People power and anti-corruption; demystifying citizen-centred approaches

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Abstract

In recent years there has been an ever expanding body of work that advocates putting the citizen at the centre of attempts to tackle corruption. The task of anti-corruption policy, so the argument goes, is to empower citizens to act against those who behave in a corrupt fashion. This article illustrates that whilst there is much to be said for encouraging citizens to move against corrupt officials, and citizen-centred anti-corruption ideas subsequently appear attractive in theory, implementing these notions (as they currently stand) in practice is problematic. Attacking corruption may well often be done most successfully by not openly claiming that that is the aim, and by embracing more indirect reform paths. The article concludes that without buy-in from not just citizens, but also from governments and external agents, citizen-centred anti-corruption mechanisms become limited, potentially irrelevant or even damaging as citizen apathy and frustration increases.

Introduction

Corruption, it would appear, is one of the great evils of our time. Citizens are appalled by it, international organisations have created reform agendas to tackle it and politicians earnestly claim to want to reduce it. Even the world of business has embraced the notion that it could well be in its interests to work alongside regulators and policy-makers with a view to cleaning up the environment where trade takes place. Given the increased salience of corruption in the modern world, it comes as little surprise that in recent times social scientists have also conducted ever more analysis of corruption's underlying causes, its effects, and naturally what policy-makers have tried to do (and indeed should attempt to do) to counteract it. Working to reduce the underlying negative effects of corruption therefore seems to be very much the order of the day.

Popular though the idea of anti-corruption now undoubtedly is, affecting change has been (perhaps unsurprisingly) difficult. For some, this is as the problem is incorrectly diagnosed and any subsequent solutions will therefore be ineffective (or indeed will simply make matters worse, see for example Hopkin, 2002; Persson, Rothstein and Teorell, 2013). For others it is more a case of a design-reality gap leading to implementation problems (Heeks and Mathisen, 2012) or of a lack of political will to genuinely affect change (Brinkerhoff, 2000, 2010). The proponents of many anti-corruption mechanisms are (generally) seen as well-intentioned if at times misguided. Or, if wants to be even more charitable, it can take a long time, and involve innumerable set-backs before change really does become evident; where it has emerged, in other words, effective corruption control came about "over generations or centuries" and not the electoral or administrative cycles against which many public policies are measured now (Johnston, 2014: 2). For the less charitable, the reasons for failure are much more malign, as an 'anti-corruption industry' seeks to secure the next contract and with that the next pay-cheque, more or less regardless of whether the advice given has any qualitatively positive impacts (Brown and Cloke, 2004; Bukovansky, 2006; Sampson 2008, 2010; Walton, 2013).

Be that as it may, anti-corruption discourse has certainly come a long way in a short time. World Bank Head James Wolfensohn's famous 'cancer of corruption' speech helped reshape the demands made on states by international institutions, all of which now require states to demonstrate policies of 'good governance' that incorporate more or less direct anti-corruption measures (Wolfensohn, 1996; Hope, 2009; Walker, 2009; Rothstein, 2011a). States have responded to these requests in a variety of ways. When appealing to institutions that place a high

value on democracy, the role of the citizen, defined as a competent individual with a contractual relationship with the state (Hickey and Mohan, 2004), has become ever more prominent in both anti-corruption discourse and practice (Williams, 2004; Mansuri and Rao, 2013). In fact, this direct relationship between anti-corruption and citizens, as individuals or as members of civil society, has been acknowledged by the World Bank which explicitly states that they are “essential in constraining corruption” (World Bank, 2000: xxiii). This view is further echoed by the UN and OECD, both of which stress the importance of dynamic partnerships with civil society in addressing corruption “to ensure the broad participation of citizens in decision-making” (Grimes, 2008: 1).

