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Approaches to Curbing Corruption

The standard and most widely used definition of corruption is, “the abuse of entrusted power for private gain.”¹ Another common definition is, “the abuse of public office for private gain.”² These operational, succinct definitions depict the phenomenon at the micro level as a transaction between or among parties.³ However, these conceptualizations have limitations. First, corruption is not only prevalent in governments, as suggested by the latter definition. It can occur in the economic realm and among nonstate sectors and groups in society. Second, abuse of entrusted power may not necessarily be for private gain but also to reap political gains or collective benefits for a third party, entity, group, or sector—for example, state security forces, political parties, businesses, financial services, and unions. Finally, this framework does not convey how corruption functions. It is not simply the aggregate of individual transactions between a corrupter (abuser of power) and the corruptee (victim or willing partner in the illicit interaction).

Corruption functions as a system of power abuse that involves multiple relationships—some obvious and many others hidden, hence the anticorruption community’s emphasis on transparency. Within this system are long-standing interests that want to maintain the venal status quo. My preferred definition of corruption is as follows: a system of abuse of entrusted power for private, collective, or political gain—often involving a complex, intertwined set of relationships, some obvious, others hidden, with established vested interests, that can operate vertically within an institution or horizontally across political, economic, and social spheres in a society or transnationally.⁴

Corruption can also be defined from a human rights framework—

through the eyes and experiences of regular people. Once they are factored into the equation, graft can further be understood as a form of oppression and loss of freedom. Aruna Roy, one of the founders of both the Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan (Union for the Empowerment of Peasants and Laborers, MKSS) and the Right to Information movement in India, characterizes corruption as “the external manifestations of the denial of a right, an entitlement, a wage, a medicine.”⁵

Limitations of Top-Down Anticorruption Approaches

Now into its third decade, the global anticorruption struggle has undoubtedly made progress, but real change appears to be modest.⁶ Wide-scale national anticorruption programs, traditionally favored by donor countries and multilateral institutions, have had inconsistent results.⁷ A literature review of approximately 150 studies identified through a bibliography of close to 800 sources found “few success stories when it comes to the impact of donor supported anti-corruption efforts.”⁸ Nor have public perceptions improved. Transparency International’s 2010 Global Corruption Barometer found that 60 percent of those surveyed in eighty-six countries and territories said that corruption had increased over the past three years. Eighty percent stated that political parties are corrupt or extremely corrupt, and half asserted that their government’s efforts to stop corruption were ineffective. Since 2006, payoffs to police are said to have doubled, while more respondents reported paying bribes to the judiciary and for registry and permit services than in 2005. Poorer interviewees were twice as likely to pay bribes for basic services as more well-off individuals.⁹

Traditional anticorruption approaches can be summarized by three main features. First, they have been top-down and elite-driven, with attention directed mainly toward administrative graft. Citizens and the potential of people power did not factor into the equation. Second, efforts focused considerably on developing norms, rules, and structures, resulting in legislation; institution building, such as anticorruption commissions; improvement of national and local government capacity; international agreements; and public finance management. In essence, these approaches were largely based on the experiences of industrialized Western democracies. Some governance experts argue even further that attempts to improve governance were based on a value judgment that “West is best” and what was needed was a correction of deficiencies in comparison to this ideal.¹⁰

Third, there has been a predominant focus on processes. According to Daniel Kaufmann, a development specialist, the fallacy exists that

one “fights corruption by fighting corruption.” This approach translated into ongoing anticorruption initiatives with more commissions or ethics agencies, and the drafting of new or improved laws, codes of conduct, decrees, integrity pacts, and so on, which, he asserts, appear to have had minimal impact.¹¹

Viewed through the lens of people power, the limitations to elite-driven, technocratic strategies are manifold. Foremost, top-down measures have rested on the flawed assumption that once anticorruption structures are put in place, illicit practices will accordingly change. Institutions accused of corruption are often made responsible for enacting reforms. But those benefitting from graft are much less likely to stand against it than those suffering from it. Consequently, even when political will exists, it can be blocked—not because more political will is needed, but because too many players have a stake in the crooked status quo. Second, the grass roots was not included in the anticorruption equation—as sources of information and insights about malfeasance and top-down approaches to curb it; in terms of citizens’ experiences of it; or as potential drivers of accountability, integrity, and change. Third, the systemic nature of corruption was often missed, and focus on corruption was limited in societal sectors beyond the state. Furthermore, one-size-fits-all types of frameworks aimed at replicating mature bureaucracies in the Global North were promulgated. Cumulatively, there was minimal impact on the daily lives of regular people.

