

Corruption in the Pacific (a US perspective)



Introduction

The United States State Department's [Country Reports on Human Rights Practices](#) ("country reports") strive to provide a factual and objective record on the status of human rights worldwide. The 2021 country reports were published on 12 April 2022. These are available for fifteen Pacific countries.

Section 4 of the country reports provides an assessment of "Corruption and Lack of Transparency in Government" which addresses the extent to which a country's law provides criminal penalties for corruption by officials and the level of implementation of these laws.

Transparency International in their 2021 Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) report did not include these Pacific countries:

- Kiribati

- Marshall Islands
- Micronesia
- Nauru
- Palau
- Samoa
- Tonga
- Tuvalu

The country reports therefore provide some guidance on corruption in the Pacific countries not included in Transparency International's 2021 Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) report

Details of the overview comments for Pacific countries in the 2021 country reports are provided below.

[Australia](#)

"The law provides criminal penalties for corruption by officials, and the government generally implemented these laws effectively. There were isolated reports of government corruption during the year."

[Fiji](#)

"The law provides criminal penalties for corruption by officials, but the government did not implement the law effectively. There were numerous reports of government corruption."

Kiribati

“The law provides criminal penalties for corruption by officials, but the government did not implement the law effectively. There were no reports of government corruption during the year. Officials sometimes engaged in corrupt practices with impunity.”

Marshall Islands

“The law provides criminal penalties for corruption by officials, and although the government generally implemented the law effectively, officials sometimes engaged in corrupt practices with impunity. Freedom House reported that corruption was a chronic problem, particularly in foreign aid allocation, government procurement, and transfers, and that high-ranking public officials were rarely prosecuted for corruption.”

Micronesia

“The law provides criminal penalties for corruption by officials, and the government generally implemented the law effectively, but some officials reportedly engaged in corrupt practices with impunity. There were numerous anecdotal reports of corruption.”

Nauru

“The law provides criminal penalties for corruption by

officials, and the government generally implemented the law effectively. There were no reports of government corruption.”

New Zealand

“The law provides criminal penalties for corruption by officials, and the government generally implemented the law effectively. The Serious Fraud Office and police investigate corruption. Allegations of corruption can be reported anonymously, and the law protects employees who make a report relating to their employers. Agencies such as the Office of the Controller and Auditor General, and the Office of the Ombudsman independently report on and investigate state-sector activities, acting as watchdogs for public-sector corruption. Only parliament can remove individuals, who are known as officers of parliament, from these positions. Several investigations into alleged irregularities within national and local politics were underway.”

Palau

“Government corruption was a problem, and the government took some steps to address it. The law provides criminal penalties for corruption of and by officials. The Office of the Special Prosecutor, an independent entity, is authorized to prosecute all acts of corruption in the government. There were isolated reports of government corruption during the year.”

Papua New Guinea

“The law provides criminal penalties for corruption by

officials; however, the government did not always implement the law effectively, and officials often engaged in corrupt practices with impunity. International civil society and human rights groups termed corruption “widespread” and “pervasive.” There were numerous reports of government corruption during the year. Corruption was so serious a problem in part due to weak public institutions and governance, lack of transparency, politicization of the bureaucracy, and the social pressure of traditional clan obligations. Corruption and conflicts of interest were of particular concern in extractive industries, particularly the logging sector, and in government procurement.”

Samoa

“The law provides criminal penalties for corruption by officials, and the government generally implemented the law effectively. The maximum penalty for corruption is 14 years’ imprisonment. There were isolated reports of government corruption during the year, mostly involving candidates for parliament offering bribes in exchange for votes. Officials infrequently engaged in corrupt practices with impunity. The law provides for an ombudsman to investigate complaints against government agencies, officials, or employees, including allegations of corruption. The ombudsman may require the government to provide information relating to a complaint. The Attorney General’s Office prosecutes criminal corruption cases on behalf of the Public Service Commission. The Ombudsman’s Office and the commission operated effectively. The Ombudsman’s Office included academics and other members of civil society among the members of its commissions of inquiry.”

