

## Proposition 86

# Fighting Corruption with ICT: Strengthening Civil Society’s Role

by Haidy Ear-Dupuy and Olivier Serrat

**In a Word** With information and communication technology, civil society plays an increasing role in governance, promoting transparency and accountability to tackle corruption. Development agencies can strengthen civil society-led, ICT-driven anticorruption initiatives by funding projects and programs that foster institutional environments conducive to participation in public affairs, promote cooperation and mobilization, and develop capacities.



## Realizing the Asian Century

The force and magnitude of Asia’s economic performance from the 1980s, compared to that of other regions of the world, make perhaps the strongest case yet for the possibility of an “Asian Century”.<sup>1</sup> According to *Asia 2050: Realizing the Asian Century*, a 2011 study financed by the Asian Development Bank (2011), Asia will

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<sup>1</sup>This echoes the characterization of the nineteenth century as the British Century and the twentieth century as the American Century. Then again, some believe that the twenty-first century will be multipolar due to liberalization and globalization and that no country will monopolize influence even if the world’s two most populous countries—the People’s Republic of China and India, are in Asia.

likely account for half of global output, trade, and investment by 2050. On account of nearly doubling its share of global gross domestic product (at market exchange rates) from 27 to 51% over the period 2010–2050, the region would regain the economic position it held before the Industrial Revolution. Consequently, three billion Asians could in 40 years' time enjoy living standards similar to those of populations in the West.

However, an Asian Century is not preordained. In the immediate, the region remains home to two-thirds of the world's poor, with over 800 million people living below \$1.25 a day and 1.7 billion surviving below \$2 a day. What is more, progress toward the Millennium Development Goals has been lopsided across subregions and Asia as a whole still faces moderate to high levels of hunger and maternal mortality and lack of productive and decent employment. In the medium to long term, as the region endeavors to cement gains from a decades-long economic boom and sustain its growth momentum, governments will need to take bold action across the board. Threats have to do with (i) increasing inequality within countries, which could undermine social cohesion and stability<sup>2</sup>; (ii) the risk, for some countries and for a host of domestic economic, social, and political reasons, of getting caught in the "middle-income trap"<sup>3</sup>; (iii) intense competition for finite natural resources as newly affluent Asians aspire to higher standards of living; (iv) rising income disparities across countries, which could destabilize the region; (v) global warming and climate change, which could impact agricultural production, coastal populations, and major urban areas; and (vi) poor governance and weak institutional capacity, faced by almost all countries. Meeting any one of these hazards in a shifting global environment while continually recreating comparative advantages is not a given. What is more, the risks are not mutually exclusive: they can exacerbate one another to jeopardize growth, stability, and security.

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<sup>2</sup>For instance, the 6 January 2014 edition of the *Japan Times* (2014) reported that a survey of elites by the World Economic Forum identified rising income disparities as the second top global trend for 2014, with 64 % of Asian respondents saying the economic system in their countries favors the wealthy. Despite the fact that substantial wealth was produced before, and even after, the Great Recession that began in late 2007, returns have it seems been monopolized by a small and shrinking portion of the population. The article makes the point that concentration of wealth slows growth, weakens demand, and contributes to financial crises. More ominously still, it may erode the legitimacy of government.

<sup>3</sup>Poor countries tend to grow faster than rich ones, largely because imitation is easier than invention. The middle-income trap is a situation whereby a country that has attained a certain income from given advantages—such as cheap labor—remains stuck at the same level.

