

Cook Islands Anti Corruption Agency – a description of structure

Cook Islands has a representative from each of the law enforcement agencies (7) on a board named the Anti-Corruption Committee (or Board) and this group meets 3 monthly to coordinate tasks and exchange intelligence. In turn the Board files a report 3 monthly with central government describing its activities.

Prominent activities during year 2020

- 1. A South Pacific Regional meeting addressing corruption** was held on the island of Kiribati in February 2020. The initiative was decided on at a Pacific leaders meeting in Nauru in 2018. The meeting eventuated and was aimed at **Government leaders** of small Pacific countries – Prime Ministerial level. One objective was making political leaders more aware of their operating staff activities in Anti-Corruption work. The fight against Corruption was an issue considered of pivotal significance to national and regional sustainable development. The theme was ‘Pacific Unity Against Corruption’ A path ‘fit for purpose’ to combat corruption was envisaged and this included collective efforts on both the bilateral and multilateral levels.

Pacific countries have long standing commitments to good governance and the combatting of corruption (**noting that our ADB / OECD Initiative commenced in 2001**)

Other platforms are

the Forum Eight Principles and the Sustainable Development Goals primarily SDG 16 which specifically recognises combatting of corruption as an essential precondition of sustainable development

The February conference objectives were

- to engage leaders as well as citizens.
- Enhanced resilience was aimed for with everyone having the same outlook and appreciating the benefits.
- If educational resources for schools, robust public financial management systems and training across the public services could be widely achieved including case study examples then these represent admirable outcomes.

2. **Cook Islands is re writing its Strategic Anti-Corruption Plan**, with help from an UNCAC officer
3. **Expansion of Procurement Division:** Cook Islands has recently expanded its procurement agency to have a similar work group within the main government infrastructure ministry (Tender Evaluation Team or TET). This places a first level of responsibility at the coalface of dealings between contractors or service suppliers and those responsible for administering government projects.

Contracts or work allocation proposals are then forwarded to a higher level Tender Committee staffed by heads of finance and legal divisions for acceptance or decline. In this way a robust system giving greater assurance of value for money exists.

4. **Women urged to join the fight against corruption.**

In September, the United Nations in partnership with New Zealand launched a partnership to improve the livelihoods of pacific countries. A toolkit was released offering practical guidance on what constitutes corruption in the Pacific. Pacific women have been urged to seek decision making roles and join boards and councils to fight corruption. This is a new development and Cook Islands has more work to do in aligning itself with the opportunity and engaging some staff to become familiar.

*Prepared by
Geoff Stoddart
Cook Islands Government Audit Office*