



The role of communication activity in contributing to the reduction of corruption in Sub-Saharan Africa

Robin Richards
Independent Research Consultant
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Question

- To what extent does communication activity (including communication campaigns, media relations) contribute to the reduction of corruption in Sub-saharan Africa?
- What are the lessons learned from using types of communications activity identified to reduce corruption?

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1. Summary

This rapid literature review concentrates on the role of communications activity (including communications campaigns and media relations in contributing to the reduction of corruption in Sub-Saharan Africa. The review also determines if there are any evidence-based examples on the impact of communications (campaigns or related activities) on reducing corruption. Subsidiary questions in the review are to determine if there are any lessons learned from using specific types of communication activity; the types of corrupt practices that communications activity can help to reduce and, if there are any effective communication tools for reducing corruption.

Findings of the review show that there is evidence that communication campaigns have an impact on corruption through reducing bribery and promoting reporting of corruption. However, further research is needed to confirm the sustainability of the impact of such campaigns and interventions. The review also suggests that many of the communication interventions that address corruption are initiated by civil society and some of these are undertaken in collaboration with governments.

The literature was mostly from grey and donor sources. In addition, published papers and reports were used from international development organisations and to a lesser extent academic literature (including books and journal articles). There is a dearth of literature on the impact of communications interventions on corruption and the types of communications that are most effective. There is also little literature or evidence on whether increasing the communication capabilities of government communications units or ministries has an impact on reducing corruption. In addition, the linkages between the types of interventions to fight corruption and which types of interventions have the biggest impact on particular types of corruption is sparse.

The following key points emerge from this review:

- There is consensus that to combat corruption, holistic interventions that include governance and institutional reforms such as improving administrative and bureaucratic processes are necessary (Marquette, 2014;).
- Communication campaigns and other innovative communication tools appear to be useful methods to reduce corruption such as bribery and embezzlement, but there is a need for longitudinal research and further evaluation studies to demonstrate efficacy (See for example, Peiffer and Walton, 2019;)
- Lessons from case studies show that corruption interventions in the form of communication campaigns cannot be once-off exercises but need to be ongoing to have an impact on corruption (Kobis, 2019);
- Indirect and incremental approaches over the medium term rather than direct approaches (such as through once-off interventions) to fight corruption may be more successful. Such indirect approaches include building trust in institutions. However, this does not mean 'blind-faith' in leaders. Trust should be conditional and selective (Marquette, 2014);
- There are no definitive, archetype toolkits for addressing corruption. These need to be tailored to the political and societal context (Johnson, 2010);
- Because of the paucity of academic literature and evaluation studies on the efficacy of anti-corruption campaigns, including media campaigns, it is not possible to conclusively

say which types of interventions are most successful in the fighting of corruption (Marquette, 2014);

- Some literature does point towards the need for capacity building in government agencies, civil society, and the media to refine and learn new approaches to communication. This could be achieved through the establishment of forums where ideas can be shared and new communication approaches can be developed through sharing and knowledge exchange. Such forums would assist in creating an enabling environment and learning platform for corruption fighters (Byrne, et.al. 2010);
- E-governance and the use of ICT has been shown to be effective in fighting corruption because it improves communication flows between government agencies and citizens and promotes transparency, reducing opportunities for corruption (Kossow and Dykes, 2018);
- Various online platforms such as blogs; micro-blogging (including Twitter); social networking are useful components that promote transparency and access to information and therefore are tools in the arsenal to expose and tackle corruption (Bertot, et.al., 2011);
- When communication campaigns only focus on information about the prevalence of corruption in a society, this can have the opposite effect of what is intended and can lead to 'corruption fatigue' and apathy about corruption (Peiffer and Walton, 2019);
- Some studies on communication campaigns are showing successes with specific kinds of nuanced social messaging. For example, 'social-nudging' is where citizens are exposed to the way locally relevant reference or peer groups feel about corruption through poster campaigns or films and other media formats. The efficacy of these campaigns has been tested and shown to be initially successful through counterfactual studies. However, such campaigns need to be complimented by other ongoing interventions. Longitudinal studies are required to demonstrate their effectiveness over time (Blair, et.al. 2019);

The literature review did not highlight any issues on communication campaigns and corruption that relate specifically to gender or disability.

