The Impact of Civil Society Organizations on Combating Corruption in Southeast Europe

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Acknowledgements

Abstract

Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) play a significant role in the modern society and can trigger processes of socioeconomic change in many fields, including countering corruption. Still, on the international level there is a severe lack of frameworks that would allow to uniformly assess the impact of intrastate actors, such as these organizations, on the changes in the society at large. The primary research goal of this work is to study how CSOs in Southeast European countries measure the impact of their anti-corruption work and to identify the possible convergence points of their frameworks. To that end, we have surveyed, through semi-guided interviews and comprehensive questionnaires, representatives of 10 civil society organizations working in the field. Moreover, the study has examined the cross-cutting aspects of the problem, such as the relationship between CSOs and the United Nations, horizontal cooperation between CSOs and the value these organizations attribute to the development goals enshrined in the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda.

Keywords: Civil Society Organizations, Corruption, Southeast Europe, Impact, Sustainable Development Goals, Assessment Frameworks, United Nations, Horizontal Cooperation

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List of Abbreviations

Civil Society Organization   CSO

Sustainable Development Goals   SDG

United Nations Convention against Corruption   UNCAC

United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime   UNODC

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Introduction

Corruption is one of the key challenges in modern-day international development. Leading to the undermining of democratic institutions and the principles of good governance as well as slowing down incentives that drive economic growth (Buckland 2007, 8), corruption is a cross-cutting impediment to the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Only by way of cooperation between state entities and actors outside of the government is it possible to combat these problems. The notion of civic participation is rooted in the normative assumption that the efficiency of any economic, management, and other social system as well as the legitimacy of democratic political systems depends on the involvement and participation of the public and does not simply derive from the output dispensed by the system (Matonyte 2011, 7). CSOs can be powerful actors in investigating, disclosing and fighting corruption. The United Nations Convention against Corruption (UNCAC), a fundamental instrument guiding the anti-corruption activities carried out by the United Nations and the Member States thereof, stipulates, in Article 13, that the Member States should "promote the active participation of individuals and groups outside the public sector, such as civil society, non-governmental organizations and community-based organizations, in the prevention of and the fight against corruption" (United Nations 2004, 14). Therefore, one of the most important elements that should be incorporated in any national anti-corruption strategy is the mechanism that would allow for the civil society to provide input for the government in countering corruption.

In doing this, it is important to ensure that available resources are used most efficiently and effectively to create a strong anti-corruption national framework with inclusion of government actors, civil society and private sector together. In this regard, primary importance is attached to successful development and advancement of campaigns or projects which, in turn, relies heavily upon the clear reflection of past achievements and failures of all actors. This is particularly important for CSOs: they, being more agile and dynamic than many other actors of the national anti-corruption landscape, can improve the goal-setting, methods and reporting by evaluating their own accomplishments in a consistent manner. The consideration of their work's impact can result in the elaboration of new techniques of functioning and adoption of new best practices. Therefore, the importance of impact measurement cannot be understated for the daily work of CSOs. With this study we intend to gain a broader understanding how CSOs fighting against

corruption measure their impact, as well as to provide practical know-how and best practices to organizations that look for inspiration in this area.

Furthermore, active impact measurement of CSOs working on the ground can also prove beneficial for the work of international organizations or institutions combating corruption, such as the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC). When CSOs are more aware of their strengths, as well as shortcomings and needs, institutions assisting them can design better supporting tools. This will increase the cumulative effect of the anti-corruption activities at the national and international levels. As a result, strong and consistent self-assessment frameworks will contribute to achieving the Sustainable Development Goal 16: Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions, as well as further economic growth and public accountability, thus positively impacting upon other indicators pertaining to the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda.

In order to research the impact assessment frameworks in place, we conducted a qualitative empirical study among CSOs in Southeast Europe. We explored their work practices, successes and failures, the factors that hinder their effectiveness as well as the effects all aforementioned factors carry for the assessment frameworks the organizations use. This paper comprises our findings on impact measurement of CSOs in Southeast Europe working in the area of anti-corruption. The paper is structured as follows: the next section discusses the conceptual framework and literature used in our work and outlines the definitions that we applied. The third section presents the results of the empirical study obtained through homepage analysis, questionnaires and conducting interviews. Based on these results we sketch the current situation regarding impact measurement of Southeast European CSOs in the area of anti-corruption and recommend best practices that are set out in the fourth section. Finally, we summarize the results of our research and come to conclusions that, while tailored to the region examined, could be applicable to the assessment frameworks of CSOs in the field of anti-corruption and beyond working in other parts of the world.

Theoretical Background

Conceptual Framework

For the sake of a coherent theoretical framework, it is crucial to conceptualize some of the key notions that will be used in our study. First of these is the term "civil society organization". CSOs can be defined by their function, purpose of existence, theoretical origin, membership, as well as by their linkage to the rest of the society and their participation in democratic governance. To adequately represent this variety, we will, while using the concept of CSO in our work, refer to an organization forming part of the civil society, as defined by the World Bank (World Bank, 2013):

"The term 'civil society' to refer to the wide array of non-governmental and not-for-profit organizations that have a presence in public life, expressing the interests and values of their members or others, based on ethical, cultural, political, scientific, religious or philanthropic considerations. Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) therefore refer to a wide of array of organizations: community groups, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), labour unions, indigenous groups, charitable organizations, faith-based organizations, professional associations, and foundations"

Another important notion to be developed before conducting the empirical research is the general definition of the impact of an anti-corruption CSO. While several techniques, such as the Poverty and Social Impact Analysis employed by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), allow for civil society participation, we have not encountered any attempts at conceptualizing the notion of the impact of an anti-corruption CSO.

