



Theories of change in anti-corruption work A tool for programme design and evaluation

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Abstract

Governments and donor agencies are under increasing pressure to show hard evidence that their interventions are effective and good value for money. Anti-corruption is a challenging field in this regard, with few evidence-based models to draw upon, so both the design and the evaluation of programmes need to be supported by good analytical frameworks. The theory of change (ToC) approach focuses on how and why an initiative works. Constructing a ToC enables government and donor staff to identify the logic underpinning their programmes and clarify how interventions are expected to lead to the intended results. The paper presents a user-friendly five-step methodology for building a theory of change for a programme or project. It highlights the importance of preconditions, factors that must be in place for the intervention to work as intended, distinguishing between those preconditions that can be addressed by the programme design and those that cannot. Finally, the paper provides general and sector-specific guidance based on case studies of programmes in three areas: anti-corruption authorities, civil society work, and public sector reforms. Adding complexity as well as realism, the theory of change methodology is a valuable tool for designing, implementing, and evaluating anti-corruption reforms.

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1. Introduction

Theory of change (ToC) is a method for improving the processes of project design, implementation, and evaluation. It can be used in designing overarching policies or specific programmes or projects, as well as in setting priorities within or between projects. The ToC methodology was developed to explore behaviours and outcomes that are not easily measurable, so it is well suited to the governance and anti-corruption sectors (White 2010).

Carol Weiss defines a ToC concisely as a theory of how and why an initiative works (Connell et al. 1995).¹ ToC analysis seeks to identify underlying assumptions about how change comes about, make these assumptions more explicit, and test them. It can help policy makers and evaluators in the governance and anti-corruption fields answer the question: “What makes complex change possible in a frequently changing and highly political environment?” The method has been used increasingly by governments, donors, and nongovernmental organisations (NGOs) in recent decades. Today organisations such as the UK Department for International Development (DFID) and the European Commission regard the use of ToC as mandatory (Funnell and Rogers 2011, xix–xx, 22).

A ToC is a way of teasing out the underlying logic(s) and assumptions of a policy or programme. Unlike the logical framework (logframe) approach, a ToC is a conceptual map that focuses not only on the linkages between programme components but also on the preconditions and assumptions that enable the intervention to work. ToCs are therefore useful in analysing the complex and power-dependent social transactions that anti-corruption interventions often seek to influence. Mapping the anatomy and internal logic of an intervention is necessary at the strategy, programme, and project levels. It is also a useful tool for integrating or mainstreaming anti-corruption components into larger programmes.

The ToC method can be used for both designing and evaluating policies and programmes. As explained by Ray Pawson (2003, 488), ToCs are useful for programme design because they “produce a sort of ‘highway code’ to programme building, alerting policy makers to the problems that they might expect to confront and some of the safest measures to deal with them. What the theory-driven approach initiates is a process of thinking through the tortuous pathways along which a successful programme has to travel.” With respect to evaluation, the ToC method is a way to respond to the increasing public pressure for evidence of impact and for attribution of outcomes to a specific intervention. This is difficult in anti-corruption work because of the nonattributable nature of the intervention (outcomes are a result of the work of multiple projects by multiple donors, in cooperation with government and civil society) and the complex character of the end goal (corruption is multifaceted and often hidden, so it is difficult to know how much it has been reduced). Building a good ToC is a useful first step in accounting for impact.

No guidance currently exists on how ToCs can be constructed in the anti-corruption sector, and general guidance in the governance field is also scarce. This report attempts to fill the gap by presenting a field-tested methodology and sector-specific guidance, informed by case studies of real-life programmes.

The study follows the recent publication of two large-scale reviews of donor-funded anti-corruption efforts: the multidonor Joint Evaluation of Support to Anti-Corruption Efforts (ITAD 2011) and the

¹ “Theory of change” is also called “program theory,” “logic modelling,” and “intervention logic.” Funnell and Rogers (2011, xix) define program theory as “an explicit theory or model of how an intervention, such as a project, a program, a strategy, an initiative, or a policy, contributes to a chain of intermediate results and finally to the intended or observed outcomes.” This is also widely accepted as a definition of ToC.

World Bank's Country-Level Engagement on Governance and Anticorruption (IEG 2011b). These evaluations revealed that few governance programmes in the countries covered were designed in such a way as to allow measurement of their impact on reducing corruption. Even explicit anti-corruption interventions lacked a coherent ToC and usable indicators. Where data were available at the local or sector level, the information was not used to inform programming. This shows that the anti-corruption sector has a range of issues that need to be addressed. Strategies and programmes are not being developed on the basis of empirical evidence, clear theories, or even explicit assumptions about how to create change. Given the low evidence base for most anti-corruption reforms, addressing these issues is of paramount importance (Johnsøn, Taxell, and Zaum 2012). An important first step is to make explicit the underlying assumptions about how strategies and programmes can lead to the desired results, then test these assumptions using ToC analysis.

This report explores the principles behind good ToCs, the pitfalls and weaknesses of current ToCs in the anti-corruption sector, and the diversity of ToCs within this sector. It is intended for policy makers and practitioners involved in anti-corruption work. Policy makers can get inspiration from existing ToCs and identify preconditions for policy success. Programme managers will benefit from being able to explain the intervention logic behind their work to colleagues, stakeholders, and funders. Donor representatives and other funders can use ToCs to guide their spending decisions and to select partners who are operating with the desired intervention logic. Evaluators benefit from having relevant ToCs that reveal the assumptions that underpin anti-corruption efforts, and ToCs can also guide development of monitoring and evaluation (M&E) plans.

Section 2 of the report explores the overall theories, models, and assumptions underlying the fight against corruption. These are called "grand theories" because they provide us with our overall reference framework. In section 3, a methodology for how to build a ToC is presented. Section 4 presents examples of how ToC analysis has been applied in anti-corruption work carried out by anti-corruption authorities, civil society organisations, and public sector reform initiatives, with case studies from two African countries. The discussion focuses on both implementation theory (the links between a programme's activities and attainment of its stated outcomes) and programme theory (the links between a programme's work and changes in policies, institutions, and people's lives).²

² A range of alternative definitions exists to describe the difference between levels of theories. Carol Weiss's classic distinction between implementation theory and programme theory is used (Connell et al. 1995). See also Blamey and Mackenzie (2007).

2. Grand theories of change for fighting corruption

There is a theory behind every action, but it might not be articulated, questioned, or tested. If one accepts the premise of theory-based evaluation that “interventions are theories incarnate,” then there is a theory underlying every project, programme, and policy—and potentially a black box to explore (Leeuw and Vaessen 2009, 20).

In seeking to understand “what works and why,” particularly for complex governance and anti-corruption interventions, one needs to disentangle distinct elements such as implementation failure, flawed design, and external constraints. In particular, it is helpful to distinguish theories at three levels: grand theories, programme theories, and implementation theories.

- *Grand theories* are commonly accepted explanations of change consisting of causal chains that are seen as universally true and are assumed for the purpose of analysis without testing. One prominent example is the principal-agent model, which stresses provision of incentives for agents to act in a way that otherwise might not be in their personal interest.
- *Programme theories* refer to the links between the work of a specific programme and the resulting changes in people’s lives or in policies or institutions.
- *Implementation theories* refer to the links between a programme’s activities and attainment of its stated outcomes.

Preconditions for change, that is, factors that must be present for the desired change to result, are central to the ToC method. Preconditions relating to implementation theory can often be addressed by improving the programme design; these are called *programmatically preconditions*. Preconditions derived from programme theory are not always within the sphere of influence of the programme. When these preconditions cannot be addressed by the programme they are called *non-programmatic preconditions*.

Grand ToCs are relevant because they structure programme options and influence program design. For example, principal-agent thinkers tend to stress the importance of changing incentives for government officials assumed to be vulnerable to corruption. Those who see civil society as a determinative influence, on the other hand, are less likely to stress such a focus on officials. But while implementation and programme ToCs flow from grand ToCs, practitioners are generally more comfortable focusing on the most specific level, that of implementation theories, by examining specific results chains. Medium-level programme theories, which address the causal pathways between the programme’s work and the intended socio-political change, are rarely made explicit. The applicability of grand theories to anti-corruption is also rarely considered, even though grand theories profoundly affect choices about which reforms to undertake and how.

This section analyses some of the grand theories behind our overall thinking on anti-corruption that can inform implementation and programme ToCs. Subsections 2.1 and 2.2 focus on two overarching concerns for which grand theories are relevant: how to bring about behavioural change, and how to tailor activities to the specific context.

2.1 How to bring about behavioural changes

There is little solid research and evidence on how anti-corruption interventions create change. Most experts seem to agree that “firmly grounded theories of corruption” are lacking and that the “shortage of analytically informed empirical inquiries continues” (Williams 2000, xiii).

The principal-agent model, focused on incentives to modify individual behaviour, underpins many anti-corruption interventions (Rose-Ackerman 1978; Klitgaard 1988). Often used by economists, the principal-agent model views change from an individual, micro perspective. In the anti-corruption field, the guidance that the principal-agent literature gives to implementation and programme ToCs is that the individual bureaucrat can be prevented from engaging in corrupt behaviour through sanctions, incentives, and controls. However, not all anti-corruption programmes focus on changing the behaviour of individual bureaucrats. It is not clear how principal-agent theory applies to macro-level phenomena such as institutional structure, historical trajectory, or power. Therefore, principal-agent as a grand theory has been difficult to operationalise at the programme and project level beyond frontline service delivery operations, as discussed below. To address issues such as policy change, regime change, and institutional change, political scientists and political economists incorporate power relations, civil society, and the behaviour of institutions into the analysis (Johnston 2005; Khan 1998).

The Joint Evaluation of Support to Anti-Corruption Efforts 2002–2009, or JEACE, asserts, “In the absence of a strong evidence base on the forms and drivers of corruption, donors at large have continued to follow a ‘one-size-fits-for-all’ approach to fighting systemic and endemic corruption [. . .] Institution building and governance reforms remain [. . .] the two main entry points by which they expect their interventions, individually or collectively, to lead to behavioural change” (ITAD 2011, 32). JEACE summarises the theory of change assumptions behind current donor interventions as follows:

- The main entry point in reducing corruption is to enhance the capacity of the country’s institutions to implement and monitor anti-corruption initiatives.
- Support is needed on the demand side of governance reforms, the “agents of change” being identified as civil society but also increasingly parliament and other state institutions providing checks and balances.
- There is no quick fix in fighting corruption, as institutional strengthening and governance reforms are a long-term undertaking (ITAD 2011, 33).

Thus, “institution building” and “governance reforms” are seen as the broad avenues for change. However, the literature identifies a number of problems in using these concepts for a grand theory of change in the anti-corruption field. Most criticism centres on the dependence of both avenues on the principal-agent model, and on the failure to operationalise alternative political science concepts that might be more appropriate.

Holland et al., in a review of DFID’s voice and accountability work with civil society, argue that many projects “involve a leap of faith that assumes that by building awareness of rights among right holders, or by strengthening the capacity for responsiveness amongst duty-bearers, there will be an automatic change of behavior and power relations that will lead the project seamlessly into an improved set of outcomes” (2009, 9). In short, the casual chain linking the macro-level phenomena to individual behaviour is not well defined.

Given that there is no generally accepted application of principal-agent theory to the complex factors assumed to be involved in anti-corruption efforts, anti-corruption practitioners might need to draw on a wider literature when developing implementation and programme ToCs. In particular, there is need to pay attention to theories focusing on change at the organisational and community levels as well as

change in individual behaviour. For example, general theories on policy change are likely to be relevant to some anti-corruption interventions.³

In many cases it may be possible and desirable to make use of several grand theories in constructing the theory of change for a specific reform. An eclectic and pragmatic approach that uses theories where they are strongest is entirely permissible. For example, the understanding of micro-level bribery in the economics literature can be applied to the part of the ToC dealing with service delivery or frontline service, while the ToC for dealing with patronage systems can draw on relevant political science theory. In other cases it may be necessary to choose between competing grand ToCs—for example, when scarce resources require a choice between formal audits and community monitoring as measures for reducing corruption in service delivery. One can then acknowledge that rival grand ToCs exist, assess the available evidence for when the ToCs have worked, and make an informed decision based on knowledge of the local context. Programme implementers and task managers should not be expected to develop or test grand theories. But they should be able to make informed choices between alternative approaches based on different grand theories, based on context analysis and problem identification. They should be able to make a logical case for which grand theory is most appropriate to use in the design of a particular programme.

2.1.1 How political economy analysis can help build theories of change

As shown below in section 3, a good ToC analysis often depends on in-depth knowledge of the context, especially the political-economic context, of the policy, strategy, or programme being analysed. The anti-corruption literature typically refers to “drivers of corruption” when addressing the external causal factors that could influence a ToC. Examples of such analysis, which is rooted in political economy analysis, are DFID’s Drivers of Change studies and the Swedish International Development Agency’s Power Analysis tool. Identifying drivers of corruption, or doing a political economy analysis of the environment in which the programme will operate, is a worthwhile exercise. Nevertheless, such political economy studies have seldom had a significant influence on donor policies and programmes. JEACE concludes that donors have realised the importance of context and political economy, yet the ToCs of their programmes remain largely technocratic and apolitical (ITAD 2011, 31–32). The World Bank’s recent evaluation of political-economic analysis in support of the Bank’s governance and anticorruption strategy found that political analysis is “thinly and inconsistently applied” in the Bank’s programmes. The evaluation also reported that specialized or stand-alone political economy analysis (PEA) was the analytical product least likely to inform governance and anti-corruption issues, with only about 1 per cent of projects utilizing PEAs (IEG 2011a, 49). In other words, the linkages between grand, programme, and implementation theories are not made.