Solomon Islands

“While the law provides criminal penalties for corruption by officials, the government implemented the law inconsistently, and officials sometimes engaged in corrupt practices with impunity. There were reports of government corruption during the year.”

Timor-Leste

“The penal code provides criminal penalties for corruption by officials. The government faced many problems in implementing the law, and the perception that officials frequently engaged in corrupt practices with impunity was widespread. The anticorruption commission (CAC) is charged with leading national anticorruption activities and has the authority to refer cases for prosecution; however, the CAC and the Prosecutor’s Office did not routinely cooperate with each other on investigations. Although the CAC is independent, the government controls its budget, making it vulnerable to political pressure. Institutions with the power and the competence to address corruption avoided investigations of politicians, government members, and leaders and veterans of the country’s independence struggle. The government undertook surprise inspections of government-run programs and increased pressure to implement asset-management and transparency systems.”

Tonga

“The law provides criminal penalties for corruption by officials, and the government generally implemented the law effectively. There were reports of government corruption during the year.”

Tuvalu

“The law provides criminal penalties for some forms of corruption by officials such as theft, and the government generally implemented the law effectively. There were no reports of government corruption during the year.”

Vanuatu

“The law provides criminal penalties for corruption by officials, and the government made some efforts to implement the law. Officials sometimes engaged in corrupt practices with impunity, and there were reports of government corruption.

The Office of the Ombudsman and the Auditor General’s Office are key government agencies responsible for combating government corruption.”

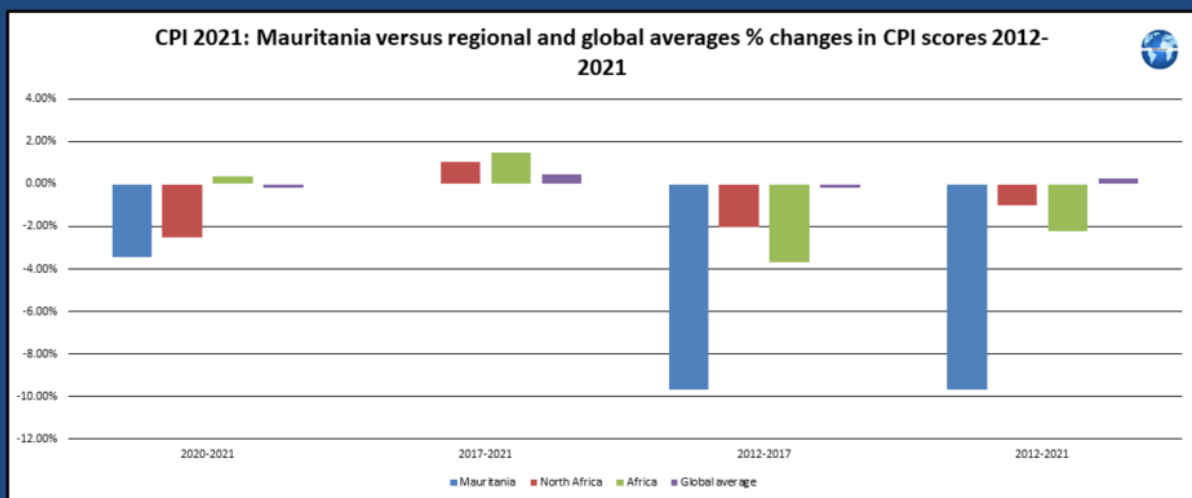
Conclusion

The laws in most Pacific countries provide relatively robust criminal penalties for corruption by officials.

The above-mentioned country reports, however, reveal there are currently significant variations in Pacific government efforts to implement legislation covering criminal penalties for corruption.

Corruption in Mauritania in 2021

CPI 2021: Mauritania versus regional and global averages % changes in CPI scores 2012-2021



Corruption was a serious problem in public administration in Mauritania during 2021 and the government rarely held officials accountable or prosecuted them for abuses according to the [US State Department's 2021 report on human rights practices in Mauritania](#), published on 12 April 2022.

