

Covering Corruption: The Difficulties of Trying to Make a Difference

A Report to the Center for International Media Assistance

By Rosemary Armao

July 21, 2010



The Center for International Media Assistance (CIMA), a project of the National Endowment for Democracy, aims to strengthen the support, raise the visibility, and improve the effectiveness of media assistance programs by providing information, building networks, conducting research, and highlighting the indispensable role independent media play in the creation and development of sustainable democracies around the world. An important aspect of CIMA's work is to research ways to attract additional U.S. private sector interest in and support for international media development.

CIMA convenes working groups, discussions, and panels on a variety of topics in the field of media development and assistance. The center also issues reports and recommendations based on working group discussions and other investigations. These reports aim to provide policymakers, as well as donors and practitioners, with ideas for bolstering the effectiveness of media assistance.

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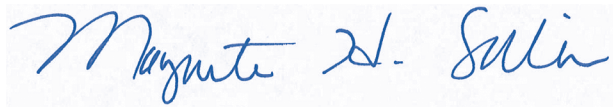
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Preface

The Center for International Media Assistance (CIMA) at the National Endowment for Democracy commissioned this study of the effect of news coverage of corruption on the incidence and prevalence of corruption worldwide.

CIMA is grateful to Rosemary Armao, a veteran editor and journalism educator with extensive international experience training journalists, for her research and insights on this topic.

We hope that this report will become an important reference for international media assistance efforts.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Marguerite H. Sullivan". The signature is written in a cursive style and is set against a light blue rectangular background.

Marguerite H. Sullivan
Senior Director
Center for International Media Assistance

Scope and Methodology

This paper examines the impact of reporting about corruption on the incidence of corruption, asking whether and how media has an effect in bringing about reform and better governance.

It asks those question in a number of specific settings—Mexico, Uganda, Bosnia-Herzegovina, and Bangladesh—where media systems, the talent and traditions of native journalists and the strength of democratic structures, especially courts, law enforcement, and government agencies, differ greatly from the United States. The experience of highly successful U.S. journalists in fighting corruption provides an illuminating comparison to that of their colleagues overseas and has been used here in consideration of the fact that U.S. media have provided a leading model for watchdog journalism. The rationale for this approach is that American journalists, who can rely on mostly well-functioning police, judicial, legislative institutions, and powerful private advocacy groups, plus a long tradition of watchdog journalism, should be expected to have the best chance of effecting change through their reporting. How the process from disclosure to reform works in the United States helps clarify what may be lacking in other countries.

The idea that a free press is linked to better, more honest government is accepted as a given, largely without direct evidence. Yet only recently have news organizations begun asking whether what they are doing is making any difference. This paper will attempt to discern patterns in the topics and methods of reporting that seem to lead to civil action and reform and also keep journalists safe to do more of that work. The purpose is to suggest some of the best practices and training that should be put into place by media development organizations and educational institutions.

The research behind this report draws from several key sources:

- A literature search of governmental and non-governmental agency reports, academic journals, websites, and news articles. Information compiled by the Committee to Protect Journalists, Transparency International, and Global Integrity was especially valuable.
- Interviews in person, by e-mail and phone with investigative reporters and NGO representatives in the United States, Bosnia, Uganda, Bangladesh, and Mexico conducted between January and May 2010.

Executive Summary

It is often taken for granted that a free press shining a light on wrongdoing is the way to control corruption.

The World Bank, with an eye to the economic potential of honest government, promotes this, as do United Nations agencies and the U.S. and European governments, which spend millions of dollars to develop media with corruption-fighting power.

And brave journalists have endured threats and attacks and have even died reporting about corruption.

In June and July of 2010 alone, three Philippino and a Greek journalist—working in different media and on different topics, but all exposing corruption—were gunned down. Covering corruption is more dangerous than covering war.

But while media has a role in guarding against corruption in healthy democracies, what is its role in states where democracy is not so healthy? Where police and politicians are among the corrupt, the courts are bound up with the powerful, and people have come to accept petty bribery and gifting as normal, what can journalists do? How can they operate in nations that give them no right to see government documents, no access to question officials and where they are subjected to jail for sedition or libel if they write anything perceived as unfavorable?

Journalists in Mexico, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Uganda, and Bangladesh face just those conditions, yet have made headway in battling the unfair treatment of citizens at the hands of their government. They brought about the political downfall of a Bosnian prime minister, for example, and stopped the sale of a virgin rainforest to sugarcane dealers in Uganda. They have shown readers that corruption is of direct interest to them and that they have the power to do something about it. They have found that compelling

writing about real people battling with the consequences of corruption overcomes the fatigue that arises from reading consistently bad news. Instead, citizens get outraged.

These corruption reporters are building international and regional networks. Such alliances offer greater security for them and wider

context and data for stories that challenge the powerful. They also are increasingly teaming with non-governmental organizations and activist groups over the Internet and through social networking media for increased impact. Stories that once might have been censored or killed now are reaching wide audiences and prompting citizen action.

Reporters writing about corruption have prompted police, prosecutors, and courts to perform their jobs better, moving their

It is often taken for granted that a free press shining a light on wrongdoing is the way to control corruption. But while media has a role in guarding against corruption in healthy democracies, what is its role in states where democracy is not so healthy?

countries closer to full democracies. They also have promoted the work of official anti-corruption agencies, providing them cover against powerful enemies who want to avoid scrutiny. Even their persistence in checking records and asking questions helps keep leaders in check.

Much of these achievements do not show up in the faulty measurements taken of corruption. The widely used Transparency International Corruption Perceptions rating measures citizens' views of the problem in their countries. A new Global Integrity scoring card of nations is based on reports from political scientists and reporters about an array of democratic institutions and mechanisms in a country. The four countries

on which this report focuses all consistently score low on both these indexes and have even dropped further down the scales. Journalists on the corruption beat in the developing world agree on many steps that could help them do their job better. Chief among them is overhauling the education they get in the field. Instead of short-term and generalized workshops, they propose two differing training models: Put advanced or experienced reporters into high-level and intense classes on finding, tracking, and documenting organized crime and corruption or fund independent centers where reporters work for extended periods under experienced editors learning the ropes and adhering to high professional standards.

Overview: The Sad State of Anti-Corruption Journalism

Media in developing countries, like the societies they cover, face overwhelming challenges in combating endemic corruption. Among them: limited resources and skills, hostile legal environments, an apathetic public, and sometimes grave physical danger.

Yet a number of organizations, journalists, and media outlets have openly challenged corruption in the most difficult of locales and won. Understanding how these successes were achieved is important to replicating future successes.

In the past three years, Mexico City's *El Universal* reported in April 2010, more than 18,000 people have been killed in the country's so-far ineffectual war against drug traffickers powered and emboldened by their blanket corruption of everything from police and customs to banks.

Drug lords have learned they can keep their depredations out of the headlines by using threats and gunfire along with bribes to craft the coverage they want from journalists. In March, the *New York Times*' Marc Lacey encountered residents in Reynosa incensed that local reporters, fearful of the vengeful drug dealers, would not risk writing a single word about repeated shoot-outs that left bodies in

their streets. The residents broke the news blackout by taking photos of the violence on their cellphones and posting videos.¹

"Journalism is dead in Reynosa," TV news producer Ciro Gómez Leyva told the *Times*.² Long-time respected investigative reporter and journalism trainer Ana Arana, who recently returned home after years of working abroad, goes further in her pessimism. "In Mexico," she said, "reporting

about corruption doesn't do anything." You may spark a scandal that will last for a week or two, she said, but "Nothing happens ... Nothing has an impact."³

Many journalists in developing or newly democratized countries around the globe—similarly under fire, under-resourced and battling

both resistant officials and a skeptical public in trying to expose corruption and crime—share that gloomy assessment.

