

PNG, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu score 27, 42 and 43, respectively. These results have been largely stagnant. Solomon Islands and Vanuatu score the same as they did when they were first included in the CPI in 2016 and 2017. PNG's score has averaged 27 since 2012. These results put Solomon Islands and Vanuatu in the top 50% of countries worldwide, but PNG in the bottom 20%.

Despite these low and stagnant scores, some bright spots exist where these countries have made substantial gains in building integrity.

PNG, after decades of tireless efforts from civil society groups, celebrated a victory in 2020 when legislation was **passed** to establish an Independent Anti-Corruption Commission. In Solomon Islands, the country **appointed** its first ever Director General to the national Anti-Corruption Commission. The priority now is recruiting and training staff to get the commission functioning. Vanuatu has held key high-profile political figures to account in the justice system with corruption charges.

The message from the 2020 CPI is that these successes will need to be sustained and supported for years to come before perceptions of corruption begin to improve.

At the regional level, Tonga joined the list of 13 other Pacific countries to have **acceded** to the United Nations Convention Against Corruption (UNCAC), the only legally binding universal anti-corruption instrument. Eleven Pacific leaders adopted the Teieniwa Vision against corruption in early 2020. However, wider endorsement amongst all the Pacific Islands Forum leaders is required for greater accountability and support to turn this vision into action.

Corruption during the COVID-19 response

2020 was a unique year in the Pacific because of the COVID-19 pandemic and two category five cyclones.

Governments took significant measures to respond to the pandemic in 2020. However, there was limited transparency and accountability in their responses. In Solomon Islands, there were allegations of **diversion** of emergency response funds by public servants, and in PNG, alleged **procurement** irregularities. Proper procurement process is important to avoid bribery, kickbacks and the misawarding of contracts. However, without adequate access to information, and sound oversight mechanisms, it is difficult to verify or disprove these claims.

Consequently, civil society actors and allies across all three Pacific countries in the index spent much of 2020 calling upon their governments to improve transparency and accountability in their responses to COVID-19. For example, in PNG, civil society demanded an audit of emergency funds and procurement.

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However, civil society engagement has not always been welcome in all Pacific countries. Press freedom has also been a long-running concern. Under its state of emergency declared earlier in the year, Vanuatu ruled that media outlets could only publish stories about COVID-19 if they received official authorisation.

Access to information as well as space and support to facilitate meaningful civil society engagement needs to be provided for key reforms and response measures to have an impact. Key transparency and accountability mechanisms need to be strengthened and oversight institutions need to be made fully functional. This will require greater funding and support, and greater political will.

Drawing on experts and business leaders' assessments of corruption in a country, the CPI can provide a strong evidence base for Pacific governments and civil society to work together in fulfilling their national anti-corruption commitments.

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