**Meeting Note: Funder Roundtable on Fighting Corruption**19th June 2020

**1. Introduction**

On 12th June 2020, the Joffe Charitable Trust and the John Ellerman Foundation convened a roundtable for funders on UK civil society work to fight corruption. 11 funders participated (see Annex 1). The objectives of the roundtable were to explore the current case for anti-corruption work in the UK, and identify common ground with funders’ strategic priorities.

A short [briefing note](https://joffetrust.org/anti-corruption-briefing-note-jun20-web/) was circulated in advance, with a state-of-the-art analysis of the strategic issues. Participants were enthusiastic about working more effectively in this area, and the links between fighting corruption and economic, climate and social justice. They recognised the scale of the issues, the current risks from C-19 and Brexit and the potential for progress.

**2. Presentations**

*2.1 Sue Hawley, Spotlight on Corruption: The big picture*

* The case of Isabel dos Santos, earlier this year, illustrates the UK’s role. The daughter of Angola’s former president, she amassed a fortune of $2.2bn and is now being investigated for corruption. She lives in London. Many UK organisations supported & benefitted from her, e.g. professional service firms, PR companies, elite schools. These funds could have lifted millions of Angolans out of poverty.
* The current C-19 crisis presents three major risks to fighting corruption in the UK: (a) the UK could become a “Singapore on Thames’, i.e. a deregulated tax haven, through initiatives like Freeports, (b) recent gains could be reversed, like transparency on company ownership, (c) new forms of corruption could spring up, including political corruption.
* Tackling corruption is not an optional extra. It is at the core of how we rebuild our economies, so they are fair, effective and inclusive.

*2.2 Rachel Davies, Transparency International: Current priorities*

* The C-19 crisis creates new opportunities for corruption, with more emergency funding & fewer checks. UKACC has identified three current priorities:
	1. Addressing the UK’s role as a safe haven for corrupt money around the world. This includes detecting funds, the legal architecture and challenging the role of the UK professions.
	2. Maintaining & strengthening the UK’s anti-corruption standards. E.g. the government’s work on tackling corruption in sectors like extractives, housing, local government and the influence of vested interests in UK politics.
	3. Procurement. Ensuring transparency & probity around government’s C-19 related procurement.

*2.3 Robert Barrington, Centre for the Study of Corruption: the anti-corruption movement*

* The anti-corruption movement dates from 1990. In 2010, the UK Bribery Act had a galvanising effect, leading to the emergence of some new players.
* The UKACC now has 18 members, mostly small though including organisations like Oxfam. They engage at different levels and, for many, corruption is one of a range of issues they focus on. In total, they spend about £4-5m pa on UK work. The movement is totally outgunned and outresourced by the opposition, e.g. hard right think tanks and campaigners.
* Its weaknesses include: holes in coverage of the issues, e.g. domestic corruption & the devolved authorities; limited popular traction; scope to strengthen relationships with other causes; varying levels of capacity and sustainability.
* Its strengths include: quality of the people; good cooperation among groups; strong track record; high level of access & influence; organisations are agile and responsive. Overall, the movement punches above its weight.

**3. Discussion**

* Participants recognised that fighting corruption is a central issue in ensuring that government works for public benefit, rather than private interests. Corruption undermines the social and economic issues that foundations work on and the Sustainable Development Goals. Participants were enthusiastic about finding practical ways of tackling the role the UK plays internationally.
* In the UK, we tend not to be big stealers of money, but great launderers. By and large firms operate within the law, pushing the limits. This includes professional service firms and companies based in the UK. However, the laws are weak in key areas, like corporate liability and lobbying. Large companies cannot be prosecuted effectively and appear to be above the law. Commercial interests are closely involved in writing and shaping the law.
* Domestic enforcement agencies have recently faced dramatic budget cuts. The Serious Fraud Office is up against the best paid lawyers in the UK. But salaries are low and they are heavily criticised whenever they lose, draining morale. Our enforcement effort is fragmented across 66 different agencies and police forces.
* How can political will be strengthened to tackle corruption? There should be ways of framing corruption for the influential Red Wall Voters, who are interested in rules & fair play.

**4. Next steps**

* There was excitement about identifying specific goals that are achievable over the next 2 – 4 years, potentially across organisations. This could attract significant funding. Could ‘sweet spots’ be identified, that resonate with domestic politics and are significant internationally?
* There is an on-going need to invest in the anti-corruption field as a whole, including strengthening key organisations.
* There are significant links between corruption and climate justice, trade deals and the UK’s wider role in the world. COP26 is an opportunity to focus attention on lobbying & corporate influence on policy making. Corruption should be built into post Brexit trade deals and considered in the government’s Integrated Review.
* It could be useful to understand why the anti-corruption movement is so collaborative and identify lessons for other fields.
* There was appetite to continue this conversation among funders, including the links between corruption and other social issues. Could we encourage other funders to build a strand of work on corruption into their work?

**Annex 1: Participants**

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| 1. Alex Jacobs
 | Joffe Charitable Trust |
| 1. Ben Stewart
 | Potter Foundation |
| 1. Helen Kersley
 | Roddick Foundation |
| 1. Ieva Kajokaite
 | Funders Initiative for Civil Society |
| 1. Jon Cracknell
 | JMG philanthropy |
| 1. Mark de la Iglesia
 | Open Society Foundation |
| 1. Max Tucker
 | Open Society Foundation |
| 1. Michael Jarvis
 | Transparency & Accountability Initiative |
| 1. Myles Wickstead
 | Joffe Charitable Trust |
| 1. Paul Lenz
 | Indigo Trust |
| 1. Sufina Ahmad
 | John Ellerman Foundation |

The roundtable was expertly facilitated by Rachael Clay and Jane Thurlow from Ethicore.