

# **A Review of the Role of Anti-Corruption Agencies in Implementing Sustainable Development Goals (SDG)**

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**Abstract:** The United Nations (UN) Agenda for Sustainable Development, released in 2015, is the blueprint for global peace, security, and prosperity. The operation is carried out via the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG), and mobilised by government institutions at the country level based on their strong institution principle. However, public institutions, including the Anti-corruption Agency (ACA), have been riddled with corruption problems affecting the SDG-related sectors. Even though limited, previous studies have discussed the roles of supervising and auditing agencies, such as the ACA, in the SDG context. This study reviewed 19 SCOPUS journal articles from 2015 to 2023, exploring the ACA's role in progressing the United Nations' SDG16 of establishing effective, accountable and inclusive institutions in Singapore, Hong Kong, Indonesia, South Korea, Thailand, and Malaysia. The review highlights that the ACA's roles are organised within the ACA structures to battle corruption and its connection with the SDG. The themes emanating from this review which declares the ACA structures supporting SDG16 are: a) Institutional Reform, b) Good Governance, and c) Anti-Corruption Advocacy. The aim of this paper is to enlighten the current state of ACA intervention for the SDGs and why it should be a part of the SDG Governance Structure. This paper intends to fill the existing gap in literature, particularly in the aspect of institutional capacities, towards contributing to the global agenda of 2030.

**Keywords:** Administrative ethics, anti-corruption policy, public sector institutions, Sustainable Development Goals

## **Introduction**

Government institutions are the main mechanism in mobilising the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) at the country level, and its governance structure varies according to their political and governmental system. With 17 interconnected goals, SDG contains specific targets and indicators prioritising world problems towards achieving sustainability by 2030. In implementing the global goals, governments, businesses, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), and individuals are perceived to be integrated (Monteiro, Viana, & Sousa-Filho, 2018). Several countries assign their central agencies to lead the SDGs, while others appoint specific ministries to take the lead. Nevertheless, other independent agencies, such as audit and anti-corruption agencies (ACA), play critical roles in supervising, monitoring, and ensuring that the government is accountable for the

SDGs (Güney, 2017; Hope Sr., 2019). This paper is relevant to SDG 16: To promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, to provide access to justice for all, and to build effective, accountable, and inclusive institutions at all levels. Specifically, it focuses on Target 16.5: To substantially reduce corruption and bribery, and Target 16.6: To develop effective, accountable, and transparent institutions. This review paper aims to answer the question: “How does ACA contribute towards SDG implementation and progression through its structure?” The SDGs’ governance mechanism includes various government institutions at the national, sub-national, and local government levels. However, corruption could impede SDG progression and is associated with lack of integrity (Joseph et al., 2019) such as embezzlement, bribes, kickbacks, money laundering, and illicit financial flow (Hope Kr., 2023). These raise concerns about the government’s ability to promote a peaceful and inclusive society for sustainable development through trusted and reliable public institutions, particularly the ACA, which serves as a bastion of corruption.

SDG implementation by involving the ACA raised a few concerns including the lack of political will to continue the predecessor initiative in government reform, lack of proper assessment, and overlapping institutional roles (Kapeli & Mohamed, 2015). Consequently, the ability of government institutions and independent agencies to promote a peaceful, inclusive society for sustainable development is doubtful. This is because the SDGs’ success heavily depends on institutional support that is free from corruption. Although ACA’s effectiveness has been endlessly questioned, it is the most common institution established in most countries, and the value of integrity and oversight of the system cannot be ignored (Gemperle, 2018). The questions of ACA’s autonomy, restricted structure, and shared/blurred functions limit their exclusive roles in eradicating corruption. Therefore, this study assesses ACA’s structure and its functions in preventing corruption and in facilitating the implementation of the SDGs in countries that are among the first to establish the ACA in Asia.