"There are a lots of disillusioned journalists in Eastern Europe," said Romanian investigative reporter Paul Radu, whose Center for Investigative Journalism in Bucharest for a decade has taken on organized crime and corrupt and incompetent government officials whom mainstream media had shied away from. He has also taught inexperienced reporters

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from Latin America and Asia how to track and document corruption. “They want action as soon as they print. They expect the government to take action, he said” More often, officialdom hardly acknowledges their stories and discouraged reporters get out of the business—taking with them training and skills sorely needed in the field.⁴

Often, readers and viewers are not supportive or sympathetic because they see the corruption that journalists are out to expose as inevitable. “There is a sense of apathy and

acceptance,” said Bernard Tabaire, a long-time writer and editor for the *Monitor* newspaper in Kampala, Uganda, and now general secretary of the African Centre for Media Excellence. “Even in private conversations in homes, corruption is not seen as a terrible thing ... it’s our way of life. Institutional guardians of morality like the churches—very few speak out.”⁵

Furthermore, those journalists in Reynosa are right to be afraid. Joel Simon, executive director of the New York-based Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) and a leading expert on press freedom, calls corruption “one of the most dangerous beats” in the world. Of the 812 journalists murdered between 1992, when CPJ began keeping count, and the last week of May 2010 when he was interviewed, Simon said, 21 percent had been working on stories strictly about

corruption. But the CPJ count also includes reporters killed while covering human rights (14 percent of the total) and politics (38 percent), crime (14 percent more of the total) and even sports (3 percent of deaths), where stories involve corruption such as human trafficking or fixing soccer matches.

“It’s the kind of journalism that has a lot of martyrs,” Simon said. “These journalists knew they’d be killed and accepted it as a consequence of what they were doing. They believed so fervently, it didn’t matter.”⁶

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— Joel Simon, executive director,
Committee to Protect Journalists

That is the situation in Russia, where 13 journalists have been killed since Vladimir Putin took office, and no murderer has ever been caught.⁷ While most news outlets and non-profits in Russia, like those in Mexico, steer away

from tackling corruption as the result of such violence, an exceptional few media companies and individuals keep trying.

“Moscow Crime Reporter, Facing His Obituary Daily,” was the headline over a *New York Times* story in June 2009 about Sergei Kanev, a muckraking reporter who specializes in police corruption for *Novaya Gazeta*. One of his investigations was into the 2006 murder of colleague Anna Politkovskaya while in the midst of reporting about Russian involvement in Chechnya. His mother hates his job. “It’s useless,” she told the Times. “It’s like hitting a stone wall

with your forehead. You can hit it as long as you want and get bruises and lumps if you're lucky, or otherwise get crippled, or lose your life." Kanev told the newspaper, "We try to reach our citizens to say, 'Look, people, it's enough.' Let's take back our country."⁸

"To be a journalist in Russia is suicide," the *Guardian* in Great Britain headlined a 2008 story about Mikhail Beketov, who continued to report about rampant corruption in a Moscow suburb even after his car was set on fire and his dog killed. He stopped after being beaten so badly he lost a leg, three fingers and the ability to speak.⁹ In May, the Times also wrote about Beketov, reporting that there had been no arrests in his case.¹⁰

But there is another story to tell. The choices for journalists battling corruption and organized crime do not have to be limited to suffering savage beatings or publishing exposés that bear no results, as experiences in Eastern Europe show. By adopting internationally recognized standards of accuracy, fairness, ethics, and a style of reporting used elsewhere in the world, by networking with colleagues from throughout the region and the West, and by adjusting expectations for success, reporters there are making small, steady gains against corruption. This is happening even in the absence of fully functioning press, police, and prosecutorial systems, and amid poverty and the wrenching changes of economic and political transition. Similarly encouraging results have been documented in such places as far apart as the Philippines and Uganda.

Journalists at the Center for Investigative Reporting (CIN in its Bosnian initials) in Sarajevo, Bosnia-Herzegovina, maintain a list of "effects"—resignations, firings, changes in laws, or criminal

proceedings—that they can trace at least indirectly to articles and projects they have undertaken. Over the six years it has been in operation, funded first by a USAID grant and now by donations from an array of governmental and non-profit donors, the center's experience suggests that even a limited independent press can make a difference in some cases.

In 2007 CIN reporters detailed the steps by which Nedžad Branković, prime minister of one of Bosnia's two political sections, obtained a spacious downtown Sarajevo apartment for just \$500 and with none of the usual red tape ordinary citizens face in finding housing. Government records proved that in a few days he found a swank hilltop apartment, had the government and a state company buy it, saw it moved onto a list of excess apartments kept after the 1990s war for the benefit of refugees, and then privatized it.

That was not the worst case of corruption, but it struck a chord among readers who knew firsthand about waiting for years to privatize family apartments or paying a fortune to find a place to live. Other media picked it up and dug into other aspects of his business and government life. Branković's repeated protestation to reporters that he had done nothing illegal was picked up by a popular band, which used the quote as the chorus in a protest song. When graffiti guerillas spray-painted slurs on his home and Branković demanded the police make arrests, a Facebook campaign ignited. Police were inundated with calls from people confessing to the graffiti. About two years after the first center story was published, Branković's political rivals used an indictment against him for the apartment transaction and public disenchantment

as an excuse to force his resignation. He and another top official are being tried in connection with the housing scam. Corruption trials are rare in Bosnia, as is the kind of citizen action this case inspired. Buoyed by success in removing Branković, one citizen group has moved on to press for constitutional changes that would allow citizen recalls and referendums.¹¹

Sheila S. Coronel, executive director of the Toni Stabile Center for Investigative Journalism at Columbia University's Graduate School of Journalism, has written persuasively about the power of a free press in places where journalists are safe and laws are on their side to act as a watchdog and to promote good governance. She has especially made the argument that the media can fight corruption in the Asia-Pacific region, where she has personal experience.¹² In 2000, as a reporter with the Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism, she helped bring about the impeachment of President Joseph Estrada for corruption.

The center outlined the excessive lifestyle of Estrada, an ex-movie star who kept his family and mistresses in mansions and cars. The precisely documented financial disclosures scandalized the public and powerful institutions such as the Catholic Church and led to an uprising on the streets of Manila that ended his administration.

With this as background, the intention of this paper is to look at the potential and the limits of free and independent media to help decrease corruption in countries that lack strong laws, an independent judiciary, and other democratic supports. It will look at practices that have had impact, particularly in Mexico, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Bangladesh, and Uganda, where the press has reported vigorously on corruption, and it will address three areas of particular concern: the safety of reporters, the need for better training in how to cover corruption, and the growing use of social networking and other digital technology to report incidences of corruption and raise public awareness.

Can Media Deter Corruption?

Corruption is distressingly ubiquitous, and that makes it difficult to answer the question about whether reporting on corruption helps to decrease it.

Journalists who cover corruption, CPJ’s Simon pointed out, tend to work in places where there is much corruption to begin with. He wondered: Would there be even more without them? How could one assess that?¹³

Chuck Lewis of American University, an authority on international corruption and founder of the Center for Public Integrity, in 2005 set up Global Integrity, a world-wide non-profit organization that attempts to assess corruption in countries around the world.