The US State Department notes there were reports government officials used their power to obtain personal favours, such as unauthorized exemption from taxes, special grants of land, and preferential treatment during bidding on government projects.

Corruption was most pervasive in government procurement but was also common in the distribution of official documents, fishing and mining licenses, land distribution, as well as in bank loans and tax payments.

African anti-corruption agencies' digital platform usage



Kenya's Ethics and Anti-Corruption Commission

Posted by David Fellows and John Leonardo [\[1\]](#)

The release of [TI's 2020 Corruption Perceptions Index \(CPI\)](#) on 28 January 2021 has focused attention in many countries on current corruption levels. In a recent [blog](#) we outlined the possible role social media platforms offer for promoting online public engagement in the war against corruption. We also noted that in Africa there are strong positive correlations between social media user numbers and perceived corruption levels. In this blog we review African anti-corruption agencies (ACAs) digital platform, including social networking sites, usage. Additional regional analyses will be prepared over the next six months.

The 2020 CPI outcomes from an African perspective are disappointing as demonstrated by the trends revealed in Figures 1 and 2.

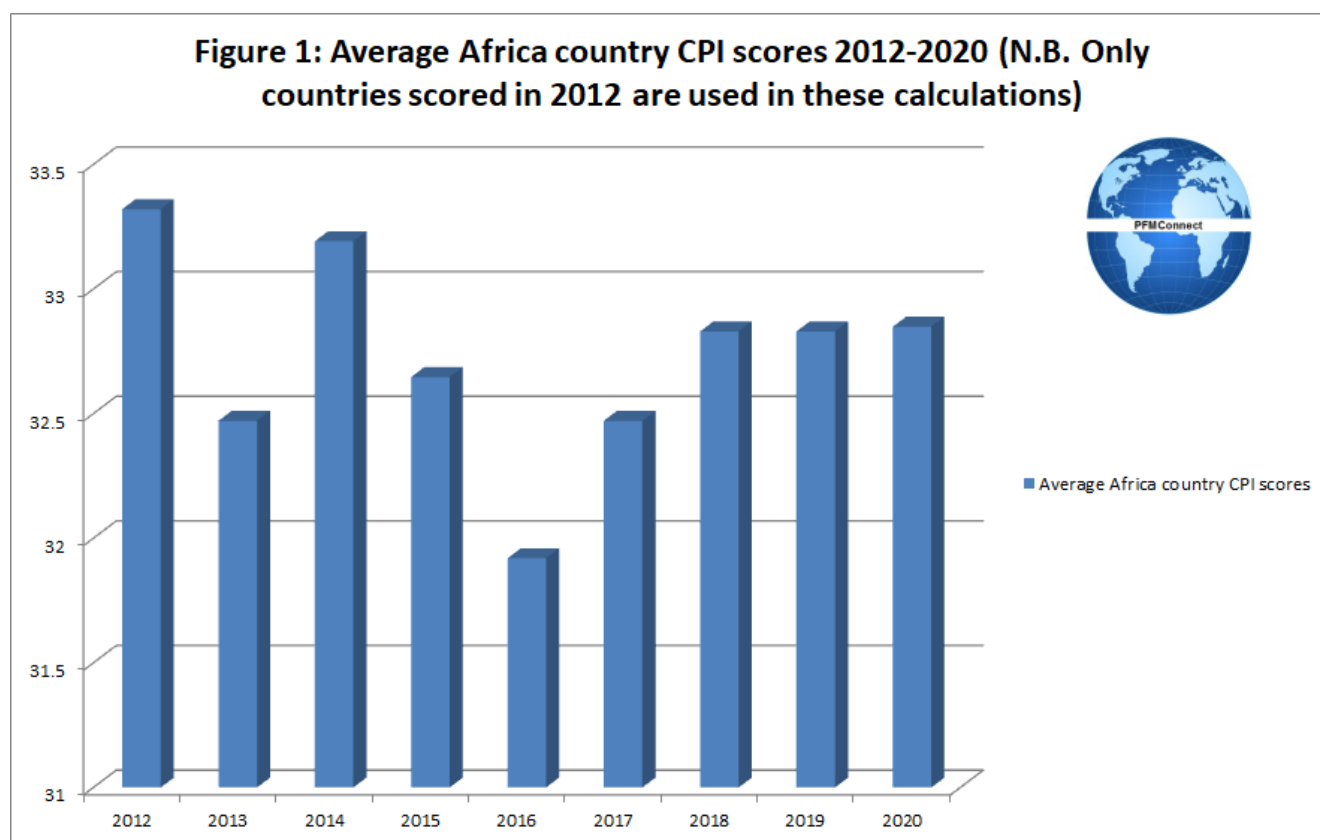
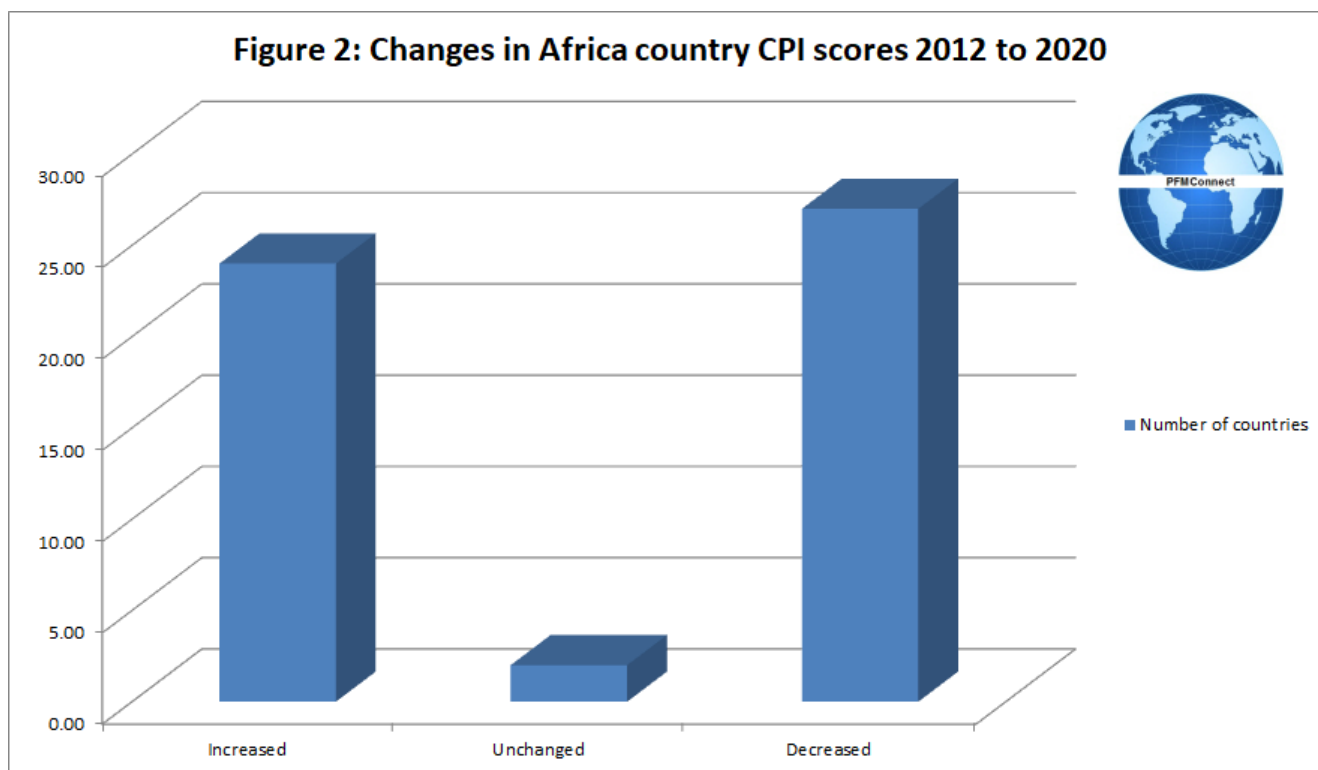


Figure 2: Changes in Africa country CPI scores 2012 to 2020



Websites and the social networking sites, Facebook and Twitter, are the digital platforms most frequently employed by African ACAs. Updates on ACA activities, developments affecting ACA operations and formal reports are featured on ACA digital platforms.

