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Trinidad and Tobago again seen to be more corrupt: what can we do about it?

Five years ago Trinidad and Tobago scored 5.3 out of 10 on Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI). The score has fallen every year since then. Last year it was 4.2. TI has just announced in London that this year we are down to 3.8.

This means that, in the eyes of foreign analysts and both local and foreign business people, over the five years more of our politicians and public officials have become corrupt.

Although our score has been dropping, our relative position on the list of countries surveyed has been roughly the same each year: about one third of the way from the top.

Even allowing for bias and/or ignorance on the part of some of the people surveyed, as well as for changes in survey methods over the period, we must take these perceptions seriously. We must ask ourselves what really is going on and what more needs to be done to reduce corruption in our land.

The Trinidad and Tobago Transparency Institute (TTTI), the local chapter of Transparency International (TI), calls on Government, business and civil society to work together to discover the causes of corruption and take the necessary steps to eliminate them.

We commend the Government on the successes of its anti-corruption drive that were announced recently by the Attorney General. However, much remains to be done.

Government should give high priority to reducing corruption in the police service. It should move towards the early implementation of the reform of the procurement regime which it has begun. It should also increase rather than decrease citizens' access to information and strengthen rather than diminish the people's power to hold politicians and public officials accountable.

Government should implement fully the Inter-American Convention Against Corruption, particularly by helping the Integrity Commission in its efforts to become a more effective corruption prevention agency. It should ratify and implement the United Nations Convention Against Corruption. And it should make a real commitment to the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI).

Business associations should promote integrity amongst their members, giving them the encouragement and the tools they need to eliminate bribery.

Civil society organisations should use all the means at their disposal to help people value integrity and demand it of their leaders.

The National Chapter of Transparency International

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Our Scores

The changes in Trinidad and Tobago's CPI ranking and score over the last five years are shown in the following table.

Year	Country Rank	No. of Countries	% of countries below	CPI Score	Surveys Used	Confidence Range
2001	31	91	66%	5.3	3	3.8 - 6.9
2002	33	102	68%	4.9	4	3.6 - 6.9
2003	43	133	68%	4.6	6	3.4 - 6.9
2004	51	146	65%	4.2	6	3.6 - 5.2
2005	59	159	63%	3.8	6	3.3 - 4.5

It can be seen that, although the ranking appeared to slip, we remained in about the same relative position with about one-third of the countries on the index above us. The same cannot be said for the score, which declined by an average of 0.3 per year.

At 3.8 our 2005 score is below the global average of 4.11.

This year we find ourselves sharing the 59th place with Cuba and Thailand. Above us, in the top 23 places, are most of the 'developed' countries with Iceland in first place scoring 9.7, Finland and New Zealand 2nd with 9.6, the United Kingdom 11th with 8.6, Canada 14th with 8.4 and the USA 17th with 7.6.

It would seem therefore that one sign of having achieved "developed status" is to have a score of 7 plus. Last year Barbados was right there with a score of 7.1. This year her score fell to 6.9 which put her in 24th place.

Amongst countries below Barbados and above us are Botswana in 32nd place with a score of 5.9, Bahrain 36th with 5.8, Hungary, Italy and South Korea jointly 40th with 5.0, South Africa 46th with 4.5 and Colombia 55th with a score of 4.0.

Some of the countries below us are Belize and Brazil in 62nd place with a score of 3.7, Jamaica 64th with 3.6, the Dominican Republic 85th with 3.0, India 88th with 2.9, Guyana 117th with 2.5 and Venezuela 130th with 2.3. Haiti is second to last with 1.8. Bangladesh and Chad are in a tie for last place with a score of 1.7.

The following table takes a closer look at the countries of the Americas.

Country Rank	Regional rank	Country	2005 CPI Score	Confidence range	Surveys Used
14	1	Canada	8.4	7.9 - 8.8	11
17	2	USA	7.6	7.0 - 8.0	12
21	3	Chile	7.3	6.8 - 7.7	10
24	4	Barbados	6.9	5.7 - 7.3	3
32	5	Uruguay	5.9	5.6 - 6.4	6
51	6	Costa Rica	4.2	3.7 - 4.7	7
		El Salvador	4.2	3.5 - 4.8	6
55	8	Colombia	4.0	3.6 - 4.4	9
		Cuba	3.8	2.3 - 4.7	4
59	9	Trinidad and Tobago	3.8	3.3 - 4.5	6
62	11	Belize	3.7	3.4 - 4.1	3
		Brazil	3.7	3.5 - 3.9	10
64	13	Jamaica	3.6	3.4 - 3.8	6
65	14	Mexico	3.5	3.3 - 3.7	10
		Panama	3.5	3.1 - 4.1	7
		Peru	3.5	3.1 - 3.8	7
78	17	Suriname	3.2	2.2 - 3.6	3
85	18	Dominican Republic	3.0	2.5 - 3.6	6
97	19	Argentina	2.8	2.5 - 3.1	10
107	20	Honduras	2.6	2.2 - 3.0	7
		Nicaragua	2.6	2.4 - 2.8	7
117	22	Bolivia	2.5	2.3 - 2.9	6
		Ecuador	2.5	2.2 - 2.9	6
		Guatemala	2.5	2.1 - 2.8	7
		Guyana	2.5	2.0 - 2.7	3
130	26	Venezuela	2.3	2.2 - 2.4	10
144	27	Paraguay	2.1	1.9 - 2.3	7
155	28	Haiti	1.8	1.5 - 2.1	4

The Reliability of the Method

The CPI ranks countries according to the degree to which corruption is perceived to exist among public officials and politicians. It is a composite index, drawing on corruption-related data in expert surveys carried out by a variety of reputable institutions. It reflects the views of business people and analysts from around the world, including experts who are locals in the countries evaluated.