A Paradigm Shift

To their credit, over the past decade, the international anticorruption and development communities began an earnest stock-taking, and a historic paradigm shift is under way in the anticorruption and accountability realms. These communities now recognize that graft cannot be fully challenged without the active involvement of citizens. The Fourteenth International Anti-Corruption Conference (IACC) in 2010, a bellwether of advances in these fields, launched a new interactive series of sessions on people’s empowerment.¹² It brought together activists to feature innovative uses of ICTs (information and communication technologies) and profile grassroots civic initiatives.¹³ The final declaration, presciently released one month before the onset of the Tunisian people power revolution, stated, “Empowered people create change. . . . This expanded element of our conference points the way for the future of the anti-corruption movement, one incorporating citizen mobilisation and empowerment, as well as the inclusion of youth.”¹⁴

By 2012, the Fifteenth IACC's overall theme was Mobilising People: Connecting Agents of Change. Transparency International's Strategy 2015 plan includes people among the six priorities: "Increased empowerment of people and partners around the world to take action against corruption. The challenge is to engage with people more widely than ever before—for ultimately, only people can stop corruption."¹⁵ In April 2011, signifying major inroads in the development realm, Robert Zoellick, then president of the World Bank, outlined a new "social contract for development" in which "an empowered public is the foundation for a stronger society, more effective government, and a more successful state."¹⁶ Jim Kim, the Bank's subsequent president, reiterated this focus. While outlining the institution's anticorruption priorities, he said, "We need to empower citizens with information and tools to make their governments more effective and accountable."¹⁷

Top-Down and Bottom-Up: Two Sides of the Same Coin

Top-down and bottom-up approaches are not mutually exclusive. Both are needed. Moreover, there are multiple ways in which grassroots civic campaigns and movements, wielding people power, can complement and reinforce legal and administrative approaches, which are essential to build the anticorruption infrastructure needed for long-term transformation of systems of graft. Some examples follow.

Vertical Corruption

People power initiatives can curb vertical corruption functioning within an institution. The National Foundation for Democracy and Human Rights in Uganda (NAFODU), a grassroots civil society organization (CSO) in the southwest of the country, initiated a volunteer-driven, community-monitoring mobilization that targeted local police intimidation and extortion (see Chapter 9).

Horizontal Corruption

Grassroots campaigns and movements can impact horizontal corruption, which operates across institutions, groups, and sectors. Dosta! (Enough!), a youth movement in Bosnia-Herzegovina, challenged systemic corruption by zeroing in on a scandal involving the prime minister of one of the two political sections, as well as a former prime minister, a state company, government administrations, and later, the prime minister of Sarajevo Canton, the mayor of Sarajevo, and the police (see Chapter 10). After investigative journalists exposed how the prime min-

ister, Nedžad Branković, acquired an exclusive apartment for approximately US\$500, Dosta! launched a campaign through graffiti, Facebook mobilization, T-shirt mockery, billboard messages, and inundating police stations with phone calls. Branković's party subsequently forced him to resign.¹⁸

Systemic Approach

Organized, strategic civic movements and campaigns are particularly suited to a systemic approach to curbing deeply entrenched corruption and abuse by exerting pressure on other sectors and nonstate sources of graft in society. Launched in 2004, Addiopizzo (Good-bye, protection money), a youth-led nonviolent movement in Palermo, Italy, is disrupting the system of Mafia extortion (see Chapter 6). The movement does this by building an ever-growing group of businesses that refuse to pay *pizzo*; mobilizing citizens to resist through simple, everyday acts, such as patronizing *pizzo*-free businesses, and harnessing national and international support through Mafia-free tourism initiatives; seeking ethical public procurement practices; and cooperating with teachers, schools, and the education ministry to instill integrity and anti-Mafia values in the next generation.

