

Workshop 6.3 on Effective Strategies in Grassroots Campaigning versus Corruption

**International Initiative on Corruption and Governance (IICG)
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The issue of corruption and undemocratic governance are of genuine concern for the people. It drains off resources for development and social services and is also at the heart of the problem of poverty and injustice.

International factors and forces, public and private, have historically played a role in perpetuating the problem up to the present.

The World Bank in particular seeks public acclaim for its so called campaign to crack down corruption but it ignores the cycle of corruption involving the governments of developed countries and transnational corporations that make financial contributions to developing countries and in return receive investment opportunities from the World Bank. This results to the World Bank supporting and promoting the corporate activities of developed countries with the consequences of harmful social and environmental impacts.

Recognizing the fact that the issue of corruption and governance cannot be comprehended purely on a national level, the IICG was established to promote public interest on corruption and governance issues from a grass roots perspective. IICG plays a role in organizing discussions in various fora, big and small to help equip and empower social movements in Asia, Africa and Latin America in taking a strong part in the stand against the corruption issue.

The fight against corruption has been long, and one of the main driving forces of this movement comes from the grassroots. On the 12th International Anti-Corruption Conference under the theme: "Towards a Fairer World: Why is corruption still blocking the way?" that took place in Guatemala City on November 2006, IICG provided the venue for grassroots and civil society organizations to come together and to draw lessons and strategies from one another's effort in the campaign against corruption and undemocratic governance through a workshop on Effective Strategies in Grassroots Campaigning versus Corruption.

The workshop was held on November 16, 2006 at the Amatitlan Hall of the Camino Real Hotel in Guatemala City. Its objectives include presenting specific cases of corruption in Asia, Latin America and Africa, Critically analyze the nature and scope of corruption, present grassroots experience in campaigning at to come up with suggestions on the way forward to combating corruption.

The panel for the workshop consisted of the following speakers:

(Due to failure of acquiring a visa, Demba Dembele of Forum for African Alternatives and Aruna Roy of Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan (MKSS-India), were not able to make it to the IACC)

Antonio Tujan Jr. is a writer, researcher, social activist, and educator. He is now IBON Foundation Inc.'s Research Director and International Director. He has written and edited several books, papers and articles on such topics as globalization, privatization, trade, and development. He is an international activist, researcher, and speaker and is currently the Chairperson of the Asia Pacific Research Network as well as Chairperson of the Management Committee of the Reality of Aid, the only global North-South civil society project monitoring ODA. He is active in other international networks and campaigns such as the global coalition on WTO, the global coalition on agriculture trade, the international social movements' network on the APEC and the International Initiative on Corruption and Governance. He is a prominent figure in the Philippines as a political analyst and people's economist.

Alejandro Bendaña (Ph.D. History, Harvard, 1979) is President of the Center for International Studies (*Centro de Estudios Internacionales*) in Managua, Nicaragua, which he founded in 1990. During the 1980s, Dr. Bendaña held several key positions in the Nicaraguan Ministry of Foreign Affairs under the Sandinista government, including Director General for Multilateral Affairs (1982-1984) and Secretary General (1984-1990). He has also served as a consultant to UNESCO's Culture of Peace Programme, a trainer in community peace-building and conflict theory, and a visiting professor at the Autonomous University of Nicaragua, the University of Chicago, and the Eastern Mennonite University in Harrisonburg, Virginia. He is the author of approximately 40 articles and five books, including *Power Lines: United States Hegemony in the New Global Order* (1996).

Kathryn R. Manga, workshop rapporteur and IICG Secretariat, is currently an International Officer for the International Department of IBON Foundation, Inc.

The session started with Mr. Antonio Tujan Jr. discussing the main workshop objectives with the expected outputs and presenting the scope of IICG's work on corruption and governance. In this introduction, Antonio discussed that IICG's approach to corruption and governance is that it is not phenomenal but systemic and historical, that it is a system or has national and global linkages not just local and individual linkages. He also said that IICG believes that corruption is an element in building participatory democracy and ethics in public service. Having said these, he ended by stating that there are three elements by which we can defeat corruption and that is through 1) fundamental reform of political structures and institutions 2) building genuine participation in political institutions and culture 3) effective transparency and accountability mechanisms founded on genuine participation and political reform.

The first presentation came from Mr. Alejandro Bendaña on corruption and governance and some glaring examples of corruption cases in Latin America. He started by saying

that we need a global system to fight corruption and that we can't have just a national strategy in dealing with it. He discussed that the public sector has been given too much emphasis while we should also look at the increasing private sector or the corporate sector. This corporate sector and multinationals have a lot more power than the governments. Governments are oftentimes bound to the multinationals with the financial support that they provide. Looking at the situation right now it is evident that these multinationals even contribute and eventually control the policies that are passed through the legal process a country that is indebted to them. This form of "bribe" gives the notion of legalized corruption or legalized theft. In many Latin American countries he said, this is known as privatization.

