

The Road Ahead: Global Transparency for a Sustainable Future

Cobus de Swardt - 2 November 2008 (Closing Plenary of the 13th IACC)

1. Vulnerability

The vulnerability of the poor

The current financial crisis is indeed cause for serious concern. At the beginning of the 21st century, the near silence of political and business leaders on the devastating economic and humanitarian impact of the crisis on the poor and most marginalized around the world, is a shocking reminder of the acute vulnerability of the poor, as well as for the urgent need of a strong civil society voice at every table that matters.

As we set out to rebuild the world's financial system, transparency, integrity and public accountability need to finally become the backbone of vital reforms. This crisis is the result of an enormous mismanagement of funds entrusted by the public to financial institutions. In addition, the renewed failure of unilateralism to promote (even) national interests, has underlined the urgent need in this century for substantially strengthened international cooperation and instruments of global governance.

Four days ago, TI's AMM called upon the forthcoming G20 leaders meeting in Washington to increase Aid, with a focus on those in greatest need and with the necessary accountability mechanisms. Will they hear our call?

The vulnerability of the most abused

This conference set a landmark as civil society rallied against the vulnerability of the most abused. Historically speaking, corruption has greased the wheels of

exploitation and injustice since time immemorial. The great human tragedies of recent history – genocides and institutionalised racism – have likewise been welded to abusive political systems that twist the public trust for private gain. The fight against corruption is central to the struggle for human rights and social justice.

It is the fact that the poor and marginalised are most affected by corruption that should give us pause. In concrete terms it means that those with least influence are faced with demands for bribes in the most vulnerable situations, during contact with law enforcement, health care providers or the education system. This is a direct contravention of the (Universal Declaration of) Human Rights' principle of non-discrimination. It is our right and our social responsibility to call every official, every employer and every employee that fuels corruption, or turns a blind eye, to account.

2. Outrage

During the conference some speakers questioned the lack of outrage by civil society given the terrible human cost of corruption. I also heard the (old) debates on the relative importance of North vs South, demand side vs supply side, on the discrepancy in legal and moral sanctions against bribe givers vs bribe takers. I then thought of the following hypothetical situation.

If you had the choice to, at the push of a button, stop either all international or all national corruption, which button would you push? I would push the international one. Whoever, from wherever, who participates in this scourge is a criminal who through a single act deprives hundreds, even thousands, of people of their livelihoods and their lives. When people and institutions act with this kind of

devastating impact in other areas we call them criminals against humanity. In corrupt transactions it is referred to as white-collar crime.

Our moral outrage and legal sanctions on all of the corrupt in the North and the South, on the demand and supply side, bribe givers and bribe takers, whose actions continue to trap millions in poverty, exacerbate the resource curse and threaten the sustainability of natural resources, must match the crimes they commit.

3. Progress / solutions

Twenty five years after the first IACC, 15 after the birth of TI, we have now – particularly in the last decade – made substantial progress in the fight against corruption.

However, our victories are not yet sufficiently decisive to ensure irreversible change, or the continued key importance of our issue on the world's social agenda. In contrast to other global social issues, such as climate change, we are not yet beyond the tipping point of no return. Our gains remain fragile and could be reversed. We still need to solidify corruption as one of the major global social issues of our time until substantially dealt with.

We in the anti-corruption community from all walks of life must now escalate the fight against corruption so as to leave no level of the government, private or NGO sectors untouched. In addition to this mammoth task of taking our issue to scale we are today challenged to provide solutions that are: technically state-of-art; politically feasible; and socially connected to the broader population. This conference substantially pushed the envelope in all these three areas.



13th International
Anti-Corruption Conference
IACC

**Global Transparency:
fighting corruption for a sustainable future.**
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Finally

Corruption is inherently a most unsustainable business strategy – ask some of the companies that are now dealing with the downfall of corrupt practices overseas. It is our task to turn the inevitable into reality quickly. Never before have we been in a better position to do it: today we understand the devastating consequences of corruption; we know the powerful and instantaneous results of transparent and accountable institutions and systems; moreover, we have the technology and means to reduce financial and international corruption dramatically and rapidly. The desired outcome is now in our sight, depending on our own will and efforts. Do we have the guts to push both buttons simultaneously!