The European Corruption Observatory
Sustaining Anti-Corruption Networks

Contents

1. Introduction

Corruption is a complex phenomenon that can hamper economic development, undermine democracy and damage social justice and the rule of law. Corruption varies in nature and extent from one country to another but all corruption impinges on good governance, sound management of public money and competitive markets. In extreme cases it undermines the trust of citizens in democratic institutions and processes. Corruption increasingly ignores borders and is based on complex networks that help wrongdoers hide ill-gotten gains and deepens global inequality. The Member States of the EU are not immune to this reality.

Journalism and its possible effect of naming and shaming is seen as a very effective deterrent to corruption. Indeed research by Transparency International in 2011 showed that in most countries surveyed more people believed in the effectiveness of journalists than in national anti-bribery laws[1]. While the 2014 special Eurobarometer also showed that the media/newspapers/journalists were one of the top three bodies that Europeans would most trust to deal with a complaint about a corruption case, should the need arise[2].

Recent scandals unearthed by investigative journalism have had a huge impact on both the public and on policy. The fall-out from the Panama Papers influenced David Cameron' s Anti-Corruption Summit, forced the resignation of the Icelandic Prime Minister and triggered further revisions of beneficial ownership provisions in the European Anti-Money Laundering Directive. The Lux Leaks scandal has led to an unprecedented level of EU policy and legislative developments in the field of corporate tax avoidance, the tax practices of several multi-national companies being investigated by the European Commission, and the setting up of a special committee in the European Parliament.

Yet in the fight against corruption investigative stories are sometimes not enough, they may expose wrongdoing but if law enforcement does not pick up on a story, or the policy priorities are focused elsewhere then nothing happens. This is when civil society and other stakeholders have an important role to play in helping to carry the story forward.   The role of investigative journalists is to expose corruption and its complex networks forcing the truth into the open. It then requires activists to put pressure on governments and law enforcement to act. These actors need to come together and to work collectively to help raise awareness, and to prevent and prosecute corruption.

There is currently no such network dedicated to corruption issues that covers the whole of the EU. Transparency International EU through the European Corruption Observatory Project has worked with Journalisfund.eu over the last two years to establish an informal network between journalists and civil society and other anti-corruption actors with complementary skills and resources with the aim of supporting each other in reaching our respective aims, to share resources and skills and to build trust. Creating a formal network that could complete complex transnational investigations from start to finish would have required greater resources and time than were available.

The European Corruption Observatory also consists of a database that tracks media stories about corruption. The database is a free and easily accessible platform for corruption related news in Europe which aimed to foster awareness of corruption.

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[1] Transparency International 2011 Putting Corruption Out of Business, see: www.transparency.org/research/bps2011/
[2] Special Eurobarometer 397 / Wave EB79.1 (February 2014) see:
http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/ebs/ebs_397_en.pdf

2. Synthesis of Workshops

To bring together both journalists and civil society actors over the life of the project six official workshops were held in different regions of Europe including:

A. **Brussels September 2014:** A focus group to help design the European Corruption Observatory Database

This was a technical workshop that brought together investigative and data journalists in the EU to discuss the technical design and functionality of the European Corruption Observatory database. The aim was to elicit feedback on the software design and to discuss the challenges and opportunities of creating such a database of media stories about corruption. Overall the attendees were generally positive towards the idea of a database. In particular they felt that the database would be useful for data analysis. However a number of issues around independence and trust were raised. There was general consensus in the group that no journalist would use the site to share information or to collaborate online even in an informal network as the platform would not be owned by a media source.

