

Preventing corruption as precondition for a successful sustainability transformation

14th – 16th February 2023, Dessau-Roßlau, Germany

Background

SDG target 16.5 aims at substantially reducing corruption and bribery in all their forms.¹ While corruption, in general, has received broad attention by research, national and global politics, and public discourse, and many measures have been taken to fight corruption both at a local and global level, too little attention has been paid so far to its role in hindering sustainability transformation.

Negative impacts of corruption on the environment, on tackling climate change and sustainable development are addressed already², but are underrepresented in the fight against corruption and underestimated as a relevant factor influencing transformation efforts. Corruption is one of the driving forces behind environmental crime, including organized crime, often generating huge financial profits for those who seek private benefits. Hence, corruption damages the environment, leads to mismanagement and loss of natural resources, as well as misappropriation of funds provided for environmental protection, climate change adaptation and mitigation.

Corruption constitutes a serious challenge to realizing sustainability transformation both directly and indirectly. For one, bribery and other illegal forms of remuneration allow (powerful) actors to hide and downplay hazardous environmental actions. People fighting against and aiming at raising awareness for such actions, including so-called whistleblowers, often find themselves at major risk. For another, corrupt sustainability professionals will not fulfil their role as defenders of the environment. UNDP defines corruption as “misuse of entrusted power for private gain”³, emphasizing that corruption risks are real also for environmental and sustainability professionals.

From this perspective, we see corruption prevention as a prerequisite for sustainability transformation. As a consequence, awareness shall be raised of the relationship between corruption and sustainable development among environmental and sustainability professionals. Moreover, measures are yet to be developed that address corresponding corrupt practices on all levels from local to global.

¹ <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/sdg16>

² UNDP, Staying on Track: Tackling Corruption Risks in Climate Change. New York (2010); UNODC, Preventing and combating corruption as it relates to crimes that have an impact on the environment: An overview. Vienna (2021).

³ UNDP, Staying on Track: Tackling Corruption Risks in Climate Change. New York (2010), p.9.

Approach

Analysing the challenge: Against this background, this workshop follows two main analytical purposes: For one, we want to understand the scope of the corruption problem, as well as the risks and hindrances associated with these. For another, analysing existing prevention efforts at the national and international level will be another purpose of the event. What are the main challenges to making these efforts more effective? On an international level, there are strong commitments to fight corrupt practices that have an impact on the environment. However, why is still so little attention given to the links between environmental crimes and corruption? Why is there a significant gap between announcements and necessary action?

Extending the scope for solutions: How can the problem of corruption be addressed? Which recommendations can be envisaged for actions to minimize corruption related to environmental issues? Who are the relevant actors and how do they relate to the challenge of corruption? How do they relate to and perceive corruption risks? What do actors need in order to take (joint) action? Which resources are already available and which ones have yet to be established? These are guiding questions we want to explore as a heterogeneous group of participants from different professional organizations and sectors.

Defining the way forward: In collaboration with representatives of authorities, scientific experts, environmentalists, local stakeholders, policymakers, and practitioners we envisage contributing to the development of proposals how to empower environmental and sustainability professionals to avoid corruption risks on all levels from local to global. Taking up the question “Which measures can we all subsequently use as multipliers to foster sustainability transformation by preventing corruption?” the event might be an initial stage of a process leading to a stronger network and applicable instruments to reduce corruption as an obstacle to sustainability transformation. Joint follow-up activities (policy papers, practical projects, further events) will ideally result from this mutual learning process.

It is our aim as TES Academy to create transformative spaces for mutual learning, relating, and collaborating. We want to invite participants to meet and connect at eye level, dive into new perspectives, and let novel, integrative approaches emerge that can ideally inform future specific projects and actions. We trust that bringing together people with such rich and diverse expertise constitutes a unique opportunity to develop something genuinely new that cannot fully be planned beforehand.

How do we work?

In line with the guiding principles of the TES Academy, the event is built upon the following pillars:

Expertise in environment and sustainability – We bring international experts together.

From personal to systemic – We consider all levels of transformation.

Holistic learning – We integrate our bodies, emotions, senses, as well as our intellects.

From local to global – We link different scales of sustainability.

Multiple perspectives – We reflect complexity and diversity of stakeholders.

Mutual learning – We learn from each other and develop spaces for collaboration on eye level.