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Implementation of relevant Conference resolutions: good practices and initiatives in the prevention of corruption: thematic discussion on promoting the use of information and communications technologies for the implementation of the Convention

Use of information and communications technologies for the implementation of the United Nations Convention against Corruption

Note by the Secretariat

I. Introduction

1.   The use of information and communications technologies in the fight against corruption has attracted growing attention in recent years. Innovation in anti-corruption efforts and the rapid development of those technologies have led to new approaches and solutions that may be used to strengthen transparency and accountability, increase public participation and build trust in government.

2.   The Conference of the States Parties to the United Nations Convention against Corruption, prior to its ninth session held in 2021, had recognized the importance of information and communications technologies for the prevention of corruption in its resolution 6/7, entitled "Promoting the use of information and communications technologies for the implementation of the United Nations Convention against Corruption", and its resolution 6/8, entitled "Prevention of corruption by promoting transparent, accountable and efficient public service delivery through the application of best practices and technological innovations". Similar emphasis on information and communication technology solutions was placed by the Conference in its resolution 9/3, entitled "Follow-up to the Abu Dhabi Declaration on enhancing collaboration between the supreme audit institutions and anti-corruption bodies to more effectively prevent and fight corruption, and the use of information and communications technologies".

3.   The Working Group discussed the use of information and communications technologies to promote integrity in public procurement and transparency and accountability in the management of public finances (article 9 of the Convention) at its sixth meeting, held in 2015. The use of those technologies for the implementation of the Convention was a topic

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for discussion by the Working Group also at its seventh meeting, held in 2016. At its ninth meeting, held in 2018, the Working Group considered the topics of conflicts of interest (article 7, paragraph 4, of the Convention)[1] and the use and effectiveness of asset declaration systems (article 8, paragraph 5, of the Convention). Also in relation to those topics, the use of information and communications technologies was explored.

4.   In its resolution 9/3, the Conference requested the Working Group to discuss how to promote the use of information and communications technologies. The present note has been prepared on the basis of information provided by 17 States parties (Argentina, Australia, Belarus, Brazil, Chile, Guyana, Iraq, Japan, Kuwait, Madagascar, Pakistan, Panama, the State of Qatar, the Russian Federation, Serbia, Switzerland and the United States of America) in response to a note verbale by the secretariat dated 23 February 2022 that was submitted after the deadline of 30 March 2022 and could not be included in the background paper prepared by the secretariat.[2]

5.   The full texts of the submissions have been made available on the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) website and incorporated into the thematic website developed by the secretariat.[3]

6.   The present note is structured according to the main themes that emerged from the submissions and that have been included in the background paper: integrity in public procurement and management of public finances; public reporting; participation of society; enhancing the transparency of and promoting the contribution of the public to decision-making processes; and ensuring effective public access to information.

II.   Analysis of submissions of States parties

A.   Integrity in public procurement and management of public finances (article 9)

7.   All reporting States parties indicated that that e-procurement portals had been established or were about to become operational as a means of simplifying procurement procedures and promoting transparency.

8.   Argentina reported on the launch of a project to streamline public contracting processes through the use of artificial intelligence and machine learning.

9.   Brazil reported that it had developed an integrated digital public procurement platform which centralized the whole procurement cycle.

10.   Madagascar reported on the launch of a new online platform that was expected to automate various stages of the procurement process and the execution of public contracts.

11.   Pakistan highlighted the features of its e-procurement regime, which included a bidder evaluation system, a real-time database of black-listed suppliers and the capacity to generate analytical reports of detected violations and breaches.

12.   The Russian Federation noted that its electronic unified information system (UIS) for the procurement of goods, works and services provided a single space for government procurement. The UIS interacted with more than 200 external systems and provided access to information such as procurement schedules, awarded contracts and registered vendors, delivery and acceptance of procured goods and services and contractors' performance. To further reduce risks of corruption, the UIS was supplemented by an "Independent Register" which provided recordings, including video recordings in real time, of actions or inactions between tenderers and public administration.

13.   In the United States of America, integrity and transparency in public procurement were promoted through the Integrated Award Environment, an online platform which facilitated the award of public contract at the federal level by interacting with multiple online systems.

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[1] See CAC/COSP/WG.4/2018/2.
[2] See CAC/COSP/WG.4/2022/2.
[3] Available at www.unodc.org/unodc/en/corruption/WG-Prevention/thematic-compilation-prevention.html.

One of such systems, the System for Award Management (SAM), was used by the Federal Government to register potential tenderers, publish procurement plans, issue invitations to tender, record awarded contracts, subcontracts and contractors' performance.

B. Public reporting (Article 10)

Using information and communications technologies to provide access to information on the organization, functioning and decision-making process of public administration

14. The majority of States parties reported that they had used or developed information and communications technologies to provide access to information on the structure, functions and decisions of public administration.

15. Australia reported that all public entities were required to publish an "Information Publication Scheme" on their websites. The Scheme provided detailed information on the entity's structure, functions, decision-making authority, recruitment of civil servants, rules, guidelines, practices and precedents related to the adoption of decisions or recommendations that affected the public.

16. Belarus indicated that it had adopted legislation requiring all government agencies to publish on their websites up-to-date information on their management, structure, functions and administrative procedures.

17. Madagascar indicated that it had recently inaugurated a telephone-based counseling center, known as "IVOTORO", to inform, guide and advise the public on administrative requirements and procedures.

