



# Behavioural influences on attitudes towards petty corruption

## A Study of Social Norms and Mental Models in Uganda

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# Acronyms

CPI	Corruption Perception Index (TI)
DFID	Department for International Development (UK)
DRC	Democratic Republic of Congo
EABI	East Africa Bribery Index
EARF	East Africa Research Fund (DFID)
EARH	East Africa Research Hub (DFID)
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
NACS	National Anti-Corruption Strategy
NRM	National Resistance Movement
NSDS	National Service Delivery Survey
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
SGBV	Sexual and Gender Based Violence
TI	Transparency International
UNBS	Uganda National Bureau of Statistics
UNPS	Uganda National Panel Survey
WDR	2015 World Development Report (World Bank)

*I am called Corruption  
I was born before all of you to the family of  
Mr. & Mrs. Society  
I am loved by the greedy and industrious people  
I am married with many sons and daughters, and Mr. Embezzlement  
is the oldest one  
I work with schools, hospitals, police stations, big offices  
and churches as well.*

*I make schools lack facilities  
Hospitals lack drugs because of me  
Policemen ignore crimes because of me  
I even make the educated float on streets.*

*I am a friend to traffic officers  
A colleague to lawyers and magistrates  
I like staying with service commissioners at all levels.*

*Those who do not know me, call me  
Fortunate, comforter, saviour or catalyst  
I wish they knew how worse I am!*

*I, Corruption, really work hard  
Some serious brethren are against me  
They preach all day long against me  
I thought they would never win me because  
I am in everyone's bone marrow  
I convince both young and old  
I work with the rich and the poor.*

*I am worried however, everybody is turning against me  
I am weakening every moment  
I fear I might be defeated!*

*Dear Countrymen, let everybody rise up to condemn and fight this evil – corruption!*

Ugandan Poem on Corruption  
by Emmanuel Kusemererwa, Butiiti P. T. College,  
Published by the Ugandan Inspectorate of Government, December 2011.

# 1 Introduction

Although substantial investments and efforts have been made to combat corruption in the developing world, the effects of conventional anti-corruption interventions remain modest at best (Marquette and Pfeiffer 2015; Mungiu-Pippidi 2011). This is often reflected in the so-called implementation gap whereby countries continue to perform rather badly despite having adopted legal and institutional reforms based on anti-corruption best practices (ibid.). As a consequence, there is growing criticism aimed at the seeming impotence of purely legal, institutional interventions focussing on corruption opportunities, incentives and risks, because they often fail to adequately take into account the local context (Haruna 2003; Mette Kjaer 2004; Rugumyambeto 2004), including prevailing social incentives, expectations and understandings vis-à-vis corruption (Baez-Camargo and Passas 2017).

As some authors have argued, corruption may be fuelled by large-scale collective action and coordination problems whereby an individual's decision to behave corruptly hinges upon their perception of their close environment as being highly corrupt (Marquette and Pfeiffer 2015; Mungiu-Pippidi 2011; Persson, Rothstein, and Teorell 2013). Furthermore, corruption may not necessarily constitute a problem per se but can actually offer pragmatic solutions to ordinary citizens as means of 'getting things done' (ibid.), while at the level of political and business elites, corruption may fulfil informal governance functions critical for regime stability and survival (Baez-Camargo and Ledeneva 2017).

Research has only very recently begun to reveal how corrupt practices are perceived in the eyes of those directly engaging in them. Emerging evidence suggests that corruption is often seen as either a 'necessary evil' or simply 'the way things are done', suggesting a high degree of social acceptability of corruption in local contexts where corrupt collective practices have become normalised (Koni-Hoffmann and Navanit-Patel 2017). In some cases, not adapting to certain normalised behaviours linked to corruption may bear high social costs when community expectations are not fulfilled. In other cases, mentally engrained collective imaginaries associated to culture or local folklore may reinforce practices associated with corruption. Therefore, when certain types of corrupt actions are socially embedded or culturally rooted, it can be said that they have become a feature during the enculturation of individuals, and thereby become collectively reproduced, normalised and reinforced (cf. Hoff and Stiglitz, 2015).

The above considerations suggest that there is a crucial need to rethink the formulation of anti-corruption approaches in order to account for locally prevailing conditions. In order to do so, there is increasing interest in exploring how anti-corruption practice can benefit from a better understanding of behavioural influences. In particular, those factors that motivate corrupt actions that do not respond to classic rational choice incentives - because they relate to social, cultural or other quasi-rational influences - and their relationship to the observed entrenched character of corrupt practices in many countries.

Against this backdrop, the UK Department for International Development (DFID), through its East Africa Research Fund (EARF), commissioned the Basel Institute on Governance to conduct the research project "Corruption, Social Norms and Behaviours in East Africa" (hereafter "the Project") aiming at shedding light into those "[behavioural] factors that influence the propensity for poor people to engage in, resist and report 'corrupt transactions' in three East African countries, namely Rwanda, Tanzania

and Uganda.<sup>1</sup> The Project activities were undertaken in collaboration with researchers from Makerere University and took place between January 2016 and August 2017. The Project implementation involved two major components.

The first component was a semi-systematic literature review (hereafter “the Literature Review”) (Stahl, Kassa, and Baez-Camargo 2017) and an accompanying Policy Brief (Baez-Camargo 2017) that compiled the evidence about the mechanisms whereby behavioural factors affect decision making related to practices of petty corruption and assessed the relative effectiveness of anti-corruption interventions targeting petty corruption in developing countries.<sup>2</sup>

The second component comprised field research activities exploring the commonalities and differences in behavioural influences on attitudes towards petty corruption across the three case study countries, focusing particularly on the interactions between ordinary citizens and low-to-mid level officials.<sup>3</sup> The field research findings have been integrated into three country reports with accompanying policy briefs and a synthesis comparative assessment distilling the implications of the research findings for anti-corruption practice and corruption research.<sup>4</sup>

This report presents the main findings from the field research activities for the case of Uganda, which focused on the health and education sectors. The report is organised as follows: following this introduction, Section 2 presents the research design, including the research rationale, the underlying conceptual framework, applied methods as well as limitations. Section 3 provides a general background of the Ugandan context in terms of the experience in implementing anti-corruption policies and strategies and its relevance as a case study in the East Africa region. The main research findings are presented subsequently: Section 4 presents the main modalities of petty corruption practices in the health and education sectors that were identified in the course of the research activities. Section 5 discusses the findings associated with the impact of factors of sociality on attitudes towards petty corruption in the Ugandan context. Section 6 is devoted to describing the findings related to how environmental heuristics and shared mental models shape the manner in which individuals make decisions on whether to engage in or abstain from acts of petty corruption. Section 7 elaborates conclusions on the relevance of behavioural factors for understanding petty corruption outcomes in Uganda and discusses policy recommendations.

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<sup>1</sup> Terms of Reference, Research on Corruption Social Norms and Behaviours in East Africa, published on 9 October 2015 by EARF (DFID).

<sup>2</sup> Both documents are accessible on <https://www.baselgovernance.org/publications/3623> and <https://www.baselgovernance.org/publications/3621> respectively.

<sup>3</sup> A complementary research project, entitled ‘Informal Governance and Corruption – Transcending the Principal-Agent and Collective Action Paradigms’, has been commissioned by DFID and the British Academy (BA) and implemented by the Basel Institute on Governance in collaboration with University College London (UCL) and the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS). Following an inductive approach – it looks at those norms and practices commonly employed by political and business elites. This top-down perspective seeks to uncover unwritten rules and behavioural patterns that articulate informal governance regimes associated with high prevalence of corruption. More information can be found on: [www.britac.ac.uk/anti-corruption](http://www.britac.ac.uk/anti-corruption), [www.britac.ac.uk/node/4660](http://www.britac.ac.uk/node/4660).

<sup>4</sup> All documents are accessible on: <https://www.baselgovernance.org/publications>.

## 2 Research Design

### 2.1 Rationale and conceptual approach

A major contribution of this research is the advancement of anti-corruption practice and corruption research by investigating the prevalence and impact of behavioural drivers of corruption. Behavioural drivers comprise quasi-rational and non-rational factors that are conducive to unfavourable corruption outcomes, including collective ways of thinking, mental shortcuts and cues, and socio-cultural expectations. In contrast, non-behavioural drivers of corruption are based on rational assumptions of human behaviour and include economic, political, institutional and organisational factors. The presumption is that *behavioural insights* can be used to shape innovative anti-corruption policies to complement mainstream approaches (cf. Dolan et al. 2010, 8).<sup>5</sup>

As per the Terms of Reference for the Project, the conceptual approach that was adopted follows the *three* broad principles of human decision-making identified in the 2015 World Development Report (WDR) on ‘Mind, Society and Behaviour’:

- ‘Thinking automatically’ refers to the propensity of people to make most judgments and choices automatically, rather than deliberately. Individuals typically process imperfect information by resorting to shortcuts and reach decisions in response to *frames* (the way choices are presented), *anchors* (contextual aspects without direct relevance to a decision which nonetheless lead individuals to jump to conclusions and make rash decisions) or *default options* (modal patterns of behaviour prevailing in a given social context).
- ‘Thinking socially’ recognises that people are enculturated into acting and thinking collectively.<sup>6</sup> Thus, social values, preferences, norms, identities and networks can exert a decisive influence on decision-making because people care about their surroundings and strive to align to what is perceived to be socially acceptable. Social determinants of individual choice often revolve around issues concerning status, respect, shame, and guilt.
- ‘Thinking with mental models’ means that individuals in any given society share common perspectives and ideas through which they make sense of the world around them. In other words, decision-making relies on concepts, categories, identities, prototypes, stereotypes causal narratives and worldviews drawn from one’s environment. Mental models can refer to the macro level, where individuals share a collective vision of how things work around them, which might be shaped by factors such as history, ideology, religion and exposure to different types of institutions. Mental models can also apply to the micro level, where an individual’s self-concept may consist of multiple identities, each associated with different norms that dictate adequate behaviours for different situations.

In terms of definitions and operationalisation of key concepts, a first recognition is that petty corruption is a highly multifaceted and fluid concept, which may comprise many different practices depending on the context. As such, it may not easily be captured in a definition or formula (Ledeneva, Bratu, and

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<sup>5</sup> Behavioural insights aim to improve development outcomes through a new generation of policies that are empirically grounded and ideally experimentally tested. According to the OECD, ‘behavioural insights’ is one discipline in a family of three, the others being behavioural science and behavioural economics – that, in addition to traditional economic strategies, use insights from psychology, cognitive science and other social science disciplines to unveil the workings of non-rational drivers of human behaviour. More information can be found on: [www.oecd.org/gov/regulatory-policy/behavioural-insights.htm](http://www.oecd.org/gov/regulatory-policy/behavioural-insights.htm) [1 August 2017].

<sup>6</sup> Enculturation refers to processes whereby individuals learn and internalise their group’s culture and social norms through repeated exposure, observation and experience, mostly during primary and secondary socialisation (Hoff and Stiglitz 2015; Gavelek and Kong 2012).

Köker 2017; Torsello 2011). For this reason, and because the research specifically seeks to shed light on behavioural factors impacting attitudes towards petty corruption, a broad approach to studying petty corruption has been deemed most appropriate in order to capture the various manners in which individuals understand petty corruption and the practices associated with it in their local contexts.

Therefore, the research focused on informal transactions (i.e. those that do not adhere to formal processes and rules) involving low to mid-level officials and ordinary citizens. Embracing a broad view was important in order to be able to capture the range of practices that have social and context-specific grounding that blur the lines between what is appropriate and inappropriate behaviours in the interactions between citizens and public officials, particularly providers of public services.

On the basis of this broad approach, practices of petty corruption were identified following Transparency International which defines petty corruption as the ‘everyday abuse of entrusted power by low- and mid-level public officials in their interaction with ordinary citizens, who often are trying to access basic goods or services in places like hospitals, schools, police departments and other agencies’ (Transparency International 2009). Thus, the definition utilised captures practices such as bribery and favouritism in the different forms they may take. It also captures what the World Bank (2010, p. 2) has labelled ‘quiet corruption’ – forms of petty corruption and malpractices of frontline providers (such as teachers, health service providers and public officials) that are “difficult to observe and quantify [...], do not involve monetary exchange [...], but whose impact on service delivery and regulation has adverse long-term effects on households.” In the developing world, it is primarily through corruption that the provision of basic services is disrupted, thereby affecting the poor and vulnerable the most (DFID 2015).

## **2.2 Research design and methods**

The Project employed a comparative case study approach applied in six regions across the three case study countries with research activities in two regions per country (one urban and one rural area) as follows:

- Urban areas: Kigali (Rwanda), Dar es Salaam (Tanzania) and Kampala (Uganda)
- Rural areas: Southern Province (Gisagara district) (Rwanda), Kagera region (Tanzania), and Northern Uganda (Acholi sub region) (Uganda)

For each country, two public service sectors of key relevance were selected in consultation with DFID experts and local stakeholders, namely, the health and education sectors in Uganda and Tanzania and the police and health sectors in Rwanda.