Implementation

Although rules, regulations, and laws targeting corruption may exist on the books, they are not always implemented or compliance is low. Such is the problem that Transparency International's aforementioned Strategy 2015 also identifies institutions and laws among its strategic priorities. The strategy statement prioritizes "improved implementation of anti-corruption programmes in leading institutions, businesses and the international financial system."¹⁹ The challenge is to ensure that commitments to stop corruption are translated into actions, enforcement, and results. Another priority is "more effective enforcement of laws and standards around the world and reduced impunity for corrupt acts."²⁰ The challenge is enforcing fair legal frameworks, ensuring no impunity for corruption.

Civil resistance can create pressure for such measures. For instance, the 5th Pillar movement in India strategically uses the country's Right to Information law (RTI) by encouraging citizens to file RTI inquiries (see Chapter 7). With the proper questions, it's possible to document misbehavior, thereby holding officials accountable. To magnify its impact, 5th Pillar links this action together with other nonviolent tactics, such as workshops in urban centers and villages, assistance in writing

and submitting RTIs, “people’s inspection and audits” of public works, leafleting, social processions, and backup for those wanting to approach the state government’s Vigilance Department and the Central Bureau of Investigation’s Anti-Corruption Division.²¹

Mobilized citizens can also play a role in implementing legal or administrative measures, particularly those won by nonviolent campaigns and movements. A review of the impact of donor funding on home-grown SMOs and social movements observed, “Ensuring that legislation is enforced may also require the capacity to monitor the activities of enforcement agencies. To enact this monitoring, social movements need more than a presence in official corridors and international arenas—the existence of a strong grass-roots network of activists on the ground is essential.”²²

Protection

Civic campaigns and movements can also support and protect honest individuals, within state institutions and other entities, who are attempting change. All too often, one or a small number of reformers cannot challenge or dismantle entrenched, multifaceted systems of graft and unaccountability. To defend the Indonesian Corruption Eradication Commission (KPK) and secure the release of two falsely imprisoned deputy commissioners, the 2009 CICA (Love Indonesia, Love Anti-Corruption Commission) campaign mobilized citizens around the country (see Chapter 5). It utilized creative nonviolent tactics, including a 1.7 million member Facebook group, humorous stunts, anticorruption ringtones, and street actions.

The Dynamics of People Power in Curbing Corruption and Gaining Accountability

History demonstrates that there is no reason to expect corrupt officials and political leaders to reform themselves.

—*Pierre Landell Mills*

Some researchers of citizen engagement and accountability initiatives have commented on the absence of theories of change in their fields of study.²³ The dynamics of civil resistance and people power provide a conceptual framework to fill this gap. Grassroots campaigns and movements by their nature emerge from the civic realm and include the participation of regular people united around common grievances, objec-

tives, and demands. Mobilized citizens engaging in nonviolent tactics make up a social force that can exert pressure on the state and on other sectors of society. This pressure comes from outside the institution or corrupt system, which usually cannot reform from within because those who are benefitting from graft and abuse circumvent technocratic measures and thwart political efforts at change.

