



Youth and Corruption

A critical building block for constructing a nation which is transparent, accountable, and open to all is mobilising citizens' sustained commitment to the fight against corruption. Getting a country's youth involved in these efforts at an early stage and as an active stakeholder offers an immense opportunity to shift how governments view their obligation to create societies grounded in ethics and integrity rather than corruption and abuses.

Integrity, like corruption, is learned. Unfortunately, in many countries, rich and poor alike, corruption has been tolerated for generations. Young people have the potential to transform this present reality and make a lasting impact as tomorrow's leaders and today's citizens by creating a world free of corruption. This paper is an attempt to begin a discussion about why and how young people should get engaged in the anti-corruption struggle. Effective youth-led activities that challenge and change the status quo are the best way to end the corruption that currently plagues too many countries across the globe.

Table of Contents

1. Overview
2. Why youth and corruption?
3. Getting youth engaged
4. Developing youth-based efforts to catalyse change
5. Conclusions

Corruption most affects young people as a result of their involvement in almost every aspect of society — as students, activists, citizens, workers, customers and voters.

Among all the age groups surveyed by Transparency International's Global Corruption Barometer, young people report paying bribes the most frequently in their interactions with key institutions and public services.

The economic costs caused by corruption can depress employment growth and make entry-level jobs scarce for young people. According to the International Labour Organisation, unemployed youth make up 40 per cent of the world's jobless despite being only 25 per cent of the total work force.⁷

1. Overview

In its worst instances, corruption is institutionalised and socially ingrained in a country, making it difficult to discern corruption as a problem from just 'the way things are done'. Older generations may have a vested interest in maintaining the corrupt status quo, or may have become tired of seeing promises for change never materialise. In contrast, youth are usually more open to wide-scale transformation and have the will to pursue it. Parents, teachers, political leaders, employers and peers shape the environment for young people to take on these roles and empower them to make the 'right' decisions in their lives.

As a group, young people make up a sizeable cohort of their communities and societies. According to most recent data, nearly one-fifth of the world's population is between 15 and 24 years old and they largely live in developing countries.¹ When people under 15 are included in this figure for youth, their share reaches nearly 60 per cent of the population in developing nations and roughly 30 per cent in industrialised countries.² As these statistics show, young people have the sheer numbers needed for social change and provide an unprecedented force for shifting the future in the global fight against corruption. Further progress on anti-corruption work will be hard to advance without young people playing a leading role.

2. Why youth and corruption?

Corruption most affects young people as a result of their involvement in almost every aspect of society — as students, activists, citizens, workers, customers and voters.³ In contrast to other groups, by their numbers, diverse roles and numerous dealings with state and society, young people tend to be more exposed to bribery. According to TI's Global Corruption Barometer (2009), which measures petty corruption, young people (under 30) report paying bribes the most frequently among all the age groups surveyed. Across the 69 countries in the sample, 16 per cent of all people under 30 had paid a bribe in the last year.⁴

In their interactions with government and businesses, young people are often put on the front line of corruption. They may be forced to 'bribe' to go to school, pass an exam or get a job. For example, petty corruption can become a prerequisite for getting a first job or the only means for young people to beat out ever-tighter competition for fewer openings (see side bar).

Corruption is often both a symptom and a cause of skewed development, inequality and escalating poverty. Around the world, approximately 500 million young people live on less than US\$ 2 a day.⁵ Corruption diverts funds intended for development, undermining a government's ability to provide basic services, feeding inequality and injustice, and discouraging aid and investment.⁶ This reality deprives younger generations of the potential to develop as individuals and to contribute to society as citizens.

The youth movement is at the forefront of challenging this status quo. Youth have always been a force of change within countries, whether by daring to ask pointed questions, pushing civilian movements of resistance or promoting social issues. Their energy, strength, inventiveness and hopefulness have led to the transformation of societies within a generation. Young people are calling for ambitious agendas, and innovative ways to shape them, on a whole array of

areas ranging from education, healthcare and labour conditions through to the environment, trade relations and global governance.

Corruption, however, is one of the main barriers that is blocking their efforts.⁸ Generating a stronger commitment by young people and youth organisations to get involved in anti-corruption efforts could help to dismantle current impediments and could be a catalyst for change in society, the economy and politics.

3. Getting youth engaged

Readying young people to say no to corruption both today and tomorrow is a pivotal step toward making real progress in the fight against abuses — from bribery and fraud, to collusion and patronage. Their engagement, while not sufficient on its own to end abuses, is one additional and essential piece that is needed to tackle corruption.

