BASEL INSTITUTE ON GOVERNANCE

Social Norms, Mental Models and other Behavioural Drivers of Petty Corruption – *the Case of Tanzania*

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This policy brief summarises the main findings and lessons learned from research on corruption, social norms and behaviours in Tanzania. While the findings show that petty corruption is prevalent and results in inequitable public service delivery, they also inform that citizen and public officials' attitudes and behaviours towards corruption are shifting as a result of changes in the political environment. The evidence furthermore suggests that the effectiveness of conventional anti-corruption approaches may be enhanced by incorporating behavioural insights about entrenched social norms and collective understandings that are associated with practices of bribery and favouritism.

Introduction

High levels of corruption have persisted in Tanzania for a long time despite the presence of a robust anti-corruption framework. More recently though, there is an increased optimism that significant changes may be underway under the current leadership of President John Magufuli. However, transforming the governance system from one in which corruption is the norm to one where it becomes the exception requires adopting measures that address the incentives and motivations of all groups whose behaviours have contributed to fuelling corruption. This means that sustainable, systemic change will ultimately require the redefinition of entrenched habits and beliefs to accommodate new narratives, attitudes and practices that promote the control of corruption.

Against this background, the perspective of incorporating behavioural approaches to promote anti-corruption outcomes has generated great interest. What distinguishes a behavioural perspective from conventional anti-corruption prescriptions is the recognition that people often do not make "rational" cost-benefit decisions but are significantly influenced by social, cultural or other quasi-rational factors.

Behavioural insights could increase the effectiveness of anti-corruption interventions by taking into account the way in which those "non-rational" factors influence the propensity of individuals to engage in corruption. For instance, perceptions of the close environment as highly corrupt may cue people into making semi-automated corrupt decisions. Alternatively, expectations grounded in social norms and collective ways of thinking may promote the social acceptability of certain corrupt behaviours.

Against this backdrop, the UK Department for International Development (DFID) through its East Africa Research Fund (EARF) commissioned the Basel Institute on Governance to conduct qualitative research exploring the utility of behavioural approaches to address petty corruption, which in Tanzania was conducted in collaboration with researchers from the University of Dar es Salaam. This policy brief extracts the main research findings and policy lessons learned for the case of Tanzania as one of three East African countries under investigation.[1]

Main Research Findings

The research reveals strong evidence that behavioural drivers play a significant role in fuelling and perpetuating practices associated with petty corruption (such as bribery, gift-giving and favouritism) during the provision of public services. In particular, high levels of petty corruption in the Tanzanian health sector are associated

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[1] The other countries were Rwanda and Uganda. For more detail, consult the comparative and country reports as well as the other two policy briefs associated to the project, accessible on www.baselgovernance.org/publications/.

with an informal system of social norms and beliefs that privilege personal relationships and the ability to pay a bribe.

The research reveals that the experience of most users of public health services is that accessibility is not straightforward; formal rights and entitlements are not adequately enforced and citizens must pragmatically resort to informal social connections or bribing as a way of expediting treatment.

Social networks emerge in the research as central mechanisms that motivate and perpetuate behaviours linked to corruption. Informal social networks start with family and close friends, but can extend to all forms of acquaintances and instrumentally include important individuals or 'useful connections' that can lend a hand in times of need. They are extremely valued resources because they provide mutual assistance and help solve problems. In fact, the evidence suggests that social networks in Tanzania have the function of a currency, in that a broad network grants power and respectability and people 'invest' in their networks with the expectation of accruing benefits at a later stage.

Social networks are effective because they operate on the basis of widely recognised social norms prescribing that individuals have an obligation to share resources and wealth with their group and a duty to reciprocate favours and gifts received. Those social norms seamlessly penetrate the public sphere, which is why the dynamics of the social networks are associated with favouritism and even embezzlement on the part of service providers, who are expected to use their positions to benefit their families and friends. Furthermore, gift-giving and bribing are used instrumentally to co-opt service providers into one's network. Under such circumstances, bribes are not dispensed as one-off transactions but rather as part of an on-going exchange in an economy of favours that explains why petty corruption has reached systemic levels.