Therein lies the strategic advantage of nonviolent resistance to curb corruption: it consists of extrainstitutional methods of action to push for change, when powerholders are corrupt or unaccountable and institutional channels are blocked or ineffective.²⁴ Mobilized citizens engaged in organized campaigns and movements generate people power through three dynamics. *Disruption* of the status quo or regular functioning of systems of corruption shakes up venal relationships and weakens enablers. The latter involves laws, practices, and professional services that can facilitate malfeasance. Hence, individually targeting or punishing every illicit interaction is not necessary—an impossibility anyway, given that most corrupt relationships are hidden and few power abusers willingly forsake their vested interests and gains. Civil resistance strategies of disruption break down the system and make business as usual more difficult and risky. MUHURI (Muslims for Human Rights) in Mombasa, Kenya, is empowering poor communities to fight poverty by curbing misuse of constituency development funds, approximately \$1 million given annually to each member of Parliament (see Chapter 10). MUHURI conducts local education and training in a six-step social audit to monitor expenditures and public works, while using nonviolent tactics, such as street theatre and marches, to build support, mobilize citizens, and collect information.²⁵

Engagement of people involves pulling them toward the campaign or movement—from the public as well as from various sectors, groups, institutions, and elites, including from within corrupt systems (e.g., political leaders, integrity champions, and honest bureaucrats). In the civil resistance realm, this dynamic is often described as shifting people's loyalties away from the oppressors toward the nonviolent civic initiative and producing "defections"—that is, individuals and groups within the corrupt system who refuse to go along with it. The engagement dynamic is based on the reality that not everyone is equally loyal, equally corruptible, and equally wedded to the corrupt system.

Engagement strategies strengthen citizen participation and campaign capacity, while weakening sources of support and control for unaccountable and corrupt powerholders, entities, and their enablers. The aforementioned NAFODU civic initiative in Uganda illustrates this

process. By engaging local volunteers and citizens to report on police graft in low-risk ways, through radio call-ins and SMS texts, it shook up the illicit system and generated social pressure. At the same time, the initiative strategically sought to win elements of law enforcement toward the community, for example, by obtaining a memorandum of understanding with officials and conducting local integrity trainings. In an astounding shift of power relations, the police began to share their own grievances and asked for the help of NAFODU and citizens to give them a voice and make recommendations to the government.²⁶

There is another dimension to engagement—joining forces with “institutional activists.” Somewhat similar to the notion of integrity champions, these powerholder insiders within state (and conceivably nonstate) entities “proactively take up causes that overlap with those of grassroots challengers.”²⁷ Their insider activism is often conducted independently of civil society. They can access institutional resources and influence policymaking and implementation.²⁸ Thus, in some anti-corruption and accountability cases, they can constitute an essential ally and critical target of engagement tactics. The objective is not to shift the positions of such “institutional activists” or to encourage their defection from the system, that is, to step out or break away from it. Rather, nonviolent campaigns and movements could seek to join forces with them in order to magnify internal, top-down and external, bottom-up pressure.

Shifting power relations through the power of numbers is a third dynamic for generating people power. Large-scale public participation relative to the size of struggle arena—which can range from the community level all the way to the national and international levels—can create social pressure of a magnitude that becomes difficult to suppress or ignore. In other words, “When one person speaks of injustice, it remains a whisper. When two people speak out, it becomes talk. When many tell of injustice, they find a voice that will be heard.”²⁹ Strategies activating the numbers dynamic can alter the loyalties of powerholders and strengthen honest changemakers within the corrupt system who are no longer alone, and thus, not easy targets to subdue. In 1996 Turkey was beleaguered by a nationwide crime syndicate that involved paramilitary entities, the mafia, drug traffickers, government officials, members of Parliament, parts of the judiciary and media, and businesses. In spite of semiauthoritarian rule and limited civic space to express dissent, the 1997 Citizens Initiative for Constant Light mobilized the public in the One Minute of Darkness for Constant Light campaign, through a low-risk mass action (see Chapter 10). They began with co-

ordinated switching off of lights, soon augmented by unanticipated outpourings on the street. At its peak, approximately 30 million people took part in the campaign, which pressured the government to launch judicial investigations resulting in verdicts, and exposed crime syndicate figures and relationships.