18. The State of Qatar reported that its Government Communications Office had launched a central platform to provide information on decisions made by public administration and other bodies such as the Shura Council and the Municipal and Central Councils.

19. The United States of America noted that its federal agencies made extensive use of websites to provide substantive information, inform the public about their activities and explain how to obtain additional information. The agency websites were linked to a federal portal, USA.gov, which served as a comprehensive and central space for citizen to access information at the federal level by subject matter rather than by agency.

Using information and communications technologies to provide information on the management of public finances

20. Chile reported that the Open Data Portal of the Office of the Comptroller General was under development. The Portal would provide a single space for citizens to access information on audits, public revenue and expenditure and other financial management acts of the government.

21. Guyana reported that the annual presentation of the budget to parliament was live streamed and that large television screens were placed around the parliament building to facilitate public viewing.

22. The Russian Federation noted that its Accounts Chamber had established a "State Expenditures" portal to increase transparency in the management of the state budget. The portal allowed the public to trace the use of public finances from the approval of the federal budget to the execution of state contracts and the issuance of subsidies.

C. Participation of society (Article 13)

Enhancing the transparency of and promoting the contribution of the public to decision-making processes

23.   Switzerland indicated that, as a means of ensuring transparency and promoting public participation in the decision-making processes, online consultation procedures had been established. Such procedures allowed the public to assess federal projects of considerable political, financial, economic, environmental, social or cultural importance.

24.   The United States of America reported that it had routinely utilized information and communications technologies to increase the participation of citizens in government oversight and decision-making processes. Under the "eRulemaking Program", the Regulations.gov portal enabled citizens to search, view and comment on government regulations. Because transparency in public decision-making was considered a priority of the Congress, most of its floor proceedings were open to the public, televised and available via webcast.

Open data

25.   Argentina reported that its Directorate of Open Data supported public organizations to publish information of public interest on the National Open Data Portal.

26.   Chile referred to its participation in the Open Government Partnership, an initiative designed to promote transparent, participatory, inclusive and accountable governance also by leveraging innovation and technology.

27.   The Russian Federation noted that, in line with an order issued by the Prosecutor General's Office, all prosecutorial bodies regularly disseminated information on their activities through their websites, news agencies, the press, radio and television.

28.   The United States of America noted that government data was available on a variety of platforms. The portal Data.gov provided access to aggregated metadata and open data at the federal and national levels.

Ensuring effective public access to information

29.   Guyana reported that more than 241 "ICT Hubs" had been activated across its ten administrative regions, providing citizens with free access to the Internet and allowing students and community members to access information on public service delivery.

30.   Iraq reported that the Federal Commission of Integrity had established an e-mail system and a hotline to facilitate public reporting and to provide information and guidance on legal procedures.

31.   Panama indicated that the Virtual Academy of Ethics and Transparency disseminated information to both public officials and civil society on issues such as ethical standards, the exercise of the right of access to information and the protection of personal data.

32.   The Russian Federation noted that the Public Services Portal provided individuals and legal persons with access to information on the delivery of public services at the state and municipal levels and on the state functions of control and supervision.

33.   Serbia reported that public access to information was provided through the Unified Information System, which required public authorities to publish their policy documents, medium-term plans and reports.

34.   The United States of America noted that its Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) Portal allowed the public to access material that was already publicly available, review FOIA data and obtain details about each agency. The Portal allowed the public to request information on any agency from a single website, thus simplifying the request-making process.

Developing anti-corruption programmes for public officials

35. In Chile, the Specialized Anti-Corruption Unit of the National Prosecutor's Office delivered a series of virtual training programmes for public officials, including those serving abroad. The programmes covered issues such as detecting and reporting on offences of corruption, including bribery of foreign public officials.

36. The Russian Federation indicated that its Accounts Chamber had developed an online training course for public officials that included videos and presentations. The course aimed at simplifying the language used in public documents as part of an effort to improve a culture of openness, accessibility and accountability in public administration. All course materials were made publicly available on an official social media channel.

37. Serbia indicated that that its Public Procurement Office had organized a series of interactive training courses for public officials on the features of the new e-procurement portal, including the management of appeals, recourses and remedies in case of non-compliance with the rules governing public procurement.

Raising awareness of corruption

38. Argentina referred to the National Training Programme on Integrity and Transparency established in 2021. Under the Programme, training materials had been developed and courses (in-person, hybrid and virtual) had been delivered to promote integrity, transparency and knowledge of good practices among public officials.

39. Pakistan reported that its National Accountability Bureau had delivered various public awareness campaigns and programmes. The materials used under such campaigns and programmes had been posted on the website and social media platforms of the Bureau.

Making relevant anti-corruption bodies known to the public and providing access to such bodies for the reporting, including anonymously, of corruption

40. Panama reported that under its National Authority for Transparency and Access to Information (ANTAI), an Intelligent Platform for the Solicitation of Information and Reporting (Smart CDI Platform) had been established. The Smart CDI Platform allowed citizens to report, also anonymously, administrative irregularities and breaches of the uniform code of ethics for public officials.

41. The United States of America noted that a number of systems were available for the public to report possible fraud and corruption. One of such systems, the Oversight.gov website, provided a centralized platform with detailed information on how to submit a report through the most appropriate channel.