B. **Brussels May 2015:** Workshop at the Dataharvest Conference (organised by Journalismfund.eu)

This workshop was an opportunity to present the design of the European Corruption Observatory Database and the aims of the project to over 300 of the leading data and investigative journalists in Europe. The Dataharvest conference is one of the largest journalism conferences in the EU. It was an opportunity for us as civil society to interact with journalists who were working on similar areas, to understand what issues and topics were shaping the journalism field and to identify where the overlap of our work is with the work of journalists. The beginnings of the informal network began to take shape at this workshop as it allowed the attendees to explore areas where we could be of mutual assistance. The feedback from the attendees was generally positive towards the aims of the project. As this was workshop attended by investigative and data journalists there was a comprehensive understanding of the need to collaborate in the fight against corruption. Many of the attendees were facing similar issues, such as a lack of funding and having to innovate and upskill to tackle new challenges in investigative journalism. Although the participants were keen to look for areas of collaboration especially in areas were funding proposals could be generated there was still a reticence to involve civil society or external stakeholders fully. The ECO database was also presented at a smaller workshop to 30 people during the conference to allow interested stakeholders to access the beta version of the ECO platform and to provide more detailed feedback on its functionality.

c. **Vilnius July 2015:** A workshop that brought together both journalism students and students studying corruption

Held during the anti-corruption summer school in Lithuania this workshop was aimed at bringing together journalism students and students of other disciplines interested in the fight against corruption. The aim of the workshop was twofold, to introduce the students to the importance of investigative journalism in the fight against corruption and to look at ways and means of collaboration across the different disciplines. The workshop also elicited feedback on the design of the European Corruption Observatory Database and the project as a whole. The students were introduced to the current state of investigative journalism and the need for increased transboundary cooperation in this field. Participants from the Open Knowledge Foundation also shared their thoughts on the importance of open knowledge and data and how it can be used in investigations. The students were also trained on the importance of ethics and fact-checking to ensure balanced representation in reporting. Extracts from various TV channels were shown highlighting how sometimes information can be distorted. This provided solid grounds for discussion about how decisions made in editorial rooms and the impact of media pieces on the public. Attendees were shown how to use ECO and then split up into 3 groups who afterwards provided detailed feedback on the functionality of ECO, the design of the platform and potential improvements to the web portal.

d. **London December 2015**: A workshop that brought together journalists and civil society to discuss whether new models of collaborations are affecting investigative journalism's ability to combat corruption

This workshop brought together a cross section of investigative journalists and civil society actors working on corruption. The workshop discussed the potential opportunities for civil society and journalists to work together and the opportunities and challenges that these types of collaborations can incur. The aim of the workshop was to encourage attendees to think beyond the usual types of collaboration and to look for synergies with other actors while being aware of the potential for conflicts of interest. The MEPs project, the first investigation to involve journalists representing all 28 member states, was presented explaining how the collaboration started and the procs and cons of working together. Andrew Feinstein from the NGO Corruption Watch explained how it's possible to cross the divide and do both investigations and campaigns. The attendees discussed how working with CSOs does not have to skew journalism and the ground rules that need to be respected when collaborating with journalists.

e. **Budapest March 2016**: A workshop to discuss investigations by both media and civil society into corruption risks in the media and telecoms industries

The aim of this workshop was to showcase how journalists and civil society often work on similar areas of interest showcasing how each tackle a subject from different angles and to share knowledge, skills and investigative tools. The workshop looked at the theme of corruption in the media and telecoms industries. The workshop focused on three levels of corruption risks: one, the risks associated with the media industry and media ownership and how these can undermine media freedom; two, the risks associated with internet

ownership (those who own the internet hold the keys to citizens daily lives and have the power to either protect or infringe access to information); and three, the transparency of the global telecommunications industry. The workshop revealed the similarities and scope for enhanced cooperation in future investigations and projects on this topic among journalists and civil society. The speakers and participants also spoke at length about the tools and techniques that were used in each of the investigations.

f. **Mechelen June 2016**: A workshop that brought together journalists, civil society, law enforcement and policy makers to discuss VAT fraud in the EU.

