



# **SPEAKING UP LOCALLY, DRIVING CHANGE GLOBALLY**

**True stories of tackling corruption to build  
a sustainable future**

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**Transparency International is a global movement with one vision: a world in which government, business, civil society and the daily lives of people are free of corruption. With more than 100 chapters worldwide and an international secretariat in Berlin, we are leading the fight against corruption to turn this vision into reality.**

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## **Speaking up locally, driving change globally**

True stories of tackling corruption to build a sustainable future

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Every effort has been made to verify the accuracy of the information contained in this report. All information was believed to be correct as of July 2021. Nevertheless, Transparency International cannot accept responsibility for the consequences of its use for other purposes or in other contexts.

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

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<b>Channelling people's power to beat corruption</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>Rooting out corruption in Nepal</b>	<b>30</b>
<b>A cornerstone of sustainable development</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>Endnotes</b>	<b>32</b>
<b>Delivering justice in Zimbabwe's courts</b>	<b>8</b>		
<b>Speaking up to defend against COVID-19</b>	<b>10</b>		
<b>Cleaning up corruption on Lebanon's longest river</b>	<b>12</b>		
<b>Power for Nigeria's People</b>	<b>14</b>		
<b>Defending land and lives in Peru</b>	<b>16</b>		
<b>Building a whistleblowing culture in Palestine</b>	<b>18</b>		
<b>A turning point for patients in Ghana?</b>	<b>20</b>		
<b>Ensuring COVID-19 relief reaches Sri Lanka's people</b>	<b>22</b>		
<b>Defending land rights in Papua New Guinea</b>	<b>24</b>		
<b>Defying judicial corruption in Guatemala</b>	<b>26</b>		
<b>Challenging vote buying by Serb politicians</b>	<b>29</b>		

# CHANNELLING PEOPLE'S POWER TO BEAT CORRUPTION

With the right support, people around the world are tackling corruption in their own lives –  
and on a much wider scale

When 16-year-old Abdul Rahmana Shakina collapsed in 2017, her parents rushed her to northern Ghana's main hospital. Diagnosed with acute anaemia, Shakina needed an urgent blood transfusion – a treatment supposed to be free. But first, doctors demanded a bribe.<sup>1</sup>

With little in their pockets, Shakina's parents begged for the transfusion, promising to return the next day to pay. But the doctors refused for 12 hours. When they finally gave Shakina the blood and oxygen she needed, it was too late. During the procedure, she died.

Every day across the world, corruption affects millions of ordinary people like Shakina's family. No country is free from it. Lives are held back when embezzlement prevents funds from reaching schools, or when resources for environmental protection and sustainable livelihoods are siphoned off; when public contracts are awarded to well-connected but unqualified companies, or when people must pay to file a police complaint – with those least able to pay suffering most.

## A shared problem across individual lives

Standing up to corruption can be difficult. It can be hard to find out what to do, and powerful forces can block the way. But despite seemingly overwhelming obstacles, individual people can tackle corruption – with the right support and advice.

In more than 60 countries, Transparency International's Advocacy and Legal Advice Centres (ALACs) are trusted partners for people wanting to speak up. We support victims and witnesses of corruption, and anyone

wanting to challenge it, enabling them to make their voices heard, while minimising the risk of retaliation. Drawing on their cases, we also challenge systemic corruption and its causes.

Clients include whistleblowers, journalists, businesspeople, public servants and ordinary people from across society. Their stories range from petty corruption like bribery, to wasteful resource management, shady business deals and undue influence in decision-making.

Despite their best efforts, people often arrive feeling helpless and that the system allows impunity for wrongdoing. ALACs give them hope.

## Equipping people to fight corruption

Our experts provide free, confidential advice and legal assistance to equip people with the knowledge and tools to tackle corruption. We help them navigate complex reporting channels, access public information, submit official complaints, gain media support and take cases to court.

Since 2003, ALAC lawyers, researchers, activists and volunteers have provided support to more than 270,000 people. Their successes have fuelled the network's expansion from Europe to Africa, Asia and the Pacific, Central Asia, Latin America and the Middle East – showing that reporting corruption is one of the most effective ways for people to assert their rights and demand accountability from those in power.

By helping people safely find a way to speak up, ALACs make a long-term difference in the way societies work, building intolerance for corrupt acts and making it

easier for others to come forward. In Ghana, after complaints of bribery and extortion at the hospital where Shakina died, an ALAC investigation prompted a national debate and official enquiries, deterring medical staff across the country from demanding bribes.

## Personal stories that drive change

Drawing on true stories like this from 12 countries, this report shows how people can break the cycle of corruption by working with ALACs in a wide range of contexts. It illustrates that change is possible when people speak up, even when the odds seem stacked against them. From Peru to Papua New Guinea, these stories are about standing up for individual people's rights – in cases that can become powerful catalysts for wider change.

The ALACs' work is deeply rooted in the belief that ordinary people can stop corruption. And around the world, women and men agree. Transparency International's *Global Corruption Barometer* surveys<sup>2</sup> show that most people believe that they, as individuals, can make a difference in the fight against corruption.

## Adding up to global impact

The rich range of testimonies and experiences recounted to our staff reveals how corruption works in practice, helping us identify wider solutions that address real problems in everyday life.

As well as helping individuals, communities and organisations to pursue their corruption-related complaints, the reports received by ALACs help inform our advocacy campaigns to make sure that our policy recommendations are grounded in real experience. They give us insight into how corruption works in practice, so that we can keep working on relevant solutions to fight it and address its root causes.

This way, individual cases feed into worldwide impact. Preventing corruption is now recognised as pivotal to delivering the UN Sustainable Development Goals<sup>3</sup> (SDGs) – the globally agreed targets for a peaceful, equitable future for everyone. Like the work of ALACs, the SDGs reflect universal priorities in people's daily lives, from quality education and health care, to environmental protection and decent jobs. This means that every time someone speaks up against corruption, they're also taking a crucial step towards achieving the SDGs – as the stories in this report show.

By challenging a judge whose corrupt rulings support local extortionist gangs, for example, a Guatemalan businessman is promoting justice. And a community in Nigeria that reported bribery and price hiking by their electricity supplier is supporting progress towards affordable energy for all.

Stories like these from ALACs around the world highlight people's personal experience of corruption. But each has a ripple effect, driving progress towards the fair, transparent societies the SDGs envisage.



# A CORNERSTONE OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

When people challenge corruption in their daily lives, they play a vital role in helping achieve the Sustainable Development Goals

Like many policy frameworks, the UN Sustainable Development Goals<sup>4</sup> (SDGs) can sound remote from ordinary people's lives. An urgent call to action for all countries, the 17 goals are designed to deliver peace and prosperity for people and the planet. Yet daily life is exactly what they're all about – from having enough to eat, to getting quality education and medical care, to earning a decent living.

But every day around the world, corruption is a clear barrier to this progress. This makes fighting the corruption that people encounter as they try to live, work and learn crucial to realising the SDGs.

## A cross-cutting issue

From ending poverty to tackling climate change, corruption is a cross-cutting issue. Left unchecked, it seriously undermines efforts to achieve the goals that world leaders have committed to and that are crucial for a sustainable future. Where corruption exists in hospitals, progress towards targets on health care will be limited. Where corruption affects schools, targets on education are unlikely to be realised. Where corruption undermines service delivery, goals on poverty eradication, clean water and affordable energy will be almost impossible to achieve.

