



**"Generally, resources and best practices are coming from Western countries. Having an Asian-centric forum adds value for us as we deal with challenges that manifest themselves in a culturally similar context."**

Shanta Helena Dwarkasing  
UN Global Compact Network Malaysia & Brunei

**"The diverse perspectives of presenters and participants underscored the importance of Collective Action in addressing common challenges."**

Tanyakorn Thippayapokin  
Anti-Corruption Organisation  
of Thailand

**"To promote integrity in the private and public sectors, efforts need to be synchronised".**

Xuan Dinh  
Vietnam Chamber of  
Commerce and Industry

# *Key takeaways from the first* **Asia-Pacific Anti-Corruption Collective Action Forum**

Promoting multi-stakeholder approaches to support business integrity in Asia-Pacific

**On 25 September 2023, the inaugural Asia-Pacific Anti-Corruption Collective Action Forum was held in Manila, Philippines.**

The Forum provided a platform to share good practices in multi-stakeholder approaches for strengthening business integrity in the region.

The Forum was organised by the Basel Institute on Governance with the support of the Anti-Corruption Initiative for Asia and the Pacific, jointly managed by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and the Asian Development Bank (ADB).

Over 50 participants from the private and public sectors, international organisations, civil society and academia came together for the Forum. The primary goal was to build mutual trust between stakeholders, which is necessary for Collective Action. Additionally, it aimed to establish a regional community of practice that can assist companies in enhancing their compliance frameworks and addressing specific corruption risks.

## Collective Action in Asia-Pacific

Collective Action is characterised by sustained cooperation between stakeholders who support each other to strengthen business integrity practices within companies, and work towards fairer competition between them.

The potential of Collective Action to improve the business environment and reduce corruption is increasingly recognised by leading international organisations and standards such as the 2021 OECD Anti-Bribery Recommendation, the 2023 OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises on Responsible Business Conduct, the 2022 B20 Indonesia Policy Paper on Integrity and Compliance, as well as in several National Anti-Corruption Strategies and Action Plans.

In Asia-Pacific, small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) are a dominant force. In 2023, they represented over 97 percent of all businesses. They contribute significantly to economic growth – with their share of GDP ranging from 40 percent to 60 percent in most economies – and provide two out of three private-sector jobs in the region.

Often operating in challenging environments with tight profit margins, SMEs are at particular risk of being drawn into various types of corruption. On the positive side, this heightened vulnerability and need for support to address the issue opens up opportunities for anti-corruption Collective Action.



### **What are SMEs?**

There are different definitions of SMEs. According to the OECD, SMEs are enterprises that employ fewer than 250 people. They are further subdivided into micro enterprises (fewer than 10 employees); small enterprises (10 - 49 employees); and medium-sized enterprises (50 - 249 employees).

Although there is still huge potential to increase knowledge and practice of Collective Action in Asia-Pacific, the region already hosts some of the largest and most active initiatives in the world. In October 2023, the Basel Institute published a working paper on Collective Action in the ASEAN region – part of the wider Asia-Pacific area – showcasing and analysing notable examples.



Binder, Lucie, Vanessa Hans, and Anna Stransky. 2023. 'A collaborative approach to improve business integrity in ASEAN: Case studies of anti-corruption Collective Action in the region.' Working Paper 48, Basel Institute on Governance. Available at: [collective-action.com/explore/publications/2316](https://collective-action.com/explore/publications/2316).

In fact, one of the initiatives featured in this paper went on to win the 2023 Asia-Pacific Anti-Corruption Collective Action Award, which was presented at the Forum through the support of the Siemens Integrity Initiative. The **Thai Private Sector Collective Action Against Corruption (Thai CAC)** won following jury selection and a public vote. The initiative has gained growing recognition both in Thailand and

internationally for its contribution to cleaner business, primarily by offering certification to companies. The aim is to provide independent verification of the strength, completeness and effectiveness of a company's anti-bribery policies and procedures, against checklists of criteria that are based on international standards.