“As long as we have humans we will have corruption,” he said. “You are not going to stop it. It’s part of the human DNA.” Global Integrity works with researchers and journalists to rank countries’ overall anti-corruption safeguards. The intricate ranking includes evaluations of six good-governance institutions and mechanisms in each country such as media, civil service and administration, elections, and rule of law.¹⁴

After about four years of scientific monitoring, Global Integrity Managing

Director Nathaniel Heller says: “I personally believe there’s no way to know whether there is more or less corruption in the world today compared with yesterday.” Likewise, he called it “impossible to know” if news coverage helps decrease corruption, though he believes the two are only indirectly linked.

“In many countries, strong media helps, and we believe it to be a key anti-corruption mechanism.”

Heller said. “In more repressive countries, reporting on corruption will simply get you killed or kicked out with little impact on the problem.”¹⁵

Bob Greene, investigations editor of Newsday and a founder of Investigative Reporters and Editors

(IRE) in the United States, used to tell young audiences at IRE conventions that corruption looked the same everywhere. He would go on to list the offenses they should be on the lookout for, such as nepotism, expense account abuse, trading on insider information. In similar fashion Forbes magazine writer Paul Klebnikov in his 2001 book, *Godfather of the Kremlin, The Decline of Russia in the Age of Gangster Capitalism*, laid out the panorama of corruption he found in Russia at the point the Soviet Union collapsed. This included

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plunder of natural resources, privatization schemes, and criminal collaborations between business and government officials. In 2004 Klebnikov was shot nine times on a Moscow street and bled to death. Journalists covering corruption throughout Eastern Europe still read his book as they might a text to gain understanding of what they can expect to find on their beats.

“Corruption tactics can be similar to the point that they seem developed by franchise or have been cloned,” said Leonarda Reyes, founder and director of the Center for Journalism and Public Ethics in Mexico. “This is true for some grand corruption strategies by multinational corporations and smaller corruption in local real estate.”¹⁶ Reyes, a former investigative reporter for *Reforma-El Norte*, exposed electoral fraud and corruption in the awarding of public contracts. The comfort in all this is that while crime fighters and reporters may never hope to end or even greatly reduce corruption, they can slow it down. Considerable anecdotal evidence and academic research exist on what the media can do, in some circumstances, to keep corruption in check. For example, media can:

Inform citizens so that they can take action. The late Rob Eure, a Virginia investigative reporter who became a much-traveled journalism trainer in developing countries during the second stage of his career, used to preach, “You can’t change what you don’t know about.” As he saw it, the media’s vital role was to open the

eyes of readers and viewers to how the government, business and institutions they relied on really were functioning. Eure believed that informed citizens would respond, at least eventually.

The Branković and Estrada stories illustrate what Eure was talking about. People also reacted when Ugandan reporters began reporting heavily in 2007 about government plans to turn a third of Mabira Forest, a pristine and beloved rain forest less than an hour from the capital, into a sugar cane plantation. They organized protests and rallies, handed out bumper stickers, called radio stations, and signed online petitions.

The government backpedaled. While not removed from the table, the plantation proposal has stalled.¹⁷

In Russia, it was a golden bed that created an outcry. In March 2010, the Russian Interior Ministry announced plans to buy a bed covered with 24-carat

gold for a VIP guesthouse used by foreign dignitaries in Moscow. Word spread through the blog *zakupi_news* (Purchases), and citizens long used to their officials’ excesses reacted this time.¹⁸

Demonstrate to citizens their own responsibility for corruption. Victor Hart, the chairman of the Trinidad and Tobago Transparency Institute, reacted in March to the country’s placing 72nd out of 180 countries in Transparency International’s 2009 Global Corruption Report by saying that the public was complacent about corruption because it was so commonplace.

The comfort in all this is that while crime fighters and reporters may never hope to end or even greatly reduce corruption, they can slow it down.

“We have all grown up in a society of high corruption on an everyday basis. There are everyday instances ... where we ... facilitate payments to get goods cleared on ports or get building plans approved,” he said. “This is the type of widespread petty corruption that is prominent in this country and which fuels and encourages grand corruption.”¹⁹

A 2007 Bosnian project about a labor black market that was costing the country tax money meant to fund pensions and health care insurance emphasized that plenty of job seekers looked for deals that would get them higher salaries even though they came at the expense of employers paying into funds they might well need in the future.²⁰

Connect citizens to the consequences of corruption. Many Afghans regard corruption as a fact of life and even as a blessing for the privileged.²¹ Similarly in Eastern Europe and Africa, corruption is seen as the rightful perquisite of belonging to a top elite²² But good journalism can make people see that corruption affects them negatively and directly so that it is harder to be blasé or philosophical about it. For instance, corruption means shortages of teachers in Sub-Saharan Africa, not enough funds for pensioners in Eastern Europe to make ends meet, and buildings constructed of shoddy material in Asia collapsing and causing deaths. Corruption scares off investment and thus jobs. Bangladeshis learned in June 2010 that illegal factories set up in an overcrowded Dhaka slum where construction laws are not enforced have consequences after a fire killed 117 people.²³

Bolster government anti-corruption efforts. The media can make heroes of officials and agencies trying to combat corruption, and they can portray organized

crime and corrupt politicians in their true light, not as dashing outlaws but as rapacious thieves. Even regimes with suspicious relations toward the press want their good anti-corruption deeds publicized. In December 2009, the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission of Nigeria called for an alliance with media houses so the public could be informed about what the government was doing for it. A Botswana minister with the Directorate on Corruption and Economic Crime recently asked the media to slow down on reporting about corruption and instead wait for the commission to wrap up investigations and then get word out to citizens.²⁴ Pippa Norris and Sina Odugbemi in a report for the World Bank’s Communication for Governance and Accountability Program titled *Public Sentinel: News Media and Governance Reform* found that the media can give cover to anti-corruption agencies that typically are not popular with other officials or agencies they watch over. These organizations are frequently set up solely for the sake of pleasing donors. By winning public support for these groups, the media may help them stay in business. World Bank research suggests that publicity can encourage whistleblowers to come forward and witnesses to testify about wrongdoing. The media is also uniquely able to hold anti-corruption agencies themselves up to scrutiny, research shows.²⁵

Create an environment hostile to corruption; act as a preventative. Elected officials who know they are subject to scrutiny by a watchdog press are less likely to engage in corrupt behavior. Good newsrooms routinely check travel expenses and read campaign finance reports and candidate disclosure forms to keep officials honest. Jennifer Bakyawa,

a former reporter for Kampala's *Monitor* newspaper, said, "So much corruption can be stopped just by knowing someone is looking over your shoulder."²⁶

Prevention: An Effective Tool to Reduce Corruption, a 1999 report by The UN Centre for International Crime Prevention, argued that preventing corruption was easier than catching and prosecuting it. This report said that "systems whereby senior decision makers declare their assets ... is now widely

seen as the key to unlocking the anti-corruption chest."²⁷

Bosnian journalists at the Sarajevo center recently succeeded in getting changes in that country's asset declaration form after a series of articles in which they found forms for 27 leaders incomplete, incorrect, or illegible.

In reality, however, these ideas are difficult to put in place.

Obstacles and Challenges

Reporting on corruption is a difficult, dangerous business. While the rewards of good journalism that exposes corruption can be great for civil society and good governance, they aren't always so great for the journalists who practice it, often at considerable risk to themselves.

Public Apathy

Rarely does mere publication of a story lead to public outrage. The exact ingredients for such a story eludes even American journalists, who can count on advocacy groups, friendly politicians and an audience with an unambiguous view that corruption is wrong. Coronel says the Estrada story took off in part because it was sensational and easy to understand. There was a clear villain.²⁸ The Mabira Forest story touched Ugandans because people have walked and brought their children there and care about it. Other stories about businessmen dealing with the government to usurp Ugandan land went unnoticed. Similarly, a 2004 story in Bosnia about bacteria in food sampled around the country resulted in demands for better inspections. People care about food, not government regulation per se. Writers attempting to explain complex or systemic corruption, looking at privatization

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or land distribution, for example, are much less likely to arouse readers.

