
PARTICIPANTS' PAPERS

SUCCESS FACTORS FOR SMASHING CORRUPTION AND NEW APPROACHES TO SUSTAIN PROBITY CULTURE IN HONG KONG

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Recognized as one of the cleanest cities with the least corruption in the world¹, Hong Kong has come a long way in the anti-graft battle. Before the inception of the Independent Commission Against Corruption (ICAC) in 1974, corruption was very rampant in both the public and private sectors in the city of Hong Kong. Most people accepted corruption as a way of life and were so ready to grease the palms of officials in seeking employment, schooling, housing and doing business. Today, the society of Hong Kong upholds high ethical standards and a zero-tolerance attitude towards corruption. According to the ICAC Annual Survey 2017², on a rating scale of 0 to 10, of which 0 represents zero tolerance and 10 represents total tolerance of corruption, the mean score for Hong Kong was 0.6. A vast majority of citizens agreed that keeping the city corruption-free was important to the overall development of Hong Kong and supported the anti-graft work of the ICAC.³ Such transformation of attitude over the past 40 + years is the synergy of a host of factors serving as the pillars of success in the fight against corruption.

I. THE SUCCESS FACTORS

A. Strong Rule of Law and Profound Determination of the Government

Hong Kong enjoys worldwide acclaim as one of the most corruption-free places, with a sound anti-graft system and a culture of probity entrenched in the community. What lies at the heart of its success is the ICAC's and the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) Government's undaunted determination in upholding the rule of law. The Prevention of Bribery Ordinance, *i.e.* the anti-corruption law of Hong Kong, comprehensively covers both the government and the private sector. More importantly, the law is enforced in a fair and impartial manner, without any political consideration. As emphasized in the Policy Address by the Chief Executive of Hong Kong in October 2017, the ICAC remains independent and is fearless, robust and effective in pursuing the corrupt. Regardless of the background, status and position of persons or organizations involved, the ICAC carries out investigation without fear or favour. Evidence is then passed to the Secretary for Justice who makes the decision of prosecution. The crooked will be brought to justice for open and fair trials before the court. The separate power of prosecution and independent judiciary are two fundamental elements in the checks and balances system to ensure there is no abuse of investigative power.

The HKSAR Government is committed to upholding judicial independence, the independent status of the ICAC and the rule of law. All of these are the core values of Hong Kong well affirmed by the Basic Law⁴. Keeping Hong Kong corruption-free is always at the top of the agenda of political leaders. The clear political will to eradicate corruption in the city enables the operational autonomy of the ICAC. The ICAC Commissioner is directly answerable to the Chief Executive of Hong Kong, to make sure the anti-graft

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¹ Hong Kong has consistently remained in the band of the top 20 economies with very low levels of corruption in the world according to the Corruption Perceptions Index compiled by Transparency International since 1995. The city is ranked the 13th least corrupt place among the 180 countries/territories in the Corruption Perceptions Index 2017.

² ICAC's Community Relations Department has conducted community-wide opinion surveys through interviews since 1992. Objectives of the surveys are to understand the public attitude towards corruption and the reasons behind it; to identify changing public concerns regarding corruption and the underlying reasons; to gauge public opinion towards the work of the ICAC; and to gauge the behaviour and experience of the public in reporting corruption. The surveys have been conducted by independent research firms that are commissioned through quotation exercises. A total of 1,516 persons were successfully interviewed in the 2017 face-to-face household survey.

³ According to the ICAC Annual Survey 2017, 99.2% of respondents agreed that "keeping Hong Kong corruption-free is important to the overall development of Hong Kong"; whereas 96.8% of respondents responded that "the ICAC deserves their support".

⁴ The Basic Law is the constitutional document for the HKSAR.

agency is free from any interference in conducting investigation. Over the years, the ICAC continues to receive full support from the city's top leaders and lawmakers, in terms of the comprehensive anti-corruption legislation; adequate investigative powers for effective law enforcement; and sufficient financial resources for implementation of its holistic three-pronged strategy to combat corruption.

B. Holistic Anti-corruption Strategy

Hong Kong has been tackling corruption with a holistic approach, combining enforcement, prevention and education to smash corruption on all fronts. Alongside deterrent enforcement actions which make corruption a high-risk crime, the ICAC has put in place a system and rules to eliminate corruption loopholes and has transformed the public attitude towards corruption from meek tolerance to rejection and to engagement in the graft fight through unremitting community education. During a visit to Hong Kong in 2016, Mr. José Carlos UGAZ, the former Chair of Transparency International, praised Hong Kong for its pioneering and time-tested three-pronged strategy as a role model for the world on how to deal with the problem of corruption. Both the symptoms and the root cause of corruption are fully addressed through this panoramic approach.