But when people are able to tackle the corruption they encounter, they can create immediate, positive progress towards delivering the SDGs – as the stories in this report show.

## Small steps towards big goals

In Sri Lanka, for example, villagers contacted the Advocacy and Legal Advice Centre (ALAC) after local officials failed to deliver relief funding during the COVID-19 pandemic, depriving them of much-needed income. Supported to contact the higher authorities, they soon received the benefits they were entitled to, helping prevent hunger and poverty during lockdown.

In Palestine, a whistleblower who exposed potential fraud in his work at a government ministry was arrested and forced to resign, but the local ALAC helped him publicly challenge his treatment. The case put pressure on the government to adopt the country's first whistleblower protection system in 2019 – encouraging more people to report wrongdoing in future.

## Targeting corruption for SDG delivery

Stories like these, and many others from ALACs around the world, show the positive impact tackling corruption has on progress towards the SDGs. By uncovering embezzlement in a Nepali school, a determined headmaster is helping deliver quality education for all. By highlighting the corruption that allows property owners to illegally pollute Lebanon's longest river, people are protecting their health and the environment.



photo: Vlad Karavaev / Shutterstock.com

### **Prioritising governance to achieve the SDGs**

Preventing corruption is now recognised as so crucial to achieving sustainable development that SDG 16 – Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions – includes targets to substantially reduce corruption and bribery, and to develop effective, accountable and transparent institutions. These targets are seen as a cornerstone of achieving all the other SDGs. Without headway towards just, inclusive societies, any progress towards the SDGs is likely to be fragmentary and short-lived.

In 2020, following recommendations from Transparency International, the UN proposed that progress towards SDG 16 be reviewed annually,<sup>5</sup> rather than every four years. This prioritises governance issues such as corruption, and provides a vital feedback channel for people around the world to identify and overcome instances where corruption is frustrating delivery of the SDGs.

### **From daily life to global change**

Every time someone speaks out against a case of corruption, this creates a snowball effect. People's voices add up to take change from a local level to a global one – so that the young Zimbabwean woman who overcame bribery aimed at blocking her court case for domestic abuse was promoting gender equality and access to justice as global norms. A woman in Papua New Guinea who reported land court officials for demanding illegal payments in a family dispute was standing up for decent work and economic growth. And villagers who reported a candidate from Serbia's ruling party for seemingly trying to buy their votes with the promise of a newly paved road<sup>6</sup> were promoting justice and strong institutions.

Fighting corruption is not an end in itself. It is an essential means of delivering sustainable development for all and building fairer societies in which no one is left behind. By speaking up against corruption when they encounter it, with support from ALACs around the world, people are helping achieve the SDGs – global goals that are firmly rooted in everyone's daily lives.

# TRUE STORIES OF PEOPLE SPEAKING UP AGAINST CORRUPTION

## SERBIA

A community exposes a politician's apparent attempt to buy their votes



## ITALY

A whistleblower speaks up against alleged misconduct with implications for global public health



## GUATEMALA

A businessman challenges corrupt legal rulings that favour extortionist gangs



## GHANA

Patients defy the culture of bribery for treatment in Ghana's health system



## PERU

Indigenous communities challenge the illegal loss of their forests to agribusiness



## NIGERIA

A businesswoman stands up to bribery by electricity officials, improving access to energy for her whole community



## LEBANON

Lebanon's people challenge the corruption that kept their main river polluted



## NEPAL

A headteacher reclaims essential funds embezzled from his school budget



## PALESTINE

A state employee exposes fraud and helps achieve legal whistleblower protection



## PAPUA NEW GUINEA

A woman exposes bribery by officials, helping beat widespread land corruption



## SRI LANKA

Villagers stand up against corruption in COVID-19 relief distribution



## ZIMBABWE

A woman overcomes bribery aimed at preventing a court case against her attackers





photo: courtesy of Transparency International Zimbabwe, © Tevtechmedia

# DELIVERING JUSTICE IN ZIMBABWE'S COURTS

After Tsitsi was assaulted, bribery almost prevented her court case from being heard, but she was determined to claim her legal rights

In 2017, Tsitsi Mujuru\* was heavily pregnant when she suffered a severe beating – from her partner, his uncle and one of his friends. She had moved in with her partner's family while expecting their child, having worked for the family as a housemaid. But her partner's father was a prominent local pastor, with status which meant the family did not want their son marrying a former maid.

The beating was intended to make 21-year-old Tsitsi run away. With injuries to her back and limbs, she took refuge in her aunt's house. But when she reported the attack to the police, she found officers were reluctant to take her statement, because the accused had an influential father.

When Tsitsi persisted, they eventually sent her for the medical examination needed for an affidavit that could be used as evidence in the case. Procedures require the police to collect the affidavit from the hospital. According to the hospital, they did. But when this crucial piece of evidence went missing, the police denied ever having fetched it.

## **A wider web of bribery and corruption**

Hospital staff had been lax about asking the police to sign for the document, so no one knew who had taken it. Tsitsi pressed the police to pursue her case, but they said that without the medical evidence, they could not.

It's an all-too-familiar situation across Zimbabwe, where corruption frequently denies people their right to legal justice.

But unwilling to give up, Tsitsi took her case to Transparency International Zimbabwe in the nearby city of Mutare. Staff receive frequent reports of bribery and corruption by police officers and throughout the court system, and immediately recognised Tsitsi's complaints as part of a wider picture.

### Pushing to be heard in court

Staff from TI Zimbabwe's Advocacy and Legal Advice Centre (ALAC) helped Tsitsi build a strong case by asking whether she had any other medical evidence of the injuries from her assault. Luckily, a doctor had recorded her injuries during a routine maternity check-up. ALAC staff persuaded the local prosecutor to accept Tsitsi's maternity record as evidence, and the case was scheduled for court.

But the hearing was repeatedly cancelled or delayed, or Tsitsi was given incorrect information about the time and room of the hearing, then told it had been postponed because she was absent.

Such scenarios are well-known to ALAC staff. Police, prosecutors and court officials are routinely bribed to stall hearings, until plaintiffs are frustrated enough to withdraw their case or until the media and public are no longer interested in the outcome.

### Defying legal delays

ALAC staff suspected that someone was paying the courts to prevent the case from being heard. If procedures did begin, they were soon adjourned and Tsitsi faced the intimidating presence of the pastor's family and senior church figures. But with the ALAC's support, she did not drop the case as her opponents were hoping.

ALAC staff coached her to answer lawyers' questions in court, and represented her at sessions when work and childcare responsibilities prevented her from attending.

Almost two years after the assault, Tsitsi achieved justice. Her attackers were found guilty and sentenced to two months in prison or a fine of US\$250.

### Measures to promote justice

The case is already creating a ripple effect, deterring police and court officials from demanding bribes and encouraging people to speak out against legal corruption.

TI Zimbabwe is informing senior legal officials of cases like Tsitsi's and has made recommendations to help ensure everyone can obtain justice. These include pressing for an independent board to monitor judicial integrity, and for upgraded computer systems to track hospital and police records, making it harder for vital evidence to disappear.

Equally importantly, our research shows that increasing numbers of Zimbabweans believe they can make a difference in the fight against corruption. Tsitsi's case proves that they're right – spurring more people to report corruption when they see it and driving positive change.