The methodology consisted of a sequential mixed-methods design comprising focus group discussions (FGDs), a vignette-based survey and participant observation. In some cases, semi-structured interviews were also conducted to complement some of the research findings with the perspectives of the responsible authorities.

The choice of a qualitative methodology is grounded in the fact that, as the Literature Review revealed, the Project represents a pioneering study being one of the first efforts to collect empirical data establishing the links between behavioural influences and corruption.<sup>7</sup> The choice is also justifiable by

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<sup>7</sup> To our knowledge Koni-Hoffmann and Navanit-Patel, (2017) for the case of Nigeria and the on-going project “Corruption in the Criminal Justice Sector” of the Fletcher School at Tufts University [<http://fletcher.tufts.edu/Institute-for-Human-Security/Research/Corruption>] for the cases of Uganda and the Democratic Republic of Congo are the only studies to have explicitly taken this approach to date.

the primary aim of this research to accurately capture the aforementioned hidden, clandestine and covert forms of petty and ‘quiet’ corruption (cf. World Bank 2010). In this regard, the research activities, although guided by the findings from the Literature Review, were to a large extent exploratory given the scarcity of empirical evidence and analysis. Although an effort was made to quantify some of the findings through the implementation of a survey, given sampling and resource constraints the survey is meant to yield insights indicative of prevailing patterns and does not represent statistically significant national-level trends. Therefore, data analysis of the survey remained qualitative in nature. For both the FGDs and the survey a purposive sampling strategy was employed in order to maintain the focus narrowly aimed at the prospective beneficiaries of anti-corruption interventions.

### **2.2.1 Focus Group Discussions (FGDs)**

Three categories of FGDs were convened in each of the six research areas:

- Citizens/users: Comprising youth, women of child-bearing age (low income and middle class), young male adults (low income and middle class), elderly and disabled persons.
- Service providers: Teachers and nurses.
- Management: Health staff with managerial tasks and head teachers.

The FGDs followed a protocol of prioritised topics relevant for the research and validated by the Project’s expert advisory group, testing for the prevalence of petty corrupt practices, as well as for the most relevant concepts appearing in the literature. The findings from the FGDs were subsequently used to revise and refine the survey instrument.

### **2.2.2 Vignette-based survey**

The second research instrument is a vignette-based survey consisting of two components. In the first section, basic demographic information was gathered and respondents were probed on a variety of topics including prevalence of corruption in the chosen sectors, level of trust towards different public, political and social institutions, and prevalence of certain social norms and values in the respective communities.

In the second section, fourteen ‘survey vignettes’ were developed in order to focus the inquiry into the key topics that were uncovered in the FGDs.<sup>8</sup> One of the main goals of the survey was to try to tease out whether there are differences in attitudes toward corruption depending on its intended outcome. Each ‘vignette’ describes a scenario or an instance representing one of four distinct types of corrupt practices, namely:

- ‘Greasing the system’: expediting access to a service or resource one is entitled to
- Obtaining access to a service or resource one is not entitled to
- Avoiding a sanction
- Personal enrichment

In the vignettes, a distinction was made on whether a corrupt action responds to the expectations and obligations associated with informal social networks. Survey respondents were divided into two groups: In the first group, the respondents were asked to rate the degree to which the action in question is of a

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<sup>8</sup> This methodological vignette approach has been developed and tested by Sautu and colleagues (Sautu 2009, 2004, 2002) who developed a corruption tolerance index studying the propensity of the Buenos Aires middle-class to engage in corruption.

corrupt nature. Ratings were made on a scale from 0 to 5 where 0 is not corrupt and 5 is maximum corruption. In the second group, the respondents were asked to rate the likelihood that they would engage in such behaviour. Ratings were made on a scale from 0 to 5 where 0 means “I would never do it” and 5 means “I would certainly do it”. These two modalities probe for what respondents believe is morally right or wrong and for what they would actually consider being involved in (on a more pragmatic basis). This distinction is relevant given the emerging insights into the ambivalent distinction between what is deemed to be correct and what is accepted as necessary in one’s own context.

A total of 596 surveys were conducted across the three countries of which 204 were applied in Uganda (100 in the Gulu District and 104 in Kampala), 200 were applied in Tanzania (100 in Kagera region and 100 in Dar es Salaam) and 192 were applied in Rwanda (94 in Gisagara district and 98 in Kigali).

The purposive sample design included low income and middle class individuals in their 20s and 30s (to capture women in child-bearing age and parents of children attending public schools), elderly, and public sector workers.

### **2.2.3 Limitations**

As has been mentioned earlier, it is important to underscore the pioneering nature of this research. As such, the research activities must be considered as exploratory and constituting a first step towards compiling empirical evidence on the nature of prevailing behavioural influences on the attitudes towards petty corruption among citizens in the three countries. Thus, the research findings seek to shed light on broad patterns characterising behaviours, choices, incentives, beliefs and understandings of citizens that impact prevailing levels of petty corruption in the sectors studied. The limited sample sizes also signify that the findings are indicative and at best representative of the communities in which the research activities took place and are in no way statistically generalisable to the entire national context. Rather, the primary aim was to account for analytical generalisation (cf. Yin 1998, 2014) by cross-comparing the results of the three case studies through a behavioural lens as stipulated by the conceptual framework (WDR). In order to validate the findings of the research, efforts have been made to corroborate the trends captured in the research with results from major surveys conducted at the national level such as the East Africa Bribery Index 2017. However, while the research suggests that informal practices (such as favouritism and gift-giving) have a central role in shaping outcomes in the provision of public services, many of the behaviours documented have not been to date properly quantified by means of national level representative surveys. In this regard, the research findings should be interpreted as the output of a first-phase exploratory inquiry that draws the attention of practitioners to certain social dynamics and points to topics in need for further research.

## 3 Uganda: Background

Corruption, both petty and grand, is widespread in Uganda and represents a major obstacle to the country's development and the smooth provision of public services. Although the Ugandan government's anti-corruption efforts under President Museveni, who came to power in 1986, have been more pronounced in recent years, allegations about lack of political will and proper dedication to the fight against corruption have raised considerable concern. Besides a recurrence of cases of grand corruption that are disclosed with unsettling frequency, the main challenges encountered by ordinary citizens and service seekers involve practices such as bribery, favouritism, absenteeism and gift-giving – which are associated to high prevailing levels of petty corruption and 'quiet corruption' – namely the overall failure of public officials and service providers to deliver basic public services (cf. World Bank 2010).

The magnitude of the challenge posed by corruption in Uganda has been captured by a multiplicity of indicators. Transparency International's Corruption Perception Index (CPI) 2015 ranked Uganda in 139th position out of 168 countries surveyed, with a score of 25 out of 100; while 2015 Global Corruption Barometer ranked Uganda the 5<sup>th</sup> most corrupt country on the African continent (Transparency International 2015). These rankings place the country in the bottom third of countries perceived to be the most corrupt and represent an indication of widespread and endemic run-away corruption.

Overall high levels of corruption were also reported by 81% of respondents in the 2017 East African Bribery Index (Transparency International 2017), which also reported that 59% of Ugandans believe corruption has worsened in the past 12 months and 59% believe it will increase in the next 12 months. Bribery levels are reportedly significant as recorded by Transparency International's 2015 People and Corruption Survey, where 38% of Ugandans reported having paid a bribe to secure a public service (Transparency International 2015). According to Uganda's National Service Delivery Survey, 23% of households have experienced and fallen victim to bribery in 2015 alone, with 78% of Ugandans thinking of bribery as the most common form of petty corruption (UNBOS 2015). Yet, also according to data from the Uganda National Bureau of Statistics (UNBOS), only a very slim minority of Ugandan households (8%) is actually aware of the prevalence of quiet corruption characterised by maladaptive practices such as absenteeism and the failure to undertake formal duties (UNBOS 2015).

There is a significant and constant tension generated by the coexistence of the previously described high levels of corruption and the formal order that conforms to internationally-recognised principles of "democratic governance", "good governance" and anti-corruption "best practices". Indeed, Uganda has adopted elaborate anti-corruption legislation<sup>9</sup>, ratified international treaties<sup>10</sup>, and established public institutions<sup>11</sup> directly mandated to combat corruption which altogether have been characterised as

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<sup>9</sup> The legislation include: Access to Information Act, Anti-Corruption Act, Anti-Money Laundering Act, Budget Act, Government of Uganda Public Service Standing Orders, Inspectorate of Government Act, Local Government Act, Leadership Code Act, National Audit Act, Penal Code Act, Public Financial Management Act, Public Procurement and Disposal of Public Assets Act, and Whistleblowers Protection Act.

<sup>10</sup> Uganda has signed and ratified the African Union Convention on Preventing and Combating Corruption as well as the United Nations Convention against Corruption.

<sup>11</sup> The institutions include: Anti-Corruption Courts (Division of the High Court), Budget Monitoring and Accountability Unit, Criminal Investigation and Intelligence Directorate (Uganda Police Force), Directorate of Ethics and Integrity, Directorate of Public Prosecutions, Financial Intelligence Authority, Inspectorate of Government, Ministry of Ethics and Integrity, Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Local Government, Ministry of Public Service, Office of the Auditor General, Office of the President, Public Procurement and Disposal of Public Assets Authority, Parliament of Uganda and its oversight Committees (Public Accountability Committees), Public Service Commission, and Uganda Revenue Authority.

“probably the most complete set of accountability organs in the region, if not in the world” (Andrews and Bategeka 2013). In addition, the government has introduced a zero-tolerance policy to combat corruption and five national anti-corruption strategies have been formulated over the last two decades to demonstrate the government’s commitment to anti-corruption.<sup>12</sup> To further emphasise the relevance of this policy area, President Museveni and the ruling National Resistance Movement (NRM) government regularly issue statements publicly renouncing corruption.

The lack of implementation and enforcement of Uganda’s state-of-the-art legal, institutional and policy framework for anti-corruption result in a so-called ‘implementation gap’ of 47%, which is among the highest in the world.<sup>13</sup> Accordingly, the 2015 Afrobarometer (Transparency International 2015), reported that 69% of Ugandans think that the government is performing badly or not doing enough to combat corruption in the public sector. This is corroborated by the 2015 National Service Delivery Survey (UNBOS 2015), according to which only 10% to 16% of Ugandan households were aware of the Government’s efforts to fight bribery (16%), embezzlement and leakage of funds (10%).

The preceding situation underscores the need to collect evidence about the informal drivers of corruption that compromise the effectiveness of the available policies and instruments that the Ugandan government has at its disposal. A better understanding of those perceptions, beliefs and understandings of average Ugandans that impact the manner in which they respond to corrupt practices is an important element needed to inform continued efforts to uphold the rule of law. This report aims to make a meaningful contribution in this regard.

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<sup>12</sup> The first National Anti-Corruption Strategy (NACS) covered the period 1998-2001 with the second 2001-2003, third 2004-2008 and fourth 2009-2013. The current and the fifth NACS covers the period 2014-2019. The Directorate of Ethics and Integrity which is under Office of the President has the mandate to spearhead implementation of the NACS.

<sup>13</sup> In the Global Integrity Report (2011) Uganda was awarded an excellent score of 98% for its framework for anti-corruption legislation, which deals with detection, prevention and prosecution of corruption and 51% for the implementation of the framework.

# 4 Characterising petty corruption and its modalities

## 4.1 Corruption in the interactions between service providers and users

Before characterising the prevalence and modalities of petty corruption captured in this research, it should be noted that almost all respondents from all FGD groups – service users, managers and providers in both rural and urban areas alike – referred to the precariousness of the current situation affecting most Ugandan citizens (including poverty, high costs of living as well as notoriously low wages and heavy workloads) as a key obstacle to overcoming corruption. Salaries are often not paid regularly, jobs are insecure and scarce, and living expenses are unaffordable for many Ugandans.

Illustrating the above, one woman in the rural service users' FGD lamented: “the current cost of living is so high compared to the little salary.” Along the same lines, a teacher from Kampala explained that “money itself will never be enough unless you have side incomes”, which may not be illegal in itself but the need to go procure extra money may result in high levels of absenteeism. In fact, teachers' absenteeism rate is estimated at 20-30% according to the Uganda 2040 Vision (NPA 2015) and, according to a National Panel Survey conducted in 2011, absenteeism happens in one out of five primary school classrooms across the country (UNPS in Martini 2013, p. 6), thereby critically affecting the quality of education.

In this context, one of the overarching findings stemming from the research is that petty corruption – whether in the form of bribing, favouritism or absenteeism – is not necessarily regarded negatively but is rather often understood as an instrumental strategy that people resort to as a coping mechanism in order to meet their basic needs.

