

Transparency International (TI) has chosen a clear and focused definition of the term “corruption” as the “misuse of entrusted power for private gain” and further differentiates between “according to rule” corruption and “against the rule” corruption.

An example of corruption “according to rule” would be the facilitation of payments: where a bribe is paid to receive preferential treatment for something that the bribe receiver is required to do by law. Corruption “against the rule”, on the other hand, is a bribe paid to obtain services the bribe receiver is prohibited from providing.

To gauge the perception held by people in rural PNG communities about “corruption according to rule”, “corruption against the rule” and other forms of corruption, TIPNG undertook the Corruption Perception Survey (CPS) project in four strategically placed provinces commencing in October 2008. The provinces were Southern Highlands, East New Britain, Madang and Milne Bay.

Specialist Community Based Organisations (CBOs) in these provinces were engaged as partners after the TIPNG-CPS Head Researcher conducted research skills training to equip personnel with research skills necessary for their roles in the project.

The CPS involved surveying ordinary Papua New Guineans living in varying communities; those living in communities where mining and development impacts on their lives and those with little or no developmental impact on their lives.

Interestingly the findings of the research show that those interviewed were aware that a lack of development, some people having more power while some have less or no power, lack of education, pressures of the modern world and poverty often propelled people into participating in corrupt transactions.

For them, addressing corruption cannot occur without fixing the causes of wider social problems: lack of equal power, weak government, poor accountability mechanisms and lack of services in rural areas. The responses suggest that corruption cannot be disentangled from social realities.

In turn, some people the CPS surveyed even felt that corrupt behaviour may be beneficial for those who have little social, political or economic capital. This further challenges the approaches of some anti-corruption policies and programs in PNG.

Response to survey questions suggests that ‘corruption’ is a far broader and more nuanced issue than simply abusing one’s entrusted power. Rather, they point to the constraints placed upon those in rural communities, which can lead to acceptable forms of corruption. This is because, for the socially disenfranchised, some acts that outsiders perceive as being corrupt may be ultimately beneficial.

Fighting corruption then, becomes more about social justice – increasing levels of education, improving health facilities, policing the actions of powerful government officials or candidates – than just condemning ‘corrupt’ acts, which may be seen to benefit the poor and marginalised.

The findings provide a challenge for those involved in anti-corruption organisations as it suggests that corruption is the symptom of a much larger problem. The core problem is linked to the inability of governments, and others, to provide basic services to those who need them. It is linked to the mode of development and politics which often promotes the individual at the expense of the community. It is also linked to the cultural settings in which these acts occur, with communities’ referencing the well-being of their own members, at the expense of their neighbours or those in other areas of the country.

In other words, the findings of the CPS report suggest that anti-corruption agencies may be more effective if they are more than just ‘anti’. People surveyed want to see tangible development. Development which benefits the entire community, not just segments of it. If anti-corruption (or any other concept) is linked to tangible outcomes, it will be more likely to be supported by communities. By promoting the advantages of a life without corruption, without providing tangible evidence such as development is, at best, problematic.