Therefore, the lack of a developed body of research upon the specific topic of measuring impacts of anti-corruption CSOs allows us to propose a definition of impact that would be relevant to our study. It is our view that the best approach to this problem is outlining aspects of the work of a CSO, for which we can evaluate specific silos of activities. Possible categories could be the outreach capability of a CSO to other members of civil society or the level of awareness among general public of a given CSO and, more generally, the topic of corruption. For the purposes of the present study, we define "impact" as a result of a long-term and comprehensive activity (including targeted projects and programmes)that has sought to attain certain anti-corruption goals (such as reduction of petty corruption, adoption of stricter regulations and their enforcement, changes in the societal behaviour patterns) and that has had a direct effect on the society or on a certain sector thereof. Under the "assessment of the impact" we understand the deliberate and meaningful analysis of the eventual outcome not only in a descriptive way, but in a manner that seeks to explain the causal relationship between the performed activity and the outcome itself.

However, according to our presumptions, it is most likely that the aspects outlined in our research questions, as well as certain further results of our empirical research may have a significant effect over the definition of "impact" proposed above.

Last but not the least, it is important to discuss the concept of *corruption* itself. Perhaps intentionally, but the UNCAC does not contain any clear-cut definition on corruption. The notion of corruption presupposes a broad range of improper or regularly unlawful activities that involves misconduct or misuse of power in exchange for certain personal benefit. Its form and substance vary from case to case. It can be so-called grand corruption that refers to the level of the stakeholders - typically high-ranked government officials - or the material value of the subject of corruption. In case of petty corruption usually other officials, doctors, teachers, business representatives are involved at a lower level. Having regard to this broad and frustratingly intangible nature of the phenomenon of corruption, in this present paper we further refer to corruption as an unlawful act - regardless of its value - that involves abuse of power for any type of private gain.

Literature review

We considered our research topic especially engrossing due to its interdisciplinary demands, where expertise and sources with legal, economic, sociological and political nature are essential to provide a thorough picture at the end. Regarding the literature related to countering the corruption phenomenon, there is plenty of material available to the researchers. Numerous government entities, agencies, international organizations, national NGOs and civil society stakeholders are active in the field of anti-corruption, producing a significant amount of material. This made providing the research context for the study carried out by our group somewhat easier compared to those that are dealing with under-researched topics. Nevertheless, since the research project relies mostly on empirical sources such as interviews and data analysis, the academic literature serves only as a secondary source in this regard. Nevertheless, it was our intention to analyze a broad set of authors and to provide a comprehensive overview on some of the most relevant resources. While processing the relevant literature we also noticed that many of the articles focus on case studies or historical developments in particular countries or regions. These countries mostly belong to low or lower middle income economies (Obaidy, 2017; Setiyono & McLeod, 2010).

Among these resources (e.g. Ackerman, 2013; Bertot, Jaeger & Grimes, 2010), some highlight the specific means of combating anti-corruption such as adjusting the existing legal environment, improving accountability and efficiency of the judicial system and law enforcement bodies, promoting transparency in multiple levels of public administration and business or establishing a properly functioning e-government. Several other materials (e.g. Gutterman, 2014; Carr & Outhwaite, 2011) focus on the civil society actors themselves, describing the most common

features and especially defects of the CSOs active in the field of anti-corruption. These can be used to better understand why certain CSOs (particularly those that have solid foundations and are more embedded in societies) achieve more progress than others. While practically all conclude that corruption is a worldwide phenomenon, there are some truly instrumental writings and analyses that shed light on the corrupt practices and customs in particular countries that were under the scope of our investigation (e.g. Buckland, 2007).

These different types of sources focused on various aspects of corruption, therefore enabled us to lay down the foundations of our research regarding terminology, definitions and civil society engagement indicators. It also made it possible to gain a direct knowledge on the situation regarding corruption in certain countries. Also, these materials were useful sources to understand the role of the CSOs, academia and other actors in the field of our project.

As we stated above, while many aspects of the multifaceted problem of corruption have been covered in a multitude of studies published by various stakeholders, particular questions are left out of the majority of these works. The examples of such issues include the self-assessment frameworks of anti-corruption CSOs and cooperation between CSOs and the United Nations within the framework provided by the UNCAC. These topics, albeit bearing extreme relevance for the comprehensive image of anti-corruption efforts worldwide, have largely escaped the attention of academia.

Research Design

<u>Methodology</u>

The main assessment framework that our research will rely on and, possibly, supplement, is the set of Global Indicators for the SDGs and targets of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. However, the parts of the framework related to countering corruption[1] omit the important role of the agency that different actors on the national and international level have upon the change of these indicators reflecting the situation in the country at large. That means that the specific results of the anti-corruption activities of the civil society are largely unaccounted for in the framework of the 2030 Agenda.

Therefore, we seek to study the differences and similarities in the approaches of different anti-corruption CSOs in assessing the efficiency of their activities with the aim of synthesizing a common framework to determine what impact a given CSO has on countering corruption in a respective country/region. Narrowing the area to Southeast Europe in this case yields the advantage that the states in which the CSOs operate are more alike as they share certain important political, socioeconomic and historical characteristics. Therefore, we assumed that the CSOs in these countries are confronted with similar challenges, which should increase the descriptive power of the comparison and make it less vulnerable to uncontrolled variables. In the course of the interviews we were seeking to retrieve information about the goals and objectives set and attained by the organizations, as well as on the peculiarities of their assessment frameworks.

While it was hardly possible to predict the exact span of the factors and aspects impacting the mentioned assessments before conducting the empirical part of our research, we concluded that certain important aspects related to priority-setting and capacity-building may have an important effect on the results. Among these we singled out the presence of the SDG framework in the priority-setting mechanism of CSOs, the co-operation of a given CSO with the UNODC (within the UNCAC network or otherwise), and the interactions between different CSOs, be it in information-sharing, capacity-building or exchange of good practices.

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[1] Namely, target 16.5 ("Substantially reduce corruption and bribery in all their forms") and the corresponding indicators 16.5.1 ("Proportion of persons who had at least one contact with a public official and who paid a bribe to a public official, or were asked for a bribe by those public officials, during the previous 12 months") and 16.5.2 ("Proportion of businesses that had at least one contact with a public official and that paid a bribe to a public official, or were asked for a bribe by those public officials during the previous 12 months").