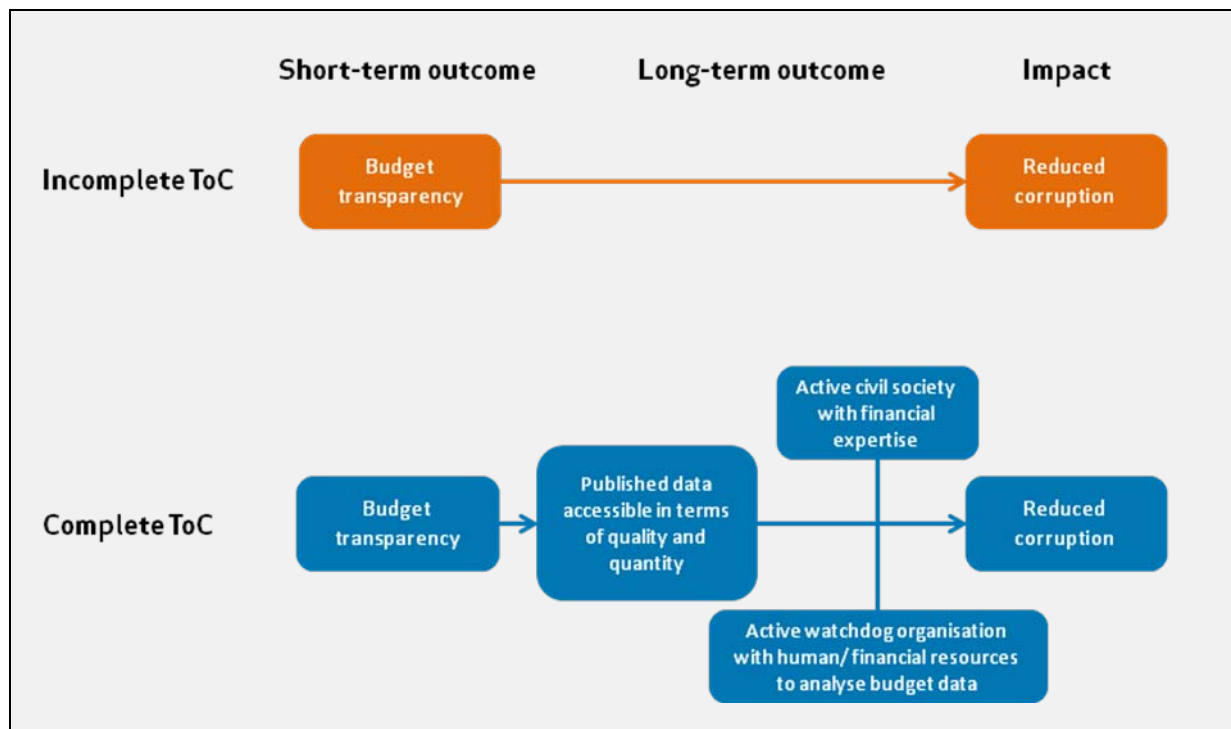
Numerous factors could help explain the dearth of political economy analysis in anti-corruption work, such as low capacity and time constraints. However, it may also be that practitioners do not consider PEA useful because it only reveals one part of the overall picture, namely the external factors of importance for a project. Even if we understand the political economy problem, we also need an understanding of how this matters for the inner anatomy and logic of programmes. The ToC method provides a framework that makes PEA operationally relevant by bridging the analysis of both internal and external factors that make change happen.

³ Examples of theories that could be used for ToC development are the garbage can theory (Cohen, March, and Olsen 1972), the incrementalism model (Lindblom 1959), and institutional rational choice (Ostrom 2007).

2.1.2 Why concepts are not theories—and why it matters

Perhaps due to the lack of a coherent grand theory explaining how anti-corruption interventions can lead to behavioural change, practitioners have had to fall back on using concepts as proxies. The example of the role of transparency in fighting corruption illustrates the value of thinking through the theory of change. The transparency movement was based on the important assumption that an increase in transparency would create fewer incentives for corrupt behaviour. A decade later, scholars now realise that this assumption needs to be modified (Lindstedt and Naurin 2005; Kolstad and Wiig 2009). A number of complementary preconditions, such as information accessibility and the existence of watchdogs, are often necessary to achieve the intended impact. As a result, “the relationship of transparency to accountability is as a necessary but insufficient condition” (McGee and Gaventa 2010, 4). If transparency programmes had articulated a ToC and tested the programmes’ assumptions, this realisation might have come earlier. Figure 1 illustrates what an incomplete (or non-articulated) ToC and a complete ToC would look like for a hypothetical budget transparency programme.

Figure 1. Complete and incomplete theories of change for a budget transparency programme



2.2 Which interventions in what context?

While the debate on how best to bring about behavioural change to reduce corruption is fragmented, there is general consensus that anti-corruption interventions should be tailored to the local context. Accordingly, “a crucial task of evaluation is to investigate the extent to which pre-existing social contexts ‘enable’ or ‘disable’ the intended mechanisms of change” (Marra 2000, 25).

Using a model based on principal-agent and cost-benefit logic, Jeffrey Huther and Anwar Shah provide the best available presentation of a theory of what works and does not work in the fight against corruption in specific contexts, making a distinction between countries with poor, fair, or good quality of governance. Huther and Shah argue that in countries where corruption is endemic, “direct dialogue on corruption is likely to be counter-productive,” and setting up explicit anti-corruption programs would “result in simply another level of corrupt officials under the name of anti-corruption offices.” On this basis, they advise against any direct anti-corruption support in countries with weak

governance. They conclude that in these countries, donors should focus instead on promoting broader governance reforms (Huther and Shah 2000, 13). Their typology of effective donor programmes based on governance quality and drivers of corruption is shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Huther and Shah’s “Effective Anti-Corruption Programs Based on Governance Quality”

Corruption	Governance	Priority anti-corruption efforts
High	Poor	Establish rule of law Strengthen institutions of participation and accountability Limit government interventions to focus on core mandate
Medium	Fair	Decentralisation and economic policy reform Results-oriented management and evaluations Introduction of incentives for competitive public service delivery
Low	Good	Explicit anti-corruption programs such as anti-corruption authorities Strengthen financial management Raise public and officials’ awareness No-bribery pledges, fry big fish, etc.

Source: Huther and Shah 2000, 12.

Even though donors have earmarked the bulk of their support for good governance programmes in many weak governance countries, they have neither followed nor claimed to follow Huther and Shah’s model. On the contrary, donors in many cases have either failed to recognise or have ignored the likelihood that support to, for example, anti-corruption authorities, public financial management initiatives, and civil service reform could fail because of a lack of independence, capacity, and professionalism. The rationale behind such complex interventions in a low-capacity, fragile context is at times formulated as “building capacity to be ready for when the political conditions change.” However, capacity building as an aim in itself is highly questionable. Furthermore, donors have increasingly (albeit not systematically) engaged in high-policy dialogue on corruption with partner governments in recent years. This approach goes against Huther and Shah’s views that a direct dialogue on corruption would be counterproductive in highly corrupt countries.

Huther and Shah’s attempt more than a decade ago to scrutinize the very large menu of possible actions to contain corruption and develop a framework to help assign priorities, depending on views of what does and does not work in specific countries, largely remains the basic framework for anti-corruption reform. However, it has not proven practical for donors, as its theory of change is conditional on long-term, societal change.⁴ In the terms used by anti-corruption practitioners, Huther and Shah’s model does not tell us how governance can be improved so countries can “graduate” to the next level. It cannot be taken for granted that supporting the rule of law and strengthening institutions of participation and accountability will reduce corruption and improve governance.

2.3 Summary

In short, the questions of how to bring about behavioural change and how to select and sequence anti-corruption interventions to suit the context remain largely unanswered. Practitioners responsible for

⁴ The critique is thus similar to the one made by Samuel Huntington in his classic *Political Order in Changing Societies* (1968): if one considers change to be dependent on broad societal changes, one commits a tautological fallacy, because one fails to identify the causes of this societal change.

designing anti-corruption policies and programmes thus have limited support from existing grand ToCs at this overall policy level. However, the absence of strong grand ToCs and the poor evidence base for “what works and why” in anti-corruption interventions does not prevent practitioners from developing implementation and programme ToCs. On the contrary, it makes it even more important to show the logic on which a specific intervention is based so it can be analysed and tested. This enables programme managers to make important midcourse corrections to the intervention, and allows policy makers to learn from previous mistakes.

3. Methodology: How to build a theory of change

The ToC method is increasingly used by programme designers, implementers, and evaluators, and several donor agencies now require the development of ToCs as part of their evaluation and design of programmes. This section discusses what makes a good ToC, presents a five-step methodology for practitioners, and outlines the limitations of the method.

3.1 What makes a good theory of change?

ToC is a tool used to systematise information and direct lines of inquiry. To put it in terms familiar to most development practitioners, a ToC merges the strengths of a well-evidenced and tested results chain and an analysis of the enabling environment, such as situation analysis, stakeholder analysis, power analysis, and/or political economy analysis. Results chains are useful exercises for displaying the (assumed) causal pathway of change, but they often end up being too “sterile” and ignoring a number of important factors whose absence might cause this pathway to break down. These factors are called *preconditions* in ToC-speak. Unpacking preconditions is key to the ToC method of identifying—and hopefully overcoming—obstacles to achieving results.

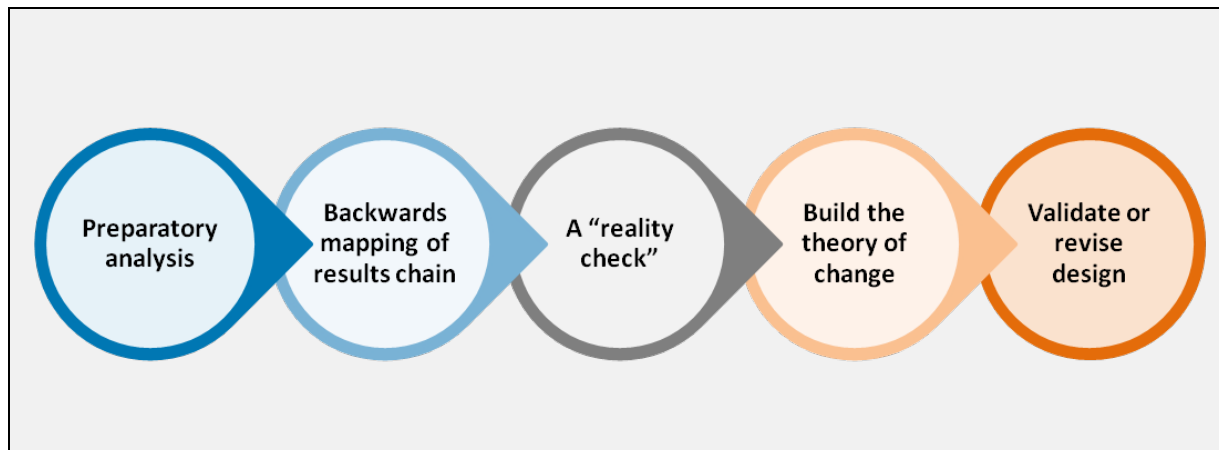
ToC is based on a causal logic, but it is not just about building a results chain (showing, for example, how an activity leads to an output). It goes further and tests this logic by insisting on having a plausible explanation (the *because*) for the causal pathway. The logic is as follows: *if X happens, then Y will follow, because predetermined preconditions have been fulfilled*. A ToC makes explicit underlying assumptions about how change happens (Ober 2012).

The author of this study reviewed available ToC methodologies before embarking on the fieldwork.⁵ The studies show that there is no established gold standard. The existing methodologies were adapted to provide a more intuitive framework for the readers of this report. In short, any methodology should aim to make explicit the underlying assumptions about how change happens, identify the sources of the theories (whether they are based on experience and/or research), and test the validity of the ToC before making recommendations for strategies and programming. Purely desk-based or purely participatory engagement will miss key elements of a ToC. The inclusion of different information and perspectives is a good way to verify the quality of the ToC and validate the preconditions established.

3.2 Suggested steps to a theory of change

To encourage use of ToCs among practitioners, a step-by-step approach to building a theory of change is provided below, incorporating experiences from the fieldwork. The terminology and approach have been adapted to be as familiar as possible to development practitioners while retaining core ToC characteristics. The five main steps are shown in figure 2 and briefly described in this section. While these are the main steps, the actual analysis is a reiterative process.

⁵ The main methodologies that were found useful include those of Connell et al. (1995), Anderson (2005), Funnell and Rogers (2011), and Ober (2012). A recent review by Vogel (2012) is also useful. Special thanks to Heidi Ober for working with us on the methodology.

Figure 2. Five-step approach to building a theory of change

The steps suggested here can be used either to create a ToC from scratch to inform the *design* of a programme or project, or, alternatively, to create a ToC retroactively in order to unpack the logic, intent, and indicators behind an existing intervention for the purpose of *evaluation*.

Step 1. Preparatory analysis

For both design and evaluation purposes, review the general literature on “what works” in the specific area of anti-corruption. Analyse the context to identify the actors, incentives, and interests that may hinder or aid implementation. For evaluation purposes, review programme documents to understand the main philosophy and working modalities of the programme, and conduct interviews to verify facts and find discrepancies between design assumptions and implementation realities.

Step 2. Backward mapping of results chain

Graphically (re)construct the causal pathways of change to create a results chain. For evaluation purposes, depict the logic described by programme staff. Facilitate their thinking but do not interfere in the process. For design purposes, depict the assumed or intended causal pathways. The construction of a results chain for ToC purposes differs from a standard results chain exercise in two ways:

- a) The goal needs to be *specific*. “Reduce corruption at all levels” is too vague a goal to use for a ToC. Instead, identify what the programme aims to do, for whom, and where. A community monitoring programme might have as its real goal to “reduce corruption in the road construction sector at the local government level in three districts.”
- b) Construct the results chain by beginning with the overall goal and then working *backward*, identifying first outcomes, then outputs, and finally activities. This allows people to think about what must change or be produced rather than beginning with their favourite activity in mind. It might be that different activities than the “usual suspects” are needed.

Step 3. Reality check

Assess the coherence of the internal logic of the programme, and then test it by considering relevant external influences:

- a) Consider whether the results chain has an *internal* logic to it. Conduct a forward mapping: begin with the available inputs and move from inputs to activities, from activities to outputs, from outputs to outcomes, and from outcomes to impact. Asking critical questions can

uncover whether the available inputs are sufficient for implementation of the activities, whether resources have been made available on time, and so on.

- b) Assess whether the results chain holds when *external* factors are considered. Which outside forces might prevent a corruption investigation from resulting in a conviction? Depending on the context, several factors may be relevant. For example, the presence of a corrupt judge may encourage criminals to believe that investigation efforts are futile.

Use the “if . . . then . . . because” method of questioning to provide a reality check on the results chain. Is it realistic to assume, for example, that *if* a programme conducts a number of awareness campaigns, *then* attitudes and behaviour towards corruption will change? Probably not, *because* behavioural change is hard to bring about merely by providing information. The reality check will lead to the identification of a number of preconditions. Examples of preconditions relevant to this example are given in section 4.3.3.

Step 4. Build the theory of change

Address preconditions and inconsistencies in programme logic in the ToC:

- a) *Identify the links* in the results chain where the assumed automatic causality depends upon fulfilment of a precondition. Attempt not to provide general, across-the-board assumptions as in logical framework matrixes. Make the preconditions as specific as possible. Which resources are needed? What kind of behavioural change must take place? Who must show political will? Be as specific as possible.
- b) Distinguishing between programmatic and non-programmatic preconditions can be helpful in later stages to clarify what is within the sphere of responsibility of the programme (programmatic) and what is outside that sphere (non-programmatic). All *programmatic preconditions* should be addressed, either by the programme itself or by other actors. *Non-programmatic* preconditions cannot be addressed by the programme but should be monitored so when conditions change one can redesign programmes to exploit new windows of opportunity.
- c) Identify a *possible, plausible pathway to get to the desired objective*. Remove as many obstacles as possible by proposing interventions to address programmatic preconditions. In reality, it is often a case of trial and error, or design-test-learn-redesign: analysing failure, making a change, and then trying again. Pilots are therefore useful programmatic responses for ToC thinking. Donors should allow such reiterative learning loops.

