Short Session Report

Session Title: Anti-Corruption Journalists and Activists: More Light, More Heat

Date & Time: Saturday, December 3 • 11:30 - 13:30

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Session coordinated by: Anne Koch, grand corruption team, TI Secretariat

Moderated by: Giannina Segnini, Director of the Master of Science Data Concentration Program, Graduate School of Journalism, Columbia University

Experts:

Paul Radu, Organised Crime and Corruption Reporting Project (OCCRP)
David Kaplan, Global Investigative Journalism Network (GIJN)
Marina Walker, International Consortium of Investigative Journalists (ICIJ)
Patrick Alley, Global Witness (GW)
Carlos Hernandez, The More Just Society in Honduras (and TI chapter)
Anne Koch, Director at TI, involved in its Grand Corruption work
Bea Edwards, Government Accountability Project (GAP)

Main issues raised in kick off remarks. What’s the focus of the session?
World is changing as we know, and it doesn’t make sense to be working separately on anti-corruption. The line between journalists and campaigners is becoming increasingly blurred in some countries, and while there should be clear roles for both, the active collaboration can lead to more investigations of corruption and more impact to change the world to the better.

What initiatives have been showcased? Briefly describe the Game Changing strategies/ ideas (if applicable)

1. The OCCRP-TI project on collaboration between journalists and campaigners

If we do this project right, empower journalists and learn from each other, we can stop more criminals than before. In this project. TI will do the activist side. OCCRP will do the investigative side. This is a global project, and the criteria for collaboration is that both sides need to be committed to truth telling. Transparency will be key in this relationship, with independence for each side from each other. If we have those ingredients, we can make more impact when journalists expose and investigate then the NGOs take those facts further, case by case, to advocate and campaign. In some cases, we will be presenting facts to prosecuting authorities, as well as working on actions to address systemic issues facilitating grand corruption. TI will do this with the OCCRP on a selected number of agreed cases of corruption.

2. Journalists adopting a non-profit model for media organisations, and becoming more like NGOs.

In the United States, there have been some 125,000 newsroom jobs lost in traditional media. There is a need to search for new models of making investigative journalism sustainable. Creating charitable
foundations is one means, and US tax law promotes this with a 100% tax deduction for charitable contributions to support this work. That model has bloomed in countries where conditions are much more onerous. We now have donors, individuals and other supporters who are underwriting in-depth investigations, which is a trend that we need to encourage and expand.

Briefly describe the highlights including the thematically interesting questions and ideas that were generated from the discussion or from the floor, and session quotes.

Dave Kaplan on journalists and activists sharing the goal of speaking truth to power. “We are kindred spirits. If (President-elect) Trump is taking positions on issues that are unconstitutional, such as stripping the U.S. citizenship of those burning flags, or supporting torture, does this make us campaigners if as journalists we speak out? If so, let’s go there.”

Marina Walker on drawing the line between activism and journalism. “Advocates have told us that we can help them more if we maintain clear lines of separation and roles. They don’t want to be journalists. We have similar ideas but very different roles.”

Bea Edwards on journalists who both need whistle blowers and protect them. “When she or he blows the whistle, typically they have an unequal battle because that individual is pitted against an institution and that is not a fair fight. A whistle blower becomes the target of an entire institution’s pressure. The whistle blower is ostracized: former colleagues will not speak to them, and when they walk into a room a silence falls. Or they lose their office and are put into a broom closet with nothing to do, disconnected from the internet. So we need to pull the whistleblower’s information out of the institution and into the public, so that public opinion can be brought to bear, because so long as the whistle blower is isolated inside an institution, they can be silenced.”

Ilya Shumanov of TI Russia on investigating to take action
When I came to Transparency International in 2012, it was an accepted
principle previously that we do not investigate. Now three years later, investigation is one of the main things we do. ... In my country, it is necessary not only to speak loudly but do something. You must do advocacy. Ok, so you publish info about corruption and nothing changes. Would you like to go further? Yes, of course! We in TI have very high expectations for this joint TI-OCCRP project. There are 50 TI chapters that want to do investigations on a national level…”

What are the key recommendations, follow-up Actions (200 words narrative form)

1. Citizen action through transparency. The moment that journalists or activists expose data on corruption, creating a database of documents, then we stop the corrupt from doing business as usual. Banks won’t give loans, and other companies won’t do business with them. We get criminals writing us letters that say that we are costing them millions of dollars by adverse publicity, and asking us to take done our info.

2. Sometimes we are lacking in sticking to a story. Often we are shallow, and not following up on our previous work. The power of NGOs focusing on investigative reporting comes when it is not “hit and run” but when it builds on work over 6 or 8 years ago.

3. What worries me in the global corruption fight: Who is paying for it? We just can’t match the amount of money that organised crimes is putting into corruption. It troubles me. If not for the U.S government that is supporting this new TI-OCCRP project, OCCRP could not be working in the countries in which we are working. We need to find more sources of funding because this fight can’t continue like this.

Key Insights that could be included in the IACC Declaration
Journalists, anti-corruption activists, and citizens all share the imperative to investigate and expose corruption to stop it.

Rapporteur’s name and date submitted Casey Kelso, 3 December 2016

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