This trend towards citizen participation and engagement in anti-corruption efforts has seen the emergence of two distinct narratives, both of which stem from international institutions and the plethora of non-governmental organisations that work in this field. Firstly, that of the honest, empowered, community-based citizen who is presented as being able to find the best answer to the corruption that they themselves often witness (Johnston, 1998, 2005; Schwenke, 2005; Knox 2009). Secondly, a narrative that sees the task of anti-corruption policy as existing to mobilise – directly and indirectly – empowered citizens against those considered corrupt (Johnston, 1998; Shim and Eom, 2009). However, laudable though both of these aims are, their theoretical underpinnings remain unconvincing, leading to little that could be understood as positive processes of change. This article begins by analysing the development of anti-corruption discourse before moving on to discuss the theories and mechanisms that expressly claim to ‘bring the citizen back in’. It illustrates that these latter ideas are often developed on the basis of theoretical propositions that are unlikely to work in practice. The third section provides an analysis of anti-corruption mechanisms that contain an element of citizen engagement and participation before suggesting possible ways that we can learn from both the mistakes and failures of the past as well as the successes. Institutions and the institutional context, so we argue, need to be brought back in. It concludes by arguing that the role of the individual citizen in contributing to anti-corruption movements and practices is subsequently often overemphasised and needs to be fundamentally re-thought.

From practical concerns to theories of anti-corruption and citizen engagement

If in practical terms James Wolfensohn’s 1996 speech marked an important step towards prioritising ‘anti-corruptionism’, then the groundwork for how this would be implemented was already being done in the hallowed halls of academia. And this groundwork led to specific sets

of policy recommendations being developed, very few of which placed the citizen directly at the centre of their concerns. Through the 1990s in particular, a strong core of political economists developed a body of anti-corruption principles that soon morphed into anti-corruption policies. A number of the key actors in this debate had feet in both the policy and the academic camps. It should subsequently come as little surprise that when international organisations, prompted by Wolfensohn's rallying call, began to discuss corruption then the ideas and recommendations of such thinkers gained particular resonance.

What did this mean in practice? Firstly, the academic analysis of corruption experienced what Jonathan Hopkin described as an 'economic turn', as economists took ever more interest in questions of what caused corruption and what should be done about it (2002). Much of this analysis started from a position that was highly critical not just of the state's ability to efficiently and effectively deliver public goods but that also embraced a set of behavioural assumptions that fundamentally distrusted politicians in the first place. In essence, politicians – much like all human beings – were understood to be rational, self-interested, utility maximisers (Downs, 1957). This led some analysts to be crystal clear that "government intervention in the economy" is the root cause of corrupt practices and "a large government increases corruption and rent-seeking" (Alesina and Angeletos, 2005). Even the less fundamentalist strain of this public choice approach to analysing political affairs was still unambiguous in claiming that "excessive state intervention" would, sooner or later, directly or indirectly, lead to "a range of ill-defined pathologies, ranging from low-level inefficiencies, through bureaucratic 'shirking', to out-and-out corruption" (Hopkin 2002: 580).

For many scholars, corruption analysis subsequently offered an opportunity not just to illustrate that the state was wasteful but also that the rent-seeking tendencies of politicians could, and indeed would, lead to an escalation in the number of corrupt practices. The idea that the state could provide efficient and effective (and by definition corruption-free) services was dismissed as idealistic "romanticism" (Tanzi, 2000: 19). "Corruption" in other words "will be reduced mainly in those countries where governments are willing to substantially reduce some of their functions" (Tanzi, 2000: 133). Many of the suggestions made were nonetheless implausible in environments that do not have strong, well-organised, legitimate and effective states policing them. Creating, for example, "strong apolitical regulatory bodies" whose work is shaped by "transparent and open processes" is a task that states with high levels of corruption are, by definition, unlikely to be able to fulfil (Rose-Ackermann, 1999: 43-44). The fact that the data on the relationship between levels of public spending and incidences of corruption remained (and still remains) ambiguous did not stop many of the policy prescriptions from taking hold.

Through the 1980s and 1990s state intervention in economic and social life was viewed increasingly sceptically and should subsequently be restricted to a set of specific, limited activities. The role of the citizen in all of this was, for the most part, completely ignored.

The ineffectiveness of the policy proposals that this approach engendered prompted a significant amount of discussion both on the general assumptions made and also the noticeable lack of any bottom-up, citizen-orientated dimension to the debate. The universalist claim that corruption is a problem (everywhere) because people's actions are motivated by rational self-interest, including concern for the well-being of friends, family and peer group members, and that corrupt behaviour is subsequently the outcome of a weighing-up of incentives and opportunity structures (see Rose-Ackerman, 1999) was soon openly challenged.

