

Full research report

The perception and response of the church to Corruption in Latin America and the Caribbean



Table of contents

Introduction	2
Background	2
Objectives	3
Scope	4
Methodology	4
Overview of corruption in Latin America and the Caribbean	5
Metrics	6
Impact	7
Environment	7
Justice and policing	8
Democracy and governance	8
Reforms	9
The role of churches with regard to corruption	13
Perception and characterisation of corruption	13
Factors influencing the role of the churches in relation to corruption	15
Recommendations	26
Key recommendations - Church policies to fight corruption internally and externally	26
Recommendations from Tearfund	27
Recommendations from other participants	28
Recommendations from the focus groups	29
Recommendations from the DEI research team	30
ANNEX A: Research methodology	32
Study subjects	32
Coding method	32
Triangulation method	34
Limitations	34
ANNEX B: References and bibliography	35
References	35
Bibliography	37

Introduction

In late 2020, Tearfund commissioned a piece of research aimed at better understanding the prevalence, causes and effects of corruption, the situation of churches in the face of this social scourge, and possible strategies and programmatic responses with which to combat corruption adequately and effectively.

The Ecumenical Research Department, or DEI according to its Spanish abbreviation, was contracted for this purpose. In April 2021, the DEI presented the results of its study ***'Corruption in Latin America and the Caribbean and the role of the churches'***.

This document is an abridged version of the final DEI report and is laid out as follows:

- Section 1 sets out the objectives and methodology;
- Section 2 analyses the situation of corruption in the Latin America and Caribbean region, its impact and reforms;
- Section 3 analyses the role of the churches with regard to corruption in Latin America and the Caribbean;
- Section 4 concludes with strategies and possible responses of churches to the problem of corruption.

Background

Corruption is one of the most significant problems affecting people's lives and the general welfare of societies in Latin America and the Caribbean. To begin with, we need to recognise that corruption prevents a society from developing properly by adversely affecting health, life, the most vulnerable groups and their relationship with the environment, State structures and democracy, to name but a few things. The Corruption Perception Index 2020 (CPI 2020), published by Transparency International in 2021, reveals a grim picture of the state of corruption worldwide. Indeed, the global average score is a mere 43 out of 100. The issue of corruption is not exclusive to governments and their institutions but also extends to private organisations and society as a whole.

The Corruption Perception Index 2020 (CPI 2020) reveals a grim picture of the state of corruption worldwide: the global average score is 43 out of 100.

The Covid-19 pandemic has highlighted and exacerbated the dire consequences of corruption, exposing health and tax systems unable to deal with its effects. According to the same Transparency International report, there is a correlation between lower levels of public sector corruption and higher investment in health in a country. One clear example of this is Uruguay, which has the highest CPI 2020 score in the region (71) and which invests considerably in health, with an effective epidemiological surveillance system that has been vital in tackling the pandemic (Transparency International, 2021, p.9).

The problem of corruption requires urgent intervention by all social actors, including religious communities who, through their faith and their churches, are fundamental to achieving the necessary change.

Objectives

This study had one general and a number of specific objectives:

General objective

To establish the perceived causes and effects of corruption in the Latin American and Caribbean (LAC) countries in which Tearfund is working and thus provide an input that will enable the Tearfund LAC cluster to develop possible strategies and programmatic responses that are appropriate and effective.

Specific objectives

- To understand the historical role of the church in Latin America and the Caribbean in mitigating or contributing to the fight against corruption.
- To explore the role that the Church in Latin America and the Caribbean could play in the face of corruption, in particular in the countries where Tearfund is working.
- To identify prevailing factors that favour or mitigate corruption in Latin America and the Caribbean.
- To review and determine those initiatives/strategies supported by Tearfund and its partners across the world that have been most effective in preventing and tackling corruption.
- To map existing public policies that promote the fight against corruption in Latin America and the Caribbean, in particular in the countries where Tearfund is working.
- To propose interventions/strategies to effectively address corruption in LAC, based on the research findings.

Scope

The scope of the research enabled a theoretical-methodological approach to perceptions of corruption in ten countries in the LAC region, including all the countries in which Tearfund works (Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Guatemala, Haiti, Honduras, Nicaragua and Peru) plus Costa Rica and Venezuela. It was carried out by means of a survey among members of different denominations of evangelical churches, a review of the literature and of Tearfund documents relating to work done on the topic in question.

Methodology

This research is an exploratory-descriptive study using qualitative and quantitative methodologies which, through documentary review, surveys, interviews and focus groups, has enabled in-depth inquiry into the subject matter. The methodology is explained in more detail in Annex A to this report.



📷 The lack of solid waste management in Haiti creates an adverse environment for health and disproportionately affects people living in poverty. Photo: Jonathan Clement / Tearfund

Overview of corruption in Latin America and the Caribbean

According to Peralta (2018, p. 3), corruption is “obtaining personal benefit at the cost of harming, either directly or indirectly, the rights of third parties. It involves obtaining an advantage by exercising power, or gaining a position or economic benefit through deception, influence, etc.”

Corruption and abuse of power can be found at almost every stage of human history. The need for ethical and fair regulations to govern life in society is evident from the very earliest of the Old Testament texts, as well as in legal initiatives taken previously by rulers in ancient Egypt and Babylon. Briceño Guerrero (2007, p.13) argues that the origins of corruption in Latin America and the Caribbean can be traced back to colonial times. The dishonest practices and behaviours of the colonisers were legitimised, legalised and came to be seen as normal. This normalisation of such behaviour in the centres of power resulted in a culture in which these practices came to form the basis of the social structure. The church –which was mostly Roman Catholic– not only supported these acts of violence and expropriation but provided a symbolic universe that could be used to maintain these corrupt practices as part of a supposed natural order rather than the result of the decisions of specific groups that had enriched themselves through the death and dispossession of millions of people in the so-called New World.

Corruption in Latin America and the Caribbean, and indeed globally, is one of the worst evils of humanity. It has become evident through the Covid-19 pandemic that most countries are experiencing a crisis of culture and ethics that permeates all spheres of public and private life, to varying degrees and with dire consequences for the poorest and most vulnerable.

As Delia Ferreira Rubio, chair of Transparency International (quoted in Transparency International, 2021, p.8) puts it, ‘Covid-19 is not just a health and economic crisis. It’s a corruption crisis. And one that we’re currently failing to manage.’ Research conducted by the organisation reveals that corruption negatively affects people's access to quality health services. Another important finding that emerged is that ‘even when accounting for economic development, higher levels of corruption are associated with lower universal health care coverage and higher rates of infant and maternal mortality and deaths from cancer, diabetes, respiratory and cardiovascular diseases.’ (p.8).

Metrics

The table below shows the level of perceived corruption in the ten countries studied, from 2016 to 2020, according to the Corruption Perception Index:

Table 1

Comparison of perceived corruption in the countries studied over the last five years

Colombia	90	37	96	37	99	36	96	37	92	39	37.20
										38	37.00
Peru	101	35	96	37	105	35	101	36	94	38	36.20
		33	112	33	132	29	123	31	124	31	31.40
Guatemala	136	28	143	28	144	27	146	26	149	25	26.80
	123	30	**	**	**	**	146	26	157	24	26.60
Nicaragua	145	26	151	26	**	**	161	22	159	22	24.00
	159	20	157	22	161	20	168	18	170	18	19.60
Venezuela	166	20	169	18	168	18	173	16	176	15	17.40

Source: Table produced by DEI on the basis of data from Transparency International (2021)

The ranking corresponds to the perceived level of corruption in the public sector in 180 countries. They are ranked in order from least corrupt to countries with the highest perceived corruption, on a scale of 0-100, where 0 means high levels of corruption and 100 means no corruption.

** Average country score obtained in the Corruption Perception Index from 2016–2020 on a scale of 0-100 where 0 means high levels of corruption and 100 means no corruption at all.*

*** No information*

It is clear from the table that there has been no significant progress in reducing corruption in the ten countries studied. In fact, the situation has deteriorated in most of them, particularly Honduras and Venezuela.

Although these figures have been produced using a methodology of acceptable validity and veracity, they do not give a precise account of all the cases known, reported, prosecuted and litigated in the different countries. There is a weakness in this regard in that it is the governments themselves that are responsible for sharing and publishing their own figures and so, in most cases, they do not do so.

Impact

Corruption in Latin America and the Caribbean has had a profound economic, social and environmental impact throughout the region's history. This crisis of governance within the institutions is taking a heavy toll on public policies, human rights and social justice in most countries.

There is a direct link between corruption and achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) agreed by the United Nations.

Almost all the studies reviewed for the purpose of this research demonstrated a direct link between corruption and achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) agreed by the United Nations in 2015, with targets for 2030. There is a consensus that vulnerable populations in the most corrupt countries suffer most as a result of their needs not being met. This is currently reflected in the disproportionate impact the Covid-19 crisis is having on countries with the greatest economic needs and the highest incidence of corruption.