Another relevant insight is grounded in the perception of FGD participants in the service users' group that accessing public services and interacting with the public sector have for the most part very little to do with formal rights and entitlements. Rather, corruption is appraised to be inevitable and inescapable as it is deemed to be the most effective route to obtaining services, solving problems, accessing resources or, in other words, “getting things done.” Among Kampala participants the general perception prevails that even though all criteria are often met for receiving a service one is entitled to, it is often not possible to realise that entitlement without resorting to corruption.

In the study, the main modalities in which petty corruption is most frequently encountered are paying a bribe and using personal connections to obtain a service. These are sometimes even used simultaneously as having a personal connection may be conduit to negotiating the bribe.<sup>14</sup> This is further illustrated by the survey results that suggest that citizens in Uganda frequently deal with problems with public service providers by asking for help from an important person as attested by 21% of respondents (34% in the rural area).<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Bribing often involves money, but not necessarily, it may also involve the exchange of goods and even sexual favours commonly known as ‘sextortion’. The topic of sexual corruption is further discussed in section 4.3.

<sup>15</sup> In the survey, the respondents also stated they frequently deal with problems with service provision by firstly denouncing it to the management of the institution or office through the available complaint mechanism. However, in the FGDs we found little evidence that denouncing petty corruption through formal channels is an often-used strategy in practice.

In the case of the health sector, service seekers in Kampala agreed that treatment might be denied when the family of the patient refuses to pay a bribe or that they might be made to pay for medicines (for example, anti-malarial drugs) that should be provided free of charge. In the case of the education sector, teachers from Kampala discussed that bribing is a common practice to obtain assistance when sitting for the national exams. Bribing and favouritism are also used when the person seeking to obtain a benefit or service is not entitled or eligible to receive it. For example, this may be the case in order to get admission in a school or college when the individual does not have the required grades or to obtain a position in a favourable location as schoolteacher or Head Teacher ahead of other better qualified candidates.

Bribes may be solicited by the provider as a requisite to deliver the service. In such cases, bribing is extortive. Urban service users agreed that refusal to pay a bribe always creates problems for the service seeker, at the minimum in the form of an unduly long wait but also plausibly in the form of other types of aggressive retribution or even involving devastating personal consequences. Some examples given included a nurse blatantly asking a woman with severe chest pain to pay for a bribe, saying that “these days there are no free things, [not] even at the main hospital; give me 20 thousand [schillings] and I will take you to the doctor.” A similar pattern has been found in previous research involving victims of Sexual and Gender Based Violence (SGBV) where health workers ask for bribes of between 20,000 and 30,000 Shillings to conduct a medical examination (P. Bukuluki and Nyanzi 2017). Other incidents recounted by research participants involve a midwife asking a pregnant woman for a 25-thousand-shilling bribe so that she could provide the essential materials (a basin, soap and a cloth) to deliver her baby although those items should be made available at no cost.

Some respondents referred to fear of reprisals from corrupt low-level officials as an obstacle that prevents them from denouncing acts of corruption to the competent authorities. In fact, the unwillingness to denounce is sometimes associated with the fact that people rather want to be perceived as compliant because complaining and denouncing is expected to be counterproductive. This is further exacerbated by the fact that people do not generally expect any appropriate or timely action on the part of the authorities. In other cases, local leaders have refused to file a report because they know it takes a long time to get a proper replacement for a health worker. Thus, the decision to denounce may involve consideration of the costs of reporting at both the personal and the community levels.

Bribes can also be unsolicited, willingly offered by the service seeker in the hopes of expediting or improving the quality of service, obtaining an undue benefit, or avoiding a sanction. In this modality, an alternative but similar instrumental approach to paying a bribe is to come to the service point accompanied (or recommended) by a person who has a personal link to the service provider. Health and education workers in Kampala confirmed that there is a widespread belief among users that nothing can be obtained without paying a bribe. They estimated that in about half of the interactions users offer unsolicited “gifts” to providers. Consistent with these findings, the survey results show that around one in four of respondents in Kampala (24%) would certainly engage in the corrupt act of offering an inducement to a nurse to be treated promptly and avoid wait time.

From the perspective of service providers, refusal to provide a favour may be problematic. A significant number of health workers from Kampala explained that patients would accuse them of being “bad” or “rude” if they do not take a bribe. Requests for undue ‘favours’ also sometimes come from influential people. A head teacher from Kampala explained how unqualified people who want to run for election sometimes put thousands of dollars on the table in order to obtain academic credentials (such as the Uganda Advanced Certificate of Education) that are required to be eligible to contest for various political positions. There are undesirable consequences reported of head teachers refusing to grant

such credentials such as being transferred to a remote school. Similarly, a rural health manager stated: “there comes pressure from the sub-county officials where a patient comes with chits from senior sub-county officials and ask to be seen first [despite high demand and everybody else having lined up, ...] making it very hard to resist such pressure.” Sometimes, pressure is exerted from within as bribe-taking colleagues are known to bad mouth fellow colleagues (positive deviants) for not accepting bribes.

In other cases, public officials exploit their positions by proactively constructing opportunities for personal enrichment. For example, head teachers or principals at prestigious schools profit by informally sparing some slots in the enrolment process in order to please their superiors or earn money from wealthy parents whose children’s grades would not suffice for being accepted on a competitive basis.

Sometimes corruption may take place at the initiative of ‘intermediaries’. One health worker from Kampala stated that support staff often solicit bribes from users promising them a faster service. This health worker said: “[The support staff] comes over to you and says you know what *musawo*, (health worker) this is my sister and ask you to help the relative [and then] they do the same with the doctor this is my sister so you find in a day, the support staff has had like five relatives.” This is sometimes referred to as “clan soccer” and is often abused since the terms brother and sister are used in a fluid manner in Uganda.

#### **4.2 Corruption within the workplace**

Research participants also shared experiences about corruption at the workplace. It often occurs during the recruitment of staff by means of exchanging a bribe or through personal connections. In this regard, research participants pointed to anomalies in the recruitment process in the education sector whereby many employed teachers are not qualified but nonetheless recruited at the expense of other better trained candidates. Two rural health workers discussed how those recruited through corrupt means get promoted if they remain loyal to their superiors, whom another respondent labelled ‘god fathers’.

Overall, frontline health workers believed that promotions are predominantly given to corrupt workers despite the fact that the main criteria for promotions are based on performance including work effort and honesty of employees. A health worker added that “the doors for people who are not corrupt are very narrow but for the corrupt they are wide [open].” The latter are rewarded with promotions and deployment to better stations while the opposite applies to those who resist corruption.

With corrupt high-level officials recruiting and promoting only the corrupt, corruption naturally spreads further: “this is because the [corruption] chain will continue up the ladder from low cadres to the top leadership of institutions and departments and the chain of corruption will be everywhere [...] and never end”, as one respondent noted. Thus, corruption in the workplace may involve collusive behaviours among staff, as research participants described corrupt practices that can be facilitated by cooperative interactions between health facility managers and health workers.

Corruption in the workplace can also involve extortive behaviours where the victims may be the staff at the lower levels of the command chain. A newly employed health worker described that he was forced to pay a bribe while still on probation in order to obtain his confirmation letter and work forms; otherwise his employment would have not been further extended. In another example, teachers in Kampala complained that managers steal their allowances. However, even extortive corruption is frequently not denounced out of fear over losing one’s job or being bullied. As stated by a nurse who witnessed incidences of corruption involving fellow health workers: “although you know what is happening, you stay quiet because it’s beyond your understanding.”

All in all, when observing the practices at the workplace, distinguishing between relationships marked by collusion and those involving extortion proves often elusive. Higher-level actors may ensure obedience and compliance by subordinates by inciting them to engage in the corrupt practices themselves. As one health worker experienced: “if you refuse, you miss the job [opportunity] or your name will not appear on the payroll.” Subordinates not participating in the prescribed corruption schemes or denouncing incidences of corruption may face serious repercussions. At the same time, those engaging in corrupt actions benefit personally, which marks the ambivalence of these relationships.

From the perspective of service providers, both health workers and public school teachers, a central problem lies in the exceedingly low salaries they receive. Teachers also pointed to extremely long working hours as a conducive environment for corrupt behaviours. In this regard, teachers from Kampala said that in their positions they cannot often “bribe for money” but that sometimes they “bribe time” out of necessity. One teacher gave the following example:

“I am teaching in a primary school and my child is in secondary school and the child is sent back for fees. I don’t have money [and] am waiting for [the] end of [the] month, so after I have received money is when I will pay but will the child be studying? Instead I will bribe time, I go away [and] leave the children [I] am supposed to teach in class to look for where I can get some money. Therefore children will not get what they were supposed to get that day. I have bribed time so that is what is on ground, teachers do not bribe money as such but cheat on time and that one also I see that it is bribing to me, the way I understand it.”

These trends are confirmed by the 2015 National Household Survey, according to which 42% of Ugandan households state low salaries as a leading cause for corruption (UNBOS 2015).

### **4.3 Victims and perpetrators of corruption**

Although corruption affects everybody in one way or the other, the FGD analysis suggests that the most vulnerable tend to be women as well as the poor and underprivileged.

Women were particularly referred to as a group that has repeatedly fallen victim to extortion and fraudulent bribery. Research participants cited cases of women being subjected to brute force when they refused to pay a bribe. Among urban participants there was also a discussion suggesting that while larger bribes tend to be solicited from men, women give more easily into paying a bribe. According to one female service seeker, corruption and bribery are primarily male-dominated behaviours because “women fear to steal money, it’s men who are thieves and [who] have the techniques of stealing.” The FGDs also revealed how gender matters in the provision of public services in that interactions between the same gender often involve a rougher treatment (for example, of the female patient by the female nurse) whereas transactions between parties of the opposed sex are generally more ‘agreeable’.

The role of gender in corrupt transactions was also highlighted in the survey findings indicated by differing preferred strategies to deal with problems with public service providers. Whereas male respondents note that the best way to deal with problems would be to denounce malfeasance to the management of the institution or office through the available complaint mechanism; female respondents indicate that the best way to engage in such a situation is by asking for help from an important person.

Aside from physical violence, extortion and bribery - women often fall victim to sexual corruption: “if you are a lady and God modelled you very well and you can’t pay by cash then you can pay it on the bed,” one female participant said. Thus, access to public services is sometimes exchanged for sexual favours

in an extortive manner. However, sexual corruption is also said to be used instrumentally. In its mildest form, research participants agreed that sexual corruption manifests itself in that pretty women are often given a discount or said to use their looks to haggle with male service providers for a lower price. But according to the Kampala group, it is also often the case that “the female youth bribe using their bodies (offering sex).” According to research participants, this practice is commonly known as “thigh power”, and one example given involved a female student who offers her lecturer sex in exchange for (good) marks. This appears to be a relatively common practice, solely done by girls, who often complain to lecturers that they were awarded lower marks than expected and request an informal review of their examination papers insisting that lecturers will be able to find marks to add and improve their grades. Although few would suggest sex directly, this creates a situation of susceptibility to exploitation and abuse by lecturers.

Research participants also suggested that the most vulnerable and susceptible to bribery are those lacking a social network, those who are marginalised such as single mothers, who often do not have any relatives or friends to rely on that could connect them to service providers. This is also supported by the survey responses from women in Kampala, noting that the description of an individual that lives a fully autonomous life and tries to rely on other people’s help as little as possible, were rated most often as being ‘not like me’ (42%). This suggests that female survey participants in Kampala believe that it is important to have support of other people, particularly, as it relates to obtaining public services. In fact, in the urban users’ FGD the conclusion of the group was that the most vulnerable are the poor, not only because they lack the money to bribe but also because, as a participant explained:

“the poor have no networks, i.e. didn’t study with that person, does not know the other person [service provider] is not related to the other [...] The poorer you are the more prone to bribery because there is no one you are going to call, you know no one, you don’t have a child that knows a doctor that will call you for example if your father is going to a hospital and you know of a doctor you studied with you call him and inform him that your dad is coming. So a poor person [who] does not have such networks has no choice but to sell his goat to be able to go to the teacher or to the doctor and bribe.”

#### **4.4 The unwritten rules of the practice of bribing**

While the amounts involved in bribing are not necessarily fixed, there are unwritten rules that establish what constitutes a reasonable amount for a bribe. For instance, when asked when service providers would ask or *not* ask for a bribe, respondents argued that they first assess the personal condition and circumstance of each service seeker. In this regard, it was said that in cases of emergency, cases involving the care of children, the elderly and close-to-death medical conditions providers usually refrain from asking for a bribe. Also, respondents in the urban users’ group shared the opinion that the amount of the bribe may depend on physical appearances, such as the car one drives or the manner in which one is dressed: “well dressed people may be expected to have more money and a higher propensity to pay a bigger bribe than shabbily dressed ones.” One respondent and mother recounted the following: “to acquire services I go with my child on my back, with a calabash and often they assume that I am a poorly educated, suffering woman, and get their sympathy.” Other respondents said that “if one is to negotiate a bribe in respect to being offered a job, the amount of a bribe will be dependent on the expected monthly salary attached to that job,” or the amount of the bribe may also be “dependent on the amount of the possible fine the offender may pay should the case be forwarded to higher authorities.” Thus, each situation and chance for bribing or asking for a bribe is assessed individually.

