

Findings

Africa Region



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Learning by Doing: Action Research and Governance

A great deal of literature exists on the concept of "Action Research." Common among most is the concept that creating dialogue among different groups promotes change through a cycle of evaluation, action and further evaluation, an iterative process illustrated in Figure 1 below. In particular, Action Research has been described as embracing "principles of participation and reflection, and empowerment and emancipation of groups seeking to improve their social situation. " (Seymour-Rolls and Hughes 1995)

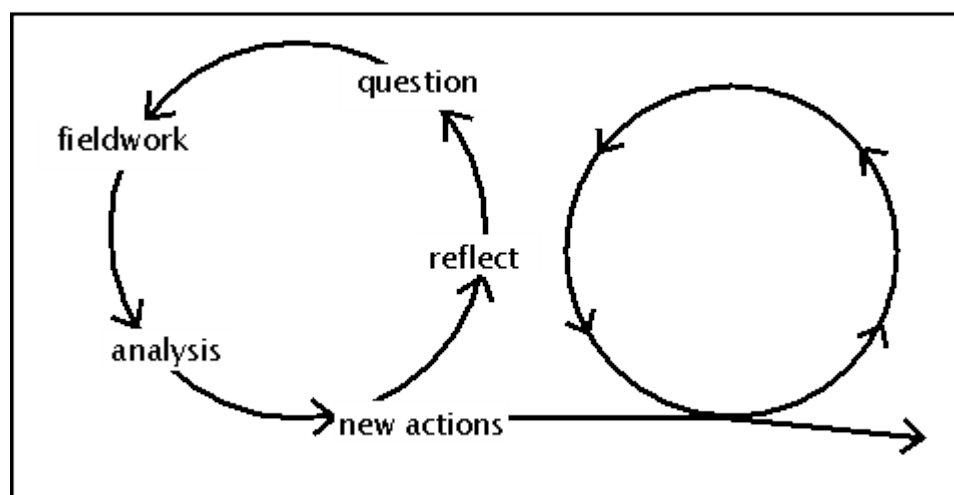


Figure 1: Cyclical Research Process (Wadsworth 1998)

The World Bank Institute's (WBI) Governance Program applies the methodology described above both in the piloting of its new approaches to public sector management issues and its dissemination of lessons learned from such pilots and experiences elsewhere. The Program arose from a need to provide assistance to those countries and governments seeking to reform an unsatisfactory governance environment.

Specifically, the Governance Team facilitates and assists client countries in their pursuit of good governance. In fostering collaborative efforts among all stakeholders in a given society — government, public and private sectors — the Team helps to draw out shared goals and objectives. Such goals are identified through a variety of instruments which

include diagnostic, service delivery and integrity surveys, national integrity systems workshops, action plans and anti-corruption strategies. Each of these instruments is predicated upon broad-based participation both to maximize the local ownership of anti-corruption initiatives throughout a given country's population and to increase the objectivity and relevance of the reform by drawing a wider group of participants into the process.

Broad-based participation in reform initiatives is encouraged by the Team in order to raise the expectations of service providers and service users and increase the likelihood of successful reform through heightened awareness of responsibilities, and means of recourse. "[The] more disempowered you are, the less hope you may have about either the value of participating or even the chances of something good coming of it. If you are radically disempowered you may not even be able to envisage something better..." (Wadsworth 1998). Expanding the number and diversity of more marginalized participants in the process simultaneously empowers those participants by providing them with a voice and reinforcing the value of their opinions. Successful reform is more likely to occur in an empowering environment where participants perceive that their input and efforts will have an impact.

The countries in Box 1 are regional examples of the action research process in which the WBI has been engaged. In order to make this learning process as rich as possible, countries have been chosen across all five regions. Experience from these countries provides examples of best practice and lessons learned which are often more relevant and easier to transfer to the circumstances of other countries in the same region.

Box 1: Action-Research Pilot Countries

Region	Active	Planned/Requested
LAC	Bolivia, Nicaragua, Venezuela	Guatemala, Honduras
AFR (anglophone)	Ethiopia, Ghana, Uganda, Tanzania	Kenya, Nigeria
AFR (francophone)	Benin, Mali, Mauritius	Madagascar
ECA	Ukraine, Georgia, Albania	Bulgaria
MENA	Jordan, Palestine	Lebanon
SA	Bangladesh	Pakistan, Indonesia
*Active in 16 countries, planned/requested in 9 countries		

Basic cross-cutting lessons

While the Governance Program is carefully tailored to each client's particular national

situation, some approaches based upon the Team's prior experiences have been successfully adapted to the circumstances of other countries. The Program accumulates such lessons learned on a regional basis for the consideration of neighboring countries experiencing a similar set of circumstances. Two tools have been developed that are transferable to national initiatives under most circumstances: action-oriented data collection and action planning workshops. Both of these depend upon the continued commitment of a government to increase its transparency of operations and to collaborate with non-governmental institutions and stakeholders.

