



## 2018 OECD GLOBAL **ANTI-CORRUPTION & INTEGRITY FORUM**

# **The Ambivalence of Social Networks and their Role in Spurring and Potential for Curbing Petty Corruption: Comparative Insights from East Africa**

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### **Abstract** (300 words)

Applying a novel behavioural approach to anti-corruption presents a promising but largely unexplored avenue to understand the seemingly entrenched nature of corruption. Behavioural approaches account for local contexts embedded into a given social fabric and cultural structure and acknowledge the leverage of socio-cultural drivers that influence the propensity of individuals to engage in corruption. The prevalence of behavioural drivers has indeed been empirically evidenced through fieldwork

conducted in East Africa, where strong social norms and cultural values sustain a plethora of social networks whose dynamics often spur petty corruption. With a focus on the health sector in Rwanda, Tanzania and Uganda, the empirical findings from this research indeed corroborate the role of social networks in perpetuating collective practices of petty corruption – including bribery, favouritism and gift-giving. A comparative analysis of social network dynamics across the three countries showcases the inherently *ambivalent* and *two-edged* nature of social networks. The paper compares social networks dynamics and related petty corrupt practices and brings to the fore how structural and functional network properties could be utilised as entry points for anti-corruption interventions. The case is made for designing a novel type of behavioural anti-corruption intervention whereby the power of social networks is harnessed to elicit behavioural and attitudinal change for anti-corruption outcomes. We thereby propose an altogether different theory of change.

**Keywords:** East Africa – petty corruption – social networks – behavioural drivers of corruption – behavioural interventions

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## **1. Introduction – A *Behavioural Social Network-Centred Approach to (Anti-) Corruption***

### **1.1 Traditional Approaches to Anti-Corruption and Rational Drivers of Corruption**

In light of overwhelming evidence of ineffective legal, institutional and organisational anti-corruption interventions (cf. Ledeneva et al., 2017; Marquette and Peiffer, 2015; Mungiu-Pippidi, 2011; Persson et al., 2013), we acquiesce in the call by many academics and anti-corruption practitioners alike to take into account local contexts and realities for implementing more innovative anti-corruption interventions (Haruna, 2003; Mette Kjaer, 2004; Rugumyamheto, 2004). This requires for anti-corruption interventions to be sensitised to locally prevailing social habits, expectations as well as cultural understandings and attitudes vis-à-vis corruption (Baez-Camargo and Passas, 2017; Koni-Hoffmann and Navanit-Patel, 2017). In line with other authors (Ledeneva et al., 2017; Marquette and Peiffer, 2015), we argue that existing theoretical and conceptual models of corruption, which anti-corruption interventions are essentially based upon in terms of their programme design and theory of change, are not rivalling each other but should in fact be considered conjointly.

Following this line of thought, corruption may be both a cause and consequence of accountability problems due to imperfect asymmetric information between an agent and a principal, whereby lack of oversight and ineffective monitoring incentivises agents to engage in corruption (Klitgaard, 1988; Rose-Ackerman, 1978). Corruption may at the same time be fuelled by large-scale collective action and coordination problems whereby an individual's decision to engage in corruption hinges upon their perception of their close environment as uncooperative and highly corrupt, thereby justifying their own corrupt behaviour on the basis of reciprocity and simply as 'the way things are done' (Marquette and Peiffer, 2015; Mungiu-Pippidi, 2011; Persson et al., 2013; also Rothstein, 2013). Moreover, corruption may not necessarily constitute a problem per se but can actually offer pragmatic solutions to ordinary citizens as means of 'getting things done' (Marquette and Peiffer, 2015), while at the level of business and political elites it may fulfil informal governance functions critical for regime stability and survival (Baez-Camargo and Ledeneva, 2017). What these approaches have in common is their institutionalist, structuralist or game-theoretical underpinnings based on micro-level rational choice assumptions of human decision-making from standard economics. Conventional anti-corruption interventions modelled on either of these theoretical underpinnings have failed to produce sufficient favourable anti-corruption outcomes.

### **1.2 Taking Account of Social Dynamics and their Role in Spurring Corruption**

Rather than following a 'one-size-fits all' approach aimed at implementing international anti-corruption 'best practices' from the Global North, we argue that anti-corruption interventions must be tailored to local realities in order to increase their likelihood for success. It is therefore necessary to

empirically assess the socio-cultural environments and politico-economic contexts where anti-corruption interventions are to be implemented.

