Executive summary

Strategic anti-corruption communications and behaviour change interventions

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A summary of Working Paper 45: *Strategic anti-corruption communications – Guidance for behaviour change interventions.* **The Working Paper joins our Public Governance team's efforts to strengthen evidence around behaviour change approaches to address corruption. It was prepared as guidance for the USAID Indonesia Integrity Initiative (USAID INTEGRITAS).**

This publication is intended to guide practitioners who are seeking to complement conventional anti-corruption measures by adopting a behavioural communications approach. It aims to connect a typology of anti-corruption messages with behavioural change theories, and discuss their impact. Subsequently, it suggests practical implications for designing anti-corruption communication as part of behaviour change interventions.

Seven key topically pertinent studies are reviewed to identify typologies of messaging and their effectiveness. The messages can be categorised as:

→ Messages about the pervasiveness of corruption

→ Messages about actions undertaken against corruption

→ Messages about corruption as a moral issue

→ Messages about the impact of corruption

→ Messages about the illegality of corruption and sanctions

→ Narrowly framed messages tailored to specific audiences

Overall, the review finds that:

→ Emphasising that corruption is widespread typically backfires.

→ Negatively framed messages are mostly ineffective.

→ Messages with a narrowed focus and target group may be more effective.

Insights from behaviour change theories and research can provide further guidance:

→ Social norms provide a helpful conceptual framework to tackle corruption as a collective action problem. Approaches that challenge social norms and reveal "true norms" have been found to be successful in fighting corruption.

→ Messages can shape and change beliefs via priming (increasing awareness of and cognitive engagement with an issue), learning (new information leads to updating beliefs and perceptions), and persuasion (individuals are persuaded to think differently about the issue).

→ Messages aimed at triggering learning and/or persuasion might be more effective if they are adequately contextualised, formulated and delivered.

→ Certain messages fail to convince people to update their beliefs – even in the face of credible information that would appear to contradict held beliefs. Behavioural science suggests some approaches to overcome these challenges:

— People might be more open to updating their beliefs when their environment and/or welfare (external or internal) changes.

— Prompting people to seek additional information, rather than simply telling or informing them about relevant issues, may increase effectiveness.

Further, each anti-corruption communication intervention should be based on its own, tailored Theory of Change (ToC) to properly reflect the complexity of the targeted problem and the different activities and pathways that can ultimately lead to the desired change. **The following stepping stones towards achieving such a ToC and suitable intervention entry points are detailed in this resource:**

→ Identify and formulate

— specific goals;

— the specific problem and its context;

— the necessary preconditions which constitute the pathways for change.

→ Consider

— the baseline of prevailing descriptive norms, injunctive norms, personal attitudes and behaviours;

— the power of influence (identify which outcomes are within the intervention's control);

— the messenger (certain messengers hold more sway in reaching the target group than others).

Finally, the guidance recommends that practitioners:

→ Invest in a strong monitoring and evaluation framework. This is crucial to measuring the achievement of outcomes effectively, and should be implemented continuously from the point of the intervention's development to its completion.

→ Make the message relevant and actionable, by:

    — inviting relevant stakeholders to comment on the ToC logic and integrating their feedback into the ToC and intervention design;

    — observing real-world behaviour rather than merely surveying experiment results;

    — using messages about the concrete impact of corruption (particularly on the target's immediate environment) to stimulate the audience to take action.

→ Develop a long-term approach, for instance by complementing messaging with:

    — changes in other factors of the choice architecture;

    — community meetings;

    — cultivating networks of champions;

    — engaging opinion leaders;

    — credible monitoring.