The findings illuminate the tensions generated by the coexistence of multiple normative frameworks. On the one hand, citizens ascribe great value to social norms of solidarity and reciprocity, not only because they are effective in solving problems and lending assistance, but also because they are associated with social status, respect and reputation, all of which in turn reinforces the social acceptability of corruption. On the other hand, the formal laws are often regarded as intrinsically unfair, and because legal rights and entitlements are rarely realised, formal rules and procedures are dismissed as little more than an obstacle to the pursuit of more important goals.

Against this backdrop, there is mounting evidence that the tightening of law enforcement under the current administration is exacerbating tensions between the informal social and formal legal norms, as service providers find it increasingly difficult to utilise their public positions in favour of their networks.

> ## Box 1: Turning tides: 'the Magufuli effect'
> - President Magufuli seems to have struck a cord with Tanzanian citizens by espousing virtues of integrity as evidenced by the social media frenzy that followed the first austerity measures asking 'what would Magufuli do?'
> - Citizen support for the President is linked to expectations of meaningful changes and improved livelihoods, which if realised, could potentially limit the instrumental role fulfilled by the social network.
> - Conversely, public service providers are responding to this shrinking space for corrupt behaviours creatively, for instance, by simply stating 'Magufuli' as a code word to communicate to their networks that it is no longer possible to grant favours or divert resources to favour particularistic interests.

Other behavioural drivers of petty corruption relate to *stereotypes* or *default assumptions* (narrow frames) about high corruption as being the normal state of affairs and inevitable. Citizens also share *collective images* (mental models) about the ineffectiveness of anti-corruption institutions, which reinforce the idea that impunity is the norm.

However, the research findings indicate increasing levels of trust in national and local governments. This may suggest that collective images may be changing in a way that it is possible to view the state as an agent of positive change.

> ## Box 2: Behavioural drivers of petty corruption in Tanzania
> - In a context of deficient public service delivery, *social networks* fulfil a crucial functional role by providing an informal safety net for citizens. Values of solidarity and reciprocity pragmatically translate into practices of favouritism and bribery (often camouflaged as gift-giving) thereby providing citizens with access to public services.
> - Citizens default to *narrow frames* confirming that practices of petty corruption are the normal state of affairs and corrupt practices are justified with the understanding that everyone engages in them.
> - *Mental models* further reinforce the perception that anti-corruption and enforcement agencies are weak, suggesting that impunity is the norm.

Policy Recommendations

On the basis of the research findings, the following *four* recommendations highlight the relevance of applying behavioural insights for practitioners:

Testing behavioural approaches to anti-corruption.

Developing interventions based on the evidence concerning behavioural drivers of corruption is a promising avenue for complementing conventional anti-corruption approaches. Such behavioural interventions

should be conceived to target and even harness the local context and understandings - including social norms and collective beliefs - which shape incentives, attitudes and expectations regarding corruption. Designing anti-corruption behavioural interventions involves identifying shifts (or nudges) in the environment or in the information that is shared with individuals that will motivate decision-making that supports better control of corruption outcomes.

It should be underscored that, although a number of behavioural interventions have proven effective in experimental settings, the practice of incorporating behavioural considerations into policy making to improve macro level socio economic outcomes is still very much in a nascent stage. There are no blueprints to predicting what nudges people will respond to and in what way, which means that a) behavioural interventions should be rigorously piloted and assessed and b) practitioners should be ready to experiment and test different approaches to find those most effective in bringing about social change in a given context.