We explored our research question qualitatively using interviews with representatives of CSOs and supplemented our results with questionnaires. Moreover, we compared the internet presence of all organizations we reached out to in order to receive a broader impression of anti-corruption activities of the civil society in Southeast Europe.

Due to accessibility and internal validity issues we have limited our research to eight countries and one territory in Southeast Europe, namely Croatia, Albania, Serbia, Bosnia & Herzegovina, Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia[2], Moldova, Romania, Slovenia and Kosovo[3]. These countries are geographically close to each other and are strongly intermingled historically. Hence, their institutions (and, therefore, issues related to governance, economy and social aspects - such as corruption, which builds upon all three of them) bear more resemblance to one another, with CSOs facing similar challenges. This increased the internal validity of our research and made the answers in the interviews comparatively stronger. Moreover, our UN partner organization UNODC had built strong relations with CSOs in this area. This made the accessibility and communication with representatives more feasible.

With support of our UN mentors we reached out to 42 civil society organizations in these countries and territories. To find this sample of CSOs we mapped suitable organizations in each country and territory(including in the mapping the information on their online appearances and activity in the media sphere), with our findings augmented by contacts UNODC has from its cooperation and training with civil society. The initial contact was made by UNODC and we carried on the correspondence if the organization responded.

Due to research-related limitations, this proved to be the most feasible strategy to find suitable interview partners for us. However, it had the drawback of enabling us to contact only organizations that had web appearance or were involved in international cooperation, which is the case for larger, more institutionalized organizations. Recently formed and less formalized grassroot organizations, which mostly act on the community-level, were out of reach. However, we assume that these organizations are less likely to have implemented a strong reporting or impact assessment system (the grounds for such assumption are discussed in the Homepage Analysis section). Therefore, they are less relevant for answering our research question on how impact is being measured.

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[2] All references to the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia in the present document should be understood in the context of the UN Security Council Resolution 817 par.2.

[3] All references to Kosovo in the present publication should be understood to be in the context of Security Council resolution 1244 (1999). This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSC Resolution 1244 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence.

We developed a questionnaire that was sent out to all participating organizations and that was used to structure the interviews we conducted with representatives of CSOs. The questionnaire can be found in the appendix. On the one hand, the questionnaire addresses quantitative details of the organizations, their legal form, number of staff or the specifics of anti-corruption campaigns they are currently running. On the other hand, we asked CSOs to elaborate on their perceived role in society, the main objectives and how they are addressed. Most importantly, it contains questions on how the organizations assess their successes and how they interact with one another and with UN counterparts. To put our findings in the interviews and questionnaires in a broader context, we analyzed the homepages of all organizations we reached out to. We determined their location, establishing year, and main focus as well as specific objectives, tasks and number of campaigns reported.

Research Questions

Our research, first and foremost, seeks to empirically establish the presence of self-assessment frameworks concerning the work of CSOs in the field of anti-corruption in Southeast Europe (or the lack thereof). Therefore, our primary research question was formulated as follows:

How is the impact of CSOs in the field of anti-corruption being measured in Southeast Europe?

To ensure that we also study the value that said organizations attribute to other cross-cutting aspects, such as the SDG framework, cooperation between the CSO and the UN and the interactions between similar CSOs for the purposes of information-sharing, capacity-building and exchange of good practices, we have formulated the following sub-questions:

How do CSOs in the field of anti-corruption in Southeast Europe contribute to achieving SDGs?

How does cooperation with the UN in the field of anti-corruption impact results of the work of the CSOs and the perception of said results by the CSOs?

Which effect does cooperation with other anti-corruption non-governmental actors have for the activities of a CSO and for the assessment of its successes and shortcomings? What are the most successful ways of such cooperation?

Results of Empirical Research

The result section of the paper is divided into two main parts. The first outlines the broad characteristics of the anti-corruption civil society actors in Southeast Europe that we determined through the analysis of the organizations' homepages. The second summarizes our findings from the interviews and questionnaires regarding the impact measurement of CSOs, their goal-setting and long-term planning techniques, the main hindrances to their work and the cooperation with other civil society organizations, as well as with the United Nations.
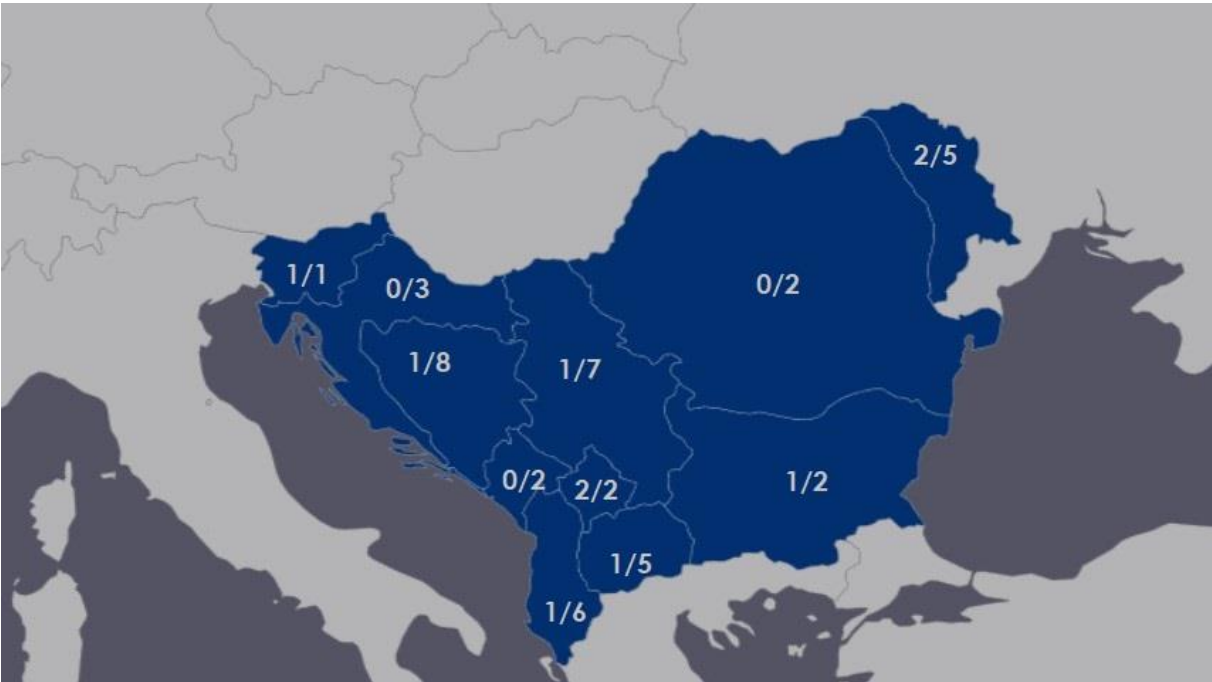
Figure 1: Numbers of CSOs contacted and number of CSOs replied per country

