

# CITIZEN EMPOWERMENT AND GRASS-ROOTS ACTION TO CURB CORRUPTION AND GAIN ACCOUNTABILITY

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## *Why is it important to empower citizens to fight corruption?*

1. It's ordinary people who bear the brunt of corruption, have direct experience of it and suffer from it. Aruna Roy, one of the founders of the Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan (MKSS) movement for the “Right to Know” in India, characterizes corruption as “the external manifestation of the denial of a right, an entitlement, a wage, a medicine...” In bottom-up approaches, corruption isn't considered in a vacuum; it's linked to other injustices, from violence to poverty, human rights abuses, substandard social services, authoritarianism, unaccountability, to environmental destruction.
2. People have power and can use it to curb corruption. Nonviolent social movements and campaigns have a rich history of ending oppression and injustice, including forms of corruption. A 2009 study found that over the past 110 years, violent campaigns succeeded historically in only 26 percent of all cases, compared to 53 percent in the case of nonviolent, civilian-based campaigns (see resources section).
3. Traditional, top-down, administrative, rules-based strategies are based on the assumption that once anti-corruption structures are put in place, illicit practices will change. Institutions accused of corruption are often made responsible for enacting change. But those benefitting from graft are much less likely to end it than those suffering from it. Thus, even when political will exists, it can be thwarted, because too many people have a stake in the crooked status quo.
4. When citizens fight corruption, the priorities often shift from technocratic reforms and grand corruption, to curbing those forms of graft and abuse that are most harmful or common to ordinary people, particularly the poor. In people-centered approaches,

curbing corruption becomes part of a larger set of goals for accountability, participatory democracy, and social and economic justice.

***Why are citizens – mobilized in grass-roots campaigns and movements – often effective in curbing corruption?***

People power may be particularly suited to a systemic approach to curbing corruption because it consists of extra-institutional pressure to push for change, when power-holders are corrupt and/or unaccountable, and institutional channels are blocked or ineffective.

Top-down and bottom-up, grass-roots approaches are not mutually exclusive. Civic campaigns and movements can:

- Complement and reinforce legal and administrative mechanisms, which constitute the anti-corruption infrastructure needed for long-term transformation of systems of graft and abuse;
- Shake-up vertical and horizontal systems of corruption;
- Exert pressure on the state as well as on other sectors of society;
- Bolster efforts and support/protect honest individuals within the state and other institutions and sectors attempting reforms and change.

***What are the dynamics of people power?***

Mobilized citizens, engaged in organized, civil resistance can generate social force - people power - that:

- Disrupts dishonest relationships and the status quo within systems of corruption by -
  - shaking up corrupt interactions and relationships
  - generating political will
  - pushing for people-centered measures
  - reinforcing new patterns of administration and governance centered on accountability to citizens.
- Wins people over to the civic campaign or movement, even from within corrupt systems
- Weakens sources of support and control for unaccountable and corrupt power holders, entities, and their enablers

Citizens in grass-roots anti-corruption campaigns/movements utilize a variety of nonviolent tactics, such as:

noncooperation	monitoring officials and institutions
civil disobedience	monitoring budgets, spending, services
low-risk mass actions	social audits
displays of symbols	social networking/digital technologies
street theatre and stunts	education and training
songs, poetry, humor	social/economic empowerment initiatives
citizen and candidate report cards	youth recreation
demanding and acquiring information	creation of parallel institutions

anti-corruption pledges  
public awards  
protests, petitions, vigils, marches, sit-ins

strikes, boycotts and reverse boycotts  
nonviolent blockades  
nonviolent accompaniment

***Where can I find resources on people power and citizen initiatives to fight corruption?***

General sites

[www.nonviolent-conflict.org](http://www.nonviolent-conflict.org)  
[www.internationalbudget.org](http://www.internationalbudget.org)  
[www.newtactics.org](http://www.newtactics.org)

[www.informationactivism.org](http://www.informationactivism.org)  
[www.tacticaltech.org](http://www.tacticaltech.org)  
[www.transparency.org](http://www.transparency.org)

Resources

New Tactics in Human Rights “Tactical Dialogue on Empowering Citizens to Fight Corruption” - online dialogue, resources, PPT, links to documents

<http://www.newtactics.org/en/blog/new-tactics/empowering-citizens-fight-corruption>

“People Count: How Citizen Engagement and Action Challenge Corruption and Abuse”

<http://nonviolent-conflict.org/index.php/learning-and-resources/resources-on-nonviolent-conflict?bTask=bDetails&bId=344>

Online documentaries on two anti-corruption campaigns: the Turkish "Citizen's Initiative for Constant Light" and the Kenyan MUHURI (Muslims for Human Rights) social audits

<http://www.gecetreni.com/1dkk.html>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z2zKXqkrf2E>

People Power online game (anti-corruption scenario): <http://www.peoplepowergame.com>