Typically, a high-level government official is proactive in seeking to organize the fight against corruption. The Governance Team works with this individual (or "champion") to identify the appropriate needs of the country given the existing circumstances and to identify other national counterparts who will form the National Integrity Steering Committee (NISC), a group which will take the lead in monitoring and maintaining the momentum for reform. The NISC may be assisted in its efforts by a National Integrity Unit (NIU) which, as an independent government agency, serves as a watchdog for the enforcement of the "rules of the game." The NIU may be an established constitutional entity such as an Ombudsman, Auditor-General or Inspector of Government or may be specifically appointed by executive decree.

Generally, the NISC will commission a survey to be conducted prior to a National or Municipal Integrity Workshop in order to assess indicators and perceptions of corruption in particular services or in public administration in general. The data and analytical results resulting from these surveys are then disseminated to the workshop. The growing realization that the views of the private sector and civil society should be considered is supportive of efforts to develop effective, action-oriented information-gathering procedures. Such views are integral to examining the interaction of the private and public sector.

Action-oriented data collection

Critical for the success and sustainability of the integrated approach to governance is the innovative use of information. Data from service delivery and integrity surveys, and other economic and financial data are made available to all stakeholders in society (i.e. the general public, private sector, NGOs, watchdog organizations, etc.), thereby opening up government to the public. Moreover, it can serve as a basis of information against which future progress may be monitored. By committing to an open process, the government opens a dialogue with all of society thus increasing the amount of views and opinions heard beyond the scope of the "usual" group of officials and experts, and opening the way for more innovative solutions and alternatives. It is significant to note that surveys used for pure awareness-raising and problem identification are less involved and smaller than surveys used for problem description or in the development of a broader reform program.

Action Research Lessons Learned

- Dissemination of information relating to the government's responsibilities and its actual delivery of services: (i) raises the public's awareness of its right to services without charge and of acceptable standards in those services; (ii) informs the public of its own role in fighting corruption; (iii) enables it to monitor government initiatives; and (iv) provides it with a voice to register complaints and solutions.
- In addition, as transparency increases so does the accountability of public servants

because a system of checks and balances is developed—with the public checking and governmental institutions re-adjusting.

- The information on public perceptions of and experiences with actual service delivery and levels of corruption provides a basis for a more practical discussion among stakeholders. The information can include not only an identification and description of the problem, but also suggested resolutions made by those surveyed: heads of households, corporate executives, communities, service workers, and administrators at different levels.

Action planning

Using the information gathered in data collection efforts, a country can begin to identify and examine vulnerable areas, devise solutions and monitor progress in strengthening these areas. Often this process is captured in the preparation of an Action Plan which lists each recommendation for resolving the inadequacy, specifies a time-frame in which the resolution will occur and identifies an institution and contact person responsible for monitoring the progress of the resolution. This type of instrument is usually developed with the input of all stakeholders over the course of a national or municipal integrity workshop. Diagnostic information serves as the input to the integrity workshop, while the National Anti-Corruption Strategy and Action Plan are important outcomes.

Action research lessons learned

- Essential to building integrity is undertaking and maintaining the public's confidence in the State as an institution. It is dependent upon the people's loyalty to its philosophy and policies regarding the development of the society's social, economic, and political welfare. At the heart of successful reform is the State's ability to reciprocate that loyalty by involving its constituency throughout the process.
- Although the preliminary National Strategy and the Action Plan may be developed prior the integrity workshop, they are only finalized upon completion of the workshop when all participants have been given the opportunity to comment. These serve as the basis from which progress will be assessed by all participants at the workshop and indeed stakeholders throughout society. Thus, both instruments serve to continue to fuel the action research process over time through the reiterative process of reflection, analysis and renewed action.
- Having facilitated the implementation of Action Plans in seven countries at national and municipal levels, the Governance Team has learned that one important characteristic of the Action Plan is to manage a country's expectations by ensuring that the plan's recommendations are realistic. Approving a grandiose plan that sees few, if any, results is not only demoralizing, it perpetuates the view that nothing can be done to alter a situation. To avoid this, short-, medium- and long-term objectives should be identified which can provide visible "quick wins" in the near term and institutionalized change in the longer-term. By maintaining the quality of reform progress over time, stakeholder motivation in the process will be sustained.

The Use of Action Research by the Client

In the WBI's approach, the instruments and tools described above are used in an action

research process at national and municipal levels to:

- gain greater understanding of the issues and current environment
- consider means of changing the environment
- seek answers and alternatives
- evaluate the answers and implement alternatives
- think of new actions
- repeat steps (i) through (v) in the context of the new actions.

