

31 January 2013

BRIEFING STATEMENT

WHAT THE PUBLIC TOLD US ABOUT CORRUPTION

Corruption Watch was launched as a response to the rising number of corrupt acts that were reported to civil society organisations, revealing the negative impact of corruption on people, especially those living in poor communities. CW, established at the initiative of Cosatu's leadership, is an independent organisation with the mandate to focus on the abuse of public resources by those in government and business. CW's work is foregrounded on the understanding that better access to information and a credible channel for reporting corruption will enable the public to hold their leaders accountable.

CW's first year, which kicked off with the launch on 26 January 2012, has presented both successes and challenges. The most significant step has been the public's willingness to use CW's communication platforms to report corruption. The information gathered from the reports enables CW to:

- Confront the authorities with knowledge that is based on real experiences rather than perceptions.
- Create campaigns that are informed by public views and work towards building communities of corruption fighters.
- Access insight from the public about possible solutions or interventions that stand to improve accountability and transparency among those who are responsible for managing public resources.

In 2012, CW used various strategies to influence change. In April, the organisation released a report on corruption within the Johannesburg Metropolitan Police Department (JMPD), highlighting the unit's weaknesses and the extent to which traffic police abuse their power on the roads. The report formed part of CW's anti-bribery campaign, *No more Tjo-tjo*. Corruption Watch made recommendations to the City of Johannesburg and in October 2012 the City established an anti-corruption plan which incorporated all the recommendations from CW.

"This became an example of how we would like to interact with public officials. We would like to be part of the solution rather than always highlight problems," said executive director, David Lewis. CW will continue to monitor the City's action on curbing bribery in the JMPD.

CW also used its legal capacity to get involved in joint civil society efforts to influence parliament (e.g. the Protection of State Information Bill submission) and to fight through the justice system for leadership that is accountable, as in the case of Lt Gen Richard Mdluli.

While we are only able to selectively investigate serious allegations of corruption reported to us, a number of investigations were initiated and completed in 2012. Within six months of CW's existence three cases showing clear evidence of corruption were presented to the Public Protector for her further action. Information was also shared with the Limpopo investigation task team with regards to corruption in the province's health department.

"We are still looking forward to the Public Protector's report on the three investigations. They involved the Department of Transport, the National Youth Development Council, and the City of Joburg. We have been under no illusion that investigations would be intensive, costly, and require time to bear fruit. But we would like to see the authorities do more to take the matters further."

Partnerships with the media have provided CW with better results with a few cases exposed, including the recent Mvula Trust story. Last year, CW also worked with *Media24* investigations unit to expose the role of Neo Africa in the Limpopo text book scandal and also handed over information to the *Sowetan*, *Beeld*, and *Daily Sun*: *"We take seriously and recognise the role the media has to play in putting the spotlight on corruption and exposing the corrupt,"* Lewis added.

What did we learn about corruption in 2012?

Over 3 223 incidents were reported to CW by December last year. Most people reported using the SMS hotline (45%) and the website was the second most preferred reporting platform (34%). The majority of the people who reported online preferred to remain anonymous and left us with no forwarding contact details. The downside of anonymity is that it limits CW's ability to take the reported matter further. However, we understand why many of our reporters want anonymity and we have committed ourselves to protecting our whistleblowers. About a quarter of the total number of incidents reported to CW, just over 1 227, involved the abuse of public resources by someone involved in either the government or business or both. Some of the cases fell outside CW's mandate, for example, labour disputes and consumer complaints. These people were referred to relevant organisations. Some 14% of corruption reports received did not have enough information in them for CW to work out the type of corruption involved.

While the corruption reports CW receives cannot on their own be taken to represent the state of corruption in the whole country, they give insight into the nature and ways in which corruption manifests in peoples' lives. The highest incidents of corruption are experienced at local government levels (22%) and most complaints

point to abuse of power and resources by public officials and particularly within the procurement of goods and services.

“The most disturbing form of corruption has been happening at school levels. This involves theft of funds, goods and equipment by principals and teachers. Even more disturbing are cases which indicate that parents, through school governing bodies, are also involved in corrupt awarding of tenders,” said Lewis. Schools corruption is the third highest type of corruption reported (11%) after traffic police corruption, which is mainly about bribery on the roads and in licensing of drivers (14.4%).

The highest concentration of reports is from Gauteng. This is the region where CW has been most active in its first year and it is also the most populous province. Reports from small towns make up 42% of the total number of corruption incidents reported to CW: *“It is the high number of reports from small towns that has been a concern. We believe that the reason for this is a lack of options and channels that people have for reporting and fighting corruption. There is limited access to media or to supportive NGOs and legal resources in these areas.”*

Turning information into action in 2013

The data collected in 2012 informs CW’s strategy going forward. CW will focus on:

Schools - Fighting corruption in public schools will be a key focus this year: *“We are asking the public to tell us more about what is happening at schools with regards to corruption. We would like to promote awareness and work together with communities to deal with this type of corruption,”* said Lewis.

Small towns - Corruption Watch will also create a presence in small towns to enable easier access to reporting and build alliances with civil society and groups who could help build communities of corruption fighters.

Procurement - A large amount of government spending takes place at local government level. The high incidence of reporting indicates that people across small towns in South Africa are either aware of, or suspect corruption, or are affected by it. Corruption has been widely reported in procurement, with people channelling funds to personal accounts, exerting power to cover up for corrupt acts, and distributing funds and food to secure votes in local elections.

Public education - CW aims to tap in to the existing qualities of SA’s youth in leading the fight against corruption and resist participating in corrupt behaviour. *“We will build on last year’s effort to create awareness among the youth and work towards building an army of corruption fighters. We are appealing to what young people can offer today in making the voices against corruption louder,”* Lewis added.

For more information download CW’s annual report at www.corruptionwatch.org.za or contact:

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