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CORRUPTION, JUSTICE AND LEGITIMACY PROGRAM

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How Anti-Corruption Efforts Can Inadvertently Fuel Conflict



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Corruption in Fragile States Blog



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The Corruption, Justice and Legitimacy Program @ Besa Global

The **Corruption, Justice and Legitimacy Program (CJL)** is a research-to-practice initiative committed to improving the impact of anti-corruption programming in contexts of endemic corruption. We have pioneered a systems-based corruption analysis methodology that identifies drivers and enablers of corrupt practices in order to inform strategic programming decisions. Integral to CJL's approach is the inclusion of social norms, a critical determinant of behavior. Our research shows how norms drive corrupt practices and inhibit anti-corruption efforts, especially in contexts of fragility and conflict. Key to improving effectiveness and our commitment to 'do no harm' is developing processes to adapt anti-corruption programs to the realities of fragile and conflict affected states. Advances in our work can be found on the **Corruption in Fragile States Blog**.

CJL is housed at **Besa Global**, an innovator and convener in the corruption and conflict space. As a thought leader, Besa Global works with social change partners to make strategic decisions to maximize their impact.

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This **Working Paper** is part of the Corruption, Justice and Legitimacy (CJL) Program's learning initiative, "Conflict Sensitivity in Anti-Corruption," a research-to-practice effort to identify ways to support anti-corruption efforts to succeed in conflict-affected environments without exacerbating conflict. Working Papers are CJL's way of sharing initial findings that are substantial and worthy of review but still open to evolution and improvement through scrutiny from the community of practice.

I. Introduction

Anti-corruption (AC) efforts are often undertaken in conflict-affected states, where deep societal divisions are intertwined with abuses of power. Example after example demonstrates that endemic corruption often worsens conflict and can become a driver of conflict and that ignoring corruption can further entrench it and block progress toward sustainable peace in the long term.¹ But what if **well-intentioned efforts** to fight corruption in such contexts can also, unintentionally, fuel intergroup tensions or even tip fragile post-war political settlements back into violence? If anti-corruption efforts exacerbate conflict, not only do societies suffer but progress made in combatting corruption could be overridden by the instability and violence those very efforts cause, which, in turn, fuels more corruption. For these reasons, understanding how anti-corruption efforts can unintentionally **exacerbate conflict** matters to anti-corruption practitioners.

This working paper gathers evidence and practitioner experience about this under-examined question. It identifies seven possible ways that AC efforts can make conflict worse in societies experiencing intergroup tensions, political and social violence, or war and describes the key pathways through which this happens. It is a product of the Corruption, Justice and Legitimacy (CJL) program's learning initiative 'Conflict Sensitivity in Anti-Corruption,' a research-to-practice effort to identify ways to support anti-corruption efforts to succeed in conflict-affected environments without exacerbating conflict. These inadvertent negative impacts represent common patterns we found through gathering and analyzing experiences of AC efforts undertaken in conflict settings. While we found few examples where AC efforts mitigated negative impacts or had positive impacts on tensions, the paper shares the few that did emerge, as they may be illustrative of possibilities for working effectively in conflict-affected societies.

The purpose of presenting the findings here is to illustrate the common patterns we have identified to date, and further our collective learning by sparking feedback, testing resonance, and seeking additional practitioner experience. The paper aims further to stimulate discussion and new ideas on the potential unintended negative impacts of AC on conflict, how to assess them, and how international, national, and local agencies can adapt how they plan and implement their programs to avoid or mitigate them. We recognize that fuller case studies in a potential future phase of this initiative will be needed to develop the detail and nuance needed for convincing 'evidence.' For each of the patterns we suggest that the issue is not with the fact of conducting AC efforts generally, but with the specific ways these efforts are conducted. Greater detail and nuance will also be needed to identify **what specific aspects** of the anti-corruption approaches or intervention decisions generate these impacts and to understand what adaptations might help to avoid fueling violent societal tensions.

II. The Intersection of Conflict Sensitivity and Anti-Corruption

Is Anti-Corruption Conflict Blind?

In the broader humanitarian and development aid fields, a key insight gained over two decades ago was that the impact of international assistance in a context of violent conflict is never neutral (whatever the intentions of those who conduct the programs); aid always interacts with the conflict and becomes part of the conflict.² The responsibility to **do no harm** has since become a well-known ethical imperative for international aid in conflict areas.³ Aid programs have been encouraged to adopt a **conflict-sensitive** approach, to analyze how a program might interact with conflict dynamics and then adapt programming to avoid exacerbating prevailing tensions and possibly even bridge existing divisions. With the development of varied conflict sensitivity tools, specialized conflict advisors, policy guidance within multilateral and bilateral aid donors, and now donor-funded conflict sensitivity hubs in specific regions, this conflict sensitivity agenda has become a prominent element of global aid policy.

What is Conflict Sensitivity?

Conflict sensitivity is commonly understood as gaining a “sound understanding of the two-way interaction between aid activities and context and acting to minimise negative impacts and maximise positive impacts of intervention on conflict, within an organisation’s given priorities/objectives (mandate).”⁴

By contrast, conflict sensitivity appears to be mostly **missing in action** in the AC practice world. On the one hand, the AC field is increasingly giving attention to the intersection between corruption and conflict and how to design more effective anti-corruption efforts in fragile and conflict-affected contexts. For example, Transparency International’s 2022 Corruption Perceptions Index highlighted how corruption accompanies high levels of conflict, and GiZ’s 2020 Review of Evidence focused specifically on designing AC interventions in fragile settings.⁵ The U4 Anti-Corruption Resource Center, together with the Berghof Foundation, has gone further to consider how corruption could be addressed as part of a peace process,⁶ while CJL has developed a course on how to design anti-corruption programs in conflict contexts on behalf of U4. Political economy analysis and other approaches to working ‘more politically’ are also increasingly used to inform anti-corruption programs.⁷

On the other hand, this has not extended to looking in the mirror at how AC measures themselves may impact conflict. Our review suggests that many AC efforts do not consider how their approaches might interact with the conditions in conflict-affected states and mostly use existing models or ‘blueprints’ that may have worked in non-conflict settings. In fact, we found that many AC initiatives currently appear to be ‘conflict blind.’⁸ That means that we found little attention to the need to ‘see’ and understand the **conflict dynamics** in the areas where AC programs were undertaken.

Some anti-corruption practitioners have expressed concern that drawing attention to negative impacts of anti-corruption work can itself do harm by dissuading people from tackling corruption at all because it is ‘too risky.’ This is a legitimate concern about the risks of reductionism in focusing only on the ‘harms’ of anti-corruption, since, as noted above, ignoring corruption also does harm. Yet, experience using these approaches in other spheres of aid over two decades shows that trying to avoid negative impacts does not mean ‘do nothing.’ Rather, conflict sensitivity is about being aware of the context as one designs and implements assistance efforts: learning to **analyze** the context in order to **anticipate** and **monitor** potential unintended impacts, and then **adapt** programs to mitigate them where possible. (Conflict sensitivity is also needed in our own messaging around potential negative impacts of AC in order to ensure that ‘do nothing’ is not the message people hear in contexts where that is sure to be harmful.) This paper hopes to support the AC field to identify and address correctable problems and weak spots in our approaches when they are used in conflict-affected settings. Rather than weakening the anti-corruption agenda, it aims to **strengthen AC efforts** in conflict-affected societies and improve approaches and results.

What Do We Mean by Conflict?

What ‘conflicts’ are we concerned about exacerbating? Conflict at various levels exists in all societies, and some forms play a constructive role in fostering important social change. The absence of overt violence, however, does not mean there is no destructive conflict. This ‘negative peace’ is often critiqued as too narrow a view of conflict to capture the broader issues of pervasive injustice and structural violence which are often the underlying root causes of overt violence.⁹ For our purposes of understanding negative impacts in this paper, we consider conflicts which are violent or risk leading to violence — either political, social, or of a criminal nature. These can be civil wars or interstate wars, urban violence, or pervasive political or criminal violence that threatens the lives and well-being of people. We also include in our definition divisions and tensions that are not yet violent (or where there is limited violence) but that have the risk of escalating into violence. Exacerbating conflict does not only mean affecting the actual level of violence (e.g. attacks, deaths) but also the parties’ capacities for violence and the causes or conditions that lead to violence (e.g. inequalities, intergroup hostility, etcetera).

Are Existing Conflict Sensitivity Tools Adequate for (More Inherently Conflictual) AC Efforts?

As noted above, for over 20 years, development, peacebuilding and humanitarian aid agencies have been using ever more nuanced conflict sensitivity approaches, and have developed practical frameworks, tools, and processes to affect practice. There is now deep experience and expertise in conflict sensitivity across many sectors, as well as resources and ‘lessons learned’ for conflict-sensitive practice. (See Appendix I for existing centers of conflict sensitivity expertise — hubs — for aid efforts more generally, that AC efforts could look to for support in some regions.) A question remains though whether these existing conflict sensitivity tools can be used ‘off the shelf’ for anti-corruption efforts. Or, is there something about fighting corruption that requires somewhat different practical frameworks given the distinct nature of AC? AC is different because blocking access to illicit wealth and power is **inherently conflictual**¹⁰ and involves shifting power. Some AC tools either expose or punish wrongdoers directly, or, through advocacy, mobilize social discontent against ‘those thieves’ to create pressure for change. Intentionally adversarial methods and coercion-based enforcement mechanisms are seen as legitimate and necessary tools in the AC toolkit. The powers of enforcement by the state, such as investigations, prosecutions, and sanctions, can strip resources, privileges, and power from wrongdoers. Watchdog roles and investigative journalism can whip up public discontent through public exposure and tactics like naming and shaming. Resistance to these measures is, therefore, expected. In fact, conflict (that is, visible resistance to AC measures) is often a sign that AC efforts may be working in threatening groups who benefit from corruption.