Another problem is that one story on a topic or even a series of stories by one media outlet rarely is capable of causing an outcry. To launch citizen action a story must have “legs” in the journalistic parlance—that is, have many angles so alluring that other media take it up. There is no way to insure

that this will happen.

Importantly, even where government normally ignores the wishes of the people, when a generally inert public does become engaged, its influence can be outsized. Marches, petitions, rallies, and other displays of public disapproval in Uganda, Bosnia, and the Philippines sparked by media reports have had policy consequences. Even in such repressive places as Burma and Iran, where “media reports” are underground and

online, regimes are pressured to act when monks march or students take to the streets.

Quite in the opposite direction, press critics maintain that a steady diet of corruption disclosures, far from engaging the public, has significant corrosive effects, teaching citizens they should not trust public officials or institutions, that politics is little but empty spectacle and that their country is all bad.²⁹ The South African National Anti-Corruption Forum complained a few

years ago that coverage of high-profile corruption there, such as the racketeering and money laundering charges against President Jacob Zuma, “contributes to the negative psychosis [sic] of South Africa being generally corrupt.” Journalists turn that argument around and say the consequences may be real, but the cause is corruption—not reporting about corruption. Still the forum suggested the media needed to go beyond exposés and educate the public about corruption and how to stop it. Otherwise, citizens feel powerless.³⁰

There is something to that notion of “corruption fatigue” said Lewis of American University. “The public does get worn out or bored. That doesn’t mean we stop trying. We have to be creative.”³¹

Drew Sullivan, founder and still a consultant with the CIN in Bosnia, disagreed. “I don’t think corruption fatigue exists,” he said. “I think people get bad journalism fatigue.” Some media, he argued, frustrate people by repeating hearsay and using unnamed sources and obviously unfair or slanted wording. When news media present credible, nailed-down information, clearly explained and connected to peoples’ lives, they engage their audiences. Sullivan noted that the Branković story had been reported before the center took it up, but without documentation or specifics. No one paid attention then.³² Writing compellingly, something rarely stressed in investigative journalism training, can make stories about intractable issues

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— Chuck Lewis, American University

come alive. When the Bosnian center ran a project in 2006 about the failure of police and prosecutors to act in domestic abuse complaints, editors objected that they had already run stories on that topic. But it remains still a top-read feature at the center’s site, because these articles told vivid stories from the point of view of women whose lives had been ruined. Filled with quotes and description they appealed to readers’ compassion. “Cold, heartless dossiers don’t do a thing,” Sullivan said. Readers must be able to see why they should care, Radu said. All the writing about the

financial crisis hitting Eastern Europe had no impact—until state salaries were cut by a quarter and jobs began to disappear. Reporters who have done stories about corruption in Mexico, Bosnia, Bangladesh,

and Uganda agree, however, that even compelling stories with a direct and human dimension will go unread if they consistently fail to bring about results. Reyes said Mexicans get outraged when “corruption activity is unveiled. But then, outrage evolves into systematic mistrust, disheartenment, and cynicism. A sense of helplessness follows outrage.”

Drazen Simic, a Bosnian freelancer who covers economic issues including corruption, said, “After constant exposure of corruption in the media without any legal consequences, most often people become tired, frustrated, and in the end lose interest.”³³

Zahid Hossain, who directs the media segment of a multi-faceted anti-corruption

program in Bangladesh, said citizens there are discouraged when media reports of corruption at high levels lead to legal proceedings that produce no convictions. It then just feels like “corruption buried by some other corruption,” he said.³⁴ In late May, a court in Bangladesh dismissed the last of 15 corruption cases brought against Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, holding that she had done nothing criminal when she used government funds to pay for lobbying in the United States during her 1996-2001 administration. She was charged with wasting the money between the time she left office and her reelection in 2008. Some say the charges were politically inspired by the leader of the military-backed regime that displaced her, Fakhrudin Ahmed. But he, too, now faces corruption charges. And Hasina is still contending with kickback and extortion charges. Played out in the media, all of this can leave readers feeling that everyone is crooked.³⁵

Hostile Legal Environments

Free and independent media work best to combat corruption when working in support of and in tandem with a vibrant civil society, independent and well-functioning law enforcement and judicial systems, schools that teach civics and foster social understanding, and legislative bodies willing to make good laws, including those that protect newsgathering and foster openness.

Watergate, the classic American story about exposing high-level corruption, illustrates a system in perfect form. News reporters—protected by strong free press guarantees and a tradition (now law in most places) of protecting the names of confidential sources—break a story about wrongdoing by top government officials. Citizens are

shocked by the revelations, prompting legal investigations into the allegations. Members of Congress take up the matter in impeachment proceedings, and, under pressure, a flawed president resigns. The conditions that made that sequence of events possible in the United States nearly 40 years ago do not exist in many countries.

“The challenge for media development—and social development in general—is ensuring that several key institutions of democratic society are brought up at the same time,” said David E. Kaplan, director of the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists (ICIJ). “Creating a watchdog press is doomed to fail unless journalists have reasonably honest police, prosecutors, and judges to back them up. They need government auditors, financial regulators, legislators who do oversight, and NGO staff who act as independent voices.”³⁶

Sullivan said he has to laugh when Bosnian colleagues tell him, “You lucky Americans. What you do has effects.” It wasn’t luck at all, he retorts. It took more than a century to reach the point where a Watergate could happen.

Under the influence of the holistic approaches to fighting corruption promoted by multilateral organizations for at least the past 10 years, few anti-corruption programs are being funded today that address only the media. Bangladesh is a good example of an effort to jump-start a number of institutions at once. With USAID funding, a four-year multi-dimensional program called Progati (for Promoting Governance, Accountability, Transparency and Integrity) began in 2007. Development Alternatives Inc. runs the program while the International Research & Exchange Board (IREX)

manages the media component. In addition to pushing for better investigative journalism, other parts of the program are bolstering watchdog organizations and advocacy groups, strengthening the comptroller and auditor general's office and setting up a parliamentary budget analysis. The reasoning behind the program is that systemic corruption jeopardizes economic development and therefore tackling corruption is both worthwhile and requires, as a UN report put it, "collaborat[ion]with all branches of government and many parts of society."³⁷

Such experiments aside, in most countries institutions develop at an uneven pace. Independent journalists—and many media development implementers who see a free press as a pillar of democratization—push creation of media ahead of judicial and legislative reforms. The imbalance that results presents a question: In the absence of supporting institutions, what good does it do for journalists to expose corruption in places like Romania, Bosnia, Uganda, and Mexico? Several benefits stem from coverage of corruption, even in countries where it is endemic:

It creates expectations of ethical behavior and accountability. “You may never put the corrupt into jail,” Sullivan said, “but as important as winning convictions, you can expose wrong-doers and hold them up to society as thieves. Idi Amin didn't go to jail, but he was ostracized from his society,” Sullivan noted, speaking of the late Ugandan dictator who was forced into exile in Saudi Arabia in the late 1970s. “Society as a whole is learning from the media to see that corrupt leaders should not be tolerated.”

It educates about the need for transparency. Use and publicity about

public records and their function educate the public. For example, Ugandan reporters and environmental activists want to see the financial details of the oil-production agreements the government signed with four foreign companies. The president's cabinet maintains that they are confidential, fueling public suspicion. The drama has been heightened by a British research and advocacy firm report saying the contracts give the companies a sweet deal and by the president's refusal to show the contracts to parliamentary leaders. The controversy has raised awareness of Uganda's Access to Information Act and of the desirability of open government, Tabaire and Bakyawa said.

