

## INFORMATION NOTE

## United Nations Pacific Regional Anti-Corruption (UN-PRAC) Project

# Pacific Civil Society Engagement to Address Corruption and Promote Public Accountability and Transparency

The United Nations Convention against Corruption (UNCAC) and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) recognize that partnerships between government and civil society are critical to successfully fighting corruption. UNCAC's Preamble states that States parties need "the support and involvement of individuals and groups outside the public sector, such as civil society, non-governmental organizations and community-based organizations, if their efforts in this area are to be effective"<sup>1</sup>. As Figure 1 shows, several articles in UNCAC specifically call for civil society participation in anti-corruption prevention, criminalization and law enforcement efforts.

Pacific Governments' efforts to address corruption draw on international good practice by developing multi-stakeholder strategies which recognize that corruption cannot be fought by governments alone. Pacific experience confirms that effective anti-corruption initiatives require action both on the "supply" side (i.e. working with those officials and institutions responsible for providing good governance and accountability) and the "demand" side (i.e. the citizenry and community groups who hold governments to account for

their actions). This is sometimes referred to as a "whole-of-society" approach.

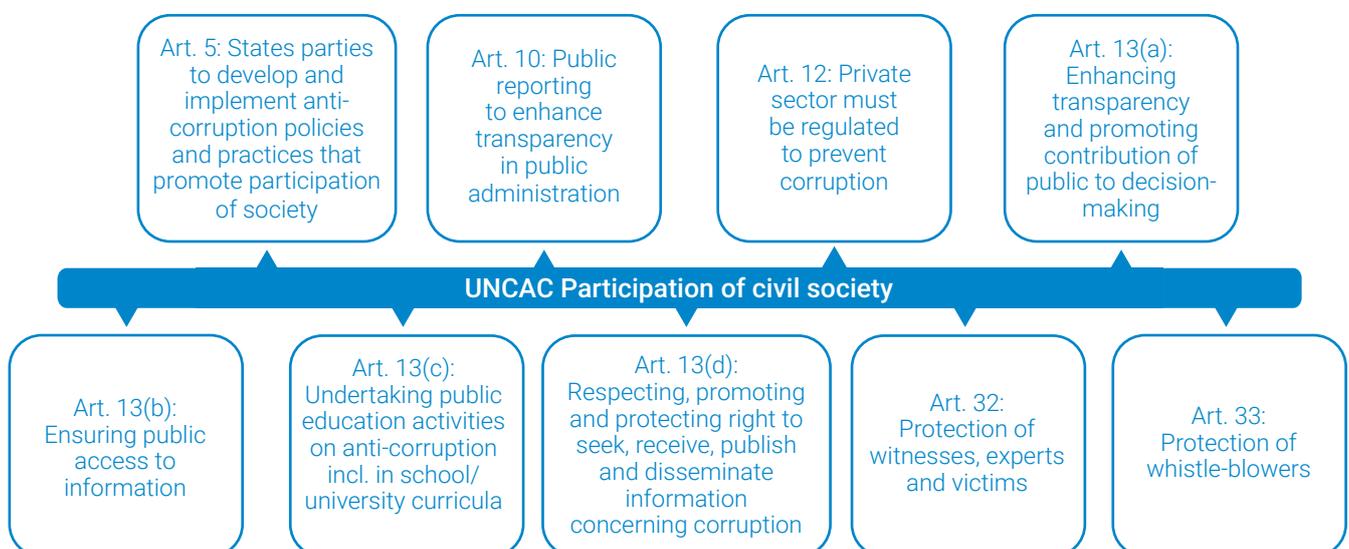
### Key entry points for working with civil society actors

Civil society across the Pacific has been active on a range of levels to ensure that their efforts to address corruption provide tangible benefits to the daily lives of Pacific Islanders. More specifically:

#### Engaging in global anti-corruption processes

- Most Pacific Governments have demonstrated good practice by involving civil society organizations (CSOs) in the UNCAC Review Mechanism; and
- Although CSOs cannot participate in decision-making at the Conference of States Parties to UNCAC, if invited by the President and approved by the Conference, CSOs can make oral statements and provide reports. They can also organize side events.

**Figure 1: Provisions in UNCAC encouraging civil society engagement**



<sup>1</sup> United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC). 2004. United Nations Convention against Corruption [Online]. Available from: [https://www.unodc.org/documents/treaties/UNCAC/Publications/Convention/08-50026\\_E.pdf](https://www.unodc.org/documents/treaties/UNCAC/Publications/Convention/08-50026_E.pdf).