Developing and educating a new generation in the values of integrity, democracy and transparency is one of the most powerful tools for ensuring a future where corrupt practices are not part of the normal way of life. Both formal and non-formal education can greatly contribute to achieving this goal, and should be used to change perceptions and practices about corruption and youth's role and interest in fighting it.⁹

The wide range of work being pursued by different youth movement actors, often in collaboration with TI national chapters and other anti-corruption partners, demonstrates that young people can get actively engaged and lay the groundwork for lasting, positive change (see side bar). In each country, the level of involvement of youth in combating corruption will depend on the particular cultural, social, political and economic context. These differences will determine how and in which spheres of society youth will be best placed to address problems and present solutions for promoting integrity, transparency, accountability and participation. Youth councils, organisations and individual young people will provide the institutional support for this work to take place and contribute to anti-corruption efforts in diverse ways — both formally and informally, nationally and locally.

4. Developing youth-based activities to catalyse change

Getting young people to participate can serve as the main catalyst for change. By becoming active, either through joining an existing effort or establishing a new one, progress on fighting corruption can be achieved. Some examples of how young people can serve as catalysts in combating abuses include joining research and survey studies, serving as electoral observers, raising ethics and corruption issues in schools, discussing the importance of values in religious settings and starting youth wings within political parties.

As a first step for action, it is important to know what young people's priorities are and how their national and international anti-corruption counterparts can support them in responding to these concerns. This can be done by conducting collaborative studies with youth organisations to collect data on young people's perceptions and knowledge of key issues, such as corruption, integrity and transparency.

"We will do a disservice to all young people if we do not find ways to create a public idea of youth as change agents: one that starts rather than concludes with the engagement of young people whose lives and communities are most in need of changing."¹⁰

- Karen Pittman, CEO, Forum for Youth Investment

Youth in Action against Corruption

Various youth organisations have come forward to get involved in combating corruption.

As one of the main providers of non-formal education, they are an important entry point for helping young people to build the skills and frameworks necessary to prevent abuses.

For example, the Ibero-American Youth Organisation (OIJ), a Latin American platform for youth issues, has cited transparency, accountability, integrity and participation as the key challenges for young people to address in the region.

Youth-lead initiatives are also pressing to bring the issue of corruption to the fore in other regions. In Papua New Guinea, the Youth against Corruption Association is working to empower young people to uphold their rights and become active participants in the anti-corruption fight.¹¹

Youth and corruption

Creating Demand for Anti-Corruption and Integrity Reforms


The focus on youth engagement and development is rooted in the idea that youth play a key role in social mobilisation and change. In the fight against corruption, the challenge lies in creating demand among youth to curb abuses and institute better governance practices. Achieving these ends requires shifting activities from being supply-side (i.e. the passage of government policies and reforms) to demand-side driven (i.e. the call for reforms).

Demand-side approaches that target civil society engagement, whether among youth or other social groups, cover a broad set of interventions aimed at promoting civic engagement in and understanding of governance processes.

While it can be empirically difficult to demonstrate impact, the secondary effects of these activities often include increased participation, greater access to information, more responsive public policies and better public services (in qualitative and quantitative terms).¹⁵

Once young people's concerns have been identified, programmes must be designed and developed to tackle the corruption issues confronting youth and which are undermining their life goals. There are different models and theories of how best to mobilise and engage youth, including the 'youth engagement continuum' (see table below), which can be used to help guide this work.¹² This framework has been put forward by some of the leading advocates and researchers on youth engagement and community youth development (CYD), a holistic view of how communities and youth interact and progress.¹³

The continuum is typically used to schematically demonstrate how to involve youth to promote systemic change on a social or political issue (see side bar). It allows us to visualise how different approaches of engagement can equally contribute to four sequential stages of impact at the community and/or organisational level: interventions, development, collective empowerment and systemic change (see side bar).¹⁴ The examples provided are drawn from the anti-corruption movement and relate to five areas of youth engagement: youth services, youth development, youth leadership, citizen engagement and youth organising. There is some overlap between these divisions, and it is important to note that they are not staged but rather are fairly fluid and reinforcing. Each of the five areas is explained in more detail below.