These elements make AC much more politically sensitive than typical humanitarian and development work for which the existing conflict sensitivity frameworks were developed. These differences translate into expectations of **adversarial relationships**, where there are winners and losers, rather than potentially cooperative relationships. Existing conflict sensitivity frameworks, by contrast, would characterize these approaches as carrying implicit ethical messages that reinforce and legitimate the use of power and coercion between groups. Conflict-sensitive approaches in AC would need to be able to determine when these approaches are simply fueling intergroup conflict (and, therefore, should not proceed) or when they are appropriate and legitimate. In other words, what conflict to ‘avoid’ or ‘mitigate’ and what is expected and tolerable — necessary even? These distinctions suggest that somewhat different tools and frameworks for AC may be needed. These questions call for further investigation through deeper engagement between the AC and the conflict sensitivity communities of practice.

Our Conflict Sensitivity in Anti-Corruption Initiative

Our work sought to engage the anti-corruption field in learning across diverse AC approaches and types of impacts on conflict. The findings below emerged from a limited research and experience-gathering process, conducted internally for CJL but aiming to engage the broader AC community in reflection and learning on this issue. It built on a 2022 literature review by Rosemary Ventura for CJL that identified 15 patterns of unintended negative consequences of anti-corruption efforts, including some that do not relate to conflict.¹¹ It extended the research, expanding and updating the review of academic literature, reviewing 50 evaluations of AC efforts in conflict settings, and conducting 15 in-depth interviews with practitioners. CJL then convened two roundtables involving 18 practitioners in summer 2023 to reality check and improve early drafts of this paper. Finally, we disseminated a working paper version in November 2023 soliciting input, validation, and critical feedback from both the anti-corruption and the conflict sensitivity communities of practice.

What Do We Mean by Anti-Corruption Efforts?

The AC interventions reviewed through this process are diverse in focus, scope, scale and the actors undertaking them. They range from locally specific and discrete programs by NGOs to affect one type of corrupt practice to bilateral aid donors' country strategies and government AC mechanisms with a national scope. Most are efforts to address corruption in the operating environment, but mechanisms within an organization to prevent, detect and/or deal with corruption (e.g. through hiring practices, procurement procedures, compliance measures, etcetera) are also included. To encompass this breadth, we will use the terminology 'AC efforts' or 'AC interventions' in this paper to refer to all these types of AC.

A Broad Definition: Direct and Indirect Anti-Corruption

The working definition of anti-corruption measures used in this inquiry was broad: it included both ‘direct’ and ‘indirect’ approaches to combating corruption. Direct interventions target corrupt practices as their explicit goal, while indirect approaches may dampen the pernicious impact of corruption or try to reduce corruption without tackling it head-on.¹² Typical direct approaches include the establishment of anti-corruption commissions and agencies, legislation and prosecution instruments, development of national anti-corruption strategies, as well as anti-corruption advocacy campaigns, community-based monitoring and other measures focused directly on corruption. Indirect measures may entail such programs as reforming public financial management systems, strengthening audit capacity, increasing government transparency and accountability in key areas like justice, rule of law, health, and education, reforming procurement processes, supporting independent media, civil society budget monitoring, and so forth. More classic governance and democratization programs could also broadly be considered as indirect AC efforts; for our purposes, however, to be included, such programs had to integrate an explicit aim of reducing or preventing corruption in service of the greater development goal.

The Challenge of Understanding Conflict Impacts: Lack of Research and Complex Causality

The literature review yielded very little in terms of formalized data; there were no focused studies of the conflict impacts of AC programs. While a few evaluations mentioned impacts on conflict contexts, this was at a very macro level, looking at country-level broad governance programming with no specifics around AC efforts. Strikingly, when we searched for the term ‘conflict’ in evaluations of AC efforts in known conflict contexts, the result was only countless hits for ‘**conflict of interest.**’

Due to the paucity of data, this process turned to in-depth interviews to collect practitioners’ and policymakers’ experiences of efforts to fight corruption in societies with a range of conflict intensities. Consequently, the examples draw heavily on practitioners’ own subjective reflections; these are shared anonymously or in generic form. The findings presented here paint a suggestive picture, rather than conclusive evidence, but are sufficiently ‘ground truthed’ by practitioners to present here as illustrative of existing experience.

The wide range of experiences referenced in this paper understandably leads to questions: how should we understand the notion of ‘impacts’ of AC on conflict

dynamics and the connection of any single AC effort to more cumulative negative effects? How can one compare a small NGO's AC program to a government AC commission or a 'say no to corruption' awareness campaign in terms of their impacts on conflict? Our approach to understanding causality in AC interventions, as with most social change efforts, is that it requires a **systems perspective**, especially in contexts of endemic corruption and conflict. While there are instances when impacts of an individual, discrete AC program in a specific place are immediate and visible, and the connection of the effort to the impacts is clear, this is not likely to be the case for many efforts. Many AC efforts will not be at a large enough scale or so immediately connected to the conflict to generate immediate and visible impacts. Rather, as in all complex systems, in many instances the causal linkages between the intervention and the effect will not be obvious or attributable, and even the effects themselves may not be obvious within short timeframes.¹³ As we have discovered through this effort, impacts may be indirect — emerging as second or third order consequences of the effort because of the interaction with factors outside of the effort's control. Or one effort with seemingly insignificant effects on conflict may, together with many other similar kinds of efforts, create a **cumulative impact** that only becomes visible after all these effects have added up over time.

Thus, in considering each of the patterns, it is useful to consider how an individual effort, in the context of and interacting with the larger system, could contribute over time to the pattern. Through this lens, the efforts of individual AC agencies are akin to larger and smaller 'drops in the bucket' that eventually add up to fill the bucket; AC efforts contribute to these broader cumulative outcomes. While no one actor is responsible for when the bucket overflows, all played a role in filling it.

III. The Patterns Through Which Anti-Corruption Efforts Fuel Conflict

In presenting the seven patterns below, we have clustered them around three overarching pathways through which the diverse AC efforts presented inadvertently fuel conflict and grievances. These are through:

1. specific choices made in the design and implementation of AC efforts — essentially ‘how’ a program is conducted,
2. consequences arising when AC goals are actually achieved — in other words, when projects succeed or might succeed, and
3. ineffective or distorted results of AC efforts — when AC efforts are intentionally misused or manipulated, or when they are based on a faulty theory of change.

Within each of these three pathways, the experience gathered suggested key patterns by which negative impacts on conflict come about.

When Implementation Choices Fuel Conflict

The patterns below represent risks of fueling conflict that stem from specific aspects of how AC efforts are implemented — that is, decisions and choices taken when designing or implementing a program or working to carry out one’s duties in an AC institution.

- 1. Resources can be distributed to some groups over others, reinforcing divisions along conflict lines.**

Much AC aid consists of technical assistance and capacity building or involves support to civil society-based actions. While it involves the direct transfer of fewer material resources to communities than does international humanitarian or development aid, it still involves some resource transfers. International resources for anti-corruption efforts go as grants or budget support for national or local government partners or civil society organizations (CSOs) or private-sector efforts. International resources pay for offices, procure equipment or technology, hire staff, fund trainings or other capacity building efforts or purchase services and supplies. AC aid may also confer less tangible benefits — such as status, professional connections, and access to further opportunities — and even can confer political legitimacy on those groups who are seen to be AC partners of international stakeholders.

These resources can inadvertently end up going to or benefiting certain types of people and certain groups on **one side of a conflict** divide more than others, which can exacerbate existing societal divisions in counterproductive ways. The group distinctions driving grievances and inequalities in each context will be different — often based on combinations of ethnic, religious, racial, socio-economic, age, gender or political/ideological divides. The following are illustrative ways anti-corruption measures can have these types of inadvertent but divisive distributional effects:

- a) An AC program may select certain CSOs as the main beneficiaries or partners based on objective or merit-based criteria but may fail to recognize that their staff, location, working languages, or broader political affiliations reflect only one side in an existing conflict or can suggest partisan agendas in a divided society. (Research shows how CSOs in post-conflict settings are often organized along ethnic and national lines that align with the divisions in the broader conflict.¹⁴) For example, aid programs have been shown to have benefited specific CSO factions in Liberia and Sierra Leone, and similar patterns existed in many countries in the Balkans, such as in Bosnia, where external support for NGOs often ended up strengthening ethno-nationalist parties. External support played into major tensions between CSOs associated with Hamas versus Fatah in Palestine as well.¹⁵ This also occurs with governmental AC efforts. Consider the following hypothetical scenario where an Inspector General's effort to support municipal-level compliance capacities selects those that received low compliance scores in reports by a national think tank. If the target municipalities are in regions dominated by one side in the country's recent bout of interethnic violence, an inadvertent distributional effect may occur. The target municipalities would then receive training, conferences, access to senior officials, and international study visits, while the others would not, despite the 'objective' criteria for selection. The other groups could resent what they see as the state's preferential treatment, which reactivates previous grievances.
- b) In contexts where the sitting government or a particular sector of the economy is dominated by one group (political, racial, religious, or ethnic), AC measures like investigations and prosecutions predominantly targeting the government or that sector will inevitably affect that one group more and could fuel existing intergroup divisions in the country at large.

In South Africa, corruption has mainly been perceived as a public sector problem, while the largely white-led private sector has reportedly been less scrutinized, being seen as cleaner — a “corruption-free zone.” In a context where whites remain dominant in the private sector while blacks control government, the imbalance in attention to private versus public sector corruption is seen as unfairly benefitting whites and penalizing and discriminating against blacks. This was underlined in the 2017 Steinhoff scandal, where regulators exposed accounting irregularities amounting to \$7.4 billion at a white-owned company, Steinhoff International Holdings. Auditors had missed warning signs prior

to the discovery, and three years after the scandal broke, no one had yet been arrested. As one analyst noted, while the scandal demonstrated that the private sector is at least as corrupt as the public sector, it was being dismissed as a “once-off freak” by whites holding stereotypes of white-led businesses as “competent” and risked allowing businesses to “continue to get away with behaviour that would never be tolerated in government.” Another put it more directly: “Accountability on alleged corruption and fraud seems to be slow, silent and forgetful when the perpetrators are white, rich and ‘qualified’.” The uneven attention to corruption may have inadvertently worsened racial inequalities and magnified damaging racial stereotypes (see pattern 4), with the risk of exacerbating existing racial tensions.

Steven Friedman, “South Africa’s Fraught Race Relations have been Laid Bare in the Steinhoff Corporate Fraud Scandal,” QUARTZ (online) December 14, 2017; Oliver Dickson, “Steinhoff Fraud Saga: The White, Rich and ‘Qualified’ can Stop the Wheels of Justice from Turning,” Daily Maverick, 18 Feb. 2021.

