

Four Important Anti-Corruption Pilot Programs

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Many innovative approaches to fighting corruption have been pilot tested with positive results. I have personally conducted many of these, working closely with local stakeholders in developing and fragile states. But much more research is needed to understand how such approaches can be properly adjusted to different contexts – especially post-conflict situations – and then, how they can be scaled up so that they have significant nationwide impacts. My new book, [*Curbing Corruption: Practical Strategies for Sustainable Change*](#), presents many of these initiatives and what more needs to be done to ensure their effectiveness.

The standard anti-corruption reform program focuses on strengthening legal, institutional and enforcement programs. But citizens and government officials don't often see these state-level efforts as placing them at high risk or significantly constraining their behavior. Instead, initiatives that address social psychological motivators – those that are specifically targeted to stimulate and persuade individuals and groups to do the right thing and curb corrupt behavior – have been shown to be more effective.

Here are some approaches that I have piloted and which merit more attention.

1. One important driver of corruption – *rationalizations that cheating is OK* – needs to be confronted. We applied an innovative pilot program in Indonesia, Afghanistan, Ukraine and Albania that established Citizen Advocate Offices (CAO). These are legal offices that seek quick administrative resolution of citizen complaints about corruption. Rather than taking cases to court, these CAOs go directly to the offending bureaucratic office with the complaint and demand that the corrupt behaviors cease. If the government office fails to change its ways, the CAO threatens to name and shame the department, but if they do recant publicly and reform their behavior, the CAO promises to name and fame the department. Over a short period of time, more than 60% of cases handled by the CAOs this way were successfully concluded. The officials abandoned their rationalizations that their corrupt behaviors were just part of doing their jobs.
2. There is often an infectious nature to cheating and corruption. That is why *social norms and group conformity* need to be addressed directly. If we see role models and other people in our community being corrupt, it can become socially acceptable in our own eyes. Again, in Ukraine, we trained and supported over 1000 investigative journalists to do the fact-finding to uncover corrupt transactions across many sectors. Their persuasive reporting had major impacts that helped change long-held social beliefs and norms about corrupt behavior – effecting both citizens and officials. 63.9% of these reports went on to be further investigated by the authorities and 27.2% of those investigations were brought to court. Of the media's reports on corruption, 10.8% resulted in judicial decisions for conviction and 46.8% yielded administrative sanctions against corrupt officials.

3. *Risk aversion* is a powerful psychological motivator to stop corrupt behaviors. Both citizens and government officials are motivated to avoid risks. But even if the risks of committing corruption are perceived to be high, including punishment, they are “after the fact” risks. The immediate rewards of committing corruption are likely to be achieved and who knows if you will be caught? The mere probability of detection is not always a good way to stop corruption. But, if you know that your actions and the actions of your government department are being carefully and continuously monitored, you might be motivated to avert the risk by putting a stop to your corrupt behavior early on. In Indonesia, we implemented many programs that would appeal to human tendencies to avert risk. One particularly effective tool we tested was called “mystery shopper” investigations. Adapted from the private sector, we provided this tool to the Ministry of Civil Service Management and Bureaucratic Reform and gave them training and technical support to conduct monitoring of public services delivery and compliance by government agencies. Using this monitoring mechanism allows Ministry officials to observe civil servants under natural circumstances, compared to more formal procedural audits and reviews, thus offering an important new perspective on the quality of services being delivered to the public. Because of its rigorous methodology and the strong evidence collected, including audiovisual recordings, the heads of government units being monitored readily accepted the findings and the recommendations derived from the mystery shopper approach. The mystery shopper tool has been made an official methodology to be used into the future by Ministerial decree.
4. Private *face-to-face interactions* that traditionally facilitate corruption can be reengineered to reduce the personal give-and-take that makes up the typical corrupt transaction. In Albania and Ukraine, we designed and implemented E-government apps for the smartphone and laptop that deconstruct and reengineer this basic human interaction. Our pilot initiatives largely targeted the business sector’s interface with government – streamlining tax declaration and payment, registering businesses and issuing business licenses and permits, and conducting public procurements. Implementation of these systems, in combination with information campaigns for businesses and engaging NGOs in monitoring and assessing the effectiveness of the reforms, resulted in significant reductions in the experience and perception of corruption in tax collection (from 42% to 19%), procurement (from 42% to 17%), and business registration processes (from 19% to 0%). Other piloted initiatives to reduce face-to-face transactions included the establishment of one-stop shops and eliminating antiquated regulations that facilitate bureaucratic discretion.

All of these experimental approaches targeted key psychological drivers of corruption and showed promise because they sought to tackle the problem at a basic human level. They offered positive and negative incentives or reframed the structure of what would have been corrupt transactions. They address the corruption problem in a way that is different from the traditional legal, institutional and enforcement programs; instead, they target individual and group

motivators which are likely to change social norms and behaviors and yield more sustainable results.

But more research is needed, as well as practical testing of these and other reform options under a variety of conditions, especially in fragile states. Once there are sufficient results, these options need to take center stage, with countries and donors promoting and funding their implementation. Especially in post-conflict settings, research has shown that implementing anti-corruption reforms soon after peace agreements are signed can demonstrate early and visible wins for the new government so that corruption does not become reinstitutionalized. But there is always a real concern that large ramp-ups of donor assistance in the immediate post-conflict period can themselves result in corruption and abuse. So, it is critical for donors to incorporate appropriate controls and oversight into their assistance programs – especially those addressing corruption – to avoid doing further harm.

Overall, it's a long and difficult process to transform a corrupt society, especially one in a post-conflict setting. But with smart and coordinated use of peace diplomacy, development assistance, and experimentation with innovative and properly targeted programs, these goals are feasible and the impacts are measurable.