On the one hand, Michael Johnston (2005 and particularly 2014) has skilfully and persuasively argued that the rules and regulations that underpin successfully attempts to tackle corruption often develop as they are in the interests of specific groups in society for them to do so. These groups frequently have less than altruistic aims, but their attempts to defend their own interests can prompt – unevenly and often in piecemeal fashion – settings to develop where it becomes harder for one group to exert its will over others. Johnston describes this as part of a process he calls 'deep democratisation'. This is not at all about imposing what would conventionally be understood as democratic institutions, but rather in "building workable rules and accountability by bringing more voices and interests in to the governing process" (Johnston, 2014: 5). It is not so much that modern day anti-corruption activists are necessarily 'wrong' in the ways that they want to tackle corruption, but there need to be much more nuanced ways of making their energy, ideas and passion more effective (Johnston, 2014: 235). For Johnston, that centres on enabling citizens to defend their interests and to expand their opportunities to affect the way that they are governed.

On the other hand, some began stressing that the problem of corruption posed a classic collective action dilemma (Rothstein 2000 and 2011; Uslaner 2004; Teorell 2007, Persson et. al. 2013) and this misdiagnosis of the corruption problem did indeed lead to inappropriate policy responses. As Johnston again notes, tackling corruption "is hard work, can be dangerous and often involves giving up benefits now in exchange for improvements that may or may not materialise – someday" (Johnston, 2014: 15). Many who might consider making these commitments will be less likely to do so if they believe that others (understandably) will not. Furthermore, if brave reformers still achieve their goals then the free rider benefits as well, and that without having taken any of the risks necessary to achieve the objectives (Olson, 1965). In

states where corruption is endemic, where principals are not really principaled at all, the failure of anti-corruption reform should subsequently be the norm (Persson et. al. 2013).

The challenge of how to deal with collective action dilemmas is epitomised in work on social capital and the related idea of social trust, and it is this that provides the most direct and explicit links to citizen-centred anti-corruption mechanisms. Rothstein (2011a) suggests that where citizens possess high levels of generalisable trust this facilitates the belief that if you are honest, and refrain from corrupt acts, others will do the same. This position received some support in a study of 33 countries in which it was shown that “trust correlates with lower levels of corruption, while controlling for GDP per capita” (Lambsdorff, 2006: 18). La Porta et al (1999) provide an additional argument that trust can be helpful in fighting corruption, by assisting bureaucrats to better cooperate with each other and with citizens. On top of that Uslaner (2013) perceptively argues that corruption does not just perpetuate such things as inequality, but this very perpetuation leads to both lower levels of trust and more corruption “in an endless cycle” (Uslaner, 2013: 3604). This loop or ‘inequality trap’ (Uslaner, 2008) can’t simply be wished away by enacting institutional reform.

Uslaner’s focus on the relevance of generalisable and particularistic trust illustrates why, in places with considerable corruption challenges, grassroots movements tackling corruption are less likely to evolve. Furthermore where they do evolve, they face more challenges than in high(er) trust environments. The costs are too high, the cultural and practical challenges too great. Yet, this clearly does not mean that the role of the grass-roots movements should be ignored. On the contrary, discussion of the potential impact that citizens can make has appeared to increase in intensity in recent times and civil society is regularly cited as a key part of the anti-corruption mosaic. Many organisations have reorganised their internal processes in more deliberative and democratic ways to exert greater influence, through votes and transparent processes. This generates a more inclusive public sphere and limits the opportunities for public officials to take advantage of vulnerable members (Wampler, 2008). This makes it more difficult for public officials to capture the participatory process in which civil society is increasingly engaged (Grimes, 2008). When civil society is given a meaningful and participatory role through administrative anti-corruption reforms, so it is argued, it has the opportunity to break a self-reinforcing corrupt political culture and support behavioural change.

Support for civil society engagement has subsequently been given by many international agencies. This has led to the development of anti-corruption mechanisms which address ‘problematic’ political cultures, and public official behaviour, through citizen participation. The

belief in this approach has led to the World Bank allocating almost \$US85 billion to local participatory development over the past decade (Mansuri and Rao, 2013). This funding stems from the principle belief that “a more engaged citizenry should be able to achieve a higher level of co-operation and make government more accountable in practice” (Mansuri and Rao, 2013: 21). In relation to anti-corruption, this type of participation has taken such forms as participatory budgeting and the formation of ‘Freedom of Information’ legislation. Ordinary citizens are seen as being in a better position to ensure accountability from public officials, deepening democracy and increasing citizen capacity (Ong, 1995; Walker, 2009). Gaventa (2004) suggests that the approach used by many political scientists, centring on aspects of accountability, legitimacy and representation, must now incorporate work from development scholars, who promote ideas of local knowledge and participatory processes to overcome previous limitations of anti-corruption. This is a view echoed by those who suggest that social empowerment and citizen participation is only achievable through local knowledge (Mansuri and Rao, 2013). Support for the idea of merging these approaches has led directly to the evolution of anti-corruption mechanisms placing the citizen at the centre, and it is to these this article will now turn.