*This is the moment when we must build on the wealth that open markets have created, and share its benefits more equitably. Trade has been a cornerstone of our growth and global development. But we will not be able to sustain this growth if it favors the few, and not the many.*

—Barack Obama

*The investor of today does not profit from yesterday's growth.*

—Warren Buffett

*Asia's governments come in two broad varieties: young, fragile democracies—and older, fragile authoritarian regimes.*

—Paul Samuelson

Prominent among the above-mentioned challenges to the Asian Century is rising corruption, which has widened the governance deficit in government, businesses, and institutions.<sup>4</sup> Although corruption is not a new phenomenon, and is certainly not confined to the region, it could if left unchecked weaken institutions, corrode the fabric of governance, and unravel hard-won gains. In any event, changes in demographics, galloping urbanization, and an expanding middle class will precipitate pressures to drive the transformation of governance and institutions in Asia over the next 40 years. Failure to deal with corruption would create a binding constraint to efforts to maintain social and political stability and to fortify the legitimacy of government.<sup>5</sup>

The next 40 years are expected to see major changes in Asians' needs, expectations, and demands for governance reforms. All trends suggest the emergence of a more empowered citizenry with sharper claims from the state in terms of greater transparency and accountability<sup>6</sup> and more efficient service delivery. All being well, these aspirations will make for demand-led reform for genuine transformation of

<sup>4</sup>Governance refers to all processes of governing. Applied to a country's economic and social resources, the exercise of authority is reflected in policy, institutional and regulatory frameworks, incentive structures, capacity, and transparency and accountability dimensions. Institutions, the vehicles through which the processes of governing are conducted, are any structure or mechanism of social order governing behavior, e.g., laws, systems, and procedures, including the organizational entities that exercise the "rules of the game".

<sup>5</sup>Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index 2013 serves as a reminder that abuse of power, secret dealings, and bribery continue to ravage societies around the world. Sixty four percent and 95% of countries in Asia-Pacific and Eastern Europe and Central Asia, respectively, scored below 50, indicating a serious corruption problem. (For comparison purposes, only 23% of countries in the European Union and Western Europe scored below 50.)

<sup>6</sup>Accountability can be determined after the fact. But, it must also be galvanized before the fact by making the rules of the game transparent in advance of their application.

governance across the region. Prescriptions for good governance already abound and will intensify; all the same, progress will have to come from within the region.

*Power does not corrupt. Fear corrupts ... perhaps the fear of a loss of power.*

—John Steinbeck

## Governance and Institutions

Every day, and not just in Asia, we are reminded of the changes needed for economic and social progress, but not that institutions are the channels through which change happens. To promote good governance, we would do well to consider what is meant by (and can be accomplished through) participation, how participation grows out of democratic processes, how these processes depend on the structure of institutions, and how institutions originate from (and are supported by) human resources. Only then will we understand better what determines progress and picture more accurately the necessarily diverse levels of the institutional set-ups on which it depends.

The rights and responsibilities of people are central to progress. Participation is essential since privileged minorities seldom approve of reform: concentration of economic, social, and political power in their hands has retarded progress. Therefore, five questions must be asked: Who initiates? Who participates? Who decides? Who controls? Who benefits? If it is the people,<sup>7</sup> then development activities will most likely succeed (bearing in mind that the chance to take part hinges in turn on access to information, freedom of association to hold discussions, and arrangement of regular meetings at which officials and representatives can listen and respond to communities and be held accountable for carrying out their duties and responsibilities.)

*Elections belong to the people. It's their decision. If they decide to turn their back on the fire and burn their behinds, then they will just have to sit on their blisters.*

—Abraham Lincoln

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<sup>7</sup>Thomas Jefferson, the third President of the United States, held that: “The basis of our governments being the opinion of the people, the very first object should be to keep that right; and were it left to me to decide whether we should have a government without newspapers, or newspapers without a government, I should not hesitate a moment to prefer the latter”.