C. Persistent Public Support

Public support is of paramount importance to the success of anti-corruption work. The strong support from the public for the ICAC could be seen in some major findings of the ICAC Annual Survey 2017. For instance, over 96% of survey respondents opined that the ICAC deserved their support. Nearly 80% of respondents indicated that they were willing to report corruption. From the corruption complaints received, 90% of them came from the general public whereas over 70% of the complaints in 2017 were non-anonymous. All of these are solid evidence of the public confidence and trust towards the Commission. Support of the citizens of Hong Kong is an asset and driving force of the ICAC's in the fight against corruption.

II. CHALLENGES IN THE NEW ERA

While the aforementioned factors have contributed to the success in changing people's mindset and entrenching integrity as a core value in Hong Kong, the process of graft-fighting is not without challenges. The ICAC must stay vigilant to the uphill battle brought by the evolving society to its mission of sustaining the probity culture in the dynamic environment.

A. Anti-corruption Not the Priority

With the consistent and robust enforcement actions over the years, corruption is well under control in Hong Kong nowadays. The glorious achievement in eradicating corruption could possibly be a hindrance in enlisting public support to the anti-graft mission. To the general public, corruption is far more remote than other livelihood issues such as housing, education, medical care etc. Consequently, corruption is no longer perceived as a pressing problem in the city and receives diminishing attention. Hence, relentless effort is required to keep the issue on the public agenda and secure the continued support of our community for the graft-fighting work in the long run.

B. Perception of the Younger Generation

According to the ICAC Annual Surveys, youngsters (aged 15-24) are comparatively more tolerant of corruption than the other age groups.⁵ A possible reason is that youngsters in Hong Kong have never experienced the plight of endemic corruption as the older generation did. They consider corruption too abstract and remote to them. The challenge to impress upon the new generation the evils of corruption and sustain their interest and support for anti-corruption is thus indispensable.

C. Potential Loss of Public Trust

Amid polarization and skepticism arising around the globe, there has been an increasing trend of public mistrust of the government in Hong Kong including the ICAC. The extensive media coverage of some high-profile cases might also intensify the corrosion of public perception and arouse questions about the capability of the ICAC. It can take just one lapse to ruin the reputation built up over many years. Therefore, the ICAC

⁵ According to the findings of the ICAC Annual Surveys in the past eight years, the tolerance of corruption of young people aged between 15 and 24 (0.1 to 1.5 scores) was slightly higher than that of the people aged between 25 and 64 (0.5 to 1.2 scores).

has to remain sensitive to public sentiments and refine its work strategies in response to the change in the external environment.

D. Behavioural Change of Audience

The rapid technological advancement and rise of new and social media have brought unprecedented changes to the pattern of people's behaviour in reception of information in the modern society. People are now bombarded by the sheer volume of information every day and tend to spend shorter time on each piece of information. The interactive nature of new media allows users to easily screen out the content that is not of interest. To ensure probity messages effectively reach the target groups, the publicity campaigns have to be tailor-made and more concise with a sharper focus to arouse the attention of the target audience instantly. It is essential for the ICAC to keep abreast of the latest trends of communication when formulating its integrated marketing strategies.

III. TAKING ON THE CHALLENGES FROM THE PREVENTIVE EDUCATION PERSPECTIVE

To take on the challenges and continue the mission to safeguard the integrity culture in the evolving society, the Community Relations Department (CRD) of the ICAC devises an array of innovative publicity strategies to maximize the impact of its advocacy campaigns to different segments of the community.

A. Strengthening Alliances with Key Stakeholders

The CRD reaches out to different strata of the society and forms strategic alliances with key stakeholders to ensure anti-corruption and ethics management are always a top-of-mind concern of people in Hong Kong. Such partnership approach also enables the CRD to tap the resources, networks and expertise of the stakeholders so as to achieve a multiplying effect for the preventive education programmes.

An example is that the ICAC joins hands with the Civil Service Bureau⁶ to implement the Ethical Leadership Programme (ELP). Under the ELP, each government department nominates a directorate officer serving as "Ethics Officer", who spearheads ethics training and integrity promotion initiatives within his department. Similarly, staunch partnership has been built with the business sector. The ICAC has the support of ten major chambers of commerce in Hong Kong to set up the Hong Kong Business Ethics Development Centre to promote business and professional ethics as the first line of defence against corruption and fraud. Messages on integrity management and ethical governance are promulgated to business practitioners through the extensive network of the chambers of commerce. This public-private partnership was recognized and affirmed by the international arena, such as the acknowledgment by the World Bank⁷.