Institutions like the NISC and the NIU working in collaboration with other stakeholders are instrumental throughout the process, but particularly in steps (i), and (v). Moreover, the NISC working with a NIU, established within government to independently monitor government efforts to improve integrity and raise public awareness of its rights and obligations to reduce corruption, can provide the information necessary for step (ii). Survey instruments, fundamental to steps (iii) and (iv), are undertaken to provide baseline data and to measure change over time. In addition, National Integrity Strategies and Action Plans are designed by country stakeholders to establish ground rules and oversee anti-corruption initiatives; tools which can be established in steps (iv) and (v) and regularly revised from step (vi) forward.

Results of action research for WBI

Anti-corruption strategies are a meaningful component of the work conducted by the World Bank. They are important element of the Bank's Comprehensive Development Framework and are considered significant issues in the its lending activities. They are also "ripe for mainstreaming" across sectoral and thematic groups. As the Bank accumulates more information and experience that can be shared within the organization, its challenge is to mainstream corruption work without diluting its dynamism. This challenge is also our challenge.

Where the WBI does become involved, its efforts are customized to the client's situation. However, its country-based activities continue to be compatible with the Bank's general strategy and the overall larger framework of country reform (CAS). Collaboration between the WBI, Bank Operations, and the Research Team to put the anti-corruption into an effective overall strategy can only facilitate these efforts. While some standard processes based upon the governance group's prior experiences have been effectively transferred to other country circumstances, the national strategy itself must remain adaptable, changing with the "case law" or best practice experience and thereby improving the effectiveness of the final objective.

As stated previously, action research refers to "learning by doing." The objective of the action-research process for the WBI's Governance Program is to regularly monitor the performance of different tools and processes across its client countries, learn from the results as they become available, and adapt and transfer each tool according to the existing national environment and integrity strategy of its new clients. Each of the tools described above can be applied in different environments under different circumstances, yielding lessons which can be of use to countries beginning to address these issues.

Action research lessons learned

- The *process* of building national integrity systems is as important as the content.

Sequencing of reforms remains one of the most debated issues for the WBI and its clients. It is unrealistic to identify a step-by-step approach to the process.

However, it is WBI's experience that each country which has adapted the flexible tools briefly discussed above has benefited from an increased sense of ownership and the reinforced knowledge that it can control its own destiny.

- In assessing success in a given country, the Team has learned to set aside its own standard of success and instead assess progress according to the country context. During the National Integrity Symposium in Ukraine, the subject of corruption was openly discussed for the first time amongst 300 individuals of various backgrounds and professions, a success for the country. In Nicaragua, the apathy of the general populace towards anti-corruption reform changed to motivated enthusiasm upon the display of sincere government commitment at the National Integrity Workshop. In response to the government's invitation over the radio, a thousand participants of all cultural backgrounds and professions attended the workshop.

Conclusions

Combating corruption through increased integrity is instrumental to the broader goal of more effective, fair, and efficient government. Anti-corruption activists are not only concerned with reducing malfeasance but with mitigating its impact on development and society. In this regard, many questions remain unanswered including: To what extent does corruption negatively affect efforts to alleviate poverty by distorting developmental decision-making? How inefficient is bribery? What should be identified as the priority areas of corruption and which are the most costly? Who ultimately pays the cost for corruption? What is the most effective and sustainable sequencing of reforms?

Other questions include:

- What is the role and impact of bribes paid by companies from the North to civil servants in the South?
- What is the role and impact of donors on corruption in a country?
- Who is paying and who is receiving the bribes?
- Where is the money going?
- Is there a link between paying a small bribe and improved service delivery?

The strategy for building integrity systems must continue to remain flexible, changing as case law and best practice experience increase, thereby improving its own effectiveness. Successful reform requires the integration and harmonization of all reforms into a National Reform Program, including: sector reforms, financial reforms, economic reforms, constitutional reforms, civil-service reform, decentralization, army demobilization, privatization, and legal reforms. However, when designing an anti-corruption strategy, reform should initially only tackle areas: (a) that can show credible impact on important stakeholder issues; (b) where the return on investment is greatest; (c) that are discrete and where reformers can control implementation; (d) that are within the budget; and (e) that can have some short-term positive impact.

Because it is a long-term process of examining and re-evaluating attitudes and conduct for effectiveness at all levels, reformers must remain patient, acknowledging small as well as large successes over time, and they must continue to be vigilant, maintaining the motivation and momentum for reform. Visible commitment from the top, therefore, is critical and serves as a support to and role model for reform. Thus, successful reformers

must manage both expectations and change while simultaneously introducing realistic incentive structures and sanctions.

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