

# Advisory Note: Mainstreaming Anti-Corruption into the Sustainable Development Agenda in the Pacific

*Mainstreaming anti-corruption is critical to supporting the sustainable development agenda, accelerating progress towards meeting all the Sustainable Development Goals, and providing for the needs of the poorest and most vulnerable in society effectively and equitably.*

Corruption remains a challenge in every country in the world. It affects all three dimensions of sustainable development – social, economic, and environmental – and each of the five pillars of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development – people, planet, prosperity, peace, and partnerships.<sup>i</sup> Resources lost to corruption exceed the estimated 10 trillion US dollars needed to eradicate poverty by 2030 and deny much needed progress to those most at risk of being left behind.<sup>ii</sup>

Corruption is a multifaceted impediment to achieving sustainable development. It hurts the poorest and most vulnerable disproportionately by diverting funds intended for development, undermining government ability to provide basic services such as healthcare and education, discouraging aid and foreign investment, and inhibiting infrastructure development and climate change responses.<sup>iii</sup> Undermining democratic institutions, contributing to government instability, eroding public trust, and perverting the rule of law, it promotes and sustains inequality and injustice. Corruption, therefore, reflects a failure in democracy, human rights and governance that reduces human security and increases poverty.<sup>iv</sup>

This vast, cross-cutting impact on sustainable development means that anti-corruption measures need to be integrated into Agenda 2030 in order to achieve results under all 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

## The Sustainable Development Goals

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, adopted by all United Nations Member States in 2015, provides a collective blueprint for peace and prosperity for people and the planet, now and into the future. At its heart are the 17 SDGs, which represent an urgent call

for action by all countries – developed and developing – in a global partnership.<sup>v</sup> The SDGs recognize that ending poverty and other deprivations must go hand-in-hand with strategies that improve health and education, reduce inequality, and spur economic growth – all while tackling climate change and working to preserve critical ecosystems.

The 2030 Agenda was a breakthrough for anti-corruption efforts as it emphasizes the importance of promoting transparency, accountability, and anti-corruption, and makes an explicit link between corruption, peace, and just and inclusive societies. Focused on addressing governance deficits and challenges, SDG 16 – Peace, justice, and strong institutions – addresses the root causes of many development challenges and serves as a key enabler for the entire agenda.<sup>vi</sup> Without sustained peace, respect for human rights and equal access to justice for all, development fails. Without strong institutions, social, political, and economic inequalities increase, and commitments to leaving no one behind struggle.



## SDG 16 and Anti-Corruption

SDG 16 and its anti-corruption targets on reducing illicit financial flows (16.4), corruption and bribery (16.5); developing effective, accountable and transparent institutions (16.6); ensuring responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making (16.7); and strengthening access to information (16.10) are not only important for promoting transparency, accountability, and integrity, but are also essential conditions for the successful achievement of all the SDGs.<sup>vii</sup>

Anti-corruption measures and efforts to meet SDG targets are therefore complementary. SDG 16 in particular is a critical enabler of the entire 2030 Agenda because corruption in any form is a major impediment to sustainable development. For example, where corruption plagues hospitals, progress towards targets

on healthcare will be challenged. Likewise, when corruption blights schools, targets on education are unlikely to be realized, and where corruption limits public service delivery, goals on poverty eradication, clean water and affordable energy will be almost impossible to achieve. This state of affairs can be described as a 'poverty trap' where poor governance perpetuates the conditions that sustain it.<sup>viii</sup>

Conversely, successful anti-corruption measures reinforce sustainable development. When citizens experience the benefits of good governance, they are more likely to participate in contributing to and sustaining democratic processes. Good governance increases individual and societal determination to influence positive change and become honest and active participants in civic affairs.<sup>ix</sup>

### **The United Nations Convention against Corruption**

The entry into force of the United Nations Convention against Corruption (UNCAC) on 14 December 2005 provided fresh impetus and new opportunities for the fight against corruption. As the only legally binding global anti-corruption instrument, now ratified by 189 Parties (largely nations), it provides a comprehensive framework for preventing, detecting and prosecuting corrupt practices across all sectors of society, including in the public and private sectors, civil society and the media.<sup>x</sup> It is also designed to strengthen international cooperation and ensure that technical assistance is provided to countries that require it. In addition, UNCAC provides mechanisms for recovering assets stolen through corruption. This is important for many developing countries where high-level corruption has reduced national wealth.<sup>xi</sup>

