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# U.S. Agency for International Development Anti-Corruption Task Force (ACTF)

## Countering Corruption Through Social and Behavior Change (SBC)

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) is seeking to update and develop their strategic, technical, and policy guidance on countering corruption by addressing social norms and behaviors. In pursuit of this objective, the USAID Anti-Corruption Task Force (ACTF) commissioned research on how **social and behavior change (SBC)** approaches address social norms and behaviors related to corruption, and where SBC approaches can be used to improve current and future anti-corruption activities. Metropolitan Group (MG) has conducted a qualitative research scan and analysis drawing lessons from a series of case studies from Guatemala, Malawi, Mexico, Moldova, and Tanzania on how SBC approaches can be harnessed to influence decisions, norms, and behaviors around corruption and how social norm sensitivity and the use of social nudges might inform programming. This report presents the findings from those case studies and MG’s recommendations for SBC approaches that may be applied in anti-corruption efforts.

Drawing from the fields of psychology, neuroscience, economics, and political science, SBC is the application of theory-based approaches to address the factors that drive or enable behaviors at the individual, community, and/or societal levels.<sup>1</sup> Broad SBC approaches can employ a range of strategies, including SBC communications (SBCC), advocacy, social and community mobilization, and changing laws or regulations. SBC interventions have increasingly gained ground as tools to impact policies, practices, behaviors, and social norms, and have been used to target individual, social, and structural factors that influence key behaviors needed to achieve development goals. Despite this, SBC approaches have not been widely employed in anti-corruption efforts. Approaches to change behaviors, attitudes, and norms are widely understood to form a critical part of efforts to counter corruption, but these approaches are currently poorly understood and underutilized.<sup>2</sup> **As a result, few large-scale anti-corruption initiatives have been informed by SBC insights**—partly due to a lack of evidence on the effectiveness of SBC approaches for these efforts.<sup>3</sup>

However, this research showed that **many anti-corruption efforts do utilize some core SBC elements**, including values and stakeholder analysis to help drive stakeholder-centric design; iterative implementation based on ongoing assessments; the use of hope-based narratives; and communication that is focused on social norms, perceptions, and attitudes. This indicates that there is an opportunity to demystify SBC among anti-corruption implementers and partners, to help them identify where they are already utilizing SBC elements, where more robust SBC elements and approaches may be appropriate or useful and how to analyze SBC impact on key norms and behaviors. **This report aims to help bridge this gap by reviewing anti-corruption initiatives that contain SBC elements to impact or shift social norms around corruption.**

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<sup>1</sup> USAID. “Social and Behavior Change in Democracy, Human Rights, and Governance: A Primer.” [https://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf\\_docs/PA00XWX4.pdf](https://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/PA00XWX4.pdf).

<sup>2</sup> Claudia Baez Camargo and G. Burges (2022). “Behavioral drivers of corruption facilitating illegal wildlife trade: Problem analysis and state of the field review.” Basel Institute on Governance. <https://baselgovernance.org/publications/wp-39>.

<sup>3</sup> C. Stahl (2022). “Behavioral insights and anti-corruption: Executive summary of a practitioner-tailored review of the latest evidence.” Basel Institute on Governance. <https://baselgovernance.org/publications/behavioural-insights-and-anti-corruption>.



During the selection process for this research activity's case studies, MG sought to identify a set of anti-corruption schemes that utilized SBC approaches. MG also hoped to identify a set of case studies that would provide a level of diversity across several axes (geographic, type of intervention, initiative drivers, level of government at play, private sector being targeted, etc.).

The case study selection process consisted of a preliminary assessment and criteria development phase. MG conducted an initial assessment of polling, indices, interviews, and literature related to anti-corruption efforts, ultimately identifying 15 potential case studies. Following this initial assessment, MG conducted a more rigorous case study assessment and final recommendation process based on criteria developed in coordination with USAID. This assessment was aimed at identifying countries with high levels of corruption and initiatives that incorporated SBC approaches. While the evidence review did show a lack of anti-corruption activities incorporating full SBC frameworks, MG ultimately recommended five case studies that incorporated elements of SBC and represented a diversity of geography, levels of government, and sectors.

