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Overcoming the pitfalls of engaging communities in anti-corruption programmes

By Petra Burai
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www.U4.no
U4@cmi.no

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Effective engagement by communities is a crucial strategy for anti-corruption initiatives. However, encouraging involvement and civic-mindedness at a local level can present challenges for donors and practitioners. Trust, the sense of ownership, and inclusion create and strengthen participation by enabling community members to express their opinions and expectations, and demand accountability from power holders. Feedback plays a pivotal role in successful projects by fostering dialogue between policymakers and citizens.

Main points

- If elites, or powerful state or local leaders, exploit the existing legal and social order for their own benefits, corruption becomes one of the main threats to the rule of law. The expectations of communities regarding the benefits of anti-corruption policies decline if those who commit corrupt acts are not held accountable.
- If the views or perspectives of a community on corruption are disregarded, the success of initiatives to prevent it is impacted. Without focusing on how problems related to corruption affect people’s everyday lives, projects might be easily hindered.
- Being inclusive and integrating marginalised groups into anti-corruption projects is a successful way to prevent elite capture and establish balanced power relations. Organising strong, coherent, and supportive local power networks out of those who otherwise would have been barred from decision-making can concentrate capacities and influence.
- In community development programmes, communities are the ultimate beneficiaries of the outcomes. There is a significant potential in creating a community that works together upon shared identity and interests. Through coordination and a unified approach, they can achieve greater impact.
- In order to be successful, community engagement projects need to incorporate the building of trust at both interpersonal and institutional levels. Dialogue to co-create joint solutions and providing feedback on the impact of citizen input are crucial to maintaining trust and the willingness to engage.

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About the author

Petra Burai

Petra Burai is an associate of the Law & Anthropology Department of the Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology and legal advisor of the European Center for Not-for-Profit Law. She has more than 15 years of experience in contributing to international and government policies and legal regulations, and managing research projects about public participation, transparency, and accountability. Her PhD dissertation on the limitations of anti-corruption laws received the Pro Dissertatione Iuridica Excellentissima Award from the Hungarian Academy of Sciences' Centre for Social Sciences, Institute for Legal Studies.

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Abbreviations

CDC: community development council

CoE: Council of Europe

CRC: Citizen Report Card

CSO: civil society organisation

TI: Transparency International

UNODC: United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime

USAID: United States Agency for International Development

Understanding the challenges of community engagement

The pitfalls of anti-corruption initiatives have been increasingly recognised as a significant problem. While a wide range of approaches exist to combat corrupt practices, including initiatives related to broader good governance, corruption is still with us and more prevalent than ever. At the same time, the obvious discrepancy between the efforts concentrated on corruption and the collective capacity to make a real difference has contributed to the growing apathy and scepticism towards development assistance projects and anti-corruption programmes.[1]

To break this vicious circle, democratisation programmes have increased their support for decentralisation and local initiatives. International bodies and governments have aimed at prioritising the inherent democratic values of community, such as belonging and participation, as drivers of their projects.[2] At the same time, the stakeholders also had to recognise that social context matters more than had previously been anticipated.

Standard project evaluation methods mostly consider social or cultural dynamics as external, over which project donors and civil society organisations (CSOs) have limited – or no – control.[3] As a result, there is a growing need to gain proper insight into and address social traditions that are often seen as the grey area or 'blind spot' of community engagement.

Social sciences, and within the science of anthropology, have long offered explanations on how 'social context' works. Corruption is part of an informal structure, with its own system of accountability. In each community there are victims and beneficiaries of corruption, and these roles may shift depending on the circumstances.

Practices that can be formally characterised as corruption are often not seen as corrupt at all, but as traditional systems of kinship, patron–clientelism, or reciprocity. Moreover, some consider them victimless and lucrative

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1. Heywood 2017.
2. Greenberg 2010.
3. Richards 2006.

transactions because each involved party gains its own benefits or rewards if the exchange is carried out in a mutually satisfactory manner, especially in countries where the elite captures the state and neglects social accountability.

The purpose of this paper is to shine new light on the major assumptions about community engagement by connecting it to the social side of corruption as well as wider anthropological and sociological theories. It aims to develop an understanding of the challenges in designing and implementing such programmes.

The mapping of community engagement projects with the help of anthropology might be useful for two reasons. Firstly, if there is a wide gap between the views of the donors and communities about the social context of anti-corruption initiatives, the programmes clearly miss their target. Secondly, a thorough concept of community and its organisation is needed to promote collective responsibility, ownership, and trust – all of which are key for successful engagement.[4]

The paper begins by introducing the concept of community engagement and highlights the various types of projects it entails. It will then go on to give an overview of the benefits, problems, and counterstrategies by analysing the relevant literature and information gained from practitioners of the subject. Finally, the conclusion gives a brief summary of the emerging concepts and solutions by inserting them into the framework of social accountability.[5]

Researching the success of community engagement projects

The research consists of two methodological pillars: desk research, including literature review; and seven in-depth interviews with renowned practitioners of the field, including donors, intergovernmental bodies, and members of civil society organisations. The paper looks at the insights gained by these respondent experts who have been involved in different types of community engagement projects. The experts were selected to

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4. Mullard 2017.
5. Baez Camargo 2018.

represent the diversity characterising such programmes that either involve general community mobilisation for securing rights and influencing policy change, community engagement in service delivery projects, or goals combining both aspects.

The study relied on grounded theoretical sampling and theoretical saturation, moving from case to case and deciding what data to collect to maximise research opportunities and identify the lessons to be learned. The interviewees work for intergovernmental bodies, as well as international and national CSOs. Following the United Nations' terminology, the latter category of organisations is understood as non-state, not-for-profit, voluntary entities formed by people in the social sphere who are separate from the state and the market.

The respondents live and work on different continents and used different approaches to implement the initiatives. They were specifically chosen to expand the scope of data both in respect of its geographical terms and the experiences derived from their various expertise.

The experts from Kenya and Afghanistan have carried out technical monitoring of development projects in the more classic sense of community engagement. While, the interviewees from international organisations and Romania have focused more on the mobilisation of policies and rights to tackle corruption. They cooperated with professional communities, as well as the business sector and media, to implement open government projects or trainings on public participation.

Semi-structured interviewing allowed enough opportunity and flexibility to outline their professional experiences and reflect upon them in more detail. The experts were asked to describe the engagement projects they have implemented, the successes and obstacles they have faced, and the strategies they chose to overcome the pitfalls. Then the interview focused on the characteristics of the communities they have cooperated with, which community members (typically) participated in the projects, and how they reached out to them. Some of the questions also aimed at exploring what factors the respondents have found to be the most crucial for such programmes to succeed and how those steps were integrated into project design and implementation.