\*Name has been changed

**28 %**

of people in Sub-Saharan Africa who encountered the police had paid bribes to officers in the last year.

In Zimbabwe, the bribery rate for the police was 24 per cent, while 25 per cent of people thought most or all judges and magistrates were corrupt.

**45 %**

of Zimbabweans believe ordinary people can make a difference in the fight against corruption.<sup>7</sup>





photo: Stefano Guidi / Shutterstock.com

# SPEAKING UP TO DEFEND AGAINST COVID-19

After a WHO whistleblower suffered retaliation for reporting alleged misconduct during the pandemic, Transparency International is pushing for change

In May 2020, the World Health Organisation (WHO) posted on its website a report investigating Italy's pandemic preparedness, aiming to provide useful lessons to countries not yet affected by COVID-19.

The report found that Italy's pandemic plan had not been updated since 2006, meaning hospitals' initial response was "improvised, chaotic and creative".<sup>8</sup> It contained important learning for public health – yet the WHO withdrew it after less than 24 hours, causing its lead researcher, Dr Francesco Zambon, to speak out.

Dr Zambon claimed that Dr Ranieri Guerra, a senior WHO official, threatened him with dismissal unless he modified references to Italy's outdated pandemic plan. Dr Guerra had been Director of Prevention at Italy's

Health Ministry from 2013 to 2017, responsible for updating the plan to reflect international guidelines.

Worried about the report's scientific integrity and Dr Guerra's potential conflict of interest, Dr Zambon registered his concerns with managers and the WHO Ethics Office, in line with organisational policies. He claims that the ethics office ignored his disclosures for several months, and that subsequent feedback was unsatisfactory. There was no internal inquiry, and the WHO did not explain why the report was removed, stating only in December that it "contained inaccuracies and inconsistencies".<sup>9</sup>

Meanwhile, Dr Zambon's working conditions became intolerable. Increasingly undermined, isolated and demoted, in March 2021 he resigned.

## Calling for urgent reform

Worryingly, this is an all-too-familiar story across Europe, where whistleblowers often face retaliation for trying to expose wrongdoing, rather than receiving the protection they are entitled to.

When staff at the Advocacy and Legal Advice Centre (ALAC) run by Transparency International Italy heard about Dr Zambon's case, they were immediately concerned. As well as the apparent suppression of a scientific report important to global public health, there was a failure to protect Dr Zambon. This highlighted serious flaws in the WHO's whistleblowing policy – an essential element of a well-run institution.

In response, Transparency International joined with the Whistleblowing International Network and the Government Accountability Project to write to the president and members of the World Health Assembly<sup>10</sup> – which governs the WHO – in May 2021. We asked them to ensure an independent review of Dr Zambon's disclosures and a commitment from the WHO to reform its whistleblowing mechanisms to guarantee protection and justice for future whistleblowers.

## Whistleblowing crucial in a crisis

Supported by 40 anti-corruption, public health and whistleblower protection organisations, the letter challenged the WHO's failure to respond to Dr Zambon's attempts to raise serious concerns in the public interest. It also denounced the retaliation against him – in particular, the disclosure of his identity as a whistleblower. With confidentiality central to any whistleblower protection policy, this risks deterring WHO staff and those at other international bodies from speaking up when it matters.

Civil society's concerns are echoed in an external auditor's report in May 2021,<sup>11</sup> which flagged a steep rise in complaints of misconduct at the WHO. The auditor recommends that the organisation strengthens its measures for preventing and punishing wrongdoing like retaliation and corruption.

Although the issue remains ongoing, the case has drawn attention to the public's right to know, and to whistleblowers' right to speak up safely. Had Dr Zambon not raised the alarm, key learning for other countries about Italy's lack of pandemic preparedness would have remained under cover – along with the WHO's treatment of whistleblowers.

During crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic or natural disasters, the need for urgent action can undermine enforcement of rules that enable people to report misconduct safely. But strong, well-implemented whistleblowing systems are especially important in such situations, encouraging people to expose wrongdoing when lives are at stake.

## Enabling people to play their part

There is still much work to do. Transparency International and its partners will continue to seek accountability in Dr Zambon's case and proper recognition of the global public interest in his disclosures. As the agency responsible for international public health, the WHO must remove any barriers to exposing misconduct which could impact on people's wellbeing worldwide. This is essential if people are to play their central role in preventing corruption.

Knowing they can safely blow the whistle on wrongdoing is vital to encourage people like Dr Zambon to report corruption when they see it and, by doing so, to drive positive change.

**76 %**

of people in the European Union think corruption is stagnating or getting worse in their country.

**45 %**

fear retaliation for speaking out against corruption.

**45 %**

of EU residents believe ordinary people can make a difference in the fight against corruption.<sup>12</sup>

**3** GOOD HEALTH AND WELL-BEING



**16** PEACE, JUSTICE AND STRONG INSTITUTIONS





photo: courtesy of Transparency International Lebanon

# CLEANING UP CORRUPTION ON LEBANON'S LONGEST RIVER

People are speaking out against the widespread corruption that has kept the Litani River heavily polluted

For years, people in towns near Lebanon's longest river have been living in fear. Where cancer was once rare, it has become uncommonly frequent – especially among young people.

In 2019, in the riverside town of Bar Elias alone, there were 600 cancer cases among a population of 12,000.<sup>13</sup> The disease caused three out of five deaths. Many of the 48 other towns and the Syrian refugee camps bordering the river have been suffering the same problem.

The cancers have been linked to heavy river pollution. Raw sewage and waste from nearly 1,000 factories, slaughterhouses and quarries have been pumped into the Litani for years – while the authorities turn a

blind eye.<sup>14</sup> Despite its stench, the water is used for drinking supplies and irrigating crops which feed the population.

Residents have repeatedly complained to the government, but despite official promises, nothing has changed. Many factory owners are either politicians or have links to powerful political interests,<sup>15</sup> and can get away with polluting the waterway. Others bribe officials to ignore ongoing environmental violations.<sup>16</sup>

Amid persistent rumours of corruption, the increasingly desperate residents of Bar Elias contacted our chapter in Lebanon, the Lebanese Transparency Association (LTA), for help in making the government keep its promises to restore the Litani.

## A deeper web of corruption

Sadly, LTA staff were unsurprised by the situation. They receive frequent reports of bribery and corruption among the country's officials, denying people their right to essential services and undermining their quality of life.

By 2018, the LTA's Advocacy and Legal Advice Centre (ALAC) had received numerous complaints about the ongoing contamination of the Litani and the increasing rates of disease. In response, ALAC staff took innovative action to highlight the pollution and press the authorities to keep their promises to tackle it.

After the officials they contacted took no action, they teamed up with investigative journalists to identify sources of pollution along the Litani. Together, they carried out the first-ever aerial filming of the river from source to estuary, documenting flows of waste into the water. This was accompanied by field surveys to identify the parties responsible for the environmental abuses.

The ALAC also submitted an access to information request for details of budgets and projects to address the Litani crisis. They obtained a list of agreed projects for the construction and improvement of wastewater treatment plants and sewage systems. In 2016, the government had allocated 1,100 billion Lebanese liras (approximately US\$728 million) to cleaning the Litani over the next five years. But the projects were not being implemented.<sup>17</sup>

## Using film to drive change

Based on their aerial filming, the ALAC team produced a documentary,<sup>18</sup> which they circulated widely and promoted through the media, causing an outcry. In response, the National Litani River Authority also posted the film on social media and started to take action.