Contrary to some authors who merely assign socio-cultural traits to collective practices of corruption (Hodess et al., 2001; Rothstein, 2011, p. 231), we propose to extend the conceptual scope and include *non-rational* drivers of corruption, namely those socio-cultural determinants of certain types of corrupt behaviours and collective practices that have become normalised and routinised in contexts where corruption is endemic, systemic and has become the normal state of affairs (cf. Koni-Hoffmann and Navanit-Patel, 2017). We thus argue that certain corrupt behaviours have become a feature during the socialisation and enculturation of individuals (cf. Gavelek and Kong, 2012; Hoff and Stiglitz, 2015). As a result, they have grown to be socially embedded, culturally rooted and mentally engrained in the form of local social norms, collective imaginaries and vernacular knowledge. The difference of this fourth perspective lies in that social dynamics at the community-level undergird the collective reproduction of certain corrupt practices at the hands of individuals who are at the same time members of a multitude of social networks. It is in such a community setting that fixed preferences at the micro-level become endogenous; in other words, rational cost-benefit calculations of individual network members are overridden by socio-cultural commands and group expectations. Thus, in certain socio-cultural contexts, people often engage in corruption against their better judgement, out of a sense of moral obligation towards the group, to meet community expectations, to either gain social rewards or to avoid social punishments for not complying with informal and unwritten norms and practices. Central to this approach are elements of sociality and collective ways of thinking ('mental models') and their role as, what we have previously labelled, *behavioural* drivers of corruption (Baez-Camargo, 2017; Stahl et al., 2017).<sup>1</sup> At the very core of this approach lie social interactions and relationships of social exchange in community settings expressed in the form of social network dynamics.

This paper sheds light upon these social network dynamics and their problematic role in spurring petty corruption in the health sector in the East African context, with a focus on day-to-day interactions between ordinary citizens and service seekers on one side, and low-to-mid level officials and service providers on the other. It also makes explicit the inherently ambivalent and two-edged nature of social networks by laying bare the attitudes and motivations of social network members, as well as the costs attached with network membership. By distinguishing between structural and functional networks properties, network dynamics that account for the collective reproduction of network-prescribed petty corrupt practices are causally explained. Empirical evidence is drawn from

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<sup>1</sup> The World Bank's 2015 World Development Report proposes *three* broad principles of human decision-making: automatic thinking, social thinking and thinking with mental models.

qualitative research conducted in Uganda, Tanzania and Rwanda in 2016 and 2017.<sup>2</sup> Whilst controlling for national contexts and local realities, a comparison of these three countries - which vary significantly in terms of corruption prevalence, scale and propensity despite sharing comparable socio-cultural norms and practices – allows for the illustration of how social networks can also be potentially harnessed for favourable anti-corruption and social policy outcomes.

## 2. The Prevalence of Petty Corruption in East Africa and the Role of Social Networks

### 2.1 Prevalence of petty corruption in Uganda, Tanzania and Rwanda

The research informed that practices of petty corruption are present in the health sector in Uganda, Tanzania and Rwanda, albeit to different degrees. In Uganda, where anti-corruption efforts under President Museveni continue to bear rather modest effects, petty corrupt practices are most widespread and have become endemic and normalised. In Tanzania, which out of the three countries analysed and among Sub-Saharan African countries can be considered a middle-performer, petty corruption has been declining as a result of renewed anti-corruption efforts and bold actions taken by the administration of President John Magufuli. In Rwanda, which belongs to the chief anti-corruption performers in Sub-Saharan Africa, the petty corrupt practices found in neighbouring Tanzania and Uganda are far less common, mostly due the zero tolerance approach to corruption led by President Paul Kagame, which is not only characterised by harsh punishment and a strict law enforcement policy but also entails large-scale awareness raising campaigns aimed at sensitising the Rwandan public about the value of anti-corruption and integrity. These trends are corroborated by the latest international assessments, recent national corruption surveys and our own research (Figure 1).