## **Literature Review**

SDG is the United Nations’ blueprint for a global partnership in ending deprivations in all UN member countries from 2015 to 2030. SDG-related research and academic discourses have gained more attention recently. However, the existing studies on corruption and its association with the SDG only focus on the context of supply chain management in the private sector (Monteiro et al., 2018), between developing countries in assessing the relationship between governance and sustainable development (Güney, 2017), and research specifically on SDG16 which pointed out immense challenges in achieving it (Hope Sr., 2019). Some past research in African and Sub-Saharan countries (Chirambo, 2018; Davies et al., 2019) and Southeast Asia (Joseph et al., 2019) confirmed that the SDGs’ progression will be hampered by corruption. Globally, only a few studies had examined the ACA and its roles in relation to the SDGs. Hence, this study aims to explore SDG governance by focusing on the ACA to enrich the literature within the study area. There are three patterns of corruption control in Asia Pacific countries or regions namely: a) Anti-corruption laws are not implemented by an ACA (i.e., Japan), b) Anti-corruption laws are implemented by many ACAs (i.e., South Korea), and c) Anti-corruption laws are implemented by a single ACA (i.e., Singapore, Malaysia, Hong Kong, Indonesia, and Thailand) (Quah, 2022). Learning from countries that have established an ACA in their government system and exploring their roles in battling corruption is worthwhile. In this review paper, the structure and roles of the ACA will be presented in the findings and discussion section by focusing on selected journal articles.

## **Methodology**

This paper adopted the Reporting Standards for Systematic Evidence Syntheses (ROSES) approach. The steps involved are: a) Formulation of the research question, b) Identification of potential journal articles, c) Screening the journal articles, d) Quality appraisal, and e) Data abstraction and analysis. A total of 76 journal articles available in the SCOPUS database were derived using the following search

strings: [TITLE-ABS-KEY ( ("Anti-Corruption" OR "Anti-Corruption" OR "Bribery" OR "Integrity") AND ("Anti-Corruption Organization" OR "Anti-Corruption Organisation" OR "Anti-Corruption Body" OR "Anti-Corruption Bodies" OR "ACA" OR "Anti-Corruption Agency" OR "Anti-Corruption Agencies" OR "Anti-Corruption Commission" OR "Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission" OR "MACC" OR "The Corrupt Practices Investigation Bureau" OR "CPIB" OR "SPRM" OR "Suruhanjaya Pencegahan Rasuah Malaysia" OR "Komisi Pemberantasan Korupsi" OR "KPK" OR "Indonesia Corruption Eradication Commission" OR "The National Anti-Corruption Commission" OR "Independent Commission Against Corruption" OR "ICAC" OR "Anti-corruption & Civil Rights Commission" OR "ACRC") AND ("Malaysia" OR "Singapore" OR "Indonesia" OR "Thailand" OR "Hong Kong" OR "South Korea") OR ("SDG\*" OR "Sustainable Development Goal\*" OR "Sustainable Development" OR "Sustainable" OR "Sustainability" OR "Agenda 2030" OR "Global Goal\*" OR "Goal\* 2030") ) AND PUBYEAR > 2014 AND PUBYEAR < 2024]. Only 19 journal articles were suitable for review. These articles discussed the structure and roles of ACA in six countries (Malaysia, Indonesia, Singapore, Thailand, Hong Kong, and South Korea), with mentions of sustainable development. The selection criterion was articles published from 2015 to 2023. Themes and subthemes were developed from the following list of journals presented in Table 1.

**Table 1.** List of SCOPUS journals reviewed

No.	Author	Country	ACA Structure		
			Institutional Reform (IRf)	Good Governance (GG)	Anti-Corruption Advocacy (ACAD)
1.	Ayub et al. (2021)	Malaysia		/	/
2.	Muhamad and Gani (2020)	Malaysia	/	/	
3.	Kapeli and Mohamed (2015)	Malaysia		/	
4.	Quah, 2015a)	Singapore		/	
5.	Quah (2015b)	Singapore	/	/	/
6.	Quah (2017)	Singapore	/	/	
7.	Quah (2022)	Hong Kong, Malaysia, Singapore	/	/	
8.	Kalinowski (2016)	South Korea	/	/	/
9.	Choi (2018)	South Korea		/	
10.	Yomnak and Ruckchart (2021)	Thailand	/	/	
11.	Juwita (2018)	Indonesia	/		
12.	Lukito (2016)	Indonesia	/	/	/
13.	Schütte (2015)	Indonesia	/	/	
14.	Gong and Xiao, (2017)	Hong Kong	/		
15.	Scott and Gong (2015)	Hong Kong	/	/	/
16.	Scott (2017)	Hong Kong	/	/	/
17.	Johnston (2022)	Hong Hong, Singapore	/	/	/
18.	Kamil et al. (2018)	Hong Kong, Indonesia			/
19.	Mohd-Rashid et al. (2022)	Hong Kong, Indonesia, Singapore		/	/