"Right to Know" movement, MKSS, India: <http://www.newtactics.org/en/RighttoKnow>

A citizen's guide to monitoring government expenditures

[www.internationalbudget.org/resources/expenditure/index.htm](http://www.internationalbudget.org/resources/expenditure/index.htm)

Bangladesh social movement against corruption: [www.gsdrc.org/docs/open/HD492.pdf](http://www.gsdrc.org/docs/open/HD492.pdf)

Backfire Model to resist repression against whistle-blowers and anti-corruption advocates

[www.bmartin.cc/pubs/backfire.html](http://www.bmartin.cc/pubs/backfire.html)

The Whistleblower's Handbook: How to Be an Effective Resister

[www.uow.edu.au/~bmartin/pubs/99wh.html](http://www.uow.edu.au/~bmartin/pubs/99wh.html)

Excellent study on the success rate of violent versus nonviolent struggles (Stephan & Chenoweth)

[www.nonviolent-conflict.org/index.php/learning-and-resources/resources-on-nonviolent-conflict?bTask=bDetails&bId=257](http://www.nonviolent-conflict.org/index.php/learning-and-resources/resources-on-nonviolent-conflict?bTask=bDetails&bId=257)

*Only Young Once: An Introduction to Nonviolent Struggle for Youths*  
English

[www.nonviolent-conflict.org/index.php/learning-and-resources/resources-on-nonviolent-conflict?bTask=bDetails&bId=284](http://www.nonviolent-conflict.org/index.php/learning-and-resources/resources-on-nonviolent-conflict?bTask=bDetails&bId=284)

French

[www.upeace.org/PDF/file\\_jeune\\_qu\\_une\\_fois\\_Only\\_Young\\_Once\\_Fr\\_Standard.pdf](http://www.upeace.org/PDF/file_jeune_qu_une_fois_Only_Young_Once_Fr_Standard.pdf)

Guide to nonviolent action in practice

[www.internationalpeaceandconflict.org/profiles/blogs/guide-to-nonviolence-in](http://www.internationalpeaceandconflict.org/profiles/blogs/guide-to-nonviolence-in)

### ***What are some examples of grass-roots movements and campaigns against corruption?***

Afghanistan: Integrity Watch Afghanistan is training villagers to conduct social audits of internationally and domestically funded projects, in order to curb corruption and improve reconstruction and development.

Bangladesh: The “Social Movement against Corruption,” launched by Transparency International-Bangladesh, empowers citizens to hold public officials accountable for health, education and local government services.

Brazil: The Movement against Electoral Corruption coalition (MCC) collected 1.6 million signatures to introduce the Ficha Limpa (clean record) legislation to Congress, followed by street actions and digital civil resistance, coordinated by [avaaz.org](http://avaaz.org), to get it approved.

Colombia: OCASA (“truth” in Chibcha) uses the internet and social networking to educate and mobilize youth, and develop their sense of ownership in curbing corruption.

Egypt: Shayfeen.com (“we see you”) increased public awareness about corruption, fostered citizen participation, monitored the government, broadcast election fraud in real time via the internet, and proved their activities were valid under the UNCAC.

Guatemala: A local citizen’s movement emerged in Santa Lucia Cotzumalguapa after the civil war to recover the community from drug lords and organized crime, prevent electoral fraud, maintain resilience in the face of violent repression, and foster development.

India: Fifth Pillar targets bribery with innovative low-risk actions such as passing out “anti-corruption” zero-rupee notes, Right to Information petitioning, and anti-bribery pledges.

Indonesia: The 2009 CICA campaign mobilized citizens to defend the Corruption Eradication Commission (KPK) and two falsely imprisoned deputy commissioners.

Italy: Addio Pizzo (protection money) is a youth anti-mafia movement in Palermo that is building a growing group of businesses that publicly refuse to pay pizzo, and mobilizing citizens to resist through simple, everyday acts, such as shopping at pizzo-free stores.

Kenya: MUHURI (Muslims for Human Rights) is empowering communities, through social audits, to fight poverty by curbing misuse of constituency development funds.

Mexico: DHP (Dejemos de Hacernos Pendejos) is an emerging civic movement that seeks to alter the apathy of people, foster civic responsibility, and win accountability, using humor (evident from their name), street actions, stunts, and social networking.

Philippines: The Textbook Count/Textbook Walk campaign annually organizes about one million boy and girl scouts to count textbooks and conduct quality inspections, in order to curb corruption in the elementary and secondary education system.

South Korea: The “Civil Action for the General Election 2000” coalition identified corrupt and ineligible candidates in the general election. They held street rallies, petitions, phone and email campaigns, and launched youth websites that included celebrity endorsements.

Turkey: The 1997 “Citizens Initiative for Constant Light” campaign mobilized approximately 30 million people through synchronized low-risk mass actions to pressure the government to take specific measures to combat systemic corruption.

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