People Power Tactics

Nonviolent tactics constitute the methods of civil resistance that can generate people power. Grassroots civic initiatives targeting corruption have significantly expanded the civil resistance repertoire by creating innovative tactics or engaging in conventional ones in novel ways (a comprehensive list of the wide-ranging tactics employed in the twelve cases appears in the Appendix). Such tactics include

- Noncooperation.
- Civil disobedience.
- Low-risk mass actions.
- Displays of symbols.
- Street theatre, visual dramatizations, stunts.
- Songs, poetry, cultural expressions.
- Humor, dilemma actions.
- Candidate “blacklists.”
- Information gathering, right to information procedures.
- Monitoring of officials, institutions, budgets, spending, public services, development projects.³⁰
- Social audits and “face the people” forums.
- Digital resistance through social networking technologies (e.g., Facebook posts, blogging, SMS, e-petitions, tweets).³¹
- Education and training.
- Social and economic empowerment initiatives.
- Youth recreation.
- Creation of parallel institutions.
- Anticorruption pledges, citizen-sponsored integrity awards.
- Protests, petitions, vigils, marches, sit-ins.
- Strikes, boycotts, reverse boycotts.³²
- Nonviolent blockades.
- Nonviolent accompaniment.

How do citizens curb corruption? How is people power manifested? What are the results? The in-depth case studies presented in this book

progress from national campaigns and movements to more local struggles. Chapters 3 and 4 examine nationwide grassroots initiatives targeting political corruption in South Korea and Brazil, respectively. The abuse of power by political parties, elites, and legislators is common around the world. As documented in the 2011 Global Corruption Barometer cited earlier in this chapter, 80 percent of citizens surveyed perceive political parties to be corrupt. A 2012 Transparency International report on Europe stated, “Popular discontent with corruption has brought people out onto the streets in these and other European countries to protest against a combination of political corruption and perceived unfair austerity being meted out to ordinary citizens.”³³ A 2013 poll of American voters found that 85 percent stated they had an unfavorable opinion of the U.S. Congress. When asked if they have a higher opinion of the legislative body or various unpleasant things, respondents indicated a more positive opinion of root canals, head lice, colonoscopies, and cockroaches (to name a few) than Congress.³⁴ In contrast, the South Korean and Brazilian cases offer inspiration and rich lessons of how to move from anger and disengagement from the political process to nonviolent empowerment and positive change.

Notes

1. “What We Do,” Transparency International website, <http://www.transparency.org> (accessed September 16, 2013).

2. Daniel Kaufmann, “Ten Myths About Governance and Corruption,” *Finance and Development*, September 2005, 41, www.imf.org.

3. For a summary of traditional categories of corruption, see *United Nations Handbook: Practical Anti-Corruption Measures for Prosecutors and Investigators* (Vienna: United Nations Office of Drugs and Crime, 2004), 23–30, www.unodc.org.

4. This systemic definition was developed by the author, who wishes to credit, for inspiration, points made by Maria Gonzalez de Asis, World Bank, in an unpublished working paper.

5. Aruna Roy, “Survival and Right to Information” (Gulam Rasool Third Memorial Lecture, Forum for Freedom of Expression, Hyderabad, India, n.d.), 11, www.unipune.ac.in.

6. *Corruption and Human Rights: Making the Connection* (Geneva: International Council on Human Rights Policy and Transparency International, 2009).

7. Karen Hussmann and Hannes Hechler, “Anti-Corruption Policy Making in Practice: Implications for Implementing UNCAC,” *U4 Brief*, January 2008, 1, www.cmi.no/publications.

8. *Anti-Corruption Approaches: A Literature Review* (Oslo: Norwegian Agency for Development and Cooperation, 2009), www.norad.no/en.