Held during the Dataharvest conference in June 2016 the aim of this workshop was to take a particular investigation (into VAT Fraud in Denmark) and to look at how this type of investigation could be replicated by other journalists in different EU countries. By involving regulatory bodies such as Europol and academic researchers along with civil society and policy makers the aim was to build capacity and share experiences in undertaking such complex investigations and to build a wider network of different actors interested in this area of work. The workshop also looked at the challenges and opportunities for different actors to work together to uncover these corrupt networks and delved into the technicalities of investigating VAT fraud in different EU countries.

Beyond these official events, the European Corruption Observatory has also been introduced to a wide and varied audience across the European Union at a number of high profile speaking events including: to 300 journalists and hackers (technology experts) at an event in London, and to members of the OLAF Anti-fraud communicators network, OAFCN (a unique pan-European network of communicators working on anti-fraud issues), and at the International Anti-Corruption Conference (IACC) in Malaysia.

3. Challenges

Throughout the project workshops and during conversations on the side-lines of these and other events a number of similar themes emerged in relation to creating and sustaining informal transboundary networks (of investigative journalists and wider networks that include different actors). These are the challenges that will have to be addressed in order to ensure further ongoing transboundary collaboration.

Information, Data and Skills

One of the key issues that constantly arose was the transformation in the way that investigative journalists work. In a world where people, money, and businesses can quickly and freely move across borders it means that crime and corruption are also going global. Criminal networks operate transnationally - stories don't stop at the border, so journalists can't either. In today's world investigating international corruption cases requires information, technological expertise, and cooperation.

- **Accessing information and data**

The biggest global stories in recent years have been collaborative efforts based on huge data leaks. The Panama Papers leak included 11.5 million files, Swiss Leaks had 60,000 files, and Lux Leaks had 28,000 files. However, most other investigations do not start with a trove of leaked documents but with an idea and for those investigations access to information and strong research skills are critical.

Cross border investigations are difficult for a number of reasons – one of the key issues is how to find the right information in different jurisdictions when you have barriers such as different languages, laws and regulations. That is why it can be beneficial to work in collaboration with other journalists who speak the language and who understand the issues in their own countries. Take for example accessing information through Freedom of Information (FOI) laws. FOI even within Europe varies from country to country and while journalists may be experts in FOI in their own countries the intricacies of other countries may prove difficult. Working together can help to overcome these barriers. One of the first cross-border collaborations which included multiple member states was on Farm Subsidies. Farmsubsidy.org was formed in 2005 to access information on who gets what in farm subsidies from the EU. At the time the European Commission did not make this information publicly available and claimed to do so would require excessive work. So instead journalists and other actors from across Europe tried to access the data country by country and achieved some success. The ongoing MEPs project is also utilizing FOI laws to try and access information on MEPs expenses and allowances. 29 journalists contacted the European Parliament to request documentation related to the MEPs coming from his/her country. When the European Parliament refused to release this information on the grounds of personal data protection the consortium filed 29 complaints (one on behalf of each journalist) with the ECJ. Working together has strengthened their case for accessing this information from the EU.

There are many other publicly available information sources that can be useful for investigating stories including business registries, land registries, and court registries for example. However once again problems arise when you don't know what source to track in each country. Working with partners in different jurisdictions can help to overcome these barriers.

At the national, regional and global level there are many tools and platforms that can be useful when trying to find information to investigate corruption, such as: the K monitor database in Hungary which is an online library of articles dealing with corruption, public procurement and public spending; Openinterests.eu which catalogues actors involved in lobbying, expert groups, public expenditure and procurement so as to explore the interaction between them; Investigative Dashboard built by the OCCRP to help journalists research many different public data sources across the globe and to assist in their investigations; or guides such as that by Access Info which explains how to make FOI requests in a number of European Countries.

- **Skills**

When journalists do get access to information and data there are still challenges to overcome. Data is often not published in an open source readable format making it difficult for research. Language barriers also exist when using data - as a comma in one country is a decimal in another so stitching together data from different countries and sources can prove difficult.

