Building Partnerships for Integrity in Fiji

Established in 2015, Civic Leaders for Clean Transactions Integrity Fiji (Integrity Fiji) is part of the Transparency International global coalition against corruption. In 2023, Integrity Fiji became a TI National Chapter in Formation. The TI Movement brings together chapters and partners operating in more than 100 countries worldwide with an international Secretariat based in Berlin, working towards a shared vision: a world free of corruption.

BACKGROUND

In Fiji, there is limited reporting of corruption by citizens due to a lack of public awareness of anti-corruption concepts and mechanisms. High levels of poverty also fuel corruption and Integrity Fiji believes that cultural norms reduce the rates of reporting. There is a need to strengthen the capacity of anti-corruption actors, including Integrity Fiji and their partners, and to build a civil society coalition against corruption to address the current weak levels of collaboration, while also raising awareness of anti-corruption organisations.

PROJECT APPROACH

With support from the TI Indo-Pacific Partnership for Strong, Transparent, Responsive & Open Networks for Good Governance (TI IPP STRONGG) 2020 - 2023, Integrity Fiji worked towards building partnerships with the public and private sectors and other civil society organisations to raise awareness of corruption risks and drive transparency and accountability across Fiji. Building on their existing work with youth groups, government bodies, academic institutions and civil society organisations, Integrity Fiji worked across sectors to build partners’ capacity to raise awareness of and address corruption risks. Integrity Fiji’s association youth group, Youths for Integrity, was supported to develop and disseminate compelling anti-corruption messages and to build a culture of transparency across Fiji. The project was implemented over a period of 3 years and 5 months, from August 2020 to December 2023.
INTEGRITY FIJI
ACHIEVEMENTS

Improving electoral and procurement processes

Fiji has not had town and city council elections to elect mayors and councillors for the last 16 years. The new coalition government that came into power in January 2023 asked for submissions from the general public. Integrity Fiji worked with the Fiji Elections Office and the Ministry of Local Government to solicit the views of the young population which came up with detailed points dealing with (a) Residence criteria for candidates, (b) The endorsement of candidates by political parties, (c) Need to provide adequate resources for education and awareness raising, (d) Engaging youth in information sessions, (e) Voter Qualification, and easier election procedures to ease voting. It was a great success for the chapter when the Fiji Elections Office announced that these points have been accepted, demonstrating the vital role of youth supporting democratic elections and the Rule of Law as part of anti-corruption strategies.

Integrity Fiji also worked successfully with the Ministry of Finance Procurement Section on improving policies on ethical procurement processes. Furthermore, the chapter worked with vendors and suppliers to the government and government ministries who handle procurements of a value that is less than $50,000 to follow ethical procurement processes. Fiji’s national anti-corruption agency FICAC has been proactively involved in all these engagements.

Engaging the public

Integrity Fiji is very active in mainstream and social media, engaging the public in anti-corruption advocacy. Given the size of Fiji and the distance between islands, engaging the public through mass media is a great way to inspire Fijians to speak out against corruption.

Integrity Fiji developed gender-sensitive anti-corruption strategies to empower the public by raising awareness about the gendered aspects of corruption and encouraging the reporting of incidents. Anti-corruption advocacy is a challenging topic for the public who see it as dry and technical. As Fiji’s population has a large percentage of young people, the chapter used contemporary dances, songs, and videos to reach out to them. Fiji, like all Pacific nations, has strong oral traditions and the expressive arts advocacy has helped to highlight corruption and the need for people to combat it.
Stronger partnerships

The partnership with the Ministry of Lands (Mining Section), Ministry of Finance (Procurement Section), Fiji National University, Fiji's anti-corruption agency FICAC and Fiji's Parliament on democracy and the Rule of Law, has enabled Integrity Fiji to collaborate successfully on anti-corruption policies, courses and advocacy.

The chapter worked with rural communities like Nadaro, church groups in the greater Nasinu area, and youth groups to run workshops on corruption prevention and developed strategies with the Citizens Constitutional Forum and the National Youth Council of Fiji on HR and anti-corruption themes. Integrity Fiji collaborated on anti-corruption initiatives with UN Agencies such as UNDP, UNODC, UNFPA and has a strong relationship with the British High Commission in Fiji.

Moreover, through funding from the IPP STRONGG programme, Integrity Fiji was able to work with the Fiji National University to offer a course on Ethics and Anti-Corruption in Oceania. With so far 1,700 enrolments, the course was upgraded to a degree level course with 20 credit points in 2023.

“I believe this is an excellent starting point to rejuvenate our values and ethics. We will encourage all Civil Servants to take up this course.”
Rashmi Aslam, Commissioner of the Fiji Independent Commission Against Corruption

This is the first time in the university's history that a course on anti-corruption is available, with students including FICAC staff, the Fiji Police Force, the Fiji Military, journalists, and other anti-corruption NGOs.

ENGAGING YOUTH IN ANTI-CORRUPTION

Integrity Fiji supports the Youths for Integrity (YFI) network, a youth association group, in disseminating anti-corruption messages and fostering transparency. The YFI gained national recognition when, in 2021, they opposed a draft bill expected to replace the Police Act of 1965. The bill aimed to allow the police to search homes without a warrant and increase their surveillance powers by imposing severe penalties for withholding passwords to electronic devices, permitting eavesdropping, the recording conversations and recruiting informants through payment incentives. After meetings with the board and staff, these young advocates adopted a strategy using Fiji’s largest mainstream media outlets, including the Fiji Times newspaper and Fiji Village online platform, to advocate against the bill. Their press release, highlighting key points against the bill, was also submitted to the government committee handling public responses. In March 2021, former prime minister Bainimarama announced the withdrawal of the bill, a move credited to efforts by civil society organisations like Integrity Fiji. This was particularly important considering the increased closing of civic and democratic space observed in the region.