Figure 1 presented above displays the statistics regarding the response rates: shown are the number of organizations contacted and the number of organizations we had further correspondence with in each country. From the forty-two organizations we contacted eight work in Serbia, seven in Bosnia and Herzegovina, six in Albania, five in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Moldova each, three in Croatia, two in Romania, Bulgaria, Montenegro and Kosovo each and one in Slovenia. All organizations were founded during the last thirty-five years, between 1989 and 2015. Most of the organization's headquarters are located in the countries' capital, with the only two exceptions being two CSOs working in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Out of all organizations contacted, we received questionnaires or were able to conduct interviews with ten organizations, which amounts to a response rate of 24%. The

responses cited in the study include results obtained through four semi-guided interviews and analysis of six questionnaires answered by the organizations. We have listed all organizations as well as the channels of communication in the appendix. Figure 1 displays the origins of the organizations we contacted and those having replied.

Homepage Analysis

Out of the 42 organizations contacted, one organization did not have a homepage and the websites of the other two did not display sufficient content for analysis. Moreover, six further homepages were only available in the official language of the country. This left 33 homepages for the analysis.

The drawback of a homepage analysis is the risk that many homepages are not regularly updated or only display a limited amount of information. Therefore, this analysis is restricted to criteria that are not subject to frequent change, such as the objectives of the organization or their legal constitution. All analysed organizations describe themselves as non-governmental and impartial, with the main difference being the focus of their activities. A considerable share of organizations describes themselves as think-tanks, with a strong emphasis on the empirical research for public and social policy. Moreover, two CSOs contacted are initiatives of non-governmental organizations in the field of anti-corruption to coordinate the work and launch common activities. Other important spheres in which some of the anti-corruption CSOs are working is journalism and watchdog reporting. Only 20 organizations have information about the size of staff on their homepages, with more than a half of them (13 organizations) having ten or less team members. This presented several assumptions that, in our opinion, could be important for the CSO impact assessment frameworks. The size of the team, for example, can implicitly indicate the amount of resources the organization has (smaller grassroots organizations tend to have, on average, less financial support than national chapters of large international CSOs). This is further substantiated by the fact that the majority of the aforementioned small organizations employed one or more unpaid staff members., with the proportion of unpaid to paid staff in some organizations being as high as 1,2:1. We theoreticized that such organizations would have less developed assessment frameworks due to restricted resources in personnel that could act as assessment officers and spare funding that could be used towards impact assessment activities.

The analysis of objectives stated on the homepages revealed the clear difference in orientations of the civil society organizations. Whereas only a few organizations clearly state a corruption-free society as their objective, most organizations phrase their goal more broadly, such as "fostering democracy", "promoting good governance" or "boosting transparency" within their country. Furthermore, the organizations can be divided according to the focus of their activities that lies either with the civil society at large or mainly with political institutions and the government. Organizations of the first type strongly emphasize their educational role, highlighting the

necessity of raising awareness and increasing access to information on corruption for the country's population. These organizations aim to strengthen civil society directly to become a strong opponent of corrupt behaviour. CSOs with an institutional focus, on the other hand, see themselves as monitoring institutions, watchdogs or quasi-lobbying groups. Such organizations tend to highlight, through their website, meetings with politicians held and new anti-corruption legislation adopted. In the countries not forming part of the European Union, such organizations aim to encourage democratic processes in their country to support the European integration process. Moreover, some organizations do not only focus on anti-corruption but either have broader agendas or concentrate on other political issues that are linked to corruption such as human trafficking, children's rights, investigative reporting and political journalism.

Finally, on their homepages, many of the civil society organizations also outline the main tasks they are faced with regarding the aforementioned objectives. The majority of the CSOs stated on their webpages that research was an integral part of their work and one of its main purposes, with provision and distribution of empirical results on policy issues listed as main tasks. In order to increase awareness among the population and make corruption less opaque, some produce assessment tools or corruption indexes. Another important area is the partnership with and monitoring of public authorities. Moreover, a major part of all organizations state that cooperation with and support of other, smaller civil society organizations or civil society in general is a central task, with the organization of seminars or trainings sessions listed as principal tasks in this regard.

Interviews and Questionnaires

In this section we want to present the results we obtained from 10 semi-guided interviews and questionnaires with representatives of civil society organizations.

