

“Clean Hands”: How Public Bodies and Their Suppliers Fight Bribery

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Theme: [Law and Justice](#)

Global Research, January 12, 2022

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Bribery is one of the serious factors hindering effective development of a state and is a huge social threat. How do those who deal with public finances on an everyday basis fight it?

Developing anti-bribery mechanisms becomes a significant and urgent problem in the development of modern society and the State. At that, the international community sees readiness to effectively combat it as a key indicator of civility and commitment to democratic values.

With this in mind, and given the growing popularity of anti-bribery programmes focusing on environmental, social and governance (ESG) issues, many countries are opting for greater protection in this area. The effective implementation of an anti-bribery course depends on many factors and touches on all areas, including the selection of reliable quality standards and trustworthy suppliers. This case concerns public authorities and their suppliers as well. Often, they deal with public money on a regular basis, which increases their risk of bribery. How exactly do they put anti-bribery measures into practice?

Complexity that pays off

One of the recognized benchmarks here is ISO 37001, the international standard for anti-bribery management systems. It prevents, detects and combats bribery and covers the issue in the public, private and non-profit sectors, including bribery by an organization or its suppliers. One of the distinguishing aspects of ISO 37001 is the difficulty of passing it: to be certified, an organization must show an implemented set of anti-bribery measures.

Thus, the Peruvian government had to introduce a range of measures to adopt the standard and make it work: a number of training programmes for both public- and private-sector stakeholders was carried, and a working group was established. “We have engaged government authorities and private institutions interested in implementing an anti-bribery system and their response has been most positive,” [says](#) Rosario Uría Toro, Director of the National Peruvian Directorate of Standardization. It turned out that the efforts paid off: the standard was introduced in late 2017, and the country’s Corruption Index by Transparency

International [has been climbing up](#) ever since.

The difference that will be noticed

The complexity of passing the test looks scary for many: “These [arguments against the certification] include the cost, the burdensome internal processes, and of course the burning question at the end of it all: What difference will an ISO certification make in the eyes of law enforcement?” [asks](#) the Basel Institute of Governance, offering an intra-industrial collective action initiative for the fiduciary industry instead.

Bank Al-Maghrib, the Central Bank of Morocco, disagrees. The institution has been ISO 37001 certified back in 2019, and, while the certification process should have been quite a challenge for the weighty and large organization, they [carried](#) it well. What is most important, the effort was highly regarded by the country’s law enforcement and overseeing agencies, such as the national anti-corruption agency, the authority regulating capital markets and the authority regulating the insurance sector. A praise like this definitely eliminates the question of difference posed above.

Public sector suppliers, and namely, suppliers in the financial sector, also recognise the importance of independent certification. For instance, French security printer Oberthur Fiduciaire opted for ISO standards even though it had already had other intra-industry certifications, such as the ECB certificate: “The ISO standards we have put in place, whether in terms of quality, respect of the environment, safety or the fight against corruption, with ISO 37001 for example, are, in my opinion, much more relevant arguments than any statements that we could make,” [said](#) Thomas Savare, CEO of the company. The fact that Oberthur is trusted by more than 70 central banks worldwide only confirms the high level of ISO certificates and their holders.

Reinforcing integrity

Speaking of trust, this is the last but not the least issue to be touched upon. ISO 37001 contains mandatory requirements and implies firm commitment of top chiefs. In this way, certification provides assurance to all concerned that the organisation is making every reasonable effort to avoid bribery. The voluntary nature of the certification only underlines the commitment and intention to cooperate in good faith, [says](#) the Government of Québec, which has also adopted the standard to be double sure : “In recent years, the government has put several measures in place to reinforce the integrity of public contracts... This pilot project [ISO 37001 certification - ed.] is another action aiming to keep Québec at the forefront of best practices.”

Bribery is still a burning issue. Its risks vary across sectors and are particularly high in the financial industry, where organisations deal daily with money, one of the most powerful instruments of influence in human history.

Under these circumstances, anti-bribery measures become an essential factor in assessing the integrity and reliability of a public authority and its suppliers, and actions taken in this regard become a measure of trustworthiness. At the same time, the careful selection of a yardstick is important, which is why those public sectors and suppliers who want to show that their money is well-managed opt for the most reliable standards, such as ISO 37001.

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