### **The following case studies were selected:**

- Guatemala, International Commission Against Impunity in Guatemala (CICIG)
- Malawi, Construction Transparency Initiative (CoST)
- Mexico, Anti-Impunity and Gender Equality Initiative
- Moldova, Maia Sandu and the Party of Action and Solidarity (PAS) Campaigns
- Tanzania, Addressing Bribery in the Health Sector

Each case study review and assessment included (1) a literature review of relevant academic papers, policy papers, reports, and media coverage of the anti-corruption initiative, and research into the social and behavioral norms and practices influencing corruption in each country; (2) key informant interviews with relevant researchers, participants, academics, and experts with insight into the initiative;<sup>4</sup> and (3) a review of relevant polling and indices.<sup>5</sup>

With each case study, MG sought to answer a set of **key underlying questions** (while acknowledging that not every question would be answered for every case study), including:

1. What is the relevant context and background?
2. What are the behavioral determinants that need to be addressed?
3. What are the principal social norms driving corruption in this context?
4. What SBC approaches were utilized?
5. How effective were the SBC approaches and why?

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<sup>4</sup> MG identified and engaged interviewees for four of the five studies. We did not succeed in securing an interview with anyone involved in the Malawi case study. The Malawi case is well documented with evaluation by various sources.

<sup>5</sup> For a full list of sources and interviews, please see the references appendix at the end of the full report.

## Case Study Summaries

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The anti-corruption case studies are summarized below. Each case study summary includes a brief overview of the corruption context and the anti-corruption activity; a description of the SBC elements utilized; analysis of what worked, what did not, gaps in the approach; and areas that merit additional research.

**Guatemala, International Commission Against Impunity in Guatemala (CICIG)<sup>6</sup>:** CICIG was an international commission established to investigate and prosecute serious crimes in Guatemala to mitigate the wide-scale impunity of government officers and security forces. Recognizing the need for international support to address the weaknesses in Guatemala's justice system, a group of human rights actors in Guatemala (including civil society organizations, indigenous leaders, and international NGOs) engaged priority stakeholders within and outside Guatemala's government to advocate for a mechanism to fight corruption and impunity.

CICIG used various SBC tools in their efforts to fight corruption and impunity. They mapped and engaged priority stakeholders within and outside the state structure to raise the need for an international and independent commission against impunity; they employed SBCC mechanisms such as simplified communication and public education campaigns, as well as using the media to demonstrate their impact and elevate community engagement and discourse. They also leveraged priority stakeholders and effectively shifted perceptions about impunity and corruption (such as increasing trust in the justice system, countering widespread resignation, and increasing engagement by Guatemalan citizens in the justice system).

**Malawi, Construction Transparency Initiative (CoST):** CoST Malawi is the local chapter of an international transparency initiative and model that aims to engage public awareness and activate public oversight over public procurement and infrastructure spending. In 2008, a pilot chapter of the Construction Transparency (CoST) initiative was established in Malawi, which provides a framework for anti-corruption, accountability, and transparency mechanisms focused on construction procurement projects. This initiative aimed to engage public awareness and activate public oversight over public infrastructure projects to identify when funds were being misused or when contracts were not being fulfilled.

CoST Malawi has used several innovative strategies, tools, and tactics, including several SBC elements. They continually monitor their progress towards goals while focusing on levers of change for potential impact, engaging priority stakeholders in media and civil society to act as influencers, educators, and messengers. They have encouraged engagement, attention, and reporting among the public through SBCC messaging; and have focused efforts on changing policy enablers that have facilitated corrupt practices in the construction and procurement sector.

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<sup>6</sup> In Spanish, "Comisión Internacional Contra La Impunidad En Guatemala".



**Mexico, Anti-Impunity and Gender Equality Initiative:** This initiative is the work of a coalition of civil society organizations aimed at transforming social norms of acceptance of corruption and impunity through social and behavior change communication (SBCC). In response to the widespread levels of impunity in Mexico, a group of organizations came together to develop an initiative aimed at promoting policy and institutional changes, and changing cultural expectations and behaviors. The objectives of this initiative included influencing normative expectations, making impunity unacceptable by both changing policies and practices, and shifting social norms utilizing an SBCC strategy.