The collected data were then analysed and incorporated into the study by relying on the conceptual framework offered by socio-anthropological disciplines. This approach has allowed a deeper understanding of the traditions and patterns of community engagement that determine the success or failure of anti-corruption policies. The aim of this paper is to bridge the gap between academic knowledge and policy in the field of anti-corruption by providing insight as to what can be learned from anthropology to contribute to the success of anti-corruption interventions.

Defining the concept of community and identifying the different levels of engagement

In community engagement projects, the concept of community is built upon various attributes. In projects run by the World Bank, the term 'community' is principally applied to townships and villages, and their inhabitants, participating in the project.[6] In other development programmes, for example those supported by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) in the Balkans, specific characteristics such as wealth or poverty, gender, age, or disability have been used to define local communities or their specific subsets, including 'vulnerable groups.' To make local governance more authentic and participative, CSOs have been entrusted to represent the interests of the communities.[7]

Expert respondents working on monitoring projects have identified communities based upon the members' shared interests and benefits regarding a particular project. In Kenya, the definition of a community encompassed the people 'around a particular project.' For example, if a school was built, the community was the people who used that school, including the children who attended and all their relatives.[8] In Afghanistan, a community could be a village or neighbourhood that had a shared interest. CSOs worked with communities and collectives that shared resources, or made use of the same services.[9]

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6. World Bank 2013; 2016.
7. Mikuš 2017.
8. Napisa 2019.
9. Afzali 2019.

In more general terms, community engagement is about participation and empowerment for the common good of a community. Programmes built on this concept strive for ‘the active, voluntary involvement of individuals and groups in changing problematic conditions’ in communities to influence ‘the policies and programs that affect the quality of their lives’ and the lives of others.[10] The concept has its origins in the knowledge acquired since the participatory development era began in the 1970s.[11]

Community engagement often overlaps with other democratic concepts, such as public participation or civic engagement, and covers a broad range of activities. To provide greater clarity, scholars have proposed different categorisations:[12]

1. ‘Community participation’ or ‘community engagement’ includes any conduct in daily life where the primary aim is *not* to achieve social change. Instead, the focus is on informal cultural and entertainment activities organised by neighbourhood associations, clubs, parent groups, and other social gatherings. Such projects might also cover community involvement in project planning, selection, monitoring, and evaluation.
2. ‘Socio-political participation’ is more formal and works towards common causes and social change. This category covers ‘conventional political participation’, such as electoral and political campaigning, which also enforces accountability from elected officials.[13]

More theoretically, community engagement projects are often perceived as answers to the collective action theory which aims to replace the shortcomings of the dominant principal–agent theory in anti-corruption strategies. The latter concept describes corruption as occurring in a situation where public officials who have discretion over public services lack accountability and have the opportunity to commit corrupt practices.

Collective action theorists disagree. They argue that the principal–agent theory is misguided in its notion that there will be ‘principled principals’ to stand up against corruption, hold officials accountable, and implement anti-corruption reforms.[14]

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10. Ohmer and Beck 2006, 180.
11. King and Cruickshank 2010.
12. Moreno-Jiménez et al. 2013; Talò 2017.
13. Marín 2016.
14. Persson et al. 2013; Marquette and Peiffer 2015.

Instead, they see corruption as a 'collective action' where it hardly makes sense to get involved as the common opinion is: 'Everybody is corrupt, why should not I be?'.[15] When corruption becomes 'normal', communities and their members are unlikely to abstain from corruption or show willingness to implement policies or sanctions. The collective action theory brings attention to the challenges and pitfalls of coordinated anti-corruption efforts.[16]

Community engagement aims to override not only corrupt personal interests, but also the general social resignation, apathy, and acceptance that surround corruption.

Community engagement aims to override not only corrupt personal interests, but also the general social resignation, apathy, and acceptance that surround corruption. A respondent expert described this challenge:

'When they say, "Yes, people go to jail, but how does that change my life?", we try to convince them that we care about life changing issues.'[17]

In practice, development work and community engagement projects are done mainly 'at the interface between the state and civil society, at the point where representative and participatory democracy meet'.[18] Therefore, it is often difficult to make theoretical distinctions or set categories for the many types of tasks and activities such programmes imply. For instance, tools inspired by the principal–agent theory, such as monitoring and training, still play a central role in most community engagement projects.

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[15] Rothstein and Torsello 2013.

[16] Marquette and Peiffer 2015.

[17] Stefan and Parvu 2019.

[18] Hoggett et al. 2008, 15.

Firstly, donors and governments have found empowered, community-based citizens more capable at addressing corruption in the most effective ways. Secondly, community-focused policies were seen to be more adept at mobilising citizens against corruption.

Intergovernmental bodies, development agencies, and governments have supported the engagement of citizens in development strategies to improve project outcomes and curb corruption.[19] The reasons have been twofold. Firstly, donors and governments have found empowered, community-based citizens more capable at addressing corruption in the most effective ways. Secondly, community-focused policies were seen to be more adept at mobilising citizens against corruption.[20]

For intergovernmental bodies, such as the World Bank, community engagement is a development policy tool and a project design and implementation strategy. It targets poverty and inequality by answering specific needs based upon decentralised common efforts. For mutual benefit, 'effective engagement is necessary across all phases of the investment project, from the initial mapping, consultations with communities, and contract negotiations to the establishment of a grievance mechanism, ongoing community dialogue, and monitoring of both environmental and social impacts'.[21]

In community development programmes, communities are the ultimate beneficiaries of the outcomes.

In community development programmes, communities are the ultimate beneficiaries of the outcomes. They are put in charge of designing and implementing the projects funded by the international bodies and different governments. Through engagement, appropriate training, and support, they get the incentives to choose, manage, and monitor projects efficiently.[22]

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[19] Verdenicci & Hough 2015; Marín 2016.

[20] Verdenicci & Hough 2015.

[21] World Bank 2018, 1.

If we understand technical projects to be at one end of the 'engagement spectrum', then measures that foster social-political participation are at the other. For example, the Council of Europe (CoE) specifically calls upon its member states to 'seek new ways to enhance civic-mindedness' and 'promote a culture of democratic participation shared by communities and local authorities.' Both aspects of engagement are crucial for anti-corruption initiatives.

Civil society organisations (CSOs) play a pivotal role in community engagement. The World Bank, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, and the United Nations have all stressed the importance of partnerships with civil society.[23] The United Nations Convention against Corruption explicitly calls on governments to cooperate with civil society in tackling corruption.

