

Annual Young Scientist Conference 2018

Theme: Winning the fight against corruption: A trans-disciplinary approach

This document serves to give an explanation of the sub-themes to be explored during the Annual Young Scientist Conference. To send your Abstract for consideration, do check the ASSAf website for the Application Form.

1. Research showing evidence gaps in tackling corruption and comparative studies across countries or regions

There are particular challenges related to the measurement of corruption. This owes to the clandestine nature of corruption and the reliance of corruption measures on perception-based data, which themselves are determined by understandings of corruption that vary across countries and societies. Prof Paul Heywood writing in the 2016 summer issue of the British Academy Review advocates for asking the following questions wherever the word 'corruption' is mentioned: what kind of corruption is it, where is it taking place, who is involved, what are their motivations, who / what is needed to allow it to take place, what level does it operate at, what sectors are implicated, what are the key interdependencies, how does it relate to the broader social context?

Transparency International runs the Global Corruption Barometer (GCB) – a general population survey on corruption experience and perception. A useful feature of the GCB is that one can explore patterns in data both at the country level, comparing against previous results, and across countries, drawing inferences about what may have contributed to some of the differences that appear in the results. The purpose of comparative studies is to identify patterns in corruption cases for use in designing intervention strategies while in-country comparative studies across states can help ascertain varying corruption indices among the different states and also more so, across sectors. If two countries are subject to similar constraints in fighting corruption but show widely diverging success in their efforts, an analysis of their experiences for example promises to be especially fruitful for gaining a better understanding of the determining factors of a country's success in controlling corruption. Whilst the intention may be noble, there may be attendant challenges however some of which are identifying comparable points and extrapolating patterns within each study.

This sub-theme therefore seeks to explore policy lags, implementation shortfalls and point out weak legislation that enable corruption, whilst situating these within specific societal and political contexts in order to offer innovative solutions across multiple disciplines and settings. It will also seek to explore the usefulness of comparative studies, citing tangible examples and making a case for the uptake of this as a useful tool to fight corruption or not.

2. Multi-disciplinary approaches to an understanding of, solutions to and best practice measures in addressing corruption

Cost-effectiveness and cost-benefit analysis methods are currently underutilised in evaluations of governance and anti-corruption reforms in developing countries. This limits opportunities to inform policy and may lead to sub-optimal reform choices and programme designs.

The 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are an ambitious set of development targets to be met by 2030. They are considered to be holistic and all-encompassing with the promise to 'leave no one behind'. Goal 16 on 'Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions' includes commitments to fight corruption, increase transparency, tackle illicit financial flows and improve access to information. The inclusion of the SDGs as a measure of assessing a country's development track for example calls on country's to give a comprehensive assessment of the negative effects of corruption. Utilising multi-disciplinary approaches invariably aims to take into account the contributions that alternative disciplines, indicators and datasets can provide and thereby allowing for a broader understanding of corruption.

A common understanding of the necessity and benefits of tracking, monitoring progress of the implementation of anti-corruption measures and enacting policy is to ensure the uptake of these policies. This sub-theme seeks to explore recommendations and innovative solutions that have been utilised or suggested in order to fight corruption. This should not be just a “box-ticking” exercise linked to external funders or monitoring and evaluation (M&E) offices set up. Rather practitioners should keep in mind its value for establishing agreement on what constitutes progress and then demonstrating that progress. This progress is then tracked and shared especially within similar contexts in order to not only have a domino effect of positive change but to also not waste resources by re-inventing the wheel. In keeping in mind not to utilise the ‘one-shoe-fits-all’ approach this sub-theme seeks to share various resources and change mechanisms that have been deployed with positive effects whether employed as community mobilised practices using citizen monitoring for example, or legislative and policy changes or open data policy which portends access by all.

3. Counting the human cost to corruption

It is not easy to define “corruption,” as it involves many different corrupt actions that are a better focus of analysis. A comparable measure is however the adverse cost to human beings and nations. The social costs of corruption are deleterious as it deepens income inequality, poverty and adversely affects good moral values in the society. In general, corruption is a challenge to sustainable economic development, peace and good governance. Ordinary citizens bear the brunt of corruption in very direct ways - they face demands for bribes to see a doctor, find a school place for their children, or file a police complaint. And it is always those who are least able to pay a bribe who suffer most. The trickle-down effect of corruption impacting on a country’s development agenda and the socio-economic costs is debilitating.

A resource book by Transparency International titled ‘Women, Land and Corruption’ draws the links between land corruption, women’s wellbeing and prosperity. Women’s strong dependency on land as a resource means that land corruption disadvantages them more than men. Such corruption takes many forms, including traditions preventing women from inheriting land, bribery and sexual extortion by community leaders and land officials, and multinational investors appropriating land traditionally worked by women. Land corruption increases gender disparities, which undermines women’s livelihoods and social standing and, ultimately, perpetuates poverty.

4. Governance and government structures used in aiding and abetting or defeating corruption

Paul Kagame, President of the Republic of Rwanda noted that: “There can be no doubt that corruption is very costly to both governments and businesses and as such impacts negatively on our development efforts”. It therefore makes economic sense and good politics to fight corruption. Equally not in doubt is the fact that success of the fight against corruption depends on good governance. On the African continent, in seeking to give direction and impetus from continental bodies, the African Union (AU) and Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) developed a regional anti-corruption framework, establishing the AU Advisory Board on Corruption, which is mandated to carry out research on critical anti-corruption issues, and provide assistance to member states in institutional capacity building.

While this action from regional bodies is encouraging, individual member states are called upon to not only sign on to and ratify continental and globally binding statutes but to also internalise how these would be functional within individual contexts. Governance may indicate a heavy handed and top-down approach but it has been noted that democratic governments derive their legitimacy from the public. An interrogation of government structures would have the effect of building capacities where there are none or identify gaps in order to respond more pro-actively to monitoring progress in governance and anti-corruption.

This sub-theme seeks to explore whether government structures and holders of public office unwittingly aid in the perpetuating of corruption and if so, how alternative suggested structures and policies can better deter corrupt activities.

5. Technology use in aiding and abetting corruption

The Panama and Paradise Papers, WikiLeaks and Viceroy reports as examples, have revealed and shown how offshore territories - often known as secrecy jurisdictions or tax havens - play a key role in facilitating the illicit flow of money across borders. These have laid bare the international linkages that support illicit financial flows in aiding corruption. These revelations have also paved the way in which technological developments and uncanny sources especially as associated with social media and access to data have proved to be unwitting allies in the fight against corruption. This is against the grain that technology has unwittingly been used to abet corruption. The use of technology has also necessitated a response to legislation in order to close possible loopholes that could be used aid corruption.

There have been examples of online tools and resources which are encouraging citizen participation in the fight against corruption by tracking, monitoring and reporting cases of corruption which speaks to the deployment of citizen activism.

Kuhonga.com, based in Nairobi, Kenya is an online corruption mapping tool built on the Ushahidi platform. The site allows Kenyans to report incidences of corruption in real time through SMS, a mobile app, email, social media, or through the website itself. Ushahidi, Inc. is a non-profit technology company with staff in nine countries whose mission is to help marginalized people raise their voice and those who serve them to listen and respond better.

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