

# U4 Expert Answer



## Literature review on social norms and corruption

### Query

**What research has been carried out about social norms and corruption? I am interested in research into any norms that may influence people's propensity to engage in or on the contrary resist (and/or to report) corrupt transactions. Research on East Africa would be particularly welcome but please do also flag any relevant research from elsewhere.**

### Purpose

We are considering putting together a comparative research programme on corruption in East Africa, with a view to informing behavioural change campaigns and corruption prevention activities. We would like to understand what research has already been carried out to probe whether this programme is worth pursuing.

### Content

1. Overview
2. What is the impact of social norms on corruption and anti-corruption?
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### Summary

Social norms are normally understood as shared understandings on accepted forms of behaviour. There is a breadth of research on the topic of social norms and corruption, but results are mixed. Some studies emphasise the correlation between norms and the propensity to engage in corrupt behaviour, while others argue that the evidence is inconclusive and that other factors are equally, if not more, important in determining levels of and propensity to corruption.

As social norms can have an impact on people's attitudes and actions, some anti-corruption initiatives have taken on the challenge of leveraging them – either by appealing to existing social norms or attempting to create new ones – in order to change corrupt behaviour. An illustrative selection of documented examples from the East Africa region as well as other countries in Sub-Saharan Africa helps elucidate how this can be done.

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*U4 is a web-based resource centre for development practitioners who wish to effectively address corruption challenges in their work. Expert Answers are produced by the U4 Helpdesk – operated by Transparency International – as quick responses to operational and policy questions from U4 Partner Agency staff.*

## 1 Overview

“Social norms” are typically understood as shared understandings about actions that are obligatory, permitted, or forbidden within a society (Ostrom 2000). Social norms are shared by other people and sustained by their approval and disapproval (Budge et al. 2009). The guilt caused by failing to adhere to a social norm can be a powerful determinant of behaviour.

In the anti-corruption context, many studies have been carried out to explore the extent to which social norms have an impact on shaping behaviours and attitudes around corruption. Some even attempt to extrapolate specific societal characteristics that can influence individual behaviour on corruption, such as the degree to which interpersonal trust and informality are common in a society (Rose-Ackermann 1999). However, most studies focus on attempting to prove whether there is in fact any verifiable link between norms and corruption. The literature remains somewhat inconclusive on the correlation between social norms and corruption.

Some studies do provide evidence of a link between social norms that tolerate corruption (“corruption norms”) and the prevalence of corruption. One of the most well-known studies is the one by Fisman and Miguel (2006) who evaluate the parking tickets given to diplomats stationed in New York City, and find that diplomats from high-corruption countries tend to commit parking violations more often. However, other studies demonstrate that the correlation is not clear, or that other factors, such as weak governance, may be stronger determinants of corrupt behaviour.

As social norms can play an important role in influencing behaviour, they can also potentially play an important role in shaping anti-corruption campaigns. Many studies note the importance of adopting a holistic approach to anti-corruption – one that goes beyond the legalistic and takes into account the strong role played by society and normalised behaviour. This is especially true in situations in which social norms do not necessarily align with the legal and institutional framework. Social marketing strategies can be useful in prompting people to act in accordance with existing norms that denounce corruption or, in turn, help establish new norms of behaviour that are more averse to corruption.

Therefore, campaigns that focus on raising awareness, changing attitudes and promoting anti-corruption education can be more effective in reducing corruption.

However, it must be noted that changing social norms takes time and is long-term endeavour.

## 2 What is the impact of social norms on corruption and anti-corruption?

Among studies exploring the causes of corruption, several attempt – through laboratory experiments, cross-national analysis or a combination of both – to prove the positive correlation between social norms and corruption. Some studies also go further in identifying not only the positive correlation between social norms and corruption, but also those norms and cultural structures that are conducive – or not – to corruption.

However, there are also studies that directly question the positive correlation between social norms and corruption or provide mixed evidence. Some also argue that government effectiveness and the quality of institutions are better predictors of corruption than specific cultural norms.