CSOs have widely been seen as essential forms of social capital, as they are assumed to incorporate trust, norms, and networks that can improve society by assisting coordinated actions.[24] When developing and implementing anti-corruption programmes, CSOs are expected to utilise this social capital, promote democratic skills, and enable political participation and involvement in own development, thus playing a significant role in reducing corruption.[25]

Tools and strategies to encourage participation

Several types of community engagement mechanisms and tools have been designed and utilised to counter corruption. This list includes projects described by the respondent experts and other leading examples. However, due to the creativity of anti-corruption activists and organisations all over the world, it is far from exhaustive.

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[22] Ensminger 2017.

[23] Marín 2016.

[24] Putnam 1993.

[25] Griesshaber and Geys 2012.

Citizen charters

Citizen charters inform citizens about their rights and entitlements as service users, and the remedies available to them if the standards (time frame and quality) are not met. Publicly held social audits are monitoring processes through which communities can collect, analyse, and share organisational or project-related information. Such charters have been adopted all over the world. Notably, the World Bank launched the Citizens' Charter Afghanistan Project in 2016 to improve the delivery of core infrastructure and social services to communities through community development councils (CDCs).

Citizen assemblies

Citizens' assemblies are public engagement tools to promote a culture of debate and informed decision-making. For example, in Estonia, after a political corruption scandal in 2012 relating to party financing, the president convened a People's Assembly. Firstly, reform proposals were gathered online, followed by expert analysis and impact assessments. Secondly, people's suggestions were grouped into priority areas that were deliberated over in dedicated thematic roundtables. Finally, a randomly selected group of citizens were brought together to consider and decide which proposals were to be tabled to parliament. As a result, the country reformed party financing and created a permanent mechanism for citizen initiatives. A law now states that if 1,000 people support a certain topic on a designated platform, the parliament is obliged to take that onto its agenda.[26]

Community report cards

Community report cards (or scorecards) assess projects and government performance by analysing qualitative data collected from focus group discussions with community members. Citizens are trained to rate the quality of public services, such as trash collection, access to water, or the quality of education. Ideally, the government then responds to gaps in service delivery, and the citizens report back on the government's measures. The National Taxpayers Association in Kenya developed the Citizen Report Cards (CRCs) as social accountability tools to support citizen engagement in relation to the management of public funds and government service delivery.[27] The Kenyan mechanism was created from the tool developed by the Public Affairs Centre in Bangalore City, which assessed the quality of public services in Southern India.

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[26] Varga 2019.

Participatory budgeting

Through participatory budgeting, citizens participate directly in the related decision-making process and budget execution.[28] Projects supporting public decision-making and budget monitoring have become popular all over the world. For example, the city of Madrid runs Decide Madrid, where citizens receive feedback on their input from their peers as well as the city. Their proposals can be tracked, and the city even has a dedicated budget for these publicly designed and supported developments.[29]

Open data programmes

Open data programmes are developed to encourage communities to use data to tackle problems, represent interests, advocate, or hold local governments accountable.[30] In the United States, the socalled Tactical Data Engagement framework by Sunlight Foundation has been designed to catalyse open data's use for problem-solving by going beyond merely publishing data, policies, and portals.

Integrity pacts

Transparency International's (TI) Integrity Pacts rely on written agreements between the government and private bidders to refrain from bribery and collusion during public procurement procedures. Such projects operate an independent monitoring system by civil society. Integrity Pacts have been applied in more than 15 countries and 300 separate situations.[31]

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27. Napisa 2019.
28. Baez Camargo 2018.
29. Varga 2019.
30. Sturgill 2019.
31. Transparency International 2019; Marquette and Peiffer 2015.

The benefits of community engagement projects

Community engagement projects are developing in different shapes and sizes, and practitioners, CSOs, and donors report of positive experiences being gained on the ground. According to the respondent experts, such notable benefits include:

Social basis for anti-corruption work

Community engagement initiatives create a solid social basis for anti-corruption work. No project is sustainable without reaching the constituency. Increasing the constituency also means taking the time to involve people and educate them so they can act later on as an agent of change in their own communities.[32]

Community engagement initiatives create a solid social basis for anti-corruption work.

Broader spectrum of remedies

Community engagement provides a broader spectrum of possible remedies and public control over solving common problems. It is often more important to infuse anti-corruption elements into public service delivery projects than to focus on anti-corruption as a singular issue.

If, for example, construction projects are designed together with citizens, it is less likely that corruption will occur during their implementation. This is due to the inherent openness of authorities to involve the public, and promote enhanced public ownership and the benefits that arise from it.[33] Such sense of ownership also provides more sustainability. Community members are more likely to continue using and maintaining the project products from their own resources, because they care for them.[34]

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[32] Stefan and Parvu 2019.

[33] Varga 2019.

[34] Napisa 2019.

Authenticity and legitimacy

Community engagement builds authenticity and legitimacy for the projects**.** Getting local people involved provides more authentic information and adds legitimacy to a project. Communities are the ones who really know what is happening.[35]

Connecting activists

Community engagement projects connect isolated activists. Anti-corruption activists are often alone with no support. Community engagement creates an environment where community members can feel confident in expressing their concerns. Building a network of people who think alike, and bringing them together from time to time, may produce 'extraordinary feedback'.[36]

Improve service delivery

Community engagement projects improve the quality of service delivery. Through community engagement, the quality of the projects and services can improve significantly. For example, Integrity Watch Afghanistan, which carries out community-based monitoring of construction, education, and court operation in the country, has monitored 12,066 projects since starting its work in 2006. According to their statistics, the rate of solved problems compared to the number of problems they have identified up until recently is 78%.[37]

Increased accountability

Community engagement increases the accountability of public authorities and service delivery companies. Community engagement projects may ensure that government and other service providers (including contractors) are accountable to the public, and that the community has a voice against corruption and prevents it whenever it can.[38]

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[35] Földes 2019.

[36] Stefan and Parvu 2019.

[37] Afzali 2019.

[38] Afzali 2019.

Problematic elements of the community engagement concept

Intergovernmental bodies and international CSOs have put community engagement at the forefront of their initiatives. For example, with regard to urban law enforcement the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) stresses that ‘engagement, communication and participation of all the relevant local stakeholders remain among the most important tools for city officials to foster inclusive, resilient and law-abiding societies.’

In principle, anti-corruption policies denote an ethical, reflexive, and socially responsive approach. They should motivate interaction between policymakers and communities, and be created to understand and respond to their needs, views, and expectations.[39]

In reality, anti-corruption initiatives and community engagement projects, as they seek to ensure that assistance is not misused by those with power and influence, often face serious challenges and pitfalls. According to AidData and The Institute for the Theory and Practice of International Relations, when it comes to turning policies and regulations into actual steps and measures ‘anti-corruption stands apart as the policy domain with highest level of (net) domestic opposition to reform and the worst track record of reform implementation’.[40]

In some countries with a high level of corruption, the problem became even more exposed while the initiatives aiming to curb it were being implemented. Approaches based on the collective action theory were described as having failed for several reasons. If the authorities imposed rules without effective monitoring and sanctioning, the measures did not transform to generally recognised social norms. More likely, they became attractive to those wishing to deceive because of the relative low risk of being caught. Increased transparency also revealed more corruption. On the one hand, this made people even more aware of the problem; on the other, it opened the door for yet more non-corrupt actors to take part in corrupt practices.[41]

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39. Johnston 2018.
40. AidData 2015, 13.
41. Persson et al. 2013.