Corruption affects the general well-being of the population. As stated by Laver (Líbranos del mal, 2019), econometric studies and estimates show that corruption has a devastating effect on the political, social and economic development of communities and countries. Corruption hinders growth and investment, accentuates poverty and inequality, weakens the rule of law, and erodes the viability and legitimacy of the State. It is noteworthy that corruption harms people living in poverty in particular and is considered the "greatest barrier to poverty reduction" (p.25).

Environment

Now more than ever, the impact of corruption is being felt on the environment either through unbridled exploitation of the land or through a failure to consider the environmental consequences of displacing entire indigenous and Afro-descendant populations in order to extract profit from their territories. These are methods of corruption that are rarely, if ever, discussed.

Corruption in the extractive sectors has an impact on the environment and erodes local communities.

According to Gudynas (2018, p.73-87) in a study conducted by the Latin American Centre for Social Ecology (Centro Latinoamericano de Ecología Social), a review of prominent cases of corruption in extractive sectors shows that:

'... it occurs in all South American countries, under different systems of ownership and access to natural resources, and under both conservative and progressive governments, affecting all types of extractivism (mining, oil, agriculture, fishing, etc.), both in areas of resource appropriation and in its networks and support systems. Hence extractive corruption, like most forms of corruption, is highly complex because it is organised in networks that involve

a wide range of actors. Corruption consolidates some of the effects of extractivism, especially in terms of eroding local communities, weakening public policy development and damaging the quality of democracy...'

Justice and policing

Corruption is becoming increasingly common in the justice and policing system, with the punitive power of the State often favouring those who can afford to pay the officials responsible for investigating, prosecuting and trying those who commit crimes. It no longer matters who is guilty or who is innocent but rather who can offer the biggest and best rewards across the whole judicial system, thus filling prisons with poor and, in some cases innocent, people.

“It no longer matters who is guilty or who is innocent but rather who can pay the highest and best price throughout the whole judicial process.”

In this context, Salas notes in his analysis of corruption in Latin America (2016, pp.1-2) that one of the biggest impacts of corruption relates to the historical existence of impunity, as demonstrated by a case in Mexico in 2014 when 43 students from the Ayoztinapa teacher training college disappeared. This was only the tip of the iceberg and triggered several months of violent protests against the government, exposing corrupt ties between politicians, police officers and drug traffickers. In addition, accusations were levelled at a major government contractor who had unlawfully financed the luxurious private home of the wife of then Mexican president, Enrique Peña Nieto.

Democracy and governance

In his study on corruption and ethics in Peru, Ramón asserts that ‘corruption has a negative impact on the consolidation of democracy and governance, as well as subverting citizen guarantees by evading respect for human rights; and on civic ethics’ (2014, pp.2-3). We thus observe a worrying deterioration in the conduct of public officials in the exercise of their duties, as ever more acts of corruption are committed despite the existence of legal instruments aimed at ending this scourge. The search for effective methods to end this scourge is essential if we are to promote economic development, the quality of democracy and social justice. From a structural point of view, corruption has devastating effects on economic development, particularly sustainable economic development.

It also has a negative effect on the development of institutions that could foster efficient and equitable redistribution.

Corruption has devastating effects on governance and sustainable development.

In short, the impact of corruption on all spheres shows the gravity of the situation in Latin America and the Caribbean and the urgent need to come up with measures to address it that involve the different actors. Addressing the issue at a structural level will allow for the design and implementation of a large-scale programme that starts at a local level. Initiating this work from within churches and faith communities is key to achieving the necessary change.

Reforms

According to Katz's comprehensive work, there are four types of anti-corruption responses that have been implemented: institutional, judicial, citizen and international (Katz, 2017, pp.20-27).

There are four types of anti-corruption responses that have been implemented: institutional, judicial, citizen and international.

Institutional responses

Institutional responses take the form of policy reforms and the creation of institutional systems. They aim to create regulatory and institutional frameworks with which to prevent, mitigate, prosecute and litigate cases of corruption. These may be constitutional reforms –as in Mexico and Chile, for example– that then materialise in ordinary laws, bringing about improvements to existing institutions or creating a new institutional framework. These institutional responses promote transparency and accountability; a simplification of procedures; increasing use of systems that limit discretionary powers within procurement and contracting processes; and better tools for investigating, criminally prosecuting and litigating cases of corruption.

Judicial responses

Judicial responses relate to the initiation of criminal proceedings in multiple countries reflecting, in a number of them, an alignment between criminal prosecution and justice administration services. In Guatemala, there are more than ten active judicial proceedings for different acts of corruption; in Panama, a series of criminal investigations is underway involving multiple actors within President Ricardo Martinelli's government; in El Salvador, a new, more independent prosecution service and the Probitry Section of the Supreme Court of Justice are conducting investigations into three former presidents and high-level officials from at least three governments; in Brazil, the Lava Jato case has brought a large number of the country's most important political leaders to justice, in addition to prosecuting and convicting powerful businessmen; in Argentina, judicial proceedings are underway involving several officials from the government of Fernández de Kirchner; and, finally, in Chile, cases involving former officials from the Piñera government are making progress, while Bachelet's daughter-in-law is being prosecuted.

In addition to those mentioned above, there are other cases involving corruption that point to a new era in which attempts are being made to strengthen the independence of the judiciary in the face of corrupt political/business networks. This dynamic is reducing the latitude for impunity that has historically favoured those involved in corruption in the region and offers hope, at least partially, to public expectations of a more effective and rigorous justice system.

Citizen-led responses

One of the most notable features of the region in recent years has been the decreasing tolerance towards corruption. Katz states that this can be seen in many ways: in the creation of broad coalitions both among civil society and between civil society and State institutions; in broad-based social protests where the anti-corruption cause is closely linked to discussions of the quality of services and effectiveness of public policies; in increased denouncing and public discussion of the issue; in the use of social networks and the traditional media to expose corrupt practices (which can lead to criminal investigations); and in civic activism through non-governmental organisations, either individually or by establishing coalitions to promote political, regulatory and institutional agendas. Examples of such actions are the Grupo Promotor de la Ley de Acceso a la Información Pública (Group for the Promotion of the Law on Accessing Public Information) in El Salvador and the actions of a network of Mexican civil organisations that is promoting the '3 out of 3' campaign, which has resulted in a different form of citizen mobilisation: not coming out onto the streets but coordinating petition actions via non-traditional means. The author also refers to instances of participation that he calls 'this new anti-corruption citizenship', such as the mass social protests that have taken place in several countries and which act as a real trigger in the fight against corruption, generating surprising alignments between public and private actors.

In recent years, the LAC region has witnessed several public demonstrations denouncing and rejecting corruption and linking it to demands for better public services and policies. In Chile with regard to university education, for example, or in Brazil with the demand for better services in the context of organising the 2014 World Cup and the 2016 Olympics. Protests seeking to purge political systems have also been observed, such as those in Guatemala between April and August 2015, which led to the resignation of Vice-President Roxana Baldetti and President Otto Pérez Molina. In Honduras, the so-called 'March of Torches' (Marcha de las Antorchas) was also an example of mobilising to demand the creation of an International Commission to fight corruption under the aegis of the United Nations, which ended up enabling the political environment for the establishment of what is today the Mission to Support the Fight against Corruption and Impunity in Honduras (MACCIH).

These spontaneous, mass mobilisations, while only temporary, generated important institutional, political and cultural effects that explain society's reduced tolerance towards corruption.

International responses

International responses take the form of agreements and evaluations of compliance with international conventions, through the issuing of globally applicable standards by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), for example. International responses also include new forms of multilateral intervention such as the International Commission against Impunity in Guatemala (CICIG) and the MACCIH in Honduras. Latin America has also become a testing ground for experimenting to see how the international community can foster a bigger, better and more effective fight against corruption.

There are various ways in which the international community supports this fight, for example:

- Institutional monitoring of compliance with international anti-corruption conventions at the inter-American level through the Organisation of American States (OAS) and at a global level through the United Nations, by means of periodic reviews of monitoring and evaluation mechanisms. Both organisations make periodic recommendations for regulatory and institutional improvements;

- Bilateral technical cooperation between international organisations and countries, as in the case of El Salvador, where the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) is providing support to the government to strengthen the judicial oversight and administration system to combat corruption;
- Promotion of model norms or international standards on transparency and the fight against corruption, such as those promulgated by the OECD, which are binding on members or aspiring members, or used as a reference for all countries that want to improve their performance in this area;
- Specialised multilateral international commissions such as the CICIG and the MACCIH. The former, under the United Nations system (UN), aims to strengthen the investigation and criminal prosecution capacities of Attorney General's Offices and supports the prosecution of corruption and other crimes.