### Evidence of correlation between social norms and corruption

#### Cultures of Corruption: Evidence from Diplomatic Parking Tickets

Fisman, R., and Miguel, E., 2006, National Bureau of Economic Research Working Paper 12312  
<http://www.nber.org/papers/w12312>

By studying the parking violations of diplomats stationed in New York City, the authors attempt to determine the relationship between social norms and corruption. The authors examine the differences in the behaviour of diplomats from different countries, all of whom can park illegally with impunity, in order to determine the existence of a “corruption culture”. The study finds that diplomats from corrupt countries have significantly more parking violations, even when other factors (such as country income and diplomat salary) are controlled.

While diplomats from low-corruption countries (such as Norway) “behave remarkably well” (p.1), diplomats from high-corruption countries (such as Nigeria) commit many violations. This suggests that they bring the social norms of their home country with them to New York City. The authors note that the alternative explanation could be the presence of stronger social sanctions in low-corruption countries against diplomats acting with

impunity than in high-corruption countries. In this case, the authors argue that the behaviour of diplomats is in fact an indication of their home country's cultural tolerance of corruption rather than their own personal attitudes.

### Culture and Corruption

Barr, A., and Serra, D., 2006, Global Poverty Research Group

<http://www.gprg.org/pubs/workingpapers/pdfs/gprg-wps-040.pdf>

This combined experimental and cross-country study attempts to prove that the different levels of corruption across countries are, at least to some extent, cultural in that the propensity to engage in or resist corruption is embedded in their respective social norms. In the experimental bribery game, 195 participants from 43 countries were grouped into "private citizens", "public servants" and "other members of society". Knowing that offering and accepting bribes harms other members of society, private citizens have to decide whether and how much to offer public servants in exchange for corrupt services, and public servants have to decide whether and how much to accept.

For younger participants assuming the role of private citizens, the study finds a positive relationship between the level of corruption prevailing in their home country – as determined by Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index – and the likelihood of engaging in bribery in the experiment. The study suggests that while country of origin is still a strong predictor, time spent in the host country (UK) is also important, suggesting that some socialisation is taking place. In other words, while individuals carry norms from their home country to other countries, the tendency to conform to those norms declines over time. In addition, the study finds that the proportion of students refusing to engage in corruption increased as the amount of harm bribery did to others increased, indicating the presence of a norm of not engaging in bribery because it is harmful to society.

### Social Norms and Corruption

Dong, B., Dulleck, U., and Torgler, B., 2009, In Ciccone, A. (ed.), *Proceedings of the European Economic Association and the Econometric Society Europe Meeting*, Barcelona Graduate School of Economics, Catalonia, Spain, pp.1-48

<http://eprints.qut.edu.au/48490/>

This paper emphasises the importance of the social context in understanding corruption. By regarding non-corruption as the prevailing norm in societies, the authors argue that corruption violates this social norm, which generates feelings of guilt. In turn, guilt deters corrupt behaviour and may encourage compliance. Furthermore, the more individuals adhere to the norm, the more powerful the "guilt disutility" becomes. This means that when corruption is rare in a society, individuals tend to be less corrupt since the cost of violating social norms is very high. Vice versa, when corruption is more widespread, more individuals become corrupt as the cost of violating the norm declines.

The results of the empirical study, using both micro- and macro-level data sets, indicate that corruption is influenced by the perceived activities of others. The authors also suggest that a society with many corruption norm-violating individuals will also inherit a weak guilt disutility, which may lead to a "corruption trap". The authors make the recommendation that policymakers take into account the decisive factor of social interactions and group dynamics required in anti-corruption efforts.

## Which social norms are likely to influence corrupt behaviour?

### Individual Attitudes Toward Corruption: Do Social Effects Matter?

Gatti, R., Paternostro, S., and Rigolini, J., 2003, World Bank Policy Research Working Paper 3122

<http://elibrary.worldbank.org/doi/pdf/10.1596/1813-9450-3122>

Using individual-level data for 35 countries from the World Values Survey (a questionnaire on individual values and personal characteristics, including information on individuals' attitudes towards corruption), this study investigates the microeconomic determinants of attitudes to corruption. It provides evidence that social effects – that is, the influence of other people's behaviour on one's own behaviour – play an important role in determining individual attitudes towards corruption, both in low- and high-income countries. The study also finds certain groups – women, the employed, low-middle income people and older people – to be more averse to corruption than others.