Officials sent numerous legal warnings to factories and municipalities over their dumping of waste and sewage, and informed the Public Prosecutor's office, which issued warrants against several offenders.

Work is finally taking place on two major wastewater treatment plants, and the Litani's colour is starting to improve. But there is a lot more to be done, with further renovation of treatment plants and sewer networks scheduled, and new stations due for construction.

## Challenging the culture of bribery

Rescuing the river still requires major political action. In towns like Bar Elias, people's lives are at stake.

ALAC staff are watching closely to ensure that funds allocated to restoring the Litani are properly spent, and that bribery and political ties don't prevent the clean-up operations. They are also ensuring media coverage of the situation and supporting people to hold officials to account.

The slowly changing colour of the Litani River shows that people can make a difference in the fight against corruption – encouraging more people to speak out and drive positive change.

**44 %**

of people in the Middle East and North Africa think government officials are corrupt and 35 per cent think local officials are corrupt.

In Lebanon, these figures rise to the highest in the region, at 68 per cent and 46 per cent respectively.

**39 %**

of Lebanese believe ordinary people can make a difference in the fight against corruption.<sup>19</sup>





See Something,  
Say Something  
If you Join Me we can Fight Corruption

photo: courtesy of Civil Society Legislative Advocacy Centre (CISLAC)

# POWER FOR NIGERIA'S PEOPLE

Bribery in electricity supply ruins livelihoods, but Nigeria's residents are speaking out

Arriving at her hair salon in Nigeria's capital, Abuja, Titilayo Owolano had a shock. Her power supply had been cut without warning and she was unable to open for business.

None of Mrs Owolano's neighbours were affected, and while her pre-paid electricity meter was topped up with money and working as usual, she had no power. When she made enquiries at the Abuja Electricity Distribution Company (AEDC), Mrs Owolano was told her meter was faulty and her power supply had been disconnected.

Officials refused to listen when she insisted that her meter was fully functional and that the law requires formal notice before any disconnection.

Mrs Owolano was given a choice between paying a bribe and closing her business, a common situation among residents of Abuja's Bwari district. AEDC staff

often demand illegal fees before connecting them to power or installing meters.<sup>20</sup>

One official demanded 25,000 naira (approximately US\$70) from a resident before supplying her with a pre-paid meter, giving her a slip for 1,000 naira (less than US\$3) instead of a receipt. Against regulations, officials also issue estimated bills, keeping for themselves the excess paid by customers.

## Extortion for electricity

Sadly, it's a scenario familiar across Nigeria. Many people's lives and finances are disrupted by illegal connection fees and estimated bills.

So when Transparency International Nigeria received a complaint detailing cases of corruption in Bwari's electricity supply, staff recognised the problem as part of a wider picture.

TI Nigeria's Advocacy and Legal Advice Centre (ALAC) wrote to the managing director of the Abuja Electricity Regulatory Commission, asking the commission to investigate the matter and giving details of affected residents and AEDC staff involved.

The letter asked for the perpetrators to be disciplined and sought redress for affected residents. It also requested that all staff be made to comply with regulations entitling customers to free prepaid meters and banning estimated billing.

The ALAC sent the same letter to the complaints unit of the National Electricity Regulatory Commission and the director general of the Consumer Protection Council. Despite follow-up letters, of the three organisations, only the Consumer Protection Council responded. Apologising for the abuses, the council said it had contacted the AEDC and promised the situation would be addressed.

### Power company response

The AEDC provided the prepaid meters to residents free of charge, and announced that estimated billing had ceased. It also began investigating staff accused of extortion, promising to discipline them appropriately.

Resolving these complaints has improved the lives and finances of Bwari's electricity users, making their power consumption dependable and more affordable.

Since the ALAC's intervention, no new complaints from Bwari residents have been brought to TI Nigeria – although bribery, extortion and abuse of office remain common across Nigeria's power sector.

### Speaking out for people's rights

The case – which had been ignored by the police, as well as the two commissions – highlights the lack of opportunity for people to voice complaints about corruption and achieve redress. In response, TI Nigeria runs radio advertisements and holds events for communities, women's groups and students across the country to raise awareness about the ALAC and encourage people to report corruption when they encounter it.

With business flowing once again at her salon, Mrs Owolano is proof that ordinary people can make a lasting difference in the fight against corruption.

**23%**

of people in Africa who used public services had paid bribes to utilities officials in the last year.

In Nigeria, the bribery rate for utilities is even higher, with 34 per cent of users having paid a bribe in the previous 12 months.

**45%**

of Nigerians think that ordinary people can make a difference in the fight against corruption.<sup>21</sup>

**7** AFFORDABLE AND CLEAN ENERGY



**8** DECENT WORK AND ECONOMIC GROWTH





photo: courtesy of Proética

# DEFENDING LAND AND LIVES IN PERU

Despite violent reprisals, indigenous people in Peru are challenging the illegal loss of their land to agribusinesses that collude with the authorities

Diana Ríos Rengifo is continuing her father's quest. Leader of the indigenous Alto Tamaya-Saweto community in Peru's Amazon forest, she is fighting for recognition of her people's ancestral lands.

In 2003, Peru's government granted several companies more than three million hectares of forest – including 80 per cent of the Alto Tamaya-Saweto territory.<sup>22</sup> When illegal logging began, community leaders stepped up their ongoing campaign for recognition of their lands – and received harassment and death threats in response.

They sent more than 100 letters to the authorities, reporting environmental crimes and persecution, but were constantly rebuffed. Officials said they would only make an assessment if the community paid for their food and transport. Undeterred, they continued to demand justice, but in 2014, four community leaders – including Diana's father, Jorge Ríos Pérez – were murdered.

## Violating ancient land rights

Many indigenous forest communities have faced intimidation and members have lost their lives

for protesting the confiscation of their land. Vast plantations now scar the once-forested ancestral territory of villages like Alto Tamaya-Saweto. But their leaders face threats and violence when they make official complaints.

Peru's indigenous communities have cared for the Amazon ecosystem for centuries, maintaining the forest's natural balance. They have also been fighting for decades for recognition of their traditional territories. But the government has been reluctant to grant communities land titles,<sup>23</sup> instead giving land to outsiders who make millions from illegal logging, agribusiness and drug trafficking. Corruption plays a central role<sup>24</sup> in these dealings.

When the team from Proética, Transparency International in Peru, identified several cases related to land grabbing in the Amazon, deforestation and corruption of officials, they decided to take action.

## A complex web of corruption

Working with investigative journalists to uncover the role of corruption in land allocation, they pieced together the shady process for assigning land titles.<sup>25</sup>

Powerful foreign investors – agro-industrial companies supposedly associated with the Melka Group – bribed former local officials to override regulations so they could take ownership of land for palm oil and cacao plantations. Companies linked to the Melka Group have destroyed 13,000 hectares of forest in the Amazon regions of Loreto and Ucayali, for profit.

Corrupt government officials allegedly helped big business<sup>26</sup> by invalidating existing property rights and seizing people's land. Involved in complex webs of corruption and business, officials also profit from illegal logging and land grabbing – while failing to protect the territories and lives of vulnerable indigenous communities.

This contravenes Peru's national and international obligations, at the cost of forest communities. Some local officials believe there is already enough protected forest, and that poor indigenous people need economic development. Yet the plantations bring villagers no financial benefit. Instead, the ecosystem is destroyed, communities cannot live traditionally and people are struggling to stay out of poverty, while living under constant threat.

