



**Creative, Youth-Driven Approaches to Accountability are Key to Progress Against
Corruption**
Submission for the UN General Assembly Special Session Against Corruption, April 2021
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Introduction

[Accountability Lab](#) makes governance work for people around the world. We welcome the focus of the UN General Assembly on anti-corruption through a Special Session in April 2021. We appreciate the opportunity to provide thoughts on the topic and to engaging in the process as it evolves. The UNGASS offers the opportunity to shape efforts to fight corruption over the next decade through a focus on creative, youth-driven efforts to build accountability and integrity in UN Member States. This is more important than ever as the COVID-19 crisis exacerbates issues of corruption, inequality and insecurity everywhere.

Background

With the rise of nationalist politics in recent times, we have seen [increasing threats to open societies](#); and despite rising fears about issues like immigration and climate change, there has been a continued lack of accountability of those in power. The [lack of trust](#) between governments and citizens is greater than ever. Legitimacy- of all sorts- is declining.

At the same time, the global youth population is growing rapidly but young people, women and other minority groups are still largely excluded from decision-making; citizens everywhere are losing the sense that they can play a role in changing these dynamics; and it continues to be very difficult to ensure laws are reflected in practices that support transparency and accountability.

There is deep disillusionment among young people with political systems that have generated widely disparate outcomes for a small elite versus a large majority; there is an obvious disconnect between the incredible ideas, networks and creativity of citizens and the systems- local, national and international- through which processes of inclusive change can take place; and there is a sense of isolation and an inability among change-makers to come together and collectively push for the anti-corruption and accountability reforms they want to see.

These challenges are serious and have real implications for people's lives. Our work in countries such as Mali and Niger indicates a [direct link between a lack of accountability and corruption and insecurity](#). And when we speak to people everywhere, we continue to hear that it is a deficit of governance that drives problems ranging from migration to lack of public services to inadequate justice systems. We cannot achieve the SDGs unless we understand how to deal with issues of corruption and accountability.

Recommendations

We urge member states to consider the following principles as background as they develop the UNGASS political statement:

- **Thinking beyond COVID-19-** it is essential to [fight corruption as part of the response](#) to the ongoing pandemic, but the pandemic is itself a symptom, not a cause of much larger problems. We would encourage Member States to move from consideration of anti-corruption efforts within the response to a much more expansive conception of accountability as it relates to development- including governance of the environment, the economy and issues of inclusion. Unless we address the deeper challenges within our society that drive corruption, it will be impossible to fight corruption itself, during the pandemic and beyond.

- **Changing anti-corruption narratives-** approaches to accountability, transparency and anti-corruption tend to focus on the problems and the perpetrators. This is part of the answer but can reinforce collective perceptions of widespread wrong-doing and perpetuate disengagement. An alternative approach for Member States is to celebrate honesty, lift people up and support solutions, to change this narrative. [Integrity Icon](#) is a very good example of this in practice.
- **Working with young people-** pushing back against corruption is a generational effort, and young people have to lead the change that is needed. But youth voices and ideas are too often ignored or treated as supplemental rather than central to policy development processes. Member States must work to ensure not only that young people are in positions of power within government; but that support is provided to anti-corruption innovations driven by the younger generations in their countries.
- **Focusing on individuals-** fighting corruption cannot be simply a process of creating and enforcing laws. It requires a focus on accountability agents, as well as accountability organizations or actions. Member States should work to connect these agents in ways that allows them to build coalitions for change within organizations, shift norms among institutions and strengthen their collective identity and energy.
- **Supporting unlikely networks-** the anti-corruption field can at times be confused by overly technical language and approaches. This prevents, different, dynamic voices and people from becoming part of larger efforts to create change. Member States can support “unlikely networks” among civil society, government officials, [musicians](#), creatives, technologists, film-makers and others, which can open up accountability work and generate much greater engagement around core issues.
- **Building a new generation of public servants-** in keeping with the emphasis in UNCAC on merit-based and transparent public service, Member States should work to ensure that their civil service training programs have a core focus on accountability, integrity and citizen-centric decision-making, not just anti-corruption processes and tools. Member States should also work to ensure more active networks among civil servants to share ideas, approaches and support. This will ensure that [these kinds of programs](#) build the values that can underpin effective governance over time.

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