It also shows that individuals living in regions where people are on average less averse to corruption tend to be more tolerant of corruption. This can mean that

individual incentives to oppose corruption are low. Therefore the authors recommend that policymakers focus on an anti-corruption approach that operates on several fronts at once.

### Wealth, Culture and Corruption

Husted, B.W., 1999, *Journal of International Business Studies*, 30(2): 339-360

In addition to examining the impact of national wealth, income distribution, and government size on the perceived level of corruption in a country, Husted measures the correlation of four cultural factors and conducts empirical tests of each on Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index. The four cultural values include: "power distance", that is, the level of paternalism in a society; "collectivism", the extent to which individuals are more likely to violate laws if those run counter to moral codes; "masculinity", the extent to which competitiveness and material successes are valued over quality of life; and "uncertainty avoidance", the extent to which a society feels threatened by uncertainty. The results of his tests are that cultures that are highly masculine, have a high power-distance and a high uncertainty avoidance are more likely to be corrupt. The author also concludes that cultural features should also be considered when designing anti-corruption policy, as the same strategy may not work in all cultural contexts.

### On the Cultural Transmission of Corruption

Hauk, E., and Saez-Marti, M., 2001, *Journal of Economic Theory*, 107: 311-335

<http://www.iae.csic.es/investigadoresMaterial/a9217095045archivoPdf88100.pdf>

By combining two types of economic models, the authors argue that the distribution of ethics in a population and expectations about future policies are essential to explaining corruption. For example, individuals from societies where reliance on informal contracts is common are unlikely to be deterred from that practice. The authors argue that public opinion does not necessarily and universally consider corruption – in particular, small-scale corruption – to be negative. Therefore the article makes the case that educating the young, and thus changing social norms, is a vital element in reducing corruption. In fact, it argues that educating young generations to adopt an attitude against corruption is a more cost-efficient approach to anti-corruption than sanctions and monitoring.

## Studies with mixed results

### Determinants of Corruption: Government Effectiveness vs. Cultural Norms

Kapoor, M., and Shamika, R., 2009, *B.E. Journal of Economic Analysis & Policy*, 12(1)

[http://www.isid.ac.in/~pu/conference/dec\\_10\\_conf/Papers/ShamikaRavi.pdf](http://www.isid.ac.in/~pu/conference/dec_10_conf/Papers/ShamikaRavi.pdf).

Using the same methodology and data, this study challenges the abovementioned findings of Fisman and Miguel (2006) by comparing the parking behaviour of diplomats to the government effectiveness index of their respective countries. The government effectiveness index measures the "quality of civil services, quality and quantity of public infrastructure as well as organisational structure of public offices" (p.1). Their results show that controlling for the quality of government reverses the corruption index coefficient and makes it statistically insignificant. Diplomats from countries with weak government institutions have more unpaid parking violations. The authors argue, therefore, that social norms related to corruption are not significant in explaining the violations of diplomats.

The authors also make note of implications for policymakers. They argue that interventions that solely focus on social norms will be unlikely to succeed. Instead, policymakers should focus on strengthening government institutions, which could have a direct impact on corruption by "improving the quality of education, pursuing reformist policies which encourage foreign investment and introduce measures which lead to better management of public offices" (p.11).

### Experiments in Culture and Corruption

Banuri, S., and Eckel, C., 2012, World Bank Policy Research Working Paper 6064

<http://elibrary.worldbank.org/doi/book/10.1596/1813-9450-6064>

This study explores the relationship between culture and corruption through a review of past laboratory experiments and theoretical studies. The authors posit that culture interacts with corruption through formal institutions and social norms, both of which differ across countries. The study argues that corruption norms are a specific form of social norms and dictate the extent to which individuals engage in and expect others to engage in corruption, regardless of institutions. Their review of past experiments concludes that the results have been mixed due to differences in design or in the response to punishment across societies. Therefore the

authors caution that remedies against corruption must be prescribed appropriately and according to the micro-level context.