### Reaching an international platform

Proética staff used their findings to challenge local officials and press for formal investigations. But despite a precautionary order to one palm oil company to cease activities immediately, its operations continue. Intimidation of indigenous people also continues.

In October 2020, Proética, indigenous organisations and NGO partners brought four emblematic cases, including Diana's and those of other environmental leaders, to a public hearing at the Inter-American Council on Human Rights (IACHR). This was the first presentation to an American regional body showing how corruption affects indigenous people's human rights.<sup>27</sup> The IACHR urged the Peruvian government to carry out detailed investigations and apply appropriate sanctions.

The hearing drew widespread national and international media attention, enabling indigenous leaders and Proética to meet with leading national authorities, including the President of Congress and the Ministers of the Interior and Culture. Peru's government says it is willing to work with the IACHR – yet attacks on indigenous leaders have further intensified.<sup>28</sup>

### Speaking out for forest protection

Proética is continuing to support indigenous demands and expose the underlying causes of harassment and illegal deforestation. It is advocating for effective police protection for community members, and advising communities' legal cases over the assassinations and intimidation. It is also working with Peru's Environmental Prosecutor's Office to develop a complaints mechanism and a publicly accessible website of environmental crimes, and has contributed to draft laws on protecting human rights defenders.

These approaches are exposing the intersection of corruption, violations of indigenous rights and ecological devastation. They are steps towards a future where the voices of people like Diana and her community members are heard – and acted on – as a vital part of Peru's forest protection system.

**85 %**

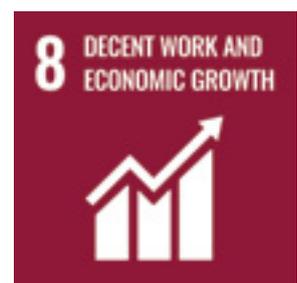
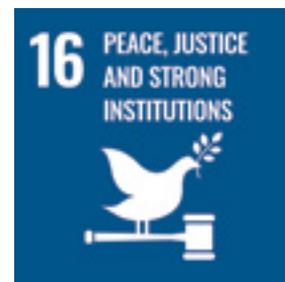
of people in Latin America and the Caribbean thought government corruption was a big problem. Peru had the highest regional score, with 93 per cent.

**33 %**

of Peru's people had trust and confidence in the police.

**77 %**

of Peruvians believe ordinary people can make a difference in the fight against corruption.<sup>29</sup>



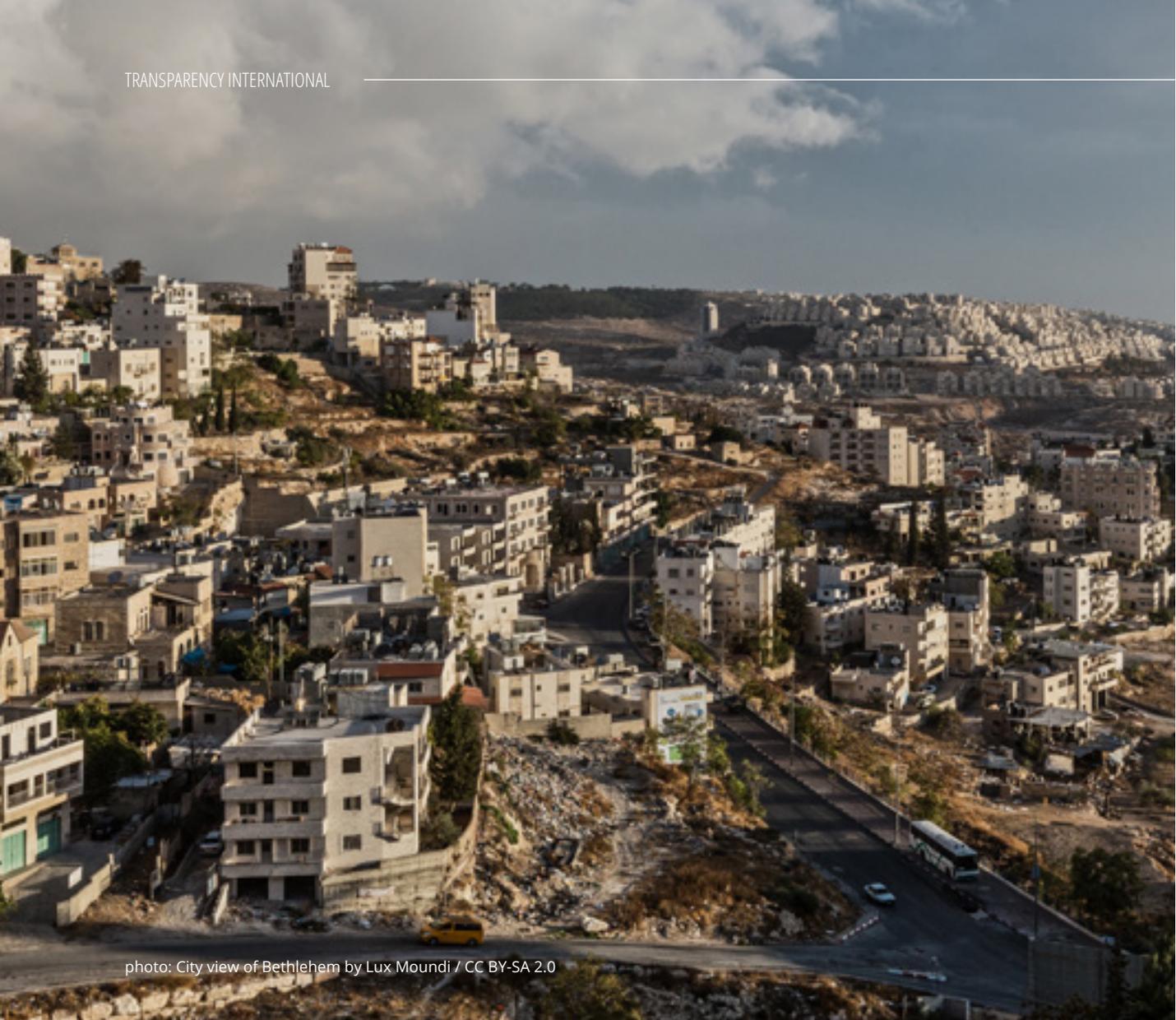


photo: City view of Bethlehem by Lux Moundi / CC BY-SA 2.0

# BUILDING A WHISTLEBLOWING CULTURE IN PALESTINE

By revealing extensive corruption in a Palestinian ministry, a courageous employee has helped bring in the country's first whistleblower protection law

In 2015, Sami Khalidi\* was employed as a financial auditor in a Palestinian ministry when his work uncovered extensive embezzlement by officials. The perpetrators had disguised their fraud cleverly, working as individuals and in different networks, rising to a very senior level.

Sami immediately reported his findings to his supervisor, but no action was taken against those

behind the web of corruption. Instead, Sami was told to leave his job, under a new law for early retirement – widely thought to be used by officials to get rid of unwanted staff.<sup>30</sup>

With no whistleblower protection law to safeguard his position, Sami had no choice but to “retire” – in his 30s and with children to raise.

\*Name has been changed

## A familiar pattern of corruption and cover-up

It's a situation all too familiar across Palestine, where people who speak out against corruption have often paid a high personal price – including stigma, intimidation and job loss.