Since the 1990s the support offered by civil society was seen as essential in boosting social demand for anti-corruption measures and good governance. However, recently this type of support has become the subject of serious public debate and organisations find themselves facing serious integrity challenges.[42] Alongside disenchantment with the principle of transparency and scandal fatigue, a certain level of scepticism regarding civil society and international bodies developed.[43] Most of these issues have found their way into the populist narrative, questioning their legitimacy.[44]

This trend continues despite the billions of dollars invested in anti-corruption programmes.[45] Though tackling corruption has become an 'industry' in its own right,[46] the related community engagement programmes, according to previous studies, mostly fail for the same wrongs they aim to tackle in the first place:

Corruption and elite capture of the projects

Corruption can become part of the project culture because of, among others, lack of information, poor training about the rights of participants, and weak ability to choose tasks and leaders, or monitor staff and those in charge and to blow the whistle about irregularities. Programmes become particularly prone to corruption if they are coerced by the project implementers who utilise them for their private interest.

For example, in Kenya's Arid Lands Resource Management Project (1996–2010) it was shown that only a handful of carefully selected people actually benefited from the funds provided by the development programme. Most of the beneficiaries were either community development council officials or people associated with them. In each of the participating communities almost all of the funds were embezzled.[47]

'Design-reality gaps' between expectations and on-the-ground realities

As Heeks and Mathisen underline,

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[42] Heeks and Mathisen 2012.

[43] Okolloh 2019.

[44] Brechenmacher and Carothers 2018.

[45] Marquette and Peiffer 2015.

[46] Sampson 2017.

[47] Ensminger 2017.

'All anti-corruption designs contain within them an inscribed "world-in-miniature" which we may call requirements or assumptions or expectations about the context into which the initiative is going to be deployed. This includes inscriptions about the technology that will be available; about the values that people will have; about organizational culture; about work processes and structures; and so forth.'[48]

If the gap between the perceptions of the designer and the world of the users is too wide, the project is heading for a fall.

Lack of understanding of local power structures

For example, in Uganda a study showed that the motives of individual actors are often influenced by the interests of the social groups to which they belong, as well as patronage based on kinship and community origin. For external actors aiming to implement reform policies such complex networks are almost impossible to map.[49]

Co-optation risks

Anti-corruption mechanisms focusing on citizen engagement can lose direction or be abused easily. In such cases, political or personal agendas undermine the public interest in order to achieve personal gain.[50] When public budgeting was introduced in São Paulo, the government co-opted the project to legitimate its own policies, as the 'participatory decision-making process was grafted onto an existing political-spoils system'.[51]

Induced citizen engagement

Sole reliance on induced community engagement might not result in successful projects, since it is unlikely to build long-lasting cohesion at the community level. Similar types of people tend to form groups with one another; thus programmes do not strengthen cross-group cohesion.[52]

Lack of inclusion erodes engagement

If the attention paid to the mechanisms involving marginalised groups is insufficient, as was shown in the case of engagement projects in Australia,

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48. Heeks and Mathisen 2012, 541.
49. Fjeldstad 2006.
50. Verdenicci and Hough 2015.
51. Wampler 2010, 189.
52. Mansuri and Vao 2013.

the project is no more than a one-way instrument to put through the government's agenda without real conversation. Similarly, labelling previously used consultation and information processes as 'community engagement projects' hollows out the concept.[53]

Practitioners and CSO experts who participated in the interviews have encountered several other problems during the implementation of community engagement projects:

Mindset: pessimism, scepticism, and radicalism

Regardless of their geographical location, many community members seemed to feel that themes related to corruption were highly sensitive and contradicting. Generally, experts distinguished three groups within communities. The first consisted of those who were motivated to be active, because it would lead to improvement. The second group was very sceptical about the things that could be changed, and the third group consisted of those people who refused to engage.[54]

People also came with a limited, but radicalised, knowledge that was heavily influenced by the media and politics. In Romania, CSOs had difficult times in challenging the mindsets and flawed information shared by some communities, and in opening a balanced discussion.[55] In Afghanistan, community engagement specialists had to overcome the general pessimism – people thinking there is no point in doing anything or contributing to community interest as nothing is going to change.[56]

Power asymmetry within communities

When monitoring community engagement projects in Afghanistan, the implementers had to pay careful attention to ensure that community representatives did not speak just for a certain individual or a group that dominated the whole community.[57]

In Kenya, some community leaders, on occasions, did not want their projects to be assessed. So they would mobilise citizens to hinder the project monitoring. Exerting their power, they issued threats to scare away people who volunteered to carry out monitoring tasks, or made community members write reports that were not accurate. Reports were also falsified to damage the reputation of the monitoring organisation. Even if, despite the obstacles, truthful reports were drafted, some leaders did everything they could to stop their publication.[58]

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[53] King and Cruickshank 2010.

[54] Hrvolova 2019.

[55] Stefan and Parvu 2019.

[56] Afzali 2019.

[57] Afzali 2019.

Powerful landlords, community power holders, and aggressive local officials have, in some cases, also tried to make it difficult to implement community engagement projects in Romania.[59]

Insecurity

In certain geographical areas, such as Afghanistan, insecurity counts as one of the major problems of community engagement projects. The respondent CSO was only able to go to secure areas where it was safe to work with the community.[60]

Lack of meaningful connections and trust between project implementers and communities

If the views or perspectives of a community are disregarded, it can become unapproachable. Without focusing on how problems related to corruption affect people’s everyday lives and highlighting the connections, projects might be derailed easily.[61] In some communities in Kenya, people had to be educated that the money that had been used in construction projects actually came from their own pockets. After it was explained how the state budget and tax system worked, they understood that it was their money which was being used and the reason why they needed to engage.[62]

Finding the right connections and communicating effectively were crucial. Frequent causes of unsuccessful projects are the lack of cooperation from local CSOs, no knowledge of the local language, and difficulties in identifying the right authorities and officials to involve.[63]

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58. Napisa 2019.
59. Stefan and Parvu 2019.
60. Afzali 2019.
61. Varga 2019.
62. Napisa 2019.
63. Földes 2019.