Numbers and Role of CSOs

With the exception of two, all involved CSOs are legally defined as non-governmental organizations. The other two are established as a public association and a foundation. The staff employed by them ranges from 4 to 43 members per organization. For most organizations fighting corruption is not the only area of activity, with promoting electoral justice or the rule of law further cited as principal. This finds a reflection in the proportion of campaigns (if a given CSO conducts campaigns) dedicated to anti-corruption, with the majority of organizations reporting from zero to two ongoing campaigns in this field. Only one CSO stated to conduct five anti-corruption campaigns. For some CSOs, campaigning is not a suitable tool to reach their objectives, and they rely more on publications or investigative journalism. In order to communicate information on campaigns, as well as for the purposes of general reporting, CSOs

use a mix of traditional media, digital media, personal meetings or events. In terms of digital communication channels, the organizations report to use their own homepages, social networks and, more rarely, mail newsletters. Most organizations use press releases and conferences to attract traditional media. A few also use public appearances on television as a powerful tool to reach many people in the civil society. Most organizations rely heavily on meetings, round tables and seminars to address their target groups. These can either be other grassroot organizations, civil society in general or policy-makers and authorities. Such gatherings can be efficient methods to distribute information or to align campaigning efforts.

The channels used, therefore, determine the outreach capacity of the organization. Whereas one claims to reach the entire country with a television programme, organizations that work mainly through meetings reach around 100 people per meeting. Among the organizations that stated an overall outreach capacity, the numbers (due to a variety of outreach methods used) are highly heterogeneous and range between 3000 and 500 000 people.

In order to understand better the role the organizations define for themselves we asked them to choose the most important tasks from the following list:

- educating members of society,
- whistleblowing,
- acting as a watchdog,
- raising awareness,
- research,
- influencing policy/politics,
- ensuring transparency and providing access to information.

The organizations that participated in the research defined their work the least as whistleblowing (20%). There was a stronger emphasis on observing and influencing policy as well as increasing transparency (70%). The same number of organisations underlined the importance to act as a watchdog and educating society. The task that was referred to the most was research, it was selected by nine out of ten organisations.

Goals and Activities

Besides the overall ambition of reducing corruption the goals of the organizations can be classified in three categories: improving the legal system and the operation of a state's bureaucracy, contributing to the political and economic development, and empowering civil society to fight corruption.

Firstly, organizations with a clear focus on the advancement of the rule of law in their country aim to achieve access to justice for all citizens, to promote an efficient judicial system or to advocate for human rights-based approaches in the administration of justice. This implies a greater extent of transparency in the work of state organs. Furthermore, other organizations are devoted to the economic and political progress. They aim to design and promote alternative policies on socioeconomic and political issues, supporting the implementation of political reforms – especially with regard to strengthening democratic values – and, in some cases, contributing to the EU integration. This orientation is underlined by a statement of a Serbian organization, which stated that its "main goal is to increase transparency in the work of state organs as a way to prevent abuse of public authority for private purposes". Finally, some organizations have the objective of increasing the reach and integrity of civil society by cultivating a "zero tolerance" for corruption. This embodies the goals of informing citizens about current situation regarding corruption and increasing the awareness of citizens about corruption-related topics.

In order to achieve these targets, some organizations strongly focus on research and release of publications related to public policy or cases of corruption. In Serbia, the Center of Investigative Reporting outlines their way of working to "conduct research, publish investigative stories and other material and conduct follow up research in case of changes". Besides that, organizations provide data and further information for the media to use or develop a methodology to report on corruption in a country. Moreover, they try to be present in public or media debates, contribute to policy working groups and hold discussions with legislators or civil society. By cooperating with other non-governmental or grassroot organizations in a network they can claim more political power and weight.

Hindrances

In their fight against corruption, civil society organizations in Southeast Europe face great monetary and information constraints and are confronted with a lack in political will. Many organizations report that underfunding and especially the inconsistency in funding is the greatest hindrance to the effectiveness of their work. "Jumping from grants to grants" impairs long-term implementation and continuation of successful projects. In comparison to the number of donors, the number of CSOs has increased, which results in a higher demand for the same amount of funds. Therefore, donors gain more influence to stress their own preferences for activities of CSOs, with such preferences always not fully compatible with the goals, methods or operating capacities of these CSOs. For example, often donors prefer projects that are highly visible (public events or gatherings) to more substantial but technical programs that are not advertised to the broader society but have a greater and more lasting impact. Moreover, donors can be particularly cautious towards risky activities, e.g. CSOs investigating and reporting on grand corruption cases.

Secondly, some institutions are reluctant to share information with the civil society organization, which would be necessary to determine the occurrence of corrupt behaviour. This is a result of non-transparent institutions and governments that offer very little to no access for the CSOs. Therefore, their activities can be hardly assessed. Finally, a far-reaching hindrance is the lack of political will to improve the current situation in terms of corruption. On the one hand this becomes apparent in the non-implementation of necessary regulations. In Moldova, one organization reported that authorities are reluctant to initiate controls for income declarations that could contain corruption. In the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, a CSO criticized the insufficient legal protection of whistleblowers that leads to a very low rate of reported cases of corruption. On the other hand, politicians are often unwilling to consider evidence-based findings and design policies accordingly. Even if CSOs are involved in meetings with policy-makers it is not certain that their recommendations, which are based on thorough research, are actually taken into account. Many of those meetings only occur *pro forma;* some of them may even be used by the authorities as an additional source of legitimacy for their actions while not contributing to any significant results in countering corruption. Often, new strategies for policies are not based on any evidence and are counterproductive: when they do not achieve the desired results, the society at large gets disillusioned and the cumulative effect on countering corruption reduces. This, in turn, makes it harder for CSOs to garner necessary political, social and financial support for their campaigns.

Impact of SDGs

All civil society organizations that responded are aware of the Sustainable Development Goals by the United Nations and the majority of them noted that their work is well aligned with them. While almost all CSOs referred to a specific goal – SDG 16 ("To promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels"), all but one noted that the SDG framework was not one of the main factors considered in impact assessment strategies or in goal-setting activities.