### Do Attitudes Towards Corruption Differ Across Cultures? Experimental Evidence from Australia, India, Indonesia and Singapore

Cameron, L., Chaudhuri, A., Erkal, N., and Gangadharan, L., 2005

<http://ideas.repec.org/p/mlb/wpaper/943.html>

This study analyses cultural differences in attitudes towards corruption by looking at micro-level behaviour in an experimental environment. The study involves a total of nearly 2,000 students from two low-corruption countries (Australia, Singapore) and two high-corruption countries (India, Indonesia). The experiments generally found that there was no clear and robust relationship between the level of corruption in the four countries and the participants' behaviour in the experiment. For example, some of the main cross-country findings include: participants in India exhibited a higher tolerance of corruption than the subjects in Australia, while the participants in Indonesia behaved similarly to those in Australia. The participants in Singapore were more likely to engage in corruption than the participants in Australia.

Nevertheless, the authors found that attitudes towards corruption can play a critical role in the persistence of corruption. Higher levels of exposure to corruption in daily life may promote a tolerance of corruption that is reflected in norms of behaviour. The study shows, for example, that Indian participants may be more tolerant of corruption due to the greater prevalence of corruption in India. As corrupt behaviour becomes the norm and is tolerated by the population, corruption flourishes.

## 3 Changing corrupt behaviour through influencing social norms

The literature on social norms and corruption argues that social norms can guide action directly. Academics and practitioners agree that instilling anti-corruption in a society that has been permeated with corruption to such an extent that it becomes embedded in daily life and social norms requires a multi-pronged approach that not only pushes for institutional and legal reform but also focuses on changing behaviours and attitudes.

The studies presented in the following sections are divided between analytical pieces that provide general guidance in the topic, and country case studies and initiatives which attempt to elucidate the theory on anti-corruption campaigns with real-life examples to illustrate how anti-corruption campaigns can attempt to change social norms. It must also be noted that the number of case studies found on East Africa was relatively limited, and therefore relevant cases from other countries in Sub-Saharan Africa have also been included.

For more on behavioural campaigns in general, please consult the U4 brief from 2011, *Behaviour changing campaigns: success and failure factors*.

### Analysis

#### Contextualizing Conceptions of Corruption: Challenges for the International Anti-corruption Campaign

Gephart, M., 2009, German Institute of Global and Area Studies Working Paper No.115

[http://repec.giga-hamburg.de/pdf/giga\\_09\\_wp115\\_gephart.pdf](http://repec.giga-hamburg.de/pdf/giga_09_wp115_gephart.pdf)

This working paper analyses the challenges faced by the global anti-corruption movement in terms of the difficulties between the universality of the anti-corruption norm and its contextualisation for local application. The author argues that in order for the global anti-corruption campaign to be successful, the term corruption has to be more tangibly defined without condemning values, norms and social practices of the "Global South". Accordingly, the anti-corruption norm in the global anti-corruption campaign has to be contextualised in the following way: with respect to the culturally-shaped conception of the division of private and public; with respect to local understandings of corruption; explaining what is meant when talking about corruption; and understanding that a zero-tolerance rhetoric may not be appropriate.

#### Social Marketing Strategies to Fight Corruption

Kindra, G.S., and Stapenhurst, R., 1998, The Economic Development Institute of the World Bank

<http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTWBIGOVANTCO/R/Resources/socialmktg.pdf>

The paper focuses on the role social marketing can play in creating an environment that discourages corruption. Drawing on lessons from the use of social marketing in other campaigns – such as those on public



health, the environment, education etc. – the authors argue that social marketing can have an important impact on the anti-corruption movement.

Social marketing aims to influence the acceptability of social ideas and generate internal pressure for change by creating new norms of acceptable behaviour. The authors argue that social marketing can play an important role in the anti-corruption context by: raising awareness about the costs of corruption in a country; mainstreaming the concern about corruption within national institutions; increasing the understanding of causal factors of corruption amongst the public; and influencing behaviour.

