The airport concession contract between Alterra Partners and the government of Costa Rica has been riddled with problems and doubts since it was signed four years ago. The privatization of Juan Santamaría International Airport is the largest endeavor of its kind in Costa Rica and the proceedings and its outcome will set a precedent for future negotiations. Two years ago the Comptroller General’s Office found several financial irregularities in the contract. Alterra Partners halted construction and the two parties have been in negotiations ever since. Transparency International of Costa Rica (TICR) has attempted to participate in these negotiations, as a representative of the citizens, but neither the government nor Alterra Partners is interested in facilitating the flow of information. In an interview published in La Nación on February 12, 2005, Minister of Public Works and Transportation Randall Quirós said, “A negotiation cannot enter public view… until we [Alterra Partners and the Government] are in total agreement on each of the points we discuss.” Despite this statement, TICR is working hard to fulfill its mission: to increase levels of accountability and transparency, to monitor the performance of key institutions, to press for necessary reforms in a non-party political manner, and combat corruption through prevention and reform.

In the light of recent investigations that resulted in two former presidents under house arrest, one would think the level of citizen participation would be high in this case. Unfortunately, it is not, which makes the job of TICR harder as there are few voices concerned with the fate of the airport. In this paper, I question the strategy used for popular cases with strong citizen participation and unpopular, but important, cases with low participation. How should their methodology differ with the different types of cases? I propose that TICR focus on raising public awareness in all the cases they investigate. I also suggest they build a strategy to harness collective action and use it effectively in their fight against corruption.