Furthermore, bribing has its own language and there is a repertoire of strategies that Ugandans identify as signalling the intention to solicit a bribe. Some people directly indicate the nature of their request by for instance asking for “*lac kalam*” (to be paid for the ‘writing pen’) “*kintu kidogo*” (something small) or “give me my cut”. Others may more subtly insinuate their intentions by using expressions such as: “do you have a brick?”, ‘we’re out of fuel’, ‘give me airtime/transport’, ‘I don’t have a stamp’, ‘put a stone on your paper’ or ‘I need a pen to sign’. More recently, a handshake may be offered, insinuating the infamous presidential handshake where over six billion shillings were handed out to a selected group of high-level officials involved in the Heritage tax dispute case. Thus, there are frequently used expressions that indicate a bribe is being solicited.

In terms of gesticulation and body language, service providers might give the person supposed to offer a bribe a dirty look, become rude, or they might ignore them altogether pretending to be busy and unconcerned. Alternatively, service providers asking for a bribe may write the terms of the bribe (most likely the amount) on a small paper and hand it over to the service seeker. They may use gestures such as rubbing their stomach to demonstrate they are hungry and need something to eat; may also scratch their throats suggesting they are thirsty hence needs something to drink; or a woman may deliberately expose her thighs to suggest she is offering sex in exchange for a favour or her issue being resolved. The urban group also mentioned how sometimes service providers soliciting a bribe will exaggerate the situation as being very serious and having devastating consequences if nothing were to be done about it immediately. Occasionally the service provider may suggest referring the matter to another person; his or her superior but also sometimes a more junior staff who is in collusion.

However, as already mentioned, users often offer unsolicited bribes. In this regard, the research suggests that rejecting a bribe is rare, not only because of low incomes - “only a dog would bypass money!” as one FGD participant exclaimed - but also because of the social norms associated to gift-giving that have been previously discussed: ‘as a service provider you cannot reject such offer because it was given deliberately,’ which means that it would be rude to reject a bribe.

## 5 The role of social networks and the importance of social variables

Social norms and values can be understood as standardised generalisations concerning expected modes of behaviour among community members and therefore represent an important source of guidance on how to act in particular situations. Repeated social interactions and extended exposure to a given social structure leads to certain behavioural patterns becoming internalised and normalised, thereby forming collective social norms and practices (World Bank 2015; Hoff and Stiglitz 2015). In environments where high levels of corruption prevail, practices of petty corruption, including bribery and gift-giving, may therefore be perceived as the norm, and as such, become socially accepted and even prescribed (Lindner 2014; Banuri and Eckel 2012; Jackall 1988; Anders 2002; Anders 2005). In fact, individuals in such contexts may come to consider petty corrupt practices as either the way things are done or even as beneficial if direct personal benefits are derived (cf. Stahl, Kassa, and Baez-Camargo 2017).

In this section we present the findings associated with the social context and the manner in which accepted norms and values shape behaviours linked to the prevalence of petty corruption in Uganda. A salient topic that emerges from the research findings links reported experiences with petty corruption to informal social networks, their functional and structural attributes, the social dynamics they reinforce, as well as the costs and tensions they generate.

### 5.1 Social networks as effective resources for problem-solving

Any given individual is naturally part of a multiplicity of social networks, beginning with the closest ones comprised of family and friends and extending to networks involving more distant acquaintances such as school peers, neighbours, fellow church (or mosque) goers and so on. While for some Ugandan respondents, family and close relatives make up the closest and most trusted circle of a network, for others, close friends are the most important members of their networks. Social networks may be constructed on the basis of specific criteria of group affiliation such as gender, ethnicity or, as described above, professional acquaintances in the form of vertical networks at the workplace. Other networks may consist of 'friends of friends'. As one respondent puts it: "sometimes they can be relatives or friends [...] or sometimes I could connect through a friend who is closer to that person." In this case, there is more social distance between the one member of one social network connecting with another member of another social network through a friend or colleague they have in common. Significantly, the research suggests that inclusion criteria may also be fluid and instrumental whereby networks are constructed in a deliberate manner to link up individuals increasingly far removed from each other on the basis of pragmatic considerations.

The research findings confirm the insights from the Literature Review suggesting that social networks are particularly relevant in East Africa as the strong personal connections among members constitute an effective mechanism to pool scarce resources and provide access to goods, services, resources and even career opportunities to those involved (Jauregui, 2014; Ruud, 2000; Chang et.al 2001; Grodeland et al., 1998; Ledeneva, 1997; Sneath, 2002). It is for these reasons that social networks constitute an informal social safety net that helps people cope with resource scarcity and are therefore highly valued.

In the comparative discussion about the centrality of social networks in East Africa it is important to make a conceptual clarification. Whereas it is clear that individuals belong to multiple, overlapping

networks anywhere, the type of networks that are emphasised in this Project are those to which the individual feels bound by obligations that are primordial because they are enforced and sanctioned by stringent social controls. Those networks are the social equivalent to what the political sciences refers to as the leader's 'winning coalition' (Mesquita et al. 2005), meaning those constituencies whose support is most essential for maintaining legitimacy in the case of the political leader, and status and social recognition in the case of the individual. The networks understood in this manner are also interchangeably referred to as cliques, which is the subset of individuals in a wider network in which actors are more closely and intensely tied to one another,<sup>16</sup> or as reference group (following Koni-Hoffmann and Navanit-Patel 2017).

The relevance of social networks for this research is that they play a pivotal role in shaping behaviours due to the importance they have as mechanisms for pooling resources and therefore solving problems and coping with resource constraints. As one woman stated "alone you cannot do much to survive, [therefore] it is important to belong [to a network]." Thus, social networks are regarded as a resource to be resorted to in order to access needed services. As expressed by an FGD participant, in order to get treatment "you have to get a *musawo nga mukwanogwo* (health worker who is your friend)." Another participant added that networks are also important because they may facilitate a connection with high position officials who are more likely to get things done.

Survey results emanating from the Gulu District indicate that respondents primarily deal with problems with public service providers by asking for help from an important person, underlining the importance ascribed to social networks when accessing public services. This is also confirmed by the survey responses from Kampala, where 30% of respondents asserted not to be like the description of an individual that lives a fully autonomous life and tries to rely on other people's help as little as possible, again suggesting the central role that group belonging plays in their lives.

Social networks are desirable and sought after because they may be understood as a form of social currency in the Ugandan context. This can be appreciated in the implicit value and meaning that is attached to the networks as reflected in the perceptions of the research participants. For instance, commanding a vast network is considered to be a source of status and respectability, especially when the network includes individuals in positions of power and influence. Conversely, as mentioned before, FGD discussions suggest that not having a network is perceived to be a worse situation than having a low or no income at all.

Additionally, the conceptualisation of networks as a form of currency is also supported by accounts of how individuals invest in their networks. As indicated by participants in the providers' FGD from Kampala, a family may pool and invest large sums of money to get a child through medical school. The expectation thereafter is that this doctor will earn enough to provide for the family but also use his or her position to help the family in various ways including by providing preferential treatment whenever dispensing professional services.

The research findings suggest that due to this function they perform, social networks are built instrumentally, even strategically especially in the urban areas. Because networks help to access services it is important to make sure to have a relationship with useful people: "Teachers, health workers help you in different ways the reason you need to have many of such [in one's network]". Thus, respondents said that networks can be expanded by attending social functions (such as weddings and funerals), going to bars and other places where people consume alcohol, and through social media.

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<sup>16</sup> See [http://faculty.ucr.edu/~hanneman/nettext/C11\\_Cliques.html](http://faculty.ucr.edu/~hanneman/nettext/C11_Cliques.html) [25 August 2017].

Crucially, networks can be built on the basis of a transaction or exchange, which can be a gift but also a bribe. Health workers in Kampala explained how patients will come and give them money and understand that by doing so they have built a relationship, that they will be remembered and treated in a preferential manner going forward, which stresses the functional value ascribed to network building. Conversely, research participants explained that, unless a network is of benefit for its members and addresses some of their burdens, it may become obsolete and cease to exist.

## **5.2 Social values, social norms and network dynamics**

The effectiveness of social networks is related to the manner in which they embody deeply ingrained values of reciprocity, solidarity and moral obligation towards one's group. Based on these values, certain behaviours are expected. Thus, when it comes to the family, the entitlement to partake of the gains of a next of kin is an essential, unquestionable premise of social life in Uganda. In other words, it is a fundamental social norm and consequently, one of the worst transgressions occurs when an individual is seen to turn his or her back to a family member as witnessed by the following remark made by a service seekers' group participant in Kampala:

“If my brother earns 15 million and I ask him to help me pay twenty thousand shillings for my son to register for exams and he tells me about his cow which is sick and that he needs 100,000 for it to get treated yet he can't help me with only twenty thousand shillings; then what do I need from him apart from beating him to death!”

In many cases there will be strong expectations that relatives who are formally employed, by virtue of receiving a steady salary, should be in a position to support and look after the needs of the family.

Outside the close family, at the heart of the dynamics of the social networks lies an exchange or transaction that may involve a favour or a gift and is replicated and sustained through time. Each member is expected to contribute to the well-being of other members of the network in one way or another. This transaction-based relationship binds individuals by virtue of the mutual recognition that the receiver becomes morally indebted to the giver who, in turn, holds an entitlement to ask the return of the favour when needed. This transactional logic ties in with social values of reciprocity and is also aligned with social norms such as those involving gift-giving. In fact, because the act of presenting and receiving a gift is socio-culturally anchored, rejecting a gift can be interpreted as disrespectful and such a person is often referred to as *lacac* – somebody overly proud, confident and arrogant who looks down at others. The survey results confirm the relevance of reciprocity in the Ugandan social context as 40% of respondents in Kampala strongly identified with the notion that there is an obligation to reciprocate every favour received from friends and acquaintances.

## **5.3 Social networks and corruption**

The practices associated with social networks are linked to corruption in several ways. As previously indicated, an important social variable is 'social pressure' in a sense that social networks expect members that have access to resources – whether by virtue of being more affluent or holding a public position – to ensure benefits are secured for and distributed to the network.

Referring back to the example of the family who has invested in the medical career of a relative, the harsh reality of extremely low salaries means that their expectations cannot be realised. As a consequence, service providers may feel pressured to engage in corruption to “satisfy the family.” Significantly, survey respondents from the Gulu District could actually relate to a hypothetical situation

in which a nurse would solicit bribes at work in order to raise the needed money to pay school fees of a child and close to thirty percent of respondents (28%) noted that they would certainly engage in the corrupt act themselves.

Network dynamics can be observed within the workplace, where attitudes of management often reflect a sense of entitlement vis-à-vis subordinates, who in turn experience a sense of obligation towards higher-level officials. This happens especially during recruitment processes that are guided by particularistic criteria, which ultimately means that the job giver is granting a favour to the recipient, who thereafter enters the workplace under an unwritten, but well understood condition of indebtedness vis-à-vis the sponsor. As participants in the urban service users' FGD observed, public officials often engage in corruption "to serve the interest of the appointing authority." In practical terms, this means that the recipient of the favour must be prepared to cater to the demands of those above them, often at the expense of service users.

Also, as mentioned before, offering a bribe is understood to be one way to create a relationship with the service provider, thus co-opting this useful person into one's network. This means that the relationship goes beyond a one-off transaction and generates certain responsibilities and expectations. In other words, once the relationship has been established, the transactional logic underpinning the network dynamics replicates and perpetuates the practices of bribing and favouritism.

Practices of gift-giving to providers of public services are also common and provide an interesting example of the ambivalence that behaviours aligned with social cultural norms acquire when they take place in the context of the public sector. Being asked to draw a demarcation line between a gift and a bribe, several respondents agreed that: "a gift is something you are given with no expectation of any payback" whereas "a bribe comes with a demand attached." A gift is thus usually given with good intentions and as symbol of gratitude *after* a good deed or a favour has been rendered, whereas a bribe involves more of an informal transaction for which payment is effected *before* the actual service is completed.

However, in a context where social networks play a determinant role, the distinction may not be clear-cut. A gift does not preclude that a sense of reciprocity may arise among the involved parties, instating a sense of indebtedness on the receiver and a sense of entitlement on the part of the gift giver. In the words of a research participant "a gift [is] for something [well done] and not [to] ask for anything. Then someday [that] person will give you something saying that the other time you helped me so much." In this vein, a health worker from Kampala shared that often, when patients give a gift of appreciation, what it means is that they are expecting to be reciprocated by receiving privileged treatment in the future.