However, democracy is more than multi-partyism or the granting of concessions by authorities. Civil society needs to be fortified at all levels in agreement with the customary checks and balances of cultures. One should also ask what kinds of institutions and what manner of democratic processes are necessary to release the productive energies of people, and what conditions are required to make these institutions and processes work. The answer is that democracy must start from where people are and that—for democratic processes to unfold—transparency and accountability as well as the participation they hang on are essential. It follows that institutions (and their democratic processes) should be at three levels

- At the *community* level, a viable institution reflects the ideas, interests, and needs of communities. It has their confidence and the strength to communicate their views to higher authorities. Naturally, this assumes a degree of decentralization of decision-making. It presupposes too a capacity to act on rights and responsibilities. Above all, perhaps, the right to organize must exist.
- At the *regional* level, a viable institution possesses a mix of technical, managerial, and information-handling skills. It has also the ability to interpret communities to the nation (and vice versa). Most of all, it has a reasonable measure of autonomy (including independent revenues).
- At the *national* level, a viable institution has competence in policy-making, in socioeconomic analysis, and in technical research. It has negotiating parity with international bilateral and multilateral agencies. It provides inputs to national policy-making without relying on external advice. And it assists in the identification of linkages between the national, regional, and community levels.

A tall order? Yes, on which economic and social progress in Asia (as elsewhere) depends—even more so if one also integrates the *global* level.

## Transforming Governance and Institutions in Asia

Even over the uncertainties of a 40-year horizon, governance and institutions are a good foundation from which to discuss the broad direction of Asia. Whereas regulations can be changed relatively quickly, e.g., 1–3 years, institutions need to be assessed over the long term, e.g., 10–15 years. Governance evolves incrementally over a longer time horizon, unless it is exposed to sudden and fundamental disruptions such as armed conflict or revolutions.<sup>8</sup> An analytical framework to stimulate governance and institutions would continuously examine the following issues: Who leads the public sector? How are policies applied? How are policies

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<sup>8</sup>When citizens think that the economic system itself favors a certain class, and that class is shrinking, then the political system is under assault. Democracies are intended to represent the interests of all citizens and a healthy democracy must give hope to all citizens, especially those at the bottom.

implemented? How are resources allocated? How are public oversight functions carried out? Are there redress mechanisms?

*Courage is what it takes to stand up and speak, Courage is also what it takes to sit down and listen.*

—Winston Churchill

*A “no” uttered from deepest conviction is better and greater than a ‘yes’ merely uttered to please, or what is worse, to avoid trouble.*

—Mohandas K. Gandhi

Thankfully, there is no shortage of indicators with which to track the governance and institutional evolution of countries over time. The Worldwide Governance Indicators published by the World Bank Institute measure six core dimensions: voice and accountability, political stability and the absence of violence, government effectiveness, regulatory quality, rule of law, and control of corruption. From 2010 data, weighting country scores by gross domestic product, it appears that between 1998 and 2009 (i) Asia worsened in voice and accountability as well as political stability and the absence of violence, but improved in other areas; (ii) Asia-7<sup>9</sup> outperformed the rest of Asia in all six core dimensions of governance, also if weighted by population; (iii) Asia-7 lagged behind the rest of the world in governance; (iv) northeast Asia outperformed other subregions of Asia in control of corruption; and (v) Asia, including Asia-7, underperformed the rest of the world.

*The one good thing about repeating your mistakes is that you know when to cringe.*

—Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn

Corruption affects the quality and composition of public investment, thereby restricting access to essential goods, services, assets, and opportunities and ultimately undermining efforts at poverty reduction and human development. In a world characterized by macroeconomic uncertainty, rapid social change, and technological innovation, citizens’ expectations of what government ought to deliver are rising. It is essential that all Asian countries should focus on improving governance and transforming institutions to meet the challenges of the coming decades. Deterioration in the quality and credibility of national political and economic institutions in many Asian countries, evidenced early, among others, by the

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<sup>9</sup>Asia-7 are the People’s Republic of China, India, Indonesia, Japan, Republic of Korea, Malaysia, and Thailand.

1997 Asian financial crisis, is a daunting concern and a reason why Asia's rise should not be considered preordained. Against this background, governments must do more with less, and they must do so in much more visible ways, if they are to retain (or regain) the faith of their constituents. Eight principles and priorities deserve special attention: (i) focus on building strong and transparent institutions—they define success; (ii) grasp that corruption cannot be left unchecked; failing this, it will eventually suffocate rule-of-law institutions; (iii) devise participatory approaches to policy-making and reinforce accountability mechanisms; (iv) appreciate that designing policies is only a start; implementation is what matters; (v) ensure that the rule of law applies equally to everyone; (vi) institute a civil service that is based on merit; (vii) understand that a healthy relationship between authority and citizens is a function of trust; and (viii) recognize that “best-practice” approaches will not suffice: countries have to adapt to “best-fit”.

