INTRODUCTION

Ever since the first Transparency International ‘Sourcebook’ (1996), the concept of the ‘national integrity system’ (NIS) has become central to civil society and expert efforts to assess and strengthen anti-corruption capacity worldwide.

Building on early and parallel research into ethics regimes, ethics infrastructure and horizontal accountability, TI’s approach has now seen integrity system studies or assessments, of various kinds, undertaken in over 100 countries. The quality of integrity systems is now also being examined in international institutions such as the European Union, and transnational financial systems like those linking the G20.

This international workshop was convened by the Transparency International Secretariat, TI Australia and Griffith University to review achievements and challenges, strengths and weaknesses in the NIS approach. The aim was to examine opportunities for future development of the approach, its relationship with other TI anti-corruption tools and assessments, and ways of strengthening the contribution of the approach to continual improvement and reform.

A call for papers was distributed widely through TI and academic networks in March 2014, to TI chapters and researchers who had led or worked on a national integrity system (NIS) or other integrity assessment project.

Responses from 24 countries identified 14 important issues for discussion about the NIS approach, ranging from measurement of reform impacts flowing from NIS assessments; to fundamental issues of methodology, design, adaptiveness and flexibility; relationships with other integrity system assessment tools; and project governance and advocacy.

THE WORKSHOP

On 17-18 June 2014, a group 60 experts and anti-corruption advocates assembled at Griffith University in Brisbane – the site of the 2014 G20 Summit – to discuss many of these issues. They included TI representatives and key researchers from 14 countries (Australia, Bangladesh, Canada, Cambodia, Germany, Kenya, Myanmar, New Zealand, Poland, Russia, Sri Lanka, United Kingdom, United States and Vietnam).

Professor Nikos Passas, Northeastern University (USA) discusses criteria for success on day 2 of the workshop.
Introductory sessions reviewed the history and impacts to date of the NIS approach, and briefed participants on the current TI NIS ‘toolkit’. In his opening address, Nikos Passas of Northeastern University (USA) and the International Anti-Corruption Academy (Vienna) identified key features for inclusion or strengthening in governance reform and capacity-building approaches, including:

- **Good diagnostics of risk and response**
- **Stronger focus on substantive objectives** (anti-corruption outcomes over outputs, regulation and institutions)
- **Conduciveness to strategy, integrated policy-making and actionability**
- **Multi-dimensionality**
- **Generalizability/comparability**
- **Forward-looking**
- **Transparency & easiness to understand.**

Adopting these as guiding criteria for development of the NIS approach, workshop papers (day 1) and group discussions (day 2) focused on issues across three main areas.

1) **INTRODUCING GREATER FLEXIBILITY**

Responses leading to the workshop, and several key papers and presentations, emphasised a need for the NIS approach to evolve so as to provide greater flexibility and adaptability to the diversity of integrity systems and the societies they serve – while continuing to provide a common structure and support for analysis.

Professor Paul Heywood (University of Nottingham) argued for a more reflexive approach for conceptual and theoretical, as well as practical reasons. Concrete examples of where the NIS ‘pillar’ approach had been, or could be usefully adapted were provided alike from industrialised countries (Suzanne Snively and Daniel King, TI New Zealand) and less industrialised countries (Elizabeth Johnson, NIS Project Director, TI Cambodia).

A **first recommendation** from the workshop involved adaptation of the toolkit to allow greater flexibility in **choice of the ‘units of analysis’** at the heart of an NIS assessment. This included:

- Clearer ability to identify new or different institutional ‘pillars’, where institutions remained the primary unit of analysis; and
- Extension for identification and assessment of whichever key anti-corruption ‘actors’, ‘functions’ and/or ‘processes’ are relevant in a given context.

It was noted that this greater flexibility in the choice of the main units of analysis was a feature of some more recent assessment approaches – including the Local Integrity System (LIS) approach piloted in countries including Kenya (presented by Ambasa Elijah of TI Kenya).

A **second recommendation** was to strengthen assessment of the **relationships between integrity actors/pillars** as units of analysis in their own right (whether primary or secondary).

Currently, while questions in the toolkit did test the nature and health of some relationships between pillars, it did not generate conclusions on the health of system relationships as a whole, or whether the system was performing effectively ‘as a system’ or network.

Metaphors other than fixed structures (e.g. the ‘Greek temple pillars’) were noted, including the ‘bird’s nest’. Many participants felt a dynamic metaphor would be most useful, even if the primary units of analysis remained institutional (e.g. ‘wheels’ or ‘cogs’ rather than static pillars).

A **third recommendation** was for **greater flexibility** by allowing for **different levels of assessment toolkit, depending on context and need** in a country or system.

The value of this was demonstrated by many presentations, including David Allan (Spectrum, Myanmar) on corruption ‘heat mapping’ as a precursor to a possible NIS assessment.
In addition, where an NIS had previously been fully assessed, some countries were trialling a streamlined NIS ‘update’ methodology for which the entire toolkit was not required.