| Youth Engagement Continuum | | | | |
|---|--|--|---|---|
| Intervention → | Development → | Collective Empowerment → | Systemic Change → | |
|  | | | | |
| Youth Services Approach | Youth Development | Youth Leadership | Civic Engagement | Youth Organising |
| Programming focuses on treating and preventing corruption in the key areas affecting youth (education, employment, health, police, political parties, etc.) | Activities attempt to provide support and opportunities for youths' personal development in the areas of ethics, integrity and transparency. Work may be carried out through youth-adult partnerships and non-formal education within youth organisations. | Initiatives aim at building and developing youth leadership and decision-making skills, such as through educational courses on ethics that are part of mandatory school curriculum and non-formal education. | Work engages young people in political education, advocacy and awareness to create a collective identity among youth as agents of social change. Activities include service delivery monitoring, independent election oversight and participation in school boards. | Activities engage youth in mobilisation efforts and direct action, trying to involve youth as integral members and actors of governing bodies, such as through the creation of voluntary citizen corps to report corruption in their communities as well as organising campaigns against corrupt officials. |

Youth services approach

Activities are aimed at developing a solid theoretical and ethical framework to understand why it is important for young people to get engaged in the fight against corruption. For example, the launch of an awareness-raising campaign could help to increase understanding of the effects and costs of corruption. This

could be done by engaging parents to promote their consciousness about corruption in their communities and how it affects the lives of their children.

Additionally, platforms could be developed to get young people involved in battling corruption. Lebanon's *Youth Charter on Combating Corruption* includes promises like "we, the youth, pledge to combat corruption in public elections, whether it be by forgery, by (the) buying of votes, or by using legislative work to serve private interests".¹⁶

Another activity under 'youth services approach' could involve a two-step process that would undertake an initial survey to develop an understanding of the problem and then would utilise the results for more in-depth initiatives at later stages (i.e. 'youth development'). Countries, including Lithuania and South Korea (see side bar), have used this model, incorporating survey findings into an educational curriculum designed to increase students' understanding of corruption, ethics and integrity.

Youth development

Rather than focussing only on outreach activities and services for young people, the youth development approach looks at offering them opportunities.¹⁷ The objective is to create a stronger level of engagement with young people and encourage their personal development while fostering their commitment to fighting corruption. This can be done through formal and non-formal training initiatives which are scaled up to the rest of the population.

The TI Italy chapter has followed this approach in designing its programme 'My Choice!' (*SCELGO IO!*). The programme, developed for primary and secondary schools, is targeted at enabling students through training and learning, to make the best decisions in their professional and personal lives. The focus is on empowering students to take responsibility when it comes to respecting the rule of law, equal opportunities, ethics, justice, human rights and the environment.

Another example comes from Argentina where the national anti-corruption agency surveyed Argentine youth about their opinions of corruption (i.e. 'youth services approach') to produce a pedagogical book on the topic. The publication is included in the list of required readings for the 'Ethics and Citizen Education' class, which is compulsory for Argentine high school students.¹⁸

Youth leadership

'Youth leadership' approaches often include components of a 'youth development' approach but here activities are designed to empower young citizens to act as leaders in the anti-corruption movement and their communities by building their knowledge and skills. For example, the World Bank has developed a virtual training programme for youth to promote young people's role in setting up transparency and good governance projects in their communities. TI Lithuania, TI Lebanon and OCASA (a Colombian youth organisation against corruption) have organised similar training courses (see side bar).

This approach can also involve reviewing and reassessing whether anti-corruption learning modules are adequately used in youth leadership education curricula. In cases where there are no appropriate and/or sufficient national

Korea's Campaign on Youth Integrity

In South Korea, the TI national chapter developed a Youth Integrity Index to capture and track changes in high school students' opinions on corruption and ethics.

Since 2001, the chapter has conducted seven surveys that focus on four dimensions of youth integrity: morals and ethics, knowing right from wrong, respecting laws, and (in)tolerance of corruption. Questions include "Is being rich more important than being honest" and "Is giving a 'gift' to a teacher a good way to get better grades."

In South Korea, the survey's findings have been used by the chapter to develop materials for an anti-corruption course taught to middle and high school students in the capital of Seoul and Kyunggi province.¹⁹

In order to compare results regionally, the survey was extended in 2008 to look at youth perceptions in Bangladesh, India and Mongolia.

Anti-Corruption and Youth Partnerships in Lithuania

The TI national chapter in Lithuania has previously partnered with the Lithuanian Student Union Association to promote integrity among students throughout the country.

The chapter has also helped to conduct a training seminar on integrity and accountability for student political leaders and has been continuously hosting lectures for university and high schools students in the capital and other Lithuanian towns.