The [United Nations Convention Against Corruption](#) includes provisions relating to financial management and public reporting (Articles 9 and 10 – see Appendix). The extent of ACA compliance with these provisions has also been examined in this blog.

1. African ACAs digital platform usage

1.1 Website usage

Details of the use of websites by African ACAs as at mid-January 2021 are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: African ACAs use of websites

ACAs	Number
ACAs with stand-alone websites	27
ACAs with webpages included in government websites	3
ACAs without any web presence The Uganda case	24
Total	54

NB. Nigeria has two recognised ACAs with websites; Uganda has two recognised ACAs but only one has a website with the other using only social media sites. One Nigerian ACA with a website and the Ugandan ACA which only has social media sites are not included in Table 1 or Table 2 below.

Details of the use of websites by African ACAs in countries with relatively higher and lower 2020 CPI scores are presented in Table 2.

Table 2: African ACAs use of websites by 2020 CPI scores

ACAs	Number	Stand-alone websites	Web page on government site	No website
ACAs with higher 2020 CPI scores	27	19	2	6
ACAs with lower 2020 CPI scores	27	9	-	18
Total	54	28	2	24

Data was available for both 2020 CPI scores and 2020 UN E-government scores in 42 countries. There is a strong positive correlation between country 2020 CPI scores and 2020 UN E-government scores for the 23 countries where ACAs have websites (for which data is available); a strong negative correlation was found for the 19 countries without ACA websites.

1.2 Website visit activity

Actual visit numbers to ACA websites in the 2020 December quarter were annualised to provide annual visit estimates which were in turn divided by country internet user numbers to provide an indication of ACA website penetration levels.

The average derived ACA website penetration level for all ACAs was very low at 0.37%. The only favourable scores were recorded by Mauritius (5.9%) and Madagascar (1.9%).

1.3 Social media activity

Social media follower information was analysed for ACAs with Facebook and Twitter pages using data available in mid-January 2021. Details of current Africa ACA social media pages are presented in Table 3. NB The Facebook and Twitter pages of the two Nigerian and Ugandan ACAs are included in the data presented in Tables 3, 4 and 5.

Table 3: African ACA social media pages

ACAs	Facebook pages	Twitter pages
ACAs with stand-alone websites	20	15
ACAs with webpages included in government websites	1	0
ACAs without any website	1	1
Total	22	16

1.3.1 Facebook activity

Less than one half of the ACAs have Facebook pages.

While the average Facebook penetration level for ACAs on a country basis (country ACA Facebook followers divided by total country Facebook subscribers) for the 20 countries was relatively modest at 1.06%, there were some notable exceptions.

Four of the six countries showing penetration levels in excess of the Facebook country ACA average of 1.06% also had follower numbers greater than estimated annual visits to their websites; details are presented in Table 4.

Table 4: African ACAs with significant Facebook penetration levels

ACAs	Estimated annual website visits	Website penetration %	Facebook followers	Facebook follower penetration %
Egypt	404,384	0.82%	630,827	1.49%
Nigeria (2 ACAs)	351,944	0.28%	576,137	2.12%
Seychelles	300	0.42%	850	1.20%
Tunisia	28,920	0.37%	106,104	1.43%

1.3.2 Twitter activity

The number of ACAs with Twitter pages is modest.

The average Twitter penetration level for ACAs on a country basis (country ACA Twitter followers divided by total country Twitter subscribers) for the 14 countries was, however, very high at 23.73%. Twitter country ACA penetration levels exceeded Twitter internet user penetration levels in six countries (Kenya, Niger, Nigeria, Rwanda, Uganda and Zimbabwe).

