Unit 7: Political Commitment to Anticorruption

Learning Objectives

What do politics have to do with corruption?

After studying this unit, you should be able to:

- Understand the function and structure of an anticorruption commission;
- Understand the role of parliament in fighting corruption;
- Recognize what is meant by public money for the public good.

Diagnosis, direction, stakeholder participation, education, and prevention are all very important steps in corruption prevention, as we have learned in the earlier units of this module. A national commitment by parliamentarians and other political organizations to the corruption problem is also needed to overcome corruption. This unit looks at options for parliamentarians and political bodies’ to become involved and the extent of external participation in the process.

With each country comes a unique culture, values, traditions, economy, history and political structure. As a result, there is not one corruption fighting action plan that works for all countries. Action plans need to establish different priorities, sequences and timing for fighting corruption reflecting each country’s problems and opportunities.

Nonetheless, action plans draw from the same general pool of anticorruption reforms including economic reforms, institutional arrangements administrative reforms for promoting incentives for public officials and awareness raising campaigns that encourage citizens to resist corruption. As this unit will explain, these tend to include public spending patterns, the development of an ACC, citizen involvement, and a well functioning transparent, accountable and involved parliament.
**Monitoring Public Money**

A major component to corruption prevention by parliament and other branches of government is regarding the way the government spends public money. When there are opportunities and incentives for government officials to spend poorly, or steal from the public purse, there can be problems that run deep into the public systems.

Because the spending of public money so important, countries have developed procedures to oversee how the government is managing its money. The head of the government must explain how much money the government plans to spend in the coming year and how it will be budgeted according to parliament’s approval. Throughout the year the government is required to keep financial records to show that it adhered to the budget, with the help and monitoring of government auditors.

**Citizen Involvement**

Through access to information laws, concerned citizens can get a careful look at funding in the budget and then check to see if the money was actually used as reported. Through open budget hearings citizens can oversee the use of public money, and how the government is carrying out its jobs.
What reactionary efforts to corruption are lacking is a lobby to keep anticorruption reform on the agenda. A good strategy to address corruption involves a step by step approach:

- Recognizing and acknowledging the problem;
- Taking charge by showing leadership and involving groups that have a stake in the issue;
- Understanding the problem through diagnostic surveys;
- Identifying what is needed to address the problem through education and action-planning workshops;
- Drawing up a strategy that is prioritized into short, medium and long term plans;
- Implementing the strategy;
- Reviewing outcomes through monitoring;
- Identifying new challenges.

Anticorruption Commissions

Some governments have gone a step beyond laws preventing corrupt behavior and have actually created political bodies formed especially to educate, legislate, and punish acts of corruption. These Anticorruption Commissions are composed of an individual called a Commissioner, who essentially runs the ACC, an administrative branch, a community relations branch, and a corruption prevention department. These organizations, which are often non-governmental, have been adopted in a number of

Box 2
Citizen-ACC Cooperation: The Case of Zambia

In 2000 Zambia, the Anti Corruption Commission established a public discussion forum on Promoting and Protecting Integrity in Public Life with the following objectives:

- To bring together people from government and civil society, particularly people who could influence public opinion, to mobilize support for integrity in public life.
- To disseminate information about integrity and corruption and raise public awareness about important integrity and corruption issues.
- To promote partnership between the ACC and civil society, as ACC cannot fight corruption effectively without the support of civil society, and to build coalitions of like-minded citizens concerned about standards of integrity.
- To provide a forum where ACC could learn from the public and listen to public concerns about corruption.

The ACC used the forum, which was attended by Chief Justices, diplomats, academics, and policymakers as a means of gauging whether its priorities, policies, programs and activities were in line with public expectations or whether the Commission should be reformulating policy in certain areas to take into account public priorities and concerns.
countries around the world. Some believe that they are essential for institutionalizing anticorruption schemes, while others are less convinced of their effectiveness.

In order to be successful, anticorruption commissions must be independent, have a clear reporting hierarchy including executive officials, parliamentary authorities and public oversight committees, and a government that is committed to enacting reforms that may be difficult. In addition, laws must be established and enforceable by the commission in order for a commission to succeed. In addition, a clear reporting hierarchy in which reports are delivered by the director of the organization to oversight committees and then shared with parliament and the government is necessary for an anticorruption commission to run successfully. Without such a hierarchy, the executive office makes all of the decisions on the legislation and persecution of corrupt behavior. Finally, oversight committees allow for an effective and efficient commission.

The Role of Parliament in Curbing Corruption

The first major step of parliament is to prevent corruption in parliament is to build a parliament that is accountable to any wrong doings in office. When parliament is accountable to acts or even just threats of corruption, the people recognize that it is dangerous. As a result, many nations have instituted laws and policies to help curb corruption or opportunities therein in parliament and other bodies of government. Indeed, this is an emotion that is taken seriously at all levels of parliamentary organizations. For example, In a joint United Nations Interparliamentary Union (IPU) meeting on Good Governance and the Fight Against Corruption John Williams, Chairman of the Global Organization of Parliamentarians Against Corruption, told Parliamentarians, “Accountability is us, the Parliamentarians,” stressing that only through accountability could good governance be established and corruption fought.