Data needs to be decoded, structured and understood to build a story. This takes a whole new set of technological skills and in many instances (especially when investigating corruption) it requires hard financial skills to be able to understand company accounts or complex tax regulations etc. Capacity and lack of investigative and technical skills can be an obstacle to working effectively together. When the ICIJ was investigating Off Shore leaks it had to isolate and distribute data on a country by country basis as it did not have the resources to train local journalists in data analysis. The OCCRP and other investigative journalism outlets on the other hand often work with already trained journalists who are members of their network to bypass the capacity issue. Other ways around a lack of skills and capacity were seen in the investigation the Migrant Files which was a European investigation into migrant deaths – here strong project management was key with a data journalist being the main point of contact who was able to assist and lead the other journalists on the project.

Trust and Independence

Every collaboration is based on trust. In the field of collaborative journalism this is a recurring issue. Journalism has strong core values of integrity and independence which can hamper effective collaboration. In recent years we have seen an increase in collaboration between journalists and it has now become a more acceptable and even preferential method of working on investigations – however there is still work to be done on encouraging stronger relations between journalists and other actors such as civil society.

The link between journalism and activism is clear in the fight against corruption and it's obvious that greater information sharing can increase the overall impact of both sectors. Media and NGOs have historically had a symbiotic relationship – with the media sourcing experts from NGOs for tips and quotes and in return NGOs receiving increased media coverage for their organisation and the issues they work on. Yet despite this history, partnerships between the media and NGOs can be difficult and trust can be lacking.

A key theme throughout this project was how the media can maintain independence and editorial control over an investigation when working with other actors. The debate around "journalistic integrity" is certainly not new and questions have always arisen as to whether it is

actually achievable or even desirable. Indeed some believe that an independent media is myth and that bias is nothing new - newspapers have always had agendas in the past. And even now there are many examples of media outlets that are not unbiased such as Outlaw a legal reporting website which is funded by the law firm Pinsent Masons. However the fears around the risks to independence are heightened when non media actors become involved. The fear being that working with external stakeholders could undermine the audiences trust in the media, reduce reporters to nothing more than mere messenger boys, or even threaten their credibility. Setting strict boundaries from the outset along with maintaining high editorial standards is critical to overcoming these obstacles.

When working in partnerships another issue that can arise is defining who does what – what is the role of the NGO and what is the role of the journalist. For more controversial investigations it is also critical to understand who in the end is responsible for the story legally speaking. Many journalists who attended the project workshops also highlighted issues around sharing information, tools and platforms with non-media actors. Many journalists did not feel comfortable using platforms built by non-media sources or sharing research notes and files (they questioned who would really own the information, and how secure they would be etc.). As both the media and NGOs become more technologically savvy and interaction increases levels of trust should improve in this regard.

Other tensions and barriers to working together are quite varied. As discussed during the workshop in London tensions can arise due to a belief that journalists want an exclusive when investigating a story while campaigners want mass appeal with the investigation reported in multiple media outlets not just one. However this is an old argument and one that is no longer valid. Today as the media moves towards large scale investigations such as the Panama Papers (where the story was broken by more than a hundred media outlets simultaneously) the need for an exclusive story is dwindling. Now it is about taking a global or regional story and finding a local perspective to it so that many media sources can report on it at the same time to their distinct audiences. NGOs on the other hand are also more willing to partner with media outlets to provide exclusive content for example many Transparency International Chapters work in partnership with investigative journalism media outlets.

As the world around us changes old barriers to collaboration are beginning to erode and lines between the media and NGOs are becoming increasingly blurred. Freelance journalists increasingly work in different areas, they may be producing content for an NGO or writing policy papers for a think tank, while simultaneously producing content for a news organisation. NGOs in return are becoming their own news entities as can be seen in the investigations conducted by Global Witness or Greenpeace hiring in-house journalists. Changes in media consumption and increased use of digital and social platforms has also reduced the need for NGOs to rely on the media to reach wider audiences.