The practice of placing the citizen at the centre

This move from concerns about corruption via more theorising about corruption and its causes to increasing awareness of the role that citizens might be able to play in helping move anti-corruption forward has helped citizen-centred approaches – particularly in the world of development – shift much closer to centre-stage. These approaches and mechanisms take many forms, vary in degrees of meaningful participation and are principally formed around ideas of empowering local citizens (Mansuri and Rao, 2013). The belief that a government or political institution is better or ‘deeper’ when ‘closer to the people’ and therefore “intrinsically good” has subsequently gained in traction (Widmalm, 2008: 15). It helps to ‘build capacity’ and to promote the idea of long-term institutional reform through local ownership and control by those who will be both accountable to, and governed by, the reforms. Johnston (2005) goes further, arguing that such reforms are needed not only to improve public management and justice but to enable “vigorous contention over real issues among people and groups capable of defending themselves politically, and reaching political settlements sustained by their own lasting interests” (Johnston, 2005: 3). This helps to create social ownership of public life, building institutions from a stronger social foundation, without which reforms are unlikely to last.

Neo-institutional economists also began to stress the importance of moving away from generalisable theories of anti-corruption towards stressing the importance of understanding local context, emphasising decentralised decision-making and the need to increase levels of transparency across the operations of government (see Shah and Schacter, 2004; Ivanyna and Shah, 2014). The introduction of participatory institutions in Porto Alegre (Brazil) is widely hailed as the most successful example of this type of approach (see Wampler, 2008, 2010; Wampler and Avritzer, 2004). Participation in Porto Alegre took the form of participatory budgeting which saw the management of public finances for public goods, such as health, education and infrastructure, devolved to communities following a process of reductive elections, from regional to community level. Some go as far as suggesting that this is a scalable version of Athenian direct democracy, decreasing many of the problems and complexities associated with contemporary government decision-making (Fung, 2003) and that “active and knowledgeable citizens” (Wampler, 2008: 61) come to the fore. This type of participatory structure has been demonstrated by Besley et. al. (2005) to better reflect citizens’ concerns and provide a forum for monitoring the actions of elected representatives, reducing the opportunities and incentives for corrupt behaviour. This is supported by Abers (1998), who conducted an in-depth longitudinal study of Porto Alegre, finding that participatory budgeting has altered political cultures and opportunities for favouritism which had previously been prevalent. In Brazil the formation of these participatory institutions was the result of civil society activism, mobilising the community through public forums, constant negotiations and protest (Heller, 2001). These “challenged traditions of weak enforcement of social rights and the direct intervention of politicians in the distribution of public goods through clientelism and patronage” (Wampler and Avritzer, 2004: 309).

Citizen empowerment can, however, come in altogether different ways. Reforms based around notions of eGovernance attempt to tackle corruption by removing public officials from the process of mediating between citizen and state. eGovernance is subsequently seen as a “cost-effective and convenient means of promoting openness and transparency to reduce corruption” (Bertot et al, 2010: 264). In essence, eGovernance can take two forms: firstly, the provision of information about policy-making and service delivery, secondly, the reduction of unnecessary intervention by public officials through online applications for such things as licences and permits (Shim and Eom, 2009). Furthermore, eGovernance can enhance the relationships between government employees and citizens, allowing for citizen-tracking of activities and therefore being directly related to the building of social capital and social trust (Lin, 2001; Shim

and Eom, 2009). Both Andersen (2009) and Bussell (2012) have subsequently illustrated that there can be a substantial anti-corruption and economic benefit to providing eGovernance.