These examples illustrate how gift-giving is a widely shared social norm, an inherent part of the social structure and culture. These underlying conceptions indeed have the potential of blurring the distinction between a gift and a bribe as long as the fulfilled function and intended aim are rarely explicitly articulated. Furthermore, rejecting a gift or even a bribe may cause great distress and nuisance to the extent that it is rooted in local cultural traditions. As a female health manager from the rural area puts it: "because we work in a community [...] sometimes they don't bring [us] money, [but] cassava or even a chicken, when you have done something for them and have forgotten. They will even get annoyed if you refuse."

An important insight emerged when discussing the relationship between corruption and the social networks when a woman in the rural service users' FGD stated that: "It [corruption] has actually destroyed [networks] for some of us because you will connect very well with a friend but he or she

might become very sharp or greedy and divert what should have been yours [...] at a great personal loss.” What is remarkable about this reflection is that the participant understands corruption in this context as not sharing with the group rather than the misappropriation of public resources. Conversely, favouritism was not seen among Kampala FGD respondents as either corruption or bribery but simply as “using one’s networks and connections to get what one wants.” Kampala health facility staff also agreed that there is nothing wrong with giving preference to family members “your relative must be given priority if there is not an emergency, my mother, father, son or daughter come first.” Furthermore, there was agreement that this was the way things should proceed “according to culture.”

The discussions that were captured in the field shed light into how the social values and social norms that are important to the communities shape the normative perspective individuals adopt vis-à-vis practices that from a conventional good governance perspective would fall under the category of petty corruption. Among research participants, bribing is understood to have an instrumental intent: it is one of the strategies ordinary citizens may resort to in order to meet their needs and solve problems they face. Thus, urban public service users gave several examples that indicate that a bribe is understood simply as a means to “get what you want.” For instance, a bribe can be effective “ [for] your child to get admitted in a certain school in spite of not getting the marks needed to qualify to be admitted in that school.” Thus, the research participants had a clear understanding of the concept they were discussing, highlighting that the main point of a bribe is to convince an individual (a service provider, public official, a service user or a citizen) to change his or her mind so that one of the parties gets what they need.

From this perspective, bribery is tolerated in certain scenarios and under certain conditions, particularly those in which the transaction is viewed to be favourable to those involved. For example, a parent might come to the health centre with a sick child and find a long queue; paying a bribe in this situation may be viewed as a positive sum solution because ultimately the service provider - who is significantly underpaid - gets an income supplement and the parent gets speedy treatment for the child. Furthermore, the FGDs illustrate how there is such thing as a reasonable bribe, where a service provider that is ‘helpful’ at reasonable rates gets recommended across networks. Therefore, in a context where social ties are articulated in such a fluid and opportunistic manner, corrupt practices are exacerbated exponentially and without clear boundaries.

There are exceptions to this lenient view vis-à-vis bribing, in this regard, a major offense is acting out of greed as it is a transgression of the imperative to share. Thus, extorting a bribe out of a desperate situation (for example, refusing to provide treatment to somebody in critical condition) and demanding unreasonably high bribes are practices that are strongly and unequivocally condemned. The same can be said of bribing by individuals out of pure greed, understood as not sharing the profits of the corrupt deals with their group. In general, urban respondents did not consider corruption as ‘something bad’ as long as the bounty is redistributed among the more expansive and fluid networks in contrast with the case of rural areas where research participants denied that corrupt individuals share with their groups. In line with these findings, greed (78%) and rising immorality (86%) were declared the most important causes for corruption by Ugandans in the 2015 National Service Delivery Survey (UNBOS 2015), which relates to claims about the monetisation of society, glorifying wealth and ostentation as an important behavioural driver of corruption (see section 6.2). Interestingly, 49% of respondents in the National Service Delivery Survey stated ‘peer pressure’ as the reason that drives people to engage in greedy, immoral and corrupt behaviour (ibid., 249) – which illustrates the pervasiveness and strong influence of social networks as a major behavioural driver of corruption that is reinforced by the importance given to money and wealth. These findings showcase the importance of behavioural interventions aimed at attitudinal, behavioural and value change.

#### **5.4 Ambivalence of the social networks**

Social networks are regarded as valuable resources because they provide access to services, resources and are useful in coping with the challenges of life. Practices of petty corruption become normalised because the transactional logic of the social networks seamlessly penetrates the public sector to the extent that it could be said that they informally regulate the provision of public services. However, the research also points to costs and tensions that arise out of the intensive resort to social networks in the name of ‘getting things done’.

A female respondent argued that being part of a network is simply too expensive and risky: “for me, I just start from scratch [trying to secure the needed service, ...] because if you try to make [certain] connections, it can be too expensive for you to manage.” This comment highlights the fact that, although having no network is seen as worse than having little income, constructing and sustaining networks beyond the family requires resources. This is an inherently regressive impact of the extensive reliance on social networks; as pointed out by a female FGD participant who commented on how not everyone is able to afford a network’s membership: “some of us don’t have any relative or contact up there so there is nowhere to start from anyway.” A distinction on the relevance of social networking by socio-economic class is also supported by the survey responses whereby middle class respondents from Kampala tended to strongly distance themselves (“not at all like me”) from the individual described as “living a fully autonomous life and relying on other people’s help as little as possible” compared to the low income group, who to a large extent considered themselves to be similar to such character.

On the basis of the observations above, an important insight emerges about the relevance of social networks in the Ugandan social context. Networks are highly effective social safety nets that pool resources; harness group solidarity and espouse values and norms of reciprocity for the benefit of the in-group. However, networks are also exclusive and favour groups with moderate to high incomes who have the resources to command and sustain the loyalty of a network. Which leaves the poor, uneducated and non-connected excluded from the benefits of such informal safety nets and even more vulnerable to extortive bribing, low accessibility of public services and overall deficient state performance.

In addition, the research also reveals other tensions and costs associated with the widespread reliance on networks, which are mostly felt by providers of public services. A health worker in Kampala provided the perspective of the exponential costs associated with patients actively pursuing to build a network: a person might give a gift of appreciation one day and expect preferential treatment in the future and may even begin to induce their own family and friends to bring their own “gifts” in order for them to enter into the privileged treatment group. The ambivalence of the network dynamics is in that the successful provider who gets widespread recommendations across networks might derive a significant income supplement from it but at the same time acquires a heavy load of responsibilities vis-à-vis an increasing number of informal clients, all of whom demand and expect privileged treatment. In the research, service providers often shared that they felt overwhelmed and apprehensive for being subjected to numerous and conflicting expectations of family and informal social networks.

#### **5.5 Respectability, status and shame**

Research findings in Uganda closely relate to the complex challenges to anti-corruption identified in the literature in contexts where corrupt behaviours are rarely condemned (if not outright praised) when they are understood as being pursued in the fulfilment of values held dear in the communities (Jackall 1988; Anders 2005; 2002).

In the FGDs, participants were asked to describe those actions that gain individuals respect in their communities. There was overall agreement that a person is respected if he or she provides tangible help for the social group by solving problems and/or by acquiring resources on behalf of the group and sharing them. Some of the examples given about the kind of people who are respected in their community suggest that the legality of the actions by means of which such resources are obtained or problems solved is not relevant:

- "The serial thief who does not steal from his or her own community but shares the loot with the members of his or her community"
- "The thief who helps people in his or her community get things below market price"
- "Crafty people, for example one who is able to open any kind of padlocks"

These ideas about earning respect and status are strongly linked to attitudes of tolerance and even acceptance vis-à-vis certain corrupt behaviours. In the urban FGDs, respondents said straightforwardly that some of the consequences of engaging in acts of corruption are:

- "to get very rich and wealthy and hence admired by the masses",
- "to be popular, a celebrity and [thus] respected"
- to "become an investor and employ other people"

In turn, some of the answers received when participants were asked about the behaviours that cause a person to lose respect also provided interesting insights into how social status is linked to attitudes towards corruption. Particularly, several respondents underscored that taking bribes and engaging in corruption are no longer behaviours where one loses respect. On the contrary, respondent gave the following as examples of what may happen to those unwilling to engage in corruption: "one dies a poor person," will be "hated by many associates," "may be killed because of being seen as failing others," and "the people you work with and associate with ensure that you fail."

It should be recognised that amidst high levels of complacency and acceptability of corruption as a way of life, there were nonetheless positive deviants among FDG service provider participants in both Gulu and Kampala. These individuals provide in their own right a confirmation of the overall findings as they explicitly acknowledged knowing the costs associated with not getting involved in corruption but still opted to serve with honesty, in spite of often being rebuked, ridiculed and socially sanctioned.

## 6 Automatic Thinking and Mental Models: perceptions, shared ideas and self-fulfilling prophecies

Behavioural studies emphasise the importance of automatic thinking, which is the propensity to make judgments and choices automatically, rather than deliberately. Thus, decisions may respond to the presence of *frames*, which refer to the way choices are presented (for example, as a loss or a gain). Automatic thinking can also be associated to *anchors*, which are contextual aspects that have no direct relevance to a decision but that nonetheless affect judgement, leading individuals to jump to conclusions on very partial views of the problem. Choices may also be made on the basis of *default options*, which comprise the modal patterns of behaviour prevailing in any given social context.

Another key behavioural principle postulates that individuals' decision making is influenced by the mental models prevailing in their culture (World Bank, 2015). Mental models refer to categories and stereotypes that people use to make sense of the world and to shape their views. Mental models are also relevant to the extent that they shape the roles of different societal actors on the basis of what those actors believe is expected of them (*ibid.*). Shared images and ideas about social roles – including what constitutes being a 'good' politician, service provider and public official – determine how people come to expect themselves and others to behave in different situations (Kotzian, 2011). These collective images legitimise behaviours that may have no correlate to formal roles and legal mandates, thus opening the way for illicit actions to be tacitly tolerated and even accepted.

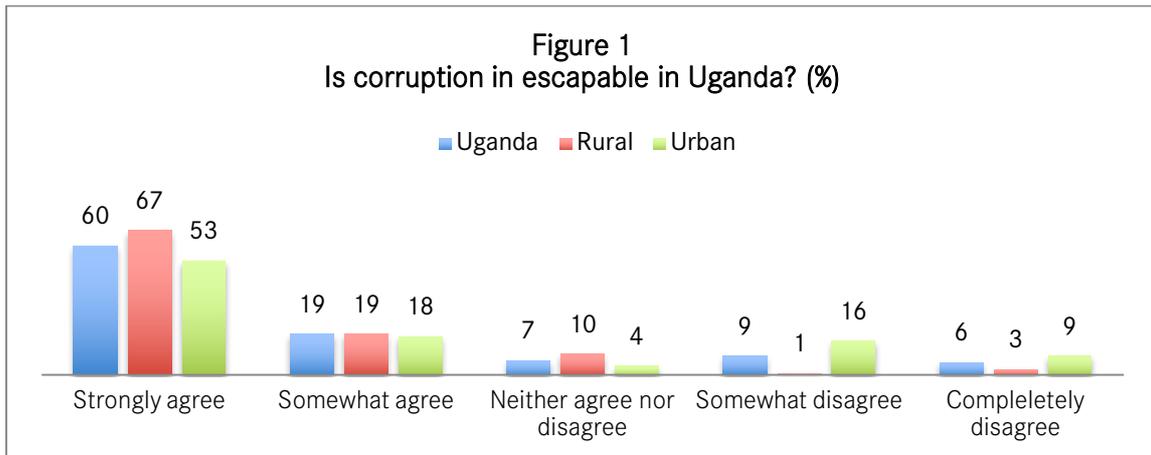
This section explores the impact of automatic thinking and mental models on the predispositions towards petty corruption in Uganda.

### 6.1 Narrow frames: perceptions about the prevalence of corruption in Uganda

As discussed in the literature review, one of the modalities in which automatic thinking takes over the rational mind is through the power of frames, whereby our choices and behaviours are affected by the perceptions of the generalised patterns of action adopted by others around us.