Step 5. Validate the theory of change and offer recommendations for programme (re)design

Test the ToC logic by another round of backward-and-forward mapping and *validate the preconditions identified by reference to documented evidence*. Invite relevant stakeholders to provide comments. For existing programmes, implementation staff will often be good critics. If programmes are to be redesigned, then be clear on how the new ToC differs from the original design to avoid “business as usual.” A new ToC would normally entail redesigning key performance indicators, the M&E system, staff responsibilities, and potentially the funding envelope.

3.3 Applying the methodology

It is not always practical, cost-effective, or necessary to conduct a full ToC analysis that includes steps 1 to 5. In some cases one may choose to focus on specific causal pathways, based on experience, research, or intuition. The most useful inquiries often relate to the middle of the results chain, dealing with outcomes. Unpacking preconditions for outputs to turn into a specific outcome, or for the

outcome to lead to the overall impact/goal, can be done fairly quickly; this is illustrated in section 4.3.3, which describes an adapted version of the methodology that was used in a workshop context. This exercise also showed the usefulness of mixing lines of inquiry to unpack implicit preconditions. Rather than just asking why one would expect X to lead to Y, it can be useful to challenge people to think about why X might *not* automatically lead to Y, and what other factors would be necessary to ensure that it does.

One practical problem when working with ToCs in the field is the overlapping levels and complexities of interventions. When working on ToCs for complex interventions it may be necessary to develop multiple results chains, as described in section 4.2 on anti-corruption authorities. It will also be necessary to consider ToCs at different levels, from high-level policy reform to specific implementation of anti-corruption regulation, as shown in section 4.4 on public sector reform in Zambia. In short, one can rarely capture all levels and complex processes in one ToC illustration, so one must break down the ToC elements into manageable components.

A good ToC allows for better thinking about the sequencing of reforms, a perennial challenge. For example, whistle-blowing legislation is important for effective investigative work. If a programme is actively working to change legislation—and has a realistic chance of doing so—it is a programmatic precondition. If no active work is being done on whistle-blowing legislation, or the chances of change are slim, then having such legislation in place is a non-programmatic precondition. In this case, scaling up of any law enforcement programmes might have to wait until such legislation is passed. This example is discussed further in section 4.2.3.

Regardless of whether one uses the methodology suggested above or other variants, the final ToC analysis should be assessed against at least five criteria.⁶ These criteria can be used as a checklist for what constitutes a good ToC:

- All preconditions are made explicit
- A strong focus is placed on behavioural change
- Consideration is given to the sequencing, complementarity, and prioritisation of reforms, leading to realistic expectations
- The focus moves away from technocratic and apolitical results chains
- New entry points for programmes and strategies are identified

If ToCs are to be used for evaluation purposes, using so-called theory-based evaluation,⁷ then the identified preconditions or assumptions need to be tracked, using indicators and data collection. This allows the evaluators to identify which assumptions are valid and which are not, thereby enabling early corrective action. In Weiss's words, "sensible evaluators track the onset of negative consequences in the same way they track the emergence of positive consequences," and the development of critical ToCs is a good way to identify unanticipated and undesired programme effects (Weiss 2000, 107–10).

Regarding the testing of the ToC and its preconditions, triangulation of evidence is recommended. Only when one has articulated the ToC can one test the extent to which the assumptions behind the ToC are valid. There are two main methods for testing a ToC. The first is to determine whether a

⁶ DFID has developed its own checklist for ToCs. A draft version is provided by Vogel (2012) in appendix 3.

⁷ In the words of Carol Weiss (2000, 103): "Theory-based evaluation is a mode of evaluation that brings to the surface the underlying assumptions about why a program will work."

“causal story” can be constructed about “how and to what extent the intervention has produced results.”⁸ A second way is to use the ToC as an explicit, formal benchmark for testing assumptions. In this approach, the ToC “provides the template for method choice, variable selection and other data collection and analysis issues” (Leeuw and Vaessen 2009, 24). If indicators are established and statistical analysis is conducted, this can lay the foundation for a rigorous impact evaluation.

Finally, because most development practitioners have had training in developing logframes and results chains, care needs to be taken to avoid simply reproducing these approaches in the guise of a ToC. ToCs are the stated hypotheses of change that will occur as a direct result of an intervention. It is not an assumption that is made about the operating environment. Rather than focusing on “assumptions,” which tend to be general, the ToC method focuses on preconditions for specific causal pathways. One can avoid producing ToCs that are glorified, complex results chains by focusing on preconditions, critical analysis, and testing rather than on wishful thinking.

3.4 Limitations of a theory of change

It is worth remembering that a ToC, by definition, does not offer the one and only truth. A ToC will always be a simplification of reality, and so it should be continuously reassessed and revised. One of the strengths of the ToC method is that it offers a flexible framework that can encompass issues relating both to implementation theory, regarding the nuts and bolts of the programme, and to programme theory, looking at broader processes of behavioural change, policy change, and organisational change. However, given the scarcity of solid evidence on such change processes in general—and the even more limited evidence in the anti-corruption literature—testing the programme theory can be a challenge.

The fieldwork undertaken as part of this study suggests that the ToC method has the greatest value in the outcomes area of the results chain. If impact statements are kept broad and take a long-term perspective (such as “reduction in corruption”), then the ToC method needs to be embedded in a rigorous long-term impact evaluation or research endeavour.

Finally, validation of the implementation and programme theory requires availability of data, but useful data are often nonexistent or in short supply. For design purposes one can refer to research or evaluation of similar programmes to anticipate how, for example, a community monitoring programme will prompt behavioural change. However, for evaluation purposes, to validate the unique ToC of a project one will often need primary data specific to that project.

⁸ A systematic way to develop and corroborate a causal story is through “causal contribution analysis” (Mayne 2001). The causal story is inferred from whether (a) there is a reasoned ToC for the intervention that makes sense, is plausible, and is agreed by key players; (b) the activities of the intervention were implemented; (c) the ToC, or key elements thereof, is verified by evidence, and the chain of expected results occurred; (d) other influencing factors have been assessed and recognised. Even if a strong causal story has been developed through an iterative process, this method can only assess contribution towards impact, not exact attribution (Leeuw and Vaessen 2009, 15–19).

4. Theory of change analysis of anti-corruption interventions by anti-corruption authorities, civil society, and public sector reform initiatives

This section applies the ToC methodology in section 3 to anti-corruption interventions in three areas: anti-corruption authorities, civil society, and public sector reform. Subsection 4.1 provides some introductory reflections on the value of and obstacles to ToC analysis, as well as a brief account of case selection and methods. The analysis is presented in subsections 4.2–4.4. Each of these subsections begins by mapping existing ToC thinking and practice in the area, providing more specific analysis than was done for grand ToCs in section 2. Case studies of specific programmes in Malawi and Zambia are presented, applying ToC analysis.

4.1 Introductory reflections on theory of change analysis and case study methodology

4.1.1 The value of—and obstacles to—application of the theory of change methodology in the field

Although the theory of change methodology has become quite popular recently, it is in fact part of an established theory-based evaluation tradition. A study of an anti-corruption project from 1997 states that “by eliciting program designers’ own theories about how the program was expected to work, [evaluators] ‘disaggregated the assumptions into the mini-steps that are implied and confronted the leaps of faith and questionable reasoning that are (often) involved’” (Marra 2000, 31, quoting Weiss 1997, 51). This helped program designers and managers validate their approach, generate external support for it, understand whether failures were results of program design or implementation, and ultimately undertake “program re-engineering” (Marra 2000, 30).

There are many reasons why practitioners might in some cases be reluctant to develop or disclose a ToC. They may realise that the programme in question is not rationally developed, is deficient in some way, or is even indefensible (Fraser 2001, 20–26). Other reasons for reluctance might be that the programme is pursuing objectives that could be questioned if made public, that task managers have inherited what they consider a faulty project, or that attempting to agree on a ToC could lead to confrontation between different stakeholders. There may even be fear that a ToC exercise could jeopardise funding, either *ex post*, by revealing that the expected impacts in the programme description were inflated, or *ex ante*, by providing a realistic forecast of the limited impacts that can be expected (perhaps contradicting the programme’s boosters) and making caveats explicit (Funnell and Rogers 2011, 135–38). McGee and Gaventa argue that the tendency to poorly articulate ToCs is due “not to weak capacity for distinguishing, for instance, intermediate from final outcomes; but to weak incentives and precedents for spelling them out” (2010, 27).

The presentation of a user-friendly step-by-step methodology in section 3, and the illustration in this section of how this methodology can be applied, is intended to address practical obstacles to greater use of the ToC method. Nevertheless, the issues mentioned above go beyond mere practicalities. Removing obstacles linked to these deeper concerns will require changes to management practices within donor agencies to encourage more openness, a learning environment, and occasional acceptance of project failure.

4.1.2 Case study methodology

Case selection proceeded in two phases. First, based on a literature review, the author identified types of anti-corruption interventions where the need for clear ToCs was perceived to be greatest. A common denominator for anti-corruption work by anti-corruption authorities, civil society organisations, and public sector reform initiatives is that there is little agreement as to the “right” strategy for fighting corruption.

Second, individual cases were selected within these overall intervention types to provide examples of specific ToCs. Eight cases were identified for an initial review, with their selection based on factors such as availability of information and prior knowledge of the context. From this sample, three cases were selected for further analysis and fieldwork and are reported in this paper.

No value judgement was applied in the case selection. In other words, the approaches used in the cases described in this report are not perceived to be better or worse than other approaches. The main criterion was whether the cases would provide illustrative examples of how the ToC method can be applied in the anti-corruption field.

No sample of cases could ever be fully representative of the varied universe of anti-corruption strategies, programmes, and projects. The ToCs illustrated in this paper are therefore not ideal types or models in any way. Given the diversity of interventions in the anti-corruption field, it would be futile to attempt to provide models. The cases presented here are merely examples, intended to help inspire practitioners to construct their own unique ToCs. As such, they are deliberately varied and operate at different levels, focusing on organisations, on programmes, on projects, and on processes. The sample includes a combination of ongoing/completed programmes and new programmes under design to provide both retrospective and forward-looking analysis.

The methods used included a review of thematic literature, examination of project documentation, and in-country research. As described below, the civil society case was developed in a more participatory manner than the cases dealing with anti-corruption authorities and public sector reform. However, all cases included thorough document analysis and interviews with relevant stakeholders in the countries. More time and resources could have been invested in validating the final analysis with key stakeholders. However, the purpose of this study is not to validate individual ToCs, but to provide examples of ToC analysis.

U4 donor partners greatly facilitated the author’s access to programme documents and to interviewees from both donor agencies and government staff. While this was beneficial for the purposes of this paper, it should be borne in mind that independent researchers and evaluators will likely face more difficulty in obtaining access to such operational information, creating a serious constraint to future knowledge development.

4.2 Anti-corruption authorities

4.2.1 Current ACA strategies and implications for change

The value of anti-corruption authorities (ACAs) has been a hotly debated topic for several decades in the anti-corruption field. Although most grand theories state that ACAs are unlikely to work effectively in places where governance is weak (see section 2.2), governments and donors continue to support them in such environments. Different stakeholders have very different expectations for ACAs, which may help explain why agreement still cannot be reached on whether ACAs have been successful or not in most cases. Another reason could be that evaluating the effectiveness of the very different organisations broadly labelled as “ACAs” is not fruitful.

There is no standard theory of change underlying the work of ACAs. These organisations perform different tasks with different objectives, have different levels of resources, and work in different contexts. As a result, their ToCs necessarily differ. Agreeing on a ToC for an anti-corruption authority can help clarify the assumptions of different stakeholders, identify which outcomes are under the ACA's control and which are not, and specify the causal pathways from the everyday activities of ACA staff to the desired impact, leading to more realistic expectations and better-coordinated work.

ACAs are often an important focal point in the national integrity system and are typically responsible for coordinating or implementing national anti-corruption strategies. As a result, when it comes to evaluation, an unhelpful blurring often occurs between the impact of the ACA itself and broad progress in fighting corruption in the country. It is not uncommon to see logical framework matrixes that specify "reduction in corruption," measured through Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI), as the goal of an ACA's work, without formulating an appropriate ToC to show how the ACA will be able to achieve this. Organizational outputs in most cases are easily identified. However, the attribution gap between the activities or outputs of an ACA and changes in, for example, the CPI makes it impossible to credibly validate that any changes are due to the activities performed. What is often missing is the formulation of specific outcomes that the ACA is actually able to influence and can thus be held accountable for. This helps explain the implementation theory. To explain how the work of an ACA can lead to the attainment of its goal of less corruption, the programme theory needs to be explained.

Thus, the definition of outcomes is crucial for ACAs. These outcomes should of course reflect the mandate and working areas of the agency in question. In general, ACAs with preventive mandates have different ToCs than those with enforcement mandates. The capacity and resources of the ACA should also be considered. A detailed discussion of what different institutional characteristics of ACAs mean for M&E, including ToCs, is provided by Johnsen et al. (2011, 17–29).

Unfortunately, existing research does not provide much guidance to practitioners on how ACAs change the corruption situation in a country. Most research still centres on broad policy questions regarding whether ACAs are useful interventions or not. A recent mapping exercise by the U4 Anti-Corruption Resource Centre showed that very few evaluations of specific ACAs have been done (Johnsen et al. 2011), so it is perhaps not surprising that little documentation exists on how ACAs create change on the ground. Despite this lack of knowledge, an industry of trainers and experts is engaged in building the capacity of ACAs based on assumptions about the standards or levels of capacity that are expected to contribute towards fighting corruption. Unique, programme-level ToCs need to be established before one can purposefully engage in capacity building. All too often, technical assistance providers view capacity building and performance improvement as the ultimate goals of technical assistance to ACAs, failing to specify explicitly how this is going to reduce corruption or increase public integrity and accountability.

4.2.2 The Malawi Anti-Corruption Bureau

The Chr. Michelsen Institute and U4 Anti-Corruption Resource Centre were commissioned by DFID to conduct a review of the Anti-Corruption Bureau (ACB) in Malawi. Developing a ToC for the agency was part of the design component of the assignment. The information in this section is based on this work.

