

International Civic Forum

Exploring the Links between Corruption and Shrinking Civic Space

Dates 22-24 October, 2018

Location International Anti-Corruption Conference, Bella Center, Copenhagen, Denmark

Summary of Discussions

The *International Civic Forum 2018* took place within the International Anti-Corruption Conference (IACC), which hosted approximately 1,500 participants. A group of 41 representatives from civil society, foundations, the media and the business sector had signed up to the Forum's sessions, which were also open to the IACC participants to attend. Consequently, the composition of the group was different for each of the six sessions. The Forum highlighted the importance of bringing together a diverse set of civil society activists and organisations. While they all may focus on different areas (such as anti-corruption, human rights, environmental issues, and LGBTI rights), the Forum gave them a space to explore the connectedness of these issues.

The six Forum sessions explored

- how the fight against corruption can result in a backlash against democratic principles and civil society and the importance of addressing this while not letting up in the anti-corruption struggle;
- how environmental defenders and indigenous people who often uncover large-scale corruption scandals in the extractive industries sector are most affected by the environmental consequences of that sector's activities as well as at great risk to be targeted by business or (inofficial) state henchmen;
- how corrupt state agents exploit the marginalisation of the LBGTI community and set up highly effective extortion mechanisms; and
- how to take a business perspective in examining the connection between corruption and people's participation, in order to make the business case for civic rights.

Co-hosted by



THE B TEAM



Supported by



HEINRICH BÖLL STIFTUNG



Key Points of Discussions

The LGBTI+ Community: Easy Prey for Extortionists?

- The example of Nigeria showcased how the LGBTI+ community is especially vulnerable to extortion. In Nigeria, as well as in many other countries, the targeted victim, or their community on their behalf, will pay bribes in order to minimize the substantial security risk to they face.
- Consequently, a highly effective bribery economy has been established, which creates a vicious cycle for victims and those trying to expose extortion schemes.
- It is important that the international civil society community fights against the marginalization of LGBTI+ communities and brings their voices more into conversations, such as the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

The Fight against Corruption as a Threat to Democracy (?)

- In some countries, often those with weak democratic institutions, corruption scandals can fuel cynicism and general distrust in public institutions. In some cases, this results in increasing support of populist agendas (e.g. the recent elections in Brazil).
- Statistics indicate that citizens in many countries are not interested in learning about corruption. The anti-corruption movement should therefore focus its attention on explaining how corruption affects ordinary citizens. It should also connect anti-corruption efforts to larger issues, such as the preservation of democracy and human rights.
- It is important that the potential unintended consequences of anti-corruption efforts do not undermine the efforts themselves. To do so, anti-corruption efforts should be better linked to the strengthening of democracy and civic space.

The Business Case for Civic Rights

- It is important to continue making the case to businesses that a democratic environment is more beneficial to business prosperity than a seemingly stable autocratic and often corrupt environment.
- When engaging with businesses, the argument of short-term costs of action vs. long-term costs of inaction is crucial.
- There is often a high discrepancy between businesses' HQ policy and in-country practices.

The Unintended Consequences of the Fight against Corruption

- The Financial Action Task Force (FATF)'s Recommendation 8 on the supposed vulnerability of charitable organisations to terrorist money laundering compelled many countries to establish regulations that are overly bureaucratic for CSOs and prevent many from receiving foreign funding altogether.
- While the recommendation has been amended, the regulations remain in many countries and are used to control organisations, which are critical of their respective governments.
- The FATF recommendation has also led to the de-banking of CSOs, as the risk analyses are too expensive for banks.



- While trying to get regulations changed, it is essential that civil society investigates how to generate more financial support in-country.

Defenders at the Front Line: Corruption and the Crisis of Attacks on Environmental Defenders

- The defence of natural resources from illegal exploitation is intrinsically linked to exposing corruption.
- At the frontline of these struggles are often indigenous people, who are already in a precarious and risky position.
- It is essential to strengthen the connection between the struggle for human rights, the anti-corruption movement, and environmental safeguarding.

A Call to Action

In the final session, action points from all previous sessions were discussed and important connections between different actors were made. Please see the annex for the list of items.

If you intend to follow up on any of the discussed action points and need support connecting with relevant actors or setting up working groups, please contact Miriam Niehaus, Project Manager, Securing Civic Rights at the International Civil Society Centre: mniehaus@icscentre.org.

