

INTERNATIONAL ANTI-CORRUPTION CONFERENCE 2024

Vilnius, Lithuania 18-21 June 2024

SESSION REPORT

Session Title: The Imperative of Inclusion - Marginalized Communities in the Fight Against Corruption

Date: 18 June 2024

Time: 5:00 PM - 6:30 PM (GMT +3)

Report prepared by:

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Outright International

Moderated by:

Jim Fitzgerald

Director

Equal Rights Trust

Panellists:

- Brigitte Chelebian
Director
Justice Without Frontiers Lebanon
 - Im Norin
Program Director
Transparency International Cambodia
 - Mariia Kolokolova
Co-Founder
Civic Educators Association of Ukraine
- Rubén Figueroa Mariona
Monitoring and Evaluation Manager
COMCAVIS Trans – El Salvador

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

Acknowledging the interplay between discrimination and corruption, this session focused on discriminatory corruption,¹ specifically the ways corruption disrupts marginalized communities, including young people, women, persons with disabilities, and LGBTQI+

¹ [Defying Exclusion: Stories and Insights on the Links between Discrimination and Corruption](#)

communities, from accessing services, seeking justice, and exercising their political and civil rights. The session also explored the ways unique forms of corruption play out in the lives of these communities. In featuring a set of speakers from diverse geographic and professional backgrounds, the session elevated the lived experiences of these communities and explored how to center these experiences as core to the solution in tackling corruption more broadly. The session also highlighted ways activists from these communities are already tackling corruption that can be scaled and integrated into broader anti-corruption efforts.

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

- Significant evidence on the correlation between corruption and discrimination- marginalized groups are impacted both differently and disproportionately
- Equal Rights Trust sought to explore a possible causal relationship between discrimination and corruption and identified four dimensions of discriminatory corruption:
 - Marginalized groups have greater exposure to corruption
 - Certain types of corruption are inherently discriminatory
 - The overall impact of corruption is disproportionate
 - Discrimination can make it difficult to counter corruption by creating barriers to accessing justice which is a critical tool in confronting both corruption and discrimination
- Corruption impedes the effectiveness of measures that seek to advance equality
- Understanding the interaction between discrimination and corruption is a good first step towards addressing the challenges faced by marginalized groups in living lives of dignity and respect

Lebanon

- Several crises including the COVID-19 pandemic, the 2020 Beirut blast, economic crisis, and war in Southern Lebanon have created more opportunities for corruption, and exacerbated the vulnerability of all women, including increases in crimes against women, trafficking, and gender-based violence.
- As a result, women in all their diversity, lack access to a minimum standard of life including limited access to education, healthcare, and necessities such as stable electricity.
- Although Lebanon has taken steps to address corruption, including the adoption of laws to fight corruption, these laws are not equally implemented and only seek to tackle corruption in the public sector, completely overlooking the private sector.
- This coincides with a judiciary that is in shambles and diminishing budgets that support women and other communities experiencing marginalization. For example, the Ministry of Social Affairs budget is seeing annual percentage decreases.
- Corruption is part of daily life in Lebanon.
 - Lack of personal status laws creates fertile grounds for both gender-based discrimination and corruption, leading to:
 - discrimination between Christian and Muslim women
 - discrimination between rich women and impoverished women
 - Displacement due to the war in Southern Lebanon is leading to discrimination and corruption against internally displaced people
 - The Kafala System leads to corruption against migrant workers. The system is indeed trafficking but not seen as trafficking because it is mentioned in the law.

Ukraine

- In 2023, Ukrainians identified tackling corruption as the second priority in the country just behind the war with Russia. Ukrainians see corruption as a threat to their democracy and the country's ability to tackle existing discrimination.
- Unfortunately, Russia is attempting to utilize Ukraine's anti-corruption efforts against them, incorporating into their war propaganda.
- For young people, corruption impacts their upward social mobility and their ability to see themselves long term in Ukraine and contributing to its reconstruction efforts. Corruption has also led a corrosive effect of public trust in government institutions and systems.
- Younger people tolerate corruption more than older people because they experience it more often, particularly as it relates to accessing education and their livelihoods.

Cambodia

- Cambodia continues to score low on corruption perception index and ranks 158 out of 180 countries on transparency and accountability, only just above Myanmar (Burma), North Korea, and Afghanistan.
- Corruption is widespread and part of daily life.
- Corruption continues to be a tool for political elites to enrich themselves and build political power. As a result, the government administration remains the same administration that took control of the country over four decades ago at the end of the war and genocide.
- Cambodia, like many countries emerging from conflict, has an extremely young population. Young people are eager to engage in combatting corruption, however they fear retribution, particularly in a culture that is hierarchical by age.
- The government continues to restrict civic space and exposure of young people to political participation, going as far as banning conversations on domestic politics in schools.
- Corruption plays out extensively in the education sector
 - Students can pay for better treatment by teachers, pay for grades, pay to be in better classes
 - Exams are necessary for many careers – police, public office, medicine, etc. – people can pay off to not take exams or get better scores therefore these positions are no longer merit-based, and youth of marginalized backgrounds cannot pay and unable to access the same opportunities

El Salvador

- In 2019, El Salvador elected President Nayib Bukele, who ran on an anti-corruption platform - "There's enough money when no one steals" – Bukele 2019 campaign slogan.
- Since entering office, the Bukele administration is deconstructing democratic institutions leading to major setbacks in transparency and monitoring of the use of public funds. For LGBTIQ people, where the funding is already quite limited, there is even less transparency and more improper use of funding for LGBTIQ issues and services.
- LGBTIQ people experience corruption through power abuse, aggressions, arbitrary arrests and the anti-gender narrative is feeding into corruption, of which corruption is a tool by these anti-rights actors to erase the existence of LGBTIQ people in the country.
- Corruption is increasingly making it difficult for LGBTIQ organizations to operate and access information they need to keep their communities informed.