Safety and Security

For a media story to be investigative, it has to reveal corruption, a violation of laws, an abuse of powers, or explain complex problems which point to shortcomings in the system. But corruption and crime are dangerous subjects to investigate – research by the Committee to Protect Journalists has shown that 35% of journalists killed (globally) since 1992 worked on these two topics.

Threats to investigative journalism are expansive and go beyond just the safety of the journalists themselves and include areas such as censorship, political pressure, intimidation, attacks on the protection of journalist's sources and increasingly, digital security.

Political pressure on journalists can be seen even within the EU member states. For example in 2014 Hungarian journalist András Pethő wrote an exposé about a series of expensive overseas business trips taken by the chief of staff to Prime Minister Viktor Orbán. Within days of the story's publication, Origo's editor in chief, Gergő Sáling, resigned – apparently due to political pressure on Origo's parent company, Magyar Telecom. Pethő and much of the rest of the site's news staff quit soon afterwards in solidarity (afterwards setting up the investigative news outlet Direkt36).

Threats to digital safety are being exacerbated by the strengthening of surveillance, both by governments and by organised crime. The technology around surveillance is increasingly sophisticated and difficult to detect, while cyber-attacks are increasingly used, including botnets, spyware and Trojan horses. Journalists from the OCCRP highlighted these issues in our workshops and reported that challenges to websites by DOS and DDOS attacks are growing and can particularly be seen in Eastern and Southern Europe. This is one of the reasons why the OCCRP focuses on hiring skilled coders. They not only build online investigative tools but play a key role in ensuring the digital security of OCCRP and its journalists.

Threats to safety are also exacerbated when working with sources such as whistleblowers and leakers. These people are almost by definition not in the networks where technological capacity has been built, though they are often the most at risk from being identified. To mitigate this threat will take a more wide-ranging drive to increase available digital security skills and training, as well as advocacy which argues against the use of increasingly intrusive state surveillance measures. There are also examples where innovative collaborations can have an impact on the protection of sources identities, for instance the anonymous whistleblowing platform built by the Spanish activist group Xnet in partnership with the municipal government of Barcelona - http://boingboing.net/2017/01/19/barcelona-government-officiall.html

Working in collaboration with other journalists and stakeholders can exacerbate some of these threats. Political pressure, censorship and intimidation levels vary from country to country, so when working together partners need to be aware of political sensitivities in different jurisdictions. Awareness of cyber dangers can also vary in a partnership - the fact is few people protect their virtual behaviour as much as they protect their property and person. These cyber risks can hamper an investigation, threaten the safety of journalists and expose sources who in turn are at increased risk.

Although there are increased risks to working with others on an investigation, collaborations can also help to mitigate certain threats. For example publishing stories simultaneously across different news organisations (and sometimes without individual by-lines) can help to diffuse the risks towards individual journalists. Collaboration can also help build technological capacity within the network by sharing knowledge and teaching others new skills in digital security.

Funding

Even with networks of journalists and increased collaboration the amount of money that organised crime is putting into corruption far outweighs the amount of money that is available to investigative it. Funding for the media, for investigative journalism and for other actors is another key theme that emerged as an obstacle to collaboration over the life of this project.

Across the board the media industry is struggling as budgets for international reporting disappear. Changing patterns of media consumption and the proliferation of non-traditional media have led to a funding crisis. In the US over 125,000 newsroom jobs have been lost in traditional media with investigative journalism particularly badly hit. Good investigative journalism takes time and resources that many media outlets can no longer afford.

Investigative journalism is now often conducted by freelancers who look to cover their costs through selling the resulting stories to media outlets. In recent years as the media landscape has changed the price per story has dropped significantly making it harder for freelancers and especially investigative freelancers to cover their costs. When working with other journalists there can be an uneven playing field when it comes to selling the story to local media outlets. Some journalists will be able to sell their stories in their own countries but others won't for a variety of reasons (the story may be too hot to handle, or there may be a lack of interest etc.). One example of this is the Migrant Files investigation - a collaboration between 10 individual journalists that relied on a €7,000 grant from Journalismfund.eu. To keep the costs low the team never met in person and connected through skype and [Trello](), they worked in English and each journalist was responsible for their own translations. However even with cutting costs the grant was nowhere near the money needed to cover the work. Some of the northern European journalists were able to sell their stories several times over and covered their costs but the journalists in southern Europe were less successful in this regard due to a lack of interest.