- c) In contexts where the government is dominated by one group, the government’s own hiring practices for AC institutions or efforts, even when based solely on technical qualifications, can lead to jobs being allocated to groups representing only government allies. This can lead to public perceptions that these internationally-funded AC institutions favor ‘one side’ over another in existing intergroup tensions and violence in the country. This **perception of bias** among staff of AC institutions can weaken the legitimacy of the AC institutions themselves as objective and unbiased among the broader population.
- d) Corruption risk mitigation policies and procedures within organizations or programs can also have negative impacts beyond the organization. For example, bidding procedures based on objective criteria and best practices for procurement can lead to an imbalance in the social identities of contractors and vendors that can exacerbate intergroup resentment and tension and be easily politicized in divided societies.

In a development program in the Preševo municipality of southern Serbia, an agency put in place robust procurement processes for bidding to construct new schools. The only companies that could meet all the criteria for the contracts were bigger organizations that were based in Belgrade, the capital. The procurement process inadvertently excluded local ethnic Albanian organizations from bidding, despite the fact that the majority population in the region was Albanian. This policy unintentionally exacerbated existing grievances of Albanians against Serbs related to the ongoing tensions in southern Serbia and the unresolved Serbia-Kosovo conflict.

Aid Practitioner

2. AC efforts can legitimate enemy images through divisive messaging associating corruption with specific groups.

In conflict contexts, corruption and anti-corruption often are part of the discourse of grievance and political mobilization. In this context, measures to promote transparency and accountability, advocacy campaigns and other efforts against corruption can exacerbate this dynamic. They can reinforce existing negative stereotypes and exacerbate existing lines of intergroup divisions (whether ethnic, religious, political, racial, or class-based) by communicating messages (explicitly or implicitly) that legitimize one side of an existing conflict as ‘reformers’ and ‘the good guys fighting corruption’ or **demonize** whole groups on the other side as ‘inherently more corrupt.’

In the South Caucasus conflicts “stereotypes of the corrupt nature of the ‘enemy’ held by each side mirror one another and are maintained or strengthened by the belief that the other side is always more corrupt, immoral and criminal.” Additionally, “perceived widespread corruption in the government on the other side of the conflict feeds into the militant discourse on one’s own side, and the chances for a fruitful peace process grow ever slimmer. Corruption on the opposing side makes the opponent an unwanted partner in any peace process and therefore the very idea of such a process is rendered useless.” In such a context, the messaging around a range of AC efforts can further entrench these stereotypes and fuel existing grievances.

Natalia Miramanova & Diana Klein, eds., International Alert, Corruption & Conflict in the South Caucasus (London: International Alert, January 2006), 27, 46.

This is a common pattern in secessionist conflicts and civil wars, where internationally recognized governments attempt to delegitimize their secessionist challengers through corruption charges, and non-state armed groups seek legitimacy by presenting themselves as fighting corruption in the government. Charges of corruption and efforts to fight corruption become part of the **information war** to legitimize and delegitimize the political claims of one or another side of the conflict. This delegitimization can worsen divisions and in fact undermine peace initiatives or negotiations.

In Angola, the international NGO Global Witness initially targeted only diamond extraction, but realized that in the ongoing civil war, the rebel side was funded largely by “blood diamonds” and portrayed highly negatively in public advocacy campaigns, while these campaigns ignored the government’s financing of the war through oil extraction. International advocacy campaigns that targeted the rebels’ financing through “blood diamonds” demonized the rebels and delegitimized their political grievances. They, therefore, had direct, unintended consequences in hardening positions on both sides of the conflict.

Patrick Alley, Kickback Episode 53: the Global Anticorruption Podcast, April 26, 2021.

When Anti-Corruption Efforts ‘Succeed’ But Fuel Conflict

The three patterns below arise when success or potential success of an AC effort — actual, potential or just feared success in reducing corruption — can actually also inflame conflict. When organizations focus on the results in terms of reduced corruption only, these negative interactions with the conflict are not part of how the effort is planned or assessed. If AC efforts reduce corruption but actually trigger major social unrest or mass violence, one can ‘win the battle but lose the war.’

3. Direct AC efforts can face resistance from their targets who mobilize people to violence along conflict lines in order to retain their gains from corruption.

Since fighting endemic corruption often involves challenging deeply entrenched power structures, it inevitably provokes resistance from power holders threatened by these measures. When anti-corruption measures shake up the existing corrupt power distributions and start to remove the gains of corruption for certain groups or elites, this will provoke resistance from these targets and their broader networks, who actively block or ‘corrupt’ AC efforts.¹⁶ In conflict-affected societies with volatile fault lines, the stakes are higher; power holders may push back by igniting **intergroup grievances** or creating provocations that can spiral out of control into violence or even mass riots along conflict lines. The risk is particularly high if AC efforts disrupt implicit or explicit allocation of access to ‘rents’ or opportunities for patronage in precarious ‘political settlements’ resulting from peace agreements¹⁷ or disrupt an existing balance of illicit powerholders in settings that have not seen war. One study of Anti-Corruption Commissions in Sierra Leone and Timor-Leste showed that “anti-corruption reforms invariably remove benefits from one faction and distribute those benefits to other factions, fueling resistance against them. [As such], they also bear the risk of renewed conflict.”¹⁸ This dynamic cannot always be avoided, but the risks must be foreseen, understood and planned for to try to minimize the potential for such negative dynamics that could threaten a shaky peaceful coexistence between groups in conflict-affected contexts. There are many examples of this pattern such as those below.

In June 2010 in the Osh region of Kyrgyzstan, ethnic clashes between Kyrgyz and ethnic Uzbek residents led to the death of almost 400 Uzbeks. The clashes were related to AC measures implemented by a new government following President Bakiyev’s ouster that led to the removal of officials in Osh. Revelations by newly free media that local ethnic Uzbeks were controlling most businesses in the Osh region and had been bribing local government officials to protect their interests provoked Kyrgyz outrage against the local elites. A range of measures — such as freedom of media, and civil society activism — had started to effectively shake up the entrenched power dynamics in the Osh region,

leading the threatened local elites, together with criminal groups, to create a big provocation. On June 10, large crowds of Uzbeks attacked ethnic Kyrgyz neighborhoods, torching several buildings and prompting enraged ethnic Kyrgyz from Osh and outside villages to attack Uzbek neighborhoods in response. Mobs looted and torched Uzbek shops and homes in Osh and several other towns, at times burning whole neighborhoods to the ground.

AC Practitioner; see also Human Rights Watch, "[Kyrgyzstan: Probe Forces' Role in June Violence - Ongoing Investigation Marred by Abuses](#)," August 16, 2010.

In 2005, the governor of Helmand province in Afghanistan, Sher Muhammad Akhundzada, was found with nine tons of opium and heroin in his basement. The British government (whose forces were deployed in Helmand) pressured President Hamid Karzai to dismiss the governor from his post. His departure contributed to the deterioration of the security situation in the province, especially after Akhundzada directed 3,000 of his followers to join the Taliban when he could no longer pay their wages.

Damien McElroy, "[Afghan Governor Turned 3000 Men Over to Taliban](#)," Telegraph, London, November 20, 2009, reported in Christine Cheng & Dominik Zaum, eds. *Corruption and Post-Conflict Peacebuilding: Selling the Peace?* (London: Routledge, 2012), 9.

The unique anti-corruption commission, the International Commission against Impunity in Guatemala (CICIG), became highly politicized around 2015, when it expanded its targets for prosecution from a small number of political elites to a broader range of business elites and middle-class actors. In response to the threat CICIG posed to their power and security, a coalition of elites actively sought to re-frame CICIG as a highly partisan leftist weapon, intentionally reigniting ideological divides carried over from the conflict period.

Walter Flores & Miranda Rivers, "[Curbing Corruption after Conflict: Anticorruption Mobilization in Guatemala](#)," (Washington, DC: USIP Special Report No. 482, 2020), 12.

4. AC efforts that threaten the survival of people in divided societies can lead them to support conflict leaders or to join armed groups.

In many conflict settings where there are weak institutions and high unemployment, many people will rely on the informal economy to survive or obtain services. For example, people may survive by smuggling goods illicitly across borders, trading goods in informal markets outside of government controls or engaging in illegal artisanal mining in conflict-affected regions where there are few, if any, other sources of livelihoods for most inhabitants. Or they may bribe police and judicial officials to escape discriminatory justice or obtain release of loved ones needed to make a living. AC

measures to combat the corruption that enables such practices and enforce rule of law can thus threaten the survival of many ordinary people. Such efforts appear indifferent to people's basic needs when they do not enable alternative solutions for livelihoods or access to services. When these measures primarily affect people aligned with one group in the conflict, they may aggravate existing grievances against the government or be perceived as a direct attack on this group. More broadly, when AC measures inadvertently **undermine livelihoods** or access to services in already marginalized communities, they can also lead to heightened support for ethnic, religious, or other leaders arising from the conflict who claim to champion this group's well-being.

The “Rose Revolution” government in Georgia came to power declaring a major anti-corruption agenda. In May 2004, it launched a “war on smuggling” in the separatist and de facto independent region of South Ossetia to clamp down on border corruption and increase customs revenue. The goal was to shut down illicit trade between Georgia and South Ossetia by cutting off the flow of goods to the massive informal Ergneti market at the de facto border between South Ossetia and Georgian-controlled territory, which had become a source of income for both Ossetian and Georgian traders — and for the de facto South Ossetian authorities. Georgia's operation destroyed dozens of small access roads crossing the de facto border and injected 13 new Georgian checkpoints manned by interior ministry forces to “stop the contraband” while also offering humanitarian aid to South Ossetians.

Some Georgian NGOs went to South Ossetia to mobilize protests against the corruption of South Ossetian officials. Just months before, mass protests combined with central government pressure had led to the ouster of the longstanding leader of Georgia's autonomous region of Adjara. However, Adjarans were ethnic Georgians with no history of violent conflict with the central government, while in contrast the 1991-92 bitter war fought between Georgians and South Ossetians had left deep grievances. Rather than motivate South Ossetians to oppose the corruption among their authorities, the Georgian campaign provoked deep mistrust and galvanized recruitment to Ossetian volunteer militias to push back the Georgian security presence (leading to a period of intense fighting). It also led Ossetians to rally around the South Ossetian (separatist) leader. The serious violence reversed years of successful multi-track trust building across the Georgian-Ossetian divide by local and international actors.