This year's index draws on surveys done in the past three years. In the case of Trinidad and Tobago the following surveys were used:

	Source	Name	Year	Who was surveyed?	Subject asked
1	Economist Intelligence Unit	Country Risk Service and Country Forecast	2005	Expert Staff Assessment	The misuse of public office for private (or political party) gain
2	Merchant International Group	Grey Area Dynamics	2005	Expert Staff and network of local correspondents	Corruption ranging from bribery of Government ministers to inducements payable to the "humblest clerk"
3	World Economic Forum	Global Competitiveness Report	2003/04	Senior Business leaders; domestic and international companies	Undocumented extra payments or bribes connected with various government functions
4	ditto	ditto	2004/05	ditto	ditto
5	ditto	ditto	2005/06	ditto	ditto
6	World Markets Research Centre	Risk Ratings	2005	Expert Staff Assessment	The likelihood of encountering corrupt officials, ranging from petty bureaucratic corruption to grand political corruption

Three of the surveys depended on the assessment of expert staff who, presumably, would have been mostly foreign. The other three depended on the opinions of business leaders, both locals and foreign residents.

It may be asked whether, in a society like ours with ethnically based politics and business, most of local business leaders interviewed might not be biased against the Government. This could unduly influence their perception of corruption among politicians and public officials, making our score go lower than it should.

According to TI, it was found that generally, residents' viewpoints correlated well with those of experts abroad. So, in the particular case of Trinidad and Tobago, we could reasonably assume that ethnic/political bias did not play a significant part. But even if it did, even if it could in part account for the steady fall in the score over the years, we could still infer that there has been no significant reduction in the level of corruption over the period. And that is not a satisfactory situation.

TI does warn that changes over the years in survey samples and methodology as well as alterations in the list of sources that constitute the index can affect a country's score. But both in 2004 and

2005 Trinidad and Tobago is cited as one of the countries in which it could be assumed that this did not apply. Even if it did, however, the CPI can give no comfort to those of us in the society who wish to see enhancement of integrity in public life.

The need for tangible results

Perceptions of corruption will probably change for the better when foreign and local businessmen begin to sense that, in this country, corruption is becoming a high risk, low return undertaking.

Successful prosecution of high profile, 'high value' corruption cases that are just and fair will certainly help increase the risk involved in corruption. Indeed, the fact that cases of this kind are dragging on and on may have contributed to the lowering of our score. Another contributing factor may have been the fact that the Government has not yet ratified the United Nations Anti-Corruption Convention.

Implementation of the procurement reforms that are now Government policy will leave less and less room for large sums of money to find their way into the wrong pockets. This will reduce the returns of corruption. But these reforms are still only on paper. Only when they become a reality will the perception begin to change.

The White Paper on procurement reform recommends as a useful administrative measure the requiring of all tenderers for a contract and all relevant buying agency officials to sign a joint undertaking guaranteeing the integrity of the whole process and accepting sanctions in the event of a lapse, arbitration in the event of disputes and monitoring by an independent third party.

This is the approach used in TI's 'Integrity Pact'. If it is implemented successfully on a major project we could find ourselves, possibly for the first time in our history, with a big project completed without the slightest whiff of corruption. This would set new standards and would surely make for a better score on the CPI.

What needs to be done

Research

To cripple corruption we need first of all to understand how it works. For this we need serious local research. We have the institutions that can do it and there is a wealth of material available on studies done in many other parts of the world that can be used.

Government

But even without research we can identify some priority areas. The Prime Minister in his Budget Speech acknowledged the corruption of local public officials by "a criminal elite" created by the illicit trade in drugs. So we must take decisive action against corruption in the police service. This should help reduce the violent crime that such corruption often breeds. And it could do wonders for our CPI score.

Then there is procurement reform. The Government can be justifiably proud of its White Paper on this issue but, until its principles of value for money, transparency and accountability are fully implemented in law and practice, it remains just paper and the CPI score is likely to remain low.

To reduce corruption we need to empower those who are most affected by it. Knowledge being power, the Government must *increase*, not decrease, access to information. Restrictions on the scope of the Freedom of Information Act are not likely to help our CPI score.

Nor for that matter could it be helped by the recent attempt to amend the Judicial Review Act so as to restrict the rights of citizens to challenge executive decisions.

Government must, in practice and action, *maximise*, not minimise transparency and accountability in all its works if it wishes to reduce corruption and to be perceived as doing so. *Verbal undertakings to do so are not enough.*

Business

The CPI looks at the corruption of politicians and public officials. But what of the people who corrupt them?

The business community must take a large share of the blame for the corruption that exists. Since Enron, Worldcom and Parmalat there has been a lot of soul-searching amongst big corporations. This needs to extend to smaller, local businesses.

TI recognises the need to look at the ‘supply side’ of corruption. It has developed a ‘Bribe Payers’ Index (BPI) which reflects the propensity of companies from the world’s top exporting countries to pay bribes in exporting markets.

It has gone further and, together with Social Accountability International, developed Business Principles for Countering Bribery. If local businesses were to study, adapt and implement these, we could see a considerable reduction in corruption, both real and perceived.

Civil Society

Corruption thrives when it is generally accepted as inevitable and unavoidable. There is need for massive public education that will make people of all ages aware of its evils and intolerant of its existence. There is scope here for schools, professional associations, labour unions, non-governmental organizations, faith based communities and especially our free media to get the message across.