## **Results**

The journal articles highlighted the structure and roles of the ACA in combating corruption in which the term SDG was not articulated and mentioned directly. Only a few articles contained mentions of SDG, sustainable development, and sustainability. The terms used by these authors were sustainable economic growth and economic sustainability (Lukito, 2016; Choi, 2018; Mohd-Rashid et al., 2022; Sunaryo & Nur, 2022), social sustainability (Sunaryo & Nur, 2022), and sustainability and collaboration (Yomnak & Ruckchart, 2021). The findings in this subsection will be arranged based on the themes reflecting the structure and roles of the ACA in six countries and how they support the progression of sustainable development (in a direct or indirect interpretation).

### **ACA has Commenced Institutional Reform (IRf)**

Almost all ACAs in the six countries have implemented institutional reform strategies towards becoming more transparent.

#### *ACA Establishment as an Independent Institution*

The first institutional reform strategy is to have an independent ACA structure known as a commission. Free-standing ACAs are unlikely to succeed (Johnston, 2022). ACAs should be integrated, focusing on comprehensive anti-corruption efforts, and receiving sustained support from the leadership and civil society. Additionally, the government should not use the ACA as an apparatus to attack their opponents (Quah, 2015b). In contrast, powerful, well-organised, and fully resourced ACAs (e.g., like those in Hong Kong and Singapore) are acknowledged as one of the best models for ACA in Asia that have successfully reduced public service corruption (Scott & Gong, 2015; Johnston, 2022).

Singapore has established the Corrupt Practices Investigation Bureau (CPIB) to replace the Anti-Corruption Branch (ACB) mainly to separate the power to curb corruption from the Singapore Police Force (SPF) (Quah, 2015b, 2017). CPIB is an effective independent body responsible for anti-corruption, under the jurisdiction of the Prime Minister's Office (PMO), and of which reports to the Prime Minister (Quah, 2017). The Malaysia Anti-Corruption Commission (MACC) is also a reformed institution from its predecessor reporting to the Prime Minister. Thailand, South Korea, and Hong Kong each has an independent ACA namely the National Anti-Corruption Commission, Anti-Corruption and Civil Rights Commission (ACRC), and the Hong Kong Independent Commission Against Corruption (ICAC), respectively (Kalinowski, 2016; Yomnak & Ruckchart, 2021; Johnston, 2022). The ICAC in Hong Kong is one of the best models for ACA due to the institutionalisation of its key structures and processes (Scott, 2017). The ACRC in South Korea underwent several reforms resulting from the merger of the Korea Independent Commission Against Corruption (KICAC) with several other agencies to create a stronger ACA institution. In Indonesia, the government established the Corruption Eradication Commission (KPK) (Sunaryo & Nur, 2022). To sustainably reduce corruption in Indonesia, the government rigorously followed through with civil service reform (Schütte, 2015), indicating that the institutional reform must involve other agencies in the country, and not limited to the ACA. In addition, it is also noted that the independent structure of these ACAs depends on the country's governmental system and legislation.

#### *A Creation of Specific Departments/Units inside the ACA*

The second structure of the ACA is the efforts towards capacity building (Quah, 2017). The ACA structure, with specific units, expertise, and capabilities, will further strengthen the institution. For example, in 2011, the CPIB was reorganised into three departments: a) Corporate Affairs Department, (b) Operations Departments, and c) the Investigation Department (Quah, 2015b). The CPIB also established a Computer Forensics Unit to strengthen its functions and enhance its investigative and evidence-gathering capabilities, guaranteeing that in-house experts are available (Quah, 2015b, 2017). In comparison, Hong Kong's ICAC also has three main departments: a) the Operation Department, b) the Corruption Prevention Department, and c) the Community Relations Department (Scott & Gong,

