



**THE ANTI-CORRUPTION
CATALYST:
REALISING THE MDGs
BY 2015**

“In order to achieve the Goals, integrity, accountability and transparency are crucial for managing resources, recovering assets and combating the abuse, corruption and organised crime that are adversely affecting the poor.”

- Ban Ki-moon, UN Secretary General (2010)

A decade ago, global leaders gathered at the UN in New York and declared a series of ambitious development promises to be achieved by 2015. With only five years to go though, the results are sadly mixed. Many of these pledges, known as the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), will likely go unmet. Progress is particularly slow in the areas of universal education, reducing maternal mortality and increasing access to clean water. Africa and Asia, the two regions facing some of the greatest challenges, are off-track on vital human development commitments.

To get back on course, a change in approach is needed, and new strategies employed. Such a shift is critical to correctly address breakdowns in governance and the corruption that accompanies them. Anti-corruption efforts must be integrated fully within MDG initiatives rather than through separate, piecemeal approaches. This shift must ensure that future funding and policies pursued to achieve the MDGs include mechanisms that promote transparency, accountability and integrity.

Transparency International's (TI) research in more than a dozen African countries has found that bribery, lack of transparency, and broken or nonexistent accountability mechanisms persistently plague MDG progress when it comes to the provision of education, health care, and water and sanitation services.

Across the world, findings show that corruption has undermined development advances. TI's 2008 *Global Corruption Report* has estimated that corruption adds more than US\$ 48 billion to the cost of meeting the MDG on water and sanitation in developing countries, where costly distortions in the sector have been well documented from Kenya to Nepal. Corruption has also left the poor shouldering the burden of abuses. For example, surveys conducted by TI India have shown that poor people there pay more than US\$ 200 million annually in bribes to access 11 'free' services, including for hospitals, schools and employment benefits.

The costs exacted by corruption can be explicit, implicit or hidden:

- **Explicit:** MDG-related funding may be embezzled by staff in a ministry, school or clinic.
- **Implicit:** Basic services may be unattainable due to bribery and other illegal payments that citizens can not afford to pay to access clean water, schools and health care.
- **Hidden:** Teachers and doctors may chronically miss work, leaving schools and clinics understaffed.

To combat these different costs of corruption, anti-corruption efforts must build transparency, accountability and integrity measures as part of development initiatives. This integration must begin with the initial needs assessment on which interventions are required to achieve the goals. It must continue with how policies are designed, budgeted and implemented, through to their monitoring, to ensure that the needs identified have in fact been met.

This has been done in Colombia where the TI chapter, Transparencia por Colombia, has partnered with the government and donors to launch a “Social Control Fund.” Through the fund, citizens monitor the delivery of key basic services: education, health, water and sanitation. This oversight has saved an estimated US\$ 5.4 million from corruption and has directly benefited nearly 10,000 Colombians. There are many other practical examples from countries, such as Bangladesh and Liberia, on how anti-corruption efforts effectively facilitate MDG achievement. Such work has been sustained by promoting accountability and transparency in relationships among all stakeholders: governments, parliamentarians, companies and civil society.

What country experiences have shown is also supported by quantitative data: an anti-corruption approach to the goals results in a ‘MDG payoff’. Research conducted by TI on data from more than 48 countries demonstrates the clear, strong and positive correlation between better MDG outcomes and greater transparency, accountability and integrity.

The results for improved access to drinking water are the most striking. They suggest that lower levels of bribery have the same statistical relationship for improving access to clean water in a country as does a higher level of per capita income. Similarly, countries with good marks on anti-corruption legislation show reduced rates of maternal mortality. A correlation is also revealed between greater public access to information and higher literacy rates for a nation’s youth.

As these findings show, the attitude that addressing governance and corruption is not a priority in achieving the goals is simply short sighted. Where they exist, anti-corruption efforts have been too often carried out in a silo and not made part of a common approach to the MDGs.

World leaders and national decision-makers have an obligation to link the MDG and governance agendas in policy and practice. Governance and anti-corruption concerns – whether for a sector or as applied to a government – must be fully integrated into MDG action plans. These plans are being devised by the UN, other multilateral organisations, donors and partner countries to step up progress on meeting the goals.

“Governance and anti-corruption efforts must be made part of a common approach to achieve the MDGs”

An increased focus on governance and anti-corruption in MDG programming is long overdue. Apart from underpinning development, this integration aligns with meeting country commitments under the UN Convention against Corruption. As the most comprehensive global legal framework for combating corruption, the UN convention has specific articles that advance pro-MDG policies and effectively links the development and governance agendas. Effective implementation and monitoring of the convention will create the foundation for sound governance of public services, programmes and institutions that are integral for MDG achievement.

There is ample evidence of the urgent need for change on how the goals are being pursued. Corruption concerns can no longer be treated as separate but equal if the MDGs are to be met in the next five years – and sustained beyond 2015.