



# Empowering Citizens to Fight Corruption

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## Abstract:

*There are two main approaches to fighting corruption: the top-down approach and the bottom-up approach. The top-down approach has to do with developing and naturalizing new rules, institutions, and norms that target the “public administrative graft.” The primary weakness of this approach, however, is that the very institutions accused of corruption are responsible for enacting change. The key reasons that citizens opt not to participate in anti-corruption movements are fear of reprisal and uncertainty of how to engage. Very few people file official complaints because they are either afraid of being punished or think they will be ignored. International solidarity and public support are crucial in protecting those who take a stand against corruption. Oppressors have strategic goals in using repression, however repression can also backfire on the oppressors and provide fuel to strengthen an anti-corruption campaign. There can be no easy answer to such a question and, at the same time, many of the comments posted in this dialogue reflect part of the answer. Ultimately, what truly matters is not necessarily the speed at which reforms /change occur, but to maintain a sense of momentum and direction in that journey. Citizens who are empowered and engaged can be the best allies in such a journey to fight corruption. It is hope that new generation would build healthy environment but it is our duty to feed root of the journey.*

## 1. Introduction

It's not too late to add your comments to this dialogue on **Empowering Citizens to Fight Corruption**. This dialogue explored how campaigns have empowered and mobilized citizens to counter corruption in their communities. Citizens working together are gaining powerful results. This is a space to learn about and share experiences in these kinds of campaigns as well as share your ideas, resources, and stories.

Though not widely known, over the past 10 years there has been a grass-roots, bottom-up "eruption against corruption" to borrow a popular slogan from the Fifth Pillar movement in India. Citizens can and are fighting to curb corruption in their communities and countries. They are organizing and strategically using nonviolent actions such as: civil disobedience; petitions; vigils; marches; sit-ins; Right to Information laws, demanding information; monitoring/auditing of authorities, budgets, spending and services; social networking and blogging; coordinated low-risk mass actions; creation of parallel or independent institutions; social and economic empowerment initiatives; street theatre; songs; humor; and public pledges.

## 2. Why is it important to empower citizens to fight corruption?

It is ordinary citizens who bear the brunt of corruption, have direct experience of it, and suffer from it. However, they also have power and can use it to fight corruption. There are two main approaches to fighting corruption: the top-down approach and the bottom-up approach. The top-down approach has to do with developing and naturalizing new rules, institutions, and norms that target the “public administrative graft.” The primary weakness of this approach, however, is that the very institutions

accused of corruption are responsible for enacting change. Those benefiting from corruption are much less likely to end it than those suffering from corruption. That is why this dialogue emphasizes the importance of the bottom-up, or grassroots, approach, which requires the mobilization of ordinary citizens. A large, united public outcry provides the force of change that reformed infrastructure. There are multiple ways in which civilians can apply pressure to the higher-ups. The main way to do this is by exerting their civic power and utilizing civil resistance and nonviolent tactics.

A key part of the process of empowerment is education. Citizens who are better informed of the corruption within their political systems are able to fight corruption more effectively as well as develop their own strategies to do so. It is also extremely important to educate people about their rights, especially those who have limited access to such information, such as those living in remoteness and poverty. These groups are easier to take advantage of, and are therefore common targets of corruption.

### **3. How have citizens organized, mobilized, and impacted corruption?**

It is very important to educate and mobilize youth in the fight against corruption. They are more likely to become actively involved and have the most at stake. There are many successful examples of both youth and adults mobilized against corruption around the world. This dialogue includes an extensive list of citizen-lead campaigns against corruption and the tactics utilized during these campaigns.

Nonviolent tactics such as citizen report cards, information booths, information gathering, etc. are important because they can mobilize the dynamics of civil resistance by strengthening citizen participation, disrupting systems of corruption, weakening sources of support and control for corrupt office holders, and winning people over to the civic campaign. Both legal action and media attention are effective, especially when combined. Legal action was taken prior to the abuse to deter its occurrence, however legal action can also be taken after the abuse has already occurred. Transparency International has set up Advocacy and Legal Advice Centers around the world where victims of corruption can seek legal help.

### **4. What are the challenges and risks faced by civic initiatives?**

While people tend to think of corruption as starting at the top and trickling down through the system, they must be aware that it really all starts with the small bribe they pay to a government employee. The focus is often on “big corruption”, but this is supported by smaller forms of corruption. The key reasons that citizens opt not to participate in anti-corruption movements are fear of reprisal and uncertainty of how to engage. Very few people file official complaints because they are either afraid of being punished or think they will be ignored. International solidarity and public support are crucial in protecting those who take a stand against corruption. Oppressors have strategic goals in using repression, however repression can also backfire on the oppressors and provide fuel to strengthen an anti-corruption campaign.

Many people express feelings of hopelessness, especially since many NGOs that are supposed to help suffer from internal corruption themselves. These feelings of skepticism and helplessness are the anti-corruption movement’s greatest obstacles. However, this only emphasizes the importance of taking a stand. The greater the number of people who speak up, the more likely it is that change will occur. Finding allies is crucial, though-- no single person can take on corruption alone. It helps to have some sort of political ally, such as a politician who will champion the cause and can work in an arena that others may find difficult to access.

### **5. Some additional challenges in the fight against corruption are as follows**

- It is often difficult to locate and target the root of the problem, the “masterminds” behind the corruption. Often small-time crimes perpetrated by minor officials are targeted while the leaders remain untouched.
- Defective laws are an obstacle, and may provide impunity for those responsible for corruption.
- Corrupt officials may work together to hide the extent to which they have abused their station. The real amount of money misallocated may never be discovered.
- Often the successful completion of projects are announced when in reality the projects have been stalled--this is another form of corruption, as the money meant for these projects is often misallocated by corrupt officials.