2015; Johnston, 2022). Even though CPIB and ICAC are among the best ACAs, they too need specific research units that apply to the other ACAs. Data provided by the research helps to accurately identify the target group and build capacity (Scott & Gong, 2015). Hence, a complete resource centre like the ICAC's CACS is needed (Quah, 2015b). ACAs understand public attitudes and perceptions towards corruption through surveys and evidence-based research data that provide credible and valuable data (Scott & Gong, 2015). Specific departments and units for community engagement were established in the case of ICAC's Community Relations Department, which was formed as a commission to gain public support and to engage with the public in its anti-corruption works (Gong & Xiao, 2017). This unit has actively approached the community, organising various campaigns and publicity, successfully creating public awareness, and reducing corruption in Hong Kong (Scott & Gong, 2015; Johnston, 2022; Quah, 2022). Unlike ICAC, Singapore's CPIB does not have specific departments to nurture public awareness of anti-corruption and does not focus on community engagement and public outreach. Thus, the Public Education Group conducts outreach programmes through prevention and education talks for pre-university students, principals, teachers, newly appointed civil servants, law enforcement agencies, and the management and staff of major organisations in key industries (Quah, 2015b). The CPIB should replicate the ICAC unit of the Community Relations Department (Quah, 2015b).

#### *Creation of Specific Committee*

Internal and external committees, such as the Independent Review Committee/Panel, were created at the highest institutional levels. The ICAC and CPIB propose various institutional/operational improvements, recommend ACA policies, and strengthen the financial and audit procedures (Quah, 2015b; Scott, 2017). The other committees in the ICAC structure include: a) Advisory Committee on Corruption, b) Operations Review Committee, c) Corruption Prevention Advisory Committee, and d) Citizens Advisory Committee on Community Relations (Quah, 2015b). The external committee in South Korea has a parliamentary committee to investigate irregularities prone to corruption (Kalinowski, 2016). Malaysia has an Action Committee chaired by the Auditor General and attended by the MACC and relevant enforcement agencies, to scrutinise specific issues and cases for further investigation (Muhamad & Gani, 2020). Additionally, Enhanced Audit Committees are one of the most effective fraud detection and prevention techniques used in the public sector (Muhamad & Gani, 2020). In Thailand, the National Anti-Corruption Committee initiates and supports corruption prevention projects (Yomnak & Ruckchart, 2021). In Indonesia, the Committee for Bureaucratic Reform was formed at the highest level to restructure civil service, including law enforcement agencies. This indicates that the anti-corruption reform is cross-sectoral, including the private sector through the Board Committee's Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) reporting (Sunaryo & Nur, 2022).

#### *The Design of an Integrated System*

A specific system has been developed for ACAs and outside the ACA structure to assist with anti-corruption work. The ACRC established a reliable one-stop service system in South Korea to address public complaints, prevent corruption, and settle administrative appeals (Kalinowski, 2016). An online system, the Citizen Audit Request System, allows citizens to request special investigations by the national audit office into suspected government programmes (Kalinowski, 2016). In Indonesia, the importance of the National Integrity System is paired with the Anti-Corruption Compliance, as part of the National Strategy for Corruption Prevention and Eradication to eliminate bribery and corruption (Lukito, 2016). Indonesia has also established an anti-fraud system to protect universal health insurance funds, guaranteeing social sustainability (Juwita, 2018). In Malaysia, the government sector should: a) use the accrual accounting system to improve governance and to assist in reinforcing anti-corruption initiatives, and b) implement the E-procurement system in the public sector to reduce lobbyist involvement and to enhance transparency and accountability (Muhamad & Gani, 2020). Similarly, in Singapore, agencies that detect procurement irregularities and minimise opportunities for fraud are constantly reminded to be vigilant and generate management reports from the Government Electronic Business (GeBIZ) system to monitor procurements (Quah, 2015b).

### *Improvement in the ACA Recruitment System*

Social capital serving the ACA must be selected from the most talented candidates and be equipped with appropriate skills to strengthen the ACA. Singapore's recruitment process for CPIB officers goes through three stages: psychometric tests, case analysis exercises, and a structured interview (Quah, 2015b). The emphasis is to recruit officers in law, forensic accounting and investigations, criminologists, psychologists, and social scientists to strengthen its capabilities in investigating cases and researching corruption issues (Quah, 2015b). Improving the Human Resource Management (HRM) system at KPK Indonesia is crucial (Schütte, 2015).

