



Speeding up the progress of ending government corruption

Patricia Moreira of Transparency International discusses how citizen participation and technology are accelerating anti-corruption efforts.

Marking the 25th anniversary of its foundation, Transparency International is a global leader in the fight against corruption. One of the Berlin-based organization's key anti-corruption tools is the Global Corruption Barometer, a survey that solicits public opinion from tens of thousands of citizens across the world. Respondents are asked a variety of questions related to their views on and first-hand experiences of corruption, as well as asking people how well or badly they think their government has done at stopping corruption. The Barometer provides a sobering assessment on the views of citizens about how their governments are acting as stewards of their finances and wellbeing.

To gain a clear understanding of the work that the organization is doing, we met with Patricia Moreira, Managing Director of Transparency International. She spoke to us about the potential causes for the laggard pace of change in many countries, the commonalities for highly performing nations, and how new technologies can help shed light on corrupt behavior.

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[Patricia Moreira, Transparency International](#)

REFINITIV: What are some of the impacts of corruption that people may not be aware of? How is it not simply a victimless crime, and what are some of the ways that it manifests itself?

PATRICIA MOREIRA: Unfortunately, corruption is a global phenomenon, and its effects go beyond what people usually imagine. This is because corruption has a very lasting impact on almost all dimensions of people's daily lives. People sometimes don't understand that corruption can cost people their freedom, their health, their money and sometimes even their lives.

Corruption mostly affects the most vulnerable people in communities and countries. One way corruption works is that people from the public sector who engage in corrupt behavior use scarce public resources to prioritize their own high-profile projects (such as building power plants or pipelines and refineries), instead of giving priority to more urgent infrastructure projects that would benefit people and communities (such as schools, hospitals and roads). Basically, there is a direct connection between corruption and access to education, to health services and to mobility.

Corruption is often discussed only at a technical level, when actually corruption is something that happens daily and affects the lives of millions of people around the world. Corruption significantly contributes to the already high levels of inequality that we see on a global scale. If you look at some of the countries that are most affected by corruption, the gap is widening between the richest ones and the poorest.

From an economic perspective, we usually refer to petty corruption and grand corruption. It is important to understand what each concept means, but also how they connect to each other. Petty corruption is what we talk about when discussing access to basic services such as health, education, water, electricity and security. This is the everyday abuse of power by low and mid-level public officials in their interactions with ordinary citizens. For example, families find themselves paying for access to 'free' government services such as education.

Grand corruption takes place in high levels of government. This kind of corruption distorts national policies, interrupts the way that states are run, and enables leaders from these countries to benefit at the expense of the public. Similar to petty corruption, the impact falls on the daily lives of individuals, usually the most vulnerable.

For us to really capture the nature and impact of corruption, it's important that we understand that it relates very much to the rule of law and to democratic processes and institutions. Corrupt behavior undermines people's trust in government, in institutions and in their countries' leadership. This creates a vicious circle that is very difficult to break because it takes a lot longer to restore trust and appropriate behaviors under which people thrive. It makes it an even more challenging endeavor for societies, governments and the global community as a whole to ensure that we are setting the basis for fairer, more just societies in the future.

REFINITIV: Given some of the lack of awareness on the impacts of corruption, in what ways can civil society organizations and the media assist in anti-corruption efforts?

MOREIRA: Both have a significant role in supporting anti-corruption efforts. Civil society organizations, such as Transparency International, that have joined in this global fight against corruption conduct research to understand what is happening on the ground and advocate for change. We try to facilitate access for citizens at the local level to speak out and denounce corrupt behavior. In certain instances, we also conduct investigations of cases at different scales – these could be petty corruption cases but also grand corruption where a number of governments and countries are involved.

Overall, it is very important that as civil society we work with this global perspective. Civil society organizations are very much aware of the need for our voices to be heard. We really have to bring the stories to the table - stories about individual people, or of a population as a whole, or from different communities and countries - where the effect of corrupt behavior can be seen and sometimes even measured. Our challenge, and this is where the work of civil society and the media comes closer together, is how we can communicate that to the general public.

Corruption is often hidden from view and not so visible in the public arena. This is where the media can play a significant role. It's very interesting to see greater collaboration between the media and civil society, as well as the growth of investigative journalism with the goal of making corruption more visible and more a part of the public conversation. Our experience tells us that only if we manage to make it an everyday issue will we be able to get the political will and commitment to start working on prevention and enforcement to fight corruption.

REFINITIV: One of the things that Transparency International does is releases its annual Corruption Perceptions Index, which is a really fascinating study. Looking at the 2017 version, it appears that the majority of countries are making little to no progress in ending corruption. The Index states that two-thirds of countries have scores below 50 on a scale of 100. That being the case, to what do you attribute the slow progress being made by governments in ending corruption?

