

Holding power to account for the common good:

*The contribution of civil society
anti-corruption organisations
to a peaceful and just Oceania*



“Governments know us for what we are.
We have no other agendas than trying to get it right for the country.
That is where the relationship is anchored”
(Ruth Liloqula, TI Solomon Islands)

In this paper Transparency International (TI) Pacific chapters describe the ‘what’, ‘why’ and ‘how’ of their contribution to integrity, transparency and accountability in Oceania including how they work with government and other organisations. The stories and perspectives of five TI Pacific chapters¹ offer insight into the unique role that Pacific civil society organisations play in anti-corruption efforts.

This report was organised and drafted by TI New Zealand. TI Chapters and TI Regional coordinators provided responses to an initial survey, and reviewed the draft.



¹ The five national CSOs working on anti corruption in Oceania contributed to this paper. They are all part of TI’s global movement against corruption and include: Transparency Vanuatu, TI Solomon Islands, Australia, TI New Zealand and Integrity Fiji (National Contact on the pathway to becoming a TI chapter). For clarity the term chapter will be used to refer to the four organisations.

The contribution of chapters to anti-corruption efforts

Direct advocacy, monitoring and awareness raising are practised by all chapters. There are differences in approaches – TI Australia and TI New Zealand also focus on research relevant to the region, and the business sector, whilst Transparency Vanuatu, TI Solomon Islands and Integrity Fiji also highly value corruption awareness and civic education across the broader population, including young people.

All chapters take collaborative approaches, working with other organisations to advocate on particular issues. Some chapters run specific programmes to encourage and inspire people and organisations towards corruption prevention and accountability. These include school programmes, workshops with young professionals, forums for public sector leaders, and multi-stakeholder engagement such as TI Australia's Accountable Mining Programme. TI Australia and TI Solomon Islands are also working together to develop and pilot an [Infrastructure Corruption Risk Assessment Tool](#) that identifies where the corruption loopholes are in the process of approving infrastructure projects.

Chapters also support and lever the publication of TI Global reports and measures, such as the [Global Corruption Barometer – Pacific](#), and the [Corruption Perceptions Index](#).

TI's National Integrity Systems Assessments are also a valued tool for establishing benchmarks and identifying gaps in integrity systems nationally. The assessment provides evidence to probe discussions on key issues for governments and other relevant stakeholders.

The context for chapters

- Some chapters work in politically challenging environments with high levels of corruption. In some cases, democracy and respect for human rights have been threatened in recent years.
- There is a challenge when governments try to limit civil society by restricting advocacy work.
- There is limited research on governance in the Pacific
- The Pacific has unique contextual realities which can hinder progress - including small economies, remote islands, natural disasters.
- Most face some lack of political will or consensus on important issues like beneficial ownership, foreign bribery and lobbying or political influence.
- There is an urgent need for more public awareness and correct information, to counter misinformation and apathy.
- One chapter notes that justice is not accessible, too costly and there are not enough free services
- Two chapters are working within a crowded anti-corruption space, with a growing number of NGOs working on common issues. While this is positive, more collaboration is needed. All face pressure on funding with other actors competing for anti-corruption, governance and human rights focused funding.
- CSOs have limited funds but they are community-based, innovative, youth-focussed, proactive and courageous.



Who has the biggest impact on broad social norms and behaviours?

Vanuatu: Church Leaders, Local Leaders, MPs and Provincial Councillors

Fiji: Government and politicians

Solomon Islands: Community governance, mothers.

