

Corruption: A Threat to Development



Much of the debate in Ireland around corruption focuses on developing countries and the risks for Irish development aid. This is based not only on genuine concern about the effectiveness of Irish aid efforts, but also on the mistaken idea that most corruption occurs in the context of development aid.

Corruption is, indeed, an issue of concern to those who are committed to global justice. However, it is not just a development issue. Corruption occurs in all countries, where the mix of opportunity and inclination exists, especially in the interface between the private and public sector.

Where it exists, corruption destabilises democratic government, harms trade and investment, threatens the environment and encourages the abuse of human rights. It impinges on basic social services and threatens the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals.



Corruption thrives when public accountability is weak. Its greatest victims are the most vulnerable groups in society - the poor, women and children, the sick and the old.

In short, corruption hits the poor especially, and should therefore be tackled. The best way to do this is by strengthening formal and informal checks and balances, promoting accountability and enforcing legislation.



Transparency is the greatest enemy of corruption. Cutting aid does nothing to eradicate bribery; supporting accountability mechanisms, on the other hand, does work.

What are Irish NGOs doing about it?

Irish NGOs are working at local, national and global levels to promote good governance and to counter corruption:

1. Abroad, Irish development NGOs are:

- ★ Working with governments and partner organisations on building better structures and systems to manage public finances;
- ★ Providing support to partner organisations to ensure their governments fulfil their commitments in areas such as public spending on education, agriculture and health;
- ★ Supporting partner organisations to monitor corruption in both the public and private sectors;
- ★ Funding impartial media initiatives in developing countries to stimulate policy debates and encourage transparency; and
- ★ Working with donors to increase transparency at global, international, national and local levels in the spending of public and development funds.

2. At home, Irish development NGOs are:

- ★ Working to educate the Irish public on the complexities of the corruption issue;
- ★ Monitoring the commitment made by the Irish government in the White Paper on Irish Aid 2006 to publish all external evaluation and public expenditure reviews of the Irish Aid programme;
- ★ Monitoring the Irish Government's commitment to combat corruption following Ireland's adherence to the OECD Convention on Combating Bribery of Foreign Public Officials in International Business Transactions;
- ★ Supporting the Irish government's commitment to help developing countries to get actively involved in anti-corruption activities;
- ★ Lobbying in Ireland and elsewhere for the enforcement of international conventions to address corruption and increase prosecution of corrupt individuals across international boundaries; and
- ★ Lobbying for the ratification and implementation of the UN Convention against Corruption.

There are clear and encouraging examples of how governments and independent groups are working to combat corruption: western companies that offer bribes are being prosecuted, and more countries are signing up to initiatives obliging them to publish their income and expenditure. Across the developing world, public accountability mechanisms – the 'pillars of integrity' – are being reinforced and are making tangible inroads.