Malawi's ACB was established under the Corrupt Practices Act (CPA) of 1995 and became operational in 1998. It uses the traditional three-pronged approach—law enforcement, prevention, and public education—modelled by Hong Kong's Independent Commission Against Corruption (ICAC). The Malawi ACB has authority to prosecute its own cases under the CPA. Even though the CPA establishes the bureau as an autonomous body, it is not a constitutional body. In effect, the ACB is comparable to any civil service department, with no budgetary independence or secured tenure for

senior management. The following strategic objectives (or pillars) are set forth in the bureau's Strategic Plan for 2007–2011 (ACB 2007):

- Maximise the potential of human and capital resources for efficient execution of activities
- Proactively prevent corrupt practices in public and private bodies
- Develop the National Integrity System (NIS) through policy leadership and enhanced collaboration
- Enhance public awareness of corruption and of the Anti-Corruption Bureau's work
- Effectively and efficiently investigate allegations of corruption, and prosecute corruption cases

When the study began, the Malawi ACB, like other anti-corruption authorities, did not have an articulated ToC to specify how its objectives could be reached. The M&E framework was not yet operational, and indicators had been defined mainly at the output level. The construction of a ToC for the agency's work involved an extensive review of past evaluations and secondary literature, followed by interviews with ACB staff, donor staff, and other stakeholders such as the Institutional Integrity Committees (IICs). In addition, production of a political economy analysis as part of the assignment greatly facilitated the ToC analysis.

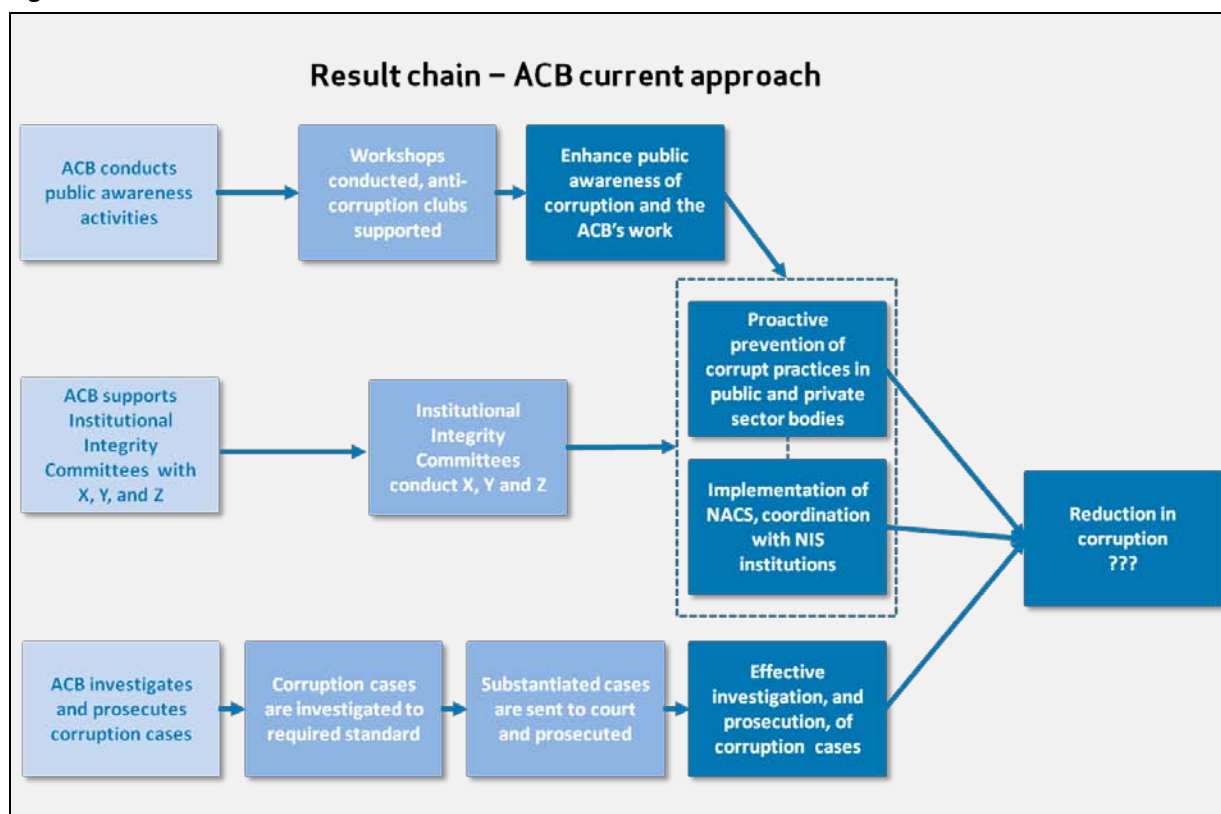
4.2.3 The theory of change for the Malawi ACB

The current ToC behind the ACB's operations is shown in figure 3. The ACB's work in fighting corruption involves three individual work streams: (a) public awareness, (b) work with the IICs to prevent corruption in the public sector, and (c) investigation and prosecution of corruption cases. Figure 3 simplifies the strategic objectives for the ACB but largely corresponds to the ACB strategy's five strategic pillars.⁹ The narrative statement of the ACB's ToC shown in the figure is as follows:

*If the Malawi ACB engages in public awareness campaigns, works with the IICs to prevent corruption in the public sector, and carries out investigation and prosecution of corruption cases, **then** there will be a reduction in corruption in Malawi **because** the citizens of Malawi will change their behaviour, the public sector will offer fewer opportunities for corruption, and corrupt offenders will be apprehended and/or deterred.*

⁹ Pillar 2, "Proactively prevent corrupt practices in public and private bodies," and pillar 3, "Develop the National Integrity System (NIS) through policy leadership and enhanced collaboration," really relate to the same outcome, as illustrated in figure 3. Pillar 4, "Enhance public awareness of corruption and of the Anti-Corruption Bureau's work," is seen in the ToC analysis as an intermediary outcome for prevention. No changes were made to pillar 5, "Effectively investigate allegations of corruption, bring offenders to court and ensure that they are successfully prosecuted."

Figure 3. Overall results chain for the Malawi ACB

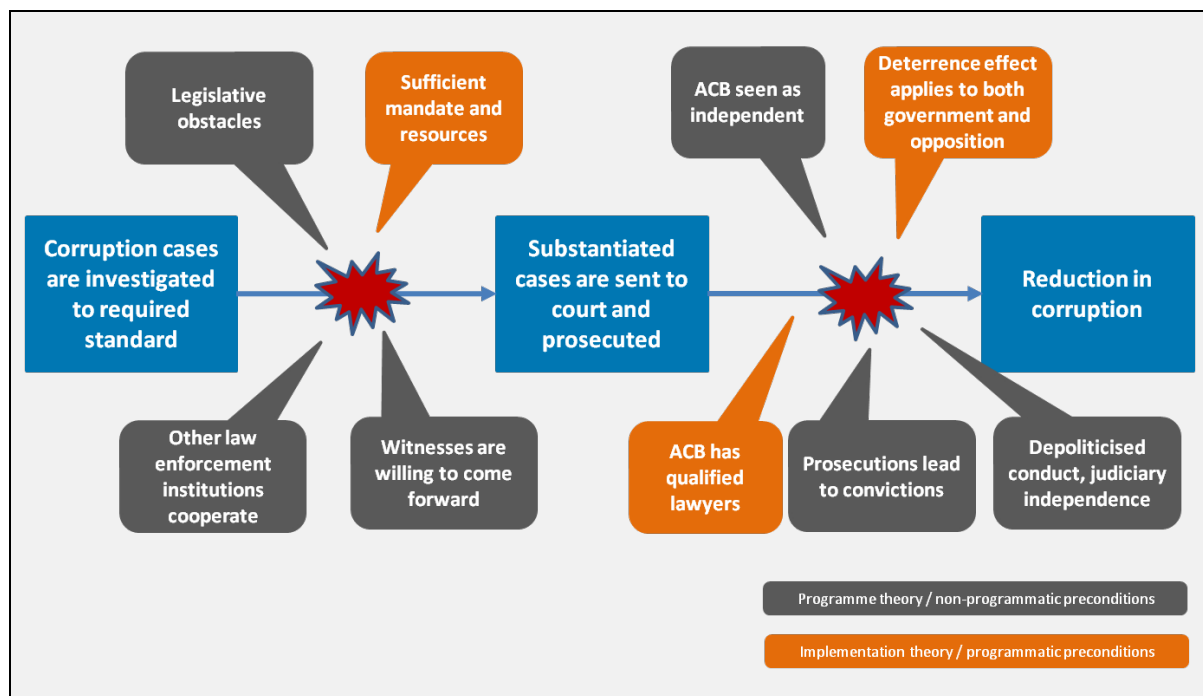


It quickly became apparent that the analysis had to be done for each of the three strands of the ACB's work in order to reduce the complexity of the overall ToC. The overall goal of "reduction in corruption" is based on the ACB's stated mission to "prevent and reduce corrupt practices in Malawi" and its mandate to deal with any offence under the Corrupt Practices Act. In figure 3, question marks have been placed after this goal to indicate a lack of specificity. One can question whether the bureau should concern itself with minor corruption cases that would normally fall under the purview of the police. A demarcation of which types of corruption the ACB primarily should target would have made the ToC exercise easier, and it would most likely also have enabled the ACB management to better track the bureau's performance.

The following subsections analyse the strands of the overall results chain—enforcement, prevention, and public education—to identify internal inconsistencies and external obstacles to effectiveness that affect the current ACB theory of change.

Enforcement

Interviews, document analysis, and political economy analysis found many critical preconditions that must be in place for the investigation and prosecution work of the ACB to work effectively. Some of these had already been identified by the ACB, for example in a SWOT analysis conducted as part of a commissioned report (Management International 2011, 51). The present analysis examined those preconditions and identified their effects on the ACB's ToC in a way that has not been done before (figure 4).

Figure 4. Theory of change analysis for the Malawi ACB's enforcement work

Crucial obstacles that hinder the ACB's work include loopholes or gaps in the legislative framework relating to whistle-blower protection, access to information, and asset declaration. The issue of the ACB's independence has a potentially very damaging effect on the enforcement ToC. Sahr Kpundeh argued in 2004 that lack of a supportive institutional state structure and leadership suggests that the Malawi ACB is either a token effort or a measure to appease donors (Kpundeh 2004, 272–73). If opponents of the ruling party are the only ones investigated and prosecuted, this could have destabilising effects on the society and delegitimise the ACB. Legislative and budgetary changes depend on external factors, but the bureau itself could improve perceptions of its independence and accountability by establishing clear case selection procedures and other internal systems of checks and balances, with external oversight (based on the “guarding the guardians” principle). The lack of human and technical capacity in the courts, police, national audit office, and other government agencies also hinders the ACB's work. The bureau seems to have adequate investigative capacity, though it lacks specialised skills such as forensic accountancy and investigating computer crimes. It has had major problems retaining qualified lawyers for its prosecution work.

As shown in figure 4, even if the ACB performs well and manages to build evidence in its investigations, with qualified lawyers to properly prosecute its cases, all this matters little if prosecutions do not lead to convictions because of, for example, politicised or inept judges and magistrates. When challenged, ACB staff maintained that investigations have a deterrent effect even if legal or political obstacles hinder convictions.¹⁰ Such indirect causal pathways could work as a plausible implementation theory, and perhaps even programme theory, but such a theory needs to be made explicit and tested.

¹⁰ Argumentation on the deterrent effect of law enforcement work typically builds on Becker's seminal 1968 paper on crime and law enforcement. The central finding presented by Becker is that increasing the probability and the severity of punishment deters crime. Much recent research has attempted to show why Becker's result may not hold, but we can still expect that if the probability of getting caught is lowered (if the ACB conducts fewer investigations), then criminal acts of corruption will increase, with costs to society. The deterrent effect of investigation would, moreover, most likely decline if the likelihood of conviction were perceived to be low.

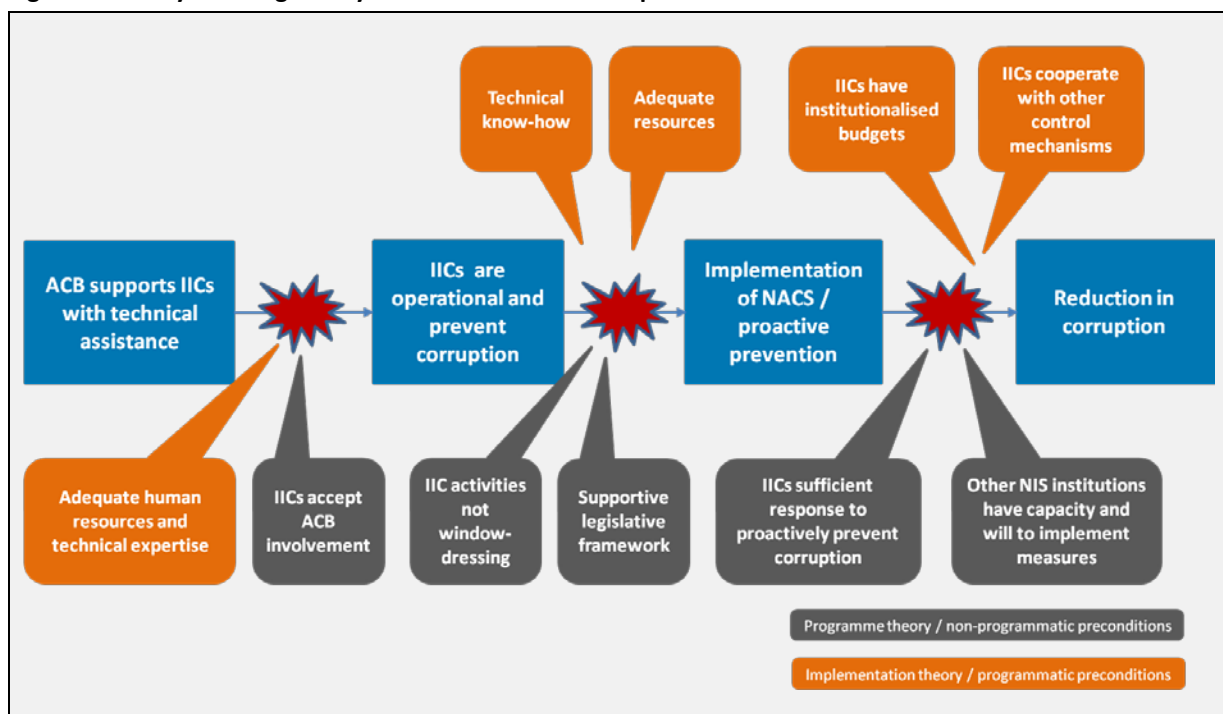
The judiciary in Malawi seems to be fairly independent compared its counterparts elsewhere, but judicial operators are not always knowledgeable about how to interpret the Corrupt Practices Act. Such obstacles to the ACB's work are external to the organisation itself, but they are part of its programme theory and should thus be monitored, as they have a direct impact on the ACB's ability to perform its work.