Citizen-centred anti-corruption mechanisms have also been developed by citizens themselves as well as by international NGOs, producing more specifically targeted and empowering anti-corruption tools which are often incorporated into government policy. The success of www.ipaidabribe.com (IPB) in India and the citizen feedback model initially in Lahore, but then across all of the Pakistani Punjab, are good examples of this. IPB was founded in India in 2008 by an NGO in Bangalore expressly to “harness the collective energy of citizens” to take on the endemic bribery evident in the city (Ang, 2014: 23). Citizens were asked to anonymously report when they had paid a bribe to a public servant as well as when they were *not* asked to pay bribes (through a part of the site called ‘I met an honest officer’). As of November 2014, the site had expanded its coverage to all of India (as well as a variety of other countries) and had received over 4.5 million visits. 32,000 reports of bribery were made. The aims of the site were not, however, to locate those demanding bribes and to confront them, but rather to use the data collected to recommend procedural reforms and also to launch campaigns that would help citizens understand what they were entitled to. The latter was seen as particularly important, as the IPB’s founders believed that this would be an excellent way of helping citizens become more aware of what was indeed a bribe and what was a fair and legal payment. The former helped governments change policies in high-corruption areas such as land-registration and driving licence distribution (Ang, 2014: 23-24).

The Citizen Feedback Model (CFM) follows a similar logic although it does so in an altogether different way. The aim is still to curb petty corruption and to encourage citizen engagement with public service delivery, with the longer term aim of building “confidence and trust between government and the public” whilst developing a “deterrence effect” amongst civil servants (<http://www.pitb.gov.pk/cfm>). As with IPB, the scheme began in 2008 and it has grown to encompass 15 districts across the state, analysing the issues of property registration, health, education and the police. CFM differs from IPB in that when a citizen goes to a government office to complete an official transaction, he/she will be asked for his/her mobile phone number. The number is then recorded on a centralised database and the citizen will receive a call to which he/she is asked to reply via SMS. The citizen is asked to give feedback on whether he/she was asked for a bribe and, if so, how much it was. This information is then forwarded to a call centre and the information is processed. Again, the aim is to look for patterns in the data with a view to coming up with prescriptions for dealing with offices where corruption appears to be a particular problem. As of November 2014 over 4m citizens had been contacted, over

500,000 had responded and 110,000 had reported corruption issues. 3,600 actions have been reported on account of complaints made (<http://www.pitb.gov.pk/cfm>).

While each of these citizen-centred mechanisms of anti-corruption provides workable, often interrelated, solutions to help reduce corruption in specific contexts, they have of course received criticism. These criticisms are often made in relation to specific mechanisms. However, there are important generalisable limitations to placing the citizen at the centre, and it is to these that this article will now turn.

Limitations of the citizen-centred approach

Attractive and innovative though some of the citizen-centred approaches are, three underlying areas of concern are nonetheless evident: the role of government, the impact of external agents and the viability of the citizen as a driving force behind these initiatives. The most obvious problem lies in that without official support, citizen participation is at best limited, and at worst irrelevant or even counter-productive. Most citizen-centred efforts to tackle corruption operate “within the bounds of more or less formalised institutional arrangements either in the form of institutions of horizontal accountability, transparency enhancing legislation, or participatory governance arrangements” (Grimes, 2008: 11). The relationship between the government and citizen-centred anti-corruption suggests that the ability and willingness of national government is vital in ensuring the ability to devolve power, or implement citizen-centred anti-corruption legislation (Huber et. al., 1997; Schonleitner, 2009; Johnston, 2014). This creates a problem for citizen-centred anti-corruption approaches as they appear more feasible in the very environments in which corruption is less problematic. Conversely, in countries where high levels of corruption are perceived to exist, governmental institutions are often weak or subject to personalistic power which is often simply not “amenable to initiatives aimed at reducing that power” (Spector, 2005: 275).

The examples of participatory budgeting or of technology-centric corruption-reporting are particularly challenging where administrative capacity is lacking. They both require functioning and responsive administration. In addition, in the case of participatory budgeting, there is a need to empowered local authorities (Walker, 2009). These conditions are integral to the success of participatory budgeting in Porto Alegre (Baiocchi, 2001; Wampler and Avritzer, 2004; Grimes, 2008; Wampler, 2008) and subsequently to the very viability of much citizen-centred activity more broadly. In Brazil local authorities such as mayors, who are part of the formal system of representative democracy, must “first centralise authority in their own hands before they hand

the authority back over to citizens” (Wampler, 2008: 66). This authority enables citizens to control public finance and decision-making on matters such as education, health and infrastructure reducing the monopoly of power held by public officials and reshaping accountability structures. The absence of devolved power can severely limit citizen-centred anti-corruption mechanisms, as any attempt to provide public scrutiny, oversight or evaluation by citizens can often simply be dismissed by public officials.

