

Study on Preventing Corruption in Humanitarian Assistance

Draft Research Project Summary

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Introduction

Background and Rationale of the Study

Larger budgets for humanitarian agencies, working under adverse conditions, and often with donor demands for rapid impact, make the possibility of corruption in humanitarian response an increasing concern. Corruption is a particular problem in humanitarian assistance, in part because the limited levels of assistance means that any leakage runs the risk of threatening human life, and because systems to prevent corruption can become too onerous and undermine the speed, flexibility and innovation needed to respond effectively to humanitarian emergencies. While corruption itself has been broadly studied, only fairly recently has corruption in humanitarian action been studied. Few agencies have in place guidelines or policies to combat corruption and there has been little joint analysis, learning or sharing of tools. This study will contribute to a ‘toolbox’ of options intended to help humanitarian actors better tackle corruption to be developed by Transparency International.

With the attempt to improve standards across the industry, inadequate understanding of corruption and the tools to prevent it constitute a significant constraint to improved practice. In a review of the types of corruption risks facing aid agencies, Ewins et al. (2006) mapped out the relief process within international agencies and the opportunities for corruption at different stages and sectors of relief delivery.

Working from the commonly accepted definition of corruption as “the misuse of entrusted power for private gain” the research will focus on the potential for gain in the form of finance, assets and influence. The study will apply the risk map developed in the earlier study to the relief divisions of specific NGOs who have volunteered to be part of this action-research. It will work with these agencies to identify key risks, existing efforts to address those risks and deal with corruption when it occurs and possible tools and measures to better combat corruption within humanitarian action.

This study will examine corruption particularly from the perspective of humanitarian agencies and their staff. The purpose is not to actually investigate or uncover corrupt practices, but rather to work with agency staff to map out potential risks of corruption in humanitarian assistance, note both the systems in place to prevent corruption and other innovative practices by which corruption risks are reduced. It will also examine how agencies manage the necessity of preventing corruption and the imperative of managing a rapid and effective emergency response, and will examine whether action to reduce corruption as part of generic good management leads to more effective response or they are seen as competing priorities.

The study will be carried out by an international partnership of research institutes including the Feinstein International Center of Tufts University, and the Humanitarian Policy Group of the Overseas Development Institute (UK), working together with Transparency International. This study will build directly on work done by HPG and TI that resulted in the Corruption Risk Map (Ewins et al. 2006).

Six international NGOs have agreed to work with the study (listed below), with a possible seventh. The main focus will therefore be on international NGOs as humanitarian actors and the partners that they work with. The study will not directly be working with UN agencies, donors or disaster affected governments.

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of this study are:

1. To identify and understand the ways in which corruption manifests itself in the planning and delivery of humanitarian assistance,
2. To engage with operational agencies to develop the evidence base of measures that can reduce corruption risks in humanitarian assistance and identify best practices to address the prevention of corruption within the humanitarian endeavor;

