Special Session against Corruption of the United Nations General Assembly, 2021

Contribution by the Interdisciplinary Corruption Research Network

The Interdisciplinary Corruption Research Network (ICRN) was founded in 2015. It is a non-commercial network of researchers as well as practitioners from various disciplines and countries working on all aspects of corruption, ways to curb corruption and foster integrity. Since 2015, the ICRN has organised four international conferences mostly attended by junior scholars and supported by renowned research institutions and international organisations (such as UNODC). ICRN also publishes its own research and cooperates with international organisations in the fight against corruption. The core team of the ICRN receives support from its Advisory Board, a group of established senior researchers in the field of anti-corruption. In collaboration with the Anti-Corruption Blog, ICRN runs Kickback - The Global Anti-Corruption Podcast that has over 20,000 listeners.

The members of the ICRN consider the Special Session against Corruption of the United Nations General Assembly an exciting opportunity for researchers, practitioners and politicians, i.e. member states, to come together in their aim to fight corruption worldwide.

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The ICRN proposes to focus on the Sustainability Development Goals as a framework in order to gain regional and context-specific insights on relevant aspects of corruption and identify mitigation strategies that can be addressed in close collaboration with various stakeholders, i.e. with partners both in UN organisations as well as in the member states.

Corruption has a significant negative impact on each of the SDGs. The following examples therefore aim at giving a first impression about possible connections and fields of application:

SDG3 / Good Health and Well-Being: In many parts of the world people need to engage in corruption to receive appropriate medical care. Those unable to afford such payments are oftentimes excluded from healthcare services. Not only in times of a pandemic, corruption in the healthcare sector contributes to inequalities in societies and a shorter life expectancy for poor people. Member states should identify points within healthcare services that are particularly prone to corruption and the reasons for this susceptibility in order to develop appropriate programs.

SDG4 / Quality Education: Good education is a key-feature of well-functioning societies and one of the so-called basic services states should provide to their citizens. It plays an important role in efforts undertaken to strengthen the role of girls and women (see also SDG5 - Gender Equality). Corruption in the education systems leads to the exclusion of poor people, particularly poor girls and women, and thereby contributes to inequalities in societies resulting in growing mistrust of people (or groups) excluded from the education system.

SDG16 / Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions: Corruption can be cause and consequence of violent conflict. It increases inequalities in societies (see also SDG10 - Reduced Inequalities) and thereby promotes the radicalisation of marginalised groups. In the absence of strong institutions, an important feature of so-called failed states and/or post-conflict societies, it undermines efforts of reconstruction. Various forms of corruption and fraud can also undermine the integrity of elections. As one of the key actors of conflict resolution and management and the promotion of lasting peace, the United Nations and its members states should take measures to identify forms of corruption that contribute to the outbreak of violent conflict and its persistence.

Building on the interdisciplinary expertise of its members, in a second step the ICRN suggests to examine the role of corruption for each SDG. To this aim, it is crucial to consider interconnections between individual SDGs caused by different forms of corruption. For instance, the illegal exploitation of natural resources by members of conflict parties and criminal networks, links challenges to overcome to *Responsible Consumption and Production (SDG 12)*, *Climate Action (SDG 13)* and *Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions (SDG16)*. By bringing together partners from international organisations, local NGOs and research facilities in member states we aim to explore how more sector-specific understandings of corruption can be used in the design and implementation of anti-corruption programs.