Prevention

The lack of internal logic behind the prevention work of the ACB was already evident at the desk review stage. As mentioned, the ACB supports the IICs in its temporary capacity as secretariat of the National Integrity Committee (NIC), which is the body responsible for implementation of the National Anti-Corruption Strategy (NACS). Despite the existence of a handbook, no standardised tools have been developed for use by the IICs. Interviews were conducted with two IICs, those focused on health care and the police, which had received support from the ACB. Their activities were found to be mainly focused on sensitisation and development of internal corruption prevention policies. The ACB clearly saw its role as advisory and did not take responsibility for driving progress.

As shown figure 5, several preconditions would need to be fulfilled for the ACB's support to IICs to plausibly lead to a reduction in corruption. First, relating to implementation theory, the ACB is overstretched in supporting an increasing number of IICs, currently more than 60. For the ACB to be able to fully support all IICs, significant resources would most likely be needed. Second, of importance for the programme theory, it is up to the IICs to decide which activities to do and how to do them. The ACB can only advise. It is taken on faith that the IIC members have the required knowledge, resources, and incentives to fight corruption internally within their organisations. In Zambia, by contrast, the incentives issue has been addressed by giving the Anti-Corruption Commission the right to penalise managers of public institutions if they fail to implement its recommendations.

Figure 5. Theory of change analysis for the Malawi ACB's prevention work

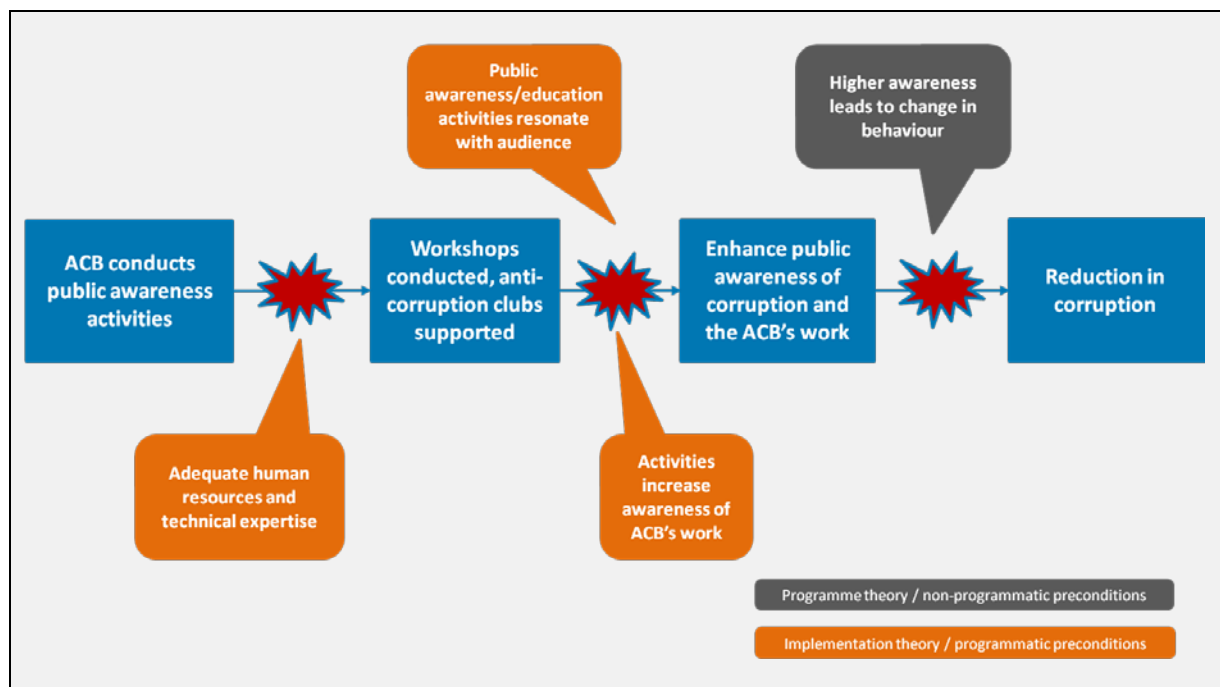


IICs depend on separate funding from the government of Malawi that has not yet been allocated, so the ACB has covered most expenses. It is questionable whether the few activities planned by the IICs, even if they are implemented, will actually make a noticeable dent in corruption levels, as they often are not supported by strong enforcement and deterrent measures such as internal affairs procedures, internal audits, and grievance mechanisms. IICs need to be seen as just one component of a larger control/integrity system within a public organisation. Hence, cooperation between IICs and human resources, internal affairs, and internal audit divisions is essential.

To conclude, the main question mark for the ACB's implementation theory on prevention relates to adequate resources. This matter can be addressed. The real problem, which lies outside the ACB's sphere of influence, is that the IICs cannot credibly claim to be reducing corruption; this has negative implications for the programme theory of the ACB's prevention ToC. In other words, the ACB does what it is meant to do as secretariat of the NIC, but this work cannot be assumed to lead automatically to a reduction in corruption. In Zambia and Tanzania, similar integrity committees have been in existence for many years and have not been able to show results, except when they are part of a larger reform programme. Section 4.4 analyses the ToC for the introduction of a service delivery charter by an integrity committee and presents an example of how preconditions can be used to reshape the design and approach of such an integrity tool.

Public education

Public awareness or public education activities have traditionally been promoted as part of the three-pronged approach championed by the ICAC in Hong Kong, which served as inspiration for the design of the Malawi ACB. A traditional, law enforcement-oriented justification for anti-corruption public awareness work is that when people are educated about what corruption is and why it is wrong, then they will refuse to engage in corrupt acts and will report corrupt acts to the authorities. This assumption fails to explain how the provision of information leads to behavioural change. For example, when a person is asked to pay a bribe, he or she may be aware that this is wrong yet still choose to pay in order to obtain the service. Other public awareness work is based on the assumption that the provision of information will lead to an empowered citizenry that will push for anti-corruption reforms. The ACB bases its prevention work mainly on the traditional, law enforcement-oriented approach, as shown in figure 6.

Figure 6. Theory of change analysis for the Malawi ACB's public education work

The ACB's public education work consists of sensitisation sessions and support to so-called anti-corruption clubs, volunteer organisations that raise awareness about corruption. This is a far cry from the more sophisticated public education work done by, for example, the ICAC.¹¹ Despite carrying out many such activities, the ACB cannot show that its work has led to a reduction in corruption. When challenged, its own version of the ToC is that its public education work raises awareness and enables people to make informed reports of corruption, so investigators can do their job better. There is no ToC to explain how the ACB's work leads to behavioural changes (other than through provision of information, but this is arguably only one factor in behavioural change). Moreover, at a global level, there is little evidence that public awareness as a stand-alone intervention leads to a reduction in corruption (Michael 2007; Disch, Vigeland, and Sundet 2009). In Eastern Europe, where substantial funds have been invested in national anti-corruption awareness-raising campaigns, these efforts have not been effective in changing behaviour. Most successful anti-corruption work actively involves citizens, engages with government, and changes systems and processes. A more credible ToC for the ACB's public education work would focus on strengthening social accountability mechanisms and moving away from passive provision of information to active citizen engagement.

4.2.4 Recommendations for future interventions

An overall insight derived from the ToC analysis of the Malawi ACB is that an anti-corruption authority's specific institutional mandate and goals, organisational structure, staffing levels, and competence are the most important internal factors driving its performance. External factors are also very context-specific: the drivers of corruption in Malawi, and the influences of its wider governance environment, affected the ACB in unique ways. Because of this specificity, the design and redesign of

¹¹ ICAC's community relations and education activities include, among other things, development of educational programmes, sponsorship of youth-focused sporting and cultural events, and influence through television programming (when the agency is written into dramas). A precondition for good outcomes is a free media (Kpundeh 2004, 267).

anti-corruption authorities should avoid the pitfall of simply copying institutional designs from one country to another.

Another insight is that every anti-corruption authority performs a range of different tasks and pursues several different goals in fulfilling its overall mission. In the case of Malawi, this necessitated the construction of multiple ToCs for the ACB, corresponding to the enforcement, prevention, and public education strands. Even though all of the organisation's work relates to fighting corruption, it is important to break down how each major group of activities is supposed to do so—that is, to construct the ToC for that aspect of the work. An anti-corruption authority might be very successful in its preventive work and less successful in enforcement, or vice versa. If it is assessed only on the overall task of “fighting corruption,” then the evaluation of performance is too general and important lessons are lost.

One lesson particularly relevant to the design or redesign of future work is that a good ToC analysis depends on knowledge of both the political economy and the broader institutional landscape of which the anti-corruption authority is part. For example, ACAs depend on the judicial system to secure convictions. Both the design and evaluation of anti-corruption authorities therefore need to take a holistic approach.

Finally, even though the term “precondition” suggests a threshold, it is rarely easy to objectively establish a threshold for when a constraint becomes critical enough to demand fundamental changes, unless these are monitored and performance standards have been established and agreed based on developments over time. For example, the ACB's law enforcement work is hindered by the legislative framework, but it can still achieve results. However, if the overall strategy lacks a coherent ToC, or major components thereof, then fundamental redesign of the intervention is needed. In the case of public education, the implementer needs to be able to explain how behavioural change will occur rather than simply assuming that provision of information will make this happen. In the case of prevention, IICs need financial resources and technical skills, and reforms need to be integrated into existing work processes to make a difference.

In sum, the analysis suggests the following recommendations for future programming and evaluation of ACAs:

- Recognise the interlinkages between the ACA and other institutions in the national integrity system, and the effects these have on ACA performance.
- Develop strong and measurable ToCs for each major strand of work, e.g., public education/awareness, prevention, and enforcement.
- Use a holistic approach in design and evaluation.
- Explicitly state in the programme ToC how the intervention will directly result in behavioural change. Assign indicators to the identified outputs, outcomes, and impacts that are clear, specific, measurable, and time-bound.

4.3 Civil society

4.3.1 Current civil society strategies to fight corruption and implications for change

Civil society interventions to reduce corruption cover a range of activities such as awareness raising, advocacy, community sensitisation, and direct monitoring of service delivery. These activities most often take an indirect approach to reducing corruption. Therefore, civil society actors can draw from the broader literature on “voice and accountability,” where work on ToCs is more advanced than in

other areas related to anti-corruption. A large number of NGOs do specialise directly in fighting corruption. This section presents a case study of one such organisation.

Many civil society programmes make a leap of faith when they assume that, for example, raising people's awareness of their rights, or building the capacity of duty-bearers to be responsive, will automatically lead to a change in behaviour and in power structures. Holland et al. argue that this "assumption about behavioural change is problematic at best. By increasing the visibility of behavioural change indicators at the output level in the logframes, it becomes possible to interrogate this 'leap of faith'. This can be done by measuring and testing assumptions about the effect of project inputs, such as capacity-building, and the subsequent impact of changed behaviour on project outcomes" (2009, 9).

Anti-corruption programmes with civil society actors typically rely on "awareness raising" and "empowerment" as grand theories. These overall approaches have had little testing or documentation, and examples of positive impacts are rare in the available literature (Johnsøn, Taxell, and Zaum 2012). The World Bank redesigned anti-corruption programmes in Tanzania and Uganda after an evaluation in 1998 identified weak points in the logic of the programmes: "One concerns the emphasis on awareness raising [. . .] People can expect no automatic progression from awareness of an unjust situation to intervening to bring it to an end. Another is the belief in empowerment. In our review of the research literature, we did not find evidence that this mechanism will indeed be effective. Even when individuals are empowered, it is not certain that empowerment at the social or organisational level will follow [. . .] Finally, it was pointed out that the prospects of the workshops' contents trickling down to society at large are not particularly good" (Leeuw, Van Gils, and Kreft 1998, 70). In recent years, community monitoring and other sorts of social accountability approaches have been increasingly used. The evidence base for the effectiveness of these approaches in reducing corruption is mixed. A consensus is emerging that community-level monitoring can be successful, but only if public officials can be sanctioned by the actions of the community (Hanna et al. 2011, 4–5).

McGee and Gaventa's review of transparency and accountability initiatives (TAIs) has a section that discusses "untested assumptions and poorly articulated theories of change." The authors state that in very few cases were ToCs consciously and explicitly articulated; as a result, the evidence on effectiveness and impact of TAIs was characterised by "confusion on both theoretical and empirical planes." McGee and Gaventa recommend that "the kind of theory of change that is needed is not one developed in the abstract that reflects a notion of change processes as linear, predictable and rigid—as log-frames sometimes do. The point is, rather, that it is necessary to surface and make explicit the pathways via which complex initiatives, destined to take effect in complex circumstances, are expected to have their effect, and to continuously revisit this throughout the initiative, in recognition that social contexts and processes are always in flux, with emergent issues, unforeseen risks and surprises arising throughout" (2010, 27–28).

One of the principal problems of anti-corruption ToCs in civil society work is that they neglect to assess the ways in which civil society organisations depend on other factors and actors in their efforts to create change. The example of community monitoring mentioned above is a case in point. A ToC would need to identify how the awareness and reporting of corruption translates into sanctions (through elections, criminal proceedings, social ostracism, etc.) and include that as an important part of the programme design. This study adds the observation that anti-corruption objectives are also typically hidden or implicit in the programme documents and results frameworks of civil society-oriented programmes, rather than being stated explicitly.

The case study of civil society work on anti-corruption focuses on the Community Empowerment in Domestic Accountability (CEDA) project being designed and implemented by Transparency International Zambia (TIZ).

4.3.2 Community Empowerment in Domestic Accountability in Zambia

CEDA is identified as a social accountability intervention. Its stated goal is “to empower citizens and partners to take action against corruption and demand for effective public service delivery” (TIZ 2012, 2). It uses several interlinked strategies to achieve results, combining elements of awareness raising, provision of public information, government engagement, and direct monitoring.

In designing the CEDA programme, TIZ sought to build on lessons learned from previous similar projects. A learning process had thus already been initiated, and the design process did not begin from scratch. Nevertheless, community monitoring is a relatively new phenomenon in a modern anti-corruption context, and relevant experiences within Zambia were limited. This presents challenges for both implementation and programme theory. It was therefore agreed that there was scope to improve the design.

4.3.3 Theory of change for the CEDA project

This subsection first describes the workshop process and the methods used to do a quick, participatory ToC analysis; this is to ensure transparency about our approach and allow replication. Second, the main findings of the workshop are presented and issues of generalisability are discussed.