"Peace, justice and strong institutions are directly related to our mission and other goals like reduced inequalities, sustainable cities, economic growth are indirectly represented in all of our activities", an organization in Serbia claims. However, it is important to note that while the described activities of all organizations and their objectives are congruent with the spirit of SDG 16 and its target related to reducing corruption and bribery in all their forms, promoting the rule of law, ensuring inclusive decision-making and/or the access to information, the direct impact of the goals on the work seems to be marginal. Although the majority of organizations surveyed quoted the targets of SDG 16 as important for their work, none of the CSOs referred to the numerical indicators 16.5.1 and 16.5.2, which shows that the SDG framework has not been central to impact assessment of these organizations. Besides, five out of ten organizations only answered the question on the awareness of the Sustainable Development Goals (leaving the

question on their impact unanswered), while the sixth organization stated that SDGs "do not have a direct impact on their work".

Therefore, the relation of the activities of CSOs to the SDG framework is not strategically communicated nor does it seem that the presence of SDG targets and indicators makes the organizations exceed their usual efforts. Moreover, in countries that are not member states of the European Union (such as Albania) CSOs rather focus on the European accession process. Fulfilling the conditions by the European Commission for becoming a member state is more relevant than the contribution to the realization of the Sustainable Development Goals. An important exception in this regard, however, seem to be presented by UNDP-funded projects that partly base project targets on the indicators related to the SDG framework, thus raising awareness among the civil society with regard to the Sustainable Development Agenda and ensuring that their activities are fully compliant with the Goals.

Self-assessment mechanisms

The diversity in the size, scope, focus and strategies of organizations surveyed was conducive to a wide variety of assessment methods used by them. Although all organizations except one reported having at least one type of consistent assessment techniques in place, the techniques themselves varied from purely qualitative and descriptive analytical narratives to elaborate quantitative frameworks with tens of indicators. This subchapter will summarise and analyse the responses CSOs provided to the questions on the assessment frameworks they have in place/identify as good practices.

Despite the aforementioned diversity of methods, some of the approaches were recurrent in several interviews/questionnaires. Four main groups of indicators prevailed, in this regard: national-level indicators, both factual and perception-based, project-based benchmarks reporting, participation of a given CSO in decision-making and media-based outreach statistics.

Among the first group the respondents named the National Integrity System Assessment framework that Transparency International has in place, the Corruption Monitoring System in Bulgaria, the frameworks based on the progress in the anti-corruption law-making process and the indicators taken from, or based upon the Corruption Perception Index (CPI). Although more than a third of the respondents indicated that these frameworks are one of their main assessment tools, all such organizations stated that one of the main challenges related to such assessments is the impossibility to determine the agency of different intrastate actors in the changes in reported or perceived corruption. Therefore, this method, while useful for presenting a wider picture of the political and socio-economic climate CSOs operate in, is unable to attribute the changes in corruption level to civil society or any other national-level actors.

The second and most dominant strand of indicators reported by the respondents is project-based assessments with pre-set indicators. In some organizations such reporting takes form of a preliminary yearly plan with benchmark indicators and a yearly donor meeting where the results are presented with regard to the benchmarks. In other organizations, all project proposals contain a comprehensive framework that would be used for descriptive and numeric evaluation. However, the variety of approaches reported under this group due to the unique nature of challenges that CSOs are faced with can make the impact of civil society organizations hard to compare even if they work in the same country.

Another important group of indicators was related to the participation of a CSO in the political life of a country and, most importantly, in the decision-making process. In this regard, the recurrent topics were the involvement of the CSO and/or the application of its work and findings in the judicial system or the legislative process, the inclusion of the organization in working groups on new laws or policies, the implementation of findings and recommendations made in the CSO's publications by policy-makers. CSOs also mentioned using indicators related to the number of anti-corruption cases brought to the court and adjudicated, as well as the disciplinary cases against judges or prosecutors whose misbehaviour has been detected by the organizations.

Furthermore, over a third of the surveyed organizations reported using media outreach assessment strategies, with quotations statistics, web analytics and circulation numbers for print publications named among the often used methods. These approaches were reported as supplementary by all respondents mentioning them, since the engagement and quotation numbers do not directly correlate with the factual corruption situation in the country (while they might have an impact over the perception of corruption, thus skewing the CPI). However, general awareness of the public about a CSO and its campaigns could be seen as an important media-driven indicator used to assess the significance of different anti-corruption actors on the national arena.

Aside from the aforementioned strategies, following indicators were mentioned (once each) in interviews and questionnaires: fundraising and budgetary assessment of successes and number of partnerships. The presence of fundraising results in the main assessment framework of one of the surveyed CSOs, which has just four paid staff, further backs up our theory that underfunded CSOs (which are often the small-scale or grassroots ones) tend to focus on the operational, rather than conceptual, indicators. Such indicators allow them to pinpoint problems related to their organizational structure and capacities so as to ensure that the CSO continues to function. However, such focus leads to largely sacrificing wider impact assessments as they may not be seen as vital to the "survival" of an organization.

All surveyed organizations reported having operational partnerships with other civil society actors on the national, regional and, to lesser extent, international level. According to one of the surveyed CSOs, "cross-border cooperation is essential, as a coalition of CSOs can exchange knowledge and methodologies, [as well as] approach a public authority and present policy recommendations at a higher level than a single CSO". However, for the majority of the organizations surveyed these partnerships tend to gravitate towards ad hoc project-based cooperation rather than long-term formalized networks for information and best practices sharing. A notable exception in this regard is the Center for the Study of Democracy from Bulgaria that is the main powercell behind the functioning of the Southeast European Leadership for Development and Integrity (SELDI) Initiative.

Furthermore, a half of CSOs reported having active cooperation with the United Nations, either in form of project grants or participation in capacity-building trainings such as the ones organized in the framework of UNCAC-related activities of UNODC.

Reservations

While we believe that our results give a good overview about the civil society landscape in Southeast Europe in the area of anti-corruption, certain reservations have to be taken into account when considering the aforementioned results and the recommendations below. Firstly, due to a moderate response rate our contact was limited to 10 organizations, which may partially restrict the external validity of certain findings of our research. Moreover, we did not receive any responses from Romanian organization although Romania has a vibrant civil society in fighting corruption. Additionally, in the results section we did not differentiate between results from interviews and questionnaires, which could lead to distortions due to different response behaviour. Finally, as UNODC supported us in distributing the questionnaires, there could be the possibility that organizations over-reported their awareness of the SDGs and their cooperation with the UN.

