


Chapter 13

Fight Against Corruption Through Technology: The Case of Morocco

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ABSTRACT

Corruption secures benefits for those with power, status, money, or protection. Corruption generally manifests itself in the form of a tacit convention that is put in place discreetly, gradually, and cumulatively by feeding itself and secreting its own rules, mechanisms, and intermediaries. In Morocco, social tolerance towards corruption is strong, influenced by a general feeling of impunity and the inequality of citizens under the law. The force of the political discourse displayed, and which is supposed to fight it remains unchanged without notorious effects. However, emerging technologies can serve as a remarkable lever to transform public actions in their fight against corruption through a paperless environment, the reduction of red tape, and highlighting the gray areas where corruption thrives. By focusing on the Moroccan case, this chapter highlights the role that digitalization can have in the moralization of public life by acting on three levers: publishing multiple data, mitigating risks associated with excessive discretion, and creating new public-private partnerships.

INTRODUCTION

Corruption is found with varying intensity in many countries and gives rise to necessarily different analyses. For some, it is marginal, cyclical and seems to be under control thanks to the effective functioning of the institutions in place and the application of the laws in force; while in others it is heavy, structural, and systemic. It deactivates and blocks not only the political and legal control supposed to fight and stem it but also the economic development of the country. According to a former minister of economy and finance in Morocco, corruption costs Morocco annually 7 billion Euros, or nearly 7% of its gross domestic product (GDP) (North Africa Post, 2020). A scourge that plagues Morocco and which

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is getting worse and worse despite the announcements of the authorities, the launch of several strategies and the establishment of an authority to fight against corruption. Government efforts to tackle it appear ineffective. Transparency International's 2021 Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) ranks Morocco 87th out of 180 countries on the index. Morocco thus fell seven places compared to 2019. In addition, with a score of 39 out of 100, it lost four points compared to 2019 (Transparency International, 2021). The results of this survey attest to the prevalence of corruption in Morocco, while political discourse continues to show a fierce will to fight it. Hibou and Tozy (2009) sum up this ambivalence perfectly: *“How to interpret the different episodes of a fight against corruption now made visible and even almost routine? Are we in the presence of a pure and simple staging? Or of an instrumentalization of a power still based on the purchase, the exchange of services and corruption?”* Such questions lead to several other questions about the urgency of a political response and about the solutions to be engaged in a visible paradox between the displayed force of its denunciation – at the level of intentions, of taking charge of the phenomenon, and the force of daily corruption. However, if the latter generally consists of an abuse of a power received in the delegation for private ends, to combat it is necessary to remedy the weaknesses of the underlying processes and institutions. Among these essential weaknesses is the main function of our bureaucratic institutions consisting in certifying the authenticity of the information jealously guarded by the administrations (Dimant & Tosato, 2018). In *The Castle*, the last novel by Franz Kafka, he deplores the fact that bureaucratic organizations exercise *“the tyranny of paper”*. Indeed, most of our daily transactions are meticulously listed in ledgers. However, by opting for digital, governments can improve the transparency and efficiency of bloated bureaucracies that often date from another era (Kahn *et al.*, 2018). Leaders around the world advocating for reform have appreciated how technology can help simplify administration (Rafay, 2019) and curb corruption by reducing red tape and illuminating the gray areas where corruption thrives (Banerjee *et al.*, 2012). For Louis Brandeis¹, *“sunlight would be the best disinfectant”*.

In this respect, a bubble of expectations is forming on the contributions of digitalization for the generalization of transparency and governments are struggling to catch up. Digitally savvy citizens are much less tolerant of bureaucracy, nepotism and corruption which remain a formidable challenge, although the digital revolution is gradually changing the game (Rafay, 2021b). Today, new technologies allow “corruption hunters” to reveal, prosecute, prevent and even predict questionable practices that could previously be covered with the opacity of paper. As a result, there are heightened and even exaggerated expectations about the potential of digital to improve public service delivery and enhance efficiency and integrity in public action. It is therefore important to reflect on both the promises and the pitfalls of this ongoing revolution to deal with endemic corruption in general and in Morocco in particular (North Africa Post, 2020), by reflecting on the potential of digitalization to change the rules of governance in place. This change in promoting transparency will first require accountability for opening and publishing multiple data (Transparency International, 2021). Second, by mitigating the risks associated with excessive discretion of power (Transparency International, 2021). This is how unlocking the potential of the Blockchain could be an important lever in the fight against corruption (Transparency International, 2021), as well as the creation of new public-private partnerships to transform public services (Transparency Maroc, 2020).

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