



Connection Between the Fight Against Corruption and Fight Against COVID-19

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At the moment, almost all countries face a global health crisis with the rapid spread of the coronavirus pandemic. Unfortunately, also during times of social and economic stress and low public trust like these, is when opportunities for corruption arise and when corruption manifests itself the most. These uncertain times provide the environment from which corrupt actors can benefit.

Healthcare sector is one where corruption exposure could cause a significant deal of damage even under ordinary circumstances. Being under the spotlight as a result of the pandemic, the sector itself and the relevant supply chains in particular, become even more susceptible and vulnerable to potential risks of corruption that could result in deprivation of people of the necessary health care, by affecting the availability and quality of health services and goods. Not only in the healthcare sector, more and more stories and news of fraudulent activities of entities and real persons in the private sector come to light every day. For this reason, identifying and having open discussions about these risks in advance can contribute to our response to this crisis and provide healthcare to those who need it most, as the fight against corruption is closely connected to fight against coronavirus.

In this regard, both governments and the private sector have a great part in combatting the potential risks and possible corrupt acts in order to respond to this crisis and prevent major losses best as they can. They must work towards preventing unethical profiteering, and the private sector should act more prudently in its business activities rather than putting profit before public health.

To begin with, governments should act with great transparency to avoid giving way to corrupt acts during the procurement of medical supplies and promote open and transparent contracting, prevent price gouging of medical supplies, and share information about all relevant processes. At a time where a highly increased number of patients are seeking medical care, many countries are expected to face (or already are facing) shortages in testing and treatment options. With this natural increase in demand for medicines and other equipment, the procurement of medicines, equipment and supplies such as face masks, rooms, ventilators and even medical staff, becomes a highly vulnerable area for corruption. Governments should look out for suppliers who might engage in corrupt acts such as signaling benefits or demanding higher prices knowing that governments are in dire need of supplies. In this regard, the governments' first priority should be having a high level of openness and transparency in the associated contracting processes. Particularly, governments should avoid any use of anonymous companies to ensure that medical and financial resources are used



without giving way to any corrupt acts. Second, governments should have strong anti-corruption policies and include anti-corruption clauses in their contracts. With these safeguards, actors would not be able to engage in corrupt acts such as charging governments unreasonable prices.

Another vulnerable area is the investment in research and development of drugs and vaccination against coronavirus by governments, which should also consist of transparent and collaborative processes. In order to achieve this transparency, the funds provided by the government should be monitored and tracked closely, and clinical study results could be disclosed or published more often.

In terms of the private sector, the crisis of COVID-19 has already impacted the private sector and almost all business operations, both in procurement lines and staffing resources. In times like these, companies should also take precautions and operate in line with an effective plan, in order to avoid getting caught up in corrupt practices. In parallel with the level of transparency the governments are required to possess, misinformation and false news can also result in corrupt actors to benefit from panic and fear, in addition to rendering the precautions taken against the pandemic ineffective. To provide examples, there is an increased amount of news circulating about people being scammed into buying protective equipment or other products and supplies with inflated or gauged prices. In an era where online shopping has become one of the most frequent used methods of shopping, e-commerce websites should actively look out for these scams and take action for inflated listings.

For this reason, to protect themselves against these opportunistic third parties, companies should closely monitor and assess any updates, orders and regulations issued by the government and act accordingly, by double checking their sources. Moreover, companies should make their research and work diligently with the available information at hand in order to evaluate the possible implications that COVID-19 may have on their business operations, as such foresight can help identify and mitigate business risks including those related to corruption the company may face in the future, leading to a more successful and less damaging outcome.

Another important issue is to control and monitor company employees, since, at a time where they could be required to make quick decisions and face many more obstacles and difficulties, panic and incoordination, on top of remote working environment, could result in higher risks of unwanted consequences. In order to prevent or mitigate these risks, the first step for companies would be to refresh and revise their existing plans and policies relating to corruption as necessary, for their employees engaging with vendors, customers and especially regulators and other governmental authorities. Thereafter, companies should communicate these plans and policies to their employees by repeating their warnings relating to sensitive operations and business activities and openly addressing corruption risks. Most importantly,



companies should build trust by promising open communication lines, for instance by informing their employees that they should notify senior management or the relevant business line when they are required to complete a task they are uncomfortable with. By keeping the relevant plans and policies updated and continuous communication with their employees throughout the pandemic, companies could significantly lower the amount of potential risks that could arise in connection with corrupt acts.

In consequence, both the public sector and private sector must do their share in their fight against corruption, for many reasons all of which result in a significant amount of contribution in the fight against coronavirus.

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