Aid Practitioner; Also, Cory Welt, “The Thawing of a Frozen Conflict: The Internal Security Dilemma & the 2004 Prelude to the Russo-Georgian War,” *Europe-Asia Studies* 62, no. 1 (2010): 63-97.

Non-state armed groups used illicit trade in ‘conflict minerals’ to finance their war efforts, enrich themselves, and expand their patronage networks in Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). To decrease this flow of funding to the armed groups, development partners supported programs for supply chain transparency and certification of minerals as ‘conflict-free.’ As a result, illicit trade in minerals diminished significantly, and security around several of the mines improved.

Over the longer term, however, the programs led to increased poverty, unemployment, and marginalization of local artisanal miners. Over one million Congolese rely on mining for their livelihood, and they in turn support about five times as many people. The transparency regulations formalized supply chain processes but marginalized those without knowledge or access to formal infrastructure, while also subjecting them to more taxes. Moreover, the reduction in the number of buyers — along with greater delays in getting paid — reduced miners’ income, leaving many out of work and resorting to banditry and greater cooperation with armed groups and criminal organizations, and the region experienced greater levels of violence and insecurity in the years since.

Peer Schouten, “[Why Responsible Sourcing of DRC Minerals has Major Weak Spots](#),” *LSE Conflict Research Programme Blog*, September 19, 2019; Danish Institute for International Studies, “[Mapping Artisanal Mining Areas and Mineral Supply Chains in Eastern DR Congo](#),” April 2019.

5. AC efforts that disrupt the ability of criminal or political groups to finance themselves can lead to more violence against individuals and communities and escalate existing conflicts.

Criminal or political groups that finance themselves through natural resource exploitation, bribery, or extortion will react to those sources being disrupted. They may use threats, intimidation, and open violence against groups undertaking anti-corruption measures (such as investigative journalism, prosecutions, or campaigns by activists) that seek directly to limit or expose their activities. This can lead to perpetration of violence and other forms of harm against individuals or entire communities. And in divided societies, targeted violence against individuals can inflame existing grievances against the factions perpetrating the violence.

In a certain artisanal mining area where cycles of violent conflict had spawned multiple armed groups, local mining governance structures documented how traders were forced to pay armed groups along the forested roads where they transport minerals and goods from the mine site to the nearest town and trading center. To address this, local communities asked an NGO project to support them in cutting down trees alongside the main road and widening the road in order to improve visibility and allow for better policing/monitoring of these crucial pathways. This would remove the ‘cover’ for the armed groups illicit ‘customs’ posts. In response, however, some armed group actors started

conducting increasingly aggressive robberies of the traders and sometimes even taking them hostage for several hours because this opening of the road threatened their income. The local governance structures had to discuss this security challenge with local leaders to encourage more police to be deployed along the zone in order to secure it for miners. This strategy comes with its own challenges given poor oversight over the police in this area. This risks exposing traders to bribes and demands made by state agents who may effectively replace the armed groups that the strategy was intended to address initially. Impacts on individuals in such a volatile area can also have ripple effects on intercommunal tensions given armed groups are aligned with different communities.

Aid Practitioner

Programs for “conflict-free” sourcing of minerals in eastern DRC were grounded in an erroneous assumption that DRC’s minerals had caused armed conflict and that consumer demand for companies to account for their minerals’ provenance would reduce revenue to armed groups. Mining, however, was just one way that armed groups generated revenue to pursue their goals after the wars had already begun, and no external advocacy groups had consulted widely with affected communities before launching their appeals. Despite the mushrooming of “clean sourcing” projects, the number of armed groups has risen steadily over the past decade, as have incidents of violence and human rights violations. Solving the conflict minerals issue was not the silver bullet for peace — in fact, many armed groups that had previously coexisted with communities in relative peace had in recent years resorted to more ambushes and looting as they lost access to minerals.

Josaphat Musamba and Christoph Vogel, “The Problem with ‘Conflict Minerals’”, *Dissent Magazine*, October 21, 2021.

When AC Efforts are Distorted or Ineffective and Fuel Conflict

The two remaining patterns arise from AC efforts that do not ‘work’ (or are likely not to work) as intended. This can be either because they are distorted or are intentionally misused during implementation — or because they are based on faulty assumptions — that is, have ineffective AC theories of change, so even good implementation does not produce the intended results.¹⁹

6. AC efforts can be weaponized against opponents and fuel conflict when people on one side of pre-existing societal or intergroup divisions are selectively targeted.

Instruments to detect and sanction corrupt behavior, such as courts, prosecutions, and anti-corruption commissions, bestow formal powers and processes that can be used in illegitimate ways by power holders, who may selectively target only political opponents. Such weaponization of anti-corruption can happen everywhere and is part of a phenomenon referred to generically as ‘lawfare,’ the use of legal action to cause problems for opponents. However, in conflict-affected settings, it can exacerbate conflict by deepening public mistrust of the sitting government, the state, and the entire anti-corruption agenda as a politicized weapon rather than an instrument supporting impartial rule of law — potentially playing into the hands of non-state armed groups that provide alternative structures and services. And it can inflame tensions directly when it is perceived as an effort to weaken one side of a conflict and exclude them from power (e.g. by stripping them of government positions or jailing political opponents). When the weaponization of AC instruments aligns with existing intergroup grievances, it may more easily alienate broader networks of supporters of those affected since they feel their ‘group’ is under attack. In fragile post-conflict power sharing governments, the impact of such selective implementation of anti-corruption provisions against only representatives or supporters of the ‘other side’ can amount to a continuation of the war and **destabilize** a negotiated peace settlement.

In addition, donor-promoted ‘zero-tolerance’ policies, where the threshold for prosecution and legal sanction is any level of corruption, can further enable power holders to weaponize corruption charges against opposition groups (and also civil society activists) while appearing to adhere to rule of law. This is because such policies make it easier for actors to exaggerate (or even fabricate) allegations about very minor offenses or ambiguous behaviors, which would be subject to the same sanctions as serious offenses.

In 2018, Afghanistan’s President Ashraf Ghani selectively used the new Anti-Corruption Justice Center created with assistance from Western countries in 2016 to target army and police generals who headed the security ministries. Under the pretext of anti-corruption and reform he forced hundreds of experienced army and police generals to retire; he perceived them as internal opponents because they were associated with other political affiliations and ethnic groups. In several cases he also dismissed, named and shamed security officials, while at the same time, the government ignored much higher levels of corruption among its inner circles. Ultimately, this instrumentalization of the AC measures weakened the chain of command of the security forces and eroded the legitimacy of the Ghani government among many regional elites and undermined their allegiance to it. This became apparent when the

government quickly collapsed, as the Taliban made deals with regional elites not to resist their military advance on Kabul in August 2021. High levels of internal disunity exacerbated by these practices had also hurt the Afghan government when it needed to present a united front in negotiations with the Taliban, and reaffirmed for the Taliban there was no point in negotiating with Ghani. Ultimately the selective use of anti-corruption prosecutions against internal opponents contributed in these ways to the collapse and defeat of the Afghan government. Afghan officials commonly noted how internationals present in Afghanistan ‘did the same’, that is, selectively ignored egregious corruption of key individuals whose allegiance was needed to further their security and military goals.

Former Afghan Government Official

Pakistan’s National Accountability Bureau (NAB), established by the government in 1999, has extensive powers to arrest, investigate, and prosecute. Over the years, the NAB has used these powers to pursue critics of the government on anti-corruption charges. This has included charges levied by sitting governments against former Prime Ministers, and this discrediting of one’s opponents through corruption charges has been “a staple of Pakistani politics.” A 2020 ruling by the Pakistani Supreme Court that the NAB had violated the rights to fair trial and due process in the arrest of two opposition politicians detained for 15 months on corruption charges, expressed concern about the “widespread perception of it being employed as a tool for oppression and victimization of political opponents by those in power.” (Supreme Court of Pakistan, Appellate Jurisdiction, in *Khawaja & Khawaja v. National Accountability Bureau*, Civil Petitions 2243-L and 2986-L, 2020, para. 67). In Pakistan, voters hearing rival political factions levy accusations of bribery and embezzlement back and forth over a prolonged period simply become apathetic, believing that “all politicians are corrupt.” Decades of watching their representatives trade a constant stream of corruption allegations have left many Pakistanis deeply cynical of such claims and “deeply distrustful of the institutions that are supposed to investigate and adjudicate such allegations.” This explains why despite serious corruption allegations against former Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan, he remains overwhelming popular. The tensions between Khan’s many supporters and the current government have resulted in big protests; so far, they have not escalated into serious violence but carry this risk.

Awan Hussain, “Pakistanis Are Sick of Hearing About Anticorruption,” *GAB, The Global Anti-Corruption Blog*, Nov. 6, 2023; Human Rights Watch, “Pakistan: End Anti-Corruption Agency’s Abuses,” August 6, 2020.

7. **AC efforts that call attention to the extent of corruption or impunity can delegitimize state institutions and contribute to legitimizing violent resistance.**

When AC programs fail to meet expectations, or when they focus people's attention on the prevalence of corruption, they may not only fail to combat corruption effectively. They can also unintentionally reinforce expectations that corruption and impunity are the norm and weaken the legitimacy of 'playing by the rules' (using legal remedies, the justice system, elections, civic action, and other democratic processes). If impunity is a driver of conflict, this can further reduce trust in already fragile state institutions, fuel cynicism and disillusionment, and increase the legitimacy of violent resistance and protest among the public, including joining extremist groups that promise to resolve these social ills.

Reports documenting current levels of corruption, as well as public awareness and advocacy campaigns are intended to catalyze grassroots action and demands for accountability. However, research has shown that they may backfire; rather than prompting action, they not only might encourage more corruption,²⁰ but may prime people to think about the extent of corruption and make them more cynical and hopeless about fighting back.²¹ Public cynicism about impunity can further result in less engagement with democratic institutions and activism to improve governance — from paying taxes to voting.²² This can ultimately further erode the legitimacy of the state, with knock-on effects on existing conflicts.