In the absence of strong administrative capacity, approaches such as that of participatory budgeting can increase incidences of corruption, resulting in the replacement of “bribes charged by central government bureaucrats with elite capture of local governments” (Bardhan and Mookherjee, 2006: 162). Ang (2014: 27) also perceptively notes that in the altogether different case of IPB the reporting tool works because there is a “constructive pattern of civil engagement between state and society”. In China, meanwhile, IPB failed rather miserably. And this wasn’t simply as the Chinese Communist Party was suspicious of it. Rather, “authoritarian rule indirectly debilitates the organisational roots of online activism” and that led to a loss of both public credibility and user enthusiasm (Ang, 2014: 27). In other words the formal and informal infrastructure wasn’t there for IPB China to function as it does in India.

The effectiveness of government in citizen-centred anti-corruption approaches also relies heavily on citizens being able to fulfil tasks asked of them. Can, in other words, citizens engage in a variety of analytical duties, complex reporting and planning activities that would usually be beyond them (Mansuri and Rao, 2013: 27)? Educated citizens are unsurprisingly often best able to articulate community needs, whereas low literacy and education levels have consistently been acknowledged to reduce citizens’ ability and confidence to participate in providing evaluation and oversight in relation to the actions of both public officials and the state (Bertot et al, 2010; Mansuri and Rao, 2013). Inadequate government provision for education subsequently negatively affects the ability of every citizen to fulfil these roles. Opportunities are largely limited to those who are wealthier and better connected, negating the inclusionary benefit these mechanisms can provide. The restriction of educational opportunities has thus become a tool used by public officials, intentionally or otherwise, for limiting and retaining control of citizen engagement.

The cooperation that is required as a necessary part of many citizen-centred anti-corruption mechanisms can easily lose direction or be abused or co-opted by elite groups or government agendas which supplant the interests of the citizen with mechanisms to achieve personal gain (Walker, 2009; Wampler, 2008). Elite capture of citizen-centred anti-corruption approaches can

be the outcome of traditional hierarchal structures and weakness of government capacity. This is supported by a number of studies which have looked at who participates in community-driven projects; findings suggest that these participants are disproportionately wealthier, better educated, hold a higher social status and are better connected through families or peer groups (Bardhan and Mookherjee, 2006; Cox, 2009; Grimes, 2008; Mansuri and Rao, 2013; Olken, 2007). Inequality within communities, combined with a poor education, reduces social capital and the feasibility of many citizens being able to contribute to citizen-centred approaches (Huber et al, 1997; Uslaner, 2013). This also suggests that elite capture, at some level, is unavoidable.

Citizen-centred anti-corruption mechanisms are often driven by international institutions and NGOs which, in contrast to citizens, have more scope to implement change and apply pressure through aid and trade sanctions on governments which are failing to address issues of corruption. The role of international institutions and NGOs in citizen-centred approaches has often developed in line with notions of 'good governance' and related concerns about corruption. Citizen-centred approaches complement many of the ideas that NGOs traditionally espouse. Furthermore there have been increased attempts by external agents to recreate apparently successful mechanisms in other countries and contexts, often while simultaneously promoting 'country ownership' via Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) processes (Walker, 2009).

The recreation of citizen-centred anti-corruption approaches by external agents greatly alters the dynamic between citizen and state, changing it from an 'organic' reaction by the citizen and civil society, to an 'induced' reaction by the citizen within a predetermined framework (Mansuri and Rao, 2013). In the majority of examples of 'induced' citizen-centred anti-corruption mechanisms results have been disappointing (Grimes, 2008; Mansuri and Rao, 2013; Walker, 2009). The reasons for this have been related to both incentives and context. External agents setting-up projects to 'induce' citizen participation often offer substantial project funding and employment opportunities, shifting the incentives of the citizens involved towards personal financial gain and away from reducing corruption. Reported levels of corruption have, in some instances, been seen to markedly increase during anti-corruption initiatives as citizens attempt to secure the continuation of the project and the related personal benefits. However, this could, of course, be the result of increased awareness. Disregarding any financial lure, the sustainability of any project is grounded in the commitment of the citizens involved at the centre of the work, and the ability of the external agent to adapt to particular contexts and issues of importance to the specific community. This requires the development of local management capacity with clear structures of accountability, and therefore most successful programmes are implemented by local

governments rather than external agents, which, by their nature, are top-down and not community based.

