

# The Role of Parliamentarians in Fighting Corruption

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In countries where corruption is widespread and entrenched, corruption will have major economic, political and social costs and consequences.

## Economic Consequences

Corruption impedes economic development by:

- increasing the costs of building public projects and providing public services
- distorting the allocation of public funds toward capital-intensive projects and away from health, education and social services
- reducing the government's tax base and therefore the revenues available for development and welfare
- undermining the efficient operation of markets and rewarding companies which cannot compete on value and price
- discouraging foreign direct investment (FDI) because corruption increases financial uncertainty

## Social Consequences

Corruption has major negative consequences for social cohesion, stability and mobility by:

- perpetuating and intensifying poverty because corruption rewards the rich and penalizes the poor thereby increasing inequality
- increasing personal insecurity and limiting the opportunities for the poor to escape from poverty and perpetuating social exclusion
- depriving the poor of their legal rights and denying them essential public services and benefits
- weakening trust between communities and encouraging the development of patron-client relationships

## Political Consequences

Corruption has a major impact on the workings of the political system and the development of democracy by:

- damaging the legitimacy of the political system and undermining public trust in politicians and political institutions
- discouraging political participation and increasing the sense of powerlessness among the poorest sections of society
- substituting personal gain for beliefs and principle and encouraging people to enter politics for the wrong reasons
- distorting the conduct and results of elections and reducing political competition
- ensuring that policymaking is responsive to the interests of the rich and not to the needs of the wider society
- obstructing and perverting the making of laws and the enforcement of government decisions



## Fighting Corruption in South East Europe

In order to fight corruption you need some understanding of its volume and seriousness in a country or region. But estimating the amount of corruption is extremely difficult and one alternative is to rely on perceptions of corruption. The best known tool is Transparency International's Corruption Perception Index (CPI). This approach has many weaknesses but is useful for giving broad indications of how countries and regions compare.

Where corruption is deeply embedded, as in the case of much of Africa and in conflict zones, the probability of success in fighting corruption is very low.

The CPI in 2007 ranks 180 countries and most of the countries in South East Europe score in the top half of the table. This suggests that, although corruption may be a significant problem in some of these countries, it is not out of control.

Given the negative impacts of corruption, it is vitally important for all branches of government to contribute to the fight against corruption and parliaments are well placed to take a lead.

# What can Parliamentarians do to help the fight against corruption?

What should their focus be?

Where should they start?

There are four key steps to fight corruption from a sound foundation:

## Improving Communications

Corruption is a politically sensitive, potentially embarrassing, topic and people often fail to discuss it in public arenas. But corruption thrives on secrecy and a lack of political and public awareness.

As the law-makers charged with oversight of government operations, parliamentarians ought to be leading the public debate.

Parliamentarians should share views, experiences and perceptions on corruption with:

- other parliamentarians
- the public in general, especially those who elect them
- professional groups, such as lawyers and accountants
- state bodies with responsibility for investigating and preventing corruption
- the media

Open debate about corruption will reduce misunderstandings and misperceptions based on different values and experiences and help raise the political and public profile of the problem.

## Developing Knowledge & Networks

Full and open debate of corruption will raise awareness of the issue but, to be effective in fighting corruption, the debate must be based on knowledge and experience.

Uninformed debate can degenerate into rhetoric and slogans. To overcome corruption you need to:

- understand its causes and consequences and identify where its impact is most damaging
- learn the methods by which it can be controlled

Parliamentarians should therefore:

- attend workshops and seminars on corruption with experts and practitioners
- establish co-operation and networks with other parliamentarians regionally and globally to share experience and best practice
- develop a knowledge bank of resources, approaches and lessons about the most effective ways of fighting corruption

## Performance Assessment

To build on the knowledge base, you need to assess the adequacy and effectiveness of current laws, rules, procedures and institutions for fighting corruption.

If parliamentarians hope to lead the anti-corruption fight, they must:

- ensure that they review and improve regulations and procedures governing parliamentary and public ethics, the methods of funding election campaigns and introduce or reappraise codes of conduct and financial declarations
- assess their current procedures and structures for holding the government to account. This should include an examination of the working of financial audit and accountability mechanisms such as Public Accounts Committees.
  - consider whether parliamentarians need more or different technical support and resources to develop their capacity to discharge these key responsibilities of scrutiny and oversight
- review the ways in which they elicit and represent voters' views on corruption with a view to building public confidence in the political system