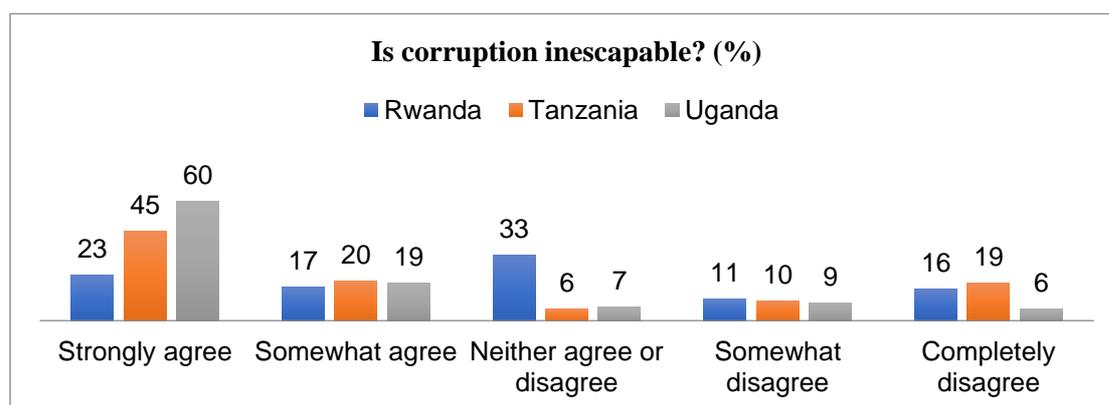


Figure 1: Is corruption inescapable in Rwanda, Tanzania and Uganda?

<sup>2</sup> The empirical findings stem from DFID-funded research on ‘Corruption, Social Norms and Behaviours in East Africa’. A qualitative comparative case study approach was applied in six regions/country and fieldwork research activities entailed focus group discussions, an ethnographic vignette-based survey, semi-structured interviews and participant observation. For more information please visit: <http://www.earesearchfund.org/research-corruption-social-norms-and-behaviors-east-africa>. Research reports are available on <https://www.baselgovernance.org/publications/>.

The encounters between citizens and providers of health services are shaped by these broader patterns of petty corruption dynamics. In Uganda and to a lesser extent in Tanzania, research participants shared that bribery, favouritism (and gift-giving) or a combination of both are commonly encountered when accessing health services. This is very different in Rwanda, where services are mostly provided ‘as mandated by the rules and regulations governing the public provision of health services in that country’. These dynamics are also captured in the survey results below (Figure 2).

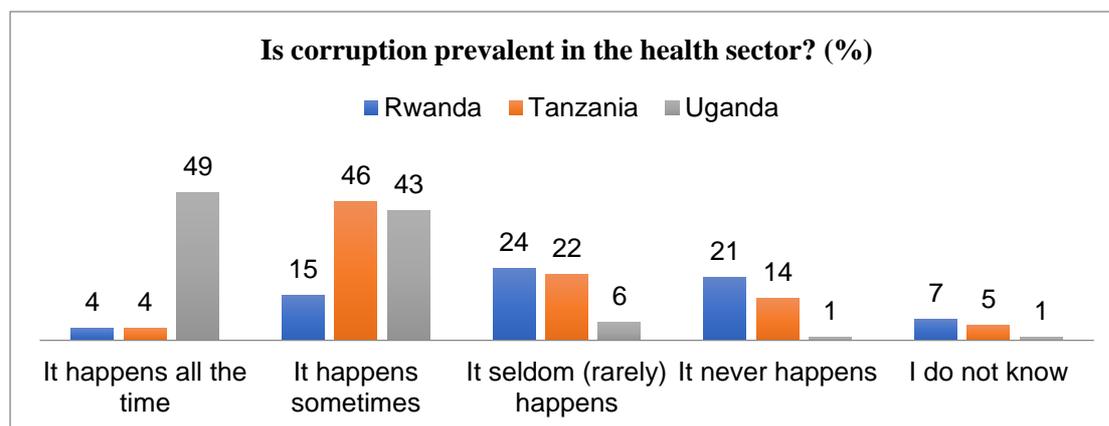


Figure 2 Perceived prevalence of corruption in the health sector in Rwanda, Tanzania and Uganda.