*The government has a responsibility to protect society, to help maintain society. That's why we have laws ... The rule of law creates a set of standards for our behavior.*

—Vint Cerf

## The Reach of ICT

Information and communication technology—meaning technologies that facilitate by electronic means the processing, transmission, and display of information—is one of the forces shaping the twenty-first century. Through faster and cheaper communication, ICT provides the means for sweeping reorganization of business; boosts efficiency and productivity; reduces transaction costs and barriers to entry; allows people to seek, acquire, and share expertise, ideas, services, and technologies locally, nationally, regionally, and across the world; and generally makes markets more efficient. Globalization is its most pronounced outcome.

*You affect the world by what you browse.*

—Tim Berners-Lee

Bearing in mind that almost half the world—over three billion people—live on less than \$2.50 a day, developing countries that harness ICT for Internet and mobile phone connectivity can leapfrog stages of development. This said, ICT can serve goals other than sustainable economic growth and public welfare: given the

primacy of governance in underpinning development effectiveness, one of ICT's most important applications is in e-government.<sup>10</sup>

## Fighting Corruption with ICT

ICT has great potential<sup>11</sup> to act as democratic media and the use of ICT in e-government is a major focus. [Motives and incentives owe severally to (i) interest in the promise of e-government and open data to improve government; (ii) interest in the potential of open data as a resource for growth and innovation; (iii) a desire to use ICT to address particular principal-agent problems; (iv) outside or competitive pressure; (v) bottom-up pressure from citizens; or (vi) a desire to domesticate otherwise disruptive technologies.] Its appeal owes to the enormous potential to improve public service delivery by making services more citizen-centric, soliciting citizen input to improve public services, and tapping citizens to help deliver better services at a lower cost; raise the level of participation available to citizens in the processes of governing; and increase transparency and accountability in government agencies.

*Sunlight is the best disinfectant.*

—William O. Douglas

*It is to be regretted that the rich and powerful too often bend the acts of government to their selfish purposes. Distinctions in society will always exist under every just government. Equality of talents, of education, or of wealth cannot be produced by human institutions. In the full enjoyment of the gifts of Heaven and the fruits of superior industry, economy, and virtue, every man is equally entitled to protection by law; but when the laws undertake to add to these natural and just advantages artificial distinctions, to grant titles, gratuities, and exclusive privileges, to make the rich richer and the potent more powerful, the humble members of society—the farmers, mechanics, and laborers—who have neither the time nor the means of securing like favors to themselves, have a right to complain of the injustice of their Government.*

—Andrew Jackson

<sup>10</sup>E-government (short for electronic government) refers to the use of ICT to enhance service delivery in the public sector, allow greater public access to information, and make government more accountable to citizens. It encompasses digital interactions between a government and citizens, government and business, government and employees, and government and governments.

<sup>11</sup>This potential springs from scalability, itself conditioned by the ability to reach citizens directly; data mashing; and sheer efficiency improvements over static technology and traditional project management tools.

Corruption is the abuse of public office for private gain. Whether grand or petty,<sup>12</sup> it can occur at all levels of society: in local and national government, in the judiciary, in large and small businesses, in the police and military, etc. Regardless of where it takes place, it tends to affect the poorest sectors of society the most in the competition for scarce resources and inadequately funded services.