SBC tools used by anti-impunity activists in Mexico included stakeholder mapping and engagement, and activation of priority stakeholder messengers; formative research into values and perceptions that drive behaviors and norms; development and testing of a hope-based narrative through creative expression in the public square; and capacity-building among key stakeholders and influencers. By leveraging windows of opportunity in the 2018 presidential campaign and government transition, the coalition began to shift social perception regarding corruption and impunity, and impact policy by fostering the creation of the General Prosecutor's Office.

**Moldova, Maia Sandu and the Party of Action and Solidarity (PAS) Campaigns:** This case study follows the campaigns of Maia Sandu, the current president of Moldova, and her party, the Party of Action of Solidarity, when they achieved unexpected success in 2020 and 2021. Since being established in 1991 as the Soviet Union dissolved, Moldova has experienced a succession of ruling parties and officials who have used the state's financial coffers and levers of influence to benefit themselves and those who sought their favor. In this environment, corruption was so prevalent in Moldovan politics that it nullified the issue as a campaign promise: Moldovan voters had grown cynical of candidates who promised to clean up the government, the judiciary, and the private sector, without ever following through and have not been swayed by an anti-corruption narrative in recent campaigns.

However, voter resignation and cynicism regarding corruption among political leaders appeared to shift with the 2020 presidential campaign of Maia Sandu and the 2021 parliamentary elections that led to her Party of Action and Solidarity (PAS) gaining a true majority of seats. Although their campaigns are not a comprehensive model of an SBC initiative, they did incorporate many elements of SBC that can be modeled by other actors attempting to shift corruption norms leveraging the attention and organizing principle of electoral and campaign efforts. Sandu and the PAS recognized that a successful campaign would center economic growth, assets, and benefits while eschewing typical wedge issues, such as geopolitics, in favor of a hope-based narrative to draw voters and support from multiple bases.

**Tanzania, Addressing Bribery in the Health Sector:** This case study reviews an SBC approach to an anti-corruption intervention aimed at reducing the behaviors of gift-giving and reciprocity in Tanzania's healthcare sector. Despite significant recent strides in countering corruption in Tanzania, the cultural practices of gift-giving and reciprocity have remained relatively common and accepted. Gift-giving, in this context, is the practice of curating or developing one's personal relationship with those in the position to grant access to resources or



services, either at the present time or in the future. Despite the transactional nature of this practice and recent policy regulations from the Ministry of Health prohibiting gift-giving between patients and staff, most Tanzanians view it as a positive behavior and believe that a service provider should help those in their personal networks — including family members, friends and acquaintances, and those who have previously granted them favors or given them gifts — before serving the general public.

To address this issue, a research team from the Basel Institute of Governance piloted an SBC intervention. The pilot intervention was conducted at a large regional referral hospital in Dar es Salaam and included a number of social nudges and signaling aimed at the drivers and norms influencing the gift-giving behaviors. The intervention identified and addressed a core norm issue: namely, that gift-giving was not seen as a corrupt act but rather a normative and appropriate behavior. The intervention included messaging and communication emphasizing that gift-giving connected to public services was, in fact, a form of corruption. Implementation included social nudges at the points where patient/provider gift interactions often occur, such as signs on the check-in desks and posters on the walls of waiting rooms. Staff “champions” were also trained to engage their colleagues through reminders and conversations, reiterating the messages on the signs and posters.

## Findings and Recommendations

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While there are many individual nuances across the case studies, MG has identified numerous cross-cutting recommendations that appeared in multiple cases. These recommendations include **general guidance** for incorporating SBC into anti-corruption efforts and **specific SBC and SBCC tools and tactics** that may be considered helpful to countering corruption.

### General Guidance for Incorporating SBC into Anti-corruption Efforts:

**Comprehensive and Intentional Application of SBC:** SBC is under-explored in anti-corruption efforts. Many anti-corruption activities already involve SBC components; however, very few examples of comprehensive SBC anti-corruption initiatives are being implemented to date. This has limited both the benefit that full SBC approaches may provide to anti-corruption efforts and our understanding of the influence SBC has on addressing norms related to corruption. More implementation and evaluation of SBC approaches in anti-corruption efforts is needed, including causal research on specific norms and behaviors impacted by anti-corruption efforts. There is merit in doing full SBC implementation and rigorous evaluation in different regions and contexts to build a better body of knowledge around the norms that drive corruption and effective approaches to shifting these norms.