A whole raft of anti-corruption policies, rules and institutions are in place in the countries studied. Annex B to this document includes a mapping of public policies, norms and institutions on the issue of corruption in the countries studied. This mapping has been developed on the basis of an analysis of each country's existing legislation, drawing on data from the Final Reports submitted to the OAS Follow-up Mechanism for the Inter-American Convention against Corruption (2021) and based on the UNODC Country Review Reports for the United Nations Convention against Corruption (UNCAC) (2021).

With regard to public policies and the legal and institutional framework, the following are noted:

- A lack of monitoring systems aimed at assessing effective compliance either in public service management as a whole or for each public works contract, including in relation to staff recruitment and entry processes into public service. This is in addition to the bureaucratisation of and differences in legislative and institutional processes at the federal/central, provincial or municipal level.
- No public policy in the countries studied aimed at comprehensively educating people, from school right through to university level, on their civic duty and a public ethos. Nor are there training schools or permanent programmes for those working in public service that would enable them to adopt positive values based on an ethos of transparency and honesty. A noteworthy exception is the case of Guatemala, in which the issue of right of access to public information is included in the curriculum at primary, secondary and higher education levels.
- The State has a primary responsibility to fight corruption but acts more as a policing or oversight body than as an educator. This is evidenced by the Comptroller General's offices, which are limited to mechanisms of oversight, audit and internal inspection, and by the Public Prosecutor's Office, which has a monopoly on criminal proceedings through court cases.
- There is no role for parliamentary commissions of inquiry, which would usually be made up of people elected through the prevailing democratic system and therefore directly or indirectly representative of the people.
- There is a notable absence of transparent and effective procedures and parameters by which to implement citizen participation as a mechanism of social oversight and, in cases where such participation is enshrined, it is often not implemented or there are networks of complicity which, far from mitigating corruption, favour it.
- There are no institutional mechanisms for citizen participation in the oversight of administrative contracts or public works in the region. Nor are there additional systems of social oversight for public works tenders and contracts that would enable active citizen participation in their review, monitoring and evaluation.

- There is a notable absence of comprehensive legal frameworks that could provide protection for public officials and citizens when reporting acts of corruption. There is also a clear lack of mechanisms for protecting whistle-blowers and their families, not only in terms of their physical safety but also the security of their working conditions.
- In short, the regulations governing corruption offences are totally lax and weak. The criminal penalties are relatively minor compared to the damage caused to society, given that this is a matter of misuse and misappropriation of State property and, ultimately, a violation of people's rights. In most of the countries studied, sentences range from three to five years, and they are thus considered less serious offences.
- The privileges provided to public officials within the laws themselves suggest they are designed to blatantly favour those in power. A robbery in Venezuela, for example, can carry a sentence of 12 to 15 years depending on the circumstances, while a corruption offence carries a sentence of three years. The intention in the legislation is clear.
- Abuse of office is not even classified as a crime in many of the countries while, in others, reported corruption may even be turned against the whistle-blowers and result in a very severe prison sentence. One example of this can be seen in Venezuela where violating the confidentiality of public officials by disclosing information is considered treason and can incur a penalty of up to 30 years.
- Private sector corruption is not criminalised in most of the countries and is therefore not even considered harmful to society, such harm remaining the exclusive domain of the public sphere.



📷 In Guatemala, 49.8 percent of children under five years of age experience malnutrition.
 Photo: Caroline Trutmann / Tearfund

The role of churches with regard to corruption

Perception and characterisation of corruption

How is corruption understood and characterised? An analysis of the surveys, interviews and focus groups identifies various different perceptions and characterisations of corruption.

Firstly, with regard to the concept of corruption itself, the interviewees displayed different nuances in their views. Corruption is:

- A.** more generally, 'dishonesty', a 'lack of integrity', a 'lack of honour', 'something that used to be good turned bad' or 'any form of injustice':¹

"Corruption is any form of injustice; it is bribery, greed, extortion, abuse, usury, which is a very strong term in the churches. It is sin, it results from the very nature of humankind; the word corruption comes from the Hebrew and its essence means to damage, ruin, corrupt, all earth corrupted, all flesh on earth, everything, without exception, has been corrupted and has had its path corrupted." (Focus group)

- B.** an action that violates what is right through the pursuit of self-interest.²

- C.** an action involving a financial aspect:³

- a.** robbery

'Something that is stolen from us, which is allocated and budgeted for certain works but which is misappropriated, although it can also relate to human resources.' (Focus group participant)

- b.** unlawful enrichment

'Through resources that were intended for a purpose but which are diverted for the benefit of one person, through an abuse of power.' (Focus group participant)

- c.** a misuse of resources

'Misuse, improper use or misappropriation of resources belonging to institutions and programmes that are not theirs, diversion of resources to other projects that are not planned and this means misappropriation and misuse of resources.' (Focus group participant)

- d.** misappropriation of indigenous peoples' land and other rightful resources⁴

'Corruption makes people take things that do not belong to them, taking them from others, as in the case of indigenous peoples' lands, indigenous rights, health'

¹ Some of the participants in the focus groups

² Interviews with five Tearfund representatives

³ Various focus group participants

⁴ Focus group participant

and education. These are indigenous rights which others, motivated by selfishness, somehow prevent from being realised, benefiting their own interests, or their own group, disturbing a harmonious situation for the benefit of others.’ (Focus group participant)

- D.** not solely financial acts but also things like cronyism and favouritism. It is very much underpinned by the social values of both Christians and non-Christians alike whereby, if a relative or friend is not favoured, a person feels bad or guilty. These values conflict and the church does not touch on these issues. There is a tendency to expect favouritism from and to be given preference by relatives and connections, and this is prevalent throughout Latin America.

‘Any act where you favour yourself, using power to obtain that favour. So it’s not just about money, it’s also about nepotism, favouritism, abuse of power. It is important to see that it is much more than just a financial issue.’ (Focus group participant)

- E.** linked to abuse of power.
- F.** connected to systemic injustice on the part of politicians in the discriminatory treatment of indigenous peoples, denying them their voice, imposing hegemonic modernity by cultural means and preventing the development of their worldview.⁵
- G.** contrary to integrity, damaging the fabric of society.⁶
- H.** theologically speaking, it is a deviation from God’s will, and relates to the fallen nature of the human being.⁷
- I.** theologically speaking, it is failing to love one’s neighbour, understood as the community, because every act of corruption is an attack on the common good, on the good of the community.⁸

On the other hand, the survey shows a high degree of consensus around a perception that undue enrichment and tax evasion are acts of corruption. There was, however, less consensus around the responsibility of the churches to audit the money they receive in offerings. Participants identified the following as corruption:

- obtaining personal benefits in exchange for political favours, in contradiction of Christian faith (94.8%).
- receiving tithes from people involved in crime (93.8%).
- companies that do not pay their taxes (91.7%).
- the failure of churches to comply with their duty to audit the offering money (86.5%).
- street vendors who do not pay their taxes (32.3%).

In terms of its prevalence, it was argued that corruption is not an issue that stands in isolation but rather one that affects all other problems.⁹ Moreover, corruption takes place not only in the public

⁵ Indigenous focus group participants

⁶ Interview SI-2

⁷ Interviews with five Tearfund representatives

⁸ Interview SI-1

⁹ Interviews with five Tearfund representatives

sector but obviously encompasses the private sector and the churches as well, in the way in which authority and power are exercised.¹⁰

Corruption is not an isolated issue but affects all other problems.

Factors influencing the role of the churches in relation to corruption

A key finding of the research relates to the role of the church in the face of corruption, an entity that should be a prophetic voice in denouncing it. It was argued that the role of the church in the face of corruption is to fulfil its moral and ethical duty to authoritatively denounce corruption when confronted with it. It is to speak out and act against corruption and injustice. The church must be involved in the fight against corruption. The results from the survey of church leaders show that 98% of participants support the church's intervention in the fight against corruption, thus demonstrating that it does form part of its role.

The role of the church in the face of corruption is to fulfil its moral and ethical duty to authoritatively denounce corruption when confronted with it. It is to speak out and act against corruption and injustice... Despite this, the church generally lacks a voice with which to denounce corruption; it silences it, justifies it and renders it invisible.

Despite this resounding affirmation of the church's prophetic role, the research results show that the church generally lacks a voice with which to denounce corruption, it silences it, justifies it and renders it invisible to the point of normalising it within the church itself and contributing to its prevalence in society. Most participants acknowledged that the church in Latin America and the Caribbean, in all its various denominations and expressions, has adopted timorous, timid or invisible positions on the issue of corruption.

The research offers different reasons or factors that have contributed to and facilitated the church not only failing to exercise a prophetic role against corruption but even tolerating and practising it. These fall into three broad categories: (a) theological and biblical factors; (b) political and economic factors; and (c) socio-cultural factors.