The ‘usual suspects’ problem

CSOs regularly face the problem that there are only some people in local communities who want to get involved in their projects, and quite often other CSOs already work with those people.[64] It is always easier to engage with those community members who are interested in such projects, especially if the topic is difficult to understand. According to the experts’ experiences, project participants tend to be more affluent and educated citizens, who are often better informed or aware of why and how corruption erodes public trust and undermines welfare. Therefore, the more difficult challenge is how to engage those who live under less affluent conditions or are otherwise disadvantaged, especially as corruption affects them more severely.[65]

Missing capacities within the community

Community engagement focuses on teaching locals how to use the tools and knowledge that are already at their disposal against corruption and bad governance. However, training needed to be redesigned when basic capacities, such as computer literacy, were missing. As a Romanian expert described it, ‘We’ve had the expectation that we go there and tell them technical things about what public procurement looks like and how you look at political financing, but they did not know how to use Excel’.[66]

Lack of access to information

Initially, in both Kenya and Afghanistan, restricted access to information was a key obstacle to project implementation. In Kenya, community engagement experts have often faced double standards when being provided with project documentation. For example, papers they received from the authorities were different from the official project description that state bodies worked with.[67] In Afghanistan, the situation improved significantly after the Access to Information Law was passed in 2014.[68]

Inadequate implementation and sustainability of policies and laws

Publishing information, creating databases, making data open, and adopting a law on freedom of information are all crucial steps, but they may not be sufficient. According to the respondent experts, these will not necessarily encourage people to get involved and start using the information.[69] Similarly, the experts found it problematic that policymakers and project designers tend to think that once a law or a measure is adopted, or an institution is created, it takes care of itself; in reality, it does not happen like that.[70]

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[64] Stefan and Parvu 2019.
[65] Varga 2019.
[66] Stefan and Parvu 2019.
[67] Napisa 2019.
[68] Afzali 2019.

In Kenya, undermining sustainability happened at a more personal level. After presenting the results of the projects, some community leaders wanted to withdraw the revealing reports and destroy them before many people could read and understand them – pretending that the project never happened.[71]

Lack of feedback

Closely connected to sustainability, deficient feedback to communities was found to be a significant pitfall of such projects. As a respondent expert emphasised,

'We've seen countless of times that people do get excited and take part in community engagement projects only to see that very little happens in the end and the government does not even tell them why. This is a recipe to lead to consultation fatigue or a complete loss of interest.'[72]

The limits of local actions

Grand corruption and captured states create specific obstacles for community engagement projects. If corrupt practices become systemic, sporadic local initiatives are unlikely to provide a comprehensive solution. As a respondent expert argued,

'It's like having pneumonia and using topical antibiotics on the skin of your hand. Local collective actions are important complementary tools to push for and maintain change, but there is always a risk of relapse.'[73]

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69. Varga 2019.
70. Stefan and Parvu 2019.
71. Napisa 2019.
72. Varga 2019.
73. Nosko 2019.

Challenges, lessons, and counterstrategies

Though the experts' answers accentuate their personal dilemmas in light of the specific social and political contexts they work in, the issues presented also epitomise the challenges that anti-corruption practitioners and community engagement specialists face on a daily basis all over the world.

The concept of corruption and the definition dilemma

Corruption, in very general terms, might be defined as the act of giving and receiving advantage in illegitimate or exploitative contexts. According to Transparency International's rather pragmatic approach, it is the abuse of entrusted power for private gain. It can be classified as grand, petty, and political, depending on the amounts of money lost and the sector where it occurs. In many traditional cultures and a rising number of politically captured states, relationships and exchanges based on the advantage or gain have been or become the source of power.[74]

Anthropologists have long emphasised that the definition of corruption is community dependent. Some authors have defined concerned acts and customs as 'naturalised' or 'legalised' corruption. Applying the already established international definitions of corruption to the local context, they perceived such practices as exemptions from moral and legal responsibility. For example in former communist countries, such as Romania, corruption was described as a legitimised everyday game of exchanges that everybody played in an unregulated public sphere with personalised tactics for short-term benefits and disregard for the long-term social and political consequences.[75]

Other researchers, rather than considering the Western notion of corruption, showed that traditional communities in different parts of the world had always been aware of what was corrupt and not, but in their own terms. In the Pacific region, communities had their own perception about what corruption entails and it depended on whether a relationship was being exercised for a legitimate purpose or for a corrupt context of domination and obligation.[76] Consequently, the success of anti-corruption strategies was determined by the legitimacy of any distinction made within the community and how community members evaluated their own practices.[77]

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[74] Findlay 2007.

[75] Rivkin-Fish 2005; Zerelli 2005; Sedlenieks 2004.

Furthermore, in countries under political transition or in turmoil, finding their own values has been particularly relevant if social structures and the legal system were in a constant flux. Where 'official' norms and policies have been changing persistently, communities were keen to find stability and reliability in their mutually shared norms and personal relations, which they never considered to be corrupt.[78]

The community's approach to the concept of corruption has very much shaped community engagement projects as well. In Romania, the challenge was that people tended to include much more in the definition of corruption 'than there actually was'.[79] Therefore, there is the risk of corruption becoming an undistinguishable target and a catch-all term to cover virtually any negative or 'unjust' behaviour.[80]

In line with the findings about naturalised corruption, in some Central and Eastern European countries potential project stakeholders admitted that, for them, corruption was just a way of doing business. Therefore, they were not willing to engage with civil society on the issues of democracy, rule of law, and governance.[81] In Afghanistan, there have been some prevalent norms within society – such as helping each other's relatives or bonds within community – that sometimes resulted in ignoring corruption, or even in undertaking corrupt practices.[82]

Interestingly, regardless of geography, the respondent experts have overcome the definition dilemma by elevating community engagement projects beyond conceptualising corruption. As one expert mentioned:

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76. Findlay 2007.
77. Sissener 2001.
78. Burai 2016.
79. Stefan and Parvu 2019.
80. Heywood 2017.
81. Hrvolova 2019.
82. Afzali 2019.

'You do not fight corruption by fighting corruption, it is often not even necessary to put the "corruption" label on projects, letting it enter the discourse.'[83]

In Romania, projects were deliberately not oriented towards only corruption, but also the wider concept of bad governance.[84] In Afghanistan, corruption was seen as a risk of external contractors restricting community interest, and therefore not a problem within communities. By focusing on communities instead of individuals and electing representatives to stand for their interests in dedicated community councils, they reduced the chances of misuses by powerful individuals, because the whole community was mobilised.[85]

What makes and breaks community engagement: the sense of ownership

Locality or the common use of public services were only some of the factors that constructed communities in engagement projects, but what determined the initiatives' success were shared interests. Social sciences have emphasised that communities represent a broader relationship of solidarity over individual self-interests by sharing both benefits and misfortunes.[86] The feeling of solidarity, as well as identity, comes from a sense of belonging and, in the case of the projects in question, ownership.[87]

As the Kenyan expert explained, people participated and continued to use the project products because they experienced a sense of ownership.

