

2022 COUNTER-CORRUPTION SUMMIT
Introducing SARCOE and The Stellenbosch Dialogue
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By
Dr. Roger Koranteng
Adviser and Head Public Sector Governance, Commonwealth secretariat

BACKGROUND

I wish to thank Prof. Geo Quinot for his kind invitation for me to share Commonwealth Secretariat experience at this important summit.

A central part of the commonwealth Secretariat’s mandate is to help member countries face up to corruption and tackle its destructive impact. The key framework underpinning the Commonwealth Secretariat Anti-corruption work are: The United Nations Convention against Corruption, under which states parties commit to take steps to prevent corruption. The Commonwealth Charter which commits member countries to good governance and transparency, and to rooting out systemic and systematic corruption.

It is important to note that, in the past the Commonwealth Secretariat AC works was through articulation of its position on the subject through speeches, declarations and policies. For example, in 2000, a Commonwealth Expert Group produced *the Framework for Commonwealth Principles on Promoting Good Governance and Combating Corruption*. The Commonwealth Heads of Government endorsed the Commonwealth Principles on Promoting Good Governance and Combating Corruption, and in their subsequent meetings in 2003 (Nigeria) and 2005 (Malta), urged fellow member countries to sign, ratify, and implement the United Nations Convention against Corruption (“UNCAC”) and implement measures to root out, both at the national and international levels, systemic corruption, which undermines good governance, respect for human rights and economic development.

Again CHOGM 2015 in Malta recognises that “The Commonwealth Secretariat is doing important work to address corruption, and this should be strengthened in the future.” In May 2016, the Commonwealth Secretariat convened a Tackling Corruption Together conference, attracting an unprecedented level of participation and interest from around the world, building consensus across diverse constituencies on proposals for collaborative practical action.

In 2008, Commonwealth Secretariat appointed me as Adviser (Governance) with the responsibility to monitor, evaluate, and advise on the creation, structure, capacity,

management, and performance of governmental oversight bodies in Commonwealth countries. With this broad job description, among others, I stated to monitor and evaluate the governance oversight institutions. I first worked with Supreme Audit Institutions (AFROSAI-E) which has its Secretariat in Pretoria, then with the offices of the Ombudsman, in fact, it was at one of the AOMA's conferences that I met Prof Thuli Madonsela and worked with her to organise good governance conference which brought all the Chapter 9 Institutions in the SA Constitution to collaborate. I notice that in Africa governance space, the Supreme Audit Institutions, Offices of the Ombudsman, and even the Human Rights Institutions were organised with co-ordinating networks, Associations, or bodies. However, on the Anti-Corruption landscape, I didn't find a well-organised and effective co-ordinating network or Association. So, I decided to pitch my tent in the AC space within the Commonwealth, starting with Africa region and to give a practical meaning to the speeches, declarations and policies Commonwealth Secretaries has articulated over the years.

I started in-country approaches to deal with issues of corruption by sponsoring foreign experts to help member countries to deal with their corruption, but that strategy was fraught with many challenges, such as lack of understanding of the African culture and landscape. Western Anti-Corruption frameworks and policy transfers were not working well on the continent for obvious reasons.

However, I noticed that on the continent I could identify countries which were performing relatively better whilst others were lagging in dealing with corruption. So I asked myself, why don't I bring these countries together to learn from each other? Since, they are in the same environment and are confronted with similar issues, the learning curve would be shorter.

Following years of in-country work, I decided in 2011 to invite all Heads of ACAs in Commonwealth Africa to a Conference. That 1st Conference of Heads of Commonwealth Africa Anti-Corruption Agencies was held in Gaborone, Botswana, in May 2011. H.E. Lt. Gen. Seretse Khama Ian Khama, the then President of the Republic of Botswana opened the landmark Conference.

A direct result or outcome of the first conference was the creation of a practitioners' network of Heads of Anti-Corruption Agencies in Commonwealth Africa (now referred as the Association of Anti-Corruption Agencies in Commonwealth Africa). The conference sought to broker exchange of ideas and practices among Commonwealth African countries, and to encourage the sharing of expertise in areas where they have a comparative advantage. The Heads of Anti-Corruption Agencies bought my proposal to meet annually for peer review and innovative experience sharing, and that, the host and venue for the annual conference would be rotated among member countries.

This led to the institutionalisation of annual regional conference/meetings of the Heads of AC Agencies – These annual meetings act as a focal point for the Association, providing a forum through which Heads peer-review country’s anti-corruption reports and shared transferable experiences and learning.

Meetings have so far been held in Botswana in 2011, Zambia in 2012, Mauritius in 2013, Ghana in 2014, Tanzania in 2015, Namibia in 2016, Malawi in 2017, Nigeria in 2018, Uganda in 2019, both in 2020 and 2021 we had virtual conferences which had a record number of 800 participants each. This year in May, the Heads of Anti-Corruption Agencies in Commonwealth Africa met in Kigali. Next year meeting will be held in Seychelles in May.

Aims and Objectives

To broker the exchange of ideas and practices among Commonwealth ACAs,

To promote inter-agency collaboration and learning through the sharing of experiences and best practices.