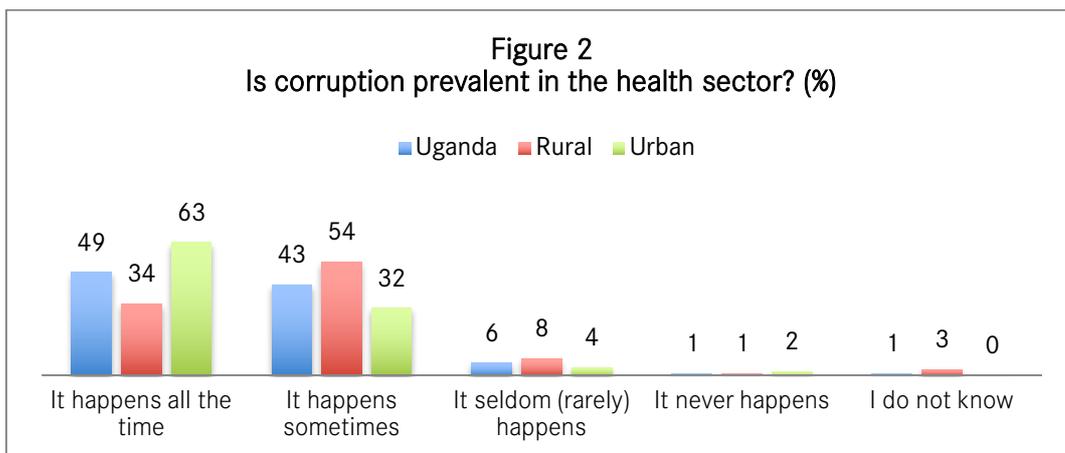
In this regard, FGD participants from both rural and urban areas almost unanimously agreed to the fact that corruption is virtually everywhere in Uganda with the health, education and, notoriously, the police sectors being among those most prone to petty corruption. Research participants also concurred that bribery is the most common and frequently used practice of petty corruption, and as a result thereof, has become an informal social currency that is deeply embedded in Ugandan society and culture.

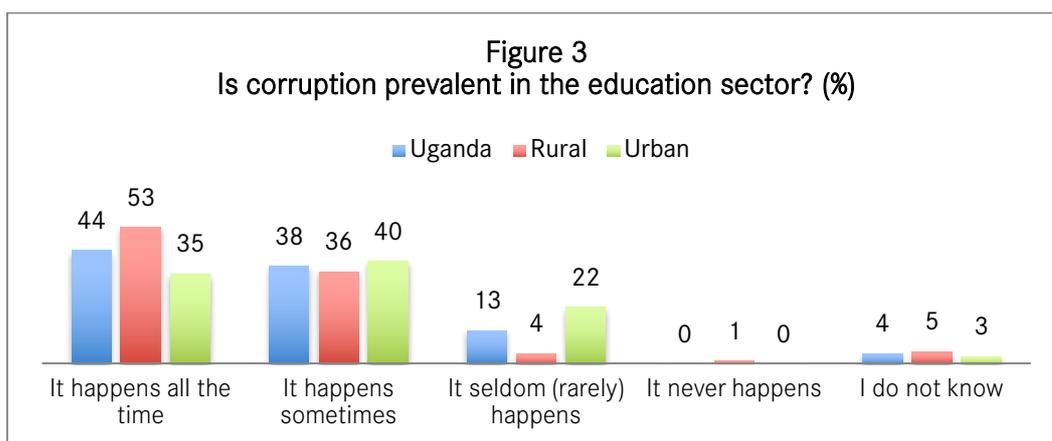
The perception about the pervasiveness and inevitability of corruption among focus group participants was also reflected in the survey results where 67 percent of rural respondents and 53 percent of urban respondents strongly agreed that corruption is inescapable in Uganda (see Figure 1 below).



When asked to point out which actors within the public sector are most likely to be corrupt, FGD participants strongly confirmed the presumption that corruption is found virtually everywhere. Corrupt practices are associated with most categories of public authorities including politicians, judges, bureaucrats, police officers, community workers, doctors, nurses and teachers among others. Furthermore, research participants also indicated that corrupt behaviours are not confined to public sector figures but are also practiced by neighbours, community members and even in-laws. As one woman denoted: “corruption will never end and looks like they poured [it] into the water people are drinking.”

For the particular case of the health and education sectors, research participants agreed that corruption is difficult to eradicate because of the manner in which it is fuelled by widely embraced social norms that strongly impact the behaviours of a broad range of actors, including doctors, head teachers, managers and even users who collude and construct complex corrupt networks. The survey findings complement these observations showing that the highest number of respondents (31%) rated trust in health care providers as ‘low’. These observations are also further highlighted by the survey findings regarding the perceived prevalence of corruption in the health and education sectors as shown in figures 2 and 3.





## 6.2 Mental models: stereotypes about Ugandan identity

As mentioned in section 2.1., FGD participants shared the perception that some forms of bribery or favouritism will be present when accessing public services, which means that petty corruption represents a narrow frame that shapes the behaviours of individuals in their interactions at the point of service delivery.<sup>17</sup> This narrow frame regarding petty corruption in public services is reinforced by other broadly held preconceptions. Kampala respondents provided meaningful examples of some of the expressions that are used to solicit a bribe such as “act like a Ugandan” or “what don’t you know?” which merit particular attention in this research as they confirm an expectation that corruption is the norm. Indeed, such expressions invoke collectively held mental models about the normalcy of corruption in the act of soliciting a bribe. This reinforces the common conception among Ugandans that corruption is a socially accepted pattern of behaviour. In fact, 25% of Ugandans state “the condoning attitudes of society” as an important reason for individuals to engage in corruption (UNBOS 2015, 249).

The expectation that if given the opportunity, anyone would engage in corrupt behaviours was articulated by a participant in the urban FGDs: “if someone is employed to slash grass around the compound, this person may not have the opportunity to get involved in corruption. But if presented with such an opportunity, he or she would have gotten involved in bribery.” This sentiment was also shared in a group discussion about an incident described by a FGD participant (users’ group) who was forced to pay a bribe before receiving medical attention. In this regard, the participants wondered whether she expected to be treated without paying a bribe, as it is common knowledge that to get treated at Mulago [National Referral Hospital] - like any other public health facility - you have to first pay a bribe to health workers.

In fact, FGD participants discussed at length the meaning and connotation of being Ugandan. Strikingly, most of them associated ‘Ugandaness’ with corruption, bribery, money-driven-ness, astuteness and sharp-mindedness. Ugandans, according to some, have by default an agenda. One service provider from Kampala recounted how when trying to confront a guard at the gate of the health facility who was soliciting bribes in order to let people in before opening hours “[the guard] asked me are you not a Ugandan?” Other respondents reflected that “talking [and thinking] of Ugandans [as being corrupt] is now becoming the habit of Ugandans” not only alluding to the fact that corruption has become the norm but that corruption is deeply embedded in Ugandan mentality. This negative connotation is not limited to Uganda, but has become a stereotype among neighbouring countrymen and fellow Africans.

<sup>17</sup> Narrow frames refer to the reference to which the automatic system of the mind refers to evaluate a situation or that which “automatically comes to mind” WDR (World Bank 2015, p. 6).

One participant recounts her experience when travelling to buy supplies in the Democratic Republic of Congo where “they refused to sell us things [...] the moment they realised we were Ugandans, who they call Ugandis, [...] saying that we are thieves and very corrupt and shouldn’t bring our corruption there.”

It is meaningful that young Ugandans, having been socialised and enculturated in such a highly corrupt and money-driven environment, acknowledge that being “a Ugandan, [also] means to be sharp enough” to make deals, recognise traps and seize opportunities.

A second mental model that emerged as highly relevant to this research relates to the importance ascribed to money and wealth among Ugandans. Indeed, the high value ascribed to material wealth as a driver of behaviours came out strongly in the FGDs. Becoming wealthy is one key aspiration that was shared by urban and rural FGD respondents because it gives people respectability and status: “rich people are highly respected and cherished.” One participant observed that: “most of their life people in Uganda are after money” and another added that “the community looks at an ideal man as someone who has a lot of money.”

Crucially, it seems that the means by way of which wealth is acquired are not given much importance, which suggests a link between the socially accepted criteria for status and the prevalence of high levels of corruption. One respondent noted that “the one who supports the community will be more respected and [as a consequence] nowadays, in our community the young people who get a lot of money *in whatever way* are respected more than the poor old men who may be working honestly.” Another respondent put it more bluntly: “the one with money will be respected, unlike the hardworking man with no money.”

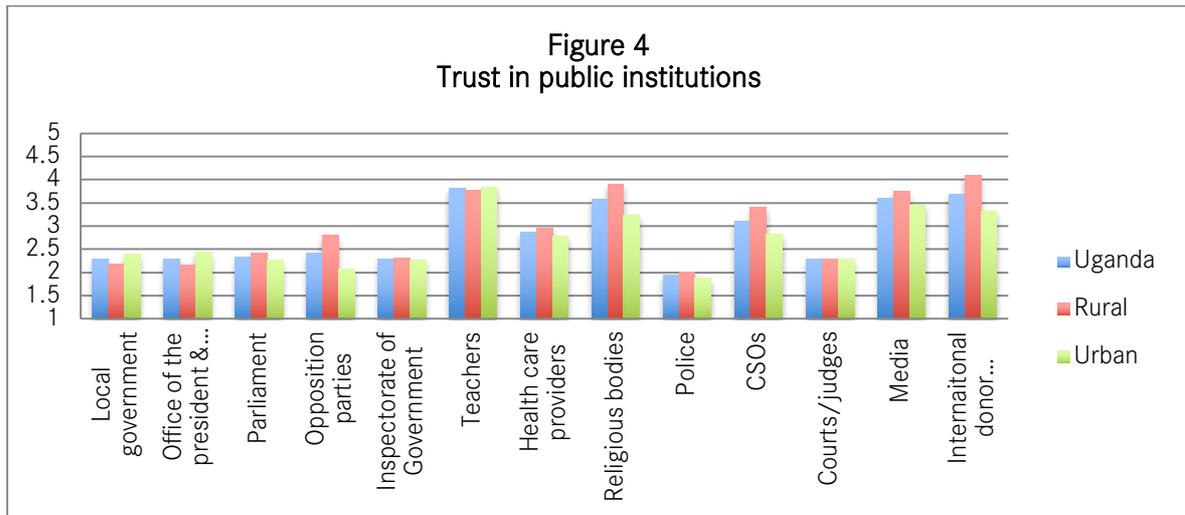
The importance given to being wealthy as a shared mental model of what is important to strive for in order to succeed, not only financially but also socially, links to a certain acceptability (or at the minimum tolerance) of corruption. Many Ugandans seem to have the feeling that in light of the high levels of political corruption and the precariousness politico-economic situation under Yoweri Museveni’s political regime, corruption is simply the way things are done, and as such, offers the most feasible chance at acquiring wealth and becoming rich. As one respondent said: “they say that during this current regime of Yoweri – if you don’t get rich then you will never be rich.”

### **6.3 Trust in institutions and attitudes towards the state and the rule of law**

Narrow frames and mental models that normalise corruption have important consequences for the way in which people view the state and the relevance of the formal legal framework in Uganda.

In both the urban and rural areas the current government is perceived to be highly corrupt, even informally endorsing corruption, espousing patronage and ensuring impunity. In the urban service users’ FGD it was expressed: “What would you expect from ordinary people when it’s rumoured that the President of the Republic and other very senior officials in his government invaded and looted timber from DRC?” Furthermore, in the urban FGDs, there was agreement that people “expect those holding public offices to enrich themselves legally and illegally” because “man eats where he works.”

Such attitudes are rooted, at least to some extent, in long-term historical experiences. For instance, according to research conducted by a member of the research team, in post conflict Northern Uganda, the state has either lost or has never gained legitimacy among some sections of the population; and therefore stealing state funds may be interpreted as being ‘smart’ rather than immoral (Paul Bukuluki 2013).



Average responses regarding trust in institutions in Uganda (1 = no trust, 2 = low trust, 3 = indifferent, 4 = high trust and 5 = total trust)

Thus, the perception about the endemic prevalence of corruption is associated with low levels of trust in public institutions as illustrated in Figure 4. Notably, in Kampala, respondents most often indicated that they had ‘low trust’ in the local government (38%) and even ‘no trust’ in the office of the President (36%). Similarly, survey respondents from the Gulu District most often noted that they had both ‘low trust’ in the local government (62%) and in the office of the President (39%).

The assumptions about the inevitability and pervasiveness of corruption in Uganda also fuel the perception that institutions responsible for taking on an anti-corruption function are ineffective. Most research participants in fact believe that part of the problem is that the law enforcement and anti-corruption institutions are themselves affected by corruption. For instance, research participants shared the opinion that the *Inspectorate Departments* of Education and Health have only shown very limited success in diminishing corruption. These sentiments are also captured by the survey results, showing that 31% of respondents have ‘no trust’ in the Inspectorate of Government and 46% of respondents indicated to have ‘no trust’ in the police. The belief is that the majority of these institutions are simply instruments serving the interests of the appointing authority (the President), whereas others (such as the Police) are additionally plagued with corruption due to low salaries.

The perception that detection capabilities are weak further reinforces the propensity of individuals to engage in corrupt transactions. This exacerbates the problem identified by some experimental studies that suggest that individuals who engage in corrupt actions tend to systematically underestimate the probability of being caught (Djawadi and Fahr 2013).