#### **Building Public Support for Anti-Corruption Efforts: Why Anti-Corruption Agencies Need to Communicate and How**

Byrne, E., Arnold, A., and Nagano, F., 2010, CommGAP

<http://siteresources.worldbank.org/EXTGOVACC/Resources/CorruptionWhitePaperpub31110screen.pdf>

This paper provides an overview of how anti-corruption agencies can work with the media to win the support of the public in the fight against corruption. The paper argues that the media can shape public opinion and change norms about corruption, and are therefore a vital player in a government's anti-corruption campaign. For example, the media can show the real human and moral costs to society of corruption, as well as the illegality of it.

The paper also presents the scenario that if people assume that everyone pays bribes and that most people will put up with the abuse, then everyday corruption will become normalised. If citizens rally together and speak up against corruption, they create a climate of opposition to it. And if they speak up loud enough, an increasing number of people will join them because they will not want to be isolated as supporters of bribery. Eventually opposition to corruption will become the dominant stance. The tools section of the paper includes a list of activities that can be undertaken by anti-corruption agencies to change norms about everyday corruption, which include establishing partnerships with civil society, and launching educational campaigns on corruption and citizen engagement.

## Country case studies

### **Changing Norms is Key to Fighting Everyday Corruption**

Panth, S., 2011, CommGAP

<http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTGOVACC/Resources/ChangingNormsAnnexFinal.pdf>

This research paper presents 18 country case studies of citizen campaigns against corruption and social norms regarding corruption. It focuses on what it argues is one of the biggest impediments to anti-corruption efforts: the institutionalisation and normalisation of corrupt practices which citizens have come to regard as fixed and incontestable. The paper argues that in order for anti-corruption efforts to be successful, the public's unawareness of its rights, fear of retaliation, cynicism, and the mentality of reluctance to challenge the status quo must be countered.

The featured case studies indicate the presence of normalised corrupt behaviour, both in everyday life as well as institutionally and politically. This, in turn, seems to have created apathetic and cynical public opinions, the paper argues. Some of the case studies indicate that civic responses to corruption can erupt spontaneously in reaction to political scandals that expose norms of political immunity or misuse of authority.

Two of the case studies are from countries in East Africa: Uganda and Kenya (note that the latter was only available on a separate website):

#### **Uganda – Case Study 5**

Panth, S., 2011, In *Changing Norms is Key to Fighting Everyday Corruption*, CommGAP

<http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTGOVACC/Resources/ChangingNormsAnnexFinal.pdf>

One of the case studies found in Panth (2011) is on Uganda and focuses on the police. It claims that the public was so accustomed to police bribes and abuse that the police force was ranked as the most corrupt institution in South-Western Uganda. The campaign focused on raising awareness about the laws governing the police and their obligations towards citizens, highlighting the damage corruption inflicted on the country, something that many people ignored. In order to change public perception, radio programmes were used to promote public vigilance and awareness against corrupt acts. Among other things, the campaign

was able to increase awareness of channels for public complaints and increase reporting of corruption cases.

### Coming of Age: Social Audit Comes of Age in Kenya

The Institute for Social Accountability (TISA), 2011  
<http://www.tisa.or.ke/coming-of-age/>

This case study focuses on social audits carried out in Kenya since 2007. While social audits are not campaigns per se, they can be used as a mobilisation and public awareness-raising tool. A social audit evaluates how well public resources are being used to meet needs of beneficiaries, and seeks to engage a wide cross-section of stakeholders through public meetings and accountability fora. A social audit is arguably very powerful because it not only raises awareness of public schemes that may or may not be working; it also enables citizens to begin questioning their leaders in dialogue. Many organisations have thus taken on social audit projects. The organisation Trocaire, for example, is funding social audits in over 30 constituencies and ten local authorities under a three-year programme. The article also acknowledges challenges in the social audit process, including difficulty in accessing records, the lack of resources for groups to publish their social audit reports, and the lack of post-audit follow-up.

