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THE INTERNET AND CORRUPTION
Transparency and accountability online



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Artivism online

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www.jmif.net and www.anticorruptionmusic.org

Introduction

Corruption has a profoundly negative impact on the lives of youth around the globe. In some cases, its consequences are severely harmful to their physical well-being: bribes demanded by health sector officials cut youth off from obtaining proper medical care; police corruption perpetuates tensions and violence within communities, driving youth into the frontlines of armed conflict; and barriers to accessing education and employment push youth into depression, drugs and alcoholism. The impacts of corruption on the mental state and attitudes of youth are no less harmful: the embezzlement of public funds and international aid by politicians and institutions erodes their trust in public systems, and bribes offered by politicians in exchange for votes, nepotism, and lack of transparency within electoral processes seed frustrations as they undermine their ability to influence public policy and realise social change.

While the deep-rooted complexities of corruption have driven some youth into a state of apathy, it has urged many others to take action. In 2009, the World Bank Institute¹ launched a new initiative to establish a collaborative platform for anti-corruption youth activists from around the world, and the Global Youth Anti-Corruption Network² was born. The profile of the activists involved is partly what would be expected from such a network: youth engaged in civil society organisations (CSOs) with anti-corruption missions. However, in collaboration with the JMI Foundation,³ the partners have worked to involve young activists with an entirely different profile – young musicians, of all styles, but in particular young urban music artists.

This report will present the partners' rationale for identifying and prioritising young artists as

important players in the fight against corruption; the online and new media strategy employed to reach out to young musicians around the globe, most notably the annual Fair Play⁴ music video competition; and the results and outcomes of the partners' engagement with young musicians.

Artivism

Fear of police violence and state repression keeps many youth silenced and self-censored from speaking out against corruption. Others, determined to resist against this repression, are turning to music – a growing number to hip-hop and reggae – to voice their thoughts on the realities and struggles within their communities. Looking at the origins of these two musical styles – hip-hop's roots being in the African-American communities of Harlem and the Bronx, and reggae's roots in the ghettos of Jamaica – lends an understanding of why these two styles are particularly appealing to young "artivists" (art + activism = artivism), as they have a long history of being utilised by oppressed groups to address themes such as poverty, inequality and injustice. Additionally, the simplicity of hip-hop production, where the only instrument and equipment necessary is one's own voice, makes it accessible for youth from underprivileged neighbourhoods to practice. Today, from Colombia to the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) to India, underground hip-hop and reggae movements are generating scores of young artists who have not only mastered the essentials of rhythm and rhyme, but whose lyrical content is insightful, inspiring and intelligent.

How might these young artists be able to influence the broader anti-corruption agenda? Certainly it is not a matter of celebrity status or pull, as state control over radio and TV has systematically worked to deny "socially conscious" artists a broad audience. Rather, what the JMI Foundation and World Bank Institute see as the key strength of these artists is the role they assume within local communities – both by representing, through their music, collective opinion on various socio-political issues affecting them, and by striving to

1 wbi.worldbank.org

2 voices-against-corruption.ning.com

3 www.jmif.net

4 www.anticorruptionmusic.org

raise consciousness and incite their peers to action rather than resignation.

Many citizens living within corrupt societies – particularly those who are economically disadvantaged and who therefore bear more harshly the impacts of corruption – harbour resentment towards political leaders, as their inability and/or lack of interest in establishing proper transparency and governance is perceived as a disregard for the people's interests. In light of this reality, musicians who grew up in underprivileged communities and dare to lobby, through their art, for the rights and interests of these communities, possess a formidable potential as alternative community leaders. In utilising music to advocate, educate and motivate rather than adopting traditional activist methods, activists take an innovative and compelling approach to influence the broader anti-corruption agenda, sounding the alarm on behalf of the most distressed and under-represented communities, and thereby asserting the urgency for change.

Online and new media strategy

Recognising the enormous leadership potential of young artists as both ambassadors of and lobbyists for the anti-corruption cause, the main task of the JMI Foundation and World Bank Institute was to develop a programme that would support and nurture this capacity. Towards this objective, the partners established Fair Play, an annual anti-corruption music video competition open to young artists 18-35 years from anywhere in the world.

