

Designing a strategy for anti-corruption knowledge management

Query:

“Do you know if some anti-corruption bodies in developing countries have knowledge management strategies and/or action plans?”

Purpose:

“I would like know to what extent such strategies and action plans can be used by donors that wish to strengthen knowledge sharing between stakeholders. “

Content:

- Part 1: Examples of Knowledge Management experiences
- Part 2: Benefits and Challenges
- Part 3: Practical considerations for developing a Knowledge Management Strategy

Part 1: Examples of Knowledge Management experiences

“Knowledge Management is a systematic process of connecting people to each other and to the information they need to effectively act.” (From the World Bank practice model: <http://www.u4.no/themes/km/documents/wbgoodpracticemodel.pdf>)

Anti corruption knowledge management (KM) programs are still relatively new and we may not yet have the distance to evaluate their actual impact and effectiveness. Examples of bodies established to collect, centralise and disseminate information on corruption in a systematic way include:

- National Corruption Observatory in Morocco
- Anti-Corruption Observatory in Cameroon
- Advocacy and Legal Advice Centres (ALACs) in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Macedonia and Romania
- Anti-Corruption Resource Centres (ACRCs) in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union

You will find further information about these various bodies, their structure, activities and effectiveness in the U4 Expert Answer on Anti-Corruption Observatories: (<http://partner.u4.no/helpdesk/helpdesk/queries/query73.cfm>).

Another related U4 Expert Answer describes Anti-Corruption clearing houses: (<http://partner.u4.no/helpdesk/helpdesk/queries/query87.cfm>)

The U4 Anti-Corruption Resource Centre, based in Norway, is not based in a developing country but aims to collect and disseminate knowledge gained through anti-corruption

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programming worldwide. Its [resources](#) include applied research ([themes](#)), a searchable [database of projects](#), this [Help Desk](#) service, and online as well as in-country [training](#) on anti-corruption measures and strategies for [partner agencies](#) and their counterparts. It dedicates a special thematic page on knowledge management for anti-corruption that we strongly recommend you to consult as it gives a good overview as well as practical tips and tools on the various challenges involved in setting up a KM system. (<http://partner.u4.no/themes/km/main.cfm>)

Typical activities

KM covers a wide range of activities aimed at facilitating the collection, use and dissemination of information. Typical activities also include the documentation of good practices as well as the provision of training and advisory services through various channels. More specifically, it can include:

- Knowledge networks, online discussion forums
- Web based information clearing houses
- Newsletters, case studies, research products
- Conferences, discussions forums, panels, workshops, round tables
- Capacity buildings, Training and seminars
- Corruption hotlines
- Collaboration sites
- Helpdesks
- Legal advice
- Advocacy: awareness raising about sectors and institutions and drawing attention to institutional and legal vulnerabilities
- Capacity building

Part 2: Benefits and Challenges

Anti-Corruption efforts are a relatively new area of practice. Donors, governments or civil society actors need to build their skills and knowledge to ensure the credibility of their efforts as well as maximise the impact of their anti-corruption operations. There is a need to demonstrate that it is possible to achieve change and a need to show what interventions and processes are more likely to effect that change.

Benefits

Producing and making knowledge available

Over the last years, both academics and practitioners have gained considerable experience and knowledge that needs to be shared to benefit the anti-corruption movement as a whole. This emerging knowledge is dispersed, partly accessible through the internet or in books, journals and various publications. Key functions of KM include centralising, organising, analysing as well as disseminating information, research and data on corruption in a systematic manner. This contributes to generating knowledge, promoting good practice and effective interventions as well as facilitating innovative anti-corruption initiatives.

Promoting effective use of knowledge

Ideally, KM strategies are implemented to support the quality and efficiency of operations. Access to knowledge and information is a key element in the process of designing, implementing, evaluating and disseminating anti corruption programmes. Effective KM

systems provide technical guidance and advisory services at all stages of the programme cycle and help target operations, set priorities and select effective strategies.

Sharing knowledge with stakeholders

Given the nature, range and complexity of the issue, anti corruption work brings together a wide range of stakeholders of various profile, background and capacity. KM helps bring all relevant areas of expertise together in a sort of “knowledge bank”, as the World Bank calls it. Of particular interest to the donor community is the opportunity KM offers to promote knowledge re-use, improve donor coordination and reduce or eliminate the duplication of efforts.

