

## Implementing Effective Anticorruption Programs in Post-Conflict Countries

by Bert Spector, Technical Director, Management Systems International

International and bilateral donors have poured large sums of money into post-conflict countries like Afghanistan and Iraq to hasten security, stabilize the peace, rebuild governance, and stimulate economic and social development. Often, a cross-cutting goal is to combat corruption in these fragile states and major programs have been designed and implemented to promote anti-corruption reforms. Are the expectations for these programs unrealistic? Have they yielded results? Are post-conflict countries ready and capable of implementing the difficult legal, political, economic and cultural changes that are required to reduce or prevent corruption?

We know that producing a measurable impact on corruption can take time – a long time, even under the best of circumstances. International experience shows that traditions of corruption among political and economic elite or among the populace at large cannot be reversed quickly. The process can take generations. Amidst the fragility of governance institutions and rule of law in post-conflict societies, addressing corrupt tendencies head-on and with rapidity is a tall order.

### Corruption, Conflict and Peace Negotiations

If one traces back to the origins of many internal wars and conflicts, a core grievance that is often cited as a major catalyst for the conflict is rampant and unchecked corruption, the inequality and sense of unfairness that that generates, and the bad governance it fosters. At the other



*Credit: USAID*

end, when countries are emerging from conflict, they are often extremely fragile because they are fraught with widespread corruption as a result of the destruction of their governance institutions and the rule of law.

So, corruption can be seen at the heart of a vicious cycle – making a country prone to conflict as well as destroying the stability, democracy, governance

and economic potential of fragile countries after conflict has ended. In the best of circumstances, negotiation among the formerly warring parties is one of the first steps that countries take to emerge from conflict and one of the first opportunities to do something positive to reduce the negative impacts of continuing widespread corruption.

Corruption often remains high on the list of grievances held by rebel groups in the post-conflict period because it depletes public coffers, limits the delivery of quality public services, obstructs fair systems of justice, nullifies protective regulation, reduces trust in government, scares away investors, reduces the prospects for economic growth, and is a major cause of poverty, among others. The negotiating table where the conflict is brought to an end is one of the first places where these issues can be resolved. While corruption cannot realistically be eliminated in peace negotiations, it is possible to devise the right checks and balances and include them in negotiated peace agreements to be put into effect often with the help of international donors.

So, given the post-conflict context, sustainable peace and recovery is best achieved if:

- The conflicting parties negotiate explicit anti-corruption and good governance provisions for their peace agreements that deal directly with the grievances that initiated the conflict,
- The provisions are explicitly included in the peace agreement, and

- Direct actions are taken to implement these provisions quickly – typically with donor support.

### **Positive Impacts of Quick and Targeted Anticorruption Initiatives after Peace Agreements**

In my book for the United States Institute of Peace,<sup>1</sup> I analyzed six recent internal conflicts that were resolved through negotiation and where anticorruption provisions were included in their negotiated peace agreements. I assessed and compared the negotiation processes, behaviors and outcomes in Burundi, El Salvador, Guatemala, Liberia, Papua New Guinea, and Sierra Leone.

Each of these negotiations supplemented a basic ceasefire agreement with a forward-looking formula that incorporated ways to repair and strengthen essential governmental functions, making them more transparent, accountable and sustainable. All of the agreements included an acknowledgement by all sides that corruption was a root cause of the conflict. And there was common recognition that not dealing with this corruption problem could seriously jeopardize the peace agreement into the future.

Most of the agreements then elaborated on specific changes that were required, for example: to reform the civil service, education sector, the military and the police, the judiciary, public financial management and political party financing, among others. Depending on the sector, the negotiated provisions laid out the need to make

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<sup>1</sup> Bertram Spector (2011). *Negotiating Peace and Confronting Corruption: Challenges for Post-Conflict Societies*. Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace Press.

these government functions more transparent and accountable, to streamline practices, and to institute oversight and control mechanisms to ensure compliance and reduce corruptive influences. Many agreements also included the establishment of anticorruption commissions and ombudsman offices to implement and oversee the anticorruption provisions. Some agreements even included detailed timetables and very specific provisions for implementation; others left the details for implementation somewhat vague and open to continued negotiation in the post-conflict period.

Were these positive words turned into deeds? The book analyzed the immediate aftermath of the negotiations to assess how the peace agreement provisions were implemented. Development assistance programs – usually funded by donor organizations -- were almost always the critical element in ensuring that the agreements were implemented, though there were often problems in getting these programs properly focused and implemented quickly.

Examining these six cases, I found that it was very beneficial to deal with corruption issues in the negotiation process, to deal with the problem in the negotiated peace agreement, and then to follow through in the post-agreement period with implementing these provisions, in large part through development assistance programs. But there was no obvious cookie-cutter approach.

In Burundi, for example, issue-focused committees pushed the implementation process forward. In El Salvador and Sierra Leone, mediators kept

the process going. In Papua New Guinea, a policy of inclusion for all factions stimulated implementation. In all cases, international donors promised rewards and punishments to incentivize the process of implementing good governance initiatives.

### **Quantitative Impacts of Anticorruption Assistance**

In addition to the case studies described in my book, I used World Bank, OECD and UNDP indicators to compare these six cases with a control group of seven cases where peace agreements were negotiated but with no anticorruption provisions. What were the results? Basically, we found that countries that included anticorruption provisions in their peace agreements tended to fare better in the medium and long term than those without the anticorruption provisions.

- 1.** They received faster and larger ramp-ups of foreign development assistance (24% increase as opposed to 7% increase – over 5 years).
- 2.** Countries with anticorruption provisions in their peace agreements tended to have a greater likelihood of controlling corruption over the mid-term (improvement of 5.4% as opposed to a decline of 1%).
- 3.** Political stability rankings were slightly higher for countries with anticorruption peace provisions (improvement of 16.2% as opposed to increase of 11.5%).

While the six countries that had negotiated anti-corruption provisions in their peace agreements

did better, it is worth noting that in the overall scheme of things, they are still far from effectively controlling corruption and achieving political stability. They still tend to be in the lowest quartile on these indicators among all countries worldwide. But it is fair to say that their special peace agreement provisions did give them a boost in the right direction, especially given how far behind they were as they emerged from their internal conflicts.

### **Lessons Learned for Donors**

- 1.** It is essential for donors to act rapidly after the peace agreement is signed and to harmonize their assistance with the negotiated anticorruption provisions. Otherwise, enthusiasm for negotiated anticorruption provisions quickly fades.
- 2.** Sequencing of donor assistance is important. In the post-conflict period, establishing physical security is certainly the first order of business. Next in line is the rebuilding of administrative institutions and the delivery of public services – with checks and balances built in so that corruption does not re-emerge. The next phase of

support needs to be implementing reforms in the political, economic and judicial sectors, including transparency and accountability mechanisms at each stage.

- 3.** There is always a real concern that the large ramp-up of donor assistance in the immediate post-conflict period can itself result in corruption and abuse. So, it is critical for donors to incorporate appropriate controls and oversight into their assistance programs to avoid doing further harm.
- 4.** Lastly, donors need to be sure to promote and encourage the active involvement of local stakeholders in the implementation of the anti-corruption provisions. Without local participation and buy-in, sustainability of the reforms may not take hold.

Overall, it's a difficult process to transform a corrupt society, especially in a post-conflict setting. But with smart and coordinated use of peace diplomacy and development assistance, these goals are feasible and the impact is measurable.

**For more information, contact Dr. Bert Spector, [bspector@msi-inc.com](mailto:bspector@msi-inc.com), 703-979-7100**