There is an opportunity to increase the scale and frequency of SBC elements in anti-corruption efforts, and more comprehensively evaluate their impact on social norms and behaviors. New, upcoming, and existing anti-corruption initiatives should look for



opportunities to build in SBC elements to their strategies, and identify where SBC elements already exist and merit closer evaluation and measurement.

**Prioritize Social Norms:** Despite the lack of SBC-focused research into corruption, it is widely believed that corruption is reinforced by social norms. Using SBC to influence these norms has high potential for shifting corrupt behaviors, and supporting shifts to enablers and drivers aimed at countering corruption. Anti-corruption initiatives should include formative research mapping the social norms connected to corruption to understand the key drivers influencing corrupt practices.

Utilization of SBC elements (such as the development of new narratives, SBCC, shifts in enablers, or stakeholder-centric design) can be targeted to shift specific norms. Monitoring and evaluation of changes in attitudes and norms should be built in as a component of iterative implementation to assess programmatic impact on key norms and the impact of shifting norms on corruption.

**Incorporate Stakeholder-Centric Design:** Stakeholder-centric design is the strategic use of qualitative and quantitative data to target the values, beliefs, and issues that matter most to priority stakeholders to guide the selection of engagement options, messengers, mediums, narrative and message framing, and strategies to utilize levers of change. By centering stakeholder understanding in the design, SBC planners can more effectively engage, activate, and reinforce key stakeholders. The case studies included multiple examples of anti-corruption initiatives benefiting from data-driven, stakeholder-centric design that is geared toward the values, beliefs, and experiences of key groups.

SBC approaches should be designed based on formative stakeholder research that identifies the factors driving the norms and behaviors implementers are seeking to address. These factors may include the identification of closely held values, relevant economic, political, or historical context, and existing perceptions and beliefs related to corruption and to specific drivers or enablers identified in the diagnostic process.

**Build Resiliency:** Corruption is resistant to change due to systemic and institutional factors that incentivize those in positions of power and authority to protect corrupt actors and practices, and where corrupt actors are in positions of power and authority, they are highly incentivized to protect. As a result, resiliency-building for anti-corruption initiatives is necessary to mitigate attempts to discredit or counter anti-corruption efforts and to prepare to counter potential backlash. In the case studies, MG identified one good practice example and two cases where the lack of infrastructure to address backlash was identified as a gap.

Resiliency-building may include the intentional development of infrastructure, networks, and policies to ensure the ability of a movement to withstand backlash, crises, or scandals. SBC planners should also consider including SBCC elements that inform stakeholders about the benefits of anti-corruption accomplishments, building the legitimacy and public profile of the anti-corruption effort. Implementers should also anticipate and prepare for backlash, including ongoing monitoring and evaluation and



rapid-response capacity in their iterative implementation plans. This will allow them to analyze backlash and delegitimizing efforts and be able to activate key messengers, influencers, and multi-sector allies, and deploy communication strategies to counter the attacks and backlash.

### **Specific SBC and SBCC Tools and Tactics for Application in Anti-Corruption Efforts:**

**Utilize Social and Behavior Change Communication:** Social and behavior change communication (SBCC) is a communications strategy that explicitly incorporates evidence-based findings about the beliefs and norms that influence behaviors and attitudes to influence norms, beliefs, perceptions, awareness, and action. This strategy can ensure a communications strategy best tailored to the priority stakeholder groups being addressed. The case studies showed some evidence that the use of SBCC increased the awareness, understanding, and activation of priority stakeholders, helping to disseminate and build currency for narratives that shift social norms.

Even when a full SBC approach is not being pursued, consideration should be given to building SBCC into anti-corruption initiatives. SBCC can also be utilized to support other SBC elements, such as the demonstration of change and difference by raising awareness and understanding.