### **ACA that Upholding Good Governance Principles (GG)**

Based on the reviewed articles, the following good governance principles are embedded in the ACAs:

#### *Strong Political Will*

For the past six decades, many countries had failed to combat corruption due to a lack of political will (Quah, 2017). Political will is portrayed in creating specific anti-corruption policies, political slogans, and campaigns for a clean, transparent government and commitment to good governance. Anti-corruption measures would be effective and adequate if designed to address the root causes of corruption, and if the political actor could sustain the anti-corruption commitment (Quah, 2022). Thus, the reformed ACA should not be used as a political apparatus (Quah, 2015b) because an independent ACA without political intervention will increase public trust and confidence (Scott, 2017). To combat corruption effectively, the incumbent government must: a) enact comprehensive anti-corruption laws, b) provide the ACA with adequate financial and human resources, c) guarantee the ACA's operational independence to perform its functions impartially, regardless of the status or political affiliation of the offenders, and d) exhibit sustained and perseverance effort in combating corruption (Quah, 2017).

The Indonesian bureaucratic reform, including the law enforcement agencies, has been one of President Yudhoyono's commitments (Schütte, 2015). The Indonesian government developed the Integrity Pact as an anti-corruption tool to implement the National Strategy on Corruption Prevention and Eradication. It is a formal pact that contains ministries/agencies and regional governments' commitments to carry out duties in line with prevailing laws and regulations and abhor corruption, collusion, and nepotism. This is an effort to expedite corruption prevention and eradication in Indonesia (Lukito, 2016). The ACAs in Hong Kong and Singapore also succeeded due to political support and the willingness to attack the root causes of corruption (Johnston, 2022). In Hong Kong, the establishment of an independent committee to review the ICAC's policies and working procedures illustrates the government's commitment to ACA improvement (Scott, 2017). Singapore has succeeded in combating corruption mainly because it has a government with a strong political will, and of which implements appropriate reforms to address the causes of corruption (Quah, 2017). Singapore's first prime minister's reforms on governance are an indication of political will to fight corruption (Quah, 2015a). As a result, Singapore's political will improved the functions of the Corrupt Practices Investigation Bureau (CPIB) by supporting adequate resources (i.e., budget allocation and personnel) (Quah, 2017).

South Korea championed the anti-corruption trademark, transparent government, and reform, and its pledge and political slogan can be seen as a sign of strong political will among its presidents. For example, President Roh Moo-hyun's inauguration on 25 February 2003 emphasised eradicating corruption for sustainable economic growth and a healthy society (Choi, 2018). In Malaysia, anti-corruption activities became one of the primary foci since the administration of the first Prime Minister, Tunku Abdul Rahman Al-Haj. During his administration, he stressed the importance of eliminating corruption for Malaysians to ensure the country's sustainable development (Kapeli & Mohamed, 2015). Despite different slogans and political trademarks, Malaysia's commitment to having a clean and transparent government has never ended. However, a continuous political will is vital to improve public sector integrity to assist the nation's sustainable development (Ayub et al., 2021; Muhamad & Gani, 2020).

### *Partnership and Collaboration*

Combating massive corruption practices calls for a collaborative determination by the government and all stakeholders (Lukito, 2016). For a collaboration to work, it must have an effective system and strategy that can enhance anti-corruption-related efforts (Yomnak & Ruckchart, 2021). ACA partners and collaborators entail citizens and the community at large (Scott & Gong, 2015; Yomnak & Ruckchart, 2021), public organisations (i.e., ministries, government departments, local governments) (Muhamad & Gani, 2020; Yomnak & Ruckchart, 2021), private sector organisations (Lukito, 2016; Yomnak & Ruckchart, 2021), judicial entities (Lukito, 2016), legislative entities (Lukito, 2016), watchdog agencies (Lukito, 2016), the media (Scott & Gong, 2015; Lukito, 2016; Yomnak & Ruckchart, 2021), and civil society (Yomnak & Ruckchart, 2021). The partnership and collaboration for curbing corruption can be a top-down or bottom-up approach. In the context of Thailand, Yomnak and Ruckchart (2021) emphasise that sustaining anti-corruption collaborations requires understanding of how the ACA works (i.e., on the network, categories, and communication channels). In Hong Kong, decentralising the ACA's function to the community can make the corruption reporting process easier and improve collaboration with the local anti-corruption diaspora (Scott & Gong, 2015). Meanwhile, Malaysia must improve the local authorities' disclosure of information to support the public sector's integrity performance and establish organisational credibility (Muhamad & Gani, 2020). Indonesia has a strong and effective collaboration towards anti-corruption with more than a hundred anti-corruption groups and agencies from all sectors that could work to improve its CPI (Yomnak & Ruckchart, 2021). Therefore, the National Integrity System in Indonesia serves as an enabling collaboration mechanism. The National Integrity System is based on eight interdependent pillars of integrity via the collaboration of the executive, parliament, judiciary, watchdog agencies, media, private sector (Chambers of Commerce, etc.), civil society, and law enforcement agencies (Lukito, 2016). The system can no longer support sustainable development if any one of the pillars collapses. Therefore, strengthening all the pillars should be the main target to achieve anti-corruption compliance and national integrity (Lukito, 2016).