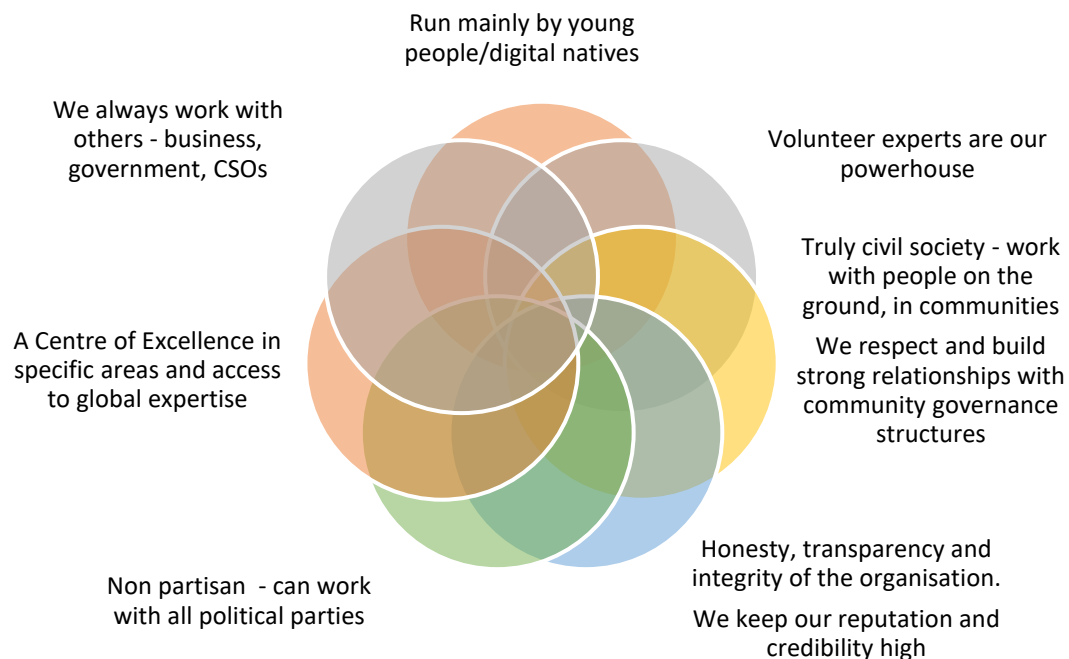
Australia: Depends on audience. Business leaders, national politicians, celebrities

New Zealand: Media, Whānau, community groups, government.

Chapters are working closely with these stakeholders to achieve impact

Unique features that make us effective in fighting corruption

Chapters have demonstrated what makes them unique, and how that helps fight corruption. Youth connections are really important and our expertise is highly valued. Relationship building is essential to making a strong case for change. Chapters are flax roots, embedded in their communities.



Partners, working relationships and collaborations

Collaboration and cooperation are fundamental to civil society effectiveness, because we can pool our resources, share our ideas and extend our reach. This practice also reinforces our non-partisan approach.

The list of collaborations is deep and broad, and the working relationships are directly related to the issue being addressed.

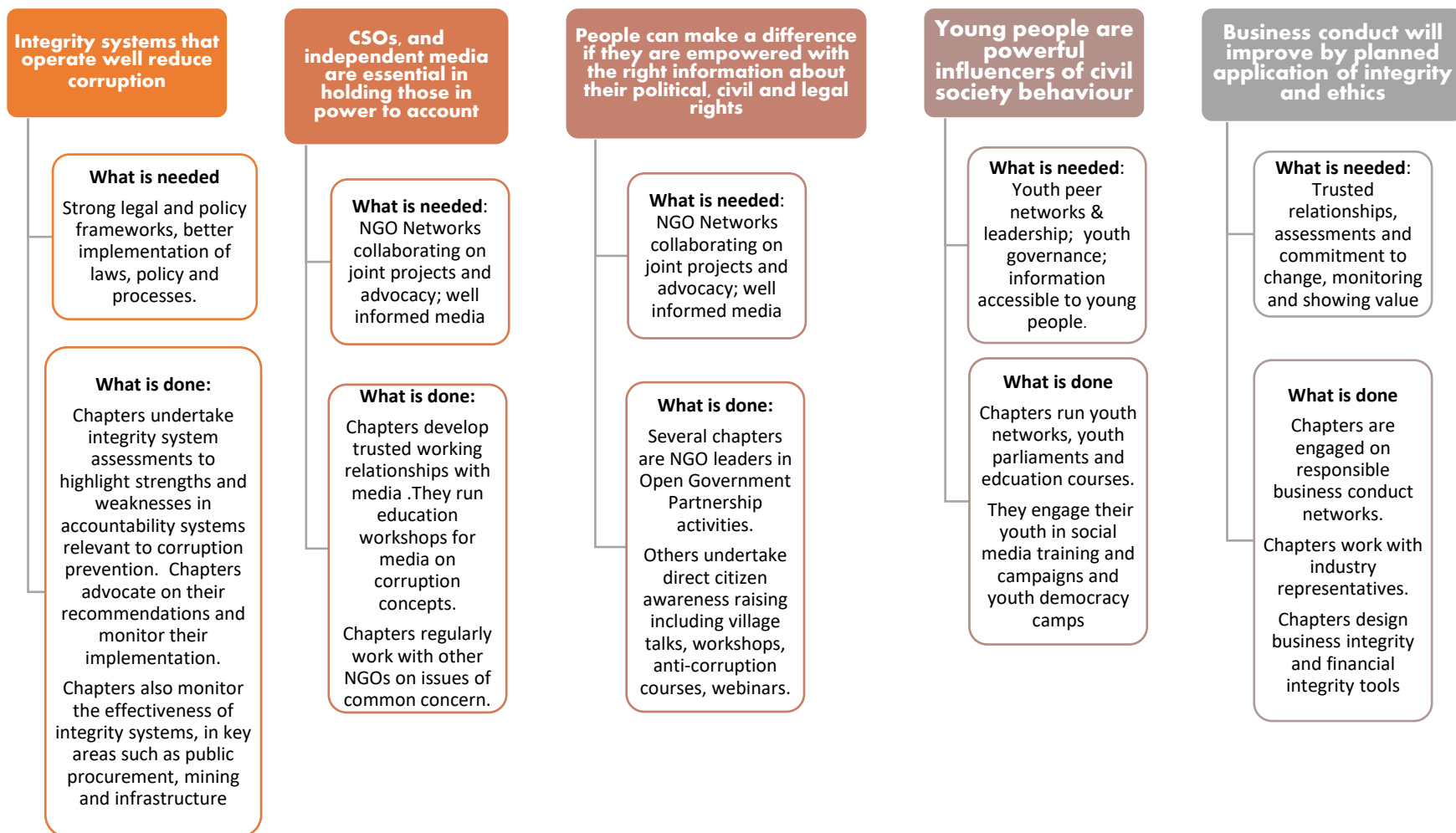
Most chapters have strong partnerships with one or more government agencies that tend to have an oversight role. For example this could be the Ombudsman, the Anti-Corruption Commission, the Ministry of Justice, Auditor-General or the Public Service Commission. The work may focus on areas of policy, or on particular programmes.