**Demonstrate Change and Difference:** Demonstration of change refers to using exemplary stories of successes, advancements, and difference achieved by an organization or movement. By providing tangible demonstrations of difference and change, anti-corruption initiatives have been able to engender optimism and hope about the possibility of real change and to reinforce activation of stakeholders, changes in behaviors, and shifts in perceptions and norms.

Throughout the design and iterative implementation of an SBC initiative, opportunities should be identified for early wins (establishing changes in policies or practices), demonstration of difference (high profile accountability, evident improvement in service delivery, etc.), and other tangible changes which can show people that change is possible and that their decisions and actions can have an effect. It is important not to over-sell these demonstrations. Tangible demonstrations of changes and difference should be presented in ways that align with stakeholders' daily experiences; otherwise, they are likely to disbelieve and/or dismiss the message.

**Develop Hope-Based Narratives:** Hope-based narratives are ideas or visions created by a set of orchestrated and organic positive stories that contribute to the long-term changes in ideas, attitudes, and behaviors that make people believe change is possible and encourage behaviors that are more likely to bring that change about. Hope-based narratives are used to activate positive feelings and mindsets such as joy, trust, and optimism, thus helping to counter "apocalyptic fatigue." As a result, people are more likely to be receptive to listening and engaging with key issues. In the case studies, anti-corruption initiatives that developed and utilized hope-based narratives successfully





countered common norms, such as the belief that it is futile to expect changes to corrupt practices.

As part of the diagnostic process, mapping should be conducted on social norms and related dominant and salient narratives to analyze and identify the need or opportunity for hope-based narratives and the core values drivers of key stakeholders. Where hope-based narratives are used to target social norms, the narratives should be developed to trigger identified values drivers and tested with priority stakeholders for refinement to ensure efficacy.

**Activate Influencers and Messengers:** Influencer activation is the targeted engagement of priority influencers to spread awareness, cultivate engagement, and disseminate core messages among their peers and communities. Influencer activation also shifts social norms by signaling change and acceptability of an anti-corruption position. It is well-understood that the choice of messenger and influencer is key when engaging specific stakeholder groups. This was identified as an effective SBC approach across several of the anti-corruption case studies.

MG recommends that implementers engage in stakeholder mapping and other formative research to identify the messengers and influencers (individuals, institutions, and/or organizations) with the most trust, reach, and potential efficacy influencing the priority stakeholder segments. Once messengers and influencers are identified, additional research should be conducted to understand their values, motivators, and alignment with the core anti-corruption objectives. This will help identify pathways to engage and activate the messengers and influencers.

**Analyze Response to Anti-Corruption Messages:** There are cases where the most effective strategy was to specifically call out corruption and cases where the choice was made to focus instead on the benefits of countering corruption as the primary focus. Addressing corruption can be a galvanizing issue, and it can also be experienced with a sense of fatigue, resignation, and wariness around anti-corruption promises. Across the case studies, MG found that it was a good practice to include the intentional selection of how to frame corruption as part of the diagnostic and design stages. In some cases, it was identified that naming certain behaviors as corrupt practices was an effective way to shift key perceptions and behaviors; and in one key example, implementers opted to focus on the benefits of countering corruption instead.

As part of the diagnostic phase, anti-corruption initiatives should include in their formative research an assessment of the public perception and reaction to messaging around corruption and gauge whether anti-corruption messaging is persuasive. Planners should make a case-specific determination of how to focus messaging on corruption.



## Conclusion

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Despite the relative scarcity of current SBC initiatives in the anti-corruption space, the elements of SBC reviewed in these case studies provide promising results, including shifts in social norms, attitudes, and enabling factors that contribute to strengthening anti-corruption efforts and advancing changes to counter corruption. Consideration should be given to the piloting of full SBC anti-corruption activities, including the rigorous evaluation that would provide evidence to better understand and develop good practices for shifting the social norms that are often core to continuing or addressing corruption. There is also an opportunity to analyze current programming and initiatives to identify the elements of SBC already extant in current USAID anti-corruption activities. Identification of these elements, and communication of data collected and lessons learned, can lead to increased understanding of SBC as a contributor to anti-corruption efforts.