Sami did not want to stay silent though. He approached Transparency International Palestine for help. Staff receive frequent reports of reprisals against people brave enough to blow the whistle on corruption, so they immediately recognised his story as part of a wider pattern.

## Trying to expose corruption

TI Palestine's Advocacy and Legal Advice Centre (ALAC) investigated the allegations and contacted government bodies including the cabinet, the ministry concerned and the State Audit and Administrative Control Bureau, asking them to verify the story.

The initial response seemed positive. The cabinet asked the ministry involved to officially investigate the situation, and the minister told the ALAC that he had formed an investigation committee and was pursuing the case with the country's anti-corruption commission.

Despite early optimism, instead of clearing Sami's name and shining a spotlight on the embezzlement he'd uncovered, the process led to Sami being arrested for libel. Some of the accused officials had filed a case against him, claiming he had misused his position, and leading to his imprisonment.

## Overcoming resistance

In response, the ALAC informed the Palestinian Attorney General that they were going to go public with the case to win support and help protect Sami if public bodies weren't protecting him. After three days in jail, he was released and all charges against him were dropped.

Investigations by the anti-corruption commission into the high-level embezzlement in the ministry remain ongoing, but the case has already had a lasting impact on the fight against corruption in Palestine.

Based on Sami's case and those of many other whistleblowers who have suffered negative consequences, TI Palestine advocated with the

cabinet and the anti-corruption commission for a national whistleblower protection system. Staff also ran a media and social media campaign, winning strong public support as they raised awareness of the ill-treatment endured by people trying to expose corruption.

## Legal protection for whistleblowers

As a result, in October 2019, the government adopted the country's first whistleblower protection system. The system covers both public and private entities, protecting anyone who reports corruption from reprisal or losing their job, and guaranteeing their anonymity where necessary.

TI Palestine hopes the whistleblower protection system will remove the barrier of fear and encourage more people to report corruption. The ALAC is now monitoring its implementation carefully to see how well it is enforced.

The protection system comes too late for Sami, but he now has a new job in the private sector and he knows his case has had a lasting impact, helping people to blow the whistle safely. If the new law is well enforced, even more people will be able to safely speak out and drive positive change.

**44%**

of people in the Middle East and North Africa think government officials are corrupt.

In Palestine, the figure is even higher, at 47 per cent – almost half the population.

**51%**

of Palestinians think they can make a difference in fight against corruption.<sup>31</sup>





photo: Tamale Teaching Hospital by Massly / CC BY-SA 4.0

# A TURNING POINT FOR PATIENTS IN GHANA?

Bribes for medical services can cost lives, but people are driving change

When 16-year-old Abdul Rahmana Shakina collapsed in 2017, her parents rushed her to Ghana's Tamale Teaching Hospital seeking emergency treatment.

The hospital serves the country's five northern provinces, so Amama and Jusif hoped for the best available care for their daughter.

Arriving mid-evening, Shakina was diagnosed with acute anaemia and her parents were told she needed an urgent blood transfusion. However, health workers later refused to provide treatment until her parents paid 108 Ghanaian cedi (approximately US\$20) for what was supposed to be a free procedure.

With only 20 cedi (US\$4) in their pockets, Amama and Jusif begged doctors to give their daughter the transfusion anyway, promising to return the next day to pay the balance. But without the money up front, the doctors refused to act promptly.

Amama lay next to her daughter all night, trying to comfort her. In the morning, hospital staff told Amama to leave while the hospital was cleaned. When she returned, doctors were finally giving Shakina the blood and oxygen she needed – 12 hours after she had arrived.

But it was too late. During the procedure, Shakina died.

## A wider web of bribery and corruption

Sadly, this is an all-too-familiar story in Ghana.

In 2017, the Ghana Integrity Initiative (GII), a chapter of Transparency International, received multiple reports of bribery and extortion at Tamale Teaching Hospital.

Supported by GII's Advocacy and Legal Advice Centre (ALAC), patients described unofficial charges for services that are supposed to be free under the country's health insurance system, and medical negligence if bribes weren't paid.

Those who paid were never given receipts. Unable to afford the illegal fees demanded by hospital staff, some families reluctantly turned to traditional medicine.

## Undercover investigation

Suspecting that the complaints about the hospital indicated a bigger problem, GII staff commissioned an investigative journalist to explore the allegations at Tamale. Operating undercover, the reporter videoed medical staff<sup>32</sup> demanding payments for services that should be free, including emergency treatment and maternity care.

The reporter met with families like Shakina's, who had either lost children and other family members to wilful negligence or narrowly escaped a similar fate.

Riding on the back of a motorbike, he joined Alhassan, a frantic father-to-be, on a desperate tour of family and friends in search of money to pay a bribe so his wife could have an emergency caesarean.

While Alhassan managed to scrape together enough money in time, including an additional "ward fee" to see his child after the baby was delivered, other families are often not so lucky.

## Hospital response

The investigation uncovered large-scale administrative corruption, including the sale of expired drugs and widespread breaches of procurement rules, diverting hospital funds and undermining service delivery.

Denying knowledge of these abuses, Tamale's chief executive, Dr David Akolbila, condemned the culture of corruption and threatened heavy consequences for

those who continued to neglect or extort patients. The hospital has since begun investigating several specific corruption cases.

## Speaking out to save lives

In a documentary aired on Ghana's Joy TV<sup>33</sup> and radio, patients and their families spoke out about their experiences, and the investigation fuelled public debate in Ghana. As follow-up, GII is working with government health officials to address broader corruption issues affecting Ghana's health service, while also ensuring hospital managers and health officials at Tamale carry out their promises.

The investigation has already created a ripple effect, deterring health personnel from demanding bribes and encouraging people to speak out. GII hopes that investigations like these will spur more people to report corruption when they see it and, by doing so, to drive positive change.

**14%**

of African people who used public services paid bribes to health care workers in the last year.

In Ghana, the bribery rate for health care services is 12 per cent.

**60%**

of Ghanaians believe ordinary people can make a difference in the fight against corruption.<sup>34</sup>





photo: Ruwan Walpola / Shutterstock.com

# ENSURING COVID-19 RELIEF REACHES SRI LANKA'S PEOPLE

Sri Lankan villagers are among many people worldwide standing up against corruption in COVID-19 relief distribution to avoid poverty

In March 2020, the economic hardships from Sri Lanka's COVID-19 lockdown began to bite. Many people lost their jobs. Tamil villagers in Vavuniya district, in the rural Northern Province, were among millions looking forward to financial support promised by the government.

The authorities had announced<sup>35</sup> a monthly lockdown payment of 5,000 rupees (US\$27) for low-income families, senior citizens and people with disabilities. People suffering a major hit to their income – such as small retailers, craftspeople and taxi drivers – were also entitled to the payments.

Although only enough to buy an average family's groceries for around 10 days, the payments were a vital buffer against extreme hunger. But the government put local consuls in charge of distribution, without clear tracing mechanisms or accountability.

## Widespread embezzlement of relief funds

Reports of malpractice soon began to arise. Among Vavuniya's Tamil villagers, 28 people weren't even given the forms to apply for the essential allowance.

Among them was 68-year-old Theivanaiyammah. "I survive through minor odd jobs and what my children can provide," she says. "But when the country was in lockdown, my children were also having a difficult time. When I asked for relief funds from the village consul, he said my name could not be included and he was not obliged to explain why."