Most chapters work with professional organisations and companies (such as lawyers and accountants), with the broader business sector and with academics. All chapters engage with the media to disseminate our messages. Some chapters also work with churches. TI Vanuatu and Integrity Fiji work a good deal with youth, and TI Vanuatu also with people with disabilities. TI New Zealand collaborates with academic institutions, and three chapters work with politicians who are supportive of anti-corruption efforts. TI Solomon Islands builds relationships with local community governance structures, which include women, church leaders, youth, chiefs and other traditional leaders. TI Australia also collaborates with political and academic institutions as well as industry bodies.

Chapters also identified other community-based NGOs (non-governmental organisations) working on anti-corruption and governance in the Pacific. Chapters regularly work alongside these groups on issues of mutual concern, and often lead, where the other NGOs don't have the experience or knowledge. They include youth forums; women's groups; networks on a specific area of corruption such as tax avoidance or bribery; human rights; business integrity/corporate accountability; democracy and civil liberties; whistleblowing; conservation and climate change; and poverty and justice. In their countries each of the chapters is recognised as the leading Civil Society expert on anti-corruption matters.

Chapters also recognise the important role played by research institutes and media, parliamentary alliances; and cross Pacific organisations such as PIANGO (Pacific Islands Association of Non-Governmental Organisations) and PASAI (Pacific Association of Supreme Audit Institutions) and UNPRAC (United Nations Pacific Regional Anti-Corruption Project), a partnership of UNODC (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime) and UNDP (United Nations Development Programme).

The theories of change that drive our work²



² A theory of change describes why a particular way of working will be effective to achieve the intended impact.

Stories of Action and Impact

Transparency International Pacific chapters have clear sight about why and how they do their work to be most effective in countering corruption. Each of the Chapters has highlighted three of their most effective recent activities.

Integrity Fiji

- ❖ In 2021, the Fijian government tabled a draft police bill that was referred to as “draconian” and would have greatly infringed on human rights. Our Youth for Integrity group played an important role in pressuring the government and advocating for the government to withdraw the bill through social media and media coverage. Shortly after our story appeared in the Fiji Times, the government withdrew the bill.
- ❖ Integrity Fiji identified a lack of understanding of corruption amongst young people. Recognising the increasing use of online resources, Integrity Fiji worked with the University of the South Pacific to develop an online Anti-Corruption course. This attracted over 1,500 students from across the Pacific and has raised the awareness of many young people.
- ❖ Youths for Integrity know how their peers like to connect with important issues. They have connected with young Fijians through social media – using tik tok and songs. These posts have reached 118,000 social media users as of December 2021. It is estimated that through mainstream and social media, this advocacy reached over 500k Fijians.



