Cracking the Code: Social Norms and the Anti-Corruption Puzzle

Key Learning from Two Collaborative Studies

Lisa McGregor, Technical Director – Governance, Center for Governance, RTI International

Cheyanne Scharbatke-Church, Executive Director, Besa Global & Co-Director, Corruption, Justice & Legitimacy Program

Eva Matsiko, Governance Consultant

Richard Nash, Senior Global Advisor Anti-Corruption, IFES

Sarah Frazer, Associate Director, Monitoring, Evaluation, Research, Learning, and Adapting (MERLA) RTI International
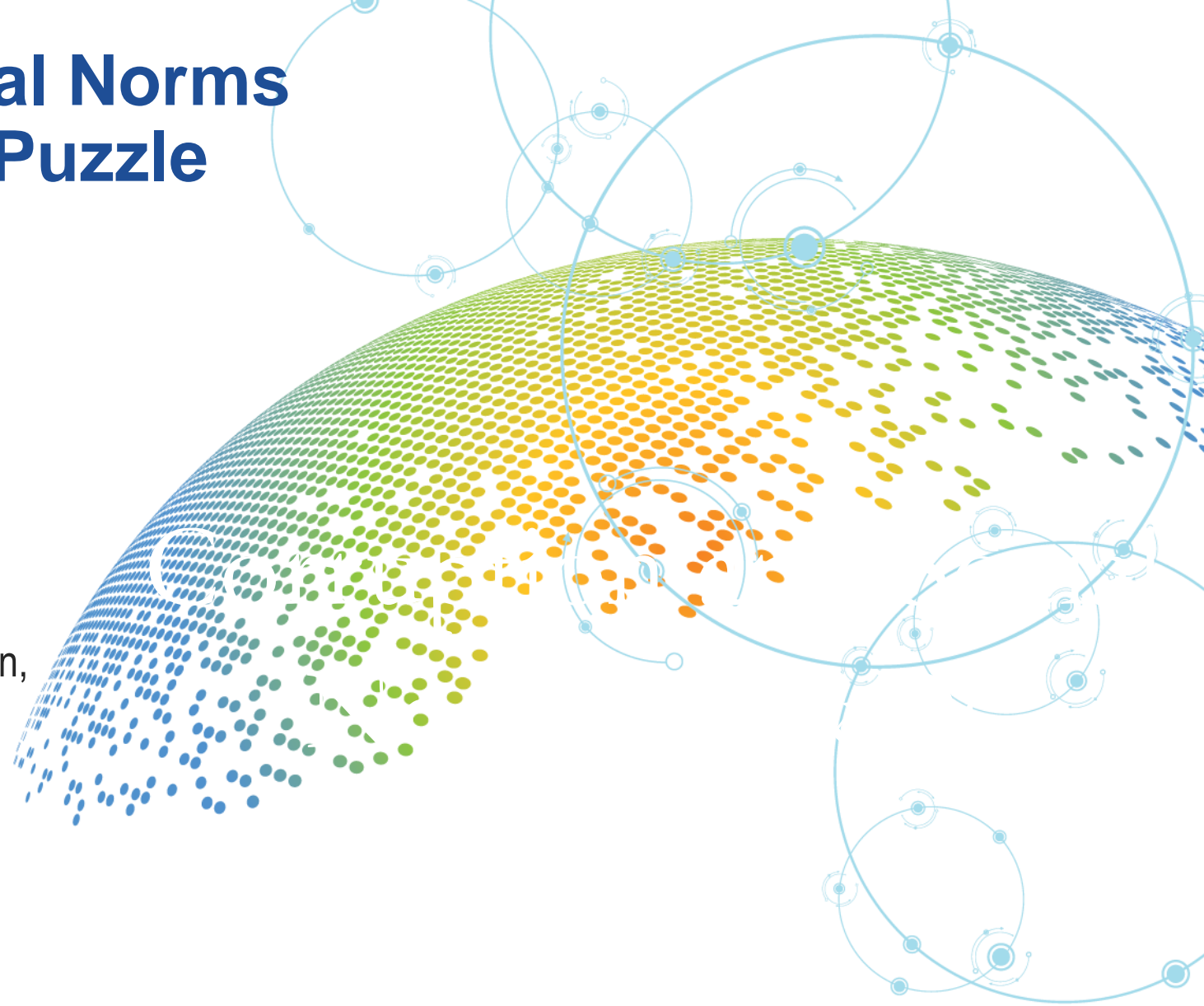
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Agenda

