent corruption.

Open contracting with its four cornerstones of outcome-driven, data-driven, participatory and sustainable procurement serves as a great framework for change.

David Riveros García - Founder & Executive Director, reAcción, a youth anti-corruption organisation in Paraguay. He talked about FOCO their community monitoring tool for the allocation of education funds in Paraguay. Since 2016, over 350 high school and university students have examined data about whether funding for school repairs in the city of Ciudad del Este are reached their intended destination.

There has been a five fold improvement in funding going to the most needy schools rather than those with political connections. David emphasises that their approach worked because they concentrated on building the community first, not the data tools. They began by analysing the data using Excel sheets and conducting interviews with school principles using paper forms. As the students developed new skills and learnt about what information they needed to gather and verify, they adopted more sophisticated monitoring apps.

César Vega - Project Manager, Acción Ciudadana (AC), Transparency International (TI) Guatemalan chapter, since 2021, AC, the Guatemalan chapter of Transparency International, has trained 296 local community leaders and other members of the public to identify and investigate corruption risks in municipal contracts through a 12-week diploma course on social auditing. The participants are members of a diverse range of local organisations, many of whom are advocates for under-represented groups, including women, youth, LGBTQI+ and Indigenous people, from both urban and rural areas.

The course focuses on municipal contracts because they are often the vehicle for delivering government projects that have the clearest impact on people's daily lives. They determine, for instance, whether people have fresh water, sturdy roads, safe classrooms, and quality healthcare. Problems in such projects are the most visible sign of dysfunctional government processes, but their root causes are often poorly understood by the public — as are citizens' rights to access information about them. This leads to pessimism and inertia. Investigations being conducted by participants since the course ended include:

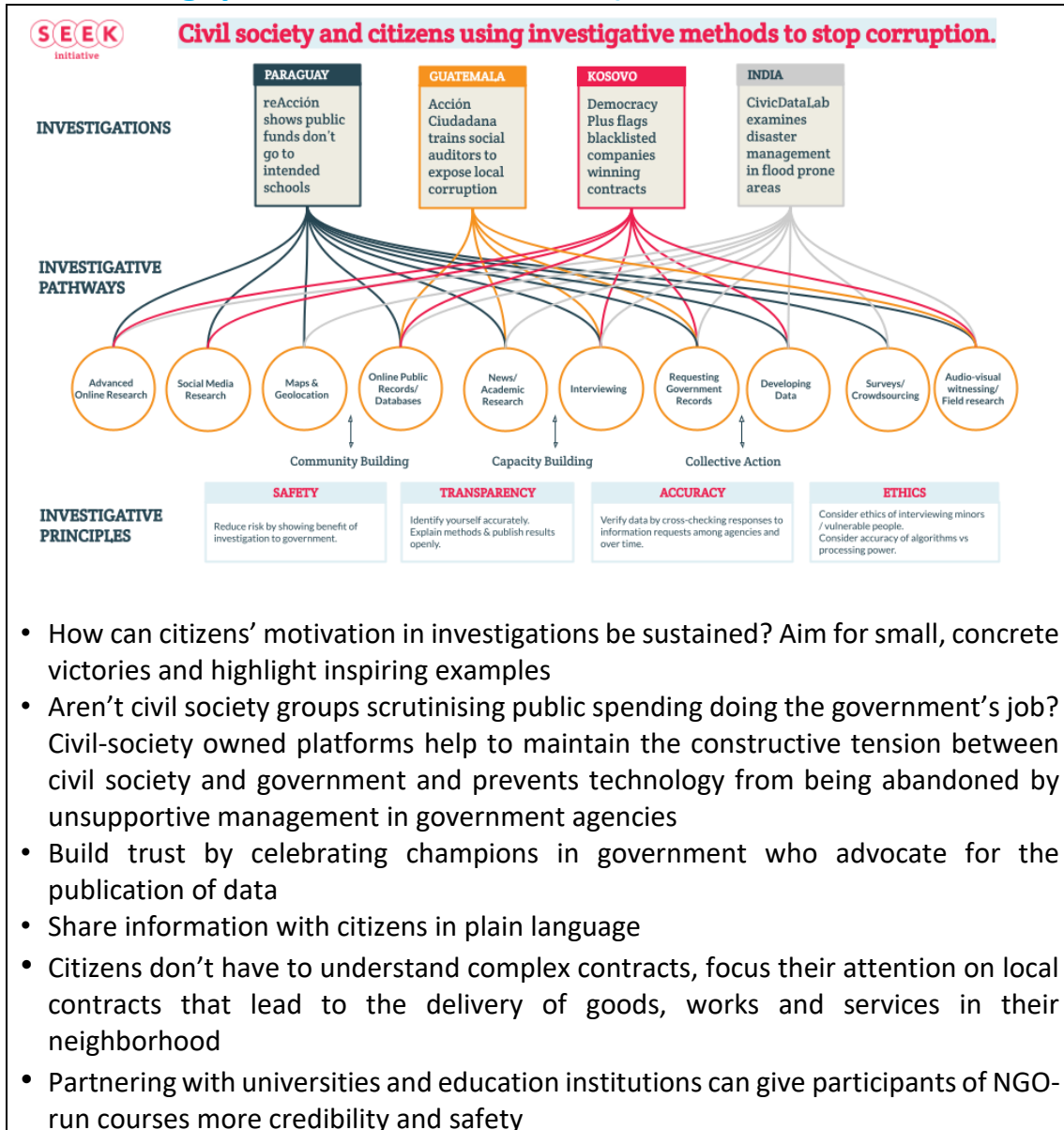
- Racism and corruption in the distribution of birth control in Mayan communities
- Unlawful collection of personal identification numbers when filing freedom of information requests through municipal platforms
- Poor service delivery in food and nutrition programs for children