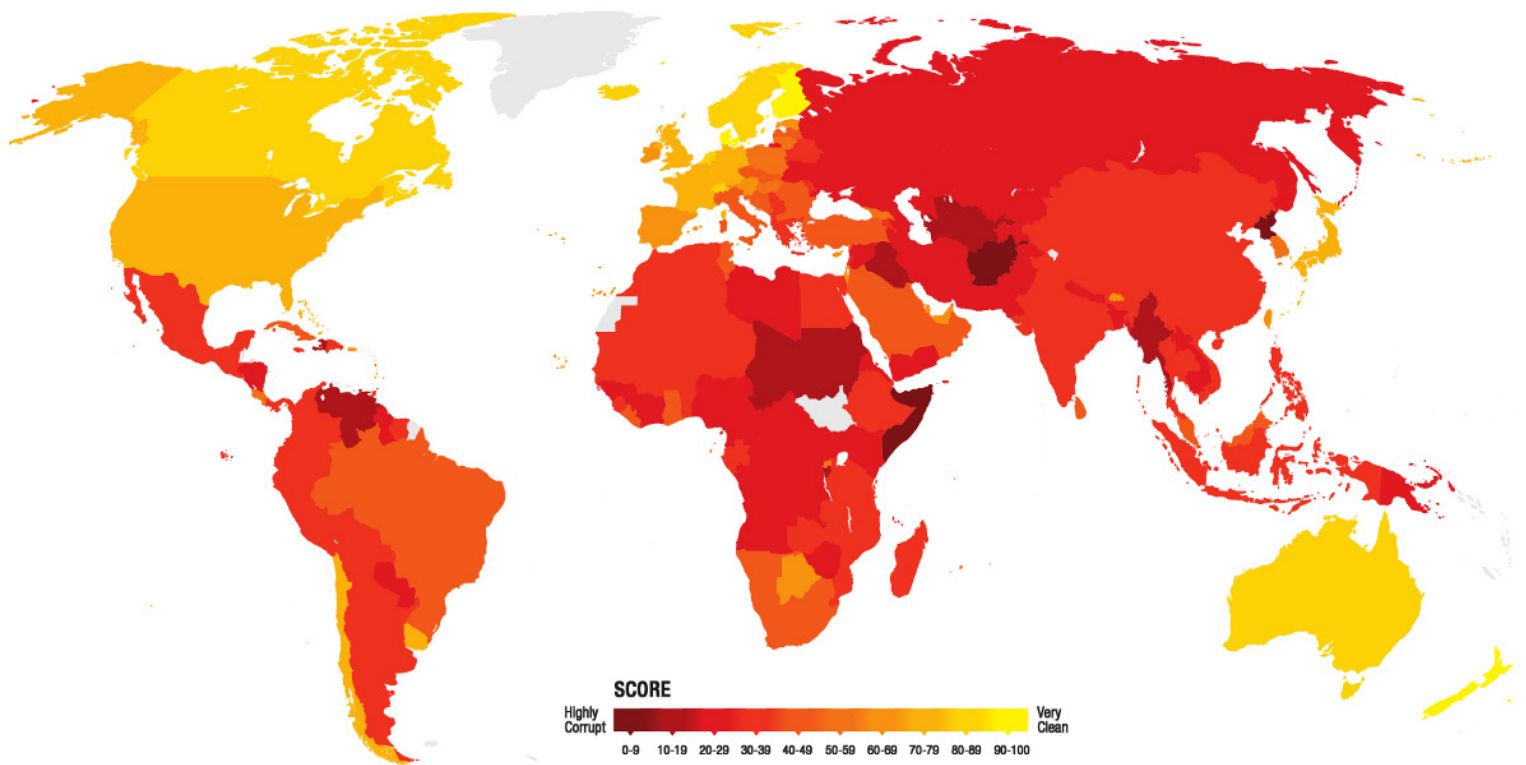
## Prioritisation & Implementation

The cancer of corruption reaches many parts of political, economic and social life but combating it requires a strategy which recognizes limited resources, time and experience. 'Zero tolerance' of corruption is a useful way of expressing commitment but it does not constitute an anti-corruption strategy.

Public debate, knowledge development and performance assessment will, together, enable parliamentarians to build an effective anti-corruption strategy which is:

- focused on a limited number of priority areas where the consequences of corruption are the most serious
- sequenced to ensure a logical and progressive implementation
  - coordinated with regional and international best practice and requirements
- complementary with, rather than in competition or conflict with, anti-corruption approaches used by other branches of government

# The Corruption Perception Index 2012



## The Goal

All countries find it difficult to fight corruption. But, if the approach recommended here is followed, there is a much better chance that:

- workable and effective anti-corruption legislation is enacted
- improvements in executive oversight procedures will ensure greater transparency and accountability
- parliamentary and public ethics regulations will be fit for purpose and more effectively implemented

Corruption will never be eradicated but it can and must be controlled.

Where the political will exists to fight corruption real progress is possible.