¹⁰ Interview SI-2

Theological and biblical factors

The following salient points can be observed:

Prosperity theology

There was agreement among the participants that the main impediment is prosperity theology, which fosters corruption in the churches. Several interviewees expressed this view.

There are churches that use the Bible to justify the fact that you are poor because you are a sinner so you must seek success and material prosperity by any means possible to avoid being in sin. This then inhibits the fight against corruption, and even facilitates and justifies it.¹¹

Prosperity theology is the main impediment, as this fosters corruption in the churches.

The issue of prosperity:

'...has become a critical issue. Evangelical politicians are men and women with a lot of power and great wealth, and they don't want to lose it, so they won't say a word. The issue of prosperity, prosperity theology particularly, the issue of power is therefore: power for what, power for whom?' (Interview FG2-6)

'There's a weakness when it comes to education in the churches, this is a very important point in terms of dealing with these issues. It's very superficial, there is no deeper reflection and it lends itself to manipulation. There is no exegetical or theological handling of the issue. These approaches are used by those who abuse the churches' resources, making their own theology and their own tools. They think that is the truth and the clearest illustration of this is prosperity theology. This is the axis of all corruption, it is also called reaping what you sow, the more you sow the more you reap. Some people believe it so much that they hand over not only resources but also property, etc. This is because of a distorted exegesis.' (Interviewee FG4-2)

¹¹ Interview SI-1



📷 An after-school care centre for children in the outskirts of Oruro, a mining city. The community is made up of people who have migrated to the city from the rural area in search of a better life. In many families the children either work to help their parents or they stay alone all day while both parents go out to work. Photo: Sara Aliaga / Tearfund

Traditional theology

The churches believe that they should not intervene in society's problems but simply preach the Gospel. Fighting corruption is not seen as part of the Church's mission and there is a fear of working on such complex social processes.

'... no-one told them [the churches] how to serve the community. They told them how to preach the Gospel, how to save souls, but no-one told them how to deal with corrupt police, corrupt authorities, and that you also need to have a voice...' (SI-1)

Fighting corruption is not seen as part of the Church's mission and there is a fear of working on such complex social processes.

The interpretative tradition of Romans 13:1-7

In this text, the Apostle Paul calls for obedience to the authorities. As a result, a theological and pastoral practice of disengagement has developed, i.e. submission simply by saying yes, or doing nothing, in response to the dictates of political authority, which has historically been linked to religious authority. This interpretative tradition omits the third verse of the passage, which emphasises wrongdoing and the ethical validation that all actions, whether of a judge or citizen, require.

The silence of the churches

'No-one talks about corruption in the churches. Instead, much of the discourse justifies corruption... In my experience of many religious services and preaching, I can say that in the last 10 to 15 years I have never heard a discussion around ethics...' (Interview FG4-1)

'I believe the issue of corruption is concealed at the church level, and when I say concealed I am using the term with all its intentional meaning, because something that is concealed is not the same as something that is simply ignored. Corruption is regarded as an external phenomenon, something that is not within us, a phenomenon that is over there while we are over here... corruption has been normalised.' (Interview FG2-2)

'Although there are many biblical references directly linked to corruption, these are not mentioned, not preached.' (Interviewee SI-1)

“Corruption is regarded as an external phenomenon, something that is not within us, a phenomenon that is over there while we are over here... corruption has been normalised.”
(Interview FG2-2)

Absence of integral mission theology

There is a lack of education and training of socio-religious leaders based on a theology of ethics, on integral mission in the context of God's mission:

'The issue of corruption arises at the beginning of the journey of a convert. It requires correct and genuine discipleship, in which the church really forms the identity of Christ in the life of one who is willing to walk with him. Instead of the church being the salt and light of the world, it ends up being corrupted by its environment.'(FG7-1)

There is a view that the church should not interfere in politics, in economic or social problems, but simply preach to people. This ideology makes it difficult to get the church to understand that, as the church, we have a clear responsibility to speak out against corruption and that it is in fact the church's role to speak out and act against corruption.¹²

The church is passive, it has not taken a stand against corruption because of the way we receive the Gospel. This way of establishing a Kingdom here and now is not yet within the reach of us indigenous peoples. One way is to work on the idea of the church as an agent of change and, when recalling scripture, I use Nehemiah as a reference.¹³

'It is difficult for the church to understand the issue of corruption in practice because, although it knows about it, it focuses on the spiritual. They say that saving the soul to go to heaven is the only important thing and that this issue is not theological. They don't want to get their hands dirty, even though they know they should. Paul was talking about dual citizenship, we are citizens of a nation with rights and obligations, and then we see ourselves as the church. Unfortunately, this has increased our indifference to social ills, we know that there is a lot of corruption.' (FG7-13)

¹² Interviews TI-1 and TI-1

¹³ Interview FG7-7

“The church is passive and has not taken a stand against corruption because of the way we receive the Gospel.”

The church has a fundamental role to play in deepening the community bond, particularly the mega-churches, which do very little. It is different in the neighbourhood churches, the small ones that have already done this. In this regard, one of the focus group participants concluded that the church:

‘...does have a role and a duty. The emphasis of Jesus Christ’s message, and even of the Old Testament, in Deuteronomy and from Genesis onwards, is that I must care for my brother. If the church taught this correctly, it would help us to resist corruption. The problem is that the church has deviated from this and much of the preaching is no longer from the Bible but what some people say. If Christians do not study the Bible, it is not clear to them that one of the duties of the Church is to care for their brother and answer the question: where is your brother now?’ (FG4-1)

Focus group participants from Haiti pointed out that the church should support people as much as possible rather than using their services for free all the time. The church has begun to preach more about corruption. Preachers and other leaders need to start preaching in a different way. Churches are preaching the same old message that is not relevant to today's problems and context. Preaching has to be put into context for these times. The church needs to stop being afraid of politics and engage in rebuilding society, which includes political and civic engagement.¹⁴

Political and economic factors

This relationship between the church and politics, including governments, was repeatedly identified as fertile ground for a proliferation of corruption. Several interviewees noted the complicity of the church with the governments of the day, which offer favours in exchange for support.

A relationship of mutual interest is created

The church is used for electoral purposes and receives favours. Politicians acknowledge the existence of a large evangelical population. More than 50% of the population, for example, is believed to be evangelical. And, of that 50%, 70% come from the Pentecostal traditions so governments approach them, manipulate them but, at the same time, offer financial support that serves the churches very well, contributing large amounts to their collection funds, building a relationship of mutual interest between politicians and churches.¹⁵

‘Cases of corruption are occurring because the government is beginning to support certain initiatives of the evangelical sectors with finance, money or perks, with favours, waiving taxes, etc. Many pastors are receiving a ‘tithe’ from the narcos without any problem, they receive very generous offerings, in kind or in laundered cash.’ (TI-1)

¹⁴ Focus group

¹⁵ Interview TI-1

The church accommodates political power

An unbridled exercise of State power, dishonest political practices and their endorsement by the different faith groups, i.e. the various faith communities, relies on a position of complacency and closeness between these groups given that, clearly, both may benefit from this exercise of power.

It is a serious problem in several Central American countries

The church's problem is that once it is so close to the government, it loses its authority to criticise, and this has become an issue in Honduras and Guatemala.¹⁶

In the case of Nicaragua:

'The Ortega government has courted many of the evangelical sectors and they are divided.' (Interview ET-1)

'70 or 80% of the leaders that I know call for silence in the face of corruption...the compliance of churches that have allied themselves with governments means they have lost the freedom to criticise them.' (Interview TI-1)

In the case of Guatemala:

'Neo-Pentecostalism's relationship with the State is one of cronyism. If we are friends of the president, we are relevant, we have influence, we can move forward without paying attention to the social problems we are witnessing. We suppress the voices of the poorest and most vulnerable, everything is a relationship of influence.' (Interview FG2-4)

'What is happening in Nicaragua? In Nicaragua, the Catholic Church and the government are at odds, so the Ortega government has courted many of the evangelical sectors and they are divided, really divided; many have accepted Ortega's help but others have not, so there is tension between some evangelicals.' (TI-1)

“The compliance of churches that have allied themselves with governments means they have lost the freedom to criticise them.”
(Interview TI-1)

El Salvador:

'Given that many evangelical representatives publicly supported and justified the candidates for the Presidency of the Republic by giving them 'divine backing', it should not be surprising that, at some point, they will also come out in support of 'laws' that are contrary to life, or simply continue to remain silent in the face of social injustice. Because, in this sense, their role is to be subservient and just bow down before the powers-that-be in return for personal benefits. The evangelical church must understand its role within the political dynamics of the country. As an actor, its role is not to promote politicians in exchange for favours or recognition; its task is to put right that which is corrupt in Salvadoran politics. Being a church that is an 'actor' requires a praxis of justice that opposes corruption. Naturally, this will not put the church in a privileged position in

¹⁶ Interviews FG2-4 and TI-1

relation to political power; on the contrary, following Jesus' praxis implies going against the system's morals...'