'People were able to say, "This is our project and we take the right project after it has been implemented." They continued to use the schools and hospitals and run them from their own resources, because they felt they were theirs.'[88]

The sense of ownership does not come automatically. It rests on a rationally motivated adjustment of interests or a similarly motivated rational agreement upon mutual consent.[89] According to the practitioners, in community engagement projects the sense of ownership could be increased through several steps. First and foremost, as an expert underlined,

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[83] Varga 2019.
[84] Stefan and Parvu 2019.
[85] Afzali 2019.
[86] Parsons 1968.
[87] Brow 1990.
[88] Napisa 2019.

'If you can get a shared understanding with the local community what the problem is, if there is actually a problem, and people can see the problem, then you can try to figure out a solution.'[90]

Another respondent pointed out that projects need to embrace issues that directly affect people's lives, providing assistance to use public information in more effective ways, showing results, and giving coherent feedback.[91]

The role of the CSOs in that process was twofold. Firstly, they had to guide and educate the communities to arrive at a common and informed decision without actually taking charge.

'We give capacity to these people to work on their own. The main task is making them do the job.'[92]

Secondly, in many cases they were translators of national or international polices and laws who trained communities about corruption, bad governance, and related rights and obligations.

Solutions to corruption practices are often highly complex and technical.[93] Translation of the multiple and fluid policies had to be done in an authentic, comprehensible, and reflexive manner, so that communities could apply the knowledge to their local context and make the best use of it.[94] In this way the experts and CSOs could avoid communities considering democratic policies as elitist, morally suspect, or disempowering.[95]

Technology and social media have expanded the role and tasks of CSOs as translators. Beyond giving training about the relevant laws and policies, they also need to provide communities with tools and skills that allow them to understand and filter populist rhetoric and misinformation campaigns built around the anti-corruption agenda.[96]

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[89] Weber 1978.
[90] Nosko 2019.
[91] Varga 2019.
[92] Stefan and Parvu 2019.
[93] Nosko 2019.
[94] Lendvai and Stubbs 2007.
[95] Greenberg 2010.

Creating communities through engagement

Taking a step further, many anti-corruption projects have created and engaged their own specialised communities. As a Romanian expert emphasised, ‘You are creating communities of transformers. Local communities are there, but a community of people who are changing communities is not a given. Those communities do not exist’.[97] The examples given by the respondents have been diverse. To achieve tangible impact, teachers in Romania have been trained in so-called Democracy Schools to engage in local community issues and use the democratic tools that are available to demand change.

On an international level, Transparency International has built a partnership called Global Anti-Corruption Consortium with the professional community of journalists of the Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project. TI and the investigative journalists work together regardless of location. In each case, five or more nationalities collaborate to put together the pieces of the story. Small cases might need four to five journalists, while medium-sized and larger ones need more resources. For example, investigating Golden Visa cases involved 20 to 25 media outlets from 15 to 20 countries, and the case of the Panama Papers scandal required 200 people to work together.[98]

> *A community that works together upon shared identity and interests, and through coordination and a unified approach, can achieve greater impact.*

The Center for International Private Enterprise has been cooperating with local partners to engage businesses in supporting civil society to realise its democratic efforts. It has also strived to create a community that works together upon shared interests because through coordination and unified approach, they could achieve greater impact.[99]

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[96] Stefan and Parvu 2019.

[97] Stefan and Parvu 2019.

[98] Földes 2019.

These projects, of course, represent only the tip of the iceberg in terms of the many types of community engagement projects aiming to tackle corruption. At the same time, they also show that constructing communities can be just as effective as working with existing ones. There is a significant potential in generating trust and cooperation, and building sustainable communities out of professional or social networks upon shared identity and interests.

Harnessing inclusion to tackle the ‘usual suspects’ problem and elite capture

Research suggests that in community-driven anti-corruption projects, participants are wealthier, are better educated, and hold a higher social status. They are also better connected through families, peer groups, and networks.[100] This may be due to the fact that community members with higher incomes are likely to be more invested in community stability and sustainability. Therefore they are keener to engage in professional local planning and development.[101]

Empowered, community-based citizens are more capable at addressing corruption in the most effective ways, and community-focused policies are more likely to mobilise citizens against corruption.

In the chain of ‘usual suspects’, international donors mostly choose trusted CSOs that have already proved their competence; while national CSOs often work with the same contacts at a local level.

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99. Hrvolova 2019.
100. Verdenicci and Hough 2015.
101. Zanbar and Ellison 2019.

‘If they are reputable, they are more likely than other informal or emerging networks to gain trust.’[102]

According to anthropological findings, CSOs are in definite need of support as their employees and activists participating in such projects typically come from the middle classes that concentrate educational, cultural, and social capital but usually lack economic resources or power of their own. On the one hand, they are committed to social progress as a fundamental, but non-material, value of their work. On the other, due to the financial dependency, they are forced to address the changing priorities of donors. This often leads to donor-driven agendahopping.[103]

These generalised characteristics of the project participants have two ramifications. Firstly, even if community engagement projects are designed to be inclusive, in reality there is a high risk that they result in elite capture. Inequality within communities weakens the ability of many members to contribute to such programmes.[104] Furthermore, if the network that the project participants form and rely on is exclusive and focuses on the interests of its members instead of the whole community, investments supporting civic engagement may not have the desired effect.[105]

Secondly, if successful, anti-corruption measures may eliminate significant informal income, thus creating winners and losers at both ends of society.[106] This often-forgotten context makes anti-corruption projects unique and, at the same time, highly sensitive among community engagement initiatives. The level of participation, and subsequently the success of the programmes, clearly depends on both the short- and long-term prospects of community members with very different social standings.