### **6. Are there international dimensions to civic campaigns?**

An example of a civic campaign with international dimensions is the “Ask Your Government” campaign, which gathers governmental budget information from countries and gives citizens access to this information. By tracking how public funds are used, citizens and organizations can spot corruption. This is a great way to hold the government accountable and involve more people with the anti-corruption campaign. New Tactics hosted a separate dialogue on this and has published related tactics.

The United Nations has a Convention Against Corruption (UNCAC). While this is not a civic campaign, it certainly lends international authority to more local efforts.

Use of the Internet is another way in which campaigns can go international. For example, Avaaz.org created an online petition to draw attention to the Ficha Limpa campaign, It is important to bear in mind, though, that while online tools are useful in promotion and sharing information, projects that engage with established civil society groups are more likely to succeed in the long run.

### **7. What is the role of social networking and digital technologies?**

Social media eliminates several obstacles faced in the fight against corruption and has many unique advantages. Social media allows anyone to speak up about his or her concerns and access information on corruption. Attention can be raised using blogs, petitions, video, etc., all of which can be anonymous, although in today’s day and age it is much easier to trace uploaded videos, posts, etc. The tactical dialogue “Staying Safe: Security Resources for Human Rights Defenders” suggests one way to deal with this problem. Some of the key benefits of social media are that it disrupts systems of corruption, strengthens citizen participation, strengthens campaign organization and capacity, wins people over, and weakens sources of support and control for unaccountable and corrupt power holders.

### **8. What is civic power and how does it work?**

Have you wondered what exactly are civic power and civil resistance, and how is it that citizens can be a force to hold power holders accountable, make demands and get results, including curbing corruption? Here is a summary of the core concepts.

**8.1 CIVIC POWER:** pressure that comes from significant numbers of people organized together. It’s also called people power. It’s the capacity to make your collective voice heard. This power isn’t given to people by powerholders at the top. It originates from citizens and the civic realm.

**8.2 CIVIL RESISTANCE:** the expression of civic power through the use of nonviolent strategies and tactics. It’s the methodology of how to make your collective voice heard and exert pressure to curb corruption and win your rights. It’s also called nonviolent struggle.

**8.3 NONVIOLENT TACTICS:** the methods of civil resistance. Scholars have identified over 200 tactics, and most campaigns and movements create new ones. Civic anti-corruption initiatives engage in varieties of: no cooperation

- civil disobedience
- low-risk mass actions
- displays of symbols
- street theatre and stunts
- songs and poetry
- humor
- citizen “report cards” for public services
- civic “report cards” for political candidates
- monitoring of officials, institutions, budgets, spending and public services
- social networking technologies (e.g., Facebook organizing, blogging)
- education and training
- social and economic empowerment initiatives
- youth recreation
- creation of parallel institutions
- anti-corruption pledges; public awards
- protests, petitions, vigils, marches, sit-ins
- nonviolent blockades
- nonviolent accompaniment.

**8.4 DYNAMICS OF CIVIL RESISTANCE:** civic power is wielded through the sustained, strategic application of a variety of nonviolent tactics that are designed to:

**8.5 STRENGTHEN** citizen participation and campaign organization and capacity;

**8.6 DISRUPT** systems of corruption, including dishonest relationships, illicit practices and the status. What this means is that civic anti-corruption campaigns and movements do not achieve goals and objectives because power holders and authorities want to be nice or magnanimous to the people; it’s because they create pressure that cannot be ignored and they disrupt corrupt systems and relationships. Introduced in local level institutions of public service delivery, the IP has built-in process of application and monitoring. The IP involves a written but voluntary commitment signed by stakeholders – public representatives, officials and other service providers, informal groups of people as service recipients and citizens’ committees - where all parties make a pledge to work together and help each other to:

- prevent and control abuse of power for private gain;
- eliminate all forms of unauthorized payments, including bribery for services rendered;
- ensure and promote participation of service recipients in decisions that affect the content and quality of services provided;
- ensure transparency in public contracts and in implementing work under such contracts; and
- community/service recipients and due importance will be given to their needs and
- Create conducive conditions for better coordination among all departments/offices within the jurisdiction and ensure all offices, both government and non-government are run with efficiency and integrity without any partisan political bias;

- Regularly organize Face the Public programs to monitor and review the progress of implementation of the IP and to ensure their accountability.
- Ensure that the employees shall not take part in any bidding process for procurement for the institution which may benefit them directly or indirectly or in any other form. The employees will not also play the role of mediator in any part of the procurement process. In giving services to its clients, the employees shall not take any financial or any other benefits or resort to corrupt practices. The authority will take all measures to prevent abuse of power in these processes.

## 9. Suggestions

There can be no easy answer to such a question and, at the same time, many of the comments posted in this dialogue reflect part of the answer. As the official Chapter of Transparency International in Lebanon, here are some of the tactics we have been using:

- 1: Raising awareness:** organizing conferences and training workshops (in major cities and peripheries of the country) to raise the public's understanding on issues such as electoral reform, Access to Information, Whistle Blower Protection, Anti Corruption Commissions, Corporate Governance etc...
- 2: Collective Action:** creating coalitions which include all relevant stakeholders (public sector, private sector, civil society, academics, youth)
- 3: Developing new laws/recommendations and advocating for them:** through the collective action initiatives mentioned above, ensure that you have the appropriate skill sets on board to develop new laws and advocate for their enactment.

## 10. Conclusion

Ultimately, what truly matters is not necessarily the speed at which reforms /change occur, but to maintain a sense of momentum and direction in that journey. Citizens who are empowered and engaged can be the best allies in such a journey

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