The development of effective anti-corruption strategies is highlighted in article 5 of UNCAC, which requires States parties to develop and implement effective, coordinated anti-corruption policies that promote the participation of civil society and reflect the principles of rule of law, proper management of public affairs and public property, along with integrity and transparency. An effective anti-corruption strategy, however, requires a detailed understanding of a country's governance and political environment.<sup>xii</sup> The quality and effectiveness of anti-corruption measures rely on an in-depth understanding of where, when, why and how corruption occurs, along with the factors that allow it to persist in a specific country. It is also imperative to accept that corruption is a political problem related to power relations. Effective anti-corruption programmes must include adequate mechanisms to address all possible sources and types of resistance.

By ratifying UNCAC and participating in its implementation, countries can both strengthen their legal and institutional frameworks for fighting corruption

and improve their capacity to achieve SDG targets and promote a more harmonized and coordinated approach to global development. In this, UNCAC serves as a guiding framework and inspiration for a whole-of-society and whole-of-government response to corruption.

Ensuring that obligations under UNCAC are met is one sure route to achieving SDG 16 and enabling the achievement of all other SDGs.

### **Mainstreaming Anti-Corruption**

Mainstreaming anti-corruption involves ensuring that anti-corruption perspectives and approaches are incorporated into all stages – development, implementation, and monitoring – of every aspect of development work, including those that are not directly aimed at countering corruption.<sup>xiii</sup> As discussed above, corruption promotes and sustains inequality and injustice and affects every aspect of sustainable development. Addressing corruption in healthcare systems will, for example, enhance Good Health and Wellbeing (SDG 3). Likewise, countering corruption in education will improve access to Quality Education (SDG 4), and reducing corruption in infrastructure development will improve access to Clean Water and Sanitation (SDG 6) and Affordable and Clean Energy (SDG 7). In all instances, the benefits that result from an increased focus on anti-corruption will accrue most substantially to the poorest and most vulnerable.

Another broad principle of mainstreaming involves the transfer of practices and approaches proven to be effective in one domain into other organizations and bodies.<sup>xiv</sup> This means that successful anti-corruption efforts from local governance, public administration reform, access to justice, and civic engagement, for example, can be used to counter corruption in healthcare, education, infrastructure development and more, with the aim of accelerating achievement of all SDG targets. Underlying this approach is the fact that anti-corruption measures both reinforce and benefit from fundamental governance principles such as accountability, transparency, access to information, rule of law, participation, responsiveness, and equality. As a result, human rights and democracy are reinforced and sustainable development benefits, while corruption faces direct tried-and-tested responses.

Irrespective of the SDG in question, mainstreaming interventions against corruption need to centre on developing comprehensive initiatives that respond to prevailing governance challenges. All aspects of governance should be taken into account. Successful strategies will be evidence-based, dynamic, integrated, and holistic. They must be able to both accurately assess the problem in advance and adapt to changing



circumstances. Individual elements of such strategies must be integrated and continuously coordinated with each another. The overall strategy must be broad enough to ensure that all elements of government and society – including areas currently unaffected by corruption that may be impacted in the future – are not left out.

Thus, the aim of mainstreaming anti-corruption into the broader sustainable development agenda essentially means reducing corruption in each subject area of the SDGs to support their achievement.

This strategy is beneficial as it allows a sector specific approach to corruption as opposed to a broad one-size-fits all approach. It also means that reducing corruption can have a positive impact on people's well-being across diverse sectors. It may be more feasible to include reforms at the sector level in cases where anti-corruption is not high on the agenda of the government in question.<sup>xv</sup>

Additionally, including anti-corruption as an aim on the national agenda can attract more donor funding from countries with corruption prevention objectives. This more purposeful integration of anti-corruption can also achieve results under SDG 16 much quicker than originally intended as it is being addressed at all levels.

## The Situation in the Pacific

Particular concern exists regarding progress towards the SDGs in the Asia and Pacific region. The ESCAP 2022 SDG Progress Report for Asia and the Pacific concludes that progress is 'insufficient,' and the expected year for the achievement of the SDGs in the region is now estimated to be 2065.<sup>xvi</sup> Although the pandemic and climate change are acknowledged to have exacerbated development challenges, between 2017 and 2021, the estimated achievement date in the region has slipped more than 10 years, and the gap is increasing each year.