To overcome those problems, the respondent experts have highlighted the importance of paying particular attention to inclusion during the implementation of community engagement projects. In Afghanistan, while each project begins with reaching out to the local community development council, CSO experts also try to include representatives of the broader community, such as youth councils or marginalised people who do not have

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102. Hrvolova 2019.
103. Mikuš 2017.
104. Verdenicci and Hough 2015.
105. Griesshaber and Geys 2011.
106. Heeks and Mathisen 2012.

a voice in the existing structure. They are present at the event where the volunteer community representatives tasked with monitoring the process are introduced. They make sure that the election is transparent and the whole community agrees with the decision.[107]

Inclusion has denoted the importance of balanced participation in terms of both gender and age. In Kenya, the respondent expert found that it was mostly women who engaged in the projects related to water and health facilities, as 'men did not understand the challenges of those facilities that women understood'.[108] Though young people were more reluctant to take part, when they did get involved, the projects also had a stronger echo through local assemblies and demonstrations.[109]

The involvement of young people has produced considerable results in other parts of the world as well. For instance, in Italy the government decided to make the data on one million projects and 100 billion euros worth of funding from European Union Cohesion Funds available online. In addition to many other projects, a school programme called A Scuola di OpenCoesione was launched. A network of schools was created that trained thousands of students on how to use the information to monitor completion of investments in their very own schoolyards or neighbourhoods.[110] European examples showed that, in aging societies, engaging elderly and pensioner communities through innovative projects has helped them to fight abusive power that was relevant to their own lives.[111]

Power relations and government support

Communities do not exist in a political or economic vacuum; they are connected through various links to the larger society and the state.[112] Therefore, power relations within the community and society at large, as well as the attitude of the authorities, have a decisive impact on the outcome of community engagement projects. As the primary aim of community engagement is to empower local citizens to participate in public affairs, if official support is lacking then efforts might become limited, even irrelevant, or in some cases counterproductive.[113]

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[107] Afzali 2019.

[108] Napisa 2019.

[109] Napisa 2019.

[110] Varga 2019.

[111] Nosko 2019.

[112] Watts 2000.

If we understand ‘local’ to be the proximity to decision makers and the capacity to influence decisions on priorities regarding the use of public or international development support, we also have to recognise the potential negative consequences such closeness entails for participating in anti-corruption projects. As an expert noted regarding local businesses:

‘They are typically more vested [in the programmes], they have more interest in local democratic governance, but they can be at a greater risk of being affected by certain actions of local governments.’[114]

In terms of power relations, the situation becomes even more complex in captured states and areas severely affected by globalisation. State capture and the overt use of power present an evident risk for anti-corruption programmes. If elites, or powerful state or local leaders, exploit the existing legal and social order for their own benefits, corruption becomes one of the main threats to the rule of law.[115]

At the same time, a matter of growing concern to both scholars and practitioners is the extent to which public interest can be realised under conditions of corporate and financial globalisation and their local consequences.[116] A respondent expert shared the following negative example:

‘If a local community is affected by globalization, for example, by multinational companies that outpace local suppliers and take the profit away, then corruption might be the only protecting mechanism for a community to make sure that the local contracts go to local suppliers who will actually spend the profit within the community.’[117]

While decentralisation is at the core of community engagement, studies see an emerging risk of over-delegating tasks and competences, which may result in reverse democratic accountability. In this case, communities

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113. Verdenicci & Hough 2015.
114. Hrvolova 2019.
115. Hellman et al. 2000.
116. Shaw 2011.
117. Nosko 2019.

implement state tasks, while being accountable ‘for sorting out the social consequences of economic conditions which are entirely beyond their control’.[118]

When monitoring development projects in Kenya and Afghanistan, communities were chosen from a list produced by the government of the initiatives that had been implemented in a particular province or region. Then the communities were screened in terms of their willingness to participate and, in the case of Afghanistan, security.[119]

Looking at projects in Kenya through the lens of social sciences, power had both positive and negative impact on their.[120] The expert CSO was strategically aiming to establish good relationships with the authorities from the local level up to the national level. When the leadership supported their work, it was significantly easier to engage communities since the members took the projects more seriously. Therefore, when leaders were asked to tell community members to attend the weekly meetings, they made concrete and visible decisions with explicit messages in support of the initiatives.

However, some leaders were far less enthusiastic about being screened and monitored, so tried to mobilise people against the projects or make the final project reports disappear through more obscure channels.[121] This hidden control over (non)decision-making was an equally potent form of asserting power that could decide the fate of the programme.

In Romania, the respondent experts were choosing challenging locations in terms of power relations to fill certain gaps or power vacuums. In some cases, they went to localities where no other programmes were running or not much happened in general. For a project about clientelism, they engaged in regions which were more affected, or with communities where they knew that there were no opposition to holding local leaders accountable and there was a need to engage.[122]

To establish balance over power asymmetries the experts applied different approaches:

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118. Shaw 2011, ii136.
119. Napisa 2019; Afzali 2019.
120. Bachrach and Baratz 1962.
121. Napisa 2019.
122. Stefan and Parvu 2019.

- **Inclusion.** Being inclusive and deliberately integrating less powerful groups within communities into the projects was a successful way to reduce over-domination. Organising strong, coherent, and supportive local power networks from those who would otherwise have been barred from decision-making was a way to concentrate capacities and influence.[123]
- **Access to information.** Freedom of information measures brought about systematic shifts in power relationships, especially regarding the hidden dimension of opaque decision-making. In Afghanistan, one of the most important achievements of the programme was that access to information became an accepted norm in many parts of the country. Subsequently, contractors could no longer refuse to provide information. If they failed to deliver the requested information, the government was obliged to enable access to the documents.[124]
- **Technology.** Simple technological developments, such as mobile phone applications that enabled citizens to monitor government infrastructure projects, could be instrumental to the success of the project. People could report via their phones whether projects had indeed been completed. In Kenya, technology tracked the exact time when the community members had reported, so project team members could interact with them immediately to get accurate information. Such efficiency contributed to preventing corruption, as potential perpetrators could be caught at any time.[125]

In community engagement projects targeting corruption, it was elaborate feedback mechanisms that made a real difference.[126] In Kenya, technology enabled the storing of information for a longer period of time and the ability to publish reports to connect with wider audiences, especially young people who were participating less in the projects.[127]

The role of trust

Community engagement does not work without trust. As an expert respondent stressed, ‘Trust is the main driver of good citizen engagement

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123. Földes 2019.
124. Afzali 2019.
125. Napisa 2019.
126. Varga 2019.
127. Napisa 2019.

and can build power and legitimacy. Without trust it makes no sense to engage, because words, commitments have no weight'.[128]

Community engagement does not work without trust.

According to sociological studies, trust implies two levels of interpretation: the construction of trustworthiness and the action of trust itself.[129] Very simply, trustworthiness establishes trust.[130] Practical experiences have supported this theoretical premise. As an expert respondent described:

'Trust is important, especially because when CSOs from the country capitols come into the countryside wanting to do work there, they are faced with scepticism. People ask questions: Who are these people? What is their motivation? Why are they doing it? This all goes back to the underlying question: does or would the anti-corruption work undermine community cohesion? Thus, you need trust, but you also have to be trustworthy. One way to overcome this is to enable local actors, listen to them about their needs, and provide them with adequate support instead of telling them what to do.'[131]

In order to be successful, community engagement projects need to strategically incorporate and maintain trust at both interpersonal and institutional levels in various relationships. Accordingly, trust should constitute the relations between:

- CSOs and community members
- CSOs and community leaders
- CSOs and authorities
- Community members and their leaders
- Community members and fellow community members

Ideally, these relations form a chain of trust during the implementation of the project. However, one of the most critical pitfalls of community engagement projects lies within the vulnerability of the chain. If, in any of these interactions, mistrust prevails and suspicion hinders making the decision to engage in common action, the whole project is in jeopardy. Though projects are able to engage community members despite the resistance of, for example, the authorities, project participants usually need to invest much more effort, time, and financial sources to produce successful outcomes.