To encourage the sharing of expertise and knowledge in areas where they have a comparative advantage.

This has helped to strengthen regional cooperation through benchmarking, practitioner exchanges and peer learning among the Anti-Corruption Agencies in Africa.

Outcomes

The Association’s forum has provided exchange of good practices and the provision of pro-bono inter-agency mutual support amongst its members.

It has led to inter-agency collaboration, study trips and learning among ACAs in the region,

The study trips are aimed to sharing of successful and innovation anti-corruption projects the heads of ACAs presented at the annual review meetings.

Sustainability

The sustainability of the association is highlighted by the importance the Heads of ACAs attach to the Association, as evidenced by:

All Heads ACAs always fully participate in the Association activities such as annual conferences and training programmes.

They pay their own travel costs to attend the Association’s annual conferences/meetings, and,

The eagerness of the heads of ACAs to share innovative anti-corruption works with peers at the annual conferences and meeting is amazing.

This positive trend is reflected by Transparency International's Corruption Perception Indexes, in which the top ten least-corrupt countries in Africa are mostly Commonwealth countries.

Establishment of Commonwealth Africa Anti-Corruption Centre

At the second conference for Heads of ACAs in Commonwealth Africa held in May 2012 in Livingstone, Zambia. I conducted needs assessment of all the ACAs and the Heads of Agencies overwhelmingly indicated lack of training for their staff, was a major problem. E.g., Lack of investigation skills has allowed corrupt officials to go free.

I, thus, informed the Heads of ACAs of the need for a training Centre for the ACAs, and requested the Heads of ACAs to confer with their respective governments to consider the possibility of hosting a regional training Centre in their country.

I received 3 expressions of interest from The Gambia, Mauritius, and Botswana. I selected Botswana's proposal as the best among the three countries and negotiated with Botswana Government for in-kind support for training facility, staff and office accommodation. I also convinced the Commonwealth Secretariat to support the Centre with funds for running training programmes.

In February 2013, the Commonwealth Africa Anti-Corruption Centre, was formally launched which reaffirms the Commonwealth's commitment to fight corruption in partnership with the Government of Botswana.

The Commonwealth Secretariat dispatched me to Botswana for about 3 months where I operationalized the Centre.

Partnerships: I also organised a Development Partners and Stakeholders' Conference which provided an opportunity for international development partners and stakeholders to discuss their collaborations with the Centre. The Conference was a huge success; delegates from 30 organisations participated. World Bank, Transparency International, UNODC, UNDP, Basel Institute of Governance, Institute for Security Studies (ISS), African Development Bank, among others declared their preparedness to collaborate with the Centre in many areas.

With training facilities and office accommodation provided by Government of Botswana, programme funds from Commonwealth Secretariat and Resource persons given by the

development partners, I designed and organised capacity building programmes and ensured the Centre was up and running before I returned to my based in London.

Goals of the Centre

The overarching goal of the centre is to reduce corruption in Commonwealth Africa. The Centre specifically seeks to improve AC agencies' capacity and capability to combat and prevent corruption.

The centre is expected to achieve the above goals by providing training, and other anti-corruption initiatives for all Commonwealth African countries, in areas such as investigations, public education and prevention, prosecution, monitoring and evaluation, and professional ethics including twinning and practitioner exchanges.

Centre's Approach to Capacity Building

Building upon lessons from earlier interventions, with respect to the unsustainability of one-off-stand-alone training programmes, I designed the Centre's capacity building programmes based on the Professional Action Learning model. Where feedback and M&E was built into its design.

The Centre's courses consist of 3 phases or interventions of one week each over a period of 12 months.

Participants are required to demonstrate the application of skills and knowledge acquired from each phase by providing evidence-based feedback and reports in order to progress to the next phase.

To ensure maximum impact, the programmes are designed to systematically address capacity constraints at all levels within the ACAs – from Heads of the Agencies to operational staff.

Achievements

A recent independent evaluation conducted by PFM-Connect on behalf of the Commonwealth Secretariat found that "Commonwealth member states have benefited significantly from the Centre programmes and tangible capacity improvements have been realised by the Anti-Corruption Agencies". The survey responded by 65 Anti-Corruption Agency representatives found that:

- 80% considered Centre's courses had significantly expanded their knowledge
- 70% reported significant improvement in their ability to perform their current roles
- 68% reported making significant changes in their work after returning from Centre's courses.

Sustainability

The level the enthusiasm demonstrated by ACAs and the high-level participation in the Centre's activities and Association's annual conferences, as well as their willingness to bear their own travel and associated costs to access the Centre's training programmes in Botswana and participating in Association's annual conferences, for over a decade is an encouraging sign regarding the future sustainability of Commonwealth Secretariat AC work.

Conclusion

By creating the Association of regional Anti-Corruption Agencies and establishing of regional Anti-Corruption Training Centres not only in Africa but also in the Caribbean and other parts of the Commonwealth. I have sought to give a practical expression to Commonwealth Secretariat position on Anti-Corruption, which hitherto was through articulation of its position through speeches, declarations, policies and its charter.