When the local consul refused to help, the villagers complained in April to Shelter for Integrity, Transparency International Sri Lanka's regional Advocacy and Legal Advice Centre (ALAC).

The ALAC staff immediately recognised a pattern. They had received 40 complaints about the diversion of pandemic payments.

## Investigating missing benefits

Across the country, missing COVID-19 relief payments became a common issue,<sup>36</sup> exposing many people to severe and avoidable hardship during lockdown.

Some consuls claimed never to have received money from the government to pay to vulnerable families. One was alleged to have stolen<sup>37</sup> the funds she was

supposed to distribute. Others were negligent or inefficient, never directing the money to families so urgently in need.

There were also allegations of political manipulation,<sup>38</sup> with some consuls altering recipient lists to help win support for certain politicians, and parliamentary candidates highlighting their alleged influence over who would receive payments, as a campaign tool.

## Ensuring delivery of payments

To support the 28 villagers excluded from payment, ALAC staff contacted the local consul, but were told it was too late for anyone to receive pandemic relief. The ALAC staff then helped the villagers draft a joint letter to the divisional secretariat – the level of government above the local consul – to report the undelivered aid.

In response, the divisional secretary acted swiftly, instructing the consul to prepare the list of people entitled to COVID-19 relief payments according to government criteria, and issue the allowance immediately. The benefits were paid to the families, including Theivanaiyammah, who were, by then, desperate for financial support. This helped them endure the economic hardship resulting from the pandemic.

Through similar approaches, the ALAC was able to resolve all 40 of the complaints it received about the diversion of COVID-19 relief payments.

## Building a culture of openness

Transparency International Sri Lanka is continuing to work hard for full transparency in the country's COVID-19 relief initiatives and wider benefits system. Staff encourage people to speak up when they face corruption, and provide them with safe, accessible support through the ALAC when they do.

This creates a wider effect. Each time someone stands up against an individual case of wrongdoing, they're also helping build a culture of fairness and integrity.

By challenging the diversion of COVID-19 relief funds, the country's people are already helping ensure everyone receives the benefits they're entitled to – enabling change that will outlast the pandemic.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, nearly half of the world's population stayed at home<sup>39</sup> in order to slow the spread of the virus. Governments pledged<sup>40</sup> trillions of dollars in economic stimulus to help ease the hardship – but in many places, corruption is preventing aid from reaching the people who need it most.

During 2020, more than 1,800 people contacted Transparency International's Advocacy and Legal Advice Centres (ALACs) to report over 1,500 cases of corruption and other irregularities related to the COVID-19 pandemic.

**38%**

of people in Asia think corruption is increasing in their country

In Sri Lanka, the figure is even higher, at 52 per cent.

**77%**

of Sri Lankans believe ordinary people can make a difference in the fight against corruption.<sup>41</sup>





photo: courtesy of Transparency International Papua New Guinea

# DEFENDING LAND RIGHTS IN PAPUA NEW GUINEA

Land corruption is common across the country, but residents like Betty are standing up against bribery and illegal deals

When Betty's father died, he left her a parcel of traditionally owned family land in Port Moresby, the capital of Papua New Guinea. The land has high commercial value, prompting a dispute between Betty and other members of her village, who disagreed about which parts of the land she can use.

In 2016, Betty took the case to the local land court, which appointed two mediators to help resolve the dispute. They inspected the land and spoke with both parties, but then demanded payments from Betty, as the complainant – payments they had no right to request.

## A common form of corruption

Worried about losing her land rights, Betty contacted the Advocacy and Legal Advice Centre (ALAC) run by Transparency International Papua New Guinea. The centre gives free legal advice and support to people who have experienced or witnessed corruption.

ALAC experts immediately recognised Betty's problem. The centre has received around 600 complaints linked to land corruption since 2009, making up a large part of its cases. Land corruption takes many forms<sup>42</sup> and disproportionately impacts the poorest and most vulnerable people in society. Betty's case is just one of the many types of land issues faced by Papua New Guineans<sup>43</sup> who have contacted the ALAC for assistance.

## Enabling people to speak up

ALAC experts advised Betty on the laws governing village mediators and of the illegality of the demand for payment. Anti-corruption officers then wrote to the country's Chief Magistrate on Betty's behalf, to raise the issue.

As a result, both mediators were suspended, although Betty's case remains before the courts. She is still receiving advice from the ALAC as she tries to navigate Papua New Guinea's legal system.

To help people like Betty, TI Papua New Guinea successfully lobbied for a complaints desk at the Lands Department, instead of simply a complaints box. The desk has now been expanded to a fraud and complaints unit. TI Papua New Guinea meets officials from the department on a regular basis to follow up on land complaints that come to the ALAC. The Chapter is also working hard to keep the issue of land corruption on the national agenda, publicly raising some cases with the responsible government agencies.

## Challenging the government

In 2017, after an alleged illegal land deal worth over US\$10 million,<sup>44</sup> TI Papua New Guinea revealed that implicated ministers<sup>45</sup> were joining the new government after they had been suspended. It managed to sustain national media attention,<sup>46</sup> attract international coverage<sup>47</sup> and prompt the Prime Minister to brief Parliament<sup>48</sup> on the case.

In February 2018, files critical to the investigation went missing,<sup>49</sup> but the investigation report was shared with Parliament.<sup>50</sup> Following weeks of sustained pressure, TI Papua New Guinea managed to make the report public, calling on the police and the national ombudsman to take action.

The affair is one of several unresolved cases that TI Papua New Guinea has promised not to forget.<sup>51</sup> Confronting the government is not easy and sometimes the Chapter faces attacks<sup>52</sup> for flagging politically sensitive issues, but working with people like Betty, it is determined to tackle land corruption cases at all levels – whether they involve US\$10 million or a pair of unscrupulous village court mediators.





photo: iStock.com / Solarseven

# DEFYING JUDICIAL CORRUPTION IN GUATEMALA

With the right help, a Guatemalan businessman is challenging rulings by a corrupt judge in favour of local extortionist gangs

In March 2017, a note was delivered to the internet café run by Javier Muñoz\* in the town of Amatitlán, Guatemala. It ordered him to begin paying protection money of 8,000 quetzales (US\$1,000) a month. "If I didn't, they would kill my wife, my family, my workers and me," said Mr. Muñoz. "The person who brought the note showed they knew my daily routine and where I lived."

This kind of extortion is frighteningly common in Guatemala. Mr. Muñoz reported the threat to the public prosecutor in the neighbouring city of Villa Nueva and the police began an investigation. They encouraged him to set a trap by leaving the payment in a rubbish bin near his premises for the extortionists to collect, while the police waited nearby. But on the agreed day, the police never came.

Hours later, another note arrived announcing the protection money had gone up to 10,000 quetzales (US\$1,300) and was due in two days' time. "If not, they said they would blow up the premises, and if anyone inside got blown up too, that was not their problem," said Mr. Muñoz.

## Living under constant threat

A new police agent was assigned to the investigation and in April, the extortionist was caught while trying to collect the payment. Mr Muñoz recognised him as a client of the internet café – but he was also a gang member. After an initial hearing, he was placed in custody awaiting trial.

During the following months, threats from the gang kept coming. Fearing for their safety, Mr Muñoz and his wife hardly left the house. Their income dropped by around 60 per cent. Mr. Muñoz began taking medication to help himself sleep and his wife became chronically depressed and started seeing a psychiatrist.