Cornejo Hernández (2020, pp.35-45)

Other political and/or economic factors include: the economic dynamic of consumption, which normalises corruption; a strong correlation between poverty and corruption; poverty wages; government neglect and a failure to provide alternatives to poverty; a corrupt and unjust social system; the bureaucracy of the municipalities; and impunity within the justice system.

One interviewee noted that this was a structural issue:

'Structural racism, structural inequality and structural injustice all facilitate corruption. These are systems and structures that usurp the resources of others. I am not just talking about financial resources. It is also the usurpation of time, of cultural and ancestral riches, of land, of natural resources; it is a usurpation in which the 'other' is harmed. The 'other' who also inhabits that same space, he or she is harmed. Corruption is an all-encompassing form of violence.' (Interview TI-5)

From the survey results, the link between church and politics was seen as follows: the church should influence politics (76%); politicians should consult religious leaders (58.3%); politicians have the right to influence churches (11.5%).



📷 Around 2 million Venezuelan migrants have settled in Colombia after fleeing the socio-economic crisis in their country. Photo: Ferley Ospina / Tearfund

Socio-cultural factors

The following key points can be observed:

Corruption is a cultural norm

There has been a normalisation of behaviours and practices and these go unchallenged, evidently facilitating corruption even from a very early age.

Acts of corruption are normalised and naturalised (tax evasion, overpricing, etc.),¹⁷ and are therefore present at all levels of society. This is justified by using poverty as an excuse¹⁸ and also on a biblical basis. Acts of corruption are justified as something that you are owed: there is a feeling of having suffered injustice, 'I am doing this because they did it to me before'. The following comments are all in agreement on this point:

'If politicians steal then I also have the right to take something - that's the rule.... You're eating in a restaurant and they ask you what amount you want the bill made out for. For me, this is a normalisation of something which, in a culture like Sweden, where I live, would be very shameful.' (Interview FG6-4)

Acts of corruption are justified as something that you are owed: *I have suffered injustice, so I am doing this because they did it to me before.*

'It permeates all levels of society. People are aware that corruption exists. There is an awareness of corruption at the highest levels of government, in the Presidency, the various ministries, institutes and different levels of society. But the problem goes beyond that, as it lies at the base and foundation of society, even in communities and households.' (Interview ET-4)

'There is overpricing when you buy something. There is overpricing when contracts are awarded because the companies pay a 10% kickback to whoever signs the contract, i.e. the mayor's offices. There is an economic dynamic that normalises the corruption that people living in poverty engage in. For example, making money without paying taxes through illegally traded goods. There are also customs officials, businessmen, military and police officers that go along with smuggling. Chances are that people opt for the simple, the agile, the quick, and not for declaring their business dealings every month. The Santa Cruz mayor's office normalises corruption: "If I steal, but I am getting work done, I can show I am making the city prosper". Corruption has increased with this current government, it has come to be seen as natural, it has been more public and well-known, more noticeable.' (Interview ET-2)

'The causes relate to impunity and trivialisation; it is becoming part of the culture, becoming normalised. It's the Brazilian concept of 'jeitinho' (smoothing a path) that lets things pass, lowers the bar. There is less appreciation of what is right, it is becoming increasingly minimised. It takes something ever bigger to shock us. There is something cultural about that.' (FG6-1)

¹⁷ Interviews TI-1 and TI-2

¹⁸ Interview TI-4

The church has normalised corruption in both its external and internal conduct

In relation to the politics that has entered the church and established corruption in everyday practices:

'People look for ways to make money, to avoid paying taxes, to avoid paying for services, such as electricity, by engaging in corruption. Even with the Word, with the Bible, they use it to justify corruption. It is already very much a question of culture. Individualism, competition, consumption, a weakening of community. There is no solidarity. There is no sense of building something together for the country, for the community.' (Interview ET-1)

Church members who are public officials are involved in corrupt practices.¹⁹ Christian politicians have made no systematic efforts to fight corruption.²⁰

'We cannot content ourselves with saying that corruption is a natural part of politics because that same corruption affects the church. In some cases, the churches have focused only on aid, such as providing medical care and feeding the hungry. As Christians, we all have this moral and ethical duty, but fighting corruption is also part of it.' (Interview ET-3)

Several interviewees stated that the church lacks transparency. They present a picture of an unaccountable church whose budgets, where they exist, are not made public and do not therefore demonstrate good management as an example to the community. On the contrary, illegally sourced tithes form an important part of the way churches are run, generating complicity between corrupt Christian pastors, politicians and businessmen. Churches benefit from corruptly obtained tithes, concealing illicit acts as long as the churches receive funding. We are dealing with a church that is not used to being accountable, a church that does not budget, a church that does not consider this to be a part of the processes of any institution or organisation.²¹

The survey shows that only 27% of the participants know of any church or social organisation that is working to address the problem of corruption, demonstrating a lack of churches tackling this social scourge. On the other hand, 49.5% said they had witnessed an act of corruption within the church, indicating a significant rate of corruption within religious institutions.

Pastors and leaders who do undertake social work and fight corruption run a high risk to their safety and security

There is a lack of public awareness and collective responsibility

A lack of social oversight and civic education

Which aspect of education is lacking? It is the civic education that says 'thou shalt not commit injustice'. But it should also say: 'thou shalt not permit injustice'.²²

There are certain conflicting social values that the church does not address

We have a tendency to expect favouritism and preferential treatment from our connections; this is very prevalent in Latin America.

¹⁹ Interview TI-3

²⁰ Interview TI-4

²¹ Interview TI-1

²² Interview SI-3

Factors encouraging the church to take up its role

The research also provided insights into factors that can encourage and contribute to the church playing a positive role in the fight against corruption. The following were noted:

A deep and true faith

The example of Jesus

Jesus was always active in the face of injustice:

'The Gospel of the Kingdom brings with it a way of seeing who I really am. What I do should point to the signs of the Kingdom, which is justice in its different expressions.' (Interview SI-3)

A theological understanding of the concept of justice within the Bible includes numerous examples of corruption by governments, persons or structures, which are contrary to God's will, and where the role of the Christian is to follow the example of Jesus by speaking out against them.²³

In relation to Jesus and love:

'I would say the most important is Jesus and specifically the two most important commandments, Thou shalt love God and love thy neighbour as thyself.' (Interview FG4-1)

A church that fosters a sense of community

'I think the big problem we have in northern Central America is that we are creating cities of despair. The only body that I see conserving a degree of hope is the church and, when that hope is also fostered in community, with a sense of solidarity, it motivates people to be different. This not only prevents people from becoming involved in acts of corruption, it also motivates them to show solidarity with those in need and sets off a chain reaction of good deeds...' (Interview TI-2)

Access to information and accountability

'Churches and communities must have adequate information about problems and difficulties in order to bring about their resolution. With this information comes a legitimacy that enables accountability to be demanded of public and governmental bodies, using dialogue with these entities to advocate for the proper resolution of problems.' (TI-3)

Education

'We need more education, more advocacy so that people understand why they should not engage in corrupt practices; education and poverty reduction.' (Interview TI-4)

'I think [there is a need for] religious training, in the sense of spirituality. I am not only talking about Christian spirituality. [I mean] a spirituality that values honesty and integrity. Because it is people who change first. First the human being changes and then the system changes, so the spiritual step is essential for us to change the public system.' (TI-5)

'The first step is civic awareness. A collective responsibility... Raising awareness is very important. As my collective awareness and responsibility increase, I will act differently. If

²³ Interviews SI-3 and SI-2

I do something wrong, I do it with the weight of conscience and, if I have that individual conscience, I will prevent others from doing wrong or corrupt things...' (Interview SI-3)

Christian ethics

'The foundation lies in the ethos of the Kingdom of God, in the values of the Kingdom of God. Even thinking about my upbringing, the idea of not stealing was instilled in us. But that is not enough. It is more than that. It is thinking not only of the moral dimension of the commandments but of an ethos of the Kingdom in which your neighbour is the reference point, as is the idea of not stealing.' (Interview FG6-1)

Transparency

'That is how we understand the text that says: "Then you will know the truth and the truth will set you free". We know it not only in its biblical sense but also in its broader one: to know what is really going on. The misuse of resources. This generates a level of indignation that contributes to people's involvement in the struggle. We had a training session in Teresina (Piauí) with a municipality of 6,000 inhabitants.' (SI-3)

Social audit

'We have the right to access information, to social accountability, to confront the government and tell them you can't do that, stop. The power we have is the power of oversight.' (SI-2)

Positive findings emerged from the survey: reverends, pastors and leaders of evangelical and long established churches who are ensuring that their churches apply mechanisms to prevent or sanction corruption; transparency mechanisms such as public reports and accountability; oversight mechanisms, such as internal and external audits; educational activities or training; whistleblowing protocols; community oversight activities. Responses of this kind were given by the church leaders from Haiti who were surveyed, most of whom form part of the anti-corruption campaign 'The Haiti we want'. These findings were markedly at odds with the rest of the Latin American sample.