Research Questions

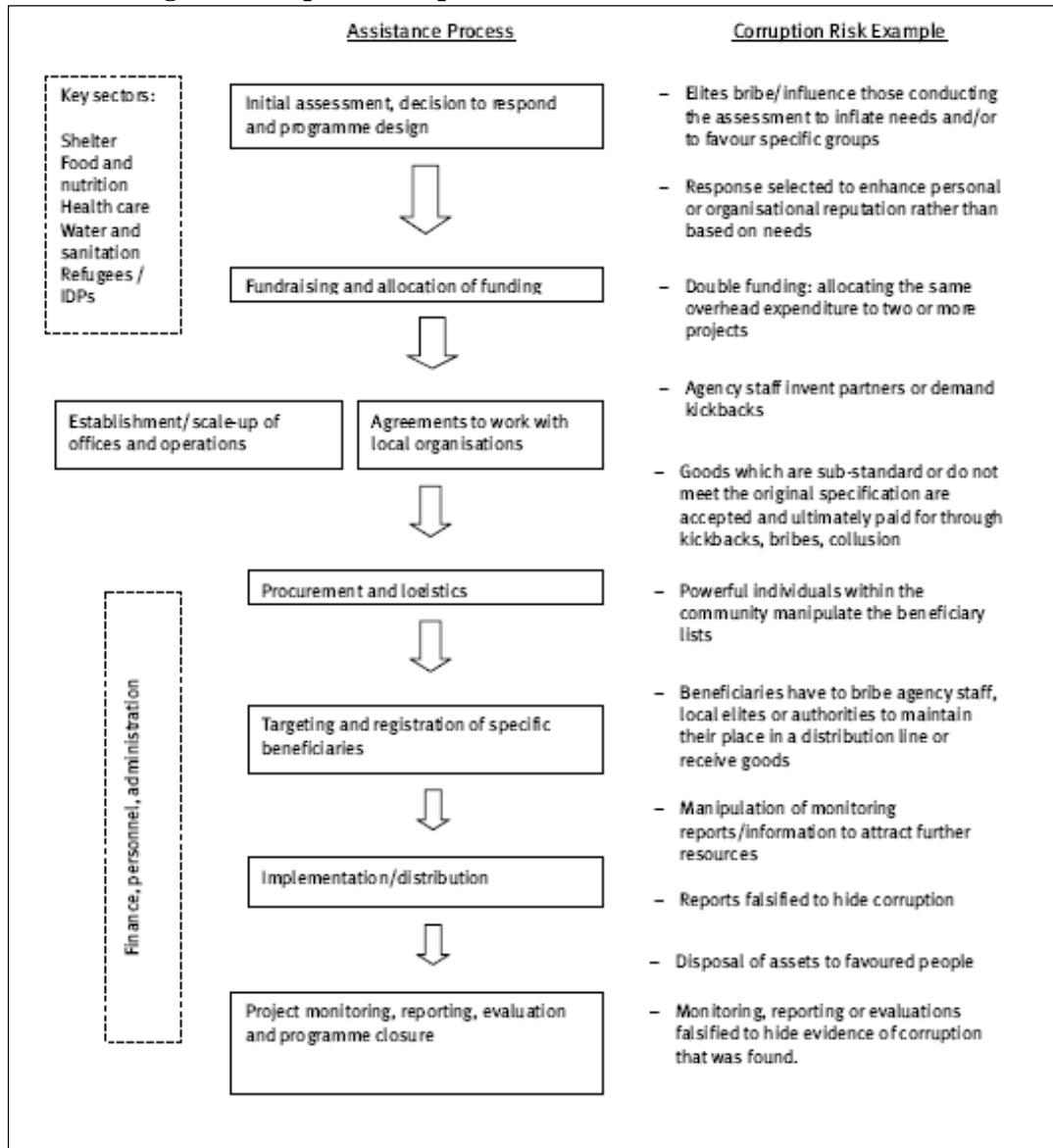
The study will be guided by the following questions.

- What are agencies' perceptions of the most significant threats of corruption?
- How do agencies manage the risk of corruption (and the risks of various means of prevention) as part of an overall strategy of risk management?
- What policies, procedures and examples of good and bad practice have agencies developed both to minimize the risks of corruption occurring and to address corruption when it occurs.
- In humanitarian response (particularly in rapid onset crises) how do agencies manage the need for systems that prevent corruption on the one hand, and systems that permit more rapid innovative response?
- Is stronger action to tackle corruption seen as part of generic good management and greater accountability that lead to more effective and innovative responses?
- What are the risks and benefits of different measures to tackle corruption?
- What capacities exist to develop good practice in tackling corruption within agencies and are there trade-offs between investment in this issue and other priorities?
- Do humanitarian agencies have a responsibility to understand and minimize corruption in "entrusted" partners with whom they work (be they local organizations, host-country government agencies, other international agencies, or for profit businesses who supply the humanitarian effort)?
- Is it part of the responsibility of humanitarian agencies to denounce corrupt practices in emergency contexts where they work or to accept it as a distasteful aspect of someone else's practice?