Advocating for change and raising public awareness

KM can be seen as a part of a broader strategy aimed at influencing policy decisions. It provides evidence-based guidance for informed policy making. It contributes to the prevention of corruption by promoting the adoption of adequate legislation that minimises the risk of corruption, the establishment of relevant anti corruption mechanisms or by providing tools for investigating or monitoring the state of corruption in a particular sector, country or region. KM contributes as well to public education, awareness-raising and outreach by providing information to the public, making people aware of their rights and building the demand for their rights.

Building institutional memory

Another key function of KM is to document successes and failures, publish results of field work and research, disseminate experiences and lessons learnt. It systematises in some ways project knowledge, with the view to assessing impact and documenting interventions that work or don't work. It builds global knowledge on activities and practices that are otherwise scattered and difficult to access.

Building stakeholder capacity

Such interventions also aim at building the capacity of the various stakeholders by equipping them with the skills, tools and information that they need to hold those in power accountable for their decisions and behaviour. At another level, it allows promotes the production and generation of new knowledge as people take advantage of available information.

Challenges

There are a series of challenges involved in developing a KM strategy:

Access to Knowledge

Knowledge is useful only when it's accessible. Attention should be paid to delivering knowledge through target-oriented channels of communication, in local languages when needed, using technical tools that are accessible to the targeted audiences. At another level, such strategies mainly manage second hand knowledge. Providing a directory of experts may help give end users direct contact to expertise when necessary.

Knowledge collection

Information and data collection may be a challenging task when it comes to finding out what the various agencies are doing at country/field level. Time pressure and lack of appropriate resources may hamper the systematic documentation of projects and sharing of experiences at the field level. When organisations are geographically dispersed, it is difficult to link to similar projects or initiatives, sometimes even within the same agency and special consideration should be given to the cross-referencing of anti corruption projects and activities.

More generally, systematising anti corruption knowledge is demanding because of the wide range of actors and subjects it involves, the complexity of the issue as well as the level of expertise it requires.

Barriers to knowledge sharing

There could also be certain resistances to knowledge sharing among stakeholders to overcome. The issue of confidentiality may play a role and limit the extent to which agencies are prepared to share their experience. Organisations and individuals may also be reluctant to share their knowledge out of fear to reduce their monopoly of expertise and comparative advantage on the development “market”. To address this issue for example, UNDP provides incentives to staff by integrating knowledge sharing as one of the criteria used in the performance appraisal system. Appropriate opportunities for knowledge sharing should be provided to facilitate the KM process. KM requires the establishment of an organisational system that allows knowledge sharing on a regular basis (publication, newsletters, bulletins, etc...).

Quality standards and control

KM is still a relatively “new” strategy for development and many initiatives in this field are at an early stage of development. The challenge is to set and maintain quality standards and values while responding to a rapidly changing environment. This may involve arbitrating between the need to generate “new” knowledge to remain at the cutting edge of anti corruption knowledge versus the benefit of managing and providing better access to already existing knowledge. The system should be maintained and controlled to ensure the highest standards of quality over time.

Part 3: Practical considerations for developing a Knowledge Management Strategy

Strategic decisions must be made with respect to key factors that will affect the scope, structure and nature of a proposed KM system. Before setting up a KM system, there are several questions that should be considered in order to ensure the system is effective and meets the aims of its creators:

- Why will knowledge be shared? The answer to this question will have implications for the resources that will be needed to support the system, the type of information that will be made available, how and to whom knowledge will be shared. Setting clear objectives will ultimately help keep the focus on the programme’s purpose and comparative advantage.
- What knowledge will be shared? Various kinds of information can be made available, depending on the intended objectives and target audience(s) of the KM programme. The question of what knowledge to share also relates to quality, value and reliability of shared knowledge. The choice can be made to be comprehensive rather than selective, giving end users the responsibility to reach their own conclusions on value, relevance and quality of available data. Another strategy consists of filtering the information, organising knowledge and providing explicit guidance and quality assessment of contents.
- With whom will the knowledge be shared? Another important decision relates to the intended beneficiaries of the programme. What will be shared and how will largely depend on whether the intervention targets an internal or external audience, anti corruption activists, corruption victims, policy makers or the general public, at local,

national or international level. This decision will directly impact on the nature of the knowledge shared, on the ways it will be shared as well as the resources that will be needed.

- How will knowledge be shared? Many options are possible to disseminate knowledge, including face to face advice, a helpdesk, hotlines, fax, e-mail, web, conferences, publications or a combination of all these various options. Channels of communication should be favoured that make knowledge accessible to the intended beneficiaries. In this regard, special attention should be given to the language and technologies by which knowledge is delivered.
- How relevant is the knowledge to the local reality? There is no blueprint for combating corruption. The knowledge that is shared should be adapted to the local context to which it will be applied.