Why this approach? The competition was developed as a means to discover and establish contact with young socially conscious musicians. Much has been said about the contribution of social networks such as Myspace, Facebook and Twitter towards the democratisation of the internet and the music industry, by providing independent musicians with an affordable means to build their audience. However, the continuing dominance of those artists propped up by record labels and corporate marketing budgets still poses a major challenge for independent artists to gain significant visibility online, while it remains equally challenging for listeners to uncover interesting underground artists amidst the overabundance of content and advertising. To participate in the Fair Play competition, artists must upload their video entry and artist profile to the competition's website. In doing so, they gain a unique opportunity to reach new listeners worldwide and to have their work promoted as part of the global Fair Play campaign. For those with an interest in socially conscious music, the Fair Play platform serves as

a space for discovering underground artists from around the world, while translations of the lyrics (obligatory for participation in the competition), and the ability to vote and comment on the videos, provide listeners with the opportunity to gain a deeper understanding of the music and to interact directly with the artists.

In creating this online platform, the partners sought not only to connect individual artists and listeners and to compile the video materials necessary to deliver a unique global anti-corruption campaign with youth appeal. They also sought to encourage further interdisciplinary campaigns to be carried out, by making the music videos – invaluable new media outreach tools – available to other anti-corruption stakeholders such as organisations, institutions and the media, for broader dissemination as part of local/national level campaigns.

Results and outcomes

The first edition was organised in 2009-2010, and achieved the participation of artists from Armenia, Bangladesh, Burundi, Cameroon, Canada, Colombia, the DRC, Germany, Kenya, Lebanon, Macedonia, Malawi, Panama, the Philippines, Portugal, Senegal, Sierra Leone, South Africa, Tanzania, Uganda and Zimbabwe.

I-Voice (Palestine/Lebanon), Mafilika (Malawi) and Katya Emmanuel (DRC) were selected as winners of the music video competition, performed at the 1st Global Youth Anti-Corruption Network Forum in Brussels, Belgium, and recorded a new collaborative track: "Together Against Corruption".

Over 100 artists/bands participated in the second edition of Fair Play organised in 2010-2011, from Argentina, Australia, Barbados, Bulgaria, Cameroon, Colombia, Croatia, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Egypt, France, Germany, Guatemala, Indonesia, Italy, Kenya, Lebanon, Malawi, Mali, Mexico, Mongolia, Nepal, Peru, the Philippines, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sudan, Uganda and Vanuatu.

Winning bands De Bruces a Mi (Colombia), Kafulu Xenson (Uganda) and Young Life (Vanuatu) participated in the 2nd Global Youth Anti-Corruption Network Forum in Nairobi, performed live at the Sarakasi Dome alongside top Kenyan artist Sauti Sol, and recorded three new collaborative tracks: "Say No to Corruption", "Hand in Hand" and "We Are One People."

The lyrics of the submitted songs express various emotions, one of the foremost being frustration towards the perpetrators of corruption and injustice. As artist Marshall Dixon of France writes: "They have forgotten us really we are tired/ The people are starving really we are tired of your

bullshit/ Your promises really we are tired/ The injustice, the violence really... the corruption and impunity in the country/ Really... tired, tired really we are tired.”⁵ The frustration that stems from the perpetuation of corrupt systems over time is highlighted by artists Bafing Kul & the Apollo Band of Mali: “We had fought for democracy/ The old regime was overthrown/ New figures were elected/ But the corruption never went away, as if nothing had changed.”⁶ Loathing towards those involved in corruption and their disregard for the negative impact it has on others is evident in the lyrics of Croatian band St!llness, who write: “All that is left/ Are crumbs/ That remain/ After they’ve eaten/ They sit/ In their seats of power/ Bellies full/ With fat collaborators/ Reinventing bullshit.”⁷

The songs also serve to expose many forms of corruption from bribery to embezzlement, fraud and extortion, citing examples from the artists’ own communities. As Nelo Chouloute of Haiti writes: “They promise a new project for Slum Lasaline/ Funds provided/ Promises to build a new highway for Slum Carrefour/ Funds provided/ We will develop Slum of Cité Soleil/ Funds provided/ However, our money stays in their pockets.”⁸ Hip-hop artist Hustlajay of Kenya bears witness in the song “Minyororo Ya Haki”: “[Common man’s] lands together with title deeds are taken away and given to the powerful, and common man left as squatters/ Day after day we growing poor and poorer by being asked to bribe for our rights.”⁹ Artists Dr Sley & Da Green Soljas from Cameroon choose to highlight one of the most taboo abuses of power in their song titled “Down By the Riverside”: “I’m Mr Professor/ Every girl must sleep with me, except you want to fail.”¹⁰