Transparency Vanuatu

- ❖ Transparency Vanuatu recognises communities in Vanuatu like to learn together. This is why they hold community education, telling communities about Corruption and its effects on the society and giving them the knowledge and resources to hold leaders to account. These sessions have been very well-received with Transparency Vanuatu regularly requested to visit communities;
- ❖ Building on its community education approach, in 2019 and 2020, Transparency Vanuatu partnered with the Right to Information office to ensure citizens across Vanuatu had access to clear information about the parliamentary budget. Following this, Transparency Vanuatu has also been campaigning to raise awareness of MPs' Salaries and Allowances as well as their roles and responsibilities so that voters can make informed decisions.
- ❖ Transparency Vanuatu recognises that many people in remote communities do not understand their rights and responsibilities, and this can lead to corrupt behaviour or exploitation. Through community education, Transparency Vanuatu is increasing awareness on Human and Constitutional Rights and Responsibilities and encouraging people to use the Right to Information legislation and regulatory functions to access information.



Transparency International Australia

- ❖ TI Australia's National Integrity System – [Blueprint for action report](#) looks at Australia's whole framework of integrity institutions and outlines what can and should be done in the coming years to secure a high integrity future. This includes direction on achieving greater transparency over political lobbying and donations, to stronger protection for whistleblowers, and a strong and independent anti- corruption watchdog.
- ❖ [Bribery Prevention Network](#): TI Australia has been one of the founding organisations of the network. It is a public-private partnership that brings together business, civil society, academia and government with the shared goal of supporting Australian business to prevent, detect and address bribery and corruption and promote a culture of compliance.
- ❖ TI Australia hosts the Accountable Mining Programme – working with governments, companies and communities who want to fix the flaws in the way mining permits are granted. A key output of this Programme to date has been the creation of the Mining Awards Corruption Risk Assessment (MACRA) tool. A lack of transparency and accountability in the awarding of mining sector licences, permits and contracts – the first stage in the mining value chain – is a root cause of corruption in the mining sector. The [MACRA Tool](#) fills this gap by helping users to identify and assess the underlying causes of corruption in mining sector awards – the risks that create opportunities for corruption, and undermine the lawful, compliant and ethical awarding of mining sector licences, permits and contracts.



Transparency International Solomon Islands

- ❖ TI Solomon Islands is firmly grounded in the community because it firmly believes that ordinary people are only able to hold those in power to account when they have the knowledge and tools to speak up. The biggest achievement for TI-SI is that people are speaking up more and demanding their rights. This is due to the awareness raising, particularly about the rights that people have and how to advocate for themselves.
- ❖ Understanding the need for good laws to govern and guide public and private actions, TI Solomon Islands has successfully advocated for the introduction of several pieces of legislation that improve accountability and reduce corruption: this includes Anti-corruption Legislation, Whistleblower legislation and changes to the Electoral Act.
- ❖ TI Solomon Islands also monitors legislation being put through the house, with an eye towards transparency, accountability and integrity. This has led to some strong advocacy when the legislation is rushed or not well thought through. TI Solomon Islands has successfully advocated against legislation that could lead to corruption or bureaucratic elitism. Examples are The Traditional Customs and Facilitation Bill that would have put people's private property under the control and authority of the government, and a bill designed to increase the number of government ministries.



Transparency International New Zealand (TINZ)

- ❖ TINZ has recently published its research on the connection between corruption and money laundering across Pacific States. [Corruption and Money Laundering in the Pacific: Intertwined Challenges and Interlinked Responses](#). The report analyses the primary AML (Anti Money Laundering) measure relevant and applicable to anti-corruption. It examines the capacity and practice of implementing these standards in the Pacific, with detailed analysis of and case studies from seven selected Pacific Island Countries (PICs).
- ❖ TINZ has actively advocated for more transparency around who controls companies and trusts. The government has recently announced its intent to introduce elements that will bring about greater transparency in company ownership.
- ❖ During 2020 TINZ facilitated a group of Civil Society Organisations to advocate strongly for better CSO participation in the development of the Fourth National Action Plan under the Open Government Programme. This was effective and has resulted in a more participatory planning process.
- ❖ Clinical Trial Transparency. TINZ worked with Mesh down Under to advocate for New Zealand to become a signatory to the World Health Organisation 'Joint statement on public disclosure of results from clinical trials'. This was a success, and should result in more comprehensive information to people considering and/or participating in clinical trials.
- ❖ TI New Zealand advocated for many years for greater transparency around political party funding, more transparency around political lobbying to Ministers and a Code of Conduct for politicians. There has been progress on each of these advocacy points.



Working with government (politicians)

Chapters experience variable reactions from government and powerholders with some having consistently positive working relationships and others facing resistance and lack of collaboration. In general politicians are open to ideas and challenge, even when there is bad news, such as a dropping score in the Corruption Perceptions Index. All chapters noted that positive relationship building and mutual trust are most helpful for building relationships with government.