The Bosnian center seeks documents to buttress every story it publishes, but the access law in that country, while strongly written, is rarely enforced. Reporters inform readers about bureaucratic hurdles they encounter trying to get public records. They also go to court to press their cases for records, and write stories about that.

It alerts international players and empowers internal groups. Simic in Sarajevo said the media even without action by prosecutors and judges can still have a limited effect by collecting documents and evidence for international organizations to use. Transparency International, for example, he said, “can use information to create a more realistic picture about widespread corruption in the country.” Donors upon whom governments rely also read media reports, noted Bakyawa in Uganda.

Radu's group operates without good freedom of information laws and under a famously corrupt government that never acts on its stories; yet he takes satisfaction from the fact he knows they are hurting organized

criminal groups with every story they produce. “There are people out there who care about what you are writing,” he said. “These groups all have a legit component, and when you expose them you hamper their possibilities to conduct the legal part of their business. People who want to put their money into something do due diligence, they run the name of the firm they are interested in through a computer. And your story might change their mind.”

Azhar Kalamujić, the editor of the Bosnian center, said corruption reporting can put citizens and groups such as unions in a stronger position

in dealing with government officials.

“Thanks to news stories the public has learned that politicians even in times of recession are increasing their already high salaries while asking citizens to accept austerity measures,” he said.

“After such stories are published politicians are in far worse position in negotiations with representatives from unions and associations of citizens. In my opinion, this is one of the most significant benefits of newspaper reporting on corruption.”³⁸

It pressures other institutions into acting.

Hossain in Bangladesh and Tabaire in Uganda agree that the media can sometimes press weaker institutions into doing the right thing. “Free and independent media can put pressure on the judiciary to act in corruption cases,” said Hossain. “In Bangladesh there are strong laws against corruption, but they are not put into

practice ... corruption is in the anti-corruption commission too and they are politically motivated so that the law cannot take its own course. But the media, we have seen on many occasions, can change the course of action if we press.” The Ugandan news media, Tabaire said, continues to press Parliament for release of results from a long-suppressed inquiry into misuse of funds that were supposed to go toward the 2007 Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in Kampala. High-level ministers and others are suspected of having filched hundreds of millions of taxpayer dollars.

In Bangladesh there are strong laws against corruption, but they are not put into practice ... But the media, we have seen on many occasions, can change the course of action if we press.”

— *Zahid Hossain*

The *East African* newspaper, for example, has fanned the controversy with blunt language such as: “The patter [sic] “is clear and familiar from corruption scandals of the past: A cabal of influential politicians, government officials and private

contractors sharing the loot after bureaucrats award bids with inflated budgets, and get hefty kickbacks from the businessmen.”³⁹

It provides context to the level of corruption in different regions. While a Shorenstein Fellow at Harvard University in 2006, Chuck Lewis wrote about an epiphany he had had visiting Uzbekistan nine years earlier. “I had become concerned that the extremely dangerous, heroic corruption reporting in the world is too micro, beyond the drama and titillation, often lacking context and even broad, public relevance,” he said. “Inside and outside that repressive country, all citizens—from

foreign investors and companies with offices there to tourists as well as truly endangered indigenous human rights activists and journalists—seemed to lack current, credible online information about the quality of governance, rule of law, civility, press freedom and accountability. There was no satisfactory, comprehensive, ‘one-stop-shopping’ organization or website generating such vital insight.”⁴⁰

Lewis went on to adapt the “macro investigative methodological approach” the Center for Public Integrity had used to examine corruption in state legislatures and Washington for looking at entire countries. The non-profit Global Integrity resulted.

Lewis sees Global Integrity country profiles as a tool that citizens and journalists should use in conjunction with the annual ratings of countries by level of corruption that the Berlin-based Transparency International has put out since 1995. Transparency International’s ratings are based on surveys that measure perceptions about corruption in a country. Global Integrity seeks a more realistic view of corruption, or at least of the numerous elements that contribute to corruption.⁴¹ Using political scientists and journalists on the ground who are already writing about corruption, Global Integrity looks at about 300 indicators then assigns each country a score of 1 to 100 so that it can be compared with other nations in the same region or worldwide. The survey

Taken together, the Transparency International and Global Integrity rankings give nuanced glimpses into countries, which have stirred national pride or embarrassment and generated news stories and public discussion.

also assigns a measure of the “gap” between anti-corruption rhetoric and action.

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Bangladesh, for example is ranked 139 out of 180 in the most recent Transparency International ranking and received a rating of 68 (weak) in the most recent Global Integrity report. The gap between rhetoric and real achievement in fighting corruption is “very large.” Taken together this means there are both a high perceived level of public-sector corruption and problems with a number of mechanisms enumerated in the report, such as executive accountability.⁴²

“People were humiliated,” Hossain said, after Bangladesh scored at the bottom of the Transparency International rankings for three years in a row. “Government response was very harsh. They did not accept the results. But members of civil society and the media received the information with interest and utmost anxiety. Time and again media reported about corruption in Bangladesh and how to get rid of this cancer from the society.”⁴³ Kalamujić said it was news in Bosnia when Transparency International showed that perceptions of corruption there intensified between 2005 and 2009, when it was

ranked 99 of 180 countries. The most recent Global Integrity report assigns Bosnia a weak score of 63 and calls the gap “huge.” Bosnia’s comparative ranking with other countries in the region, including other old provinces of the former Yugoslavia—it was ranked worst of all—also made news. In Serbia, Montenegro, Macedonia and Albania, he said, ratings improved during those four years.⁴⁴

Uganda was ranked 130 out of 180 in Transparency International’s latest report and was scored 69 (weak) by Global Integrity. Mexico, 89 in the Transparency International ranking, was scored 72 (moderate) by Global Integrity.

The Dangers of Reporting on Corruption

As the CPJ statistics quoted earlier show, and another CIMA report, *Under Attack: Practicing Journalism in a Dangerous World*, elaborates, reporting on corruption is risky.

The risks are various and of different intensity. Dino Jahić, assistant editor at the Bosnian center, said reporters there get telephone and face-to-face verbal threats that they’ll lose their jobs or that something in their private lives will be revealed. Center reporters have been threatened: One woman was told she could end up with a broken leg, and in one instance a reporter working on cigarette smuggling in Montenegro got a call warning him to back off with a mention that his mother—with whom he lived— and dog could suffer. Bakir Hadziomerovic, editor of the popular *60 Minutes* TV show in Bosnia, was put under police protection in 2009 after receiving a series of such threats while working on stories about organized crime.⁴⁵

Attempts to bribe or co-opt reporters are common in Eastern Europe and Africa. Radu was once offered a position by a businessman he was investigating. Bakyawa in Uganda said that, “you take the bribe, and you will then be exposed as corrupt yourself.” Jahić’s recommendation for journalists: “Don’t sell yourself for a dinner or a paid vacation.”

More seriously in Uganda, Bakyawa said, has been “backdoor hunting” of reporters by the operatives of officials who have been subjects of their stories. The reporters end up beaten, their equipment confiscated.

Over the past decade, the government of Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni has shut down the *Monitor* and several radio stations. A particular target of the president’s has been Andrew Mwenda, a former *Monitor* reporter who now edits *The Independent* in Kampala. He was charged in September 2009 with sedition, in addition to the 21 criminal counts already lodged against him. The latest offense, according to CPJ, which gave Mwenda its International Press Freedom Award in 2008, was a cartoon mocking Museveni’s reappointment of the same electoral commission chairman who oversaw the controversial 2006 presidential polls for the 2011 voting.