Discussion focused on the value of:

- Conducting a context & needs analysis prior to commencing an NIS assessment, to help shape the priorities and objectives of the NIS, identify the ‘units of analysis’, and determine what level of assessment was needed;
- Having different level/length toolkits available (e.g. light, medium, intensive) to meet different needs in different contexts – using criteria including: political context, level of democratisation, economic development, whether a post-conflict society, whether a post-colonial society, and nature of legal tradition (common law, civil, traditional, etc).

2) STRENGTHENING RIGOUR & UTILITY

Within the existing toolkit approach, four steps were identified for strengthening both the rigour or quality, and the utility of NIS assessments.

First, some feedback and papers demonstrated scope for revising the existing toolkit to include new questions on strategic issues going to the heart of the performance and effectiveness of integrity institutions, in addition to the existing toolkit questions. Priority areas included:

- Risks of anti-corruption policies being themselves ‘corrupted’ to serve political or other purposes besides anti-corruption, and compatibility with human rights standards (Grzegorz Makowski, Collegium Civitas & Stefan Batory Foundation, Poland);
- Research to establish and measure levels and locations of ‘political will’ as a direct part of the assessment (in addition, as currently, to the development of NIS advocacy and implementation plans).

Second, opportunity was identified for refining questions and scoring methods to increase clarity and consistency in assessment of specific issues – including a detailed presentation by Professors Salahuddin Aminuzzaman and Sumaiya Khair of University of Dhaka and TI Bangladesh.

Third, discussion about research methods and accessing credible data resulted in recommendations for greater alignment, where useful, between the NIS toolkit and other existing sources of data, including:

- Publicly available official data;
- Other research-based international indices on specific issues relevant to NIS questions or pillars (e.g. Open Budget Index);
- Other TI research information and tools (e.g. Global Corruption Barometer);
- Use of large-scale systematic surveys e.g. of organisational culture for evidence of broad trends or major issues, over reliance on small numbers of select interviews.

As an example, A J Brown & Mark Bruerton (Griffith University & TI Australia) presented on use of available official data to monitor integrity agency capacity and resources, over time.

Professors Sumaiya Khair & Salahuddin Aminuzzaman (TI Bangladesh) present on NIS indicators and scoring

Fourth, analysis by Dr Finn Heinrich, Director of Research in the TI Secretariat, demonstrated the untapped potential of NIS assessments as a diagnostic tool for identifying or confirming strategic priorities for research and advocacy by the collective TI movement.

Using scoring from 34 NIS assessments, the analysis identified a number of patterns revealing common strengths and weaknesses between countries. The approach shows considerable potential for making greater use of NIS assessments collectively, without attempting to compare or rate countries.
3) SOPHISTICATION OF THE N.I.S. APPROACH

The workshop also noted the various developments under way to extend and deepen the NIS approach, including the Business Integrity Country Assessment and Local Integrity System tools mentioned.

The issue this raised, however, was how to maintain the value of the NIS approach as a holistic and integrated assessment, rather than having a proliferation of assessment tools dealing with separate parts or sectors of the NIS. The need for a ‘modular’ approach was discussed, in which the new tools could be used either to replace or amplify sections of the NIS methodology, or as stand-alone tools.

Pre-workshop consultation also identified many other practical issues for further discussion in charting the future of the approach – including funding, project management and governance, choice of research teams, researcher credibility and the independence of research teams from funders and National Chapters.

Finally, a special session on extending the integrity systems approach examined ways in which similar principles could be adapted to assess quality of governance across wider, international sectors including carbon integrity systems (Dr Rowena Maguire, Queensland University of Technology), civilian protection systems (Michael Smith AO, Adjunct Professor, Griffith University) and financial integrity systems (Professor Charles Sampford).

NEXT STEPS

Where suitable, a range of papers from the workshop are being prepared for publication including as a proposed special issue of the international journal, Crime Law & Social Change.

Group discussion produced concrete recommendations for developing the NIS approach, as detailed in this report. The workshop also succeeded in identifying a number of important next steps for the approach, to be led by the TI Secretariat Research Department:

1) Establishment of an NIS reference group from interested national chapters (NCs), academia and beyond;

2) An in-depth review of the NIS toolkit and training to clarify issues/questions, offer more guidance where needed, encourage more adaptation to country context, and streamline the approach;

3) Recommendations to NCs and Regional Departments for needs assessments to be undertaken before deciding on an NIS;

4) In-depth impact review of completed NIS projects to feed into making the approach more impact-oriented by providing a fit-for-purpose impact monitoring framework;

5) A concept note on how to use existing NIS reports for cross-country analysis and policy-oriented evidence outputs;

6) Development of the Business Integrity Country Assessment tool to ensure complementarity and “match” with NIS;

7) Review and support for roll-out of the Local Integrity System Assessment tool;

8) Promotion of the integrity system approach with institutions beyond the national/local.

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http://www.griffith.edu.au/conference/corruption-integrity-systems-g20