2. Does increasing communication capabilities contribute to the reduction of corrupt practices?

Marquette (2014) points out that there is very little evidence of what works and what does not work in terms of anti-corruption campaigns, either in evaluation or academic literature. Moreover, Marquette (2014) notes that it is currently very difficult to conclusively prove that anti-corruption campaigns are successful because of an absence of baseline evaluation research to prove this and, there are no tools to measure the success of anti-corruption interventions (Marquette (2014, p. 20). However, over the last fifteen years much has been achieved and there has been a great emphasis on training interventions by development agencies and a much greater awareness and unwillingness to accept corruption as the status quo. Development agencies have contributed to an increase in interest in anti-corruption interventions ranging from advocacy and awareness campaigns and anti-corruption legislation. These initiatives are likely to be important in the medium to long term (Marquette, 2014, p. 18).

With respect to the role of the media and communication in fighting corruption and to promote professionalism in journalism, Byrne, et.al. (2010) advocate capacity building programmes and forums where practical experiences can be shared with other professionals in the sector and from other countries. This kind of information exchange can be useful to source new ideas for campaign techniques and to learn new approaches to communication. The authors highlight that such an intervention would be particularly beneficial in countries where knowledge of communication techniques is weak because of weaknesses in the media environment; a newly established state corruption fighting agency or in a developing civil society. Forums would promote the creation of an enabling environment for anti-corruption stakeholders and help to build capacity of professionals in the state, civil society and the private sector. The authors note that one of the learning outcomes of such a forum would be the ability to plan communication initiatives to combat corruption in a way to maximise impact and for a sustained effect.

Research confirms that indirect approaches (at various levels and in various state agencies) may be more successful than direct approaches to fighting corruption. Marquette (2014) proposes that governance reform to fight corruption (an indirect approach) requires building the state's capacity and this is a key component towards building trust in the state rather than dedicated anti-corruption campaigns. Marquette (2014) provides an example of an indirect governance approach from the administration of a 'Performance Based Governors Fund' PBGF) in Afghanistan which provides 34 Provincial Governor's Offices with USD 25,000 per month. The Fund is utilised for operational and community outreach activities. The management of the PBGF illustrates the value of an indirect approach. Although minimal authorisation is needed to spend the funds, this is complimented with transparency and reporting requirements; frequent published evaluations including scores and rankings and performance related funding (Marquette, 2014, p. 20)

Trust-building includes confidence in the ability of the state to respond to corruption and measures to ensure the civil service does not become engaged in corruption. Johnson (2010) notes that building trust does not mean blind faith in institutions or loyalty to political leaders. The kind of trust that is necessary to combat corruption should be "*conditional, selective, linked to self-interest as well as to mutual benefit and is built on day-to-day experience*" Johnson (2010, p. 2). Johnson (2010) argues that there are no archetype toolkits for addressing corruption, especially in fragile situations (where key institutions, not limited to the state, are weak and lack capacity).

3. Most effective communication tools for reducing corruption

Anti-corruption strategies using e-government have been used effectively as a tool to help fight corruption by creating more transparent administrative processes and promoting trust in administrative systems. For example, a widely studied anti-corruption e-government intervention is that used by the Seoul Metropolitan Government's Online Procedures Enhancement for civil applications (OPEN) system (Bertot, et.al., 2010). Government and the corporate sector used the OPEN system to transform South Korean administrative procedures in relation to citizens' application processes and petitions. In Seoul, these processes were plagued by corruption and officials often requested citizens to pay bribes to have their applications processed. The system checks for delays in processing applications and government officials are required to provide reasons for delays. Studies of OPEN have shown that the system reduces corruption and increases transparency in relation to the activities of government employees.