Mwenda is not the only journalist to be hit with libel and defamation laws. Most of these cases are pending a Supreme Court ruling on whether penal code provisions under which journalists including Mwenda have been charged contradict free speech and press guarantees in the Ugandan constitution.⁴⁶ Bakyawa said the government was always careful in charging reporting or shutting stations not to tie its action to reporting about corruption. “They

will find a flimsy excuse and say they were reporting irresponsibly, breaching national security,” she said. “When asked to explain, it is never clear what was irresponsible or what was the security breach.”

Taking on corruption and organized crime in Mexico and Bangladesh can be deadly. CPJ reports nine journalists missing since 2005 in Mexico, most having covered crime and corruption. In the past decade, more than 30 editors and reporters have been killed, one-third in retaliation for their work. Media houses have been hit with grenades; homes of newsmen shot up. Congress has failed to pass reforms that would impose special penalties for attacks on the press, and worse, the organization notes, “local and state authorities in Mexico have been particularly ineffective in solving press-related crimes—and, in some instances, appear to have been complicit.” Mexican journalists have responded to the violence with less coverage and fewer stories.

Reyes said that covering political corruption was relatively safe in that annoying the wrong person might result only in losing your job or the cancelation of public advertising in your publication. Corrupt politicians, she said, “usually signal through middle people how upset they are and threaten in different ways, seldom to the point of endangering the life of a reporter.” But criminals, “edgy and unpredictable ... might hurt and kill reporters not even necessarily investigating corruption—

Taking on corruption and organized crime can be deadly. In the past decade, more than 30 editors and reporters have been killed, one-third in retaliation for their work.

just asking the wrong question in the wrong place or of the wrong person.”⁴⁷

In Bangladesh, Hossain said, “Journalists are regularly harassed, threatened or even killed for reporting corruption of influential persons.” Indeed CPJ research shows that at least 12 journalists, half of them working corruption beats, have been killed over the last dozen years. The murders have not been solved.

This kind of violence hints at just how effective corruption reporting is, CPJ’s Simon suggests. Criminals know journalism has consequences for their pocket and want it stopped. But murder is also a cost-effective and relatively safe way to reduce unwanted exposure. “Look at the cost benefit of killing a reporter,” said Sullivan who has lectured internationally about the safety of journalists. “It will stop the story, and the probability of getting caught is nearly non-existent.”

In Sullivan’s view, “We have to raise the stakes if we want to disrupt this means of stopping reporting.”

Lewis invokes the model of the Arizona Project of the 1970s and wonders if the same approach is possible internationally. After the murder in 1976 of Don Bolles, an organized crime specialist on the staff of the *Arizona Republic*, 60 editors, reporters professors, students, and other news staffers from around the country rolled into Arizona to take up Bolles’ story

and teach the lesson that you can kill the reporter but not his story. Their project was published nationwide. Only one similar project has been completed in the United States. Some three dozen journalists and volunteers joined the Chauncey Bailey Project (<http://www.chaunceybaileyproject.org>) after the Oakland Post editor was gunned down while investigating fraud and violence at an area bakery run by Black Muslims. No similar project is known to have been attempted globally.

The Mexican drug situation on the border, however, is attracting international investigative talent, including from National Public Radio, which recently aired an impressive piece looking at the disproportionate prosecution of some drug cartels as opposed to others.⁴⁸ Reporters in southeastern Europe are increasingly collaborating on cross-border stories of smuggling, gambling, and other corruption. The power of such networking is not only stories of wider scope and authority, but increased exposure and security for journalists. Kaplan's ICIJ has put more than 100 reporters in 50 countries to work tackling corruption issues including arms trafficking, privatization of scarce water resources, and the collusion of public officials in corruption.

Arana, a former war correspondent, is putting her faith in quality journalism and unity as the way to protect Mexican journalists. As the director of the Mexican Foundation for Investigative Journalism, which began operating in May, she is determined to spread the use of document mining, database analysis, social networking, and other skills. "The goal is that reporters, editors and

managers from different backgrounds can be trained together and publish works that individually would not happen or would be very dangerous to work on," she said.

In another tactic, CPJ and numerous journalists' organizations around the world are pressing world leaders and parliaments for laws calling for additional penalties and special prosecutorial measures to deal with attacks on journalists,⁴⁹ though few successes have been reported to date.

Journalists also are taking action on their own. CPJ publishes a handbook on safety intended for war correspondents and urges all reporters in dangerous locations to think about and follow a personal safety plan. Sullivan believes 90 percent of the risk of reporting can be mitigated if:

- newsrooms are secured according to strict procedures, including shredding documents and installing cameras.
- editors are kept informed by all members of the staff, and journalists know that not reporting suspicions or threats, even if they seem silly or insincere, is a firing offense
- editors follow through on possible dangers to staff members, including learning to defuse angry and threatening newsroom visitors.
- journalists know that each suspicion of a threat needs to be dealt with using measures that include changing daily routines, working outside the office, or hiring guards.
- information is published as soon as feasible, on the theory that because

many murderers are trying to stop stories, rather than seeking revenge, the publication of those stories may remove a main motive for violence.⁵⁰

Journalists must also look to their own behavior when considering safety, the experts say. Multiple analyses by international journalism watchdog organizations in recent years show that many reporters were killed because of

their own involvement in or advocacy of a cause. It is also dangerous to make a story personal or an interview challenging. Threatening a target's honor or capacity and including gratuitous personal information or misinformation in stories are acts of inexperienced reporters. "The reality is" said Simon, "a well-reported corruption story is dangerous. A badly reported story is even more dangerous, especially in places where people accused react dangerously."⁵¹

New Tools, New Hope

With so much to make covering corruption difficult and dangerous, two trends give hope. One is the potential for technology and social networking as new tools for reporting on and fighting corruption. The other is an increasing demand for specialized and sophisticated training in the investigative techniques that make for good corruption coverage.

Digital Media

In a 14-page special report on “Telecoms in Emerging Markets” *The Economist* last fall wrote about how “a luxury item [the cellphone] became a tool of global development.” Beyond economic benefits, the article found, affordable mobile phones with cheap texting capabilities are bestowing political and social advantages on the developing world.

Protected by the anonymity of the cellphone, activists are reporting human rights violations via text messages, the magazine pointed out. Citizens call into talk shows far more often than before to talk about the taboo topic of corruption. Journalists are using those quotes in articles they did not dare write before. In Pakistan, the magazine found, a land office official directed clerks to submit a daily list of land transfers, including the amount paid and the mobile phone numbers of the buyers and sellers. He then did random checks to see whether

people were being asked for bribes. Charges were brought against one clerk, and other bureaucrats are trying out the idea.⁵²

In ethnically torn Burundi, the World Bank Institute has been experimenting with cellphones and radio, trying to get young people, a critical constituency, talking about politics. It has succeeded in reaching people in remote areas, provided the stabilizing effect that comes from letting people voice their views, and it has brought in some tips about injustices that should be investigated.⁵³

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In the countries where the Internet remains largely uncensored it is harder to silence criticism or suppress exposés. Russian bloggers have made the most of this, going far beyond what the state-dominated media is printing about malfeasance.⁵⁴

The Russians also are beginning to publicize abuses on YouTube. In a sub-titled parody of *Star Wars* called *Old Thieves* (Starie Wori in Russian) stockholders of VTB expose a \$150 million embezzling scheme by manager of the country’s second largest bank. (Watch at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xMYLnETH_mk)

Radu is designing a project he calls The Investigative Dashboard that would put an array of database and search engines online and easily available to every would-be corruption reporter in the world. He believes it may someday ease the reporting work and broaden the scope of reporting on organized crime.⁵⁵ Investigative reporters working across borders are already plugged into content-sharing systems and networking on listservs and websites. And on the Internet articles can be cached for years, providing a rich archive of investigative journalism.