However, when looking specifically at the Pacific context and considering the areas most important for SDG mainstreaming, a few factors should be kept in mind. First, it is important to consider which SDGs are of particular importance for sustainable development, by, for instance, looking at where Pacific Island Countries (PICs) are most at risk. Second, those SDGs most at risk of corruption should be considered; this could, for example, include sectors where large amounts of funding have been allocated, increasing incentives for corruption. Finally, the SDGs which have harnessed the most political will and attention can be targeted first.

The answers to these questions will likely be different for every PIC. Despite their similarities, each PIC is unique and has a distinctive set of needs and motivations.

However, SDG 13: Climate Action is one that would fulfil these criteria in most PICs. PICs are disproportionately affected by climate change, including through sea-level rises threatening to essentially 'sink' some countries, as well as marked increases in natural disasters.<sup>xviii</sup> Climate change is also at the top of many PIC leaders' agendas. Palau's President Surangel Whipps Jr., for example, recently spoke to the media urging climate action to stop the increase in the natural disasters that Palau and other PICs are facing.<sup>xix</sup> Finally, policies to combat climate change receive significant funding; for example, approximately \$3.3 billion was committed for climate projects in the Pacific region between 2014 and 2019.<sup>xx</sup> While this is a positive development, it also makes climate change projects particularly susceptible to corruption. As the costs for effectively adapting to climate change are quite high – such as costly and resource intensive projects to protect coastlines<sup>xxi</sup> – the impact of corruption in these areas can result in the diversion of funds, rendering the project less effective.

Another key issue for many PICs is SDG 14: Life Below Water. Many Pacific Islanders rely on the ocean for

## SDG 16 Challenges

Regarding SDG 16, four significant issues are slowing progress:

1. In many countries, institutional capacity and political will to implement the anti-corruption targets of SDG 16 is weak.
2. Knowledge is limited regarding how to mainstream and integrate SDG 16 and anti-corruption targets in national, sectoral, and local development plans and processes.
3. Methodologies and/or data is lacking to benchmark and monitor progress on SDG 16.
4. Effective national coordination and monitoring mechanisms largely fail to involve major stakeholders (e.g., audit institutions, anti-corruption agencies, civil society organizations).<sup>xvii</sup>



food (consuming fish two to three times more than the global average);<sup>xxii</sup> household income (47 percent of coastal households earn their first or second income from selling surplus fish and invertebrates caught from coastal and nearshore waters);<sup>xxiii</sup> and government revenue (for example, fishing license fees contributed 78.1 percent of national government revenue in Kiribati in 2015).<sup>xxiv</sup> Fisheries are also particularly susceptible to corruption due to the complexity of the value-chain which often includes foreign fishing vessels and other international actors. It is often high on national agendas for the reasons mentioned above – particularly in cases where fishing revenue makes up a large percentage of the PIC’s national government revenue.

Finally, SDG 3: Good Health and Well-Being has been at the top of all PIC agendas since the onset of COVID-19. The pandemic has understandably consumed a large proportion of government and donor spending in the region. However, this influx of funds coupled with the necessary relaxation of compliance, oversight and accountability safeguards required to achieve such a rapid response, has created ample opportunity for corruption to thrive.<sup>xxv</sup> The impact of COVID-19 on the health and well-being of Pacific Islanders has been extensive; not just in terms of the health impact to those PICs that experienced outbreaks of the virus – for example, Fiji, Papua New Guinea, Tonga, Kiribati, and Solomon Islands—but also in terms of the effect on mental health for those who have lost their livelihoods due to the collapse of the tourism sector.

As all 14 PICs are parties to UNCAC, the Convention serves as a powerful entry point for national anti-corruption efforts across the region. A key component of achieving the SDGs, including SDG 16, is for countries across the region to continue to meet their responsibilities under UNCAC to prevent, detect and counter existing and emerging forms of corruption and support anti-corruption mainstreaming. Fundamentally, this requires a comprehensive and multidisciplinary ‘whole-of-government’ and ‘whole-of-society’ approach which involves everyone – government, the private sector, academia, media organizations, citizens, and civil society organizations – working individually and collectively to counter corruption.

While every PIC is different and will have a different set of key development priorities, the following recommendations provide suggested steps suggestions that may be taken to mainstream anti-corruption into the SDGs and the broader sustainable development agenda.