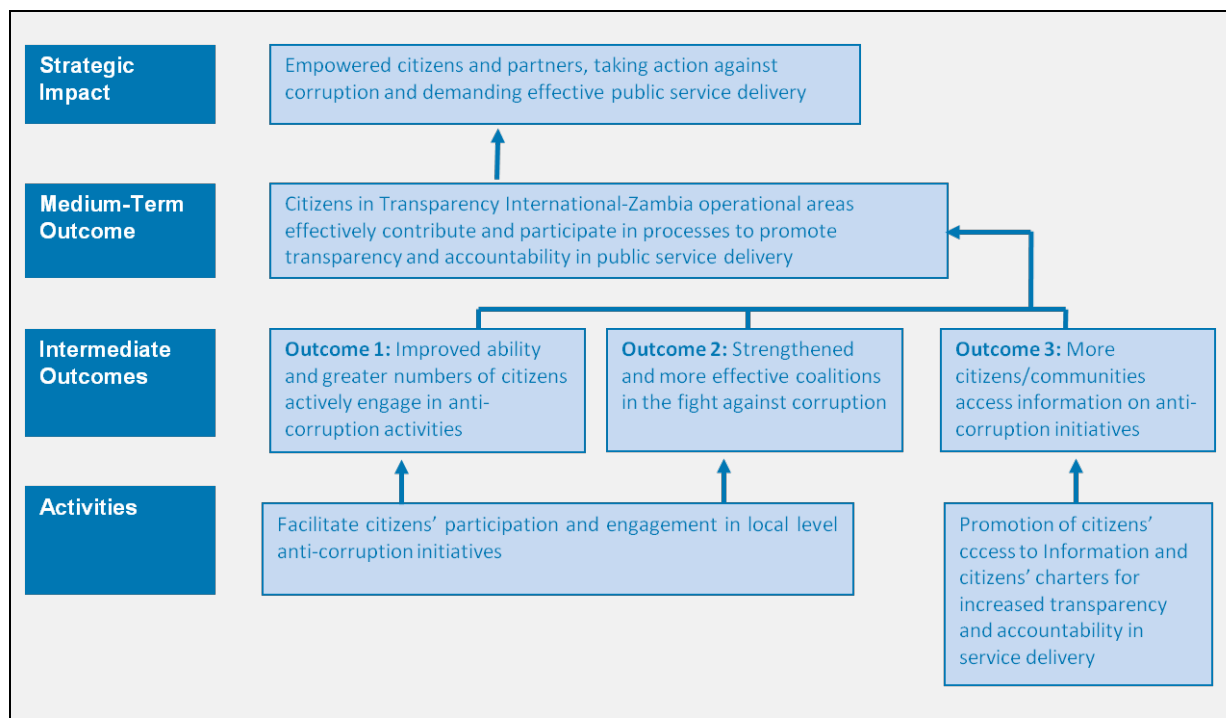
Participatory workshop approach

The author was fortunate to meet with TIZ at a time when the CEDA programme was still in the late design stage. It was therefore decided to hold a one-day workshop to analyse the programme. Preparation consisted of reading the available project documentation. Given the short time frame, a condensed, three-step ToC analysis was done. The workshop:

1. Conducted a backward mapping exercise from the stated CEDA objectives to the activities done and the inputs available. This created a results chain for the project, as shown in figure 7.
2. Identified linkages in the results chain where important preconditions might need to be fulfilled for the causal relationship to hold.
3. Developed ideas about how the CEDA project could address these preconditions in its design.

A meeting was held the day afterward with the responsible TIZ staff to validate the analysis. The analysis presented below is based on the insights of these staff members, with the author of this report acting primarily as a facilitator.

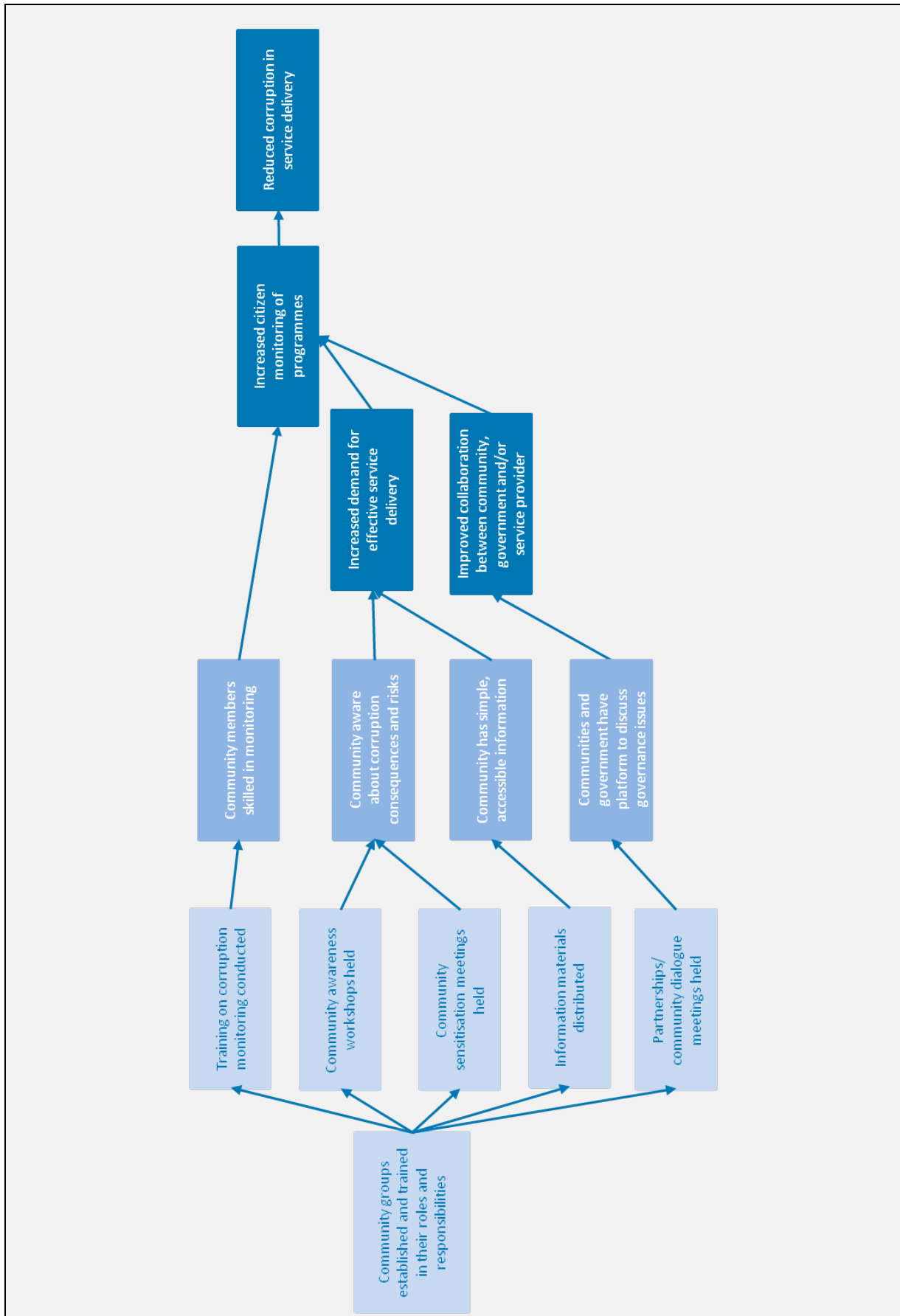
Although the existing project documentation already had a visual representation of the underlying results chain (figure 7), the programme outline and activities had evolved since the original project proposal was drafted. Some activities were no longer proposed, and some were considered more important than others. This also meant that the expected outcome had changed to some extent. Accordingly, the workshop produced a new version of the results chain (figure 8).

Figure 7. Original CEDA results chain

Much discussion went into redefining the goal statement. While empowerment was seen as important for all aspects of the CEDA ToC, the concept proved difficult to operationalise. The workshop participants therefore concretised the lofty goal of “empowerment” into a more measurable objective, namely reduction of corruption in service delivery. Once agreement was reached on the objective of CEDA, the results chain was constructed by means of backward mapping, that is, analysing which outcomes were necessary to achieve the objective, which outputs were necessary to achieve the outcomes, which activities were necessary to produce the outputs, and so forth. This process helped identify outcomes, outputs, and activities that either were not part of the original results chain or no longer were needed in the revised programme design.

Given time constraints, a full ToC mapping was not conducted. Instead, the participants identified one cause-effect relationship in the revised results chain that was thought to be most questionable. The chosen question was how making communities aware of corruption would result in increased demand for effective service delivery. This relates to the programme theory: the question is not whether TIZ is doing its work correctly, but whether this work will lead to change in people’s lives. The analysis was then done by making explicit all known assumptions behind that particular causal relationship. The responses showed that the programme staff had detailed knowledge of the enabling and constraining factors that could affect the ability of the programme to work.

Figure 8. Revised CEDA results chain



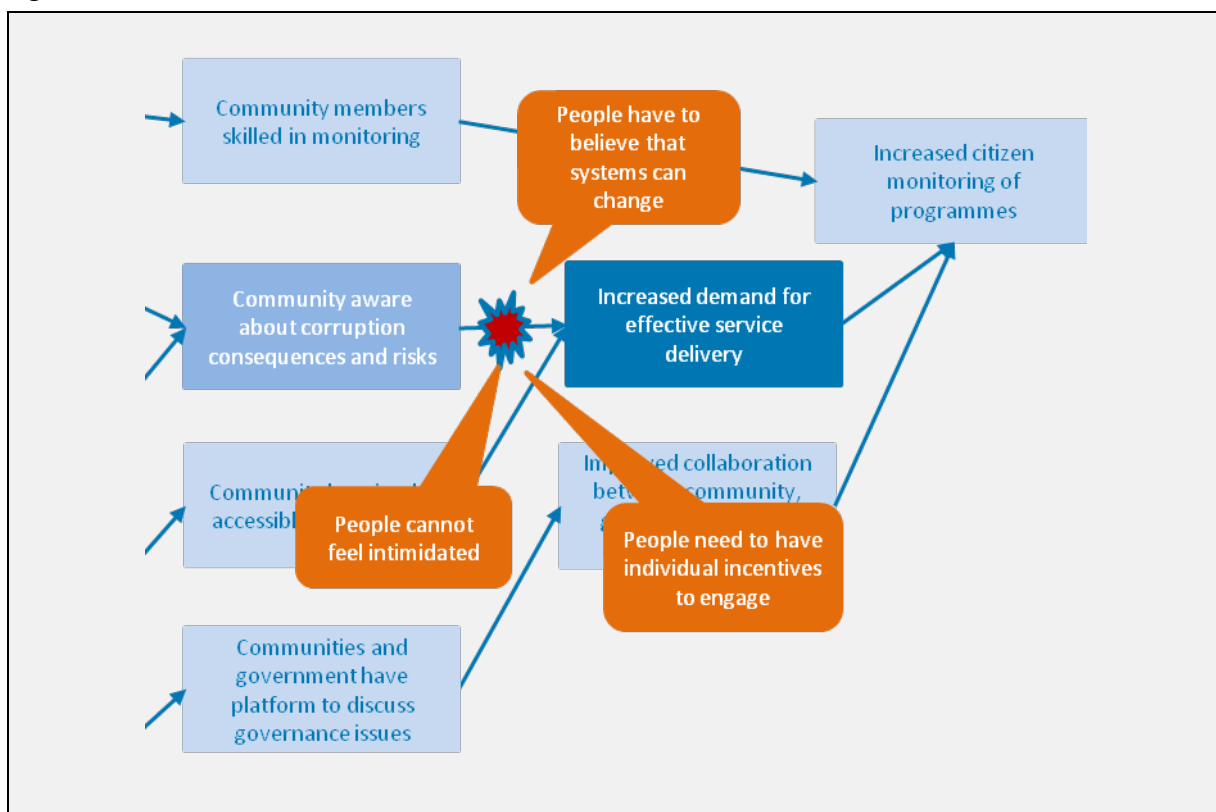
Main findings and recommendations

The implicit thinking on the specific links between increased awareness and increased demand for service delivery in the original design of the CEDA programme could be expressed by the following narrative statement:

*If communities are better informed about the negative consequences of corruption, **then** they will be empowered to pose greater demands for service delivery, **because** they will know their rights to services and the risks that corruption poses to all members of the community.*

However, it soon became clear that the programme staff themselves knew that this was an idealised version of reality. The ToC analysis illustrated that one cannot assume that people automatically will have an interest in fighting corruption, because (a) they might be involved in and/or benefit from it themselves (corruption is the easiest way to get services), or (b) they may be scared of the consequences if they oppose powerful people, or (c) they may see the problem but believe that (government) systems are too difficult to change and that efforts therefore will be in vain. All these factors could be powerful obstacles to the effectiveness of the CEDA programme, as illustrated in figure 9. As preconditions for the programme to work, therefore, people need to have individual incentives to engage, they cannot feel intimidated, and they have to believe that systems can change.

Figure 9. Preconditions for the causal link between awareness and demand



Going further, the ToC analysis identified a number of ways in which the CEDA design could address the precondition that “people have to believe that systems can change”:

- Sharing experiences and positive stories that demonstrate that systems can be changed

- Creating a platform for dialogue and making it easier for people to engage with local authorities
- Disseminating information about what service delivery procedures should be
- Addressing issues at the district level, where they have most impact
- Engaging government, and allowing space for officials to show that they are open to change

A thread connecting these suggested actions is the need to engage with government. TIZ was already working on a number of these issues to optimise its programme approach where constructive relationships with local government authorities were possible. However, a problem arose when local authorities were not willing to engage, and this happened more often in the more corrupt districts. The ToC analysis suggests that a project like CEDA could be most effective in areas where it is possible to establish a dialogue with government. However, as TIZ pointed out, it can be difficult to justify to funders and constituents why one should not work in districts where the local government is not responsive, given that these can also be some of the most corrupt areas. So projects have to “muddle through” and do the best they can.

Nevertheless, one could use the ToC analysis to design the programme so that work would only be initiated in the districts where local authorities and/or service providers have made a formal commitment to the process. The level of political will should be assessed before project kick-off, and monitored throughout. This means that the broad concept of political will must be operationalised into specific preconditions for action. A precondition could be, for example, that the government shares information on public service provision with civil society and sends representatives to public meetings organised by civil society.

In the most corrupt districts where local authorities are not cooperative, it may be possible to initiate other projects for which government engagement is not an important precondition. Such projects would most likely not depend on behavioural change to reach their objectives, but would be more oriented toward “control” or “system reform” measures. An example might be audit activities driven by central government initiative.

A modified ToC statement derived from this analysis could be:

*If communities are better informed of the negative consequences of corruption **and** believe that systems can change, **then** they will be empowered to pose greater demands for service delivery, **because** they will know their rights to services and the risks that corruption poses to all members of the community, **and** they can see signs that the local/central government and service providers are engaging constructively.*

In sum, the exercise yielded the following insights:

- The ToC analysis does not have to cover all causal pathways. If programme staff or other stakeholders have identified specific issues, a targeted exercise is of value.
- A participatory approach is at the heart of the ToC method.
- There is no automatic causal link between raising awareness and improving anti-corruption outcomes.
- Depending on the context, a number of preconditions for behavioural, institutional, and policy change may be important. ToC analysis can help identify ways to address the constraints posed by the absence of these preconditions.