- The use of emergency laws by Bukele to curb gang violence has made it particularly difficult to act and comment on corruption cases. Although the policies have seen success in curbing the violence, it has led to major increases in rights violations and limitations of fundamental freedoms. However, Salvadorians seem to not mind as they reelected Bukele in February 2024. The attitude is that although the government may be stealing money, we don't care because they've solved problems related to gang violence.
- There is still strong commitment in the region to anti-corruption despite the rise in authoritarianism and use of emergency laws to in the pursuit of safety and security in El Salvador and other countries in the region.

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

Solutions

- Educating people on their rights and understanding the legal system.
- Active civil society that can operate without limitations by the government. LGBTIQ, women's groups, and youth groups are already playing important roles in countering and calling out corruption.
- Intentional engagement of organizations representing and led by those experiencing marginalization is key to the solution. Seeing the value add of these organizations and viewing them as active participants/leaders rather than passive recipients.
- Civic education has shown a positive correlation to understanding and wanting to counter corruption.
 - In Ukraine – after participating in an interactive Democracy from Theory to Practice course young people stated having zero tolerance to corruption and felt it was important to fight corruption now, rather than wait until the end of the war.
 - Research also shows that higher knowledge of civics and strong democratic values can lead to the reduction of corruption.

Questions from the Floor

How are you seeing the weaponization of marginalized groups to improve reputations of political actors?

- LGBTIQ people are being weaponized via criminalization and certainly seeing candidates running on anti-LGBTIQ platforms across the numerous elections this year to win votes. In some cases, candidates are calling out competitors as being a member of the LGBTIQ community (even if not true) or their lack of strict stances against LGBTIQ rights, leading to candidates having to end their campaigns.
- There is a growing backlash towards the use of the word "gender." The word gender, in some contexts, is automatically associated with the LGBTIQ movements which is enough to shut down any engagement with political actors. For example, rather than using "gender-based violence" some groups are having to reframe to "violence against women."
- We're also seeing a lot of candidates run on anti-immigrant and anti-refugee platforms, weaponizing xenophobia to improve their reputations and win votes.

Does corruption impact communities' ability to take up political office and participate politically?

- Absolutely! In El Salvador, you must "pay to play" in general to run for office, however for LGBTIQ people, the cost is higher not only financially but reputationally.

LGBTIQ people cannot run openly, and it's unlikely political parties will take them on as candidates even if they don't run openly.

- In Ukraine – Marshall law is in effect which basically keeps the political status quo in place making it difficult for young people to find space to engage politically.
- Nepotism is high in Cambodia. On the surface, it appears as though there is a lot of youth participation in government but in reality, those young people are the sons, daughters, and family members of current political leaders.

Suggestions on overcoming competition between communities experiencing marginalization as they vie for limited financial support in this space and/or lack solidarity?

- The government context in El Salvador has made it difficult to build solidarity which is why international support to build solidarity is extremely helpful.
- Ensuring everything is led by the communities themselves helps mitigate – to some degree – this competition. Locally led design of initiatives is key
- Important to remember that many groups experiencing marginalization are not necessarily thinking about corruption as their priorities are focused on meeting their daily needs. It requires groups working on anti-corruption to engage organizations representing and led by marginalized groups and identify ways to work together towards a collective end.

How can international organizations localize in ways that is appropriate?

- Small grants can be instrumental in helping stand up organizations and build the capacity to do this type of work. Small organizations bring a big value add and can reach large numbers of people.
- Make proposal processes less cumbersome and complex. Ensure granting processes are also streamlined and easier. “The bureaucracy is killing us!”

Key Themes from the Conversation:

- In addition to the link between discrimination and corruption, there is also links between crises and corruption which creates more space for discriminatory corruption.
- Corruption is part of the daily life of communities experiencing marginalization.
- “Corruption is accepted if it works.”
- There is a correlation between LGBTIQ criminalization and corruption.

Key recommendations for the future and concrete follow-up actions

- Acknowledge that organizations, leaders, and individuals from marginalized groups exist and are dynamic, vibrant, and ready to engage. Often these groups require minimal support to begin to engage and partner on anti-corruption efforts.
- Even in contexts where certain communities are criminalized or face extreme forms of marginalization, there are ways to engage. Do no harm should not equate to do nothing at all.
- Identify organizations representing and led by communities experiencing marginalization and begin to build relationships with these organizations. Leverage these relationships to identify areas of collaboration and partnership in filling research gaps, sharing of expertise, and implementation of programs and initiatives.
- When collecting data, seek to disaggregate where possible. Consult leaders of these communities to determine the best ways to disaggregate based on local contexts.

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

- International support has made building the bridge between anti-corruption actors and civil society actors led-by and representing marginalized groups easier. International donors and international organizations receiving funds for anti-corruption work should be more intentional in their inclusion of marginalized groups in their work, conducting both targeted programming and mainstreaming of these voices into activities.
 - Ensure stronger representation and leadership of organizations, activists, and individuals from marginalized groups in national, regional, and international convenings and conversations such as the International Anti-Corruption Conference. These leaders bring critical insights into panels and workshops regardless of the topic.
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Rapporteur's name

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Date submitted

28 June 2024

Action! This report needs to be emailed to iacc-av@transparency.org within 24 hours of the session. If you wish to update the report, please do so by 21 July. Thank you.