Gap analysis: recommended best practices

This chapter builds upon the results of the empirical research to suggest methods and practices that could beneficially impact the efficiency and effectiveness of anti-corruption work of civil society organizations in Southeast Europe. These encompass, among others, the issues of

assessment frameworks, cooperation of CSOs and United Nations, as well as between different civil society actors.

Many organizations have reported national collaboration to be a very powerful tool in achieving the organization's objectives. However, it was mostly confined to joint projects. In our opinion, coordination and cooperation between CSOs should be strengthened and formalized. A strong national coalition of civil society organizations carries greater weight in the discussion with policy-makers, and a regional forum of CSOs can contribute greatly to sharing of information and best practices related to countering corruption. While similar initiatives – such as the Southeast Europe Leadership for Development and Integrity (SELDI) regional network or Regional Anti-Corruption Initiative (RAI) – have already been implemented, they largely suffer from the lack of universal membership of regional CSOs, absence of UN participation in the formation and functioning of the network and non-inclusion of the issue of harmonizing impact assessment techniques in the best practices sharing process.

One of the important fields in which sharing best practices can bring a positive cumulative effect is impact assessment. While this study has identified the variety and inconsistency of the assessment techniques used as one of the main efficiency gaps of the Southeast European CSO landscape, this variety can be used to the benefit of the civil society in elaboration of a comprehensive reporting tool. All four groups of assessment techniques (national perception-based and facts-based indicators, project indicators, outreach capacity and political participation) described in the "Self-assessment methods" subsection of the "Interviews and Questionnaires" section could be included in the new instrument that would be available online on the website of the CSO regional forum mentioned above. Allowing to combine quantitative methods with success story reporting, this instrument would highlight the short-term results of the CSO's anti-corruption activities, as well as the often overlooked long-term cumulative results such as the secondary and tertiary information-sharing by the entities who participated in CSO-organized trainings or the carryover effect of the message of civil society campaigns even after their official end.

Such an approach would centralize and harmonize CSO reporting, with CSOs picking fragments of the evaluation framework *à la carte*, creating their evaluations based upon the indicators most applicable to their profile. The publicly accessible tool would allow civil society experts, government practitioners and the general public to compare the results of activities of various CSOs and map the anti-corruption landscape of the civil society to determine with higher precision the agency of civil society at large and of singular civil society actors upon the changes in the country's corruption situation.

Furthermore, this tool could prove useful to the United Nations as well, with twofold significance. Firstly, one of the indicators of the platform could be structure din a way that it

would allow CSOs to provide success stories in relation to the promotion of SDG16 through their activities. Placing an emphasis on the SDG framework, both in handling project proposals (as per the good practices used by UNDP) and in the reporting activities could greatly raise awareness about the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and contribute to the participation of the civil society in the global efforts to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. Secondly, such centralized reporting will allow the UN, as well as donor entities, to assess, in real time, the effectiveness of the activities of a CSO, including the efficiency of its use of material resources., which would have a positive impact upon the allocation of budgetary means to CSOs.

Conclusion

Civil society plays a crucial role in countering corruption, impacting the entire cycle of anti-corruption activities - from lawmaking and awareness-raising to acting as a watchdog and bringing corruption cases to court. Despite the difficult socioeconomic and political conditions related to the ongoing process of democratization in many of Southeast European states, there is a vibrant anti-corruption civil society landscape in the region.

The majority of the organizations composing it have a strong research focus or prioritise policy-making consultations. Most of them have some kind of a reporting system in place, based on national-level indicators, project-based statistics, outreach capacity or involvement in the political process. The majority of them cooperate nationally, regionally and, to lesser extent, internationally with other civil society actors for carrying out joint projects and sharing information. The trend for cooperation and the variety of assessment systems in place could be used to create a broad coalition of CSOs with information-sharing arrangements and standardized reporting procedures that would maximize the cumulative effect of their activities.

With minor exceptions, CSOs report that their activities promote SDG 16, but there is a need for more meaningful UN-CSO cooperation to ensure that the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is fully mainstreamed into the goal-setting, work and impact assessment of CSOs.

The recommendations contained in this report related to impact measurement and inter-CSO and UN-CSO cooperation are tailored for the situation of the Southeast European states, but it is the assumption of the researchers that they could likewise be used in other regions to improve the comparability of CSO activities and to optimize their work, thus enhancing the positive effects that CSOs working in anti-corruption can cause by ensuring that national political processes are more accountable, fair and transparent.

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Appendix

Questionnaire

This questionnaire was sent out to all civil society organizations contacted. Furthermore, it was applied to structure the interviews.

Questionnaire

For the evaluation of the impact of the civil society organizations in the field of anti-corruption

Introduction

Corruption is one of the key challenges in modern-day international development. Leading to the undermining of democratic institutions and the principles of good governance[4], as well as slowing down incentives that drive economic growth[5], corruption is a cross-cutting impediment to the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Only by way of cooperation between state entities and actors outside of the government it is possible to combat these problems. Addressing the contribution of Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) can, for example have a significant impact on establishing effective and accountable institutions, specifically aimed in SDG 16.

Therefore, our study seeks to elaborate a framework for assessing impact, particularly of CSOs on national anti-corruption efforts. Our primary research question is: How is the impact of CSOs in the field of anti-corruption being measured in Southeast Europe? The following questionnaire aims to gather feedback to this question from the relevant organization. The result will be analyzed and compiled in a research paper. Our final goal is to -based on the working practices of the involved organizations- come up with solutions and highlight good practices that can be widely implemented among the CSOs and that would enhance the potential and influence of their work.