### Corruption, Politics and Societal Values in Tanzania: An Evaluation of the Mkapa Administration's Anti-Corruption Efforts

Heilman, B., and Ndumbaro, L., 2002, *African Journal of Political Science*, 7(1)  
<http://embamex.sre.gob.mx/kenia/images/stories/pdf/ajps007001002.pdf>

This article assesses corruption and anti-corruption efforts in the framework of societal corruption dynamics, which, it argues, the government fails to take into account. The authors posit that in Tanzania, corruption has become an everyday norm, with the practice of bribery having become internalised. Therefore, anti-corruption efforts that assume that corruption is an "individual" problem are unlikely to have much success, since the norms that uphold the patronage system will actively undermine reform. This, they argue, is the problem with the anti-corruption efforts of the current government. In order to address corrupt behaviour in situations of embedded corruption, fundamental societal change, including the development of new social norms, will be required.

The authors recommend policymakers adopt a holistic approach rather than a legalistic solution that targets individual wrongdoers. This, they argue, has a better chance of success. This means the public must be sensitised to the harmful effects of corruption, as well as empowered with the means to take action against corrupt officials.

### Initiatives

#### SERAP launches Citizens' Guide to ICPC to encourage whistleblowers

Socio-Economic Rights and Accountability Project (SERAP), 2013

<http://serap-nigeria.org/serap-launches-citizens-guide-to-icpc-to-encourage-whistleblowers/>

SERAP is a Nigerian NGO established in 2004 to promote transparency and accountability through human rights. In 2013, the organisation launched a simplified guide to the Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Commission (ICPC) that helps increase citizen awareness about the ICPC. More specifically, it provides examples of the types of corruption by local government officials as well as information on how citizens can lodge complaints before the ICPC. It also encourages citizens to be proactive and take on the role of whistleblowers to expose corruption. Through this guide – which is widely distributed and available free of charge – the organisation aims to combat the problem of impunity in local government.

#### TELL-it-True project in Liberia

Accountability Lab, Annual Report, 2012

<http://www.accountabilitylab.org/pdfs/2012-accountabilityLab-annualReport.pdf>

The TELL-it-True project is one of the "@accountability Initiatives" supported by the Accountability Lab, a non-profit organisation. The project seeks to "overcome the culture of silence" regarding the corruption that occurs on university campuses, which can range from bribery and teacher absenteeism to sexual extortion. By setting up an anonymous text-message hotline with a call-back system, it allows students to report their experiences and get confidential advice on possible solutions. This helps victims of corruption to overcome their fear of reprisal, and enables students to speak up against corruption. The collected information is shared and discussed periodically with the university administration and student union in order to find solutions. Findings

and action points are then shared with the wider student body.

#### E.TV Launches Anti-Corruption Campaign

AllAfrica.com, 19 November 2013

<http://gaccgh.org/news/gacc-news/e-tv-launches-anti-corruption-campaign#.UtaUjj-A5nU>

At the time of writing, the Global Media Alliance in Ghana and the Ghana Anti-Corruption Coalition are launching "Speak Up", an anti-corruption campaign aimed at educating Ghanaians on the national anti-corruption laws, in particular on whistleblowing. Through the use of live radio and television discussions on corruption, viewers can call into the show, send text messages or use the official Facebook page to submit comments and questions. The purpose of this campaign is to combat the culture of corruption that has become endemic in Ghana by informing and empowering citizens.

## 4 Further reading

The sources below provide additional background readings on, respectively: social norms and behavioural change; the evolution of social norms; and the causes of corruption.

Budge, M., Deahl, C., Dewhurst, M., Donajrodki, S. and Wood, F. 2009. *Communications and behaviour change*. Central Office of Information  
<http://www.cnsc.org.mz/index.php/por/content/download/1636/14742/file/commongood-behaviourchange.pdf>

Ostrom, E. 2000. "Collective Action and the Evolution of Social Norms." *Journal of Economic Perspectives*. Vol. 14, No.3, 137-158  
<http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0895-3309%28200022%2914%3A3%3C137%3ACAATE0%3E2.0.C0%3B2-V>

Rose-Ackermann, S. 1999. *Corruption and Government: Causes, Consequences and Reforms*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press