Various artists make tributes and show respect for those engaged in the fight against corruption, emphasising the importance of speaking out against abuses of power. In the lyrics of “La Pedata di Dio”, Italian artist Zero Plastica declares: “This goes out to every life cut short by armed hands/ This goes out to those who denounce the extortion and to those who boycott mafia-controlled services/ This goes out to every victim gone missing and no longer with us/ This goes out to every man who sacrifices all to fight the Mafia.”¹¹

One of the most important and prevalent themes of the songs submitted to Fair Play is the call to action. As Alesh of the DRC writes: “I’ve seen the success of their schemes and tricks/ Which my fellow countrymen have all swallowed whole/ Not daring to raise their real thoughts/ The badly informed population ignores that for them the ground has already been marked out (...) Why do you continue to sleep?/ Apathetic to the death as they massacre you/ WAKE UP! ACT! LET’S MOVE!”¹² Artist Shekhar Sirin from India too calls his people, stating: “Corrupt politicians have looted our nation/ Even the morsels from poor snatched away/ You can hardly breathe in such environment (conditions)/ It’s time to wake up/ It’s time to get up/ The nation which is scattered & in pathetic shape/ Let’s build it back/ If corruption is RAVAN (synonym to devil in India)/ Then we will burn it.”¹³ To those already engaged in the fight, words of encouragement, urging perseverance, are extended by artists such as the Concerners from Vanuatu, who write: “You ghetto youths keep on doing good/ Keep your heads high/ Make good use of your time/ Not because you come from the ghetto/ You can make a difference, make it better.”¹⁴

Conclusion

Just as the internet has in recent years affirmed its importance as a space for social protest, so too has music been proven by Fair Play and other projects to be an effective tool in raising awareness, building international solidarity, and also – importantly – refuelling the fires of artists and activists around the world who are consistently persecuted, isolated or otherwise antagonised by the mainstream in the attempt to deter them from sustaining the fight.

Musicians, particularly those from marginalised neighbourhoods, have proven themselves to possess key leadership qualities: willingness to stand up and speak the truth, ability to analyse and articulate complex issues, and commitment to making a change. As hip-hop artists Desorden Social of Colombia write on the role of artists: “It’s been already 10 years recounting the cruelty (...)/ In 1999 two young men decided to use rap as a way to unleash their lyrics and not get choked up with what they are in living/ And now ten years later our subject has not changed/ And after hundreds of songs, the situation remains unchanged/ Because as I can remember, there’s only injustice, inequality, poverty, abuses and more misery/ There are more

5 www.anticorruptionmusic.org/?videos/on_est_faitigue

6 www.anticorruptionmusic.org/?videos/yelema%28_le_changement%29

7 www.anticorruptionmusic.org/?videos/katarza__catharsis

8 www.anticorruptionmusic.org/?videos/nelo_chouloute_-_haiti_money_embezzle

9 www.anticorruptionmusic.org/?videos/minyororo_ya_haki

10 www.anticorruptionmusic.org/?videos/down_by_the_river_side

11 www.anticorruptionmusic.org/?videos/la_pedata_di_dio

12 www.anticorruptionmusic.org/?videos/reveil

13 www.anticorruptionmusic.org/?videos/ek_aag_ka_zarra

14 www.anticorruptionmusic.org/?videos/corrupted_minds

open works and cities but serve for nothing cause still life quality descends/ 10 years and our leaders are same or worse and sold to the highest bidder.”¹⁵

The music of Fair Play artists sheds light on the realities of youth living in corrupt societies: how the system neglects their interests, how corruption perpetuates the divides between rich and poor, and how it serves to limit the human and economic development of their communities. While ghetto youth continue to be predominantly associated with violence, gangs and brutality, the hip-hop and reggae

artists engaged in Fair Play testify to another reality entirely: the multiplicity of youth voices calling for and dedicated to change. As the JMI Foundation and the World Bank Institute affirm, leaders come in all forms – they are not only the products of academic circles but also those schooled by the streets. In order to address corruption, it is crucial to diversify the stakeholders in civil society dialogue, debate, decision making and policy development; and to tap into the creative, innovative and technological capacities of youth. ■

¹⁵ www.anticorruptionmusic.org/?videos/10_anos_de_lucha