A crucial observation is that the provision of health services is regulated not by formal entitlements but on the basis of informal social network relationships and social relational dynamics between citizens and service seeker on one side and health service provider and public official on the other. In both Tanzania and Uganda in particular, petty corrupt practices are reproduced by social network dynamics, although to differing degrees. The implication of this is that for a medical treatment to be facilitated, it matters if the service user had some kind of relationship with the health provider and or if the person could afford to pay a bribe. While the scale of petty corruption and their forms differed across the three countries, these social dynamics and relational networks were actually found in all of them, thereby, illustrating the resilience of socially-driven corrupt behaviours.

## 2.2. Social networks and their structural and functional attributes

A social network is simply defined as “a [horizontal] network of people [...] or groups of people” (Newman, 2010 Chapter 1, p.6) that is characterised by social ties and patterns of social interactions which make up the structure of a network. There are different levels and concepts of social organisation within a social network. Social network structure affects behaviours, forms and functions of a given social system (for example, a society) and the type of social influence exerted on human decision-making. A major driver of social influence is social support, and social networks themselves can be conceptualised as specific sources of different types of social support (Latkin and Knowlton,

2015, p. 5). The distinction is made between structural and functional support (Wills and Shinar, 2000), with the former referring to the extent of network connectedness and social integration (for example, the type and number of social ties) and the latter comprising the specific social network functions provided (emotional/social vs. instrumental/informational). We henceforth distinguish between structural and functional network properties.

In the African context, social proximity is a key criterion for the type of connection and strength of social tie between network members (i.e. membership) that determines the nature of a network in terms of type, the function it fulfils, and the behaviours prescribed. The fact that a social system, such as a society, is highly affected by corruption may be attributable to the prevailing structures of different social networks within said society.

The research shows that social networks indeed comprise both structural and functional attributes. Structural attributes refer to local structures that are engrained in collective ways of thinking and refer specifically to social values and cultural imperatives including a) reciprocity and b) kinship solidarity, as well group status and welfare. These are thus socio-cultural determinants that partly govern social network relationships – including the rules of informal social exchange. At the same time, the functional nature of social networks and the ends at which they aim justify the means. Both structural and functional network properties, as important sources of social support, thus motivate and induce individuals to join and be part of a network in the first place and influence the provision of health services in East Africa.

### **3. Structure and Functions of Informal Social Networks in Uganda, Tanzania and Rwanda**

#### **3.1 Network Structures, Social Norms and Enforcement Mechanisms**

With social proximity being the key network membership criterion, the research takes note of two primary forms of groups that had high social proximity between them: the first is the family, which is considered to be the most important and trusted reference group. Friends and acquaintances make up the second most significant social group of relations. But these are not the only reference groups, as social networks can also be constructed on the basis of more specific criteria of group affiliation, such as gender, ethnicity or religion. It is significant that all these relations are found not to be static, but rather fluid and at times even instrumental, whereby networks have developed on the basis of ‘relatives of friends’ and ‘friend of friends’. Overall, such dynamics are found less in Rwanda where the core networks are considerably smaller and mostly circumscribe family and close friends.

The social networks observed in the research are strongly underpinned by social values and norms that shape and give meaning to each particular interaction. A crucial social norm is found with regards

to family relations as research participants agreed that sharing with your next of kin and contributing to group welfare is socially commanded. In practice, this means that family members are expected to take care and support each other, which is considered an 'essential, unquestionable premise of social life in the three countries'. In the context of service provision, the high value given to family and kinship accounts for unreasonable expectations towards single family members who hold a public-sector job. This explains how informal relations and the degree of network proximity become strong determinants of the quality of treatment received: this is the case in all three countries, where because service providers all feel strongly obliged to treat family members preferentially. With regards to the core networks composed of friends and other acquaintances, another important social norm observed is the obligation to reciprocate gifts and favours received. These engagements reflect more of a transaction-based relationship of indebtedness and entitlement between the giver and receiver of services.

All network members aim to adhere to these social norms and values as they are reinforced by means of social rules and controls associated with status and respect. This means that service providers rejecting a gift offered to them by service users are considered downright disrespectful. Failing to provide preferential treatment to a relative can even destroy a person's social standing. Group expectations and obligations are thus collectively reinforced by means of peer pressure, and morally upheld by informal rules of reciprocity and kinship solidarity. In the African context, reciprocity is socio-culturally anchored in tribal affinity, pre-colonial community values and social norms of more collectivist societies (Blundo and Olivier de Sardan, 2006; Ekeh, 1975; Sardan, 1999).