- For the CEDA programme, the most important precondition is that “people believe that systems can change.” Measures around positive stories, dialogue/engagement with government, information about service delivery, and engagement at the subnational level were identified as enabling factors.

4.4 Public sector reform

4.4.1 Current donor strategies for fighting corruption in public sector management

A common definition of corruption is “the abuse of public office for private gain.” Yet donors’ public sector management (PSM) programmes rarely make direct reference to fighting corruption in their programme documents and logical frameworks. Instead, the link between PSM and anti-corruption often remains either implicit or incidental. This is based on an assumption that the public sector can be reformed, and service delivery improved, without tackling corruption issues head-on. This assumption is yet to be proven.

Although the decision by many donors not to focus on corruption in interventions designed to support government-led programmes may be due to tactical concerns, it comes at the expense of in-depth analysis of the forms and drivers of public sector corruption, and clear ToCs. It also runs contrary to what has been labelled the “emergent new approach” being promoted by the World Bank and other donors since 2004. This involves “a paradigm shift in the analysis and operational approach to building state capacity—from a narrow focus on organisational and public management approaches to a broader perspective that incorporates both the institutional rules of the game within which public organisations operate and the political dynamics” (Levy 2004, 25). Corruption is often an integral element of the rules of the game and political dynamics, and addressing corruption should therefore be central to most reform efforts. However, while there is a growing tendency to focus on corruption risks in government service delivery sectors such as health and education, donors still largely shy away from such approaches in their support to central government reforms.

The move towards programme-based approaches to aid, and the Paris Declaration’s principle of government ownership, has brought new challenges from a theory of change and implementation perspective. The goals and objectives of donor-funded PSM programmes have been set at a very high level, and the boundaries and causal paths linking inputs, processes, outputs, and outcomes have often been blurred or left largely undefined.

Attempts to use political economy analysis to come up with what the World Bank describes as “smarter project designs” for PSM have so far been largely inconclusive. In a recent public consultation concerned with the World Bank’s new strategy on public sector management, experts commented that “the draft strategy is insufficiently clear about its ‘theory of change’—it does not take a position about what makes change possible in a highly political environment.” As a result, donors’ programme design remains firmly tied to a results chain that is “somewhat technocratic and apolitical.”¹² Incorporating rent-seeking behaviour and political incentives into a ToC analysis would help address these problems. To do this, corruption issues must be dealt with explicitly.

The World Bank strategy acknowledges that there is no specific unified theory of change for PSM reform, notwithstanding donors’ increased willingness to expose the assumptions underlying PSM reforms and the shift in emphasis from reform content (what should be done) to reform context (where

¹² Comments by David Booth, Willy McCourt, and Benjamin Santa Maria as part of the consultations on the World Bank’s Approach to Public Sector Management (PSM) 2011–2020, available on the World Bank’s Governance for Development blog, <http://blogs.worldbank.org/governance/comment/reply/886>.

it is to be done) and process (how the problem is to be defined and the solution developed). The strategy concludes that PSM reforms are inherently uncertain, noting in particular that it is challenging to change the actual behaviour of public officials, deep within the public sector results chain (World Bank 2012, 4, 10).

In sum, grand ToCs for PSM reform are in short supply. It is therefore not surprising that there are no grand designs for how anti-corruption objectives can be pursued within public sector reform. Nevertheless, donors still work on these issues on a daily basis. The following case study from Zambia can provide some insights for future strategies and programming.

4.4.2 PSM reform in Zambia

Zambia has followed a programme-based approach to public sector reforms since the early 2000s. The government-led Public Sector Reform Programme (2006–10) had three main components: public finance management, decentralisation, and public service management—the latter being the component concerned with civil service reforms. The overarching policy goal of the public service management component was “to enhance the delivery of services for citizens and to create an appropriate institutional environment for reducing poverty.” (Republic of Zambia 2011, 2). This component initially had four subcomponents: rightsizing, pay reform, performance management, and payroll management and establishment control (PMEC). PMEC was the only subcomponent to focus explicitly on a specific type of corruption, namely payroll fraud and ghost workers.¹³

During the fieldwork, it became clear that many PSM interventions with relevance for anti-corruption fell outside the scope of the Public Sector Reform Programme. This section will therefore present a potpourri of anti-corruption reforms implemented by different actors, at times in an uncoordinated manner. Because of this eclectic rather than holistic approach, the overall picture may appear fragmented, but this reflects the lack of a unified, comprehensive approach to anti-corruption in PSM in Zambia.

4.4.3 Theories of change for PSM reform in Zambia

This section shows how ToC analysis can be used to inform approaches that make either implicit or explicit references to anti-corruption. Two reform processes have been selected: (1) payroll management reform, and (2) the introduction of service delivery charters by Integrity Committees (ICs). These two processes were selected because they were the ones that aimed most directly at reducing and controlling corruption, the former in a direct way and the latter in an indirect way. Process reengineering to minimise discretion, and thereby corruption, will be analysed as a part of these processes.

The ToC analysis below is informed by document analysis and personal interviews with key stakeholders in Lusaka. Insights on the nature of integrity committees also benefitted from fieldwork in Malawi, where the Institutional Integrity Committees are similar in design to Zambia’s Integrity Committees.

Payroll management reform

The PMEC subcomponent of the Public Service Reform Programme aimed to support effective budgeting, monitoring, and control of employee numbers and personal emolument expenditure. The

¹³ Following the 2009 PSM midterm review, these four subcomponents were reorganized into two: (1) a comprehensive institutional appraisal/organisational development approach, and (2) pay reform and payroll management and establishment control (Republic of Zambia 2011, 2–3).

introduction of a computerised payroll management system was intended to tackle the issue of ghost workers and payroll fraud, as well as lead to other efficiency gains. The ToC statement would be:

*If a computerised payroll management system is introduced, **then** the number of ghost workers and levels of payroll fraud will be minimised, **because** the automation of systems will reduce opportunities for corrupt behaviour.*

While such a computerised system would appear to have a rather straightforward ToC, the PMEC case illustrates a number of preconditions relevant to future reforms. The main programmatic preconditions for PMEC to achieve a substantial reduction in payroll fraud were that the computerized system was (a) fully rolled out (as hybrid systems may fuel rather than hinder irregularities), (b) regularly used for monitoring, and (c) regularly updated. The PMEC experience is a reminder not to underestimate the technical challenges relating to implementation of computerised systems. For example, integrating the PMEC and the IFMIS (Integrated Financial Management Information System) posed a substantial challenge (Republic of Zambia 2009, 18).

There are, however, also important non-programmatic (and non-technical) preconditions, outside the sphere of influence of the PMEC itself. The JEACE evaluation explains the many years of delay in implementing the PMEC system by noting that “resistance to rolling out new systems is likely to be found at different stages of the process, as vested interests are threatened and opportunities for leakages are reduced.” Since retention of ghost workers can be a source of patronage for different people in existing systems, vested interests can frequently trump general efficiency gains (ITAD 2011, 29).

The PMEC system has now been fully rolled out to provincial centres. This has significantly reduced unauthorised payments and the number of ghost workers. The government of Zambia’s estimated budgetary savings on the annual wage bill is US\$20 million per year. Ghost workers are measured as the percentage of error on the payroll system. The higher the levels of so-called “data integrity,” the better. In June 2011, the data integrity of the PMEC system was 96 per cent (DFID 2012, 7).

These gains are, however, not sustainable without active effort. Payroll data within the computerised system require frequent cleanup and verification. Moreover, whereas the PMEC system may address the issue of ghost workers, controlling related forms of corruption requires the participation of other government systems. If the government wants to ensure that corruption is not merely displaced, as rent-seeking strategies shift to exploit the weakest points in the systems, then supportive measures are needed. For example, issues such as identity fraud and patronage in recruitment are also part of effective payroll management and establishment control; the Public Service Commission would be a relevant actor in tackling such issues. Future projects should aim to strengthen such linkages.

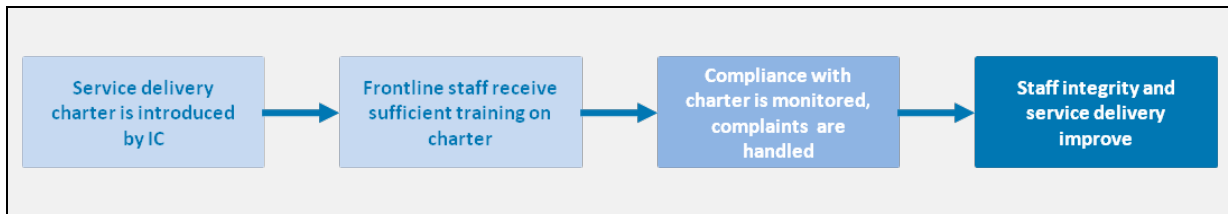
Service delivery charters and the role of integrity committees

Donors and governments often make use of “integrity tools” to address the corruption issue. Codes of conduct, corruption risk assessments, asset declarations, and service delivery charters are typical examples. This subsection focuses on service delivery charters, documents that provide citizens with information on their rights to services and the standards of service delivery they can expect. But the analysis would be similar for the other tools mentioned.

In Zambia and other countries in East Africa, integrity committees often are charged with implementing integrity tools. The ICs in Zambia have been introduced with support from the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC). ICs were piloted in the eight state agencies perceived as most corrupt

in the National Governance Baseline Survey of 2004.¹⁴ Another five ICs were rolled out in 2008, and the committees are now operating in 20 institutions. ICs are asked to introduce integrity tools with little support, often no prior experience, and few financial resources. Approaches differ between institutions, but figure 10 illustrates how the introduction of a service delivery charter is normally thought to lead to less corruption.

Figure 10. Rationale for how service delivery charters reduce corruption



The ToC statement for service delivery charters, applicable to most integrity tools, could be expressed as follows:

If service delivery charters are introduced, people are trained, compliance is monitored, and complaints are handled, then corruption will be reduced and service delivery will improve, because staff will have incentives to follow the prescribed practices.

The reality is, however, much more complex than this statement and figure 10 suggest, and project designs must take this complexity into account. It relates both to (a) the interdependence of various actors that must work together to achieve anti-corruption outcomes, and (b) the support, resources, and implementation necessary to achieve results.

An overall precondition for integrity tools such as service delivery charters to work is that they must be implemented as part of an organisation's system, not as an add-on. In most cases this requires some process reengineering. An IC cannot work in a vacuum; it needs to be part of, and monitor, a change management process encompassing the whole institution. Similarly, a single instrument like a service delivery charter is likely to have low impact on its own. As noted in the 2009 midterm review of the PSM programme, "to ensure the utility and therefore relevance of the 'charters' requires that they are properly sequenced and linked to the review and work process re-engineering and performance management efforts" (Republic of Zambia 2009, 21). Integrity tools often will only be effective if complementary measures—rules and regulations guiding procurement, personnel management, financial management, internal control, and internal and external audit—are overhauled. The establishment of a service delivery charter means next to nothing if other organisational policies relating to, for example, sanctions, pay and rewards, internal audits, and complaints are not aligned with the charter's paragraphs.

The composition of the integrity committees is another key factor. This relates to the issue of alignment, and whether the reforms are championed within the organisation. The members of the committee should ideally represent all integrity units and actors within the organisation, from human resources to internal audit. Effective coordination between the relevant departments is essential, as only some of the complaints received by the ICs will relate to corruption or integrity issues. It is also important to include senior managers on the committee to ensure high-level buy-in. However, conflict of interest issues should be taken seriously when designing the standard operating procedures of the committees. Most other integrity units operate on the "arm's length" principle to reduce undue

¹⁴ The ACC, Immigration Department, Lusaka City Council, Ministry of Lands, Ndola City Council, Public Service Pensions Fund, Zambia Police Service, and Zambia Revenue Authority.

influence and protect independent assessment. This is unfortunately often not possible with the ICs, whose members belong to other units and “volunteer” to sit on the committee.

ICs need to engage in clear communication about their role. In Zambia, there is little guidance at present on the division of roles and responsibilities between the Cabinet Office, the ACC, and ICs at the policy level, or between the ICs and other control and integrity units (such as internal audit, human resources, internal investigation, etc.) within the targeted institutions.

Moreover, effective monitoring requires trusted complaint handling mechanisms. In Zambia, an IC is supposed to receive, consider, and provide redress on all complaints relating to alleged corruption, ethical issues, or maladministration in its organisation, whether the complaints emanate from within or outside the organisation. The specific design of the complaint handling mechanism is important, however. Victims of corruption may not feel comfortable reporting it to a unit inside the organisation. In such cases they can use the ACC’s complaints mechanism. With support from the US Agency for International Development (USAID), Transparency International Zambia established an Advocacy and Legal Advice Centre to monitor customer service and receive complaints. As an independent, nongovernmental organisation, the centre is able to better guarantee the independence and anonymity of the complaints handling process.

The existence of sanctions is often a precondition for reforms to work as intended, even for “soft” anti-corruption measures such as service delivery charters. Just as with criminal offences, there should be pre-established sanctions for different kinds of administrative offences, reflecting their severity. If administrative sanctions are left vague or opaque, then this level of discretion might be abused. Administrative tribunals, supervised by the Public Service Commission, are one way to minimise discretion.

Other preconditions are included in figure 11. Some might seem obvious at first glance. Service users of course should be informed about the content of the charter, their rights, service standards to expect, and where to complain, and this information should be posted at an accessible, central location. Nevertheless, such preconditions are not always present. Finally, the nature of corruption in the institution should be analysed before expecting that a service delivery charter will yield results. If corruption is systemic within an institution, and senior managers extract rents through their subordinates, it is overly optimistic to expect that the same senior managers will cooperate with reform efforts; they are much more likely to disrupt or block them.

USAID’s Zambia Threshold Project, funded at US\$22.7 million under the Millennium Challenge Account, focused on reforming specific state agencies that play a role in servicing businesses. They included the Ministry of Lands, the Patents and Companies Registration Office, the Zambia Revenue Authority, and the Department of Immigration, among others. The 2004 National Governance Baseline Survey found widespread public perceptions of corruption in these agencies. But the USAID programme, while relatively successful elsewhere, did not perform well at the Ministry of Lands because of deeply engrained corrupt practices by top personnel.

Many of the preconditions in figure 11 relate to implementation theory and can be addressed by the implementers to a large extent. Thus, having a service delivery charter work as an anti-corruption tool is more demanding and complex than imagined, but entirely feasible. Most of the non-programmatic preconditions needed for the tool’s effectiveness can be ensured, and obstacles to effectiveness removed, if leadership shows commitment and a broader process of systems reengineering takes place. But if a whistle-blowing culture is nonexistent or corruption within the organisation is deeply entrenched and systemic, then efforts to introduce a service delivery charter will amount to no more than window dressing.