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[128] Varga 2019.

[129] Torsello 2008.

[130] Hardin 1996.

[131] Nosko 2019.

The chain of trust is fragile and can break easily, even in situations that seem to be ideal for community engagement projects. Studies warn that where members are particularly committed to their communities, high levels of trust may create equally high expectations towards their leaders.[132]

Losing trust in state-level leaders as well as local leaders undermines the legitimacy of their initiatives. The expectations of communities regarding anti-corruption policies and their benefits decline if those who commit corruption are not held accountable for their actions.[133] Practitioners found that often it is the state that does not trust its citizens, which might further undermine legitimacy of the programmes.[134]

The preconditions to creating trust are confidence and dispositions that allow community members to take the risk and participate in the project.[135] As the Kenyan expert emphasised:

‘Trust between us and the community was about delivering what we have promised. For example, we promised the community that we would try and get them the right information, and we approached the authority to get that information and give them to those communities.’[136]

In this case, the CSO has demonstrated its trustworthiness by fulfilling the community’s expectations and showing it will be able to do so in the course of the whole project.

Trust within communities has ultimately been bound up with the feeling of self-belief. In Afghani communities where scepticism and apathy prevailed, gaining self-belief was a trigger to take the risk and step up against problems affecting their lives. Self-belief denoted that they could take action against corruption and expect results in exchange.[137]

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[132] Zanbar and Ellison 2019.

[133] Okolloh 2019.

[134] Varga 2019.

[135] Torsello 2008.

[136] Napisa 2019.

In Romania, enthusiasm was identified as the trigger feeling that was vital for the projects to succeed, and was defined as 'really caring about the topic and wanting to do something about it' – despite the pressure put on community members.[138]

The respondent experts have identified two distinctive means to gain and reinforce trust within communities and for the projects:

- **Dialogue.** Dialogue to co-create joint solutions on how to address corruption was seen as a main contributing factor to building trust. In practice, dialogue was a continuous mutual learning process about needs, expectations, and concerns, which factored all of these elements into their final decision-making.[139]
- **Feedback.** Providing feedback on the impact of citizen input, as well as telling participants why their proposals may not have been taken on board, was suggested to be crucial to maintaining trust and the willingness to engage, as it showed people their participation was not in vain.[140]

Conclusion: The lessons learned

Hinting at the diverse characteristics of communities and the projects, a Romanian expert noted, 'There is no rulebook for community engagement.'[141] However, as the findings of this paper have shown, despite the geographical, cultural, and social differences, not only were the problems and pitfalls of community engagement projects strikingly similar, but so were the methods that experts have chosen to overcome them.

All respondent experts have decided, in their own way, to focus on context and social reality over theory and pre-set corruption definitions to make the projects successful. They have recognised and engaged with the real social

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137. Afzali 2019.
138. Stefan and Parvu 2019.
139. Hrvolova 2019.
140. Varga 2019.
141. Stefan and Parvu 2019.

and political dynamics, but without judging whether corruption is ‘normal’ or not.

If we organise their solutions into the main building blocks of social accountability which relate to successful anti-corruption initiatives, we get a comprehensive set of the tools and responsibilities of the concerned project parties.[142]

Voice

Generating and articulating citizens’ voices are vital elements of successful social accountability initiatives to counter corruption. Trust, the sense of ownership, and inclusion create and strengthen participation by enabling community members to express their preferences, opinions, and views, and demand accountability from power holders.

Trust has to be gained and continuously maintained among all actors of the projects by proving trustworthiness. Their relationships and interactions with each other constitute a chain of trust in which the links depend on each other. If trust prevails through meaningful connections, community members will take the risk to speak up and act against corrupt practices.

Building up a solid sense of ownership regarding the projects is a fundamental task. It requires the motivated adjustment of shared interests within the community with the help of CSOs as competent translators of laws, policies, and projects, as well as capacities to filter misinformation. This undertaking does not necessarily need to be overly complex. If communities are involved right from the start of a project and are allowed to decide on the different types of assistance and engagement needed, the adjustment becomes significantly easier.

Inclusion denotes making special efforts to involve community members beyond the ‘usual suspects’ and activists, such as women, young and elderly people, and members of vulnerable groups, which will provide equal chances and stakes in common decisions. Breaking away from the classic concept of communities tied to locality, and expanding the notion to professional networks and other types of organisations formed upon shared interests, might open up new opportunities for anti-corruption engagement.

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[142] Baez Camargo 2018.

Enforceability and risk management

Anti-corruption programmes often focus on risk prevention and the enforcement of sanctions. According to the lessons of the interviews, sustainability and balanced power relations play a pivotal role in the success of such projects. The initiatives rely on longer-term commitments from the project actors, while community members expect sustainable outcomes which do not end with adopting risk prevention mechanisms, policies, reports, or sanctions. Without adequate laws that enable access to information, hidden political decisions affect the implementation of the projects.

Answerability

In successful projects, it is not only the public authorities that need to be answerable. The focus should shift to the importance of feedback which incorporates the exchanges and dialogues between citizens and state bodies, as well as communication between community members and CSOs. Technology can simplify such interactions and make them more efficient at the same time.

To build lasting relationships for sustainable social benefits and outcomes, community engagement strategies need to be tailored to their target groups and their perception of corruption.

To build lasting relationships for sustainable social benefits and outcomes, community engagement strategies need to be tailored to their target groups and their perception of corruption. The specificities and dynamics of the communities should be integral elements of all stages of the project implementation process, including decision-making and the design, governance, and delivery of anti-corruption initiatives.

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Interviews cited

August 21, 2019: Interview with Péter Varga, Senior Regional Coordinator Europe, Open Government Partnership

August 30, 2019: Interview with Ádám Földes, Legal Advisor, Transparency International

September 2, 2019: Interview with Andrej Nosko, manager in non-profit sector and former manager within private philanthropic foundation

September 10, 2019: Interview with Martina Hrvolova, Program Officer, Europe and Eurasia, Center for International Private Enterprise

September 12, 2019: Interview with Sayed Ikram Afzali, Executive Director, Integrity Watch Afghanistan

September 12, 2019: Interview with Laura Stefan and Septimius Parvu, Expert Forum, Romania

September 20, 2019: Interview with Martin Napisa, former National Coordinator for National Taxpayers Association, Kenya