The attitudes towards the inevitability of corruption and the importance of wealth that have been described above have important implications for the way in which people evaluate the relevance of the formal legal framework. Overall, given the desire to overcome material constraints and the social responsibilities associated with the relevance of social networks as problem-solving resources, the legal order is relegated to a secondary and rather devalued place. In fact, several research participants conveyed the view that the formal laws are intrinsically unfair and, in pragmatic terms, little more than an obstacle to the pursuit of more important goals. From this perspective, the formal laws are also the product of a corrupt system aimed at serving the interest of those in power and the well-to-do.

In the urban FGDs participants brought up examples that illustrate how law abiding behaviour is actually frowned upon in the community. One participant explained the following: “in case a traffic official

arrests a member of a given community for breaking traffic laws and decides to forward the matter to higher authorities (for example, courts of law), the community will condemn and castigate the officer unfortunately for doing the right thing.” Also, as one service provider commented: “when you follow guidelines from the ministry, the community hates you.”

In contrast, behaviours that advance the welfare of individuals and their groups enjoy significant legitimacy. Among urban users, there was consensus that the civil servant who behaves honestly and as a consequence does not acquire wealth and cannot help his people will be despised because he/she “is not useful, helps no one, [and therefore] he/she can even be beaten and killed.” In contrast, a public official who “is able to share his wealth with the common people [when] he is getting the money from the government [it is fair because] those are our taxes. When you have lost someone he transports the body and pay for other burial expenses as well as taking care of some orphans for the late.” Nonetheless, in the rural FGDs participants also alluded to the fact that as much as the corrupt officials claim to be getting involved in corruption as a way to share the loot with their respective communities, especially those where they come from, the reality is quite different because the ill-gotten wealth stays in the cities where they live and is not shared with their families and communities of origin. In fact, the rural participants disapproved of the idea of stealing public funds on behalf of a given community.

Interestingly, in the survey a large proportion of respondents (44%) said that it is important to always behave according to the law and rated this description most often as being ‘very much like me’; which strongly contrasts with many of the positions expressed in the context of the FGDs. This apparent contradiction may actually suggest an intention-action divide whereby survey responses reflect more formal sentiments that in a more practical context need to be set aside in order to attain or furnish the requested public services.

#### **6.4 Traditional norms and values: taking a closer look at Acholi culture**

As the sections above indicate, corruption is considered to be widespread and rampant in Uganda – having become a habit and way of life since the last regime change. Thus, the shared perceptions about corruption being the norm were identified in the FGDs as a relatively recent phenomenon, identified specifically in relation to the current government. For instance, elderly service users remarked that during their lifetime as young adults, corruption was minimal because the social norms and social control mechanisms prevailing in the past were antithetical to corruption, with strong naming, shaming and stigmatisation extending to family and the clan of the corrupt.

In light of these considerations, and the fact that a significant number of studies suggest that there is a link between culture and the predispositions towards acts of corruption of individuals (Husted, 1999; Osei-Hwedie and Osei-Hwedie 2000; Hauk and Saez-Marti, 2002; Fisman and Miguel, 2006; Licht, Goldschmidt, and Schwartz 2006; Andaya 2009; Jung et al., 2014; Agbiboa 2015; Gächter and Schulz, 2016), it seems appropriate to inquire whether traditional values and norms provide an anchor that inhibits and castigates corrupt behaviours, or whether cultural propensities may have simply become exacerbated because of a more permissive stance on the part of the authorities. The fieldwork in Northern Uganda allows for this analysis to explore such questions more in depth in relation to the Acholi culture.

Acholi culture prescribes certain codes of conduct that promote honest behaviour and can, in principle, be seen as incompatible with corruption. For instance, one elderly and disabled service user mentioned the Acholi practice of ‘wang oo’ – according to which Ugandan tribes used to gather around a fire and cultural values, norms, skills, traditions (and so forth) were orally transmitted to community members in

a classroom-like setting: “in Acholi [culture] there was the traditional culture [practice] of *wang goo* where they teach [taught] each household on ethics if they heard that corruption was there.”<sup>18</sup>

There are also particular proverbs that warn people against the dangers of corruption such as “*Kalwok pe doko katwo*” (where you bath from is not where you dry from) which means that detrimental behaviours will always be caught; “*Lum winyo jo*” (even grass hears people) alerting people that illicit activities will be found out; and “*Ngwen mit ci okoke bene tye*” (the white ant is nice but it has termites) suggesting that the benefits from an undue practice are outweighed by its costs.

However, when inquiring about Acholi traditional cultural norms it is also possible to find evidence of norms and values that underpin most of the corrupt practices that have been documented in the research. Thus, in Acholi culture there are several proverbs that could be interpreted as justifying positive attitudes towards bribing. For example, the saying “*Latek keny wii ogwany mutwo*” (a difficult person misses the head of a wild cat) implies that if you refuse to give something, comply or abide by what I want, you will miss or not get what you want (a precious thing). Similarly, the proverb “*latic ber ki bakacic*” indicates that a worker deserves a token of appreciation, which reflects the values of gratitude and reciprocity but can be understood as implying that the service provider will not deliver for free, but rather needs something in return. Furthermore, the saying “*Atum pa Rwot imako i medo ki meg*” (you hold the chiefs’ spear as well as yours) can be understood as encouraging corrupt practices as it means that one can perform the work while at the same time engaging in other actions that bring personal benefit.

The proverb “*Ngat ma lacungu dwarne pe, keng jami pa lwak*” (someone without a representative will miss things meant for the community or public) is linked to the importance of social connections to obtain access to resources. Also, associated to favouritism, the proverb “*Labul tong gweno ngeyo ka pene*” (meaning he who roasts an egg knows where the umbilical code lies) encourages the appeal to someone in the system, as this person will know what needs to be done in order to get something or access a service. Similarly, the person who fails to take advantage of an opportunity might be told “*Ngor nyak i boto pa lawok*” (peas yield in a toothless persons garden).

Significantly, some of the traditions that encourage community harmony and cohesion resonate strongly with those norms that infuse the dynamics of the social networks. For instance, Acholi values include helping each other out, taking care of the family, being ‘well behaved’ and paying tribute and respect. Acholi traditions also expect community members in high positions to help out relatives and family members and those failing to do so will “be regarded badly [because] people with money are supposed to help their community,” as one respondent puts it.

The importance of leadership is also recognised in Acholi culture. For instance, there is a saying that “*Obong dyang ma ping lubo ma malo*” (the hind legs of the cow follow the ones in front) which is said when referring to an action that was copied from an elder or an authority. Another saying “*Butu i nget bye oweko kom pura kwa*” (sleeping near the ant hill has caused the body of the buffalo to turn red) justifies behaviours on the basis of their prevalence in a given context, which could be understood as implying that being with people who are corrupt also makes you corrupt.

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<sup>18</sup> It should be noted that this type of practices, in one form or another, can be found in most other cultures in Uganda.

# 7 Conclusions

## 7.1 Behavioural determinants of petty corruption in Uganda

The research findings shed light on the experiences of citizens when accessing public services. Besides confirming that petty corruption is a routine occurrence in the encounters between citizens and public officials, the research data also illustrate how formal rights and entitlements for the most part lack practical relevance in the provision of public services. Similarly, the concepts of duty bearer and right holder, although often used to refer to service providers and seekers respectively, seem to have limited practical meaning in defining the relationship between public officials and citizens. Instead, the picture that emerges is one where the provision of public services is informally regulated on the basis of behavioural patterns emanating from social norms and values, narrow frames and collectively held mental models. Therefore, the evidence collected strongly suggests all three of the behavioural principles of human decision-making outlined in the World Bank's 2015 World Development Report play a relevant role in the persistence of high levels of petty corruption prevailing in Uganda.

A first consideration stemming from the analysis of the findings points to the socio-economic background and context conditions that increase the salience of behavioural influences on individual decision-making during the provision of public services. In this sense, resource scarcity, low wages and low state capacity to enforce formal regulations contribute to creating an environment where individuals strive to embrace informal practices that are useful in coping with adverse conditions and meeting essential needs. The challenging socioeconomic context is thus a crucial reference to adequately contextualise the research findings that indicate that citizens perceive the commonly occurring instances of bribery and favouritism as necessary coping mechanisms.

The research indicates a strong influence of sociality and social factors that fuel petty corruption. Socially driven corrupt practices are enacted on the basis of the social norms and values that underpin the dynamics associated with social networks. The evidence unequivocally indicates that social networks are not only problem-solving resources, but also articulations by means of which an informal re-distribution of resources is effected. These networks rely on unwritten rules of reciprocity and obligation to the group in order to be effective. Abidance by those rules largely determines the manner in which reputation and status are cultivated or destroyed.

There are clear links between the practices of the social networks and instances of both bribery and favouritism. Firstly, there is an expectation that individuals must look after the welfare of their group, which means that privileging family and acquaintances in service provision is considered compulsory. Secondly, the obligation to assist the network also entails that individuals, especially those with formal employment, must acquire resources to share with the rest of the group. Thirdly, because personal connections are helpful, individuals actively seek to build their networks to co-opt useful actors and a common strategy to this end is to offer a gift or a bribe to providers of public services.

Many of the findings that have been discussed in this report suggest that there is a certain degree of social acceptability (or at the minimum tolerance) towards corruption and that social sanctions for corrupt behaviours are lacking. However, to conclude that corruption acceptance is a good characterisation of the attitudes of research participants would not only be misleading but also inaccurate as it would fail to convey the more nuanced elements that shape the behaviours associated to petty corruption in the Ugandan context. As the findings show, although favouritism and bribing to expedite services are not associated with negative connotations, there is a strong condemnation of

certain corrupt practices such as extortive bribing, bribing with amounts deemed excessive and bribing of close associates and family.

The analysis suggests that understanding such differences requires recognising that the admissibility of different behaviours is constructed on a basis other than a simple dichotomy between corrupt and non-corrupt actions. Instead, the criteria for defining social acceptability, respectability and status as well as the normative views on corruption become clearer when assessed with regards to the social norms and values that are truly relevant to people. As stated earlier, the values of solidarity and reciprocity are crystallised in social norms that promote sharing with one's group and reciprocating favours and gifts received.

Therefore, through this perspective, actions that enjoy acceptability are those that are perceived as being motivated by a desire to help and share with the social group (especially family) and to reciprocate a favour or a gift received. Thus, circumventing or outright violating the legal prescriptions for the benefit of one's group is an element strongly associated with social respect and status. In a similar fashion, being greedy or unhelpful is condemned and even seen as corrupt vis-à-vis the social normative framework. In contrast, the formal legal order is assigned limited relevance and legitimacy in the eyes of most people. Thus, the acceptability of bribing to avoid sanctions and the lack of relevance of formal entitlements are closely associated to a widely held view of what is considered an inherently unfair legal order.

Overall, the normative judgements about different behaviours that span the scope of interactions between citizens and public officials can be strongly associated with an underlying conception of social justice by which any given transaction is normatively appraised. The same criteria of social justice seems to underpin more positive judgements about behaviours that benefit group welfare and are aimed at effecting a redistribution of resources in favour of the social group. Thus, corruption is only considered 'bad' if the proceeds do not reach the people.

The research findings also demonstrate that socially motivated drivers of corruption are reinforced by elements of automatic thinking and collectively held mental models. Section 4.1. of the report shows how people indeed expect corruption to be the norm, which means that corruption is likely to be the automatic reference point (narrow frame) that shapes reactions of individuals in their interactions with public officials. As the Literature Review indicates, shared expectations about the behaviours of others reinforce decision-making that aligns with the norm, sometimes even subconsciously, on the basis of emotionally nuanced tendencies to reciprocate modal patterns of behaviour (Kahan, 2003; Mauro 2004; Dong, Dulleck, and Torgler 2009; Barr and Serra 2009; Kotzian 2011; Carson 2013; Peiffer and Rose 2014; Zaloznaya 2014; Lindner 2014).

Two major mental models associated with attitudes towards corruption were found in the research: one that links Ugandan national identity and corruption, and another related to the idea that success and respect are contingent upon amassing money and wealth regardless of the source. Both mental models are related and in fact reinforce each other, generating a collective narrative in which corruption is normalised as means to enrichment. This increases corruption fatigue, which makes news about corruption scandals a non-salient issue as they only corroborate the expectations of people about how leaders and state officials behave. In the research findings, there are clear indications of such mental models leading to somewhat cynical attitudes vis-à-vis corruption scandals involving high-level government officials.

Due attention should also be given to the observed scepticism about the effectiveness of the government's anti-corruption efforts and law enforcement agencies in particular. The point to be

emphasised is that mental models that normalise impunity are a considerable obstacle to promoting citizen demand for better law enforcement and other demand-side interventions. Associated with the latter challenge is a pronounced indifference and even public disregard for the formal legal framework among FGD participants.