The Thai CAC now boasts a membership of over 1,400 companies. Although it first chose to focus on attracting companies on the Thai Stock Exchange, it is now expanding its strategy to SMEs. To date, representatives from over 2,000 Thai SMEs have attended in-person or virtual events organised by the Thai CAC.

*“The Thai CAC remains committed to amplifying its success across diverse platforms, with the hope of inspiring others to join the anti-corruption Collective Action movement.”*

– Phrommet Bencharongkit  
Vice President, Thai Collective Action Against Corruption

The other two Award finalists were the Maritime Anti-Corruption Network – India and the Global Platform for Sustainable Natural Rubber. Both demonstrated exceptional commitment to business integrity and produced tangible results in their endeavours.



# Key takeaways

In addition to a dedicated session on SMEs at the Forum, there was a strong focus on the incentives and challenges for SME participation in Collective Action initiatives throughout the event. The following key messages represent some highlights from the day's presentations and discussions.

## Session: Business integrity for sustainable economic growth in Asia-Pacific: Incentives and opportunities

- Elodie Beth, Senior Manager Anti-Corruption, Anti-Corruption Division, OECD
- Graeme Seed, Principal Integrity Specialist, Office and Anti-corruption and Integrity, Asian Development Bank
- Seint Sandar Hlaing, National Programme Officer, United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, Myanmar Office

Moderator: Vanessa Hans, Head of Private Sector, Basel Institute on Governance

### 1. Business integrity opens up access to direct investment and international supply chains

International anti-corruption standards increasingly apply not only to companies that invest abroad but also to their supply chains.

As presenter Graeme Seed pointed out, six major Multilateral Development Banks (MDBs) – including the Asian Development Bank – have agreed to new General Principles for Business Integrity Programmes. The Principles set out harmonised expectations for the ethical standards and risk management practices to which recipients of funding must adhere. MDBs are a major source of loans, grants and investments for businesses in lower- and middle-income countries.

Being part of a Collective Action initiative can give companies of all sizes access to training and support in how to meet these standards in language and formats that are understandable and user-friendly.

Larger companies can support SMEs as fellow members of an initiative. In this way, they help to ensure the integrity of local supply chains – which is needed when they interact with downstream partners internationally.



→ **Example**

*Presenter Mary Lau Kwok explained how Hong Kong Business Ethics Centre has built an SME Corruption Prevention Network reaching some 40,000 member companies. They disseminate knowledge about compliance and business ethics in different formats, such as Question & Answer factsheets on locally-specific topics; 'corruption myth busting' resources; and FAQs.*



**Further reading**

Business integrity programmes: Multilateral Development Banks harmonise their guidance, by Lisa Miller, World Bank Group, and Duncan Smith, formerly of the European Investment Bank.

**Session: Levelling the playing field for SMEs**

- Mary Lau Kwok-mei, Executive Director, Hong Kong Business Ethics Development Center, Independent Commission Against Corruption of Hong Kong
- Vibeke Lyssand Leirvag, Managing Director, Felicia Designs
- Emily O'Hara, Assistant Director, Attorney-General's Department of Australia / Bribery Prevention Network, Australia

Moderator: Ryan Evangelista, Regional Manager for Asia-Pacific, Center for International Private Enterprise

**2. Incentives for SMEs need to be tangible**

As presenter Vibeke Lyssand Leirvag pointed out, although the reputational benefits of being part of an anti-corruption Collective Action initiative can be really attractive for large companies with big public relations budgets, they are less of an incentive for SMEs.



Instead, she and other Forum participants noted that incentives that provide an "immediate return" for SMEs are much more useful. For example, national or regional governments could give companies tax breaks for doing anti-bribery training; or larger companies could offer discounts on internet packages for their SME counterparts.