Similarly, when AC reforms set unrealistic ambitious goals, they may also raise expectations that, when not met, highlight poor results and **reinforce public cynicism** about the possibilities for change. In other words, AC reforms can raise hopes that the public system will operate with integrity. When this fails to materialize, or when AC measures are openly distorted and used in corrupt ways, the gap between expectations and results can mean a loss of legitimacy for the reforms, the sitting government, and broader internationally supported state-building and democratization agendas. AC campaigns that intentionally 'go slow' and use incremental approaches may also fuel disillusionment when they do not result in prosecutions of 'big fish.' There is a widespread view that AC instruments are 'good to have in place,' even when they cannot operate effectively due to the current political context. However, this pattern suggests that it may be worse to have purely **performative** AC instruments that have no teeth — as their visible impotence is not neutral. These inadvertent impacts are seen in multiple examples, such as:

Nigeria is well known for high levels of corruption and countless examples of failed AC efforts. From the public awareness campaigns and 'Pay No Bill' signs at checkpoints that seem to misunderstand that awareness of corruption is not the issue, to the corruption investigations that fall apart and convicted officials that are quietly pardoned — many Nigerians question whether any political tool can

address corruption. Some Nigerians express this view as: if playing by the rules doesn't seem to make a difference, why wouldn't they look for other means — including violence? Interviewees that expressed this view also said that they did not see violence as a good option, but perhaps the only one left. Young people were more likely to express this opinion, but even older people would question whether the existing system could be tweaked through democratic means or whether violent resistance was the only option capable of producing results.

Jared Miller, Anti-Corruption Researcher

An AC NGO published a national corruption survey every two years in a country where a fragile peace and new democratic institutions in the capital coexisted with areas of continued insurgency. Corruption in the rule of law and especially the courts was a particular problem which remained at the top of the survey year to year. Since people's trust in the courts was very low, they turned instead to informal justice instruments, including some that supported the insurgency, which gained in strength over time. The director of the NGO reflected that "I think our research and campaigns may have contributed to inadvertently reinforcing that mindset, and undermined the legitimacy of the courts — we did not look at it from this perspective then though I am not sure we could do it differently either, given the context at the time."

Anti-Corruption Practitioner

In Kosovo, by 2017 the public was highly cynical about the continued high levels of corruption of government officials. This despite forceful and wide-ranging anti-corruption measures implemented under the European Union's specialized EULEX Rule of Law mission since 2008 and the OSCE's AC programs to improve investigations, monitor cases and accountability, along with the many efforts by the government's Anti-Corruption Agency. Many interlocutors in 2017/18 said this disillusionment, along with substantial material aid from Wahhabi groups, had fueled support for more fundamentalist Islamic beliefs, especially in the rural areas. People saw that Kosovo's post-war democracy was characterized by blatant corruption while the fundamentalist Islamic groups were perceived as 'clean' and as having integrity. At that point, Kosovo had the highest rate of recruiting to jihadist organizations in Europe.

Interviews with political and religious leaders in Kosovo, 2017-18; also, Adrian Shtuni, "[Dynamics of Radicalization and Violent Extremism in Kosovo](#)," USIP Special Report 397 (Washington, D.C.: USIP, Dec. 2016).

Beyond the Seven Patterns:

The research process identified an additional way that AC efforts could potentially inadvertently fuel conflict. This possible 8th pattern is ‘suggested’ by the experience of conflict sensitivity in other domains, discussion among AC practitioners in our roundtables, and some initial research of the security sector — but direct practitioner experience with this did not emerge in our learning effort so far. Though it did not meet the standard of evidence as the other patterns described above, we include it here for further consideration by practitioners.

8. Resources from AC efforts can be diverted directly to support armed actors or the use of violence.

Resources earmarked for fighting corruption can be illegitimately funneled to armed actors and enable criminal or political violence. This is a well-documented risk in humanitarian and development aid in conflict areas. In those domains, resources often get diverted — both to non-state armed groups (through various means — from checkpoints, taxes, networks, influence, etcetera) and to the state security sector (through ‘normal’ forms of corruption). What we don’t know is to what extent this happens with AC programs.

While no detailed firsthand experience was offered of this dynamic with AC interventions, a number of the people interviewed or providing feedback believed it is highly possible — especially where AC efforts blur into efforts that aim to interrupt or reduce organized crime in conflict areas. One practitioner noted many cases where ‘fighting corruption’ is a core justification for the fight against extremist groups by state actors, while the corruption of state security actors is overlooked.²³ A well known example is how Plan Colombia — which combined counter-narcotics, counter-insurgency and ‘civil/military governance’ — provided US aid (money and arms) to the Colombian army to eradicate the drug cartels; a lot of this aid ended up funneled to paramilitary groups closely linked to the army — which themselves fueled the cycles of violence in the country.²⁴

Diversion and corruption issues in the defense and security sector are difficult to access for AC practitioners. Given the classification of information, there are many exceptions made to normal demands for transparency and independent oversight mechanisms. One practitioner noted the many challenges of working on these issues, given that demands for access to information on procurement corruption, human rights violations and abuse of power in the defense and security sector can have consequences for national security interests.²⁵ While this area faces many challenges, it is clear that corrupt practices in the security sector may lead to perpetuating conflict. The question is whether similar dynamics are occurring around AC measures taken in the security sector.

IV. What Does Conflict-Sensitive AC Look Like?

In this initiative, we looked for examples of AC efforts that took steps to prevent or mitigate the negative conflict impacts discussed above. We did not find many. This is an important area for further inquiry. What we did find, however, were a few AC efforts where an awareness of conflict risks (and sometimes formal conflict sensitivity approaches) helped develop **different ways to work** in specific conflict settings that effectively advanced AC objectives while avoiding exacerbating conflict. And in some cases these even had positive effects in easing existing tensions. These ranged from adjusting hiring policies, office locations or language use to developing different approaches to doing AC work in specific conflict settings. Three instructive examples — undertaken in the very different contexts of Sri Lanka, Ukraine and Afghanistan — follow below. While more research and experimentation will be needed to understand what works, these experiences may begin to provide a window into how AC programs can adapt to advance their objectives effectively in conflict contexts while also understanding and addressing risks of reinforcing divisions and tensions.

Addressing AC's Potential Distributional Impacts: In Sri Lanka, to avoid negative effects that could arise from programming and resources focusing on one community group more than another, Transparency International Sri Lanka has taken intentional steps to serve both Sinhalese and Tamil communities in the North and South. The aim was to avoid privileging or aligning with one group over the other — which could activate grievances related to the country's bitter 26-year civil war. They have regional offices set up in both the Northern and Southern provinces to carry out similar AC programs such as capacity building, knowledge-sharing sessions, legal aid, etcetera.²⁶

Adopting Non-Confrontational and Engagement-based AC Approaches: Since the Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine, the need for internal social cohesion — both between citizens and the government and among citizens themselves — led some Ukrainian AC groups to change 'how' they fight corruption, devising approaches that are inherently more 'conflict sensitive' with respect to internal tensions. Across Ukrainian controlled areas, the war itself brought many cleavages and increased risks of internal violence. Tensions are rising over who was serving in the army, given legal and illicit possibilities to opt from military mobilization, and there are increasing resentments from host communities in the 'rear' regions of Ukraine over resources distributed to IDPs from the war-ravaged zones. There are many weapons in circulation and many ex-combatants — with some suffering from PTSD, making them unpredictable. In this volatile situation, perceptions of internal injustices and small triggers could easily ignite angry protests that 'could' turn violent.

Many Ukrainian AC activists recognized that the conventional AC approaches used by civil society would not only be difficult to pursue given the Government's initial suspension of many tools for controlling corruption (such as the transparency register and e-procurement) because of the war. They also recognized that their approach — which focused on open data, reporting abuses, and controlling and punishing corruption — could ignite volatile grievances against the state or various internal groups. With popular expectations for integrity high across the country in light of the importance of national unity for the war effort, they were aware that failure to meet expectations could also deepen grievances and possibly even invite social unrest and they sought to prevent this. Consequently, many shifted to **engagement-based approaches** of “constructively criticizing authorities instead of open confrontation to address corrupt practices in the Government.”²⁷

Veterans' silent protests ensure fair rulings in Ukrainian courts: One example of a direct, but non-confrontational, effort to control corruption are ‘silent protests’ at the courts by combat veterans (the government has banned overt protest activity in wartime). In one city, researchers observed combat veterans were sitting in on court cases to apply pressure for the judge to decide the case fairly. Veterans used their moral authority (given they risk their lives to defend society) to prevent corrupt decisions — but without open conflict or denunciations of the judge.²⁸

A similar practice of ‘silent protests’ had been reported by some anti-corruption activists in other cities in the years before Russia's full-scale invasion.²⁹ The presence of certain influential members of the public and AC activists in the courtroom provided a counterbalance for a judge to the pressures exerted on him by powerful people to decide cases in their favor — and possibly protected judges from retaliation from these power brokers. While this approach was initiated by AC activists, some judges soon began to call them to come to the court.³⁰ Such **non-confrontational** approaches helped to mitigate the risk of violent protests and damage to social cohesion that could have resulted if courts had succumbed to interference by power brokers.

Embedding Conflict-Sensitive Anti-Corruption in Rural Development: The National Solidarity Plan (NSP) in Afghanistan, funded by the World Bank and several bilateral donors and launched in 2003, was designed to deliver development gains in rural areas through a community-driven development and reconstruction process in which Community Development Councils (CDCs) decided development programs. Its ultimate goals were to connect improved local governance with strengthened legitimacy of the Afghan central government. As an indirect AC program, it embedded AC goals in the design of the program by setting up mechanisms to circumvent entrenched patterns of diversion of outside resources, drawing on the strong taboo in Afghan traditional society against “stealing from one's own village — where your family has lived for generations and your ancestors are buried.”³¹

The NSP's record on corruption was generally good, based on NSP audits.³² At the same time, it was designed with a strong conflict-sensitive approach, and CDCs received formal training modules in conflict resolution and peacebuilding. Mohammed Ehsan Zia, a former NGO leader involved in designing the program who became Minister of Rural Rehabilitation and Development from 2006 – 2010, noted that the program had “unintended positive consequences” in **reducing conflicts** more generally.³³ During his tenure as Minister, Ehsan Zia claims many CDCs reported local level conflicts were resolved in their communities — an effect noted by many implementers, though evidence from evaluations, while noting no deterioration in social cohesion, had mixed findings on positive impacts.³⁴ During the first phase of the NSP, moreover, projects were largely not attacked by the Taliban — due, as Afghan researchers and NGO leaders involved with the projects noted, to the community's ownership and management of the projects funded, and the benefits they received.³⁵

Commonalities Across These Approaches?