In a functioning democracy, citizens rely on their parliaments for help in the corruption process since they are selected as representatives of the people to set the framework of law and oversee its implementation. Parliament, therefore, plays an essential leadership role in combating corruption, including legislative, oversight, and financial role as representatives of the people.
**Legislative Role:** Parliaments have the authority to create the legal framework needed to prevent and curb corruption, for example laws against inappropriate behavior by citizens, businesses, and other organizations. In addition, parliaments can bolster integrity in governance by establishing incentives to public officials and transparency and accountability. In order to be effective, laws must follow a key set of principles in clear language to minimize areas of discretion, and adapt them to the local circumstances and should address some issues such as conflicts of interest, nepotism, and statutes of limitation – not only to provide for the necessary punitive measures but also to promote an administrative and social environments adverse to corruption.

**Oversight:** Parliaments can also curb corruption by holding the government accountable. This can be achieved through effective participation in the budgetary process, the exercise of parliamentary oversight through anticorruption commissions, cooperation with supreme audit institutions, and promoting a media-friendly environment.

**Financial Control:** Parliament also plays a key role in the budgetary cycle; financial integrity is central to anti-corruption efforts. The budget cycle is comprised of drafting, legislation, implementation, and audit. In most countries, the ultimate control over the national budget rests with parliament. This power of the purse constrains governments to tax and spend in only specific ways and seeks to ensure management of funds, disciplined reporting and transparency. It also provides a means for parliamentarians to be heard on how money is to be obtained and spent. Parliament also considers the audit findings and provides recommendations for the next budget.

Other oversight practices employed by parliament include mandatory executive reporting and the authority to question ministers publicly on the operations of their departmental and program performance by calling for witnesses and documents and doing all of this in a transparent fashion in cooperation with outside bodies. Also, in some countries parliaments have the authority to review and approve appointments of certain public officials.
**Specialized Agencies:** Parliament is also involved in the functioning of the major oversight tools of specialized agencies. The best known of these agencies are Supreme Audit Institutions (SAIs). Although their mandates vary considerably, SAIs can help to deter waste and corruption by attesting to the financial accuracy of the data provided by the government; checking whether the executive’s spending has complied with applicable provisions, laws and regulations, and reviewing the government’s performance. To be effective, an SAI should feature a clear mandate, be independent, continuously update its expertise, and be allowed to report its results to specialized parliamentary committees such as the public accounts committee—which should then consider making recommendations to parliament for enactment. (See Budget Module for more information.) The second major specialized agency is an anticorruption agency, as discussed earlier. To work successfully, anticorruption commissions must be independent, part of a broader anticorruption strategy, embedded in a reporting hierarchy encompassing the legislative and executive and have the government enact its recommendations.

**Representation:** Representation, which occurs through a number of different channels such as the participation of civil society or the formation of political parties, is an important parliamentary instrument for building integrity in public governance. It can have the effect of empowering citizens to reject corrupt practices and expose politicians and officials who engage in corrupt activity providing a role for parliamentarians in helping to establish public standards for appropriate behavior. A good parliamentarian will travel back regularly to their home regions to organize forums of discussions, listen to their constituents, understand the causes and effects of corruption, include this information in the anticorruption policies, and monitor their impact.

**Parliament and Civil Society:** Parliament can also help to channel the interests and concerns of civil society into an open debate and help create political will to fight corruption. This will allow parliament to gain credibility and legitimacy thereby extending support for anticorruption efforts.

**Corruption in Political Parties and Parliament:** Politicians must first tackle corruption within their own ranks through political party financing, and codes of conduct for parliamentarians. In many systems political parties have become a
potential agent of corruption compromising legitimacy and integrity of democracy of political parties. Parliamentarians must also adhere to ethical behavior through such means as ethical regimes, which cover everything from conflicts of interests and the disclosure of assets to rules on post governmental employment and nepotism, codes of conduct, and codes of ethics. Internally, ethics regimes improve the behavior of legislators. Externally, they restore the often shattered public confidence in parliamentarians. To be effective such codes must be accompanied by enforcement mechanisms and be based on a shared understanding by parliamentarians of what is appropriate behavior and what is not.

**Inter-parliamentary Links:** Finally, parliamentarians can play a role in corruption prevention by participating in the collective power of inter-parliamentary links. The Global Organization of Parliamentarians Against Corruption (GOPAC) is an example of a single-purpose network aiming to combat and prevent corruption through the strengthening of integrity in governance. It does so by providing its membership with a platform to exchange information, relevant training, and crucial peer-support mechanisms. Parliamentary Network on World Bank (PnoWB), on the other hand, was created to strengthen parliamentary involvement and say in development issues. Through a diverse range of activities, it seeks to increase transparency, accountability, and parliamentary participation in international development.

Parliamentarians can also curb corruption through their role in the global governance system, such as the European Parliament or the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association.

Parliamentarians have the role of community representatives and legislator, but they also wear the hats of national role models. Parliamentarians and parliamentary staff can make very valuable contributions to the administration of better governance because they often have more at stake and have a better insight into the needs of their constituents.
Unit 7 Questions

Please answer each of the following questions. If you are taking this course in a group you may then meet to discuss your answers.

1. Do you think anticorruption commissions are an effective tool for corruption prevention? Explain why.

2. Why is parliament’s role in public money related to corruption?

3. From your own national experience, explain how political party involvement has helped or hurt good governance standards in your country.

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