Two of the countries recording above average country ACA Twitter penetration levels also had Twitter follower numbers that exceeded estimated annual visits to their websites; details are provided in Table 5.

While the majority of visits to the Nigeria and Zimbabwe ACA websites were made by local residents, the local resident proportion of Twitter followers for these ACAs is not known but it is assumed to be significant.

Table 5: ACAs with significant follower numbers

ACAs	Estimated annual website visits	Facebook followers	Twitter followers	Twitter follower penetration %	Twitter internet user penetration %
Nigeria (2 ACAs)	351,944	576,137	1,172,400	59.82%	1.55%
Zimbabwe	260	0.42%	48,500	28.78%	2.01%

2. Reporting activity

The availability of the following categories of key reports on ACA websites or on web pages of national government websites was examined:

- National Anti-Corruption Strategies
- ACA strategic plans
- ACA annual reports

Details of the availability of the above reports on ACA websites are presented in Table 6.

Table 6: Availability of reports on ACA websites

	National anti-corruption strategy	ACA annual report	ACA strategic plan
Available on ACA website	8	14	8
Available on another national non-ACA website	3	0	0
Exists but not available on any website	6	0	0
Being prepared	6	0	0
Not prepared	7	16	22
Total	30	30	30

N.B. One Nigerian ACA with a website and the Ugandan ACA which only has social media sites are not included in Table 6.

Coverage of ACA digital platform activity in the above-mentioned reports, particularly those relating to social media, was also examined.

2.1 Publication of national anti-corruption strategies

Less than one-third of African ACAs with websites have published their respective national anti-corruption strategy on their website.

While the role of the media in national anti-corruption strategies is addressed in the eleven national anti-corruption strategies reviewed when preparing this blog, references to the role of social media are limited. Egypt's National Anti-Corruption Strategy (2019-2024), Namibia's National Anti-Corruption Strategy and Action Plan (2016-2019) and Sierra Leone's National Anti-Corruption Strategy (2019-2023) make mention of social media activity,

The Namibia and Sierra Leone strategies outlined particular roles for social media activities.

Morocco's ACA published a study in 2019 that assisted its preparation of a supporting communication strategy for its National Anti-Corruption Strategy (2015-2025). This study listed social media as one of the key success factors; viz. "The body must open up on social media and have "an online platform or space", which it must maintain and control in order to get closer to its target segments and to be responsive".

2.2 Publication of ACA annual reports

Only 14 of the 30 African ACAs identified in Table 6 have

recently published their annual reports (or de facto annual reports) on their websites. Specific reference to the use of social media was made in 8 ACA annual reports.

The Ghana ACA noted in its 2018 annual report the use of social media by the Ghana chapter of Transparency International. The Kenya ACA provided statistics about website hits and social media followers in its 2018 annual report. In its 2017 annual report the Mauritius ACA gave a detailed discussion about its social media activity including its approach for using Facebook.

The executive summary for the Morocco ACA's 2019 annual report noted that the ACA had to address its social media strategy in the course of developing its overall communication strategy.

Brief references to the use of social media were made in the Namibia (2019), Rwanda (2019), Sierra Leone (2019) and South Africa (2020) ACA annual reports.

2.3 Publication of ACA strategic plans

The modest number of ACA strategic plans that have been prepared recently is very surprising.

Five of the ACA strategic plans include specific references to the use of social media (Kenya, Malawi, Rwanda, Sierra Leone and Togo).

Kenya, Malawi and Rwanda ACAs set out specific strategies and

performance indicators for social media in their strategic plans. The Sierra Leone ACA set out specific strategies and progress markers while the Togo ACA set out details of the proposed launch of its website.

2.4 Overview of ACA online reporting activity

Assuming it is appropriate for all ACAs (including both Nigerian and Ugandan ACAs) to publish country anti-corruption strategies and their annual reports and strategic plans on their websites, the number of these documents that may be potentially published stands at 96 documents. Only 30 documents were published on ACA websites. This outcome falls short of the standards envisaged in the United Nations Convention against Corruption.