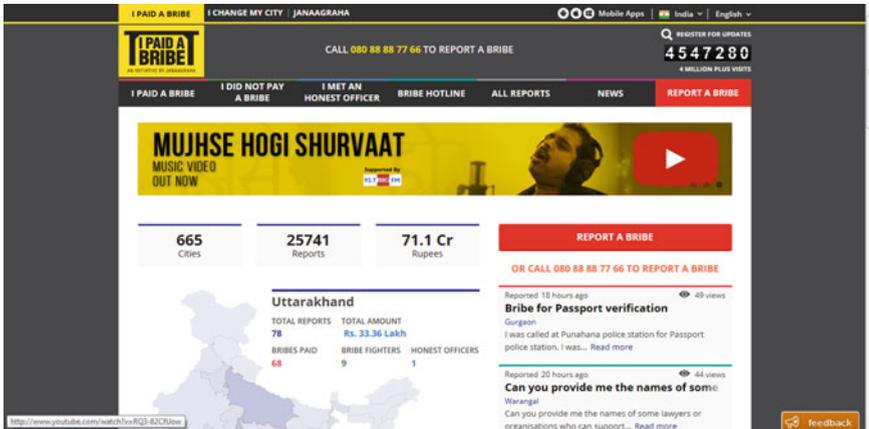
Helpfully, Tim Davies and Silvana Fumega identify eight kinds of ICT interventions that hold potential for preventing, detecting, analyzing, and addressing corruption:

- *Transparency portals*—platforms that offer timely publication of key government documents online.
- *Open data portals*—platforms that provide free access to data sets in machine-readable formats.
- *Service automation*—platforms that replace discretionary decision-making by public officials with auditable software processes.
- *Online services*—platforms that allow citizens to self-serve for public service access.
- *Online right-to-information requests*—platforms that allow citizens to file right-to-information requests.
- *Crowdsourced reporting*—platforms that allow citizens to report corruption or grievances and publicly share data on reports and trends.
- *Online corruption reporting*—platforms that allow citizens to report corruption or grievances.
- *Issue reporting*—platforms that allow citizens to report problems with public services.

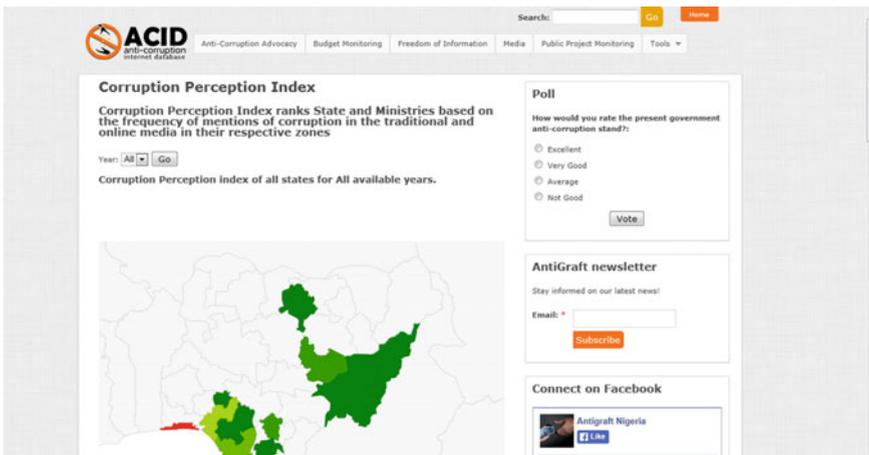
The first four ICT interventions are usually government-led. (Interventions 1 and 2 seek primarily transparency reforms; interventions 3 and 4 aim at automating transaction with government reforms.) The other four are generally civil society-led. (Interventions 5 and 6 seek transparency reforms; interventions 7 and 8 aim at transaction reforms.) Civil society also plays an important role in anticorruption theories of change around many government-led ICT interventions (Figs. 86.1 and 86.2).

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<sup>12</sup>In transition economies, the spotlight has been shone more intently on a different type of grand corruption, namely state capture. The term refers to oligarchic interests that manipulate policy formulation for their own substantial but narrow interest.