> • **Develop and rigorously test pilot behavioural interventions that apply different nudges to elicit decision making that breaks habits of corruption.**

Unleashing the power of social networks

Although social networks have been identified as fuelling and perpetuating practices of petty corruption, there is evidence that they can also be harnessed to promote better anti-corruption outcomes. Social network analysis strongly suggests the potential of social networks as effective mechanisms for spreading ideas and diffusing behavioural change. This can happen, for instance, by means of an induction or "peer effect" whereby an individual's chances of adopting certain behaviours increase if the person has a friend or relative who has adopted the behaviours in question. Thus, social networks are key to the spread of ideas and, importantly, to shifting social norms.

Network-driven interventions would harness the confirmed pressures that tending to the expectations and norms of social networks exert on individuals. Such interventions could enlist individuals in a position of influence (or centrality) in their respective networks to act as anti-corruption champions; promoting ideas and

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changes in behaviours to break with entrenched practices linked to corruption and setting new anti-corruption trends and values.

> • **Harnessing the transformative power of social networks can be pursued by identifying and engaging influential individuals in social networks to disseminate key messages and promote behavioural change.**

Promoting changes to the popular culture of corruption.

Challenging the conventional wisdom on the prevalence of corruption is key, particularly, regarding beliefs that corruption is inevitable. In this regard, the evidence suggests that the current context is ripe in Tanzania to launch initiatives to promote a shift in expectations in light of President Magufuli's actions, policies and discourse that directly confront those stereotypes. Concretely, dissemination of strong and carefully tailored messages may act as a catalyst to trigger changes in public attitudes instilling an expectation that corruption can indeed be curbed.

In this regard, there is growing evidence that "edutainment" campaigns can be effective at disseminating messages aimed at shifting mental models and entrenched practices.

Creative storylines could emphasise the hidden social costs of corruption as well as the hardships families must confront when a wage earner is convicted of a crime of corruption. Moreover, edutainment messages could reinforce the notion that citizens are entitled to receive public services in contrast to prevalent understandings that receiving a service necessitates the exchange of gifts or favours.

> • **Develop "edutainment" interventions aimed at challenging preconceptions and stereotypes about corruption and reinforcing positive stereotypes, for example promoting integrity as the new normal.**

Developing sector-specific approaches.

Public service providers are confronted with conflicting pressures from social networks that often contradict their public duties. This often involves the actions of managers and colleagues that induce individual service providers to tolerate and even actively engage in corrupt behaviours. Therefore, reforming work environments should be an important target area for reinforcing macro-level priming about the commitment to enforce a zero tolerance to corruption and an anti-corruption culture.

Increasing transparency in public service delivery may further help to reduce opportunities for informal arrangements between service providers and users. One

such approach is the introduction of digitised queue management systems, which has shown success in decreasing favouritism in health service provision in Rwanda.

Equally important would be to creatively develop positive incentives – awards, bonuses and recognitions – that explicitly reward honesty while reinforcing the credibility of sanctions in order to shift the expectations of the social networks. Citizen scorecards and similar instruments could provide useful inputs to operationalise such concepts as well as public 'naming and shaming' of individuals proven guilty of corrupt offences.

- Introducing positive incentive schemes to tangibly reward honest behaviour while increasing the social costs of malfeasance can motivate social networks to ensure that service providers act with integrity.

Lessons for Practitioners

- In a context in which formal rights and entitlements are not adequately enforced, citizens pragmatically resort to their informal social network as an effective means to obtain a 'simplified' service delivery. Bottom up interventions can only go so far without improvement in the quality and accessibility of public services.

- Practices of bribery and favouritism result in a regressive public service as the most vulnerable in society often lack the appropriate social relations or resources to elicit favours and bribe. Such hidden costs of corruption should be explicitly exposed.

- The high allegiance to social networks and the values of solidarity and reciprocity they espouse could be creatively harnessed for favourable anti-corruption outcomes.

- While social norms and mental models are entrenched, they are not immutable and can change on the basis of exposure to consistent actions and messages by authorities. Given the right political context, changes in beliefs and expectations can happen in a relatively short time period.

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