1. Welcome and Background on Corruption and Social Norms

2. Social Norms and Corruption in Protected Area Management in the Philippines (USAID SIBOL)

3. Social Norms and Corruption in institutions in an African Country

4. Wrap-up and Q&A/Dialog

Types of Corruption

Grand corruption

- when political elites steal large sums of public funds or otherwise abuse power for personal or political advantage

Administrative corruption

- **the abuse of entrusted power for private gain**—usually by low to mid-level government officials—in interactions with citizens and the private sector, including to skirt official regulations and extort citizens in exchange for their basic services

Kleptocracy

- a government controlled by officials who use political power to appropriate the wealth of their nation. Can include state capture

State capture

- when private entities improperly and corruptly influence a country's decision-making process for their own benefit

Strategic corruption

- when a government weaponizes corrupt practices as a tenet of its foreign policy

Social Norms: What & Why

- **Social norms:** the unwritten rules about the right way to behave within a group.

- **Direct social norms:** dictate a specific behavior e.g. "do not report your expenses"

- **Indirect social norms:** broader principles e.g. "protect your own"

- **Gender** matters

Example 1: SIBOL and interest in corruption

USAID Sustainable Interventions for Biodiversity, Oceans and Landscapes (SIBOL) in the Philippines

- Strengthens governance of key natural resources.

- Strengthens land and coastal resource management via the participation of communities.

- Team observed that **weak governance feeds corruption.**

- Exacerbated by overlapping mandates and lack of inclusion.

Photo credit: Richard Nash for RTI International.

Study Questions and Corrupt Behaviors

Study Questions:

1. To what degree were there issues of regularized corrupt practices within the protected area management board (PAMB) decision-making process?

2. If there were examples of regularized corrupt practices, what was the influence of social norms?

Key Issue: What is the Corrupt Practice?

- **Behavior one:** Some elected officials advance projects in the protected areas without following official procedure, even though they are PAMB members.

- **Behavior two**: PAMB members do not regularly enforce punitive sanctions on transgressions, allowing "creative" solutions to advance the project. For example, asking a project proponent pay to repair some of the environmental damage caused by the building of a road.

Methodology: Identifying Direct & Indirect Social Norms

Direct norms

(specific behavior)

Semi-structured interviews:

1. Typical
2. Appropriate

And if yes to either of the above...

3. Punishment

Indirect norms

(broader principle)

Literature scan

Semi-structured interviews:

- Link indirect norm to specific behaviors

Findings *(abridged)*

1. **No direct social norms**
   - PAMB decision making not impacted by regularized corrupt practice.
   - Ad hoc abuse of power for personal gain was happening, but it did not distort the decision-making process itself.

2. **Indirect social norms are relevant to corrupt practice but limited impact in this case!**
   - Awa (pity for others)
   - Hiya (shame or shyness)
   - Utang na loob (debt of gratitude)

Nash, R., Scharbatke-Church, C., Toribio, Z., Woodrow, P., and Brinkerhoff, D. (2023). Understanding Corruption and Social Norms: A Case Study in Natural Resource Management. RTI Press Publication No. OP-0089-2309. Research Triangle Park, NC: RTI Press. https://doi.org/10.3768/rtipress.2023.op.0089.2309

Key Lessons Learned

- Research team found the findings **counterintuitive** to scoping, lit review & context

- **Identified ongoing corruption risks**: employment conditions, investment approval process and absence of key guiding documents

- Made broader recommendations:

- Work toward a common understanding of "corruption;"

  - Check that perceptions align with reality on the degree of corruption;
  - Think of anticorruption as behavior change; and
  - Remember **silence and inaction are powerful behaviors**.

- Social norms: are rarely the only driver of behavior & are of **different strengths**

USAID SIBOL Team Adaptation in Response

- **Short term:** Increased govt leaders' awareness of corruption & social norms

- **Longer term: SIBOL team embedded applied PEA, anti-corruption & SN into its approach and activities**

  - View protected area, habitat management and rules enforcement as a **complex socio-ecological-political economy system**.

  - **More reflective in project assessments and recommendations** regarding the influence of direct and indirect social norms.

  - **Using integrative, systematic approaches** in planning and policy-making.

  - **Incorporated PEA, anti-corruption and social norms into training modules** for protected areas and policy development processes.

  - Stronger focus on **building better relationship with partners** to improve cooperation during project implementation.

Example 2: Study Purpose & Process

- Build on the process and learning of the study under USAID SIBOL.

- Explore decision making related to corruption investigations in a govt anti-corruption entity in Africa

  - The government entity was the recipient of the findings and partnered with RTI and Besa Global on action planning.

- Held 1-1 interviews with 20 members of staff from the headquarters of the anti-corruption entity and two regional offices.