**Fig. 86.1** I paid a bribe. *Note* The I paid a bribe website asks users if they had ever paid a bribe to get their work done at a government office, to whom the bribe was paid, why, and when. *Source* [www.ipaidabribe.com/](http://www.ipaidabribe.com/)



**Fig. 86.2** The anti-corruption internet database. *Note* The anti-corruption internet database, or ACID, is a multifunctional web repository for all corruption related issues. It provides a collaborative platform for information on anticorruption and good governance initiatives undertaken by civil society organizations, media agencies, and organizations; and tools to facilitate civic engagement and public advocacy. *Source* Anti-corruption internet database. 2014

## Strengthening Civil Society-Led Anticorruption ICT Initiatives

The majority of ICT-enabled anticorruption initiatives originate from civil society.<sup>13</sup> For sure, there are instances of refreshed political administrations—not discussed here—that deliver change through well-resourced line agencies, and governments remain the largest provider of information and services that are important for all, but especially the poor as a 2013 policy report of ADB (2013) makes clear. But, even where governments adopt ICT innovations for their anti-corruption potential, civil society action can boost uses of the technology, under its own steam or—preferably—in partnership with the public and private sectors, including development agencies.<sup>14</sup>

*Justice and power must be brought together, so that whatever is just may be powerful, and whatever is powerful may be just.*

—Blaise Pascal

Civil society-led interventions have been of two kinds: push and pull. In the former, citizens speak up and communicate their experience of an issue; in the latter, they draw information from available sources and use that to act in some way. Evidently, the two approaches are not incompatible: considerations of drivers of success commonly focus on either push or pull but advocates increasingly argue for synergy-based approaches that cater also to the mechanisms of interaction between the two; such approaches recognize that state–society factors do not exist in isolation from one another but are interdependent—in any case, all the time more, ICT blurs the lines between the two to inform theories of change.

Civil society organizations that enjoy a trusted relationship with their members (or the constituencies they represent) can channel information between these and government. Where they have avoided questionable allegiances they can also serve as watchdogs. In addition, if they are well-developed, they can represent a wide variety of interests and bring diverse perspectives to design strategy and increase chances of success. Of course, not all civil society organizations display these ideal

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<sup>13</sup>Here, civil society refers to groups other than government and business that operate around shared interests, purposes, and values. They include nongovernment organizations and such groups as trade unions, faith-based groups, and professional organizations.

<sup>14</sup>For example, governments may set up open data portals primarily for economic benefit but civil society can campaign for related interventions to include important information on budgets and spending, and can use that to hold governments to account (provided, that is, it has the awareness and technical skills needed to do this).

attributes: limits may be imposed by government, resources, or citizens themselves (who may not be sufficiently aware of the costs of corruption).

In poorer nations, development agencies are well placed to stimulate outreach activities that augment civil society's contribution to the fight against corruption. Expressly, through the second set of civil society-led ICT interventions that Davies et al. circumscribe,<sup>15</sup> they can on advice of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (2003) (i) foster institutional environments conducive to the development of civil society and its participation in public affairs; (ii) promote the cooperation of public and civil society actors in anticorruption efforts; (iii) encourage a broad mobilization against corruption; and (iv) develop the capacities of civil society organizations that fight corruption, including technical capacity.

*To give real service you must add something which cannot be bought or measured with money, and that is sincerity and integrity.*

—Douglas Adams

*One hand washes the other.*

—Seneca

- To foster *institutional environments*, they can fund projects and programs that (i) advance basic civil liberties for active public participation in anticorruption activities and other public affairs; (ii) promulgate legislation that facilitates the establishment of civil society organizations; (iii) stimulate the development of independent media, able to scrutinize government operations freely; and (iv) contribute to increase government's transparency and accountability as well as cooperation with civil society organizations.<sup>16</sup>
- To promote *cooperation*, they can boost outreach initiatives such as the ADB/OECD Anti-Corruption Initiative for Asia and the Pacific.
- To encourage a broad *mobilization*, they can (i) strengthen citizen support for existing civil society organizations that fight corruption; and (ii) equally, increase the participation of organizations whose primary interest is not to fight corruption.
- To develop *capacities*, they can (i) provide civil society organizations with information and expertise; (ii) sponsor training programs; (iii) contribute funds; and (iv) nurture partnerships between civil society actors.