## → Parallel breakout sessions

A. What and who drives Collective Action?: Identifying incentives for and benefits of engaging in Collective Action to strengthen business integrity

**Facilitators:** Phrommet Bencharongkit, Vice President, Thai Collective Action against Corruption and Catch Ofilada, Head of Governance and Sustainability, Makati Business Club

B. Business integrity and sustainability along the value chain: What role for Collective Action?

**Facilitator:** Dennis Montecillo, Director, International Care Ministries Foundation (ICM), Board of Trustee Member of the Global Compact Network Philippines

C. Models for Collective Action in Asia-Pacific: Identifying best practices

**Facilitator:** Elodie Beth, Senior Manager Anti-Corruption, OECD



### **3. Involving the private sector in tackling corruption is critical**

Businesses of all sizes can be victims of corruption; they can be enablers (e.g. lawyers helping to hide the wrongdoing of a public official); and they can be perpetrators. However, in the Asia-Pacific region, Forum participants reported that companies are often excluded from government or civil society

initiatives to tackle corruption, possibly due to a lack of mutual trust and regular engagement.

Instead, the opposite approach should be taken: it is critical that those who facilitate anti-corruption action in the public sector and civil society invest effort to involve the private sector from the start, or be open to supporting private sector-led initiatives. This is what defines Collective Action.

### Session: Civil society as a driver for Collective Action

- Nicole Elias, Program Manager – Private Sector, Transparency International Sri Lanka
- Shanta Dwarkasing, Director of Programs, UN Global Compact Network Malaysia & Brunei
- Tanyakorn (Yves) Thippayapokin, CoST Project Officer, Anti-Corruption Organisation of Thailand

Moderator: Joseph Pozsgai-Alvarez, Associate Professor, School of Human Sciences, Osaka University, Japan



#### 4. Go beyond the capital city

Many countries in the Asia-Pacific region are widely geographically dispersed, with a significant proportion of the population living outside of the capital city or region. Organisations that lead or facilitate Collective Action initiatives need to travel outside of the capital to engage and build trust with local politicians and businesses if they are seeking to make improvements on a national scale.

##### → Example

*Presenter Shanta Dwarkasing from the UN Global Compact Network Malaysia & Brunei, a civil society organisation, explained that securing a letter of support from a state governor in Malaysia was really helpful in attracting companies in that state to work with their organisation.*

## Session: Linking business integrity and sustainability: The added value of Collective Action

- Stefano Savi, Director, Global Platform for Sustainable Natural Rubber
- Dinh Thi Bich Xuan, Deputy General, Office for Business Sustainable Development, Vietnam Chamber of Commerce and Industry
- Anna Lagon, CEO of Bayo Manila & Board of Trustee Member of the Global Compact Network Philippines

Moderator: June Nguyen, Anti-Corruption Analyst, OECD



### **5. Anti-Corruption Collective Action is a global movement critical to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals**

As Jose Solomon Cortez, Associate Director at Asian Institute of Management, said, many countries in Asia-Pacific have a socio-political environment that is “dis-enabling” for Collective Action. In this context, “you can bring people together, but you need a common vision that captures the aspirations of everyone” in order to create change.

Promoting Collective Action as a global movement is critical to creating this common vision: there is strength in numbers, and through international collaboration, those who facilitate Collective Action “should always [be able to] find innovative solutions to ensure the sustainability of [their] work on promoting ethics and good governance.”

The final session focused on how companies can meet the growing expectation of investors and customers to address the negative impacts of their activities on people, the planet and society, while contributing to sustainable development in the countries where they operate.

There was general agreement that anti-corruption Collective Action can provide a framework that enables participants to think holistically about what behaving ethically as a business means, and what strategies can be implemented to achieve aspirations in this context.



*“If we involve all stakeholders - including government - we should be able to make a change”*

- Forum participant

## Next steps

This private sector-led Forum provided an opportunity for participants to connect with people in different countries, and from different sectors within their own country, who are currently part of a Collective Action initiative or are hoping to establish one. Participants were strongly supportive of repeating the event and using it to help build a regional community of professionals who can learn from each other as they work to improve business practices in their sectors, regions or countries.

*“The delegates were very participative and the points in discussion were thought-provoking. Looking forward to the conferences in the future!”*

- Forum participant

The Basel Institute on Governance and OECD have taken this feedback on board as they plan their work to support people and organisations in Asia-Pacific countries to prevent and address corruption.



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