### *Upholding the Rule of Law*

Good governance is vital for achieving political, economic, and social sustainability (Kalinowski, 2016; Mohd-Rashid et al., 2022; Sunaryo & Nur, 2022). The rule of law requires all citizens to be equally subjected to the law and that no one is above the law. Thus, the elements of the rule of law (Lukito, 2016; Mohd-Rashid et al., 2022) and high-quality regulations (Mohd-Rashid et al., 2022) are needed in the ACA to promote a corruption-free economy (Mohd-Rashid et al., 2022). Poor and weak anti-corruption legislation will open more opportunities for fraud and integrity misconduct in various sectors and institutions. Government institutions must have long-term objectives that provide social and economic sustainability for future generations and protect them from the severe impact of organisational misconduct (Sunaryo & Nur, 2022). In Indonesia, the National Integrity System sustainably fights corruption at multiple levels, and it requires adopting the rule of law under good governance, democratic values, a strong civil society, and the existence of economic and social progress (Lukito, 2016). For the ICAC, adopting good governance has sustained public trust and confidence in the ACA, which responds to corruption cases and complaints (Scott, 2017).

### **ACA Structure that offers Anti-Corruption Advocacy (ACAD)**

The third ACA structure is the ability of the ACA to provide anti-corruption and integrity advocacy to its internal and external stakeholders. It is done in the form of:

#### *Training Programmes/Skills Enhancement/Competencies Development*

CPIB Singapore provides in-house and external training programmes conducted locally and overseas to enhance capabilities and improve the management and professionalism of enforcement officers (Quah, 2015b). The training includes the Anti-Corruption Expertise (ACE) for investigating computer forensics and managing ACAs for anti-corruption practitioners (Quah, 2015b). In addition, CPIB

officers are trained to be legal experts via training in interview techniques, document examination, and forensics, which are crucial at CPIB (Quah, 2015b).

### *Integrity/Anti-Corruption Education*

Education is a sustainable approach to curbing corruption by nurturing moral values and changing public attitudes towards corruption. In South Korea, the ACA provides integrity education to public officials via the Internet and at the Anti-Corruption Training Institute (Kalinowski, 2016). The adoption of Anti-Corruption Education (ACE) in Indonesia is explicitly aimed at formal Indonesian education (Kamil et al., 2018). It is a part of the National Integrity System, which aims to develop a value system and create an anti-corruption attitude among Indonesians (Lukito, 2016). It is inserted into the extracurricular strategies of schools, using a top-down approach and is self-initiated. In Hong Kong, the ACE was initiated mainly by the ICAC as a prevention measure to educate the public about the evils of corruption (Kamil et al., 2018). The ICAC's public education and civil society strategies compliment the investigation and prevention functions and have become equally important (Johnston, 2022). The ICAC has successfully persuaded citizens to report corruption, making it a "socially embedded anti-corruption governance" (Johnston, 2022, p.115) which includes anti-corruption classes, school curricula, mass media strategies, and aggressive publicity on ICAC's activities and accomplishments (Scott & Gong, 2015; Johnston, 2022). The ICAC frequently sponsors youth-oriented sports and concerts (Johnston, 2022) targeting young audiences. The bottom-up strategy (i.e., increasing public awareness of corruption and approaching the "hard-to-reach groups") has contributed significantly to corruption prevention in Hong Kong (Scott & Gong, 2015, p. 90). Such civic engagement in corruption prevention is a long-term investment that led to value changes (Scott & Gong, 2015). These changes greatly affect how people think about corruption and thus should be extended to the tertiary education networks and anti-corruption assessment centres.