Bertot, et.al. (2010, p. 86) highlight ways in which Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) and social media can promote transparency and enable members of the public to monitor government activities. These include:

- Providing information on government rules and citizen rights and government decisions and actions;
- Promoting monitoring of government actions and expenditures;
- Disseminating information on government performance;
- Opening government processes relating to for example, land records and applications for licenses;
- Identifying elected officials and civil servants under investigation for corruption and fraud; and
- Disclosing assets and investments of elected officials and civil servants.

Kossow and Dykes (2018) argue that while e-governance reduces opportunities for corruption, ICT tools makes it easier for the public to obtain information on the performance of public officials and also to analyse data on public service delivery. ICT tools promote upward transparency through obtaining the public's feedback on the way lower-level bureaucrats are providing services and in this way to ensure corruption does not take place. ICT tools also promote downward transparency which aims at enabling citizens and journalists to access data, through 'transparency portals' which gives people access to key documents online to track performance (Kossow and Dykes 2018, p.11).

Bertot et.al. (2010, p. 83-84) describe the most common online tools used to disseminate information on government activities, including:

Blogs: disseminate content through websites in a structured format though postings on a specific topic and have been extensively used to promote open communication. Although blogs are typically used by government to disseminate information to citizens, non-government organisations are also able to use blogs to promote openness when there is resistance to transparency.

Wikis: these are community-based websites that allow users to add or edit new information rapidly. A good example of this is Wikileaks (www.wikileaks.org). Wikileaks is supported by hackers and activists with the goal of providing a protected online space for whistleblowers to anonymously release sensitive information to the world about government corruption.

Social networking and media sharing: allows people to target information to different social and community groups that have common interests. Examples of platforms include Facebook; LinkedIn; MySpace and YouTube. Media sharing is part of online social networking and web-based platform technology that allow users to upload and disseminate multi-media content such as: videos; audio and images to the wider public. Citizen journalism or reporting is commonly associated with media-sharing services.

Microblogging: are web-based platforms that allow users to broadcast small messages or updates to a select group or community. Examples include Twitter; Jaiku and Tumblr. These tools have considerable potential for sharing information and promoting transparency to fight corruption.

Bertot, et.al. (2010) nevertheless cautions that the extent to which social media and ICTs can create a sustained culture of transparency to fight corruption is still in doubt because research

into this has produced insufficient definitive evidence. Governments are able to 'filter' internet content, affecting the accessibility of information to citizens. This happens extensively in countries such as in East Asia; North and Central Africa, the Middle East and Saudi Arabia.

4. Case studies of communication campaign interventions targeting corruption

Case Study 1: South Africa

In an independent study was conducted by university researchers in a town in KwaZulu-Natal to test the effect of an information campaign on corruption (Kobis, et.al. ,p. 21). A 'lab-in-the-field' experiment was undertaken. The study tested the effectiveness of a behavioural approach to corruption using 'social norms nudging' which is based on the theory that people's decisions are influenced by other social influences. These social influences include the way a locally relevant reference group (relevant to the target-study group) behaves. A total of 311 participants took part in the study, made up of a baseline group (n=187) and treatment group (n=124). Respondents were randomly selected so that there was no difference across the main demographic variables between the two groups (Kobis, et.al. ,p. 21).

In the baseline group a bribery corruption game to model the psychological decision-making that exists in contexts where corruption is rife was undertaken in a laboratory setting. Respondents in the game either took the role of 'public officials' or 'citizens', reflecting common transaction dynamics between the two groups in the context of obtaining a certificate. In the game, 'citizens' could either seek to obtain the certificate legally, by applying for it and paying the regular fee or could pay a bribe to the official and avoid paying the fee. The public official equally had two options: either process the application legally, or earn additional money by accepting the bribe (Kobis, et.al., p. 21).