Photo credit: RTI International

Study Questions

1. What are the drivers and enablers behind the current challenges in the organization?

2. What social norms influence specific behavior in the organization?

3. How impactful is the norm on behavior compared to other challenges?

4. What could be done in response?

1. Institutional e.g., Law, Governance Structures, Formal Power

2. Structural e.g., Conflict, Violence, Ideology, Informal Power, Migration Demographics, Political Settlements, Inter-group Relations

5. Individual e.g., Self-efficacy, Aspirations, Beliefs/ Morals, Knowledge and Skills, Attitudes, Mental Models

POWER

COLLECTIVE BEHAVIOR

3. Material e.g., Poverty, Economic Options, Availability of Services

4. Social e.g., Social Norms, Networks and Allegiances, Role Models

CJL adapted from Cislaghi & Heiss

Methodology

RAPID LITERATURE REVIEW

IDENTIFIED COMMON INDIRECT NORMS WITHIN CIVIL SERVICE

INTERVIEWS USING A CARD SORT METHOD

Indirect Social Norms Explored *(abridged)*

Individuals in the organization are expected to:
- always 'protect our own'
- be wealthy
- not cause trouble for others
- treat rules as negotiable
- use their position for personal benefit
- give special treatment to family and friends
- follow the rules of reciprocity
- etc.

Miller, Jared. Civil Servants, Social Norms, and Corruption: What do we know? What do we do? Calgary: Besa Global, 2023. https://www.corruptionjusticeandlegitimacy.org/cs-jm-paper

Photo credit: RTI International

Ranking of Challenges

1: It is okay to steal government money

2: Poor record keeping in government departments.

3: Inadequate budget & staff for project monitoring and inspections

4: Co-ordination challenges between entities responsible for anti-corruption

5: Staff are expected to be wealthy because they are expected to use their position for personal benefit.

Ranking of Challenges

6: Political interference into project investigations and inspection

7: Staff are expected to always 'protect our own'

8: Staff don't have the expertise to investigate syndicate corruption

9: Poor implementation rate of recommendations related to monitoring and inspections

10: Staff feel powerless to act against 'the big fish'

11: Staff are expected to not cause trouble for others

Ranking of Challenges

12: Staff fear retaliation for getting someone in trouble.

13: Staff are expected to follow the rules of reciprocity.

14: Staff are expected to treat rules as negotiable.

15: Staff are expected to respect their elders.

Findings & Recommendations to Organization's Leadership

1. Develop a **practical, hands-on training program** for staff to complete in the first quarter of employment on likely challenges and tensions.

2. Facilitate a **regular discussion series** among staff (new and long-standing) to candidly share challenges and collectively brainstorm responses.

3. Actively promote **social capital** within the organization.

Overarching Lessons Learned from the Studies

- **DON'T expect social norm diagnosis to be quick or simple.**
  - Need to identify typical, corrupt practices
  - Need to understand how those norms relate to other factors driving behavior
  - Need to assess direct & indirect social norms
  - Need to understand strength

- **AC field has greater comfort with laws, processes, standards then behaviors**

- **PEA/corruption analysis sets up a social norms diagnostic**
  - Not the same thing
  - Diagnostic enables recommendations specific to the type of social norms

Overarching Lessons Learned

- **Timing matters:** For a USAID project, the optimal time for this analysis is **during project implementation,** after you've built relationships, **not during the first six months of start up** (or year optimally.)

- **This PEA and social norms process can be used across sectors.**

- **Attend to political dynamics** in the debrief of findings with the partner (separate debriefs for participants and leadership; meet in a neutral location.)

- **Methodological tweaks** would improve data collection.

- **Recommended actions** should come from a combination of data analysis/researcher and a collaborative brainstorming as part of the analysis debrief with project teams and/or partner institutions.

Question & Answer/Dialog

Additional Information

o Here is the [USAID Anti-Corruption Policy](#).

o Slide 4: For a deep dive into social norms; what they are, how they operate and their connection to corruption check out: [Understanding Social Norms: A Reference Guide for Policy and Practice | CJL](#)

o More information about [SIBOL](#)

o The complete literature review can be found at: [Civil Servants, Social Norms, and Corruption: What do we know? What do we do?](#)

o Or check out the shorter practitioner's version of the literature review at: [The Role of Social Norms in Bureaucratic Corruption: A Research-to-Practice Report](#)

o The publication on the SIBOL research: [Understanding corruption and social norms: A case study in natural resource management](#)

o To be notified of the behavior guidance note and other CJL publications, [subscribe here](#)

o Slide 20: For a deeper dive into some of our lessons – check out this blog [Do's and Don'ts when Identifying Social Norms in Contexts of Endemic Corruption](#)