These diverse examples of AC efforts appear (based on the limited information available) to have succeeded both in reducing corruption and preventing negative effects on conflict — and even ameliorated conflict dynamics. They provide a glimpse into how AC efforts can integrate into their design and implementation an awareness of the interaction of their programs with conflict dynamics and avoid the patterns of negative impact outlined above. Some commonalities across these examples appear to be:

- They made efforts **not to appear to favor** one group over another in the distribution of resources.
- They did not produce **resistance** that ultimately triggered violence between groups already in conflict.
- They did not **threaten people's survival livelihoods** and thus fuel support for conflict leaders, though in Afghanistan the simultaneous eradication of poppy crops as part of the overall international response may have had this effect and countered some of the effects of the NSP.
- They did not appear (based on our limited information) to result in **greater danger to individuals or communities**.³⁶ If true, they did not increase threats to the security of individuals and communities from reducing powerful stakeholders' access to the gains of corruption.

V. Overarching Conclusions

The patterns outlined in this paper reflect our learning to date on ways that some anti-corruption efforts have contributed to unintentionally worsening intergroup conflict. A few conclusions can be offered.

The patterns are interconnected. The patterns are not mutually exclusive — indeed, many of them are interlinked. For example, weaponizing AC agencies against political opponents may combine with legitimizing enemy images and with reducing trust in government institutions to lead to increased conflict in a given case. Thus, the patterns are useful to consider individually but also as potentially interconnected dynamics.

No AC efforts are inherently conflict-neutral. As the three pathways to negative impacts illustrate, the risk of AC fueling tensions and divisions exists regardless of whether AC efforts ‘are working’ or not. Even when the corruption that the AC is targeting is a driver of conflict, the approach chosen and modes of implementation can exacerbate (or ameliorate) conflict divisions. Similarly, failure of AC to meet its AC goals is not ‘conflict neutral’. This means that all AC practitioners working in conflict-affected societies need to keep their eyes on both issues simultaneously — the effectiveness of AC efforts generally and also how these efforts interact with conflict dynamics. It is our hope that this paper contributes to that core shift in awareness.

Individual AC efforts are not the sole cause of any particular conflict — but contribute to collective and cumulative impacts on conflict. It is important to understand these patterns as part of a bigger picture. AC efforts in these contexts are often undertaken amidst large-scale externally supported stabilization, peacebuilding, and state-building agendas by multiple international and national actors. The examples above zero in on contributions of AC measures to these conflict impacts. However, for each pattern, other reasons also contribute to why conflict increased. Given that corruption and conflict are intertwined in a complex adaptive system in any society, AC programs will always interact with the many other actors and factors in these settings to produce such second and third order effects on conflict dynamics. Thus, no one actor is fully responsible for such outcomes, and not all outcomes can be anticipated in advance. Clearly understanding such extended consequences is difficult, and we need to be humble and realistic about what can be traced back to particular AC efforts. However, acknowledging this complexity does not mean avoiding important questions about how individual AC efforts contribute to such collective and cumulative impacts. These challenges highlight how only through examining AC experience with the appropriate nuance and complexity can we find answers about what AC practitioners might do differently.

Conflict sensitivity matters at all levels — from individual program design and implementation to donor and government strategy. The experiences shared here show that conflict sensitivity approaches are not just relevant, but necessary at all levels in which AC efforts are planned, implemented, and evaluated. It is not just a concern at the program design and implementation level — though much can be done there. Nor is it just the preserve of bilateral or multilateral donors and macro-level strategists of AC — though its inclusion there is also critical. Conflict sensitivity approaches across these levels can either reinforce each other in a virtuous cycle of greater interlocking effects or, conversely, cancel each other out when good work of an actor at one level is undermined by a conflict-blind actor at another in the same setting. This could occur, for example, when donor strategies, programs, procedures and timelines are based on insufficient contextual analysis or are difficult to change once in place — narrowing the space for implementing agencies to adapt in response to knowledge about potential or actual conflict impacts. Or, alternatively, donors mandate conflict-sensitive approaches, but fail to track whether they are actually operationalized by their partners.

An example from Yemen of when patterns of corruption are themselves a conflict driver illustrates how AC efforts cannot be conflict-sensitive without strategic thinking across these various levels.

The main lines of grievance driving the conflict in Yemen are rooted in economic disparities, political marginalization, and social inequities. Corruption is widespread, and marginalized groups, such as Muhamasheen and IDPs, are disproportionately affected by corrupt practices that block their access to basic services and diversion of funds earmarked to improve the living conditions in Muhamasheen settlements. They have few champions, get far less protection from law enforcement and are much more vulnerable to recruitment by armed groups as child soldiers, along with involvement in smuggling and sexual abuse. The interplay between patterns of corruption and marginalization that disadvantage these groups is already directly driving the conflict. AC efforts risk adding to these overlapping factors that heighten group inequalities when they do not prioritize tackling the practices that are causing the economic and political marginalization of these groups — that is also driving grievances and fueling violence. Neglecting this element in program design means even good AC efforts will inevitably still perpetuate conflict drivers, even if they don't do additional 'harm'.

Feras Hamdouni, Anti-Corruption Activist - Syria and Yemen

This example appears to foreground bigger strategy level questions beyond the more limited conflict sensitivity approach we have elaborated here, but underlines the fact that decisions at all levels, including establishing strategic priorities, can have serious conflict impacts.

The structures and ‘ways of working’ of the aid system matter. Some practitioners consulted in this learning initiative pointed to the broader problematic ‘ways of working’ in the aid system that inherently impede more conflict-sensitive and adaptive aid. These include what one policy maker referred to as the ‘tribal’ sectoral divisions in the way aid is delivered in general that silo AC from other forms of international assistance. Others highlighted donor political imperatives (e.g. time pressure and need to spend) and overarching political imperatives that trump other priorities, along with rigid programming methods and monitoring and evaluation approaches that are ‘too close to the program level’ and unable to capture the broader impact level (what one practitioner called ‘street lamp monitoring’). These factors all undermine the space for AC efforts ‘in practice’ to prioritize the necessary analysis needed to become conflict sensitive. These bigger issues need to be included in the debate even if answers to them are complex.

Conflict impacts can be managed and mitigated. Although we did not find many positive experiences, the few examples of AC efforts that worked, directly or quietly, to reduce corruption and have positive conflict impacts provide a glimpse into ways forward. They suggest how AC efforts can integrate into their design and implementation an awareness of the interaction of programs with conflict dynamics to avoid the patterns of negative impact outlined above.

VI. Where to from Here?

A number of important questions remain that need further exploration.

1. **What can one do to prevent or mitigate these negative impacts on conflict?**

As we noted in the introduction, spotlighting negative impacts is not intended to strengthen arguments for not addressing corruption in such settings. ‘Do no harm’ does not mean ‘do nothing.’ On the contrary, corruption not only also fuels conflict but needs to be addressed for sustainable peace. Also, rarely in history have systems simply changed themselves without pressure of some kind; as one practitioner noted, AC always needs to apply some kind of pressure. Contention is an inherent part of AC. In these circumstances, it is important to understand how the details of the AC effort interact with the specific dynamics of the conflict to create risks of violence, war, and destructive contention. Over two decades’ experience of using conflict sensitivity approaches in humanitarian, development and peacebuilding aid has shown that it is rarely a whole program that brings about the unintended negative impacts, but rather specific decisions taken in designing, implementing, and monitoring and evaluating the program that interact with specific aspects of the local context; these can be identified, subjected to closer scrutiny and altered to mitigate foreseeable harms.

For the patterns in this working paper, we would have liked to highlight what specifically about the way the AC program was designed, funded, implemented, and monitored may have contributed to such unintended impacts; however, in many cases we did not have access to that level of granular detail. This is an important area for further inquiry. We need to gain a deeper understanding of how details of a program interact with what particular dimensions of the conflict dynamics to generate these patterns.³⁷

This will not only address overly simplistic critiques and calls that it is ‘too risky’ to address corruption in such settings, but, more importantly, will help identify practical options for mitigating these unintended impacts. The way to do so would be to undertake more focused case studies of AC efforts in conflict-affected settings to be able to surface these more granular aspects and then engage interested practitioners in a collaborative learning effort around these experiences. This is more ambitious than our current small initiative could embark on but is where more practitioner-based learning is needed.

- ### 2. **What are the gender dimensions of conflict impacts of AC?** What dynamics in each of these patterns are influenced by and perhaps impact women and men differently and what does this mean for our inquiry? Again, the current review did not have the granular level of detail around the examples collected to be able to probe this, but doing so may yield fresh insights on how to address these dynamics.

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- 3. How can AC have *positive impacts on conflict*?** Being ‘conflict sensitive’ goes beyond understanding and mitigating the risk that AC can make conflict worse; conflict sensitivity involves thinking about the two-way interaction between the conflict and the intervention and taking action to minimize the negative impacts and maximize positive impacts where possible, especially on social cohesion.³⁸ The limited examples of AC efforts that assessed and adapted their approaches to avoid negative impacts and potentially improve conflict dynamics reveal common threads that may merit further exploration. First, all were guided by a strong contextual understanding of local dynamics and actors in that setting. Second, while in some cases, avoiding negative impacts entailed limited ‘tweaks’ to existing approaches (e.g. hiring, beneficiary selection, procurement processes, etcetera), in others, understanding the potential interactions between the AC effort and the conflict led to adopting new or different approaches that both enhanced AC effectiveness and had positive effects on conflict dynamics. And indeed, many of the above aspects of CS efforts in AC bear a strong resemblance to conflict resolution principles that emphasize building relationships and trust among adversaries.³⁹
- 4. How can we enable greater dialog and continued collaborative learning on this issue to answer these questions?** The patterns presented here call for continued learning together among practitioners about how AC efforts can fuel conflict and how to avoid this. They also call for a greater exchange of experience between conflict sensitivity and anti-corruption practitioners to develop approaches that are both effective at addressing corruption and are conflict sensitive. That need is a clear conclusion from this learning initiative — and where we have seen energy and enthusiasm from some in both communities to continue the dialog such that better answers can be found.