The Conceptual Framework for the Study

The Corruption Risk Map was developed in the earlier HPG study (Ewins et al. 2006). This tool shows the general flow of analytical, fund-raising and programming operations in a typical humanitarian agency. It notes various places in the flow where corruption risks are the highest; and it also shows where risks can be effectively mitigated. The Risk Map will be used to analyze actual agency practice in preventing corruption.

Figure 1: Map of Corruption Risks in Humanitarian Assistance



While the Corruption Risk Map will serve as the conceptual framework for this inquiry, the study is grounded in broader concepts of both corruption, and other risks of aid diversion, waste and mismanagement within the humanitarian enterprise. Note the section below on review of the literature for other conceptual areas in which the specific study of corruption in humanitarian assistance will be grounded.

The Study Approach

1. Building on Existing Knowledge

This study will build on existing knowledge in two ways. First, this study builds directly on the development of the Corruption Risk Map (Ewins et al. 2006) which has already been described. Second, the study team will conduct a thorough review of existing literature, both on the specific topic of corruption in humanitarian action, and in related fields as well. Third, there will be two team meetings at which experiences to date in the research project will be shared, and joint analysis of results conducted.

The limited literature directly on the topic of corruption in the humanitarian aid endeavour has already been reviewed to some extent. This literature is referenced in the existing HPG reports, and will be reviewed in greater depth as the first step of the study. The literature review for the current study will also include several related bodies of literature:

- Broader literature on development and corruption with a particular focus on measures and tools to minimize corruption risks.
- Literature on the political economy of relief and aid diversion and approaches such as ‘do no harm’.
- Development literature on issues such as voice and accountability – some of which has links to ways of minimizing corruption.
- Development literature on concepts of power (key to understanding how power is abused).
- Humanitarian literature on downwards accountability and complaints mechanisms – Humanitarian Accountability Partnership-International; ALNAP.
- Evaluations of humanitarian action which mention corruption.

2. A Qualitative Approach to Field Work: Headquarters Visits and Field Visits

This research is exploratory in nature; it can best be described as hypothesis-building research, not hypothesis-testing research. The research team will visit agency headquarters and field offices. This allows for an iterative approach, where learning from one set of interviews can be incorporated into the next set. Since comparison across different agencies is not the objective, this approach enables maximum learning from the research as the process continues.

Sampling will begin on the basis of purposive selection of individual participants, based on the nature of their jobs in relation to the topic of the study. However, the team will rely on the initial participants to identify other respondents to interview, thus both purposive and “snowball” sampling procedures will be used to select participants.

The headquarters visits are expected to require 2-3 days, during which time the team would request to meet briefly with the Chief Executive Officer or Chief Operating Officer, as well as the senior overseas operations manager (VP level); internal auditor; director of finance; director of HR; head of procurement and logistics; the heads of program quality assurance, standards and M&E; and the director of the emergency unit. Other members of staff may be interviewed as well, if identified during the course of the initial interviews. The purpose of the HQ visits is to get a global overview and understand agency policy.

Similar objectives pertain to field visits. The field visits will be expected to look closely at an actual humanitarian operation, enabling greater detail. The field visits will be similar in format, but will focus on Country Office and project staff. The field visits are expected to take 5-7 working days, and

if possible it would be more beneficial to the study to visit the actual field site, rather than simply the Country Office headquarters.

The Study Team. The study is being carried out by the Feinstein International Center of Tufts University in collaboration with the Humanitarian Policy Group (HPG) of the Overseas Development Institute. The project is funded by Transparency International through a grant from the Swedish International Development Agency. Each agency will be visited by a team of two people, one of the researchers (from the Feinstein Center or HPG) and one member of staff from Transparency International.