Annex - List of action points/recommendations from sessions

A Call to Action

- Bolstering democracy: civil society to engage more in local governance mechanisms -> scale from local to global
- Driving a compelling narrative for civil society participation and democracy
- Educating business about the long-term costs of violating human rights and civic space
- Using the 'faming' strategy to draw in business to civic space struggle, but be careful not to get 'too cozy' and still hold business accountable
- Strengthening CSO capacity in dealing with bureaucratic burden
- Resilient Roots – strengthening CSO accountability and integrity
- As bureaucratic burden increases and situation for CSOs becomes more precarious institutional, flexible and long-term funding is ever more important
- Mainstreaming marginalised groups in to the civic space struggles, as they are mostly at the frontlines

The LBGTI+ Community: Easy Prey for Extortionists?

See [full report here](#)

- Developing a platform to enable people to report to the government the bribes they have paid (it was recognised that there are security risks involved in this) -> see "[I paid a bribe](#)" initiative
- Posting photos of police officers engaging in bribery (again, the security risks were highlighted)
- Working on other police / state authority accountability mechanisms that are more likely than LBGTI+ rights violations to incentivize government bodies to act.
- Increase media exposure of the issue
- Monitoring and attempting to halt foreign investments in homophobic politicians and agendas
- Supportive civil society groups should have a closer look at how faith-based groups pour resources into campaigns that demonise the LBGTI+ community
- Drawing more on business, with specific reference to the organisation '[Open for Business](#)'
- Forming alliances with progressive faith leaders
- Building intersectional and cross movement alliances beyond the human rights movement
- Better linkages to the 2030 agenda and collecting more data and stories to inform this.

Co-hosted by



THE B TEAM



Supported by





The Fight against Corruption as a Threat to Democracy

No action points raised but see [full session report here](#).

The Business Case for Civic Rights

See [full report here](#)

- Highlight and detail the cost of inaction and get more businesses involved to raise their voice on this issue
- The B-Team's report [Business Case for Protecting Civic Rights](#) is an important start of gathering compelling data and studies to draw in business
- GDPR is a good thing – how can these type of regulations be further developed?
- Increase joint advocacy between private sector and civil society
- For business to appreciate the role of civil society we need governments more actively involved too
- Celebrate when we see leadership from business -> fanning instead of just naming and shaming
- Civil Society needs to look for new ways to work with business e.g. YouTube – banned in Pakistan for 3 years. Engaged with IT start-ups documenting social benefits and business benefits of YouTube and other platforms e.g. Gmail, Skype. Engaged with academics, small businesses, parliamentarians
- Find a way of engaging shareholders and investors on these issues as business will always put their interests first

The Unintended Consequences of the Fight against Corruption

See [full report here](#)

- Change in FATF recommendation 8 was a success but communicating about the change and implications is still a challenge
- Hard to over-emphasise how incredible the change in UK risk assessment has been - openly saying that CS is low risk - saying that they now better understand what they didn't before; measures in place increase the risk; CS poses no additional risk just because they are CS - being rolled out across CS and banks; – World Bank use this example in their country work
- De-risking - fear based approach has permeated everything at the banks. Changing this will be a slow process and a lot of education is required on this
- There is willingness of some governments that are sponsors of international aid to support initiatives to address this as that is hindering their commitments
- Idea of AML was not to exclude human rights, money organisations and CS - need to build a coalition- stakeholder dialogue that brings together regulators, policy, big and small banks such as the World Bank/ACAMS dialogue
- Exploring technological solutions that would reduce the cost of due diligence
- Awareness raising to contrast the myth that you don't want to work with CS - needs to be dislodged



Defenders at the Front Line: Corruption and the Crisis of Attacks on Environmental Defenders

See [full report here](#)

- We need to forge better connections between groups working on anti-corruption, human rights and the environment
- Frontline defenders and activists need to be at the heart of campaigns, cooperative efforts and initiatives to support them
- Available emergency and long-term funding, safe-houses, accompaniment, legal counsel and other forms of support are unknown and / or inaccessible to most frontline defenders; we must reach out to groups across the world, and compile information on how to access support, or seek redress in multi-lingual, multi-format media
- Join data collection efforts on the issue, see [IWGIA](#) and [Indigenous Navigator](#)