Appendix 1:

Conflict Sensitivity Hubs and Resources for Aid Efforts that AC Programs Can Explore

There are centers of conflict sensitivity expertise that AC efforts could look to for some support currently. These are Conflict Sensitivity Hubs established by various agencies in specific regions that support the application of conflict sensitivity principles to aid efforts generally. These facilities are usually funded by donor agencies and drawn on as a support for both individual programs funded by that donor, and also as collective support for aid actors in a specific region — as some are open to all international and national aid agencies.

There are also research publications detailing the lessons from these hubs for integrating conflict sensitivity with broader development, humanitarian and peacebuilding programs.⁴⁰ So, for AC practitioners in some conflict-affected regions who want to incorporate conflict sensitivity into their efforts, there are existing opportunities to engage conflict sensitivity expertise. Some sites also offer publicly available materials and training to support conflict-sensitive aid and represent rich existing resources that could be drawn on by the AC field. A few specific examples are below, though this list is not exhaustive:

- International Alert, a global peacebuilding organization, operates a ‘Conflict Hub’ to provide cross-cutting, agile conflict sensitivity support to Alert and external partners, and International Alert operates a conflict sensitivity hub in DRC as well as provides advisors to other efforts.⁴¹
- There is a Conflict Sensitivity Resource Facility (CSRF) in South Sudan led by the international peacebuilding organization Saferworld in partnership with swisspeace.⁴²
- The Conflict Sensitivity Facility (CSF) in Sudan convenes donors and implementing agencies to develop and adopt more conflict-sensitive practice, supported by Saferworld.⁴³
- In Honduras, there is the Conflict Sensitivity Integration Hub implemented by FHI 360 with the goal of integrating conflict and violence prevention into USAID programming and to increase evidence and learning on conflict sensitivity in Honduras.⁴⁴
- Other conflict sensitivity hubs have been undertaken in Libya, Lebanon, Myanmar and Yemen, as noted in the research studies cited above.

Beyond the existing Conflict Sensitivity Hubs themselves there are **learning networks around conflict sensitivity** that AC actors could engage with:

- The Global Conflict Sensitivity Community Hub (CSC-Hub) is a network of organizations and individuals interested in the concept and practice of conflict sensitivity in the international humanitarian, development and peacebuilding sector, led currently by Oxfam.⁴⁵
- The US-based practitioner network Alliance for Peacebuilding (AfP) has a Conflict Sensitivity and Integration Working Group co-led by Saferworld and MSI that offers regular webinars and some online materials.⁴⁶

Furthermore, among the many Conflict Sensitivity materials and guidance notes which are intended for aid programs more generally, there is some attention given to issues raised by programming linked to AC efforts, though this is still very minimal.⁴⁷

Endnotes

- 1 Christine Cheng, Jonathan Goodhand, & Patrick Meehan, “Synthesis Paper: Securing and Sustaining Elite Bargains that Reduce Violent Conflict” (London: UK Stabilisation Unit, 2018), <https://reliefweb.int/report/world/securing-and-sustaining-elite-bargains-reduce-violent-conflict>; Philippe Le Billon, “Buying Peace or Fueling War: The Role of Corruption in Armed Conflicts,” *J. Int. Dev.* 15 (2003): 413-426; Matthew Jenkins, Roberto Martínez B Kukutschka & Nieves Zúñiga, “Anti-Corruption in Fragile Settings: A Review of the Evidence” (Eschborn: GiZ, 2020), https://www.giz.de/de/downloads/giz2020_en_anti-corruption_in_fragile_states.pdf.
- 2 Mary B Anderson, *Do No Harm: How Aid Can Support Peace—or War* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1999), 1.
- 3 The “Do No Harm” framework is an approach that emerged from a global practitioner-based learning effort and is summarized in Mary Anderson’s 1999 book, *Do No Harm*; it was and is still a leading conflict sensitivity tool. In this context “Do No Harm” refers to the impacts of assistance on the peace and conflict context; it is different from the broader “do no harm” ethical imperative in the humanitarian and development sector to address any harms that assistance may cause to people. See <https://www.cdacollaborative.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/Do-No-Harm-A-Brief-Introduction-from-CDA.pdf>.
- 4 “What is Conflict Sensitivity?,” Conflict Sensitivity Community Hub (CSC-H), <https://www.conflictsensitivityhub.net/index.php/conflict-sensitivity>. As this definition states, conflict sensitivity includes both avoiding negative impacts and where possible, aiming to have positive impacts on conflict. In this limited learning initiative, we have intentionally focused only on understanding what the possible negative impacts are given limitations of scope and time. Any full understanding would also need to explore where the interaction of the AC efforts with the conflict context has led to positive impacts on conflict dynamics.
- 5 Roberto Martínez B Kukutschka, “CPI 2022: Corruption as a Fundamental Threat to Peace and Security” (Transparency International, 2022), <https://www.transparency.org/en/news/cpi-2022-corruption-fundamental-threat-peace-security>. See also Matthew Jenkins, Roberto Martínez B Kukutschka & Nieves Zúñiga, “Anti-Corruption in Fragile Settings: A Review of the Evidence,” (Eschborn: GiZ, 2020), https://www.giz.de/de/downloads/giz2020_en_anti-corruption_in_fragile_states.pdf.
- 6 Ulrike Hopp-Nishanka, Joshua Rogers, and Calum Humphreys. “Breaking the Vicious Cycle: Entry Points for Anti-corruption in Inclusive Peace Processes.” U4 Issue 2022:6 (Bergen: CMI, 2022), <https://www.u4.no/publications/breaking-the-vicious-cycle-entry-points-for-anti-corruption-in-inclusive-peace-processes>.
- 7 See, e.g. the “Power capabilities and interest” framework as elaborated in Mushtaq Khan & Pallavi Roy, “Making Anti-Corruption Real: Using a ‘Power Capabilities and Interest Approach’ to Stop Wasting Money and Start Making Progress” (London: SOAS ACE, 2022), <https://ace.soas.ac.uk/publication/making-anti-corruption-real-using-a-power-capabilities-and-interest-approach-to-stop-wasting-money-and-start-making-progress/>; and the Everyday Political Analysis Framework, elaborated in David Hudson, Heather Marquette & Sam Waldock, “Everyday Political Analysis,” (Birmingham: University of Birmingham, Developmental Leadership Program, 2016), <https://dlprog.org/publications/research-papers/everyday-political-analysis/>.
- 8 The process to date has involved a literature search, a review of evaluations of anti-corruption related work, 15 in-depth interviews with practitioners, policymakers and scholars, and two practitioner roundtables held through the summer of 2023.
- 9 Johan Galtung, “Violence, Peace, and Peace Research,” *Journal of Peace Research*, 6(3) (1969): 167-191.
- 10 Lara Olson, “If Anti-Corruption is a ‘Different Animal’, Do the Usual Approaches to Conflict Sensitivity Apply?” *The Corruption in Fragile States Blog*, 27 November 2023, <https://www.corruptionjusticeandlegitimacy.org/post/if-anti-corruption-is-a-different-animal-do-the-usual-approaches-to-conflict-sensitivity-apply>.
- 11 Rosemary Ventura, “How Anti-Corruption Strategies Can Exacerbate Conflict and Fragility,” MALD Capstone Paper (Medford, MA: Fletcher School, Tufts University, 2022) <https://dl.tufts.edu/concern/pdfs/x346dk24j>.
- 12 There are various definitions of types of anti-corruption measures. For this paper, we use the definitions proposed by GiZ in its review of anti-corruption in fragile states. Jenkins *et al.*, “Anti-Corruption in Fragile Settings: A Review of the Evidence,” 16.
- 13 Brian Belcher and Markus Palenberg, “Outcomes and Impacts of Development Interventions: toward Conceptual Clarity,” *American Journal of Evaluation* 39, no. 4 (2018): 478-495, p. 481.