Recommendations

Key recommendations - Church policies to fight corruption internally and externally

Based on the research findings, these are the key recommendations for church policies to fight corruption:

Internal transformation of the churches

The church has played a timorous role in tackling corruption; more than that, it has actually been complicit in it. Transforming the church requires the evaluation and revision of: (a) relationships between churches, governments, social, political and business actors; (b) internal administrative processes for accountability; (c) traditional and/or prosperity theology in order to fulfil the church's role of speaking and acting against corruption and injustices.

Recognition of the church as a space of power

Some churches avoid the link between church and social power by supporting theologies that advocate that the church should not intervene in politics or society's problems. Other churches take disproportionate advantage of the social power of the church and benefit financially from close links with the government but do not use this power to fight for and bring about social transformation. The latter requires the revision of preaching that promotes theologies teaching 'You are poor because you are a sinner'. It also means that churches need to pursue justice in relation to corruption and poverty, and to go deeper into the ethics of Jesus, advocating for the transparency, accountability and integrity of governments.

Transforming everyday praxis in the communities

There is a need to re-read, reflect deeply and re-interpret in order to return to the Gospel's paradigms in relation to prosperity and loving our neighbour. This means: (a) having a voice that is not silent in the face of injustices and abuses of the most historically oppressed; (b) giving new meaning to the praxis of the Gospel taking the ethos of Jesus as the starting point, and focusing on important teachings such as: 'Love the Lord your God' and 'love your neighbour as yourself' in Matthew 22; (c) a profound and contextualised revision of biblical texts, and full respect and recognition of indigenous world views and their sense of the collective in the understanding of fair distribution; (d) returning to the different biblical narratives that call for recognition and reconciliation; and (e) promoting ethical and civic training to mitigate the phenomenon of corruption.

Changing leaders' perspectives of the role of the church

There is a need to educate leaders in a theology of ethics and the integral mission of God. This means: (a) making moral duty and Christian ethics a part of daily life, such that compliance with regulations and norms is model praxis and acts of corruption can be denounced with authority; and (b) strengthening civic and social education, training, teaching and advocacy to demand just laws for the majority.

Prophetic role of the church and its power of oversight

The role of the church in Latin America and the Caribbean in the face of corruption must be to follow God's call and go beyond prayer, to exercise its prophetic role, its moral and ethical duty to authoritatively denounce corruption. It is called to speak out and act against corruption and injustice, to be the salt and the light of the world. This involves: (a) examining its role as the salt and light of the world in order to change history and social norms, and fighting corruption as a social disorder; and (b) educating youth and young people from an early age in order to raise awareness, prevent and follow the example of the sinner who repents and tries to do the right thing once more. It does not involve reinforcing the behaviour of corrupt individuals who create mechanisms to justify themselves. It involves being aware of environmental protection, practising and promoting gender equity, community-based organisation, social accountability and social justice, and demanding efficient oversight bodies.

Giving new meaning to the role of the different church denominations in mitigating corruption

This requires ethics in the management of resources, transparency, evidence, results-based management and self-criticism, values that are far removed from the complacent positions that legitimise corruption.

Recommendations from Tearfund

Involve the church in social transformation

This means forming networks of pastors and church leaders for community work; and encouraging faith organisations to fight corruption, work together, lead by example, and show solidarity and a predisposition towards being constructive and promoting love based on the mission and purpose of the church.

Focus strategies on anti-corruption efforts

This requires educating socio-religious leaders in the theology of ethics and the integral mission of God, teaching Christian ethics against corruption and about leading by example, solidarity, love and action that pleases God, and advocacy to demand and lobby for a solution to community problems.

Develop, plan and implement anti-corruption strategies

This requires pragmatism to drive through concrete solutions, assuming a prophetic voice in denouncing institutionalised corruption and injustice in all its forms; ethical formation; citizen participation; re-education from a biblical-theological perspective for liberation, mobilisation, organisation, accompaniment and social advocacy; reflection on the perception of corruption from an indigenous worldview; and strengthening the rights of women, indigenous people, children and vulnerable groups.

Recommendations from other participants

Address two strategic areas: educate and equip

The first of these relates to education, discipleship, raising the awareness of believers and leaders that corruption should matter to us because God cares about corruption. This awareness-raising needs to be accompanied by deep biblical reflection. The second has to do with equipping believers, motivating them to mobilise as active citizens of society and to be much more involved in the good governance of their communities through NGOs, through greater participation in school, in hospitals, and other spaces. This is citizen activism. (Laver 2019, p. 106)

Learn about and recognise other efforts to address corruption outside the church

The Church could create a prophetic or citizenship ministry in order to provide a space for people involved in this work, including those who are already involved and being persecuted and besieged by corrupt people they have exposed or by a complicit society, people who risk prosecution and condemnation for their efforts.²⁴

Work with the local church through biblical-theological reflection and local development

There is a need to offer practical models for tackling corruption that can contribute to and lay out first steps, pointing the way and creating the conditions for local grassroots organisations to embark on the process. There is also a need to work with civil society in order to monitor public organisations and services in order to prevent corruption, and for basic training to raise political awareness.²⁵

²⁴ Interview SI-2

²⁵ Interview SI-3

Recommendations from the focus groups

- In addition to being a prophetic voice, we must also provide solutions and act on this problem, starting with ourselves.
- Share the results of this research in order to generate new strategies within organisations and encourage them to continue these actions and work for the most vulnerable.
- Accompany the current situation in relation to poverty, injustice and need, especially in the health sector, exacerbated by Covid-19, where those who suffer are the most vulnerable. Support the humanitarian response, reflection and action. Whether engaging with political parties or not, the church must be a source of morality and ethics in the face of excesses and acts of corruption; it must effectively accompany social movements, with greater voice and strength.
- Educational work. We must raise our prophetic voice to denounce corruption.
- Training in ethics, values and principles; training for citizen participation.
- The church has to take a stand by supporting marginalised people, victims, and not tolerating or allowing things to happen.
- Bring people together to advocate and raise awareness. Promote and design training courses for facilitators of change.
- The Good treatment campaign to promote the good treatment of children. This is a public awareness campaign that aims to treat children with respect.
- Re-education of the church is fundamental to changing the culture of corruption. Educate the youth and re-educate the adults.
- Support churches to place importance on transparency, accountability and reporting.
- Dedicated mobilisation of young people is important. It is very difficult to change the habits and customs of older generations. It is much better, easier, quicker and more sustainable to develop future generations.
- The next steps must include mobilising church leaders and youth by raising awareness and addressing corruption as a problem.
- If you have a positive experience, share it. This will show that you can start with these small groups and have a multiplier effect.
- Create a prayer movement that accompanies the different projects.
- Learn our countries' laws. All countries have laws that can form a framework for advocacy work.
- Reflect on perceptions of corruption from the perspective of indigenous peoples' experience and our interpretation of the Bible.
- Enhance and broaden the concept of corruption by incorporating the indigenous worldview, using this enhanced knowledge to inform advocacy programmes.
- Support struggles and movements for the autonomy of indigenous peoples, providing real and genuine support.
- Meet to exchange perspectives and learn from indigenous narratives, reflecting on what is understood by corruption based on their experiences and on the Bible.
- Demand that the rights of indigenous peoples are met.

Recommendations from the DEI research team

- Interventions and strategies should take as their starting point the fact that corruption is an important and necessary issue to address in the work undertaken with the Latin American and Caribbean churches. It forms part of their prophetic action, based on an integral mission perspective and a commitment to social transformation that brings about the justice of the Kingdom of God.
- Work to combat corruption needs to be guided by a critical and constant analysis of the situation that is attentive to the ambiguity of this issue. Combatting corruption has been used by political groups as a way of undermining popular governments and even of justifying interventions in countries, thus threatening the democratic order. A critical attitude needs to be maintained, which seeks different avenues and reflective approaches rooted in the immediate context, while retaining a regional and global focus and a commitment to the poorest and most excluded groups.
- When working on the issue of corruption in LAC, especially in relation to indigenous and Afro-descendant peoples, we should consider the importance of widening our understanding of corruption to embrace their worldview. Corruption is part of a system of structures that usurp the resources of others. These are not limited to economic and financial resources. They also include the usurpation of time, wealth, ancestral cultures, knowledge, land and natural resources. It constitutes the exploitation of the 'other' based on a failure to recognise their culture. This is the demand for justice that is emerging from these groups and it is a cry that needs to be heard by the churches.
- When implementing work in each country, conduct a detailed and in-depth analysis of the situation of the churches: their history, theology, and the characteristics of members. These aspects were considered in this research but they need to be developed further in each local context.
- The action of the churches should be based on a faith commitment and ethical values inspired by a biblical-theological reading that affirms their members as citizens and social actors who respect and dialogue with other actors called to become involved in eradicating corruption.
- When working to eradicate corruption from within the churches, prioritise the following areas: (a) theological training – insist that disciplines related to an analysis of the current situation, ethics, poverty and corruption be included in the curricula of seminaries and theological institutes; (b) at congregational level – include the subject in the different training spaces, such as Sunday Schools and youth, women's and other groups and associations; (c) for pastors and lay ministers – encourage participation in reflection and study groups on 'faith and politics'. Brazil's experience offers an important reference; (d) consider pastoral support for individuals and groups of Christians engaged in anti-corruption work so that they feel more supported by the churches and less isolated. As mentioned above, the creation of a Ministry of the prophetic,²⁶ or a Ministry of citizenship is suggested. When providing this support, pay attention to the issues of physical, personal and group safety of those carrying out this work.