## Strengthening the enabling environment

- Pacific CSOs have increasingly been involved by Pacific Governments in National Anti-Corruption Committees, which have predominately been set up to develop and coordinate the implementation of National Anti-Corruption Strategies (NACS). The Cook Islands, Kiribati, Papua New Guinea (PNG), Solomon Islands and Vanuatu have all set up such Committees;
  - CSOs have also engaged in other anti-corruption initiatives. For example, Transparency International PNG co-chairs PNG's Open Government Partnership (OPG) with the Department of National Planning and is involved in all three of PNG's OGP cluster priorities (on RTI, public participation and extractive industries transparency);<sup>2</sup>
  - Pacific CSOs have been active in promoting and supporting anti-corruption law reform, including by supporting awareness-raising and providing technical inputs on draft legislation. Pacific CSOs have also worked with Pacific Governments to enact specific laws, which promote public accountability and transparency, including right to information and whistle-blower protection laws;
  - Pacific Governments have established a range of independent accountability bodies, including Independent Commissions Against Corruption, Ombudsmen, Leadership Code Commissions and Audit Offices. These bodies are usually mandated to work closely with civil society in recognition of the value of a whole-of-society approach to addressing corruption; and
  - Pacific Parliaments are active in supporting anti-corruption efforts and have started to increase their formal engagement mechanisms for civil society to contribute to hearings and committee work. This oversight work contributes to exposing corruption and encouraging accountability.
- Young people across the region strongly feel the impact of corruption in their access to education and employment opportunities, and the services they depend on. Consequently, they have been extremely active in recent years in articulating their vision of a corrupt-free Pacific. For example, in 2015, the Pacific Youth Forum Against Corruption (PYFAC) was organized,<sup>3</sup> and subsequently, the PYFAC Network was established, with national chapters set up in Solomon Islands, Kiribati and Vanuatu.<sup>4</sup> Networks, such as the PYFAC Network, allow Pacific Governments to engage with youth anti-corruption initiatives;
  - Pacific CSOs have been trialing social accountability initiatives, designed to enable local communities to hold their officials to account for service delivery and decision-making processes.<sup>5</sup> Social accountability initiatives can be a useful and practical way of engaging ordinary people in identifying corruption and working with officials to address challenges;
  - The Pacific media has been very active in exposing stories of corruption and calling for more public accountability and transparency, including by advocating for right to information legislation. Their work can sometimes be risky, such that it is important that Pacific Governments ensure the national enabling environment protects the rights to freedom of expression and the media;
  - The private sector across the Pacific has been increasingly active in identifying the need to address corruption, in recognition of the reality that some private sector organizations have been participants in corrupt practices, rather than acting to eradicate it.<sup>6</sup> The Pacific Islands Private Sector Organization has led efforts to work with their members to develop codes of conduct.

## Working locally to promote accountability across communities

- Pacific CSOs and faith-based organizations can be collaborators for public education and awareness-raising. They are well-placed to engage with

communities around corruption issues as they can build on existing networks and relationships of trust; communities around corruption issues as they can build on existing networks and relationships of trust; communities around corruption issues as they can build on existing networks and relationships of trust;

Despite the small size of civil society in many PICS, CSOs, the media, private sector and other key community groups, including the youth, have all been increasingly active in working with Pacific Governments and other stakeholders to concretely implement activities that will help address corruption and build commitment to public accountability and transparency. This work should continue to be fostered going forwards.

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2 Kale, P. 2016. The Progress of OGP in Papua New Guinea. [online] Open Government Partnerships. Available from:

<https://www.opengovpartnership.org/stories/the-progress-of-ogp-in-papua-new-guinea/>.

3 Tuasau, F.M. 2015. Pacific Youth Gather in Fiji to Take on the Fight against Corruption [Online]. Available from: <https://www.transparency.org.nz/docs/2015/Pacific-Youth-Gather-in-Fiji-for-Forum-Against-Corruption.pdf>.

4 PYFAC was established with the support of UN-PRAC and the Pacific Youth Council. It has been an active ecosystem for national youth anti-corruption advocates in the Pacific region. See:

<https://www.facebook.com/155995481082309/posts/join-the-100-stories-campaign-an-initiative-by-gosh-cry-tongaa-youth-led-group-/1983300941685078/>

5 Social Accountability Initiatives usually involve a CSO working with a target community(ies) on a key issue (e.g. delivery of health services, provision of farming subsidies) to collect data about what the government has promised and has actually been delivered. The CSO will usually produce a report and/or convene a public hearing with officials, which provides an opportunity for the community to discuss their findings and call for explanations.

6 Chêne, M. 2017. 'Solomon Islands: Overview of Corruption and Anti-Corruption'. *U4 Expert Answer* [Online]. Available from: <https://www.u4.no/publications/solomon-islands-overview-of-corruption-and-anti-corruption.pdf>; Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative. 2019. PNG Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative Page [Online]. Available from: <https://eiti.org/papua-new-guinea>.