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- 14 Roberto Belloni, "Part of the Problem or Part of the Solution? Civil Society and Corruption in Post-Conflict States," in Christine Cheng & Dominik Zaum, eds., *Corruption and Post-Conflict Peacebuilding* (London: Routledge, 2012), 226.
- 15 Ibid, 227-9.
- 16 Recent thinking on how to improve the effectiveness of anti-corruption efforts has taken this into account, advocating for new and more strategic approaches based on political economy analysis and understanding of the power, interests, and capabilities of actors to act against particular forms of corruption. See, e.g. Khan & Roy, "Making Anti-Corruption Real: Using a 'Power, Capabilities, and Interest Approach' to Stop Wasting Money and Start Making Progress."
- 17 Cheng, Goodhand, & Meehan, "Synthesis Paper: Securing and Sustaining Elite Bargains that Reduce Violent Conflict."
- 18 John Heilbrunn, "Post-Conflict Reconstruction, Legitimacy and Anti-Corruption Commissions," in Cheng and Zaum, eds., *Corruption and Post-Conflict Peacebuilding: Selling the Peace?*, 215.
- 19 This is not to suggest that poor AC outcomes can only be understood after the fact; the experience shared showed that some distortions to intended approaches or poorly supported theories of change are already evident mid-implementation or could be anticipated based on previous experience and evidence. The risks of this can be surfaced even during the design phase if one asks the counterfactual 'what could happen if this AC effort doesn't work' and at least some of the following scenarios could be anticipated?
- 20 See Caryn Peiffer and Nic Cheeseman, "Message Misunderstood: Why Raising Awareness of Corruption can Backfire." U4 Brief 2023:1 (Bergen: CMI, 2023), <https://www.u4.no/publications/message-misunderstood-why-raising-awareness-of-corruption-can-backfire>; Nic Cheeseman and Caryn Peiffer, "The Curse of Good Intentions: Why Anticorruption messaging Can Encourage Bribery," *American Political Science Review* 116:3 (2021), <https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/american-political-science-review/article/curse-of-good-intentions-why-anticorruption-messaging-can-encourage-bribery/CE180F511D68B5A4D14904ACFA3728F4>.
- 21 Nic Cheeseman and Caryn Peiffer, "Why Efforts to Fight Corruption Hurt Democracy: Lessons from a Survey Experiment in Nigeria." SOAS Anti-Corruption Evidence Working Paper 027 (London: SOAS University of London, 2020), <https://ace.soas.ac.uk/publication/why-efforts-to-fight-corruption-hurt-democracy-lessons-from-a-survey-experiment-in-nigeria/>.
- 22 Cheeseman and Peiffer, "Why Efforts to Fight Corruption Hurt Democracy: Lessons from a Survey Experiment in Nigeria"; Alberto Chong, et al., "Does Corruption Information Inspire the Fight or Quash the Hope? A Field Experiment in Mexico on Voter Turnout, Choice, and Party Identification," *The Journal of Politics*, vol. 77, no. 1 (2015): 55–71.
- 23 Grateful for this point to Jason Calder of Saferworld (head of the Alliance for Peacebuilding's Conflict Sensitivity & Integration Working Group).
- 24 See also Mantilla J García Pinzón V, "Contested Borders: Organized Crime, Governance, and Bordering Practices in Colombia-Venezuela Borderlands," *Trends in Organized Crime* 24, (2020): 265–281, cited in Saferworld, *Organised Crime and Conflict: Implications for Peacebuilding*, May 2022, p. 22 (FN 132), 24. <https://www.saferworld-global.org/resources/publications/1392-organised-crime-and-conflict-implications-for-peacebuilding>.
- 25 Input by Janithrika Jayasundara, former manager of Advocacy and Research at Transparency International, Sri Lanka. Dec. 22, 2023.
- 26 Janithrika Jayasundara, former manager of Advocacy and Research at Transparency International, Sri Lanka. Dec. 22, 2023.
- 27 Interview with Oksana Huss, November 8, 2023, for the conflict sensitivity in anti-corruption learning initiative. Even before the war some Ukrainian AC organizations were advocating for less adversarial and more *engagement-based approaches* simply because they were more effective to address corruption. A study conducted in 2021 of six cities that showed notable "political will" to address corruption pinpointed a history of "communicative functions" undertaken in these cities such as facilitated multistakeholder dialogues and other communication approaches. The research showed "the benefits of fighting corruption in terms of positive local development outcomes to which all stakeholders can ascribe" rather than "[t]he negative connotations of 'combatting corruption' by convicting perpetrators." Oleksandra Keudel, Marcia Grimes, and Oksana Huss, "The Necessity of Talking the Talk: The Functions of Communication for Anti-Corruption Political Will and Policy Development in Ukrainian Local Government," ICLD Policy Brief No. 29 (Visby: Swedish International Center for Local Development), 7. <https://icld.se/wp-content/uploads/media/policy-brief-29-keudel-grimes-huss-2023.pdf>.
- 28 There are other examples of war veterans using their moral authority to demand accountability from

- the authorities. In one case, a veteran was outraged by MPs resistance to a new law to reopen the asset declarations registry immediately, while he had been wounded three times already in battle and citizens were pooling their meagre resources to purchase supplies for the army. Since protesting against the government might damage public morale, he instead launched an e-petition that generated a massive online response within hours; shortly after the registry was re-opened. Oleksandr Yabchanka, "The Guilty are the Deputies. But the Responsibility is Mine': Author of the Loud Petition Explains the Resonance around the Declarations." <https://grnt.media/opinion/avtor-guchnoyi-petyczyyi-poyasnyuye-rezonans-dovkola-deklaracij/>.
- 29 Oksana Huss, Max Bader, Andriy Meleshevych, and Oksana Nesterenko, "Explaining Variation in the Effectiveness of Anti-Corruption Activism in Ukraine's Regions: The Role of Local Context, Political Will, Institutional Factors, and Structural Factors," *Demokratyzatsiya* 28(2): 216 (2020).
- 30 Interview with Oksana Huss, November 8, 2023, for the onflict Sensitivity in Anti-Corruption learning initiative.
- 31 Interview with Mohammed Ehsan Zia for the Conflict Sensitivity in Anti-Corruption learning initiative, April 18, 2023. The NSP required the community to contribute 10% of the project cost, which, Zia noted elsewhere, motivated community members to keep an eye on their leaders and implementation "because of the money." Additional measures to prevent corruption were integrated: transparent and open elections for the community development councils (CDCs), monitoring of the council and implementation by a community-elected team of non-CDC members, a complaints system, and regular open meetings in the village council so that community members were aware of all activity in the program. Rushda Majeed, "Building Trust in Government: Afghanistan's National Solidarity Program, 2002-2013," *Innovations for Successful Societies Case Study* (Princeton: Princeton University, 2014), <https://successfulsocieties.princeton.edu/publications/building-trust-government-afghanistans-national-solidarity-program-2002-2013>.
- 32 See Majeed, "Building Trust in Government: Afghanistan's National Solidarity Program, 2002-2013."
- 33 Interview with Mohammed Ehsan Zia for the Conflict Sensitivity in Anti-Corruption learning initiative, April 18, 2023.
- 34 A 2006 mid-term evaluation included reports from specific communities that CDCs did play a role in resolving community disputes, and that "peace and unity" were seen as important benefits of the CDCs. Sultan Barakat and Arne Strand, "Mid-Term Evaluation Report of the National Solidarity Programme (NSP), Afghanistan," (York: Post-war Reconstruction & Development Unit, University of York, 2006), <https://open.cmi.no/cmi-xmliui/handle/11250/2474501>. One NGO partner, Oxfam, in a 2014/15 evaluation, compared villages where CDCs had operated several years already with newly signed up villages, finding "evidence that CDCs play an important role in conflict resolution." Kinga Komorowska, "Citizen Voice in Afghanistan: Evaluation of National Solidarity Programme III," (Oxford: Oxfam GB, 2016), 26, <https://oxfamilibrary.openrepository.com/bitstream/10546/620090/2/er-citizen-voice-afghanistan-effectiveness-review-210916-en.pdf>. A 2014 evaluation by the World Bank, however, reported that NSP only slightly "reduces intra-village disputes" and "increases interpersonal trust among male villagers;" given the weakness of the effect, it concluded there was no "discernible impact of NSP on social cohesion." Andrew Beath, Fotini Christia, and Ruben Enikolopov. "Randomized Impact Evaluation of Afghanistan's National Solidarity Programme." (Washington, D.C.: World Bank, 2013), <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/entities/publication/3ca313f9-9065-5bc0-9f3a-d94237f7e472>.
- 35 Majeed, "Building Trust in Government," 16, 19.
- 36 Though we lack detailed data on the Afghanistan and Ukraine experiences to answer this question fully, the evaluations and research of the programs did not document a major increase in violence or threats in villages participating.
- 37 There is accumulated scholarly evidence too that contentious strategies that work in democratic systems can produce highly perverse outcomes and in fact generate violence in others. For instance, studies comparing techniques of contention (protests, advocacy, strikes, revolution, and war) and their outcomes across distinct societies found that in developed democracies with strong institutions, contention may lead to effective social movements that achieve progressive reform. In other contexts, with weak democratic institutions and existing societal cleavages, protests and social movements are more likely to lead to war and revolution. Charles Tilly and Sidney G. Tarrow, *Contentious Politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).
- 38 GiZ's 2020 review of anti-corruption in fragile states emphasized the need to support AC initiatives that foster social cohesion as a key strategy for fragile states. Matthew Jenkins *et al.*, "Anti-Corruption in Fragile Settings."
- 39 Ulrike Hopp-Nishanka *et al.*, "Breaking the Vicious Cycle: Entry Points for Anti-Corruption in Inclusive

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- Peace Processes.” U4 Issue 2022:6 (2022).
- 40 International Alert, Conflict Sensitivity Hubs: A Comparative Perspective of Six Conflict Sensitivity Hubs: Executive Summary. International Alert, 2021, <https://www.international-alert.org/publications/a-comparative-perspective-of-six-conflict-sensitivity-hubs/>; Hesta Groenewald, Supporting Conflict Sensitivity Through Country-Focused Facilities: Lessons from Libya, Lebanon, South Sudan and Yemen. Conflict Sensitivity Community Hub (CSC Hub), October 2021. https://peacenexus.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/Supporting-conflict-sensitivity-through-country-focused-facilities_CSC-Hub_digital-version-1.pdf.
- 41 International Alert, Conflict Hub, <https://www.international-alert.org/expertise/conflict-hub/>.
- 42 Conflict Sensitivity Resource Facility, South Sudan, <https://www.csrf-southsudan.org/about-us/>; Saferworld Conflict and Gender Sensitivity <https://www.saferworld-global.org/conflict-and-gender-sensitivity/conflict-and-gender-sensitivity>.
- 43 The Conflict Sensitivity Facility, Sudan, <https://csf-sudan.org/>.
- 44 USAID Conflict Sensitivity Integration Hub (CSIH), <https://sites.google.com/view/usaid-csih/home>”, see also an overview of the Hub from FHI 360, <https://www.fhi360.org/projects/conflict-sensitivity-integration-hub-activity>.
- 45 The Global Conflict Sensitivity Community Hub (CSC-Hub), <https://www.conflictsensitivityhub.net/>.
- 46 Alliance for Peacebuilding Conflict Sensitivity Integration Working Group, <https://www.allianceforpeacebuilding.org/conflict-sensitivity-wg>.
- 47 There are many conflict sensitivity manuals available online and through the learning networks mentioned above. Most are general and intended to apply to all aid efforts. One that begins to explicitly address specific issues related to the AC sphere is: The “EU Conflict Sensitivity Guidance Note 5: Democratic Governance and Cooperation,” in Directorate-General for International Cooperation and Development, European Commission, Guidance notes on conflict sensitivity in development cooperation: An update and supplement to the EU staff handbook on ‘Operating in Situations of Conflict and Fragility” (Brussels-Luxembourg, October 2021).



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