However, even in cases where there is recognition of the importance civil society's role, there can be limited collaboration. Chapters also noted that this can come down to the individual decision maker and that some were more responsive than others. One Chapter noted that there has been an "increasingly hostile environment for advocacy due to proposed legislation. Advocacy is central to public debate and accountability in a democratic society."

Chapters spoke about the challenges in getting corruption issues on the parliamentary agenda and reflected that there seems to be lack of concern about not meeting international commitments.



Government recognize civil society organisations, but there is limited collaboration



The government is most responsive if there is an economic benefit for the reform



It is difficult to get corruption issues on the government's radar



There is no concern about not meeting international commitments



Committee know us for what we are, no other agendas than trying to get it right for the country. That is where the relationship is anchored

Relationships and response to advocacy

Despite the challenges raised above, chapters find a range of ways to engage government departments/representatives and powerholders, to advocate for anti-corruption action. Chapters reflected on the importance of engaging constructively with one chapter saying they are “seen as an organisation the government can work with”. In some countries the governments have recognised and appreciated that the chapter has the support, time and capacity to reach communities that government services may not reach. Additionally there is a high level of respect of chapter independence, with one chapter saying “We can’t be bought and they know that.”

All chapters have strong links to government agencies, and all are invited to provide submissions and technical input on legislative reform and take part in inquiries. Quite often there are trusted conversations that take place. Chapters are also able, when they have a seat at the table, to bring other NGOs into the conversation.

International mechanisms, such as the Open Government Partnership and reviews of UNCAC³, OECD Convention against Bribery, and FATF⁴ are opportunities to get a seat at the table. Chapters believe that their technical expertise is respected and TI global products, such as the Corruption Perceptions Index reinforce this. Some chapters noted the greater challenge of engaging with the corporate sector.

Improving the relationship between civil society and government

Chapters focus on developing constructive relationships based on mutual respect and bringing “critical friend clarity”. Additionally, chapters raised that being part of the international TI movement added legitimacy to their work and it helped when they were seen to take a multi-stakeholder approach.

“We have developed constructive relationship based on mutual respect and by appealing to Govt's commitment to work with civil society.”

“We ensure we are seen to be taking a multi-stakeholder approach, and aren't seen as being too 'radical' in our advocacy work.”

“Our international connections through the TI movement help legitimise our work.”

“Trusted engagement is very effective, as is a mutual understanding of each other's roles. We don't gossip”

“There is appreciation by government that civil society participation can be 'messier' than a consultation run to their schedule, but that the outcome is better.”

“Our advocacy is evidence based.”

Partnership and relationships are everything. Contextualising is very important.

³ UNCAC: United Nations Convention Against Corruption

⁴ Financial Action Task Force

Recommendations for strengthening civil society and community initiatives against corruption in the region

- Civil society can strengthen their effectiveness by working together on common goals and speaking with one voice.
- Civil society should leverage global networks and publications which provide evidence for their advocacy.
- Government agencies should support civil society projects and events (eg funding or through participation)
- Civil society should discuss their programmes of work with government agencies to ensure coordination and effectiveness and government should meaningfully engage civil society in programme governance.
- Social media can be an effective tool for civil society
- There is a need to ensure press freedoms and freedom of expression are respected across the region.
- Civil society should pay attention to inclusive practices, “ensuring youth, women and marginalised groups are included in conversations.”
- There is a need for adequate funding for civil society groups and capacity strengthening.

Conclusion

Transparency International chapters in the Pacific region work to fight corruption. Their assessments and monitoring approaches are accountability checks that contribute to a well-functioning state. Their advocacy and support for good governance reform means that laws and bodies function more effectively.

Transparency International chapters also support the social licence of government through their civic education and encouragement of public participation in policy setting and in elections. Their strengths lie in their grassroots programmes - educating people about their rights and obligations as democratic citizens, encouraging them to engage in elections and providing advice and communications about corruption concerns. They provide forums for debating public policies. And they cultivate democratic values in young people, through programmes that practice participation and debate, such as youth parliaments and online anti-corruption training programmes.

The chapters have expertise on technical and legal policy and legislative reform, and actively engage networks across civil society and the business sector. They are collaborative and non-partisan, respecting different points of view but from a base of evidence.

Chapters are independent of the state, private sector and media, which is good for democracy because their role is to make the state at all levels more accountable, responsive, inclusive and effective. This in turn gives more legitimacy to the state. A strong civil society strengthens citizens' respect for democratic systems and promotes their positive engagement with them. In this respect Transparency International chapters, and other CSOs across the region are able to hold power to account, vital to democratic stability.

Through greater collaboration, meaningful engagement and stronger inclusion of diverse civil society voices, governments and CSOs across the Pacific can make progress in stamping out corruption.