B. Engagement with Community

To sustain citizens' continued support for anti-corruption work, the ICAC needs to foster a sense of ownership amid the community in fighting corruption. Therefore, the Commission proactively engages different cohorts of citizens to take a participatory role in integrity promotion activities. The citizens have thus become multipliers and publicists of anti-corruption messages. In 2015, the ICAC launched a multi-year-multi-layer civic engagement and education programme entitled "All for Integrity" to instill positive values in people from all walks of life and mobilize Hong Kongers to support the anti-corruption cause. A series of events, including competitions, performances, exhibitions, bus parades, etc. have been rolled out. With over 300 organizations on board, nearly 780,000 people, or more than one-tenth of Hong Kong's population, were engaged so far. The Programme will continue to arouse public attention through intensive and multi-faceted activities, sustain the momentum of probity-culture building in the city of Hong Kong and put forth a

⁶ The Civil Service Bureau is one of the 13 policy bureaux of the HKSAR Government. It assumes overall policy responsibility for the management of the civil service, including such matters as appointment, pay and conditions of service, staff management, manpower planning, training and discipline.

⁷ The World Bank mentioned in its publication *Fighting Corruption in East Asia: Solutions from the Private Sector* (2003) that "the Hong Kong [Business] Ethics Development Center, established under the umbrella of the ICAC, provides many materials and supports training activities targeting small and medium-size enterprises ... Having a government agency directly involved in the dissemination of business ethics is quite exceptional worldwide and reflects the very strong policy of prevention implemented in Hong Kong."

profound and lasting effect in the society.

On the other hand, over 2,000 citizens are engaged as ICAC Club members as volunteers in promoting anti-corruption messages in their local communities. They render full support in ICAC's publicity projects and have become close allies and valuable partners of the ICAC in fostering the culture of integrity.

C. Riding on the New Trend of Communication

The CRD has been deploying online and offline channels to disseminate anti-corruption messages and reach out to the wider community. Digital advancement has enabled the ICAC to make effective use of multi-media platforms to engage the public. Alongside the conventional mass media production such as the TV Drama Series, TV and radio commercials and printed materials, the CRD produces microfilm, comics, animation and e-games to reach out to netizens and millennials through online media such as Facebook, Weibo and YouTube. To catch the eye of our target groups, in particular youngsters, the CRD has recently created an icon "iSir". With a professional yet friendly image, "iSir" serves as the spokesman of the ICAC to broadcast the latest news and initiatives of the Commission in a light-hearted manner through extensive channels.

IV. FOSTERING A NEW GENERATION WITH INTEGRITY

The CRD attaches great importance to moral education of the young generations and introduces positive values to them at every developmental stage. Education kits featuring the cartoon rabbit "Gee-Dor-Dor" and other parenting programmes are produced for kindergarten children. Whereas in a recent multimedia project for primary schools, over 50,000 students were engaged to produce creative audio-visual artwork on integrity themes and participate in on-campus interactive activities.

Secondary and tertiary students are recruited as ICAC Ambassadors to organize on-campus integrity activities for their peers. These initiatives help deepen young people's understanding of the importance of personal integrity and abiding by the law, hence providing a solid foundation before they enter the job market. These young supporters are also encouraged to pass on the core value of probity and exude a positive influence on the community by becoming ethical leaders in the future. On the other hand, a Youth Chapter of the ICAC Club has recently been launched to encourage more young people to contribute to the anti-corruption cause. In 2018, the ICAC will organize a large-scale youth engagement programme, the "Youth Integrity Fest", to reinforce the core value of integrity and probity culture among the younger generation. The latest virtual reality (VR) simulation and augmented reality (AR) technology will be adopted in the upcoming preventive education projects to showcase the evils of corruption through illustrative cases and demonstrate the importance of safeguarding a level playing field in Hong Kong to the younger generation.

V. WAY FORWARD

In the future, the ICAC will continue to sustain public vigilance through continuous anti-corruption education and engagement programmes with reference to the occupation, profession and daily life of different segments of the community. At the same time, the Commission accords top priority to the upkeep of public trust by informing the people in Hong Kong of its anti-graft efforts on three fronts: enforcement, system prevention as well as community education. The ICAC also spares no effort to connect with young people and engage the millennials through creative means to enhance their ownership of the anti-corruption cause so that the core value of integrity can be passed from one generation to another.

Social culture is dynamic and subject to shaping of different forces. To nurture and sustain an integrity culture is never an easy task. It requires perseverance and innovation to tackle new challenges coming one after another. ICAC officers are ready to undertake the mission with dedication and professionalism. The ICAC always welcomes the sharing of experience, knowledge and insights among regional and international counterparts to facilitate better understanding of the latest trends and anti-corruption strategies in a global context.