It is clear that to tackle organised crime and corruption effectively there is a need to search for new ways of making investigative journalism sustainable - new sources of funding need to be found and new methods of working such as with a wider network outside of the traditional actors. New models for media organisations also need to be explored such as creating charitable foundations.

Although the model of creating charitable foundations is blooming in certain countries there are a number of risks to be considered. These are mainly associated with the sustainability of this type of funding. Donor's attention spans, and funding cycles, are notoriously short meaning that many organisations are forced to close after the initial money runs out. So sustainability of funding is crucial and like NGOs non-profit investigative journalism centres need to consider diversifying their revenue streams and expanding their pool of donors. Other means of revenue that investigative journalism centres are employing include approaching individual donors, creating a paid membership, online "crowd-funding" from the public, running events, selling their databases and providing training to others. While media sites such as Buzzfeed support their investigative work through advertisement revenue and other means.

4. Future Opportunities for Continued Cooperation

The question is not if journalists should work together to expose corruption or even if they should work with other stakeholders, but rather the question is what type of network can provide the greatest impact and sustainability.

A European network of Journalists

Throughout Europe and globally there are examples of successful networks of investigative journalists such as the OCCRP or the ICIJ etc. There is no need to replicate these networks but stronger ties between them should be encouraged. If you truly want to create a robust future for journalism in Europe then it is critical to also build stronger networks with individual journalists working on their own projects, or as freelancers – including increased support and investment in reports and technical assistance.

One model for sustainable networks is the Clay Shirky collaborative model, which describes three levels of collaboration: sharing, cooperation and collective action. As you move through the three levels of collaboration there is increasing commitment, risk and also reward. A non-hierarchical model such as the Shirky model is applicable to investigative reporting as we know that good collaborations have consisted of groups of variously talented people who brought specific skills to the project to enhance its conception and execution. The effectiveness of these collaborations came from working together in a coherent group (such as the Panama Papers). For a truly sustainable journalism network that investigates corruption there must be interest from a variety of stakeholders who can contribute a diverse range of skills, it will require participants to be independent and resilient, and it has to provide benefits for the members (whether those are financial, organisational, or capacity building etc.).

To truly create a sustainable network it will be also important to tackle the challenges highlighted above:

- **Increased access to information:** Whistle-blowers and leaked documents aside accessing information and data to ensure that journalists can investigate their stories is important. To truly support cross border investigations more tools and resources like those mentioned (K monitor, investigative dashboard etc.) are needed but of equal importance is sharing the information about resources already available. There is no regional, not to mention global, map of all the databases and tools available. Throughout the two years of this project it became clear that often people and organisations in different countries were working on incredibly similar projects and building similar platforms and databases, mapping these resources would be useful along with increased opportunities to physically share information. Reducing duplication of effort would save precious resources and would be beneficial in supporting cross border networks.

- **Understanding data:** Once the data has been accessed it needs to be understood and cleaned up to create a story. There are many online tools that can help such as Open Refine or Tabula plus many organisations work to provide public information in

an understandable way – such as Open Budgets, Every Politician, Open Corporates to name but a few. There are also a number of organisations who provide training to journalists to make sense of this data such as Finance Uncovered which equips journalists and researchers with practical skills to undertake complex investigations into tax abuse, corruption and money laundering. While the Centre for Investigative Journalism trains journalists on database journalism, advanced internet research, and business document analysis. Conferences such as the Dataharvest or the Global Investigative Journalism Conference also offer the opportunity for journalists to improve their skills and build capacity. However training and conferences such as these can be expensive and many investigative reporters especially freelancers cannot afford to attend without additional funding. To truly support networks of investigative journalists then providing funding or opportunities to access these types of trainings will be important. One option would be to create virtual training courses in key skills that the network could access for free or at a reduced rate.

