

Corruption



* The information contained in this summary has been extracted from the UNODC website and the Global Programme against Corruption's Anti-corruption Toolkit (see, www.unodc.org/unodc/en/corruption.html)

Since 1994, unprecedented initiatives have been launched to raise the profile of corruption as an issue of both national and international concern, to emphasise the insidiousness of its nature and the deleterious impact it can have on the welfare of whole nations and their peoples. In the economic sphere, corruption can distort decision-making, discourage investment and undermine competition, thereby weakening economic growth in general. Given that the social, political, legal and economic facets of development are interrelated, it can sensibly be assumed that corruption in any one aspect can hinder progress in them all.

What is “corruption”?

The UN's Global Programme against Corruption defines corruption as “the abuse of power for private gain”, and it includes both the public and the private sector. Many different definitions or understandings of corruption, however, exist that generate debate among legal, academic and policy-maker circles.

While the issue is largely legal in nature, in many countries it also adopts a degree of political significance. Some of the most commonly known or encountered forms of corruption are described below:

• “Grand” and “Petty” Corruption

“Grand” corruption pervades the highest levels of a nation's government, resulting in an erosion of confidence in good governance, the rule of law and economic and political stability. “Petty” corruption involves the exchange of very small amounts of money, the conceding of minor favours or the employment of friends and relatives in minor positions.

• Bribery

Bribery refers to the bestowing of a benefit, usually a monetary payment, to improperly influence the outcome of an action or decision. The practice can be initiated by those seeking to solicit bribes or those offering one, and is probably the most common form of corruption to occur.

• “Active” and “Passive” Corruption

In considering transactional offences such as bribery, the term “active” may refer to the offering or paying out of the bribe, while a “passive” bribe is one that has been received.

• Embezzlement, Theft and Fraud

Embezzlement, theft and fraud involve the taking or conversion of money, property or valuable items by those who are not entitled to them but, by virtue of their position or employment, have access to them. The terms embezzlement and theft refer to cases in which property is taken by those to whom it was entrusted. Fraud, on the other hand,

involves the use of false or misleading information to induce the owner of the property to relinquish it voluntarily.

- **Extortion**

Extortion relies on coercion to induce cooperation, such as the threat or use of violence or the release of incriminating information. In cases of extortion, the victims are not only the public interest and individuals adversely affected by corrupt practices, but also the individual being coerced into cooperation.

- **Abuse of Discretion**

Some cases of corruption involve an abuse of discretion, vested in an individual, for personal gain. For example, a government employee involved in contracting may exercise the discretion to purchase goods or services from a company in which he or she holds a personal interest.

- **Favouritism, Nepotism and Clientelism**

Favouritism, nepotism and clientelism all involve the abuse of discretion. Such abuses, however, are driven not by the self-interests of the abusing individual or group, but the interests of someone linked to them through membership of a family, political party, tribe, religion or other groups.

- **Conduct Creating or Exploiting Conflicting Interests**

Most forms of corruption involve the creation or exploitation of some conflict between the professional responsibilities of a corrupt individual and his or her private interests. The acceptance of a bribe, for example, creates such a conflict of interest, while most cases of embezzlement, theft or fraud involve an individual yielding to temptation and taking undue advantage of a conflict of interest that already exists.

- **Improper Political Contributions**

It is not easy distinguishing between legitimate contributions to political organisations and payments made in an attempt to influence present or future activities by a party or its members in power. One approach to combat the problem of definition is to implement measures that ensure full transparency in order for both the donor and recipient to be made politically accountable.

Among the reasons that contribute to the development of corruption are faulty governments and policies, poorly conceived/managed development programmes, weak criminal justice systems, lack of transparency and accountability, poor civil servant remuneration systems, and inadequate checks and balances in organisations.

The nature and effects of corruption are unique to each country and society. In most states serious, institutionalised initiatives to curb the effects of corrupt practices remain in their infancy – a problem compounded by the fact that dependable information on the nature and reach of both domestic and trans-national corruption is difficult to obtain.

In Myanmar, law enforcement officials, particularly at the regional and local levels, have limited expertise in laws and enforcement techniques, particularly with regard to more

complex issues such as money laundering, human trafficking and corruption. Similarly, judges and prosecutors have limited technical skills to implement new legal provisions in areas ranging from mutual legal assistance to institutionalised corruption. Furthermore, salaries are often low, providing an incentive for some officials, and indeed members of the general population, to participate in corrupt practices.



The production of illicit drugs undermines sustainable human development. Moreover, it can foster the creation and perpetuation of organised criminal networks, to whom corruption is typically and intrinsically linked. Much of the structures or mechanisms through which international criminal organisations operate rely on corruption as a means to achieve their intended objectives. From small individual transactions to activities of a grander scale, these networks

profit on their illegal status to engage in corrupt activities. UNODC's objective is to raise awareness of the pernicious effects of corruption on governance, economic and social development. It attempts to do so by conducting research and collecting information on the subject and by providing technical assistance to governments in order to strengthen their legal systems to more adequately and effectively combat corruption.

- For further information:
 - o **UN Global Programme Against Corruption**
(<http://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/corruption.html>)
- Resources:
 - o **United Nations Convention Against Corruption**
(http://www.unodc.org/pdf/crime/convention_corruption/signing/Convention-e.pdf)
 - o **Anti-corruption toolkit**
(http://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/corruption_toolkit.html)
 - o **Compendium of International Legal Instruments against Corruption**
(link to http://www.unodc.org/pdf/crime/corruption/compendium_e.pdf)
 - o **Posters**
(http://www.unodc.org/pdf/9dec05/corruption2005_posterA3_E_lowRes.pdf)
 - o **Logos / Slogans**
(http://www.unodc.org/images/odccp/9dec2005/corr05_slogan_E.jpg)
- Links:

- **Transparency International.** A global civil society organisation working against corruption. The Global Corruption Report 2006 focuses on the effects of theft, bribery and extortion on health and provides insights on the state of corruption around the globe.
(www.transparency.org)
- **World Bank.** The World Bank's anticorruption initiative runs a global 24hour anticorruption telephone hotline and relies upon the Department of Institutional Integrity to investigate claims of fraud and corruption.
(www.worldbank.org)
- **Interpol.** The Interpol Group of Experts on Corruption (IGEC) is mandated to develop and implement an anti-corruption strategy, particularly targeted for the law enforcement sector.
(www.interpol.org/Public/corruption/igec/Default.asp)
- **Anti-Corruption Network for Transition Economies (ACN).** Supported by OECD, the network is a regional anti-corruption initiative created to support knowledge sharing, donor cooperation and policy dialogue.
(www.anticorruptionnet.org)