### *Integrity Assessment*

The spectrums of integrity and anti-corruption in the public sector are interconnected (Ayub et al., 2021). Therefore, promoting inclusive growth and sustainable development by ensuring equitable and efficient resource allocation, boosting competition and investment, and supporting innovation is key. However, the reasons for building an integrity system may differ from country to country (Lukito, 2016). In South Korea, the ACRC conducts an annual Integrity Assessment of public agencies to assess their efforts in preventing and eradicating poverty and improving integrity. Consequently, it led to a small portion of corruption cases being reported in South Korea (Kalinowski, 2016). In Hong Kong, integrity-related assessments and programmes are value-based integrity management programmes implemented by the government (Scott, 2017). In Indonesia, the assessment is based on the National Integrity Index, which indicates the degree of success of all its anti-corruption strategies (Lukito, 2016).

## **Discussion**

Overall, the ACAs in the six countries were designed as an independent body with a specific structure based on their political system and legislation. The achievement of these ACAs varies. Indonesia has a specific anti-corruption commission and shows a political commitment towards creating a cleaner and more transparent government; however, more must be done for it to stand on par with the neighbouring countries. Indonesia's CPI score has improved, but is significantly lower than those of Singapore, Malaysia, and Thailand. Therefore, highly systematic efforts must be made to eradicate corruption and establish a sustainable nation (Lukito, 2016). Both South Korea and Hong Kong have adopted anti-corruption strategies, with differing results. This indicates that even though specific anti-corruption commissions are established, a comprehensive commitment to reduce corruption is still required. The review concludes that Singapore's CPID and Hong Kong's ICAC have one of the best independent ACA structures in the form of a commission. Their success in reducing corruption is evident in the CPI, where they rank better than the other countries in the region.

Anti-corruption efforts require the assistance of whistleblowers; nevertheless, not all individuals are willing to draw attention to unethical conducts. A public servant's intention to disclose unethical conduct is determined by the wrongdoer's position due to fears of retaliation, career concerns, or doubts about the effectiveness of reporting (Ridzuan et al., 2019).

Good governance, anti-corruption commitment, and sustainability were found to be interconnected (Guney, 2017; Hope Sr., 2019; Joseph et al., 2019). This review concludes that the “rule of law” and “participatory mechanism” are two significant good governance principles found in the ACA structure from the selected six countries. The government and the ACA must have strong anti-corruption legislation and multi-stakeholder inclusiveness in their anti-corruption strategies. Paired with a consistent political will to implement and improve the anti-corruption policies and strategies, it will lead towards the progression of SDG16. However, it was found that little discussion has been offered on the monitoring mechanism. A capacity-building mechanism in ACAs guarantees that professionals and experts are available. A good ACA must offer training to its officers, consequently strengthening the ACA as a learning organisation. Finally, education and advocacy on integrity and anti-corruption principles will benefit both the ACA and the relevant targets. Hence, the ACA structure is concluded to be relevant in supporting the SDGs in the six countries, specifically: a) ACA as the supervising body of government policy, b) ACA as the anti-corruption law enforcer, and c) ACA as the advocator for integrity. Above all, a quest towards corruption-free nations is not an insular journey, but rather one that requires comprehensive and collaborative action with multiple stakeholders and partners.

## **Conclusion**

As an independent commission, an ACA adopts good governance principles and functions as a learning organisation, which could support the progression of SDG16. This review is not exhaustive; thus, the findings cannot be extrapolated. Even though there is limited discussion on the roles and functions of the ACA in the context of SDG progression, this review offers a pathway and direction for more future academic discourses in SDG governance. The ACA's role in the implementation of the SDGs at the multi-governmental levels can be further explored. Future studies could explore how the ACA can contribute towards environmental sustainability, providing another perspective on sustainable development.

## **Co Author Contribution**

The authors confirmed that there is no conflict of interest in this article. Asmidar Lokman wrote the introduction, analysed and discussed the findings. Mohd Idham Mohd Yusof analysed, interpreted the results quantitatively and wrote the research methodology. Shamsinar Rahman wrote the conclusion and recommendations for future research. Nurul Hidayana Mohd Noor organised the framework and reviewed the paper. Mohtar Sani contributed to the discussion of the findings.

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