



CITIES OF INTEGRITY

The African Centre for Cities Launches Cities of Integrity Project: Strengthening Integrity in the Planning Profession to Combat Corruption in Urban Development in Africa

Authors: Christian Alexander (ACC Researcher)

Corruption—defined as compromising the public good for personal, professional, or political gains—is a scourge with corrosive and far-reaching effects that can hardwire injustice into the fabric of cities and undermine social cohesion and trust within communities. Staggering figures reflecting the prevalence and impact of corruption in urban development demonstrate that tackling this issue is a key policy challenge of our time. Globally, between 10% and 40% of public budgets are estimated to be regularly lost due to various forms of corruption. In South Africa, corruption in urban development has made news over the past several years, from headlines covering State Capture of critical public infrastructure systems to sordid stories of manipulated local planning processes recounted in Crispian Olver's *How to Steal a City* (2017). The deep impact on citizens is reflected in statistics from Transparency International (2019), which registered that nearly two thirds of South Africans feel corruption has worsened in the past year.

Corruption, and its antithesis, integrity, are the subjects of a new research endeavour entitled *Cities of Integrity* with a team led by Professor Vanessa Watson at the University of Cape Town's African Centre for Cities. The project, which is funded by a grant from the UK Department for International Development (DfID) through the Global Integrity Anti-Corruption Evidence Program (GI-ACE), is investigating the relationship between corruption and the professional integrity of urban planning communities in South Africa and Zambia. In Zambia

the project is being managed by Dr Gilbert Siame at University of Zambia's Centre for Urban Research and Planning in collaboration with the Zambian Institute of Planners (ZIP). The South African research is in cooperation with SACPLAN and other institutional and research bodies including the South African Planning Education Research (SAPER) project (see article in SACPLAN, July 2019 – Issue 2) Both teams will assess the existing institutional support structures for professional integrity in these two countries between 2019-2020.

The research is premised on a novel approach to both studying and addressing corruption that emphasizes the role of professional communities as potential bulwarks of integrity. Municipal officials, political decision-makers, civil society advocates and built environment practitioners still possess only very few practical tools that help them to better understand and effectively address urban planning corruption. Planners are central players in many of the urban decision-making processes—from zoning variances to infrastructure budgeting—that are susceptible to corrupt influences, yet there has been relatively little attention paid to the planning profession's place in combatting corruption. This oversight constitutes a missed opportunity to leverage the influence of professional communities in terms of shaping the norms and identities of their members and regulating their conduct. Recent anti-corruption research and policy work suggest that pro-actively strengthening processes of integrity among professionals may prove more effective than conventionally proscriptive and punitive anti-corruption measures.

The research project's focus on integrity in professional planning communities is both promising and largely unexplored in the research, suggesting that it may reveal insights that allow research outcomes to both complement and provide alternatives to standard anti-corruption measures. The insights generated through this research will be relevant for policy and practice both in South Africa and Zambia and across the continent and will inform broader integrity strategies that focus on professional communities and their professional bodies.

The initial output for the project comes in the form of a working paper published in July 2019 by research team member Dieter Zinnbauer entitled "Leveraging the Roles of the Urban Planning profession for One of the Central Policy Challenges of Our Times". The paper, which is available on the ACC website (address provided below), lays out the evidence and argument for applying new theories regarding anti-corruption strategies. It focuses on professional integrity in relation to the documented challenge of corruption in the context of planning and urban development. It also outlines the research and action agenda for the Cities of Integrity project.

The project team also hosted a successful kick-off event and workshop in Lusaka in July 2019, which

was attended by over fifty planners from across Zambia as well as the Minister of Local Government, high-ranking officials and members of academia and civil society. Looking forward, in Zambia the research programme includes an exploratory qualitative action experiment involving the design and implementation of an innovative integrity training programme for planning professionals in Zambia.

In South Africa, the team will be initiating qualitative interviews with South African planners from a range of different backgrounds and contexts, as well as conducting a country-wide survey of planners with assistance from SACPLAN. Both of these research inputs will be used to map the experiences of planning professionals with corruption and ethical challenges in their daily work through survey research. Planners and urban planning professionals are encouraged to look out for, and participate in, these efforts.

For more information or to volunteer to participate, visit:

<https://www.africancentreforcities.net/programme/gi-ace/> or e-mail vanessa.watson@uct.ac.za



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