Corruption is tackled in the issue of governance. This is one reason why the donors from the private sector must get out of the picture for the process to be democratic. And if we want it to be democratic, the government must open its process to the grassroots and must be transparent in every decision it makes.

As a recommendation, Mr. Bendaña said that big conferences such as the IACC should always consider bringing the grassroots to these events as they are the basic force that pushes for governance reforms in every country.

With Ms Aruna Roy's absence, Kathryn R. Manga, presented MKSS's story of struggle for the Right to Information in India.

Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan works on the Right to Information in India, which has been passed as a law by the Indian parliament in 2005.

In 1976, the Supreme Court of India said that the right to information is embedded in the fundamental rights of every citizen. It said that every citizen has the freedom of speech and expression. But they cannot speak or express unless they know, and the right to know is the right to information.

Every citizen pays taxes. The money that the government collects belongs to people but they cannot demand for accounts as they do not have the machinery. It was in 1990, under MKSS led by Aruna Roy that a group of farmers and laborers fought for minimum wage under the government programs. They demanded for the master roles to know the supposed exact wage of each laborer as they suspected an on going corruption by the system. It was here that they realized and first understood the significance of transparency and the right to information. This then snowballed into protest actions and eventually became a right to information movement. Now they have the Right to Information Act.

This law gives the citizens five rights:

1. right to ask for any information from any government department
2. right to ask for inspection of any government documents
3. right to ask for photocopy of any government documents

4. right to ask for sample of material for any government work
5. right to ask to inspect of any government work

Even before its first year as an act, the government was set to kill it and weaken it through proposed amendments such as removing the file notings from the documents that will be requested by the public. The file notings reflect the process and steps in the decision making in each project. With the file notings inaccessible to the people and the name of the government officer who name the notes in the process, the right to information will not have teeth.

In September of 2006, MKSS organized a nation wide campaign to save the right to information. With such pressure from the people, the administration dropped its attempts to pass the said amendments.

After the discussion, two short documentary films on the India's fight for the Right to Information were viewed.

The discussion on the Right to Information was followed by Antonio Tujan Jr' s presentation of the cases of corruption and some examples of grassroots anti-corruption campaigns in the Philippines. He presented three case studies which includes the case of the Leyte Metropolitan Water district, the Magdalena Municipal Waterworks case and the Muntinlupa anti corruption campaign.

The Leyte case included discussions on the summary dismissal of union members who campaign against the unliquidated cash advances which amounts to more than P107M made by General Manager Ranulfo Feliciano. The dispute resulted to the unsolved vigilante type murder of two whistle blowers.

The next case presented was the Magdalena Waterworks case which was a loan from the World Bank. This loan however was decided without public consultation and turned out to be a flop because the water was not even potable. But the local government imposed the termination of the old water system and required the connection of residents to new water system based on increased rates to pay a total P50.9M loan with the World Bank. This created unrest within the community and pushed the local residents to campaign for their right to water. The news eventually reached the national media through the Water for the People Philippine Network and became a national issue.

The last case presented was the Muntinlupa anti-corruption campaign which was initiated by the Bayan Muna (People First) Party List. They established a multi stakeholder anticorruption coalition (MCGG), which include professional and civic organizations; labor unions; residents/community associations; students and youth association; key corporations; political and religious leaders. They aim to build and strengthen participatory governance with accountability and transparency rather than simply targeting officials.

The lessons drawn from this campaign includes avoiding petty politics in anticorruption work, comprehensive approach of governance, promotion of transparency and accountability and anticorruption work and the realization on the need for a national/international framework of support. The coalition also realized that the citizen's movement plays a big role as the main engine in combating corruption. They also saw the importance of developing political focus on the interests of citizens in terms of clean government, effective services, and policies that promote domestic livelihood, jobs, and community wellbeing.

After the presentations the floor was then opened for comments and questions of the workshop participants. Some of the major points discussed were the importance of looking at the private sector (corporate sector) as part of the corrupt system and the big role played by the grassroots in the anti corruption campaign in the local scene. Discussions also looked at the different strategies and tactics of the grassroots sector from staging protest rallies, information dissemination and public awareness campaigns to conducting creative means in campaigning like a hunger strike, which some protesters did in India. This also led to the discussion on the importance of the use of the multi media for every campaign. Media does not necessarily mean the mainstream media but also the importance of creating and maximizing the alternative media which may be formed by the people themselves. Also presented as examples of grassroots strategies are public teach-ins and cultural performances like songs, poems and plays which reflects the issues of the people. Antonio added that when corruption takes humongous proportions to overtake the system, the people use what is available to them to fight it.

On the other hand, the right to information and the strong campaign in India was commended by the workshop participants. A participant from India noted that this campaign highlighted that the RTI has two main aspects. It's the right of every citizen to get information and the obligation of the government to be transparent in its decision making and in its projects and works. RTI, Antonio added is making the government responsible by using the law and that grassroots campaigning is forcing the government to respect its own instruments that they themselves weaken.

As output of this workshop, the experiences, stories and presentations will be published as the Book 6 of the IICG Book Series.