

Effective Anticorruption Approaches: U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), Office of Democracy and Governance

An effective response to corruption starts with two indispensable acknowledgments: first, that no system or society is immune to corruption, and second, that we may need to commence our efforts with the very basic process of building a mutual understanding of what we mean when we say the word corruption.

Multi-faceted approaches are essential. Even when our resources are small, USAID staff spend a great deal of time coordinating with host-government counterparts and other donors to assure that a comprehensive approach to anticorruption reform is undertaken and that *diplomatic* as well as *programmatic* resources are brought to bear. USAID's experience in Kenya is a good example of what is achievable through support to reformers and institutions on several fronts. While events in that country led to a decision to reduce our assistance to certain government institutions like the Directorate of Government Ethics, earlier program support from the United States and other donors helped that office gather important information that has now been taken up by the Parliamentary Public Accounts Committee—also a recipient of USAID capacity-building support—and continues to shape a very important public debate and investigation process in that country. And, of course, none of these developments would have progressed this far without the very vital role played by Kenyan civil society, with whom USAID has partnered and which has been at the forefront of the anticorruption battle for many years.

Civil society is always a necessary partner. Governments don't often reform on their own, even when there is strong leadership supporting these changes. Some of our best results have been achieved when local communities get involved in monitoring the execution of development projects and budgets. In Colombia, community *veedurias* (citizen oversight committees) have changed hiring practices at local schools and prevented road builders from using inferior materials. In Mali, taxpayers in one Bamako district uncovered discrepancies in local budgets that led to the removal and indictment of several local officials. Similar results have been achieved in USAID programs in Rwanda and Tanzania and elsewhere.

Institution-building approaches work in places where the governance basics are established and where there is strong political commitment to change the way the public's business is conducted. USAID support has helped the Indonesian Anticorruption Commission and the South African Specialized Commercial Crimes Court achieve important successes, but in less conducive settings, specialized institutions like these have not performed as well. The record of anticorruption commissions globally bears this out.

Leveraging resources, political commitment, and development outcomes by mainstreaming anticorruption objectives and principles can be a successful strategy. USAID is pursuing this approach partly to address the problem of shrinking resources for more traditional governance work and partly because we have seen that corruption is difficult to combat only from a governance perspective. But even more importantly, we have seen enough examples of communities and governments galvanizing around reforms that involve service delivery and improving their global economic standing to indicate that this is a promising area for further effort. On the other hand, we also are aware of the risks of assuming that reforms we promote will have anticorruption impact, but not articulating it in the planning, negotiation, or expected results of an activity.

While we have learned what works, we have also discovered some ineffective approaches:

- Public awareness programs not tied to reforms
- Reforms without public awareness programs
- Failure to take a long-term approach
- Recommendations unsupported by research and data collection
- Donor-driven programs that are perceived as such.

USAID will continue to work closely with cooperating governments, multilateral institutions, and the community of nongovernmental organizations to ensure a strategic and effective correlation between U.S. government diplomatic and programmatic activities. Good governance and accountability create conditions that lift people out of poverty, raise education and health levels, improve the security of borders, expand the realms of personal freedoms, nurture sound economic and sustainable development strategies, and create healthier democracies. ■