

# British Academy/DFID/ Thinking and Working Politically Community of Practice anti-corruption workshop

London, 13 May 2016



The workshop brought together around 50 participants from across a broad range of interests and organisations, including several from overseas. It was conducted under the Chatham House rule with a good deal of frank discussion, and sessions focused on the following issues: setting the scene around 'thinking and working politically' (TWP); how can the BA/DFID ACE programme contribute to TWP; moving beyond research and policy; identifying challenges for TWP in relation to corruption; where have we got to? The aims were two-fold: a) to begin to encourage discussions around TWP in the anti-corruption space (policy, practice and research), and b) to begin to build links between BA/DFID ACE researchers and the TWP Community.

Rather than a session by session review, in this note we have focused on a small number of takeaway points, as well as alerting participants at the workshop and TWP Community of Practice members of potential follow-on events.

## *Takeaway points:*

- TWP means understanding how corruption works in reality, challenging some of the assumptions we typically bring into policy, practice and research. There are tensions between understanding the reality of corruption and anti-corruption and being seen to excuse it, and one of our key challenges going forward will be in striking the right balance here.
- We need to keep the focus on the negative impact of corruption – on prosperity, security, poverty – as the Summit has done, not in the least in order to address questions about whether anticorruption is driven by 'imposition of western values', as some critics suggest.
- In order to exploit the current political opportunity, TWP should aim to embed itself within the mainstream, while anti-corruption research should aim to be realistic and practical, tackling real world priorities.
- Research must respond to fast-moving and changing contexts – corrupt actors will respond quickly to tightening controls, and therefore research needs to be nimble, responsive, real time – as well as deep and long.
- There are still huge gaps in data and research with an overabundance perhaps in particular areas. There is a need to support and sustain research focused on 'non-sexy' but important areas, such as beneficial ownership, open contracting, budgeting, transportation, infrastructure and so on.
- We are at a good political moment<sup>1</sup> for accelerating action on corruption, including delivery of politically smart, operationally relevant evidence (connecting policy/research/practitioners). However, we are simultaneously at the least friendly moment for aid. We need to think about how to bridge this space and to develop 'public friendly' messages if we want to encourage the sort of innovation and risk taking this work will need.
- We should aim to develop stronger connections with experts on law and legal practitioners who are often at the 'coalface' of corruption investigations and prosecutions. As we saw at the workshop, this also potentially gives us access to empirical data that, to the best of our knowledge, is significantly untapped.
- Anti-corruption and SDG 16 need data and measurement, including micro-level data from organisational and institutional levels. Donors (and their foreign affairs counterparts) should make more open their information on local politics. The World Bank, in particular, is opening its data to researchers.
- The Global Summit's commitment of an innovation hub offers a potential platform for innovative partnership between research and practice, though how open this will be for external researchers is unclear at this point.
- We need to better encourage cross-fertilisation of research ideas and methods, especially (but not exclusively) between political science, psychology and behavioural science.
- (Re)thinking ways to keep research nimble and with problem solving at its heart is a challenge but one where there was considerable appetite among the group. Donors/funders and implementers could consider attaching researchers to country offices and programme teams for real-time learning.

<sup>1</sup> In the UK context, this may be contingent on unknown fall-out from changes in UK political scene following the Brexit referendum.

- A priority for DFID in particular should be to build links between the British Academy/DFID ACE researchers, the TWP CoP and practitioners.