Figure 11. Theory of change analysis for service delivery charters

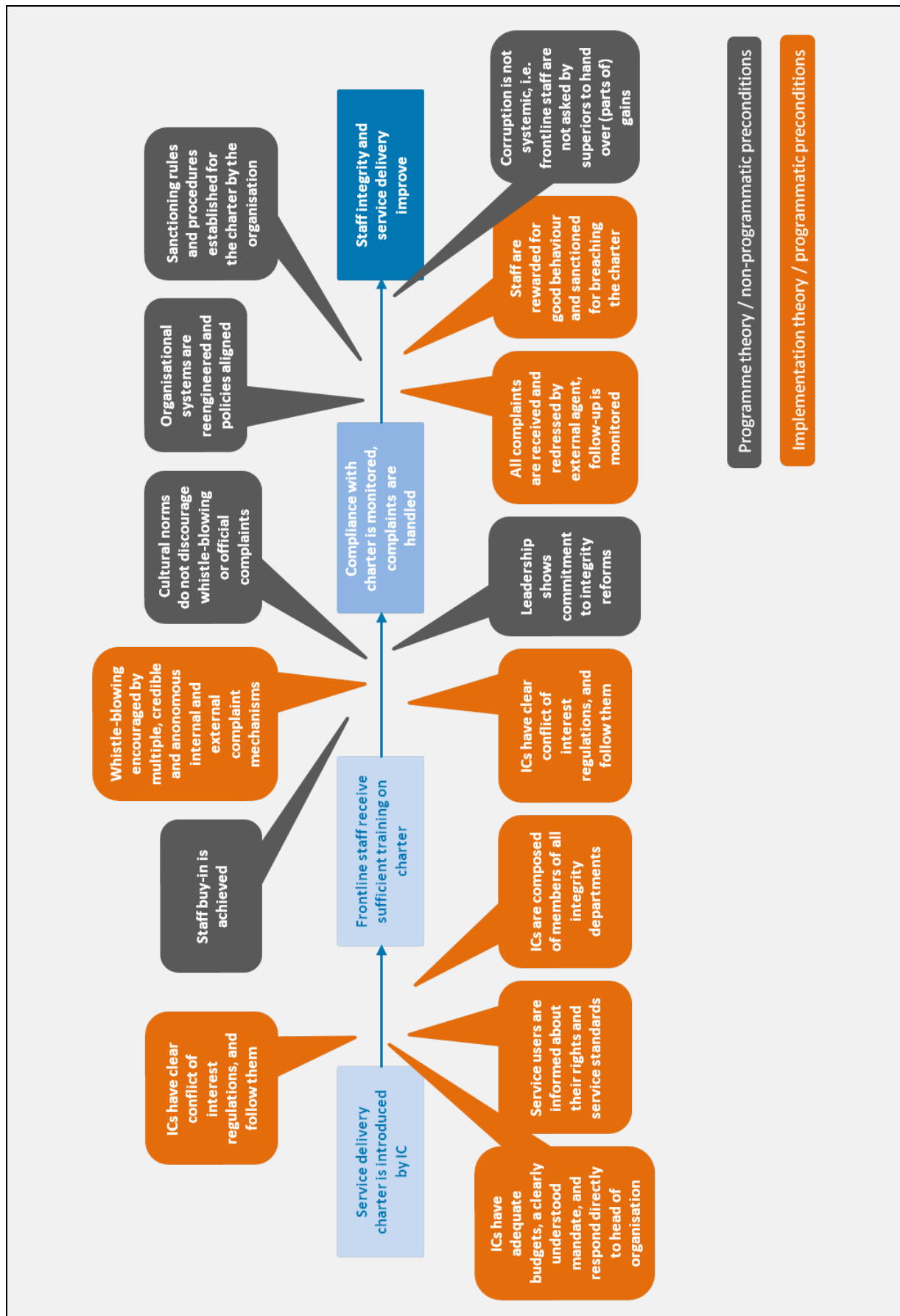


Figure 12. Redesigning the process with theory of change analysis

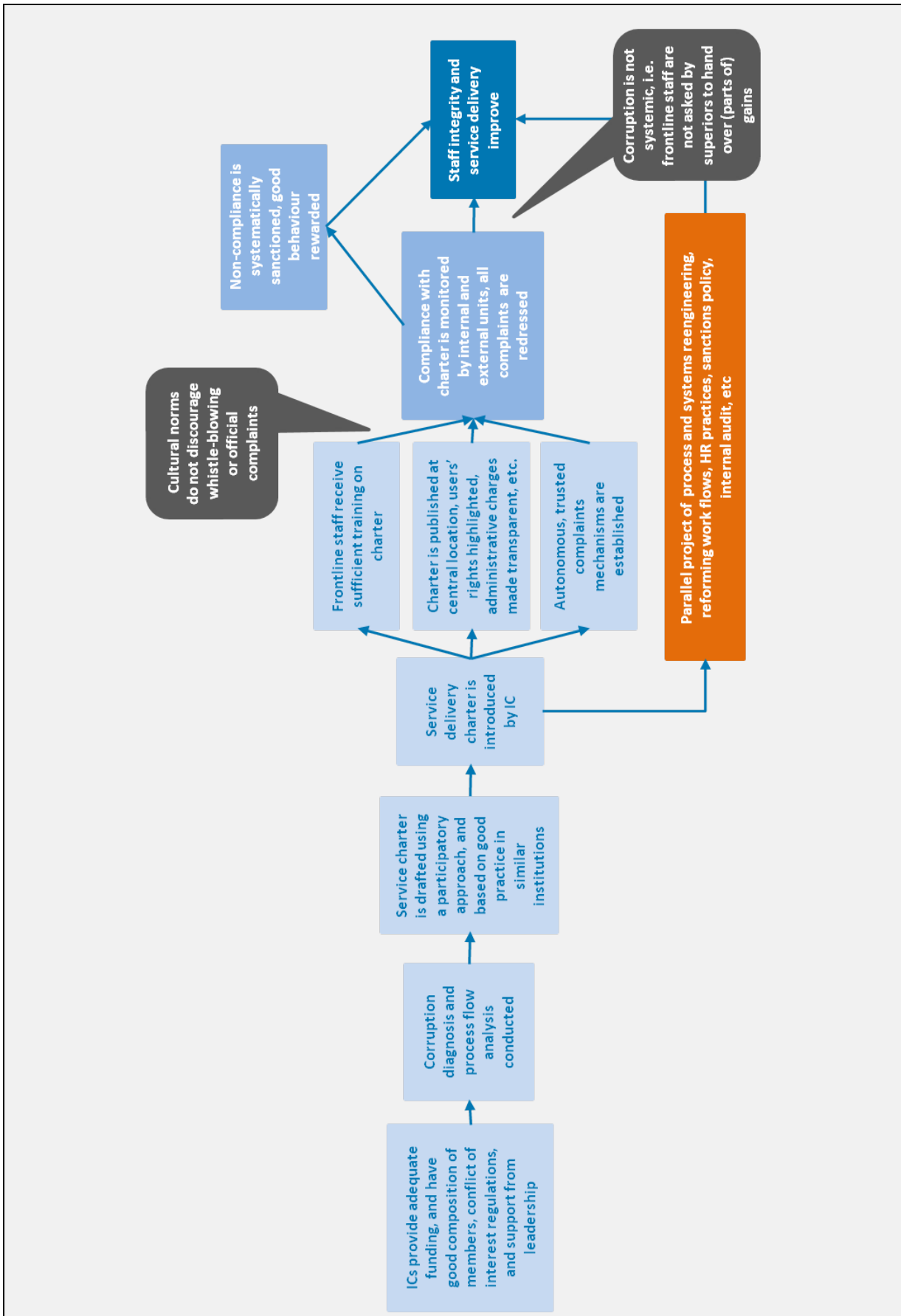


Figure 12 shows how implementers could work on removing these obstacles in order to construct a stronger ToC. All programmatic preconditions have been transformed into components of the project, and where possible the non-programmatic preconditions have been addressed by complementary projects. The progress of these complementary projects, as well as the remaining non-programmatic preconditions, should be monitored to assess their effect on results.

The ToC in figure 12 is not meant to serve as a blueprint for reform. Its purpose is to show the complex causal pathways that a seemingly simple reform such as a service delivery charter will have to travel to be effective in some contexts. It also shows the interdependence of multiple reforms. The parallel project of process and systems reengineering is crucial for making the ToC credible.

4.4.4 Recommendations for future interventions

The analysis showed that reforms and instruments that appear quite straightforward superficially often prove complex to implement if transformational change is the objective, particularly if the objective is not only to increase public sector effectiveness but also to reduce leakage and corruption. The PMEC project produced clear benefits for the government, but the benefits could potentially have come sooner if both technical and non-technical obstacles to implementation had been addressed at an early stage. A major lesson is that one should not underestimate the importance of political will in driving reforms, even those that appear to be merely technical. Nor should one underestimate the power of vested interests to block them.

Another lesson emerging from the analysis is the interdependency of reforms. Given the lack of data, no conclusive judgment can yet be passed on the effectiveness of the service delivery charters. But it was the author's impression that the charters have only really had an impact where they have been introduced as part of a broader reform agenda, not as a stand-alone measure.

The issue of a "critical mass" of reforms is still poorly understood. However, the comprehensive approach used by USAID's Zambia Threshold Project, which invested significant resources in a few institutions, seems more promising than an attempt to roll out service delivery charters in all public institutions at once, including those where an enabling environment is not present. The PSM programme also changed its approach following the 2009 midterm report, merging two separate programme components into a single, comprehensive "institutional appraisal/organisational development" approach. The introduction of ICs adds another important piece to the puzzle. However, the activities of the ICs remain largely uncoordinated with other PSM reforms. Both a midterm review of the Public Sector Reform Programme and the JEACE Zambia report find that USAID's integrated approach appears more effective (the Zambia Threshold Project ended in 2008). In short, integrated and holistic approaches to reform seem to have more credible ToCs than stand-alone initiatives.

Finally, a note on process reengineering. This tool is sometimes referred to as a way to promote integrity in public institutions. The main objective is always to increase overall efficiency, but the idea is that greater efficiency will in turn lead to fewer opportunities for corrupt behaviour. The overall ToC thinking is that one can reengineer systems and processes so they minimize opportunities and incentives for corruption, often by minimizing discretion in decision making by civil servants. Greater efficiency sometimes leads to greater integrity, but not always. For process reengineering to have a ToC for anti-corruption, clear goal statements, outcomes, and indicators relating to "leakage" are important.

In short, the analysis led to the following recommendations:

- Anti-corruption outcomes cannot be assumed to flow automatically from public sector reforms concerned with general efficiency gains. Set specific anti-corruption objectives and develop ToCs for anti-corruption outcomes.

- Be specific as to how anti-corruption/integrity measures can lead to behavioural and transformational change. Assign outcome-level indicators to track process.
- Recognise that simple integrity tools such as codes of conduct and service delivery charters need to be embedded in a larger process of change to be effective. Recognise the interdependency and complementarity of reforms.
- Do not underestimate factors such as political will and vested interests, even for what appear to be very technical reforms.

5. Conclusion

A recurrent obstacle to the effective design, implementation, and evaluation of anti-corruption programmes is that theories about the path from input to impact often are not made explicit, and the preconditions for success often are not addressed. In order to make complex reforms work in a highly political environment, it is good to have a road map—ideally one that identifies critical junctures and dangerous passages. Constructing a theory of change forces programme designers and implementers to make explicit their assumptions about expected performance, ensuring that no critical preconditions for success are ignored. This can improve the realism of programme design, which in turn can increase the impact of the intervention. Stronger theories of change for anti-corruption projects will mean stronger evidence-based evaluations and impact statements and a greater return on investment in anti-corruption interventions.

ToCs matter at three different stages of the project cycle: (a) the design stage, where ToCs can be used to focus the design, test assumptions, and communicate with stakeholders on the working modalities and objectives of the programme; (b) the implementation stage, where ToCs guide strategic management, monitoring, and data collection efforts; and (c) the evaluation stage, where ToCs are used as evaluation frameworks and can help explain causal mechanisms and lessons learned.

A distinction should be made between grand theories, programme theories, and implementation theories. Grand theories structure and give meaning to programme and implementation theories. A major constraint for practitioners is that no grand theories for how to fight corruption have been proven to work across different contexts. Thus, few grand theories in the area of anti-corruption exist for policy makers and programme implementers to draw upon. This makes it even more imperative to scrutinise the implementation theory, i.e., the nuts and bolts of the project design, and test assumptions behind the programme theory, which predicts how the project will bring about behavioural, policy, or organisational change.

There is no universal model for how to conduct a ToC analysis. The methodology presented in this report sought to provide a model suitable for most anti-corruption interventions, in a language familiar to donor officials and development practitioners. The ToC methodology was applied to specific cases in three areas: anti-corruption authorities, civil society work, and public sector reform. In mapping the current practices and obstacles to ToC use, and providing illustrative examples and methodological guidance, the author hopes to help practitioners construct better ToCs and to promote their wider use.

The analysis highlighted a number of benefits of the ToC method. Constructing a ToC makes explicit the preconditions and assumptions embedded in a programme's design, leading to more realistic expectations. It encourages a better sequenced and prioritised approach. It strengthens the focus on behavioural change, moving away from a technocratic and apolitical results chain. Finally, a ToC helps planners identify new entry points for programmes and strategies.

The case studies also highlighted a cross-cutting—and questionable—assumption behind most donor-led governance work: that change can be created with relative few resources in a relatively short period of time. *World Development Report 2011* states that it took the world's 20 fastest-moving countries an average of 27 years to bring corruption under reasonable control (World Bank 2011, 108). Expecting measurable change in corruption levels over the duration of a programme's average lifetime of a few years seems unrealistic against this background. Programmes should therefore focus less on overall corruption levels and more on identifying attainable objectives.

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INDEXING TERMS:

Anti-corruption	Corruption
Evaluation	Design
Theory of change	Methodology
Tool	Evidence
Case study	Theory-based evaluation
Programming	Strategy
Zambia	Malawi

Photo by
Cari Votava

Governments and donor agencies are under increasing pressure to show hard evidence that their interventions are effective and good value for money. Anti-corruption is a challenging field in this regard, with few evidence-based models to draw upon, so both the design and the evaluation of programmes need to be supported by good analytical frameworks. The theory of change (ToC) approach focuses on how and why an initiative works. Constructing a ToC enables government and donor staff to identify the logic underpinning their programmes and clarify how interventions are expected to lead to the intended results. The paper presents a user-friendly five-step methodology for building a theory of change for a programme or project. It highlights the importance of preconditions, factors that must be in place for the intervention to work as intended, distinguishing between those preconditions that can be addressed by the programme design and those that cannot. Finally, the paper provides general and sector-specific guidance based on case studies of programmes in three areas: anti-corruption authorities, civil society work, and public sector reforms. Adding complexity as well as realism, the theory of change methodology is a valuable tool for designing, implementing, and evaluating anti-corruption reforms.