In the second group (the treatment group) posters with 'descriptive norms messaging' (perceptions about how people *do* in fact behave) towards bribery were distributed in Manguzi, a medium-sized town in KwaZulu Natal (posters were displayed outside the entrance to building and on lamp posts) (Kobis, et.al., p. 21). In relation to the treatment group intervention, it should be noted that earlier survey data on this area in KwaZulu-Natal showed that self-reported bribery frequencies were declining. Making use of this positive trend, the corruption poster that was developed utilised a 'social norms approach', targeting beliefs about the behaviours of others in the town, rather than providing information on the negative impacts of corruption. Figure 1 shows the poster.

Despite the factual reality on the ground, before the poster treatment, a majority of respondents believed that most people in the town (more than two thirds) paid bribes. Using the impact of social messaging on a poster, the study attempted to determine if people's perceptions about corruption could be changed and whether willingness to engage in corruption (bribery) could be reduced (Kobis, et.al., p. 21). The results of the study showed that the poster treatment had an impact on the participants' willingness to pay bribes in the baseline group. For example, whereas in the baseline phase, 53.5% of public officials did not accept bribes, in the treatment/poster group phase 63% of public officials did not accept bribes. It was also found that that the 'norms-nudge' on posters reduced people's own perceived descriptive norms regarding bribery whilst leaving their perceived injunctive norms intact (perceptions on what *ought to be* in society-what is approved or disapproved of) (Kobis, et.al. ,p. 21).

See Figure 1: Poster with descriptive norms message, Source: Kobis, et.al. ,p. 21, https://www.cambridge.org/core/services/aop-cambridge-core/content/view/FD16DED219367827E1D961A093D2BD1C/S2398063X1900037Xa.pdf/social_norms_of_corruption_in_the_field_social_nudges_on_posters_can_help_to_reduce_bribery.pdf

The researchers note that to increase the possibility of lasting behaviour change, this approach should be accompanied by other complimentary strategies such as community involvement in a campaign; other information campaigns via alternative media channels and social network analysis (Kobis, et.al. ,p. 21). Longitudinal research would be necessary to demonstrate the efficacy of this approach over time.

Case Study 2: Nigeria

An independent study undertaken by university researchers in Nigeria assessed an intervention that aimed to improve notoriously poor corruption reporting among citizens and reduce the country's endemic corruption (including bribery involving civil servants and relevant state departments, and the police). It was found that a number of simultaneous interventions to improve public reporting on corruption had a positive impact on corruption (Blair, et.al., 2019). Although previous campaigns to improve reporting had been unsuccessful, the present intervention was more fruitful.

The intervention aimed at addressing perceived barriers to reporting corruption, by developing an easily accessible toll-free messaging platform and secondly through the use of two media campaigns including the production of a 'Nollywood' feature film for the project with well-known actors. Secondly, a mass text-message campaign was launched by targeting all customers of Nigeria's largest mobile phone provider in the study areas. The film and text campaigns both tried to encourage Nigerians to report corruption via text through the platform (Blair, et.al., 2019).

Preceding the two interventions, the researchers undertook a pilot survey of 345 randomly sampled respondents in four states where the study took place. The findings showed that just under 80% of respondents believed that the police, civil servants and other state governments were corrupt and that 83% percent reported being angry that they had to pay bribes (Blair, et.al, p.2).

The film intervention message was that corruption reporting was becoming the norm and widely accepted (including by society role models -in this case celebrity actors). The mass text message campaign on the other hand encouraged users to report corruption through the utilisation of the easy-to -use text-based platform (Blair, et.al.,2019). This was meant to breakdown the perception that there are access barriers to reporting corruption. The study found (through the use of a treatment and control group assessment of the film intervention) that the influence of the two interventions/campaigns operated independently and both had a positive impact on reporting corruption. The researchers note that it was not possible to report a precise response rate because they did not know how many people actually read the mass text message or watched the film.