In addition, TI Lithuania has collaborated with other civil society organisations on youth projects, including the Civil Society Institute, the Centre for Modern Didactics, the RePublica Student Corporation, and Café Babel Lithuania.²⁰

Youth and corruption

Joining forces with youth platforms (global, regional and national) can help to create a broader base of support among youth for anti-corruption work and a cohesive movement that is directed at engagement and long-term change to promote integrity, transparency and accountability in society.

programmes, anti-corruption training initiatives in schools and communities should follow. This focus on building youth leadership on anti-corruption issues can also promote transparency and integrity in the charters and work of youth organisations.

Civic engagement

Where the goal is to promote civic engagement, activities are directed at intensifying the role of young people in fighting corruption and can include elements from the other approaches that have been discussed. Toolkits and joint capacity development efforts between anti-corruption and youth organisations can provide the impetus for broader collaboration to get young people involved in the political and civic scene of their countries and communities. For example, the TI national chapter in Bangladesh has called on young people to serve as volunteers in their communities to monitor whether the local and national governments are fulfilling the promises that they have made. Over 2,000 young people (aged 15-30) from 52 administrative units form part of volunteer groups that have been set up to monitor whether corruption is affecting service delivery in hospitals and health clinics, schools, universities and public administration offices.

Youth platforms, such as the European and Latin American Youth Forums as well as other regional networks, can help to link member organisations with such anti-corruption initiatives at the national and regional level. This joining of forces would assist in creating a broader base of support among youth and a cohesive movement that is directed at engagement and change.

Youth organising


The objective of this work is to build partnerships and coalitions with other actors at different levels and from various sectors, including the government, the private sector, civil society and international organisations. Activities should be structured to increase the social inclusion of young people and to ensure the more sustainable development of their societies. In this regard, the work done in Bangladesh to mobilise a youth corps of volunteers also demonstrates that citizen engagement activities can incorporate the 'youth organising' approach, where young people are involved and encouraged to take on leadership roles within the efforts.

Volunteer groups of youth in other countries have also been successful at getting young people engaged to organise themselves and lead on issues tied to the fight against corruption and their communities' development. For example, the TI contact group in Liberia, CENTAL (www.cental.org), has set up integrity clubs (iClubs) in three counties across the country that are run by local volunteer youth, among other groups. Members serve as community monitors who raise corruption concerns (e.g. over failed public services, bribery, electoral fraud, etc.) and demand redress from government. Finally, TI has been working in various countries — such as Armenia and Lebanon — with youth volunteers to monitor political campaigns and electoral contests.

5. Conclusions

Young people are an integral element for the fight against corruption to be successful. Representing the present and the future of their countries, they are the one group that can transcend today's problems to see tomorrow's solutions. They play a key role in building and rebuilding the levels of transparency, integrity, accountability and ethics that can prevent and mitigate corruption.

For young people, taking on this responsibility within the anti-corruption movement is a way to address many of the social, political, environmental and cultural concerns that they are already raising their voices against each day. Corruption is often at the root of these problems and creates barriers for young people trying to realise change locally, nationally and globally.

Bringing the anti-corruption and youth movements together in this fight is a natural next step which should be seen as an opportunity to further strengthen both causes. Yet implementing collaborative approaches will require a commitment on both sides to recognise and foster these synergies. The opportunity is there — now each must take it. 

Youth and corruption

This Working Paper was prepared by the TI Secretariat's Policy and Research Department in collaboration with the European Youth Forum. The drafting team included Alfred Bridi, Ana Carballo, Klavdija Cernilogar, Craig Fagan, Andrés Hernandez and Anna Thayenthal.

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- ² Figures for developing countries range between 50-60 per cent. See: R. Nugent, *Youth in a Global World* (Washington, DC: Population Reference Bureau, 2006). Also see, Population Reference Bureau, 2008 World Population Data Sheet (Washington, DC: Population Reference Bureau, 2008). www.prb.org/pdf08/08WPDS_Eng.pdf. It is also important to note that who is considered a 'youth' varies slightly by region and country. In the European Union, the definition includes everyone between 15 and 30 years old (<http://europa.eu>). The United Nations takes a more limited approach, capping the age at 24 years old while the European Youth Forum, the largest European platform of national youth councils and international non-governmental organisations, extends the top of the age band to 35.
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- ²⁰ For more information on TI Lithuania and its programming, see: www.transparency.lt.

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