9. *Global Corruption Barometer* (Berlin: Transparency International, 2010), www.transparency.org.
10. Sue Unsworth, *An Upside-Down View of Governance* (Brighton: Institute of Development Studies, University of Sussex, April 2010).
11. Kaufmann, "Ten Myths About Governance and Corruption."
12. Disclosure: I had multiple roles at the Fourteenth and Fifteenth International Anti-Corruption Conferences (IACC).
13. "Changing the Rules of the Game," Fourteenth International Anti-Corruption Conference, <http://14iacc.org>.
14. "The Bangkok Declaration: Restoring Trust," Fourteenth International Anti-Corruption Conference, November 13, 2010, <http://14iacc.org>.
15. "Strategy 2015," Transparency International, 16, www.transparency.org.
16. Robert Zoellick, "The Middle East and North Africa: A New Social Contract for Development" (speech, the Peterson Institute for International Economics, Washington, DC, April 6, 2011), <http://web.worldbank.org>.
17. "Corruption Is 'Public Enemy Number One' in Developing Countries, Says World Bank Group President Kim," World Bank Group press release, December 19, 2013, www.worldbank.org.
18. Darko Brkan, Dosta! cofounder, April 2011, personal communication with author.
19. "Strategy 2015," 18.
20. *Ibid.*, 20.
21. Shaazka Beyerle, "People Count: How Citizen Engagement and Action Challenge Corruption and Abuse" (paper presented at the International Peace Research Association Conference, Sydney, Australia, July 8, 2010).
22. Rita Jalali, "Financing Empowerment? How Foreign Aid to Southern NGOs and Social Movements Undermines Grass-Roots Mobilization," *Sociology Compass* 7, no. 1 (2013): 67.
23. Rosemary McGee and John Gaventa, with Gregg Barrett, Richard Calland, Ruth Carlitz, Anuradha Joshi, and Andres Mejia Acosta, "Review of Impact and Effectiveness of Transparency and Accountability Initiatives: Synthesis Report" (prepared for the Transparency and Accountability Initiative Workshop, Institute of Development Studies, Sussex, October 14–15, 2010), www.ids.ac.uk.
24. This conceptualization is based on the definition of social movements by Kurt Schock, "People Power and Alternative Politics," in *Politics in the Developing World*, 3rd ed., ed. Peter Burnell, Vicky Randall, and Lise Rakner (London: Oxford University Press, 2008), 202–219.
25. Social audits are a form of monitoring, consisting of multiple sequenced steps, such as information gathering, training citizens to interpret documents and budgets, monitoring expenditures and physically inspecting public works, community education and mobilization, public hearings with powerholders, and civic follow-up.
26. Joseline Korugyendo, former NAFODU head of programmes, March–April 2011, personal communication with author.
27. David Pettinicchio, "Institutional Activism: Reconsidering the Insider-Outsider Dichotomy," *Sociology Compass* 6, no. 6 (2012): 499.
28. *Ibid.*

29. This quote, without attribution, is from a video presentation that had been uploaded on the homepage of www.civicus.org in 2006. CIVICUS is an international civil society alliance.

30. Monitoring is a tactic used by civic actors—including regular citizens—in the anticorruption, accountability, human rights, development, governance, and environment realms. It can involve observing, recording, verifying, comparing, overseeing, checking, and inspecting. In the anticorruption context, the targets of such activities are people (for example, election candidates, parliamentarians, government leaders, public officials, civil servants, social service providers, and police); institutions (parliaments, public administrations, government agencies, judiciaries, state security forces, municipalities, corporations, universities, schools, and hospitals); policies (such as poverty reduction, education, and natural resource exploitation); budgets and expenditures, public programs, social services, public works, procurement practices, and procurement outcomes; and social and economic development projects conducted by governments or external actors. Monitoring can either be visible (for example, public audits or site inspections) or anonymous (for instance, mobile phone videos or SMS reports of public officials and police demanding bribes). Effective monitoring creates social pressure and disrupts corrupt practices within systems of graft and abuse.

31. Nonviolent tactics executed digitally—for example, e-petitions, online/SMS monitoring, SMS balloting, and mobile phone ringtones as displays of symbols.

32. Reverse boycotts occur when consumers support or patronize particular businesses or establishments.

33. Suzanne Mulcahy, *Money, Politics, Power: Corruption Risks in Europe* (Berlin: Transparency International, 2012), 9.

34. “Congress Less Popular Than Cockroaches, Traffic Jams,” *Public Policy Polling*, January 8, 2013, www.publicpolicypolling.com.