Over the course of the study, the corruption reporting platform received 3,316 messages from 1,685 unique senders. There were 1,181 unique senders, who sent messages discussing corruption or the study's campaigns. There were also 241 unique individuals who sent concrete corruption reports specifying individuals or institutions involved in corruption. Corruption reporting was almost-two times more frequent in comparison to previous nationwide corruption reporting campaigns (Blair, 2019, p.2). The researchers contend that this campaign elicited a much higher

response rate than in previous corruption reporting in Nigeria, which received less than 140 messages over the entire country. The response rate from their intervention was also much higher than that of a radio advert campaign in Uganda encouraging citizens to send messages to their Member of Parliament (Blair, 2019, p. 4).

People most frequently reported bribes and embezzlement perpetrated by politicians, law enforcement officers and those officials in the education sector (Blair et.al, 2019, p. 3). The majority of corruption reporting occurred within the first 30 days after the campaign began. It was postulated that the film campaign influenced corruption reporting through mobilising collective emotions (anger) about corruption, despite the view that reporting corruption was also dangerous.

Case Study 3: Papua New Guinea

Peiffer and Walton (2019) argue that experiences from developing countries indicate that anti-corruption campaigns that focus on providing citizens with more information about the effects of corruption are likely to fail because it may lead to cynicism and apathy, rather than stimulating citizen activism to fight corruption. This adverse reaction has been termed 'corruption fatigue' - when society sees no benefit in working towards reducing corruption by avoiding participating in it or not reporting it when they come across it (Peiffer and Alvarez, 2016, p, 30). For anti-corruption campaigns to succeed, more refined messaging is needed.

In a survey undertaken by the Development Leadership Program (DLP), supported by the Australian government, a survey using convenience sample of 1,520 respondents in Papua New Guinea was undertaken. The survey utilised an experiment (those receiving messages about corruption) and a control group (those receiving no messages about corruption). Those in the treatment group were divided into four subgroups of roughly equal sample size and exposed to different kinds of framing-questions about corruption. This included questions relating to moral messaging: illegal messaging; local messaging and widespread messaging. These are summarised as follows:

- Moral messaging: emphasised the response from religious leaders condemning corruption;
- Illegal messaging: included statements about how corruption is illegal in Papua New Guinea;
- Local messaging: described corruption as being a national issue that could best be fought in local communities (wantoks); and
- Widespread messaging: emphasised the widespread nature of corruption in the country as being very important.

Survey analysis showed that respondents in the experiment group were more likely to respond in a positive way and to report corruption, when the anti-corruption message emphasised the impact of corruption on their local kinship groups and where the message was **locally themed**. (Peiffer and Walton 2019). Compared to the control group, respondents exposed to local messaging were significantly more likely to agree that corruption should be reported because it is morally the right thing to do (one tailed p-value <0.10)¹ and that they would report corruption

¹ This means that there is a less than 10% probability that finding is incorrect.

even if it meant having to spend a day in court (one-tailed p—value <0.05)² (Peiffer and Walton 2019, p. 23). The findings suggested that messaging in campaigns is important and these should be framed as a local community issue (Peiffer and Walton 2019, p. 3).

Case Study 4: Zimbabwe and Zambia

In southern Africa, other recent examples have been highlighted by Chibamba, et.al. (2019) in their cataloguing of some good practice examples of the use of campaigns on combatting land corruption. For example, video advocacy is utilised in Zimbabwe and handbooks on customary and statutory land systems are developed in Zambia.

In Zimbabwe, the interventions undertaken by Transparency International (TI) in exposing a private sector company's attempts to grab land in the Manicaland Province through a corrupt relationship between the company and local leaders was documented as a success. A private company, Green Fuel, had illegally encroached on land that was essential to local farmers for their livelihoods. The company used the land for the planting of sugarcane for its biofuel production.