Debora Peci - Project Manager, Democracy Plus shared the experience of Democracy Plus. The Kosovo NGO developed a Red Flags application to prevent mismanagement and corruption by detecting potential irregularities at the tender phase using risk indicators. She described a recent discovery of fraud which was identified because a tender document lacked the official stamp, and verified through interviews with the procuring entity and supplier.

Gaurav Godhwani - Director & Co-Founder, CivicDataLab, is the founder of an Indian interdisciplinary research lab called CivicDataLab. CivicDataLab and Open Contracting Partnership built an intelligent data model that will help decision-makers to improve flood preparation, response and relief procurement so that the poorest and most vulnerable people in the flood-prone state of Assam are better protected from the worst effects of extreme weather events. The data model combines three larger datasets which are seldom considered together. It sheds light on whether flood control infrastructure is being built in areas that have the greatest need in a timely manner, and gain insights on the effectiveness of past actions and future needs for

flood response and mitigation. It is a powerful preventative tool against corruption because it uses historical data to forecast where public funds should be invested to have the biggest impact.

Main outcomes of session (include quotes/highlights and interesting questions from the floor)



What can be done to create opportunities for scaling up the solutions discussed in the session? And by whom?

- Citizen and community investigators can document the steps they took to conduct inquiries using SEEK's 10 Pathways of Investigation. This creates a record for others who wish to verify or replicate the investigation, or adapt it to their own context.
- Experienced investigators can mentor and train budding investigators to build a community of practice. Capacity building organisations can extract universal

lessons from successful investigations to create educational materials for investigators.

- Community building and mobilisation is a critical element of collaborative investigations.
- Sometimes investigators can build trust with authorities by demonstrating how they will benefit from inquiries.
- Direct feedback channels can be built to enable citizens' discoveries to inform and reform government projects, policies and processes.
- Governments can ensure investigators have sound evidence by adopting regulations, processes and systems that enable proactive publication of timely and machine-readable data and documents.

**Is there a specific call to action to key stakeholders, such as governments, businesses, funders, civil society, young people, journalists or any other stakeholder that should be noted?
Please specify if relevant.**

Civic oversight is a powerful antidote to the opacity and lack of accountability that are both symptoms and enablers of corruption. Governments and businesses who are serious about curbing corruption should recognise the value of public watchdogs to ensure transparency, integrity and accountability, particularly in high risk sectors like procurement where public and private interests meet. Citizen- and community-led investigations can be catalysed by governments who respect public requests for information, and who adopt regulations, internal processes and systems that enable publication of accurate, timely, and machine-readable data and documents.

Civil society, young people and journalists can become investigators using tools and techniques that are already within their reach. SEEK's 10 Pathways and Principles offer guidance on how to conduct investigations that are accurate, safe, ethical and impactful. Public contracting datasets and records are a good starting place to investigate issues that directly affect communities, especially corruption risks.

Donor support for citizen and community investigations can lead to more democratic and inclusive decision-making, uphold fundamental human rights and create knowledge about issues in the public interest.

Rapporteur's name and date submitted

Georg Neumann