<sup>15</sup>Obviously, they can also associate directly with governments to advance the second set.

<sup>16</sup>In the Philippines, for example, ADB (2008) has promoted citizen involvement in mitigating governance risks in local government units.

Transparency and accountability are central to the fight against corruption. Corruption's most pernicious effect is that it undermines faith in public institutions. Because corruption is a function of the opportunity to abuse public office and the risk of detection, ICT is an invaluable tool with which to swell both the demand and supply sides of good governance, that is, the willingness and capacity to demand as well as the willingness and capacity to account. Working with civil society to fight corruption, development agencies can integrate ICT interventions for online right-to-information requests, crowdsourced reporting, online corruption reporting, and issue reporting across a broad spectrum of outreach activities that foster institutional environments, promote cooperation, encourage a broad mobilization, and develop capacities.

*But what is government itself, but the greatest of all reflections on human nature? If men were angels, no government would be necessary. If angels were to govern men, neither external nor internal controls on government would be necessary. In framing a government which is to be administered by men over men, the great difficulty lies in this: you must first enable the government to control the governed; and in the next place oblige it to control itself. A dependence on the people is, no doubt, the primary control on the government; but experience has taught mankind the necessity of auxiliary precautions.*

—James Madison

*There is always time to make right what is wrong.*

—Susan Griffin

## Opportunities for Learning

The scope of ICT-enabled anticorruption initiatives is large, irrespective of whether they are government- or civil society-led. In parallel with Davies et al., Åke Grönlund typifies eight kinds of actions that combat monopoly and discretion: they involve (i) automation—to remove human agents and hence opportunities for corruption in repetitive operations; (ii) transparency—to reduce the room for discretion; (iii) detection in operations—to make out anomalies and unexpected performance; (iv) preventive detection—to detect preparations for corrupt action by online social networks and individuals; (v) awareness raising—to inform citizens of the rules of the game so they may resist arbitrary treatment; (vi) reporting—to mobilize users to report cases that will make it easier to take corrective action and reorganize systems to avoid “loopholes”; (vii) deterrence—to dissuade individuals from engaging in corruption by publishing information about reported cases, as well as indicators; and (viii) promoting ethical attitudes—to engage citizens by pursuing discussions in various (online) forums.

ICT for transparency and accountability is a burgeoning field. In Asia as elsewhere, at community, national, and regional levels, the largest agenda for future work touches on untested assumptions and unarticulated theories of change. Here and there, what, exactly, would be the conditions under which ICT can deploy innate synergies between transparency, accountability, and participation? Drawing from political economy analysis,<sup>17</sup> practitioners must at a minimum, for each ICT intervention for transparency and accountability, diagnose in each different situation a theory of change laying out (i) the initial assessment of the milieu, (ii) what information each ICT intervention will provide and who will provide it, (iii) who will use the information and why, and (iv) how the use of the information will deliver tangible outcomes for transparency and accountability.

**1 + 1 + 1 = ∞**

ICT-driven initiatives play an increasing role in good governance. In Asia (as elsewhere), development agencies can work with civil society to fight corruption with ICT interventions for online right-to-information requests, crowdsourced reporting, online corruption reporting, and issue reporting across a broad spectrum of outreach activities that foster institutional environments, promote cooperation, encourage a broad mobilization, and develop capacities. Of course, the functionality, accessibility, and usability of the ICT in the prevailing context of technological literacy lie at the heart of all this.

*If the misery of our poor be caused not by the laws of nature, but by our institutions, great is our sin.*

—Charles Darwin

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<sup>17</sup>Political economy analysis investigates the interaction of politics and economics: this entails comprehending (i) the power and authority of groups in society, counting the interests they hold and the incentives that drive them, in conducting particular outcomes; (ii) the role that formal and informal institutions play in allocating scarce resources; and (iii) the influence that values and ideas—including culture, ideologies, and religion—have on shaping relations and interaction.

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