## Recommendations

### **Incorporate anti-corruption measures into all development programmes including in critical sectors:**

All development programmes should have clear and effective anti-corruption measures integrated into their design and implementation, as well as measures for monitoring and evaluation. This can include measures to provide transparency and accountability mechanisms, independent monitoring and evaluation, and strong legal frameworks for addressing corruption.

### **Consider including anti-corruption bodies or advisers in the development of policies/programmes/projects:**

For example, when planning a development initiative that aims to restore fish stocks to sustainable levels, consider including an anti-corruption adviser in the planning and implementation stages.

### **Include development considerations in national anti-corruption policies, while at the same time mainstreaming anti-corruption in different development sectors:**

This may be achieved by ensuring that anti-corruption bodies are providing oversight of all policies/programmes/projects working to mainstream anti-corruption measures to ensure that the relevant authorities are aware of progress and challenges.

### **Consult with anti-corruption authorities and develop a plan for mainstreaming anti-corruption into development policies/programmes/projects:**

This may involve using some of the suggestions in this list. This process can include anti-corruption indicators in existing and planned policies/programmes/projects so that they are assessed not only in terms of achieving the SDG that they are aiming to achieve, but also on how they are meeting SDG 16 and other relevant anti-corruption targets.

### **Strengthen the capacity of anti-corruption bodies and advisers so they are equipped to contribute to development policies/programmes/projects:**

This may involve ensuring there are advisers with expertise in particular subject matter areas. For example, in the case of fisheries, ensuring the presence of advisers with experience handling corruption in fisheries cases. When mainstreaming anti-corruption measures into SDG 5: Gender Equality, it is likely the policy/project/programme will require a corruption expert that is trained in understanding the gender dimensions of corruption and the cultural implications of gender within the particular PIC.

**Foster strong governance institutions:** Building strong governance institutions that are independent, accountable, and transparent is essential to countering corruption. This can be achieved by promoting the rule of law, strengthening the capacity of the judiciary, and

supporting the development of strong and independent anti-corruption agencies.



**Engage in advocacy and awareness raising:** Both for authorities involved in the policies/programmes/projects, as well as key stakeholders including the public and civil society organizations, to ensure everyone is aware of corruption's ability to infiltrate every facet of society, and how corruption materializes in particular sectors and/or government services.

**Encourage citizen participation:** Encouraging citizen participation in decision-making processes helps to reduce corruption. This can be achieved by promoting access to information, empowering civil society organizations, ensuring a free and plural media, and promoting citizen-led monitoring of government activities.

**Promote public financial management reforms:** Effective management of public finances is essential to counter corruption. This can be achieved by promoting budget transparency, strengthening the transparency and accountability of public procurement processes, and establishing effective auditing mechanisms.

**Support private sector engagement:** The private sector plays an important role in countering corruption by

promoting transparency and accountability in business practices. This can be achieved by promoting ethical business practices, encouraging corporate social responsibility, and establishing effective regulatory frameworks.

**Ensure international cooperation:** International cooperation is essential to counter corruption and share good practices, particularly in cases where corruption involves cross-border activities. This can be achieved by promoting international legal frameworks for countering corruption, participating in global anti-corruption networks and facilitating the exchange of good practices and lessons learned among countries at the national, regional and global levels.

*The scope and ambition of the 2030 Agenda are unprecedented and require collaboration, innovation, and shared accountability across all levels of government and civil society.*

*Partnerships of public, private, and non-profit sectors, as well as the active participation of all members of society, are essential to enhance anti-corruption efforts and accelerate progress on the 2030 Agenda.*

## ENDNOTES

<sup>i</sup> See: <https://sdghelpdesk.unescap.org/e-learning/anti-corruption-context-2030-agenda-sustainable-development>.

<sup>ii</sup> See: <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2017/01/we-waste-2-trillion-a-year-on-corruption-here-are-four-better-ways-to-spend-that-money/>.

<sup>iii</sup> See: [http://www.anticorruptionday.org/documents/actagainstcorruption/print/corr18\\_fs\\_DEVELOPMENT\\_en.pdf](http://www.anticorruptionday.org/documents/actagainstcorruption/print/corr18_fs_DEVELOPMENT_en.pdf).