3. Social media performance and document publication correlations

ACA Facebook and Twitter subscriber penetration levels are weakly related to the number of ACA National Anti-Corruption Strategy, strategic plan and annual report publications placed on ACA websites.

While ACAs with relatively high Facebook and Twitter subscriber penetration levels have not generally been relatively energetic publishers of the above-mentioned reports, their social media posting activity has been sufficiently active to attract significant numbers of followers; this is most evident in the case of Kenya, Nigeria,

Rwanda, Uganda and Zimbabwe.

ACA Facebook and Twitter subscriber penetration levels have, with a few exceptions, often substantially exceeded ACA website penetration levels.

4. Conclusion

The survey demonstrates a very limited level of publication on ACA websites of ACA reports in the three key categories identified in section 2.

It could add credibility to ACA professionalism and integrity to publish these reports even if some of the more sensitive detail concerning methodology and programming was omitted.

While ACA websites offer potential public engagement opportunities, social media activity has the potential for even higher engagement levels. It should be borne in mind that social media use in Africa, while a relatively recent phenomenon, is rapidly becoming extremely popular. The analysis demonstrates that while overall ACA use of social media is relatively limited, some ACAs have made considerable progress, particularly with the use of Twitter.

Those ACAs with websites but who currently do not have Facebook or Twitter pages should certainly consider these social networking sites as a means to gaining public confidence in anti-corruption activities and their cooperation in combatting anti-corruption investigations.

Appendix: United Nations Convention Against Corruption

Financial management and public reporting provisions

Article 9

Public procurement and management of public finances

2. Each State Party shall, in accordance with the fundamental principles of its legal system, take appropriate measures to promote transparency and accountability in the management of public finances. Such measures shall encompass, inter alia:

- (a) Procedures for the adoption of the national budget;
- (b) Timely reporting on revenue and expenditure;
- (c) A system of accounting and auditing standards and related oversight;
- (d) Effective and efficient systems of risk management and internal control; and
- (e) Where appropriate, corrective action in the case of

failure to comply with the requirements established in this paragraph.

Article 10

Public reporting

Taking into account the need to combat corruption, each State Party shall, in accordance with the fundamental principles of its domestic law, take such measures as may be necessary to enhance transparency in its public administration, including with regard to its organization, functioning and decision-making processes, where appropriate. Such measures may include, inter alia:

(a) Adopting procedures or regulations allowing members of the general public to obtain, where appropriate, information on the organization, functioning and decision-making processes of its public administration and, with due regard for the protection of privacy and personal data, on decisions and legal acts that concern members of the public;

(b) Simplifying administrative procedures, where appropriate, in order to facilitate public access to the competent decision-making authorities; and

(c) Publishing information, which may include periodic reports on the risks of corruption in its public administration.

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Digital Media, Transparency and the War Against Corruption



Posted by David Fellows and John Leonardo[\[1\]](#)

Corruption is highly damaging to economic and social life through misappropriation of public funds, restriction of open market activity, favouritism towards families of those in power, and the many detrimental effects of rent seeking. In this piece we review evidence for the power of transparency to reduce corruption and improve economic performance. We then consider the increasing relevance of digital media, particularly social media, to the transparency agenda and how its application can be encouraged.

Economic performance, transparency and corruption

The IMF's ' [Framework for Enhanced Fund Engagement](#)' 2018 noted that (i) transparency is significantly correlated with a perceptions-based indicator of the control of corruption; (ii) higher levels of corruption are typically correlated with lower growth; and (iii) corruption and governance are significantly associated with average long-run per capita growth, investment, and revenue. The IMF's Fiscal Monitor: [Curbing Corruption](#) (April 2019 edition) shows that the least corrupt governments can collect considerably more in taxes than those at the same level of economic development. [In a blog announcing this guidance](#) Christine Lagarde, then Managing Director of the IMF, affirmed the importance of transparency by commenting that; 'At the end of the day, the most durable "cure" for corruption is strong, transparent, and accountable institutions'.