- **Building Trust:** As corruption networks grow increasingly complex anti-corruption actors are progressively understanding that it takes a network to fight a network. The increased use and importance of data for investigating corruption is opening the door for journalists and other stakeholders to work together as an Open Data Community. Interaction and exchange are the foundation to a strong network so creating opportunities for journalists and these other groups to meet is important. International conferences (such as the Dataharvest conference and the International Open Data Conference) and local meet-ups (such as Hacks/Hackers) are great examples of how journalists and others in the data community are connecting and collaborating in person to support their individual work.

- **Safety:** To combat digital threats there are many organisations who specialise in digital security and privacy programmes such as Tactical Tech (who work with, journalists, activists and others to build their digital security skills) or the Centre for Investigative Journalism who run courses on this topic, the Centre has also published a handbook and will soon release an instructional video on these issues. There are also many secure online platforms where journalists can work such as spider oak, encryption tools for calls and messages such as Signal, and secure leaks platforms for whistle-blowers like secure drop by the Guardian. The Digital Security Guide from the Committee to Protect Journalists is a useful resource, but more accessible tech tools, trainings, and resources to help independent journalists manage their own security are still needed. Once again solo reporters are often at a disadvantage compared to their peers who work in newsrooms due to different levels of infrastructure and investment regarding digital security. To create a sustainable network of journalists who investigate corruption safety issues must be taken seriously. Risk assessments on security threats need to be considered when planning an investigation, technical skills and knowledge need to be shared throughout the network, and adequate costs to cover any safety requirements need to be built into the costs of the investigation. There is also a need to develop these skills more widely to oppose the increases in state surveillance since the digital security of sources is at least as important as that of the journalist. Since pretty much anyone can find themselves in a situation where they wish to blow the whistle or leak evidence of corruption, source protection in the 21st Century requires

the solutions to maintaining digital security and opposing surveillance powers to be envisioned on a universal scale.

- **Funding:** Funding for crossborder investigative journalism is the biggest challenge to creating a sustainable network. Funding to pay journalists while they conduct the investigation is the most basic requirement however to truly support investigative journalism then funding also needs to take into account other needs such accessing information, training and digital security etc. With a fragmented media landscape in Europe (there are no truly "European" media outlets) sustainability also requires journalists to sell their story to local media to cover some of the costs. However engaging local audiences can be difficult as they sometimes either do not understand, or are uninterested, in a European story. European investigations such as farmsubsidies.org and the Migrant Files were successful due to their ability to take a European story and marry it with local perspectives. Sustainable cross border investigations will require journalists to make those regional and local links.

When building a network to investigate corruption incorporating other stakeholders beyond journalists can bring additional benefits and this could be done in a variety of ways.

Journalists and NGOs: informal Networks

To advance both causes investigative journalists and civil society could help each other achieve their aims by sharing their expertise, individual skill sets and investigative tools. This informal way of working together can help to sidestep the issue of editorial independence as the two groups don't work on particular cases or investigations together.

Civil society organisations can help to equip journalists with public interest information that can assist in building professional, fact-based, objective and professional journalism. They can also help provide the public with better and more substantial information on issues of public interest as a basis for making informed decisions.

On the other hand journalists can help train civil society actors on how to conduct their own investigations. This is particularly relevant on the data side as civil society organisations are increasingly becoming more technologically friendly and are looking to innovate and explore media and Web 2.0 engagement beyond their traditional roles to aid their advocacy efforts.