## Betrayed in court

Their plans to open a second business were put on hold and relatives urged them to leave the country. "But it is hard to start all over again, especially when you are someone who loves your country and are here fighting to make things better," said Mr. Muñoz. But in October 2017, his wife left for Colombia.

In November, the trial began. Under special protection, Mr. Muñoz attended the first session wearing dark glasses and a hat and using a false name to hide his identity. Much to his dismay, the judge, Edwin Raymundo Cabrera, obliged him to remove the disguise and reveal his real name and other personal information to members of the gang present in the courtroom. He then questioned the evidence, dismissed the case and set the alleged extortionist free.

## Holding the judiciary to account

In desperation, Mr. Muñoz turned to the Advocacy and Legal Advice Centre (ALAC) run by Transparency International in Guatemala, Acción Ciudadana. With support from the centre, Mr. Muñoz filed a complaint about the judge to Guatemala's judicial supervisory board, which eventually agreed to investigate.

The board found the judge had committed serious misconduct by putting Mr Muñoz's safety at risk, ruling he should be suspended for 30 days without pay. At the same time, with the help of journalists, the ALAC discovered that at least 16 official complaints had been made about the same judge, including violating witness anonymity, abuse of authority and irregular procedures.

Acción Ciudadana and Mr. Muñoz are now attempting to have the judge declared unfit for office and dismissed. Their struggle is helping ensure Guatemala's judiciary face the consequences of their actions – a vital step in building an accountable justice system.

\*Name has been changed

**44%**

of people in Latin America and the Caribbean believe most or all judges and magistrates are corrupt.

In Guatemala, 44 per cent believe that most or all judges and magistrates are corrupt.

**51%**

of Guatemalans believe ordinary people can make a difference in the fight against corruption.<sup>53</sup>





# CHALLENGING VOTE BUYING BY SERB POLITICIANS

By exposing a politician trying to buy votes with promises, people in Serbia are championing integrity in public life

In June 2020, Serbian media reported that villagers near Leskovac threatened to boycott approaching parliamentary elections, because a promise made by a ruling party official to surface their road had not been fulfilled.

Two days later, the director of the state enterprise for roads arrived in the village, accompanied by the media. Despite having been elected for only a year, he had remained in office on a questionable basis for more than three years after his term expired. Although the state enterprise looks after major highways, the director promised that the village road would be paved within days – before urging his audience to go out and vote.

## Insulting local people's integrity

By linking a promise from the ruling party of a swiftly paved road to the need for people to vote, the director was violating election and anti-corruption laws. Angry at the assumption that they valued their local infrastructure more than their democracy, numerous Leskovac residents complained to the Advocacy and Legal Advice Centre (ALAC) run by Transparency International Serbia.

ALAC staff filed a complaint with the Agency for the Prevention of Corruption, and when the agency rejected this as unfounded, challenged the decision in the Administrative Court. They also filed criminal charges against the director with the public prosecutor. But the deputy public prosecutor in the anti-corruption department rejected the charges.

When the ALAC complained to the Public Prosecutor himself, he confirmed that his deputy's decision was incorrect, promising that the case would be reviewed.

## Deterring future vote buying

The case is ongoing, but it has already put pressure on Serbia's anti-corruption agency and the Public

Prosecutor to implement national law effectively – including in the Leskovac investigation. It also warns officials against attempts to bribe voters, and shows that people can successfully act against corruption – encouraging others to come forward and building a wider culture of intolerance of wrongdoing.

## Pressing for stronger institutions

Like many ALAC cases, the story informs TI Serbia about irregularities in the work of state enterprises and public officials, enabling it to maintain pressure for integrity in public life. The Chapter is now advocating for better institutional procedures at the Agency for the Prevention of Corruption in cases where public officials are accused of violating electoral laws. It is also pressing for public prosecutors to independently investigate all allegations of corrupt behaviour.

Despite the director's promises, the villagers near Leskovac still lack a fully paved street. But while they may be unhappy about their road, they are satisfied that with support from the ALAC, they're helping to prevent future vote buying in Serbia.





photo: De Visu / Shutterstock.com

# ROOTING OUT CORRUPTION IN NEPAL

By exposing fraud in a Nepali school, a determined headmaster is helping undermine a widespread culture of corruption

In 2018, when Dan Bahadur Chand was appointed headmaster of Shikhar Higher Secondary School in Nepal's Surkhet district, one of his first tasks was to review the school's financial files.

Chand quickly noticed several suspicious expenses, with miscalculations and missing or incomplete documents. These transactions had taken place during the tenure of the previous headmaster and

a school accountant, whom the headmaster had eventually fired.

With 850 students to educate, Chand was determined to find out more. Examining the files closely, he realised that nearly 1.2 million rupees (US\$10,700) were missing from the school's Employees Provident Fund, which held pension contributions. Money should have been paid into the fund every four

months, but the deposits had not been made. It seemed the accountant had diverted the money.

## Widespread corruption problems

Sadly, such cases of embezzlement are common in Nepal's rural areas and throughout its private sector.

To find out more, Chand tried to contact both the former headmaster and the ex-accountant, but received no response. Fortunately, he knew how to get help. He contacted Nagarik Sarokar Sangh (NSS), Transparency International Nepal's local affiliate, for support.

## Digging deeper to expose fraud

NSS advised Chand to inform the government's Education Development and Coordination Unit about the missing funds. Chand wrote to the department in February 2019, but didn't receive a response from it either.

Determined not to give up, he went back to NSS, who contacted Transparency International Nepal's Advocacy and Legal Advice Centre (ALAC) in Kathmandu.

ALACs across the world provide a confidential way for victims and witnesses to report corruption, offering expert advice, free of charge. The ALAC staff in Nepal guided Chand in checking publicly available documents, enabling him to make contact with the former headmaster.

## Building a picture of corruption in action

After hearing from Chand, the former headmaster wrote to NSS to clear the matter. He explained that as soon as he had suspected the ex-accountant was not depositing the funds, he asked for the school's financial records. When the accountant failed to provide them, the headmaster sacked him, with the backing of the school management committee.

The former headmaster also contacted the ex-accountant, urging him to contact NSS. But the accountant only responded when NSS told him they had proof of his fraudulent book-keeping, and that teachers from the school had submitted a complaint to Nepal's Anti-Corruption Agency.

## Hope for the future

Under mounting pressure and fearful of prosecution by the agency, the ex-accountant eventually returned the missing funds to the school in instalments. Chand was able to deposit the stolen money into the Employees Provident Fund on behalf of Surkhet school in March 2019, and the accountant paid the fine incurred for the late deposit. In response, the Anti-Corruption Agency closed the complaint.

Chand's determination to challenge suspected fraud achieved a victory not only for his school, but for Nepalese society, helping develop a culture of honesty and openness. Transparency International Nepal is working hard to raise people's awareness of their right to seek help when faced with corruption – and is providing safe, accessible support through the ALAC.

Fortunately, Chand is not alone. Nepal's people are increasingly speaking up against corruption – helping ensure they receive the fully funded services they're entitled to.

**38 %**

of people in Asia think corruption increased during the previous 12 months.

In Nepal, the figure is 58 per cent – higher than any other country in the region.

**68 %**

of Nepalis think ordinary people can make a difference in the fight against corruption.<sup>54</sup>



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