Kaplan lauds the ability of social networking media to build audience for crime and corruption reporting: “Within a year, ICIJ has built up a rapidly growing Facebook community of more than 3,400 people in 30 countries who care about investigative journalism.” The audience, which engages in lively online discussion, extends to India, Malaysia, Egypt, Mexico, Indonesia, Pakistan, and Colombia.

Finally, Facebook and Twitter make it far easier to move people to action over stories of corruption, say both journalists and activists. Darko Brkan, an organizer for the civic action group Dosta (Enough), credits Facebook groups for rallying opposition to Branković in Bosnia over graffiti arrests.⁵⁶ Tabaire said online appeals to sign a petition rallied protestors against the sale of Mabira Forest in Uganda. The pluses of digital media technology for fighting corruption are anonymity, censorship avoidance, interactivity,

The pluses of digital media technology for fighting corruption are anonymity, censorship avoidance, interactivity, aggregation of supporters and readers, appeal to young people, and speed.

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There are negatives too. The Internet still does not reach much of the developing world and is largely used only by young people even where it is available. Publication on the Internet exposes small media houses and independent journalism centers to potentially ruinous lawsuits that they would otherwise not be exposed to. As outlined in another CIMA publication, *Libel Tourism: Silencing the Press Through Transnational Legal Threats* by Sullivan, because the Internet can

be read anywhere, smart international criminals and wealthy individuals can claim damage from a story about them in Great Britain, where libel laws surpassingly favor plaintiffs. This is possible even if the story has nothing to do with anyone or any institution there. Sullivan said another problem is that westerners are often too quick to apply technology

indiscriminately in newsrooms where it can provide no financial benefit. “They can add a burden in places with limited resources,” he said, “and they can be a distraction.” Radu adds a caveat about security. “You are more exposed when you are online. Lots of criminals in the world use the same methods we do. Our presence on the Web enhances the chances of finding us.”

Talent and Training

Legendary American editor Gene Roberts used to lecture that the best way to get a lot of good investigative reporting done

was to hire a lot of good reporters. That is not always so easy to do.

The biggest problem getting quality reporting done on corruption in Uganda is inexperienced reporters, Tabaire said. He points to coverage of the crucial 2006 presidential elections, which were marked by fraud and preceded by political maneuvering and bribery. Of the corps of reporters covering that event, he said, 75 to 80 percent were working on their first elections. And many will not be around for the 2012 elections.⁵⁷

It takes talent, confidence, experience, and flair to write anti-corruption stories that make an impression. There simply are not enough good journalists in many places, particularly in those countries with poor journalism schools and no tradition of a free press. Worse, too many training programs treat investigative reporting as a skill anyone can pick up in well-planned workshops with star teachers.

“You can no more teach someone to be an investigative reporter who can cover corruption over a weekend than you can teach someone to practice constitutional law,” said Sullivan. “It’s people who’ve never done investigative reporting who propagate this myth.”

Skilled investigative reporters are rare, even in the U.S., where journalists pick up writing skills from childhood, go to four-year journalism schools that teach the craft, and enjoy apprenticeships through internships and progressively more challenging assignments. It can take a decade to learn how to dig into corruption and high-level crime. A number of international and local

organizations, including the World Bank, IREX, IRE, and The International Center for Journalists (ICFJ) do worthwhile training in investigative reporting. All are hampered, however, by time and by donors’ requirements that they include as many participants as possible. This makes for classes of mixed skill level and reduces lessons to the lowest common denominator. Very little advanced-level material is covered, so that participants walk away from trainings with perhaps an appreciation for the field and a general understanding but no immediately useful skills for covering contract fraud or theft through privatization.

“Media development organizations have a poor memory when they tell you the practice of parachuting professors in for workshops is long dead,” Sullivan criticized. “A disheartening proportion of investigative training is still done this way. Body counts and carpet-bomb training are cheap and measureable but they are also ineffective.”

“I have been in some very fancy places training,” agreed Radu, who is one of those teachers, “and quite a few participants seemed interested in the shopping mall nearby, not the training.”

To turn out better anti-corruption reporters, it is necessary to:

Teach the right people. Radu said pre-selection of participants would increase the value of training and allow for focused classes fit to exact skill levels rather than survey courses. Participants should have to apply, perhaps, and selection would be based on evaluations of their work and some reading of personalities. George Pawlaczyk, an investigative reporter who covers corruption in East St. Louis, IL, said

investigative reporting is not for everyone. It involves slow, meticulous work that mostly goes unappreciated. “You have to be doubtful of authority and willing to ask questions. You have to be persistent to the point of relentless. And you have to be accurate and very careful,” he said.⁵⁸

Teach them the right things. Journalists do not know enough about corruption scams or about corruption in general. Investigative workshops done in conjunction perhaps with anti-corruption NGOs such as Transparency International (which trains NGO staff but not journalists) or with the World Bank could help. Many Third World journalists believe they need to write only about illegal acts, yet much corruption is fully sanctioned by existing laws in their countries.

Daniel Kaufmann, a former World Bank authority on corruption now with the Brookings Institution, also makes a distinction between legal corruption (such as bribery or nepotism which can be encapsulated in a law) and what others describe as “quiet” corruption.⁵⁹ This everyday, less formal corruption results from public servants not doing their job well, teachers going absent, or professors accepting small gifts for favors. Journalists need to spend time documenting such instances as well as on covering cheating in presidential elections and major scandals. Too much corruption coverage lacks sophistication. Journalists need to understand how corruption developed—and the role it plays in the societies they cover. They need a reading list that might include Klebnikov’s book or articles such as a recent *Wall Street Journal* piece on the stabilizing effects of reliable corruption.⁶⁰ Journalists who intend to write about

corruption need to learn the mechanics of the sectors most susceptible to graft—such as institutional purchasing practices and court systems. They must learn how to read and interpret public budgets, how bids are awarded, how laws are passed. As for investigative skills, Radu said his ideal class would whittle the lessons down to: how to follow companies across borders; how to investigate a website; how to find background about an individual; and how to find, share, and use business databases. Radu, in conjunction with ICFJ, has published what could be a text for this class: *Follow the Money: A Digital Guide for Tracking Corruption*.⁶¹ He would get participants motivated, he said, and then put them to work in groups.

Teach them through work. On-the-job training alongside editors or senior reporters with experience digging into crime and corruption helps to create skilled practitioners. Kaplan’s consortium holds reporters, some wholly unused to editing, to high standards of sourcing and accuracy. Their work is critiqued, and they learn about writing and improve their interviewing skills. Kaplan works with reporters of some experience. Sullivan has recruited beginners or newcomers to investigations for the Bosnian center and for the Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project, a regional network that he and Radu run in southeastern Europe. The initial plan for the center was to keep journalists for a year then send them back into newsrooms with the skills and experience to teach others how to investigate. That did not work, however, because of the long learning curve for novice investigative reporters. Six years after it began, the center is run by Bosnian editors and turns out high-level projects.

Teach and support investigators through locally run centers for mid-career journalists. Journalists need to hear war stories and to learn from colleagues who can speak to them in the same language and illustrate lessons with anecdotes about people and events with which they can relate. Teaching is a different skill than corruption reporting and often the best practitioners are terrible teachers and presenters. The blossoming of locally planned and run journalism centers is heartening. Examples include the Mexican Foundation for Investigative Journalism, a Dhaka investigative journalism center created under the Progati program, and the Centre for African Excellence founded by Tabaire and Peter Mwesige, a former editor and professor, in Kampala. All bring in international trainers with specific expertise, but otherwise rely on in-country journalists and specialists. They also give small

grants to support journalistic projects that might not otherwise get done and supply research material and editing support.