Definitions

CSO: in this questionnaire CSO means any civil organization (including but not limited to NGOs) that are active in the field of anti-corruption and have significant background on the topic. The CSOs shall be able to present a brief of its work on anti-corruption regarding combating corruption.

Impact: we consider impact as a result of a long-term and comprehensive *activity* that has been done for the attainment of certain anti-corruption goals and that have had a direct effect on the society or on a certain sector of the society. This effect shall come about by a specific project or targeted program.

Assessment of the impact: analysis of the eventual outcome not only in a descriptive way (e.g. what has been done) but in a way that explains the causal relationship between the performed activity and the outcome itself.

Disclaimer

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[4] Benjamin S. Buckland, Global Anti-Corruption Efforts: The Role of Non-Governmental Organizations (Geneva: Centre for Applied Studies in International Negotiations, 2007), 8.

[5] Ibid.

All the data and feedback provided by the Organization would be treated as confidential throughout and after concluding the research. We do not disclose the gathered information to any third party, except for the UNODC and the Regional Academy on the United Nations (RAUN). The RAUN is an inter-disciplinary educational program for students and young scholars where the participants work on issues related to the United Nations and international cooperation. We, the three authors of the study, are participants in the Academy from Austria, Hungary and Russia and conduct the research in collaboration with UNODC. We only use those for scientific and educational purposes. Personal data will not be disclosed or disseminated, except with the explicit consent of the individual concerned.

Timeframe

The research is concluded between August and November, 2018. The final paper that evaluates the incoming feedback is expected to be published in the first half of 2019 on the website of RAUN (www.ra-un.org). Moreover, we will present our findings at the AUCUN conference in January 2019 at the United Nations. We kindly ask you to fill out the following questionnaire and return to isabella.bachleitner@outlook.com, orlov.main@gmail.com, and csabagondola@hotmail.com. We greatly appreciate your cooperation and we are looking forward cooperation with your Organization.

CSO Questionnaire

Background of Organization

1. Statistical   Details:

    How many people (paid and unpaid) are working for your organization?

Answer:

    What is your legal form? (e.g. charity, research institute, cooperative)

Answer:

2. Advocacy:

    How many campaigns you have at the moment?

Answer:

    What channels are you using for communicating with the target group?

Answer:

    How many people would you estimate to reach with the campaigns?

Answer:

3. How would you define your most important tasks as an organization? Please X those that apply

a. Educating Society

b. Whistleblowing

c. Watchdog

d. Raising Awareness

e. Research

f. Influencing policy/politics

g. Transparency/access to information

h. Other; if others, provide more information

Goals of the Organization

4. What goals do you set within these tasks?

5. What concrete actions do you take to reach those goals?

6. How successful would you consider yourself in achieving these goals?

7. What are greatest hindrances in your work and what means do you take to overcome them?

8. Are you aware if the Sustainable Development Goals' (SDGs) indicators correspond to your objectives? Do they impact your work in any direct or indirect way?

Measuring Impact

9. How do you evaluate your organization's work, be it with statistics, success stories, collaborations, etc.?

10. How has any relationship and cooperation with cross-border or international organizations relevant to anti-corruption, including the UN, had influence over the objective-setting of your work?

11. Can you identify good practices of CSOs, in any field, presenting the impact of their work in novel, effective, and/or innovative ways? Please expand

12. Evaluation and impact of anti-corruption work is often complex, what in your opinion are the best ways to measure, track and evaluate such work?

13. Any additional comments or remarks that you consider relevant to share with this research project?

Thank you for taking part in the questionnaire

Isabella Bachleitner, Dmitry Orlov, Csaba Gondola

RAUN Program 2018-2019

Information on Participating CSOs

Interviews

Organization	Country	Founded in	Number of Staff	Focus

Kosovar Stability Initiative	Kosovo	1998	6	Increase Awareness of Anti-Corruption Policies
Transparency International	Slovenia	-	-	Eradicate Corruption
Center for the Study of Democracy[6]	Bulgaria	1989	-	-
Institute for Democracy and Mediation	Albania	1999	18	Government Advising and Monitoring

Questionnaires

Organization	Country	Founded in	Number of Staff	Focus
Lawyers for Human Rights	Moldova	-	4	Judicial System
Centre for Analysis and Prevention of Corruption- CAPC	Moldova	2000	5	Eradicate Corruption
Kosovo Law Institute	Kosovo	2009	43	Judicial System
Center for Investigative Reporting	Bosnia & Herzegovina	2004	18	Media
OHRID Institute	Macedonia	-	5	Eradicate Corruption
Transparentnost Sribija	Serbia	-	7	Eradicate Corruption

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[6] Interview Partner is also responsible for the umbrella organization SELDI

Further Organizations

Organization	Country
Transparency International	Bulgaria
Open Society Foundation/Balkan Tender Watch	Serbia
Citizens' Association, Ceterum Censeo	Bosnia & Herzegovina
Center for Civil Society Development	Bosnia and Herzegovina
Analytica	Macedonia
ASTRA-Anti-Trafficking Action	Serbia
House of Europe	Albania
Transparency International	Bosnia and Herzegovina
Analitika	Bosnia and Herzegovina
Udd Udruga ya Demokratsko Drustvo	Croatia
Centar ya mirovne studije	Croatia
Budi aktivna. Budi Emancipiran (BABE)	Croatia
Transparency International	Macedonia
Instute for Democracz "Societas Civilis"	Macedonia
Transparency International	Moldova
Anticorruption Alliance	Moldova
Institut Alternativa	Montenegro
Transparency International	Romania
Societatea Academia din Romania	Romania
Transparentnost Sribija	Serbia
Institute for Development, Research and Alternatives	Albania
Childrens`s Human Rights Centre	Albania
Centre for Development and Democratiyation of Institutions	Albania
Albanian Center for Economic Research	Albania

Infohouse	Bosnia and Herzegovina
Centre for Security Studies	Bosnia and Herzegovina
Helsinki Committee for Human Rights	Macedonia