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Technology based solutions to solve issues with corruption

What happens when you put anti-corruption agents and technology experts in a two-day workshop to explore technology-based solutions to real-life corruption challenges? What happens when there is not just one workshop in one city for technology experts and corruption fighters, but there are simultaneous workshops happening in five cities around the globe?

Transparency International (TI) Fiji were able to explore the answers to these questions first hand when Transparency International sponsored attendance at the Hackathon workshop in Jakarta, Indonesia, for Mr Fenton Lutunatabua, TI Fiji's Programme Coordinator for the Youth Integrity Promotion Programme.

TI Fiji put two corruption-related challenges to the technology experts.

The first was about engaging youth across the country with an online tool for civic education. TI Fiji wanted a social media tool that would expose youth to their civic rights and responsibilities. TI Fiji had proposed that an online strategy could also be made available to teachers as an option to teach their students about civic education.

TI Fiji's second challenge related to the preparation for the 2014 General Election. TI Fiji suggested that a smart phone application for election monitors would be good for recording observations, including the number of polling officials, and the accessibility, security and operations of each polling station. This would empower election monitors to effectively and efficiently report on the election process and ensure that basic electoral rights are protected and procedures are followed.

Mr Lutunatabua said "With the elections coming up in 2014 young people aged between 15 and 30 are still unaware of what civic education is. Many formal and informal institutions do not have a proper strategy developed for educating youth on what civic education is and why it's important. By providing civic education, we'll be able to greatly affect the participation of young people in the democratic process, and whether they're even motivated enough to vote. If we could figure out a way to educate these young people in a way that is relevant and fun to them, they'll understand the importance of being involved in the elections."

Regarding the election monitoring smart phone application, Mr Lutunatabua said "With election monitoring and reporting, whistle blowing will be encouraged and enable people to report on any corrupt activities that they witness on the ground. The application should be able to gauge and record openness, transparency and fairness in the election process and it should also document the openness of the election campaigning period (pre elections). The application could also assist with providing a check on the honesty and fairness of the election candidates (pre and post elections)."

The "Hacks Against Corruption 2012" Hackathon occurred simultaneously in Casablanca, Moscow, Bogota, Vilnius and Jakarta over 6-7 October 2012, with the stated objective "to explore technological solutions to anti-corruption related problems".

TI Fiji, and representatives from TI in Korea, Cambodia, Indonesia, Malaysia, Sri Lanka and Vietnam presented their corruption-related problem statements to the technology experts in Jakarta.

After an intense two days of work, with the technology experts working through most of the night to get their solutions into a presentable format, solutions were proposed to the corruption fighters. Explaining the process and outcome, Fenton said "The technology experts basically worked with the problem statements from the seven different countries to develop a generic solution that could be adapted and modified for the different TI chapters across the Asia-Pacific region. Most of the solutions were prototypes of smart phone applications that people can use to report and monitor corruption activities."

"It was great to see the power of technology in addressing grass-roots corruption issues," said Fenton. "The next step will be to explore more specific solutions for each country – for example, something that addresses Fiji's unique challenges, and the need to raise awareness and interest in democracy amongst our youth prior to the 2014 elections. The Hackathon has certainly provided some motivation for that next step," said Fenton.

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