²⁶ In Latin American theological traditions, this idea is linked to following the example of the Old Testament prophets in denouncing injustice.

- It will be important for the team leading this work to have an in-depth knowledge of the theologies of the Pentecostal and neo-Pentecostal churches, especially prosperity theology, which has been mentioned in this research but the scope of which did not permit us to analyse it in any depth.
- Biblical-theological reflection, especially Bible studies, is the most appropriate way to initiate a reflection on corruption in religious communities. Individuals and groups already working on the issue point to this as a way of inspiring Christian interest and commitment.
- Produce materials related to the issue of corruption and churches. In addition to Bible studies, prayer spaces could be formed for people engaged in the anti-corruption struggle, liturgical materials could be developed and thematic campaigns could be promoted for fixed periods.
- In order to initiate and strengthen this work, it is important to disseminate successful experiences and good practices, where groups or teams of churches working on the issue of the church and corruption have been successfully formed and where the lessons learned from the experience are shared.
- For group work, it may be more motivating to start with issues that are closer to everyday life, such as anti-corruption and education, health, the environment and social action. Conduct a baseline assessment of the current situation, which can subsequently be referred back to in order to highlight progress made.
- Motivate and support the churches to develop an anti-corruption, transparency and accountability policy for their internal use and as an exercise for their members' lives as citizens.

ANNEX A: Research methodology

Study subjects

The research subjects were evangelical church leaders from different denominations. The criteria were aimed at including indigenous and/or Afro-descendant churches as well as different church traditions such as the historic established church, conservative churches, Pentecostal and neo-Pentecostal churches, and different positions or ministries within the church.

A literature review analysed key historical processes related to corruption in order to determine the perceived causes and effects of this problem, its context, figures, as well as the role that churches have played in this phenomenon.

The research work began with the design and implementation of a survey to ascertain the perceptions and attitudes of people who form part of the Latin American and Caribbean churches, for which snowball sampling was used. The form was designed and shared using a digital form tool in order to review the questions and detailed responses across five areas: (1) the perceived impact of corruption; (2) attitudes towards corruption; (3) perceptions of the relationship between the church and the world; (4) anti-corruption actions in the churches; and (5) the most effective actions to tackle corruption. The sample obtained included 163 evangelical church leaders from the ten studied countries.

Alongside the survey, structured interviews were conducted with five Tearfund managers in Bolivia, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, Haiti, Colombia and Brazil, as well as with a participant from Kenya who supports Tearfund's global work. The purpose of this process was to explore the role that the church could play in addressing corruption in Latin America and the Caribbean, in particular in the countries where Tearfund works, as well as to understand existing initiatives in this regard.

The results obtained from the surveys and interviews were then followed up with seven focus groups, organised via virtual meetings with church leaders and members from the different countries studied. The role of the churches in mitigating or contributing to corruption was investigated, and the development of proposed strategies and possible interventions for tackling and preventing it was explored. These focus groups were initially separated by country but, in the end, two mixed groups were held, one with participants from Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, Peru and Venezuela and one with members from Brazil, Costa Rica and Haiti. A final focus group was held with members of indigenous and Afro-descendant churches.

Finally, in order to validate and deepen the research, especially in relation to its last specific objective, three key informant interviews were conducted with expert leaders in the field, in order to explore corruption and the role of the churches in more depth. All of the information was cross-checked through methodological triangulation.

Coding method

The coding process sets out the essential procedure for moving from analysis to conceptualisation and from conceptualisation to integrating text with theory (Hernández, Fernández and Baptista, 1998). This systematic and rigorous process culminates in the emergence of a central category, which will be characterised as an emerging theory.

To systematise the aforementioned records, an initial work plan was drawn up by which to review all interview transcripts and records made by the interviewers. This set out a coding system to analyse the information as well as a tentative date for each stage in the analysis. A logbook was kept for the

purpose of documenting the process, with entries describing the ease and/or difficulty of implementing the tools and including notes about the findings.

For the coding method, a double-entry table was designed, with a vertical axis organised in terms of prioritised or generator categories and subcategories arising from the research questions and objectives contained in the methodological design. The horizontal axis of the table consisted of separate columns for respondents, code, keywords, emerging categories and results.

To begin the first level of coding, the information was therefore initially organised and then classified according to a definition of the units of analysis or meaning, i.e. key words and paragraphs.

These units, especially the paragraphs, were subsequently assigned and linked to the generator categories on the basis of observed similarities, taking care not to alter the interviewees' perceptions in this interpretation and thus avoiding possible bias. These categories were assigned a code to facilitate the systematisation of information, using and drawing on the double-entry matrix.

In a second level of coding, keywords were compared with each other so as to group them into emerging categories, according to similarities or differences, and they were then assigned a name and code. These are more abstract and represent the findings emerging from the perceptions of those interviewed or who participated, while the generator categories are more concrete and were established at the start of the research to investigate the phenomenon of corruption in the region.

At this level, coding is refined through differences and similarities between the emerging categories, thus distilling the information into categories and transforming it without losing its meaning, converting it into themes and sub-themes. These were coded and they form the basis of the conclusions that emerge from the analysis. The interpretation of the information's meaning is therefore produced on the basis of coding; this provides greater interpretative richness without relying on unfounded subjectivity and is a way of obtaining evidence through the reliability and validity of the coding process.



📷 The As Born Among Us Campaign, supported by Tearfund, works with over 300 church leaders and christian organisations by raising awareness and influencing policy makers in favour of migrants across Latin America and the Caribbean. Photo: Rafael Rivera / Tearfund

Triangulation method

Cowman (1993) explains triangulation as the combination of multiple methods in a study of the same object or event in order to better approach the phenomenon under investigation. Morse (cited by Vallejo and Mineira, 2009, p.121) defines methodological triangulation as the use of at least two methods, usually qualitative and quantitative, to address the research problem. When a research method is inadequate, triangulation is used to ensure that a more comprehensive approach is taken to solving the research problem.

The purpose of triangulation in this research was to compare the results obtained from different research subjects and to identify –through their perceptions– trends and commonalities that enable us to characterise and approach the phenomenon studied, as well as to obtain complementary findings contributing to the development of knowledge on this subject while guaranteeing the reliability of the results.

Methodologically, the triangulation was based on a triple-entry matrix or table. The generator categories and subcategories arising from the research questions and objectives were placed on the vertical axis while the research subjects were placed along the horizontal one together with the method used to collect the data. This organisation made it possible to observe and subsequently analyse convergences emerging from the different research subjects' perceptions of corruption and the church in the region, referred to as 'intersection'.

Knowledge thus emerges from the comparison between the research subjects' social practice and the theory relating to the topic drawn from a review of the literature. This process grants greater validity to the results, demonstrating that a combination of these methods and their appropriate use enables confidence in and the validity of each of them to be maintained. There is also a need to provide feedback to the participants in order to verify that the meanings conveyed are properly, objectively and correctly understood.

Limitations

Some limitations that affected the research should be noted:

- Tight deadline: the timeframe was too short to conduct research across a range of different countries and actors, given the complexity of working with three different languages in the region (Spanish, Portuguese and English) and cultural diversity with the aim of achieving harmonised coding and more reliable and valid results.
- Time of year: some interviewees' participation was delayed due it being the end/start of the year, as well as the Covid-19 pandemic context.
- Thematic complexity: given the complexity and sensitivity of the topic (often considered taboo), there was initially rather poor participation in the survey, which necessitated different appeals and strategies, thus delaying the analysis.
- Reduced participation: the people invited to the focus groups were reluctant to participate, which prompted a change in strategy in order to complete the research task.