The TI intervention to tackle the corruption was multi-pronged and involved partnering with local community organisations and organising a series of community events. These events included workshops, local engagement activities and facilitated contact with local decision-makers. Once trust had been gained through working with community stakeholders, TI Zimbabwe produced a short video exposing the corruption and this was followed by research and policy papers on the impact of land corruption on women and girls. Following these interventions (campaign pressure), compensation was provided to the local farmers by Green Fuel. The online documentary also resulted in further policy scrutiny and a debate in Parliament on the issue. TI identified the key factors for success of the campaign as being the following: broad stakeholder support (including the affected community and local and traditional leadership); the cultivation of strong partnerships with local and international organisations and the capacity to mobilise the affected communities (Chibamba, et.al., 2019, p.36).

In Zambia, the development of a unique handbook assisted community members to acquire land and deal with the complex procedures of customary land systems, which were prone to corruption. The handbook provided community members with a clear and standardised method for obtaining land and closed the information gap between traditional leaders and community members in the Chisuka Chiefdom of Zambia. This has reduced opportunities for corruption in an opaque traditional leadership system arising from an information imbalance between community members and land custodians. The keys to the success of the development of the handbook included: diverse stakeholder engagement, engaging customary leaders, land administrators, government bodies and civil society organisations, which helped to build trust. Innovative methods were also used to communicate the initiative involving theatre performances, which facilitated the transmission of complex information to community members with low literacy levels. A second feature contributing to success of the project was to ensure that the handbook was accessible through translations into local languages and by producing audio-versions of the manual. Finally, "Integrity pacts" promoted dialogue between traditional leaders and community members that aimed to have an impact on transparency and accountability. Integrity pacts

² This means that there is a less than 5% probability that finding is incorrect

formalised an agreement with all traditional leaders in the Chisuka Chiefdom to monitor, follow-up, promote transparency and accountability in customary land administration (Chibamba, et.al. 2019, p. 42-43).

Case Study 5: Uganda

The Anti-Corruption Coalition of Uganda (ACCW) convenes a grass roots National Anti-Corruption Week (ACW) every year in Uganda to promote popular awareness about corruption. The project was first developed and implemented by Transparency International, Uganda in 1996 in Kampala and has expanded to 27 districts in the country. The aim of the annual event is to bring together civil society organisations and government institutions with anticorruption goals to confront endemic bribery and corruption in the public sector. The objectives of the event include (Transparency International, 2002, p.1-50):

- To raise awareness and promote transparency and accountability in government through civil society mobilisation and public awareness;
- To educate people about issues of transparency and accountability in public life;
- To empower and educate citizens to demand transparency and accountability from government;
- To share experiences, challenges and ways of combating corruption; and
- To monitor and encourage government efforts against corruption.

Activities at this event include (Transparency International, 2002, p.1-52):

- Peaceful demonstrations;
- A national conference in Kampala;
- Speeches by government officials and donors;
- A public forum dialogue;
- An organised media campaign including articles, press conferences, talk shows, live radio and TV phone-in programmes; and
- Letter writing campaigns to demand government accountability.

Some of the achievements of the corruption week have included (Transparency International, 2002, p.1-53):

- Changing people's attitudes towards corruption and persuading people to refuse to pay bribes;
- The event has prompted the establishment of a number of commissions of inquiry to investigate corruption;
- ACW serves as a platform for civil society to demand political accountability to fight corruption;
- The event has led to the establishment of a Directorate of Ethics and Integrity to support the fight against corruption;
- The project has stimulated donor support and focussed attention on corruption in the country (it should be noted that the event up until very recently (2018) continued to be convened every year);
- The event has led to the creation of many anti-corruption CSOS in rural areas;
- The project has emphasised the need to revise legislation; and
- ACW has opened communications through forum between government and CSOs to combat corruption.

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