Transparency International has been supporting and sharing information with investigative journalists in many forms across the EU and globally for a number of years, including by:

- Sponsoring the One World Media Corruption Reporting Award
- Strengthening collaboration between anti-corruption experts and in particular, young journalists via the IACC

Throughout the life of the European Corruption Observatory project there have been encouraging signs of increased collaboration on a more informal basis at the European level.

Examples of this include:

- Through our partnership with Journalism Fund Transparency International (TI) attended a number of Dataharvest conferences. This collaboration expanded beyond the European Corruption Observatory Project and other TI EU staff both attended and presented their work at the different events, sharing their knowledge and skills on a variety of topics with a wider audience and expanding their networks.

- Through the different workshops of the European Corruption Observatory Project TI EU built relationships with various investigative and data journalists. Through this network other members of the TI EU team and other civil society stakeholders have had increased access to journalists. In some cases providing them with the opportunity to invite experts to provide training on different corruption related topics at various events such as on anti-money laundering and beneficial ownership.

- This informal network of investigative and data journalists created via the project has also been a source of expertise to various members of TI including TI Chapters. For instance TI EU used these connections to organise and plan a hackathon around the Panama Papers.

- On the other side journalists have increasingly approached TI looking for information while investigating stories or to explore project proposal ideas through the connections made via the project and its workshops.

This informal collaboration style is the probably the easiest, cheapest and most flexible format for sustaining any ongoing network. This type of network ensures that the lines of communication are kept open which can help build trust while the sharing of skills and expertise helps to build capacity within the network to undertake investigations. Maintaining these ties between the stakeholders will hopefully lead to other types of enhanced collaboration in the future.

Journalists and NGOs: advanced collaboration with no editorial input

There are forms of more formal cooperation between civil society and investigative journalists that allow the media to retain editorial independence. Recognising that investigations can help advance the advocacy needs of civil society organisations it is possible to fund investigative journalism via a third party which can then act as a "firewall" between the other two parties.

One example of this was a pilot project run by Journalismfund.eu - Connecting Continents. This project offered working grants for mixed teams of African and European Journalists to investigate financial governance in Africa. This cross border project was launched in cooperation with Oxfam Novib, which provided money for the grants.

Journalismfund.eu operated as a firewall between the funder and the journalists, making sure that there was a strict division between where the money came from and where it went to safeguard the independence of participating journalists and media. This ensures that the working grants are independent from commercial or political interests.

This type of collaboration can be beneficial to both parties as it funds investigative journalism and provides cases to support advocacy work.

Consortiums

As both investigative journalism and civil society adapt to the changes going on around them the need for ever greater cooperation between these two actors is clear. Beyond the sharing of knowledge and skills, beyond the funding of independent investigations there is an opportunity for an enhanced form of collaboration. Civil society and investigative journalists could work together to define themes and topics of interest for investigative stories.

Transparency International is currently exploring this method of heightened cooperation via a project with a global anti-corruption consortium made up of Transparency International, its national Chapters, and the Organised Crime and Corruption Reporting Project (OCCRP) and its networks. The aim of the project is simple: to expose the corrupt elite, make sure they are punished and to push the hard reforms to shut down the systems used to steal and avoid justice.

There are a number of key conditions that need to be met to ensure that this type of network and collaboration can work effectively:

- The most important condition is to maintain independence. Although there will be both structural and systematic cooperation throughout the project it will be necessary to ensure the working independence of both TI and OCCRP

- Not all information will be shared as this could potentially endanger both sources and stakeholders. Civil society does not have the same legal protection provided to journalists.

- Transparency will also be key in this relationship to help build trust between the different parties.

Certainly there are challenges to this new type of collaboration. It will be difficult to build trust and change attitudes right away. As this is the beginning of such a partnership it will be important to set ground rules that can be adapted on a case by case basis. The partners in this project have proven adept at doing work that has a real impact in their respective fields and the expectation is that stories or cases produced through this collaboration will yield tangible results. If this advanced form of collaboration is successful it will hopefully lay the groundwork for future opportunities in this area and will encourage other actors to overcome the barriers to collaboration.