ANNEX B: List of references and bibliography

References

- Acosta, M. (2018). *El mensaje del profeta Oseas Una teología práctica para combatir la corrupción*. Peru: Publications and Research Centre (CENIP)/Ediciones Puma.
- Asociación Vida. (2020).
- Barómetro Global de la Corrupción de América Latina y el Caribe. (2019).
- Bendaña, Saldomando and Hanlon (2007). *Corrupción Global*. Centre for International Studies/CLACSO: Managua, Nicaragua/Buenos Aires, Argentina.
- Briceño Guerrero, J. (2007). *El laberinto de los tres minotauros*. Caracas: Monte Ávila Editores Latinoamericana.
- Cornejo Hernández, M. (2020). La praxis ética de Jesús como modelo de participación política para la iglesia evangélica en El Salvador. pp. 35-45. Teología y Realidad, No. 1, January-July 2020. Evangelical University of El Salvador
- Del Pino, E. (2007). *Políticas de lucha contra la corrupción en Centroamérica y República Dominicana*. Higher Council for Scientific Research (CSIC), Comparative Politics Unit. <https://www.iesam.csic.es>
- Dussel, E. (2006). *Historia de la Iglesia en América Latina*.
- ECLAC. (2007). *La corrupción y la impunidad en el marco del desarrollo en América Latina y el Caribe: un enfoque centrado en derechos desde la perspectiva de las Naciones Unidas*. Santiago de Chile: Author.
- ECLAC. Social Policies Series No 139. *La corrupción y la impunidad en el marco del desarrollo en América Latina*.
- Gerald, C. (2004). El Peso que cargamos sobre nuestras espaldas: Corrupción en América Latina. CLAD's Journal *Reforma y Democracia*. No. 28. Caracas, Venezuela.
- Gudynas, E. (2018). Extractivismo y corrupción en América del Sur. (CLAE) *ReviISE*, (10), Year 10, October 2017-March 2018, pp. 73-87. Argentina. <http://www.reviise.unsj.edu.ar>
- Haiti Christian Committee (n.d.).
- Hernández, R., Fernández, C. and Baptista, P. (1998). *Metodología de la investigación*. (2nd ed.). Mexico City: McGraw-Hill Interamericana Editores, S. A. de C. V.
- Hernaiz, C. and Phélan, M. (2014). Sobre las mediciones de corrupción y su relación con el desarrollo y el bienestar de América Latina. *Revista Paradigmas*, Jul-Dec. 2014, Vol. 6 No. 2, 131-177. Caracas Venezuela.
- Hoffman, M. (2019). *Ética protestante. Una fundamentación teológico-crítica*. San José, Costa Rica: Universidad Bíblica Latinoamericana.
- Iconos. Revista de Ciencias Sociales. No. 22, Quito, May 2005, pp. 49-60 © Facultad Latinoamericana de Ciencias Sociales-Sede Académica de Ecuador. ISSN: 1390-1249. Susana Andrade, Dr. of Anthropology. Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales - Paris email: andradesm@puntonet.net Date of receipt: January 2005. Date of acceptance and final version: March 2005.

Katz, A. (2017). Poder Ciudadano: corrupción y transparencia: Informe 2016-2017. Compiled by Pablo Secchi; Karina Kalpschtrej; Pilar Arcidiácono - 1st ed. - Buenos Aires: Eudeba, 2017. 354 p.; 23 x 16 cm. ISBN 978-950-23-2798-3 1. Transparency. 2. Corruption.

Kaufmann, D. (2015). Corruption Matters. *Finance and Development*, 52 (3). International Monetary Fund.

Laver, R. (2019). *Libranos del mal: la corrupción y el desafío para la fe y la iglesia cristiana en América Latina*. Peru: Ediciones Puma.

Mendoza, J. and López, C. (2020). La calidad de las instituciones, su impacto en la relación entre corrupción y crecimiento económico: una revisión teórica. *Economía Teoría y Práctica*. Nueva Época, Year 28 (52), January-June, pp.15-42. <http://dx.doi.org/10.24275/etypuam/ne/522020/Mendoza>

Molina, C. (1999). *Introducción a la criminología*. Bogotá: Editorial Leyer.

OAS. (2021). *Reports of the States Parties to the OAS Anti Corruption Mechanism (MESICIC)* Accessed at: <http://www.oas.org/en/sla/dlc/mesicic/paises-home.html>

Oscar, D. (2012). El problema de la corrupción en América Latina y la incorporación de la ética para su solución en Espacios Públicos, vol. 15, no. 35, September-December, 2012, pp. 48-62. Autonomous University of the State of Mexico, Toluca.

Pastrana, A. (2019). Estudio sobre la corrupción en América Latina. *Revista Mexicana de Opinión Pública*, Year 14, (27), January-June 2019, pp. 13-40.

Peralta, A. (2018) *Foro Jurídico. Nacimos corruptos o aprendimos a serlo*. Accessed at: <https://forojuridico.mx/nacimos-corruptos-o-aprendimos-a-serlo/>

Ramón Ruffner de Vega, J. G. (2014). Corrupción, ética y función pública en el Perú. *Quipukamayoc*, 22(41), 59–73. <https://doi.org/10.15381/quipu.v22i41.10069>

Rosenmüller, C. and Ruderer, S. (2016). *Dádivas, dones y dineros. Aportes a una nueva historia de la corrupción en América Latina desde el imperio español a la modernidad*. Madrid: Frankfurt am Main, Iberoamericana Vervuert.

Salas, A. (2016). Un Análisis de la Corrupción en América Latina. R.I.T.I. (2) *September-December*, 2016.

Saravia J. (2013). *Entre lobbys y movilización social en el Perú: el tenso panorama político tras recientes casos de corrupción*. Peru: Universidad Nacional Mayor de San Marcos (UNMSM).

Tearfund (n/d). Our mission. Accessed at: <https://www.tearfund.org/about-us/our-mission>

Transparency International. (2021). Corruption Perceptions Index. Accessed at: <https://www.transparency.org/en/cpi/2020/index/nzl>

UNDOC (2021). Country profiles on the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime's review mechanism for the implementation of the United Nations Convention against Corruption. Accessed at: <https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/corruption/country-profile/index.html>

Vallejo, R. and Finol, M. (2009). La triangulación como procedimiento de análisis para investigaciones educativas. *Urbe. Edu*. Accessed at: [https://scholar.google.co.ve/scholar?q=Vallejo,+R.+and+Finol,+M.+\(2009\).&hl=en&as_sdt=0&as_vis=1&oi=scholart](https://scholar.google.co.ve/scholar?q=Vallejo,+R.+and+Finol,+M.+(2009).&hl=en&as_sdt=0&as_vis=1&oi=scholart)

Wielandt, G and Artigas C. (2007) La corrupción y la impunidad en el marco del desarrollo en América Latina y el Caribe: un enfoque centrado en derechos desde la perspectiva de las Naciones Unidas. Social Development Division 139, Social Policies Series, Santiago de Chile.

Bibliography

- Asier, A. (2020). El Hermano Juan y el Apóstol Noé: un narco y su mano derecha. In: *Paraísos de Dinero y Fe*. Latin American Centre for Investigative Journalism (CLIP) Accessed at: <https://www.elclip.org/el-hermano-juan-y-el-apostol-o-un-narco-de-guatemala-y-su-mano-derecha/>
- Comptroller-General of Accounts of the Republic of Guatemala. (2020). *Public policies and legislation to combat corruption*. Accessed at: <https://www.contraloria.gob.gt>
- Comptroller-General of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela. (2020). *Public policies and legislation to combat corruption*. Accessed at: <http://www.cgr.gob.ve>
- Infoleyes, a platform for working with Bolivian legislation. (2020). *Public policies and legislation to combat corruption*. Accessed at: <https://bolivia.infoleyes.com/>
- Ministry of Justice and Public Security. (2020). *Public policies to combat corruption in Brazil*. Accessed at: <https://legado.justica.gov.br>
- Presidency of the Federative Republic of Brazil. (2020). *Anti-corruption legislation*. Accessed at: <http://www.planalto.gov.br>
- Presidency of the Republic of Colombia. (2020). *Public policies and legislation to combat corruption*. Accessed at: <http://wsp.presidencia.gov.co>

‘To be a church that is an ‘actor’ requires a praxis of justice that opposes corruption. Naturally, this will not put the church in a privileged position in relation to political power. On the contrary, following Jesus’ praxis means going against the system’s morals.’

Cornejo Hernández, 2020

learn.tearfund.org

Tearfund, Calle 80B #39 24 Barrio Ciudad Jardín, Barranquilla Colombia

☎ +57 53783434 ✉ publications@tearfund.org

Registered office: Tearfund, 100 Church Road, Teddington, TW11 8QE, United Kingdom. Registered in England: 994339.
A company limited by guarantee. Registered Charity No. 265464 (England & Wales) Registered Charity No. SC037624 (Scotland)

tearfund