Within much of the citizen-centred anti-corruption literature there are also a set of fundamental assumptions made about the character and motivations of the citizen. First, there is an assumption that citizen engagement and participation is always possible (Walker, 2009). There is a tendency to treat communities, especially those in the developing world, as singular, homogenous entities ignoring the realities of class, caste and status which may produce unequal, non-inclusive societies. Secondly, there is a further assumption that the citizen and civil society always act to further the common good, and acts as “an inherently pro-democratic force” (Schonleitner, 2009: 36). Finally, there is an assumption that those citizen-led participatory initiatives are autonomous from, rather than being embedded in, corrupt patterns of behaviour (Schonleitner, 2009). Acknowledging and attempting to overcome these assumptions creates difficulties for external agents when attempting to ‘induce’ projects based on the citizen, further reducing their viability.

Conclusion: Citizens, Institutions and the Future

Although the growing importance of the citizen in anti-corruption policy has been widely, and legitimately, acknowledged, there are important limitations when applying this approach in much of the developing world. For these approaches to have any tangible and lasting effect we argue that there is a need for three factors to be present; firstly, the administration needs to be willing to cede real power and resources to the citizenry through participatory programmes. Secondly the tendency of external agencies and NGOs to be responsive to the needs of external actors means that their participation should be limited. Finally, the programmes have to be designed and organised in such a way as to make them viable and sustainable in the long-term, and able to meet limited, definable and achievable objectives in the short-term.

While we acknowledge that the presence of any one of these factors can lead to nominally beneficial outputs, we contend, if only tentatively at this stage, that citizen input in to corruption reduction will be most effective if all of these three factors are apparent. Further, without genuine buy-in from citizens, governments and external agents, citizen-centred anti-corruption mechanisms become limited, potentially irrelevant or even damaging as citizen apathy and frustration increases and opportunities to reform decrease. This approach very much chimes in with Michael Johnston’s (2014) claim that fostering new sets of institutional circumstances where key actors can defend (at least some of) their interests is one important way of slowly changing

the landscape where corruption flourishes. This logic also applies, if in a rather different way, to processes of reform in what are now widely perceived to be 'low-corruption countries' such as Sweden and Denmark. Sweden in particular was a case of relatively rapid reform via an institutionalised 'big bang' (Rothstein, 2011b). However, the big bang took a long time coming, and one of the key factors that inspired it was the emergence of citizens with interests to defend and grievances to make. The support and ultimately the intervention of institutions such as the Crown and courts was vital in making this citizen-inspired push for change viable in the medium and long-term (Rothstein, 2011b; Jensen, 2014).

External institutions and agents that possess a bias for democratic structures have been enthused by the success of citizen-centred approaches in addressing corruption across diverse countries and contexts, notable examples include participatory budgeting in Brazil and eGovernance in India. However, in attempting to recreate these mechanisms, governments and external agents need to understand the underlying reasons for their success. This inevitably leads to the misplaced creation and implementation of citizen-centred approaches in contexts where they are unlikely to work. These come about as a result of poorly designed or weak institutional frameworks, disinterested governments, external agents' keenness to induce civil society activism and with that increased social capital. Ineffective (or counter-productive) citizen-centred anti-corruption ideas also occur when proponents are keener on keeping up with current trends advocating good governance or there is an inability of citizens to achieve the idealistic versions of society expected by some citizen-centred anti-corruption activists.

The attempts of international organisations and well-meaning anti-corruption activists to talk about best practice and benchmarks, and to encourage the empowerment of well-meaning citizens, is highly unlikely to bring with it genuine change. Change occurs when (often newly empowered) institutions (understood in the broadest sense) successfully manage to walk the tightrope that links the ideals of those working there with the interests of the political actors that they are trying to influence. The key in many situations therefore may well be to fight corruption by essentially not talking about it. It is, in other words, governance that really matters and once the governance context has been understood, then, and only then, will more specific anti-corruption policies have a chance. In states where governance quality is low, then politicians have to be persuaded to buy in – whether that means directly, indirectly or at times almost unknowingly – to the anti-corruption agenda. This might well be very distasteful for anti-corruption activists who know just how badly some leaders have behaved in the past, but it nonetheless a fundamental part of any successful anti-corruption strategy – and that includes those that look to put the citizen at the centre of their strategy.

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