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Profile in Public Integrity:

Jaime Torres Melo Veedor, City of Bogotá, Colombia



Jaime Torres-Melo is the Veedor (Ombudsman) of the city of Bogotá. The [Veeduría Distrital](#) is responsible for citizen oversight, corruption prevention, procurement controls, accountability and handling complaints and claims in the district and local administrations within the city. The agency seeks to promote citizen oversight, improve public management in Bogotá and increase the efficiency and effectiveness of public policies. Jaime holds a MSc. in Development Management from The London School of Economics (LSE). Jaime has been a professor at several universities and held a number of positions within the non-governmental sector and the Colombian government, among other roles.

In your experience, how do you think the Veeduría is unique as an anti-corruption body?

The Veeduría Distrital of Bogotá is an independent preventive control agency that investigates and seeks to stop administrative inefficiencies and corruption risks in the city government entities, while promoting citizen oversight through specific programs. Its creation more than 20 years ago gives it a solid position within the city's administration, where it focuses on transparency issues and anti-corruption measures. The Veeduría is a “hybrid” entity within city administration, meaning that it is part of the central government but works directly with citizens. Even though the Mayor of Bogotá appoints me, my work is completely independent and autonomous, and my term lasts until the end of the current city government's term. I have direct access to all the head officials of the city government.

The Veeduría Distrital also focuses on promoting a robust culture of integrity among all public officials, so that they avoid corrupt practices that damage the public trust. The Veeduría Distrital does not, however, have any sanctioning or criminal investigation functions. Instead, the Veeduría Distrital issues recommendations on a wide variety of topics important to citizens.

What can anti-corruption agencies in other countries learn from the Veeduría's powers and structure?

One thing is the Veeduría Distrital practice of issuing preventive actions that identify administrative inefficiencies and corruption risks. These actions allow us to anticipate problems, through investigations initiated by the agency or citizen complaints. Our work ranges from setting guidelines in transparency and integrity for public offices to issuing innovative assessments of policy processes, in order to assist prevention efforts. Other anti-corruption agencies also use our public procurement findings, which are taken from diagnostics, evaluations, and risk assessments that advise various entities, facilitating their work in different stages of the contracting processes. Finally, the Veeduría Distrital's combined work at the city level with its different districts and the implementation of national-level tools serves as a useful lesson for other agencies that seek to engage citizens in the work of prevention.

What is the scope and nature of corruption in Colombia? How does corruption in Colombia differ from that in other countries, such as the United States?

Several authors agree that corruption in Colombia is best explained by the concept of “state capture,” in which legal and illegal actors exert influence to achieve laws and regulations for their own personal gain, rather than the general

interest of the people. In this arrangement, corruption networks are composed of criminals, as well as actors operating legally. Small-scale corruption is also widespread in Colombia. This phenomenon affects daily life particularly in the city where local actors, public service providers, and citizens are linked.

What successes are you most proud of during your time as the Veedor of Bogotá?

It has been very challenging, but there have been several important achievements during this period. First, we have diversified and improved the methodologies we use to understand, evaluate, and improve the city's contract management. We have also strengthened delivery of services to the citizens of Bogotá, an area where Bogotá stands as a leader in Latin America.

Furthermore, together with Bloomberg Associates, we have developed a Citizen Complaint Dashboard for Bogotá. The tool's purpose is to visualize and analyze citizen complaint data in a useful way to help citizen oversight and decision-makers address public matters in a preventive way. Citizen oversight has been another important area where we have had success since I became the head of the Veeduría Distrital. We have worked actively at the city and district level, developing technical tools and training citizens in their use. We have also conducted strategic oversight of different projects and given support to several participatory processes in the city.

Finally, I have confidence in our strategic projects on transparency and innovation. Those areas give us structural support for all our preventive work for the public and City institutions. The Veeduría Distrital's transparency project created the first measurement of corruption risks in 34 public institutions in Bogotá; making Bogotá the first city in Latin America to apply this type of index. Furthermore, we are working in formulating and implementing the Public Policy of Transparency, Integrity and Zero Tolerance to Corruption for the city.

In addition, the innovation project for public management in Bogotá, which is best known as the Public Innovation Lab (LABcapital), has become a concrete tool for preventive work in the city. LABcapital has helped government institutions identify public challenges related to the design and implementation of plans, programs and public actions. In order to find a solution to each challenge, LABcapital has designed a methodology (Empathy-Intuition-Action) that allows citizens and public officials to create innovative solutions for complex problems within a preventive approach.

In what ways do you think CAPI can better serve the international anti-corruption community?

CAPI has become an organization of major importance in the fight against corruption within city governments. CAPI generates a proper atmosphere to develop new tools that will tackle corruption, and these tools could be available in other languages and flexible to different contexts. It fosters a network of agencies working for the same purpose, which helps to document experiences and spread them to all of the members.

CAPI is rapidly becoming one of the leaders in the fight against corruption at the local level, which is vital given the new [U.N. Sustainable Development Goals](#) (SDGs). SDGs [eleven](#) and [sixteen](#) specifically seek to make local governments more effective and accountable to citizens, for whom it is essential to battle corruption and increase access to public information, while promoting citizen participation. Leveraging initiatives with international organizations working at the decentralized level will guarantee fairer cities and territories that promote anti-corruption measures.

Finally, I would like to thank CAPI for your interest and special focus on the work that the Veeduría Distrital of Bogotá has done to promote integrity and transparency at the subnational level. It is a privilege to share our experience and learn from many others.