How governments may involve digital media

The [World Bank Document](#) 'Enhancing Government Effectiveness and Transparency: The Fight Against Corruption' (September 2020) details studies in which developing countries have sought to combat corruption by improving transparency.

It instances:

- The identification of corruption relating to infrastructure projects in Columbia by the Government

urging citizens to publicize unfinished projects.

- The introduction of participatory budgeting in Brazil where one study found that adopter municipalities achieved a 39% higher tax collection than those that had not.
- The use of Beneficial Ownership declarations in the Ukraine where online access to records promises significant advantages following a chequered introductory experience.
- Public reporting of Supreme Audit Institution (SIA) findings in Ghana, and India's practice of encouraging the public to comment on SIA reports and provide evidence of misdeeds.

These are all public engagement activities that can most readily be undertaken via digital media.

The impact of social media

Social media is a growing phenomenon across the developing world. It can be used by governments to encourage citizens to make their views known (figures in million).

Country	Population	Internet users Dec-00	Internet users Dec-19	Facebook users Dec-19	Twitter users Dec-19	Min of Finance Twitter followers Jun-20
Kenya	53.7	0.2	46.8	7	0.954	*0.004
Rwanda	12.9	0.005	6	0.6	0.079	0.064
Uganda	45.7	0.04	18.5	2.5	0.177	0.062

Note: *Kenya's Anti-Corruption Agency has 293,000 Twitter followers

A survey of Kenyan social media users conducted by [SIMELab in 2020](#) suggested that social media use was becoming highly age specific.

Age	Social Media Preferred by Kenyan Users (SIMELab findings)
Primary school pupils	Facebook
14 to 20 years	Pinterest, Snapchat, TikTok
21 to 25 years	Instagram, Snapchat, Telegram
26 to 35 years	Linked in (particularly for those from higher education), Skype, Twitter

The survey identified the three most used media as WhatsApp (89%), Facebook (82%) and YouTube (58%). [TIFA Research](#) has identified Facebook as the current most effective advertising platform.

The African public accountability movement [Connected Development](#) (CODE) based in Nigeria uses digital media to help marginalised communities monitor public service investment employing its 'follow the money' slogan. A current focus is COVID-19 expenditure.

[We have analysed](#) the correlation between Transparency International's 2019 CPI scores for the 48 best performing African Countries included in the index where both Facebook and Twitter services were available. There are strong positive correlations between social media user numbers and perceived corruption levels. This result seems consistent with the transparency/corruption relationship found in the IMF Framework for Enhanced Fund Engagement, reflecting public

interest in government affairs and corruption.

A growing relationship between formal digital media and social media

Over the past year online news media have reported government initiatives against corruption and investigated acts of corruption. Two examples:

- On 11th November 2020 the [Cyprus Mail commented](#) that: 'without (greater) public support, anti-corruption groups are unlikely to attain their objectives, because the politicians will have no reason to take any notice of them'.
- On 21st November 2020 [ABS-CBN News reported](#) that a task force investigating Philippine Government corruption led by Justice Secretary Menardo Guevarra had received at least 60 complaints during the previous two weeks.

These causes could benefit from social media use by community activists (Cyprus) and the government (Philippines).

Conclusions

The economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on developing countries brings the prospect of reduced national resources unless and until these countries can address their corruption challenges.

Formal online media have helped increase transparency in recent times. Further, social media is fast becoming an important form of popular communication throughout the developing world. The targeted use of social media platforms presents an effective opportunity for online public engagement that makes messaging easy to assimilate and respond to.

Governments can use social media to seek public support for reporting anti-corruption activities, complaining about unfair decisions and exposing the accumulation of unexplained wealth by politicians and officials. Such engagement is, however, dependent on the demonstration of government integrity, the recognition of public priorities, and the provision of basic information on services and funding to local communities.

The international development community can encourage governments to uphold press freedom, protect whistle-blowers and use social media as part of the transparency process, and scale up its support to countries that are pursuing effective anti-corruption policies.

A supporting video is available [here](#).

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