MOREIRA: I think this is precisely the message we were trying to send across. This slow progress is due to the fact that corruption is by its nature a complex phenomenon that involves a number of different actors and factors. To be able to effectively fight corruption, we need the engagement of different actors coming from the public sector, the private sector and from civil society. We need prevention but also enforcement. The whole chain of processes that need to take place to effectively fight corruption is a complex one and requires time.

For us to effectively fight corruption, we need to have the right laws. This usually requires time because legislative changes require their own process. Even more importantly, the fight against corruption requires a sustained effort. I mentioned earlier the need for political will and commitment from the different agents involved - the public sector, the private sector and civil society. Each one of them plays a role. Sometimes there are initiatives that are quite significant, but to make them happen you need critical mass and achieving that critical mass is difficult. The way politics and changes in government evolve in different countries often doesn't facilitate the process of ensuring commitments to fight corruption are made, and the political will is stable through time to actually enable these changes to happen.

REFINITIV: On the flip side of that, you've got some countries that are performing very well in the Index, with scores in the high 80s-90s. What attributes do you find that the highest performing countries have in common?

MOREIRA: In our experience, there isn't really one magic formula or single solution to be effective against corruption. There are no examples of a very specific piece of legislation or initiative that took place in a given country that on its own made change possible.

What we do however find in common is that the countries where the Index provides the best results are countries that have a free space for civil society engagement. This goes together with freedom of the press and freedom of association. High-performing countries are those where the judiciary system is strong, independent, makes its own decisions and drives them through to their ultimate consequences. They have strong institutions and strong governance frameworks. Those

are common characteristics in high-performing countries, but we think that even these countries face challenges because corruption is a global phenomenon.

For corruption to exist, it requires the involvement of different players. It is not just a local phenomenon. While corruption can occur at a local level, it is often an international phenomenon through the global financial system. No country is safe from corruption. It is very important that the countries at the top of the Index not only maintain but strengthen all their systems and remain vigilant. This allows them to lead other countries by example so that we have models in the world to join forces against corruption.

REFINITIV: What impacts do new technology such as smartphones, social media and the ability for people to communicate widely have on increasing transparency and combating corruption?

MOREIRA: Everything happens in real time now, and everything is known. It can be said that secrets aren't really possible anymore. I think technology has played a very important role in bringing us to this point. There's more awareness about corrupt behavior worldwide, and technology has contributed a lot to that awareness.

Technology has also been a very strong ally of citizenship by bringing civic participation to a different level. Also, in terms of data and information availability, it plays a tremendous role. For instance, we were talking earlier about investigative journalism. A lot of work has been made possible in the last couple of years in terms of massive leaks of information that have brought to light a lot of corrupt behavior. This is enabled by technology.

That's something to bear in mind at the global level in the fight against corruption. On the individual level, smartphones and social media have strengthened citizenship participation and that is very important. From our own work we see how such technology is being used to fight corruption. For instance, we

are using technology to enable health users to monitor local health centers. By using radio and mobile phones and internet applications, they can follow up on corruption scandals related to the healthcare system.

In other instances, some countries have developed electronic tools and platforms to work on procurement processes. This is very important because procurement is an area where you find a lot of corrupt behavior happening because these are huge multimillion-dollar projects and investments from the government side that no one used to know anything about. In a number of countries, because they have been able to develop the right tools, these procurement processes are now made public and available online. Therefore, there's a lot more follow up on all this.

There are a number of examples worldwide where we can really see technology contributing to the development of the fight against corruption. But because we're talking about corruption, I need to make a comment on the other side of technology development that could potentially negatively affect the fight against corruption.

Technology development is usually very good, but it also has a dark side. We see some of this already and believe that on a global scale there is some concern - for instance, when you talk about the financial sector, the movement of financial flows and the use of blockchains, cryptocurrencies and technologies related to how money moves from one place to the other. We are concerned that in some cases, technology might allow financial flows to take place without identifying who is behind the monetary movements. It's a word of caution because it is important to keep it in mind.

We know these technological developments will continue. In the fight against corruption, we are looking into specific areas to see which preventive measures and improvements are possible from a technological perspective, to ensure that these things do not go the wrong way.

Patricia Moreira
Transparency International

Patricia became Managing Director of the International Secretariat of Transparency International in October 2017. Before joining Transparency International, she spent 13 years working at Ayuda en Acción, a Spanish aid organisation, where she was chief executive office from 2009. The focus at Ayuda en Accion was to promote social impact and innovation in a global environment. Patricia lead a team of 100 people at the headquarters with a further 300 in the field in 20 countries. Prior to that, Patricia worked as an international management consultant for 10 years specialising in technology, innovation and impact. She holds an MBA from INSEAD, France and a BA in Economics from the University of California, Los Angeles, and has done PhD research in Social Entrepreneurship at ICADE University in Madrid.