



THE FLETCHER SCHOOL
TUFTS UNIVERSITY

**The Nexus:
Corruption, Conflict & Peacebuilding Colloquium**
*Thought Piece: Anti-Corruption measures causing
conflict?*

Fighting corruption has become an increasingly important topic for governments of the industrialized donor nations and the institutions whose membership they dominate. The World Bank and US government are at the forefront of this agenda, though most of the European nations have subsequently added it to their foreign aid policies in recent years.

Despite the increasing attention placed on this issue by the international community, very little exchange occurs between those working on conflict/peacebuilding and those engaged in fighting corruption. The de-facto pillars operate simultaneously and often in overlapping sectors yet without co-ordination or purposeful mitigation of possible consequences (positive or negative) each may have on the other.

The Institute for Human Security within the Fletcher School at Tufts University hosted a select group of thinkers and policy makers to discuss the critical questions related to the nexus of conflict, corruption and peacebuilding on April 13, 2007. The *purpose* of the event was threefold:

- 1.) Finalize a map of existing research and activity related to the nexus;
- 2.) Exchange views and ascertain thinking about gaps and emerging questions; and
- 3.) Determine the questions of significance for a research agenda and attendant activities moving forward

In preparation for the colloquium, each participant was asked to draft a short *Thought Piece* on a specific aspect of the agenda in order to fuel the discussion. These pieces were intended to be 'food for thought' and not academic, formal publications;¹ nor were they intended to be made public. However after much discussion regarding the paucity of existing literature it was felt, where authors permitted, that there was value in making them available.

For further information on the Colloquium, contact Professor Cheyanne Church at Cheyanne.church@tufts.edu or visit <http://fletcher.tufts.edu/corruptionconf/index.html> .

¹ Further information on the agenda and the parameters provided on the Thought Pieces may be found on the Colloquium website.

THE NEXUS: CORRUPTION, CONFLICT & PEACEBUILDING THOUGHT PIECE

ANTI-CORRUPTION MECHANISMS CAUSING CONFLICT?

MARY ANDERSON

WHAT WE KNOW

I am not aware of any systematic look at how anti-corruption efforts (or mechanisms) cause conflict. However, two pieces of work we have done may point to potential areas for further exploration.

I. First, some years ago we did some preliminary work (with an OECD/DAC anti-corruption project) about a range of possible—not conflict related—side effects of anti-corruption efforts. Two very interesting things emerged in the early days of this work.

A: In every society where case studies were done (and, therefore, this may be true in all societies), it was clear that there was a broad consensus (a shared understanding) of what, in that context, constituted “corruption.” Definitions varied from place to place, but each society knew for itself where the line was that divided acceptable behaviour from unacceptable behaviour.

B: Early case experience showed that some anti-corruption efforts that were not based on an understanding of these common, society-shared perceptions of what did and did not constitute “crossing the line,” missed the mark in terms of their effects. One story, for example, was of a community where it was common to pay off a policeman whenever stopped for a traffic violation because the time required to appear in court was so great that the costs in terms of lost wages more than counterbalanced a pay-off to the police. When an anti-corruption campaign promoted rejection of such pay-offs, police began to wear a badge that indicated they could not be bribed and people were encouraged to apply anti-pay-off stickers to their automobiles. Many police and many cars sported these indicators of rejection of the “system of bribery.” However, the costs of court

appearances did not change. As a result, people and police reported that the well-known and accepted system was so disrupted that corruption became much worse. That is, since no one knew if the other really would accept a pay-off system, the costs of bribes went off the charts. Everyone felt they were taking a much bigger risk if they offered/accepted a bribe, so the negotiations became more clouded and the pay-offs much larger.

II. Second, the lessons learned through the Do No Harm work on “inadvertent conflict reinforcing side-effects” of other types of well-intentioned efforts (humanitarian and development assistance), may suggest some potential conflict affecting side effects of anti-corruption work as well. More evidence-gathering could be done to see if any of these is significant and under what circumstances they become so. The particular DNH lessons that may be relevant are:

- A. Distributional, market and legitimization effects of campaigns. As is true of any effort that involves resource transfers, anti-corruption campaigns insofar as they are funded and focused, may feed into and reinforce pre-existing dividers in societies by favoring some sub-groups over others (distributional effects). Or, such campaigns may increase the profitability of certain activities within a society, reinforcing people’s inclinations to kept the systems going (for example, if certain groups gain wages or profits from anti-corruption work, is it in their interest to have corruption disappear?—i.e. market effects). Or, if power is derived by some subgroups in anti-corruption campaigns, it is important to look at how former and new power relationships relate to intergroup conflict in that society to see if these legitimization effects are positive or negative.
- B. Implicit Ethical Messages. It would seem likely that the implicit messages of anti-corruption work would have quite negative impacts. We know, for example, that some “name and shame” campaigns of human rights activists have had counter effects by causing some human rights violators to feel so ostracized and vilified, that they conclude they cannot be re-accepted by the international community. With such a judgment, they proceed unaffected with abuse simply because they see no further loss to their status or access to others. If anti-corruption campaigns

vilify specific individuals and/or groups, such effects may harden, rather than correct, their practices.

WHAT ARE IMPORTANT RESEARCH QUESTIONS

To figure out how best to approach corruption in the range of societies where international work, it would make sense to me to begin by gathering in more detail (this may already have been done and I may simply not be aware of it!) exactly the society-specific definers of what is, and is not, corruption (and why).

The question for me is what is the real focus of anti-corruption? For me, it would be to end exploitation (by some people of others), and to correct injustices that affect quality of life. When a family member shares his/her new wealth or position with other family members (which is traditional in many societies), the question for me is who does this harm and who does this help. Does this, in fact, result in injustice and/or exploitation? Who is served by what kinds of anti-corruption efforts and who loses? What are the interim steps through which societies might go to reverse existing patterns of exploitation/injustice that occur through corruption? Are there step-by-step approaches that are more effective than frontal attacks? That is, the interesting and challenging questions for me are at the pragmatic level of how to design and implement more effective programmes.

Final story: We have some evidence that people within their own societies can come up with specifics that could result in more effective programming. For example, when we talked with a broad range of recipients of humanitarian assistance in tsunami-affected Aceh (Indonesia), we were told by a number of them that they were disappointed in the international community's failure to "correct" their pre-existing system of favouritism and cronyism. Their reasoning went like this: It had been traditional for years that a Head of Village (HoV) would favour his relatives or others who had special access to him. When international agencies arrived, by channelling assistance through the Heads of Villages, they reinforced this misuse of power. Local people acknowledged that the

international NGOs had to work with and through the HoVs since they are the legitimate political structure in that area. However, they were disappointed that, once having agreed with a HoV on appropriate criteria for aid distribution (to those who need it the most, for example), that international NGO staff did not come back to villages to check on actual distribution patterns. They said that, had we done so, we would have found traditional favouritism in place. Then, they said, rather than accusing a HoV of corruption, international staff should have simply reopened the conversation (“We remember that we agreed on x as the system for aid distribution but we observe that this has changed a bit since we were here. Is there some way we can help you get this back on track so that those in greatest need actually receive the things they need?”)

This, they said, would have “freed” the local power structures from their own systems. They pointed out that, within the system of Acehese villages, there was little leeway for anyone (including HoVs) to change these patterns. A number of local people told us that, with the help of the international community at this time of crisis, many (most) would have welcomed the kind of outside influence that would have helped them change these patterns. They also said that local staff of international NGOs could not have this influence. It required on-site visits (carried out respectfully rather than accusatorially) by international staff. To a surprising degree, they held the international community accountable for not having changed this “unfair” system when they had a chance to do so.