<sup>iv</sup> See: <https://hdr.undp.org/system/files/documents/rhdrfullreportacklingcorruptiontransforminglivespdf.pdf>

<sup>v</sup> See: <https://sdgs.un.org/goals>.

<sup>vi</sup> See: <https://www.transparency.org/en/our-priorities/sustainable-development-goals>.

<sup>vii</sup> See: <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/peace-justice/>.

<sup>viii</sup> Gupta, S. (1998). Does Corruption Affect Income Inequality and Poverty? IMF Working Papers, 1998(076), A001. Available at: <https://www.elibrary.imf.org/view/journals/001/1998/076/article-A001-en.xml>.

<sup>ix</sup> Mansoor M. (2021). Citizens' trust in government as a function of good governance and government agency's provision of quality information on social media during COVID-19. Gov Inf Q. 2021 Oct;38(4):101597. doi: 10.1016/j.giq.2021.101597. Epub 2021 Jun 23. PMID: 34642542; PMCID: PMC8494525. Available at: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC8494525/>.

<sup>x</sup> See: <https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/corruption/uncac.html>.

<sup>xi</sup> See: <https://www.unodc.org/islamicrepublicofiran/en/impact-of-corruption.html>.

<sup>xii</sup> See: <https://www.undp.org/publications/anti-corruption-strategies-understanding-what-works-what-doesnt-and-why>.

<sup>xiii</sup> See: <https://www.u4.no/publications/mainstreaming-anti-corruption-into-sectors-practices-in-u4-partner-agencies.pdf>.

<sup>xiv</sup> See: [https://ec.europa.eu/employment\\_social/equal\\_consolidated/data/document/etg5-mainstreaming-paper-final.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/equal_consolidated/data/document/etg5-mainstreaming-paper-final.pdf).

<sup>xv</sup> Ibid, p.2.

<sup>xvi</sup> See: United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (2022). Asia and the Pacific SDG Progress Report 2022 - Widening disparities amid COVID-19. Available at: <https://www.unescap.org/kp/2022/asia-and-pacific-sdg-progress-report-2022>.

<sup>xvii</sup> See: <https://www.unssc.org/news-and-insights/blog/moving-commitment-action-integration-anti-corruption-sustainable-development>. a

<sup>xviii</sup> Manal Fouad and others, 'Unlocking Access to Climate Finance for Pacific Island Countries' (24 September 2021) *International Monetary Fund*, p.1. Available: <https://www.elibrary.imf.org/view/journals/087/2021/020/article-A001-en.xml>.

<sup>xix</sup> Victoria Seabrook, "'We're going under": Do not let climate change consign us to history, pleads leader of island nation Palau' (22 February 2022) *Sky News*. Available: <https://news.sky.com/story/were-going-under-do-not-let-climate-change-consign-us-to-history-pleads-leader-of-island-nation-palau-12538210>.

<sup>xx</sup> Fouad et al (n. 9) p.8.

<sup>xxi</sup> Ibid, p.3.

<sup>xxii</sup> Johann Bell and other, 'Vulnerability of Tropical Pacific Fisheries and Aquaculture to Climate Change' (2011) *Secretariat of the Pacific Community*, p.1. Available: [https://horizon.documentation.ird.fr/exl-doc/pleins\\_textes/divers15-01/010063492.pdf](https://horizon.documentation.ird.fr/exl-doc/pleins_textes/divers15-01/010063492.pdf).

<sup>xxiii</sup> Ibid.

<sup>xxiv</sup> The 2015 report is the most recent report available from the Ministry of Finance & Economic Development (MFED) website: MFED, 'MFED Annual Report 2015' (2015) p.12. Available: <http://www.mfed.gov.ki/sites/default/files/MFED%20Annual%20Report%202015.pdf>.

<sup>xxv</sup> UN-PRAC, 'Advisory Note: COVID-19 and Corruption in the Pacific' (May 2020) *UNDP & UNODC*, p.1. Available: [https://www.unodc.org/documents/southeastasiaandpacific/pacific/2020/UN-PRAC\\_Advisory\\_Note\\_-\\_COVID-19\\_and\\_Corruption\\_in\\_the\\_Pacific\\_May\\_2020.pdf](https://www.unodc.org/documents/southeastasiaandpacific/pacific/2020/UN-PRAC_Advisory_Note_-_COVID-19_and_Corruption_in_the_Pacific_May_2020.pdf).