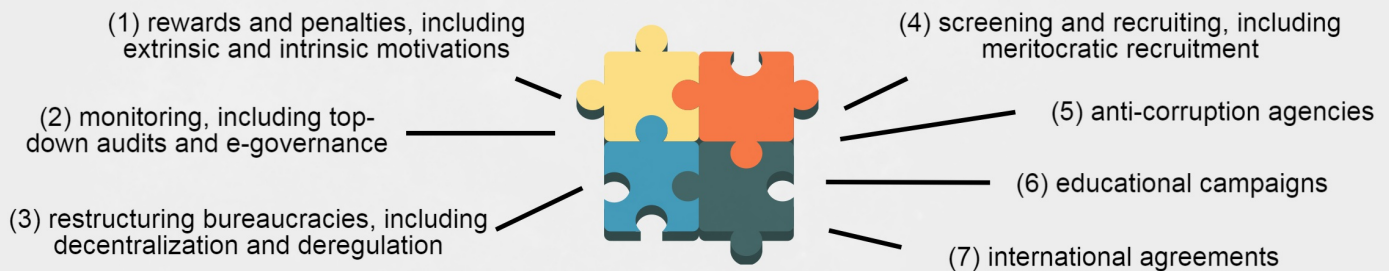


Combatting Corruption Among Civil Servants: Perspectives on What Works

Seven prevalent anti-corruption strategies

New USAID literature review assesses seven strategies for reducing corruption among civil servants, and presents broader considerations for USAID Missions engaged in anti-corruption programming.



Key Findings

Broader Analysis and Strategies



or



- Corruption reforms fail in the long term when they are focused only on individual “bad apples” who need to be rewarded for good behavior and punished for bad behavior.

- In many contexts corruption represents an alternative social order. This means that anti-corruption efforts fail because those tasked with oversight are themselves part of this corrupt order.

How has corruption been overcome at a country-wide level?

The overarching lesson is that successful, long-term corruption reform requires host country demand for corruption reform, including a group or set of individuals that have a stake in fighting corruption.

What factors can undermine local demand for anti-corruption reform even where corruption is condemned in the abstract?

The research suggests that civil servants and citizens engage in corrupt practices for three main reasons:

- because it is necessary to do so to survive in a broken state system;
- because the distinction between a corrupt act and a non-corrupt act is unclear; and
- in response to pressure from ethnic or kin groups.

Three broader anti-corruption strategies to consider...

Big Bang



Because corruption is a system-level problem, it can be reformed through a “big bang” or a “big push” that attacks all dimensions of the problem at once.

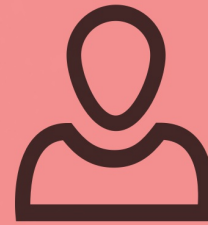
This strategy can generally only be implemented in rare historical moments, such as following defeat in war.

Islands of Integrity



Given the need to attack multiple dimensions of the problem, and the difficulty of doing so at the level of a whole country, scholars suggest the strategy of attacking all dimensions of the problem within particular organizations. Scholarship shows that some organizations can remain free of corruption even in countries where corruption is widespread, and therefore it may be possible to address corruption organization by organization, by conducting a “big push” inside one organization at a time.

Intermediaries



How to address citizens’ need for help in navigating state bureaucracies? Much corruption exists because citizens need to be corrupt to meet everyday requirements, such as access to electricity or water. In such contexts, citizens often need the help of intermediaries to navigate state bureaucracies, and these intermediaries can drive up levels of corruption. Reformers could consider providing citizens with other ways of navigating the state.

Additional Findings

- Scholars and policymakers have yet to rigorously assess the majority of commonly prescribed anti-corruption strategies.

- The partial exception concerns anti-corruption audits and e-governance, which based on existing evidence appear to hold promise.



- Adequate civil service wages seem to be a necessary but not a sufficient condition for control of corruption, as does a free press.

- An emerging skepticism regarding the effectiveness of social accountability mechanisms, as well as anti-corruption agencies.

About the Research



Combating Corruption Among Civil Servants: Interdisciplinary Perspectives on What Works

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