This brings the analysis back to a final point that should be underlined. As mentioned above, in relation to the norms that regulate social interactions, a complicating factor that is linked to the entrenched nature of petty corrupt practices among Ugandans is the coexistence of two overarching normative frameworks: a formal, legal one that prescribes behaviours governed by adherence to principles of a universalistic provision of public services and distribution of public goods on the basis of formal qualifications and entitlements, and an informal one based on solidarity and reciprocity that prescribes distributive decision-making on the basis of personalistic and particularised criteria. In practice, the research shows that the gap between these two normative frameworks is significant; individuals do not identify with the rule of law and find it inherently unfair, whereas the networked logic of trust-based reciprocity and moral obligation is effectively the foundation for the construction of social status.

## **7.2 Policy entry points**

A central consideration for developing anti-corruption interventions that tackle the behavioural factors exacerbating corruption risks must include the recognition of the functionality of corrupt practices, such as bribery and favouritism, in solving-problems and helping average citizens to meet their basic needs. The research findings suggest that practices of petty corruption must be understood as constituting an informal social safety net against the failure of the state to provide adequate services and to implement effective and targeted social programmes for the population. The feasibility of the informal safety net is further enabled by the failure of the state to provide adequate complaint mechanisms and to enforce sanctions against public officials involved in alleged abuse of office, which breeds a sense of impunity and lowers the perceived risk of detection and punishment.

While such considerations unequivocally indicate the importance of strengthening top-down governance mechanisms to improve the performance of state institutions, the research also sheds light on several entry points that can be harnessed from the bottom-up to promote positive changes and anti-corruption outcomes.

The review of the relative effectiveness of anti-corruption interventions suggests that policies and strategies that question commonly held beliefs about corruption can be effective in addressing narrow frames and shifting mental models (Stahl et al., 2017). Two key points need to be emphasised in this regard:

- ***Firstly, reinforcing and emphasising actions and messages that challenge conventional wisdom is essential, particularly when it comes to the expectation that corruption is inevitable and that it tends to go unpunished.***
- ***Secondly, individuals are highly pragmatic, as evidenced by the functionality of the practices of petty corruption, and for that reason they are more likely to react to messages that clearly outline the hidden costs of corruption that exist beyond a short-term and short-lived benefit.***

In this regard, challenging conventional wisdom would involve actively and credibly disseminating information about steps being taken to strengthen enforcement of sanctions and to visibly publicise cases of crimes of corruption being investigated, prosecuted and ending in convictions. As the Literature Review suggests, the messages conveyed in any anti-corruption awareness raising campaign

must not only contradict existing stereotypes but also showcase evidence about the personal costs that corrupt practices impose on families.

- ***Linking the exposure of cases of bribery, favouritism or embezzlement with concrete examples of the costs and consequences of corruption could be an effective strategy to promote a message that contradicts prevailing mental models.***

Along similar lines, the assessment of the relative effectiveness of anti-corruption interventions reinforces some of the lessons learnt about the power of information in changing minds and behaviours. Specifically, in contexts where corruption is endemic, informational campaigns that focus on raising awareness of formal rights, entitlements and on building capacity to aid citizens in identifying instances of corruption tend to have only moderate success. When behaviours are influenced by quasi-rational factors such as narrow frames and mental models, the evidence from the Review suggests that an effective way to challenge conventional wisdom is by disseminating stories and illustrative examples of how corruption hurts individuals and families as well as contradicting notions that the corrupt are successful in life. There is increasing evidence about the effectiveness of so-called “edutainment” campaigns in disseminating and convincingly communicating positive messages via soap operas and other variations of storytelling where positive role models are reinforced (see for example Hoffman and Patel 2017, 30). This could include shedding light on the plight of positive deviants that pay a high price for not getting involved in corruption. These individuals should be recognised; thereby encouraging and demonstrating that their uprightness is appreciated and not in vain. While the research indicates that corrupt individuals are sometimes regarded as heroes because they seem to be doing well and are often recognised in many places including churches and public functions, anti-corruption champions need also to be profiled and exalted to counter the mental models associated with social status and success.

- ***Disseminating messages via mass media interventions (such as community broadcast radio programmes) that put the spotlight on stories of how corruption hurts people’s livelihoods, the importance of quality public services and reinforcing positive role models can be an effective strategy to complement and reinforce official efforts to counter petty corruption.***

The evidence from the research highlights the many ways in which public service providers stand in a position where the divergent demands of the formal and informal normative frameworks collide. Service providers are subject to multiple social expectations and demands that often contradict their formal duties. The perception that informal norms are more strictly enforced by means of social controls is compounded by shared narrow frames and mental models that suggest that the formal legal framework, in contrast, does not provide a compelling deterrent for corrupt behaviours. However, the research findings elucidate the tensions that the network-based social interactions generate for the service providers who testify to feeling stressed and overwhelmed by often unrealistic expectations on the part of their networks. In this sense, practitioners need to think of innovative interventions that increase the credibility of sanctions at the workplace while appealing to the interests of providers and their networks by developing schemes that, rather than relying on negative incentives such as mechanisms for denouncing corrupt behaviours, actually reward honesty and integrity.

- ***Reshuffling the incentives of the service providers in a way that responds to the conflicting normative directives they are confronted with would entail a combination of making the threat and risk of detection and punishment more likely and credible. Introducing positive incentive schemes by means of which honest behaviour is tangibly rewarded and made***

***relatively more attractive to both service providers and the social networks; thereby giving them incentives to act with integrity and honesty.***

The focus on service providers can also be tailored through a sectoral approach to promote social norm changes in the organisational culture of the workplace. As the research indicates, there is indication that peer pressure among health workers can exacerbate corruption risks along with the unsolicited proactive efforts of users that seek to befriend health workers. The literature suggests that certain changes in the work environment can be useful to combat the narrow frame about the inevitability of corruption.

- ***Small, simple interventions might be effective to propel and reinforce positive changes in organisational culture at the workplace. Different heuristic cues can be explored and tested for their relative effectiveness, examples of which may range from improving the visibility of official rules and procedures (for example by means of displaying citizens' or patients' charters) to smaller symbolic gestures (such as one tested in an intervention in Serbia where health staff were required to wear pins with the legend "I work for the salary not for the bribe").***

Another crucial intervention area involves social networks, which are essential to the social fabric of Uganda. The research underscores how their effectiveness is sustained by locally held values of reciprocity and solidarity. Such values constitute key network properties that can be creatively harnessed in pursuit of better development and anti-corruption outcomes. An emerging field of research that focuses on social networks as vehicles for effectively delivering certain interventions, particularly tested in the field of public health (see for example Kim et al. 2015), has shown great potential.

- ***Applying techniques that have been tested in other fields to identify influential individuals within social networks and working with them as anti-corruption champions to diffuse important information and promote certain behavioural changes. This has the potential of maximising intervention impact by virtue of the intrinsic properties of social networks whereby knowledge and behaviour can spread exponentially across interpersonal ties.***

The research also suggests that promoting social accountability approaches that rely on individuals denouncing instances of corruption tend to be ineffective given the fact that bribing and gift-giving are often initiated by users themselves. In these cases, service seekers feel compelled to engage in bribing and favouritism as these practices rely on ties of trust and reciprocity between those providers and users of public services. Only in social contexts where corruption is collectively condemned and frowned upon (such as extortive bribing) would make citizen-denouncing a more viable alternative. Purely relying on denouncing is problematic given that service users, especially from the rural FGDs, reported being fearful about retributions from accusing corrupt service providers.

- ***Strengthening the anonymity of current complaints mechanisms would be a positive step albeit not a sufficient one.***

The challenge, thus, is to address the identified factors that motivate users to proactively bribe and seek personalised favours from the providers. In this respect, the research findings emphasise that service users regard bribing and favouritism as strategies to get the attention they need or desire. For this matter one can learn from the lessons of other countries that have successfully contained high levels of petty corruption. An example of this is found in Georgia, where the functionality of petty

corruption was effectively diffused by formalising the willingness to pay for a service in the form of institutionalised service fees.

- ***Bribing might be formalised in health facilities on the basis of “pay as you can” differentiated user fee scales by means of which people without a medical emergency that nonetheless are willing to pay to avoid waiting can do so while at the same time free access to essential services for vulnerable groups is protected.***

To avoid regressive effects, a system of categorisation by income level similar to the one in Rwanda might be considered. Ensuring that state efforts go to providing an effective safety net for the poor is particularly important in light of the research findings that suggest that the network-prioritised access to services is regressive. Especially, given that maintaining a network requires resources and the poorest typically lack the kind of network connections that may help them avoid being consistently relegated in the provision of public services.

The gap between formal and informal normative frameworks is also a topic that practitioners need to address to promote better anti-corruption outcomes. In this sense, explicit appeals to traditional Ugandan values as the basis for social and other official programmes and policies might be a palliative to the lack of perceived legitimacy of the formal legal framework. As evidenced by the brief review of culturally based norms stemming from Acholi traditions, there are plenty of traditional norms that appeal to communal values of honesty and integrity that could be emphasised; although it is true that several of those could be interpreted as promoting practices of bribery and abuse of power. In this regard, the case of Rwanda again provides useful insights.

- ***The rehabilitation of traditional values via policies that draw on accepted social norms and practices can be a successful strategy to close the gap between formal and informal normative frameworks and can be combined with a public campaign aimed at tackling the associations between Ugandan national identity and corruption.***

Another key topic that emerged strongly in the research findings is the apparent prevalence of sexual corruption. This deserves special attention, as sexual corruption is hardly comparable to other types of corruption. For instance, in cases of sexual corruption one key question is whether the actions of both the bribe taker and the bribe giver should be equally criminalised. Some scholars have put forward that regardless of who requests the sexual exchange, only the public official and not the woman should face corruption charges because of the power asymmetry, which makes any argument about consent questionable. Corruption charges however should proceed when a woman makes a sexual proposal to obtain a favour from a public official and the latter refuse as the woman is then guilty of attempted bribery (Gitlin 2016). If one were to agree with this interpretation, then it would be of utmost importance to raise awareness among male public officials of the implications and consequences of accepting sexual favours from the public, possibly in a light that makes such offenses particularly shameful and costly. This message could be disseminated and reinforced via “edutainment” campaigns where positive role models could be reinforced. Positive role models of engaged, empowered women could also be sought out to improve denouncing rates among victims of sexual corruption. A positive experience in fighting sexual corruption in the education sector in Cameroon involved enabling female students at university to bring their grievances about unwanted sexual advances by professors forward to one of the highly respected Vice-Chancellors, who as a female role model conveyed a strong presence (Little 2014).

- ***Raise costs – in terms of criminal sanctioning and social shaming - of soliciting or accepting sexual favours on the part of male public officials. Establishing safe whistleblower mechanisms for women to denounce unwanted sexual advances preferably linked to a strong, positive female role model.***

The research on behavioural drivers of corrupt behaviours delivers evidence about the processes and areas that are promising entry points for developing interventions aimed at promoting behavioural change in support of better development outcomes. However, adequate contextualisation of any development intervention is crucial, especially in the case of behavioural interventions, as it is extremely difficult to predict which precise approach is going to be effective and fitting for the intended target groups. Therefore, practitioners must be prepared to experiment and test different approaches to find out to which the target populations are most responsive.

- ***Developing pilot interventions to test different approaches to behavioural interventions by means of rigorous experimental methods such as randomised control trials in order to discover the most effective programme models.***

Finally, albeit certainly not least, the research suggests the importance of building confidence in the state institutions charged with fighting corruption. The research brought forth the extent of lack of trust in specialised anti-corruption agencies. People often expressed reservations about forwarding complaints to these agencies which they accused of being corrupt and serving the interests of the appointing authorities. Indeed, research suggests that 44% of Ugandans believe that the most effective measure to counter corruption is to strengthen anti-corruption law enforcement (UNBOS 2015). In this regard, the research participants preferred to report to the institution where the corrupt behaviour was encountered. This therefore suggests the need for the proper institutionalisation of anti-corruption efforts throughout all public institutions. In this regard, a relevant entry point would be to concentrate efforts on delivering results in an area that is of direct relevance to the welfare of individuals and families, as suggested by the Literature Review.

- ***Improving the image of the anti-corruption authorities through a comprehensive campaign that combines strengthening of conventional monitoring and sanctioning mechanisms alongside the piloting of innovative behavioural approaches to curb corruption in a particular sector, such as health, that deeply impacts the welfare of citizens.***

Fighting high levels of corruption unquestionably is a paramount challenge. Two decades of experience from developing anti-corruption approaches based on legal and institutional reforms have shown that formal instruments are not sufficient to eradicate entrenched practices. Adopting a behavioural lens to unveil deeply rooted beliefs and habits that incentivise corrupt practices significantly broadens the opportunity space for developing new and more innovative and effective anti-corruption approaches. The findings from this research together with the empirically informed policy suggestions are expected to make a meaningful contribution in this direction.

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