Bolster journalism schools. Journalists who come into investigative training not knowing the basics of fact-based reporting and clear writing take longer to turn into top-flight anti-corruption reporters. Working with local universities to revamp journalism programs now heavily weighted with language, literature, religion and philosophy courses to include more craft would be worthwhile. It would also be difficult. Faculty could be swayed by new equipment, exchange programs involving travel and retraining to make some changes. For example, USAID put out a request in early 2010 for proposals to remake journalism curriculums in Afghan universities in partnership with Afghan professors.⁶²

Recommendations

Journalists and the news organizations that have had the most success combating corruption and pushing for reform in the areas of Eastern Europe, Asia, Africa, and Latin America studied in this report agree to a remarkable degree on what works. They believe that the following is needed:

- ▶ Journalists must be schooled in investigative reporting and in specific techniques useful for tracking and documenting corruption and organized crime connections. This kind of reporting represents the most difficult and complex of journalistic tasks, yet it too frequently is being tackled by inexperienced and ill-trained reporters working under editors and directors little more advanced. They too often make mistakes or fail to present fully credible cases of wrongdoing. The credibility of journalistic reports on corruption is crucial to winning public notice and support.
- ▶ Training organizations—and the donors who support them—must honestly assess the difficulty of the journalism task they undertake when planning seminars and courses in investigative reporting. Quick and shallow surveys of investigative techniques taught by generalists rather than specialized journalists do not adequately prepare reporters for

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working on projects aimed at disclosing corruption. Frequently, training programs are conducted by writers who regard themselves as investigators but who have yet to master the basics of fact-based reporting and compelling writing, much less the intricacies of tracking off-shore investments, interpreting public documents or running asset checks. Even in the West, these kind of advanced skills come from years not months of hands-on experience under the tutelage of knowledgeable editors and news directors.

- ▶ Local journalists with these skills such as the founders of the African Center for Media Excellence should be financially supported and encouraged. Cross-border exchanges of successful investigations and techniques should be encouraged. And the use of foreign trainers—usually but no longer exclusively western—as editors working with teams of local reporters should be regarded not as cultural hegemony but as legitimate bi- or multi-cultural efforts. Local non-governmental organizations that oppose corruption need to be enlisted for training reporters more often.
- ▶ Particular note should be made of the need for training in investigative interviewing. Journalists who report on corruption should never make their reporting personal. They should be polite,

fair, and even-toned, not insulting nor insinuating. They should not project themselves as advocates.

- ▶ Media houses must themselves be transparent and free of corruption. Their ownership, newsgathering methods, and journalistic ethics must be open to inspection if their reports about corruption elsewhere in society are to be trusted.
- ▶ Journalists should engage with colleagues in other media in their countries and with those in independent journalism centers elsewhere in their region. Organized crime linked to governments work across borders and the consequences of high level corruption rarely are confined to one nation. Cooperation leads to more effective reporting, better story selection, and improved chances for attention and action.
- ▶ Investigative reporters working on corruption stories need a detailed plan to help insure their personal safety and must insist that their media house have an office-wide plan in place. Elements of such a plan should include:
 - a considered assessment of the likelihood of danger and impact to be applied to the selection of all stories. Where reporting is dangerous it is more effective to work on the most meaningful stories and do fewer of them, rather than to take a scattershot approach and report on every tip of wrong-doing and malfeasance. Certain money-rich and under-regulated sectors—for

example, customs and road-building—are particularly prone to corruption nearly everywhere. By concentrating on such hot spots journalists are likely to have high impact and may also take advantage of opportunities to share reporting expertise and sources.

- a system of reporting and acting upon threats, including guidelines for when to call in authorities.
 - secure systems for physically protecting offices, and techniques for interviewing in dangerous situations, including team reporting and the use of monitoring technology.
- ▶ Reporters who tackle corruption as a beat must define it in the broadest sense, as actions by public and business officials that are improper.
 - ▶ Thinking about “results” when it comes to corruption reporting must change. In places like Eastern Europe and Africa reporters are discouraged when long and difficult investigations result in little reaction and no change. They tend to leave journalism and seek higher-paying jobs elsewhere, costing the field the most knowledgeable and experienced talent. The best investigative reporters in transitional countries know that in the Internet age what they write does not disappear. It is reposted, picked up, archived. Years after an initial publication, a story about a corrupt business or official still has life and still can have

an effect. In addition to sparking criminal proceedings, resignations, and legal reforms, stories can have impact by hindering the legitimate business aims of suspect firms. Due diligence searches that turn up well-supported articles about corruption can stem the flow of investment into the legitimate arms of criminal concerns.

- ▶ For maximum impact, investigative stories should be presented in at least bilingual format rather than in local languages alone. Stories in English are picked up in a wider array of websites and are more likely to be copied and read by different audiences. Spanish, Swahili, Chinese and other appropriate alternatives should also be considered.
- ▶ Corruption reporters should make it their goal to change the expectations of their readers and viewers about getting equal treatment at the hands of their public officials. In too many places corruption and graft is seen as a “way of life,” an immutable practice about which little can be done. The best one can hope for, these citizens believe, is that someday they, too, can break into the elite and gain favored treatment. By writing in clear, concrete terms about the real consequences and schemes of the corrupt, reporters can change views. Corruption reporting needs to offer solutions, hope and encouragement that things can change.
- ▶ Journalists need to lobby and raise public awareness about the need for strong freedom of information laws in their countries. Where these laws have been adopted, journalists need to use them and press the issue if they are still denied access. They need to explain to readers why this is important. Without a way to obtain and inspect government and business documents there is no way to find out how authorities are really doing their jobs for the public.
- ▶ Journalists must lobby and raise public awareness about the need for effective mechanisms to support whistleblowers. Views on “tattle-tales” vary by culture, and western rules on protecting principled witnesses to corruption who come forward to the media need to be studied and adapted to other cultures. Journalists everywhere should consider safeguards, including tools such as hot lines, for important sources who risk jobs and lives for the sake of exposing wrong-doing.
- ▶ Journalists need to take advantage of actions by foreign governments that promote the power of the press. For example, under the Daniel Pearl Freedom of The Press Act, the U.S. State Department expanded its scrutiny of news media restrictions and intimidation as part of its assessment of the human rights records of countries it does business with and gives aid to. The World Bank and the European Union similarly limit loans and restrict interactions with corrupt and repressive regimes.
- ▶ Journalists must hold NGOs as accountable as they do public officials when writing about problems and corruption. A functioning civil society—like an independent judiciary and functioning police and investigatory

agencies—amplifies the effect of journalism in cleaning up societies. Where these segments do not exist or do not perform well, journalists must demand better performance.

- ▶ Journalists would do well to embrace the Internet and social networking outlets such as Twitter and Facebook, which bring citizens more quickly into social debates without the filter of news organizations, government ministries or NGOs. They should milk these media for ideas and sources. At the same time journalists worldwide must grapple with the balance between

informing the public and becoming crusaders and advocates.

- ▶ Journalists tackling corruption in countries without strong institutional support must secure continued financial backing for their undertaking. Reporting on corruption that is sporadic and short-lived is pointless. But sustained investigative journalism with follow-through and suggested solutions is expensive. Reporters working in independent investigative centers can use training in fund raising, program development, and business practices, including budgeting and purchasing.

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