*"No one can ignore the importance [that] Rwandan people attach to relationships and [there are] consequences associated with not serving the neighbour or one of your family members, even when the situation does not allow [you to do so]."*  
(Research participant from Kigali, Rwanda)

The values and norms that underpin the relations between members of the social network and the manner in which these norms are linked to social status and respect makes that the practices of networks become intimately linked to informal actions such as bribery, favouritism and gift-giving in the provision of health services.

### 3.2 Pragmatic Functions of Informal Social Networks: The End Justifies the Means

The first functional role social networks fulfil is mutual support as a pragmatic way of dealing with poor service delivery. This is considered a problem-solving strategy and a way for citizens to 'get things done' in contexts of resource scarcity where formal rights dictating the provision of health services cannot effectively be exercised. Citizens therefore resort to their networks pragmatically, as an informal social safety net to access public health services. In Uganda and Tanzania, practices of

petty corruption in the health service are indeed considered to be widespread, of instrumental nature and informally regulated by the degree of network proximity. In Rwanda, it was commonly perceived that health services are provided according to the formal legal stipulations. Despite this, the research still uncovers practices of favouritism between family members and close friends during the provision of health services. Relying on these social networks is considered the only viable way to speed up treatment. Therefore, social networks represent effective and pragmatic means of obtaining a 'simplified' service delivery.

*“Your relative must be given priority if there is not an emergency, my mother, father, son or daughter come first.” (Health facility staff in Kampala, Uganda)*

Given the high functional value and utility of such an informal safety net, members find it useful to build and extend their networks (especially if they include influential or strategically placed individuals). A second functional role is thus social capital which its members can gradually build up. Expanding the network is achievable by creating personal links and relationships with the service provider based on bribes and gifts as was noted in Uganda and Tanzania. Even more, strategic efforts entail the practice of developing personal connections with powerful and high-ranking persons. Therefore, social networks are highly valued. These network-prescribed practices have a significant exponential effect as the logic of reciprocating bribes, gifts and favours received represent a cycle of being entitled to something or indebted to someone; thereby resulting in the continuation of corrupt practices. Moreover, such practices favour those that are part of the 'in-group' or have the financial means to build up the necessary network, which, in the cases of Uganda and Tanzania, ultimately accounts for a regressive health service.

### 3.3 Social Functions of Informal Networks: Sense of Group Solidary and Belonging

The first social function observed is a sense of belonging that is reflected in strong group solidarity among network members. Group solidarity is a powerful form of social currency that network members resort to, because strong social ties reduce uncertainty and increase the ability to access health services. Following this logic, the research finds evidence that citizens would 'invest' in their network with the expectation that this would then secure solidarity in the future. Consequently, a major transgression of this form of solidarity occurs when members are considered to be indifferent to the needs of their network. An example of this is acting out of greed - such as demanding a bribe in a desperate situation or requesting an unreasonably high bribe.

Social networks are also considered important sources of power as they command status and respect, especially when the network connection involves public officials. Social power and status follow from

behaviours by which members show compassion and solidarity with others, particularly, when problems are resolved and/or resources acquired to be shared among network members.

*“Society will love him and even recommend people to him for fast services” .... “People will try to build good relationships with him and he would be respected and gain prestige.” (Research participant in Tanzania)*

These ideas are also intimately tied to attitudes of tolerance and acceptance of corrupt behaviours as for instance was the case in Uganda. Interestingly, the research shows that health official acting out of compassion towards their fellow members are often recommended across networks. While this could potentially create many informal clients (and thus increasing the official’s social status and power), service providers also worried about the overwhelming responsibilities and expectations that come with network membership.

#### **4. The Ambivalent and Two-edged Nature of Social networks as an Entry Point to Anti-Corruption Policy Making**

##### **4.1 Ambivalence of Corrupt Behaviours**

It is the structural and functional network properties that as key sources of social support spur collective practices of petty corruption in Uganda, Tanzania and Rwanda. This is a direct result of informal social dynamics between network members who penetrate the seemingly ‘formal’ space of the public sector. The consequence of this is that the behaviours of citizens and public officials alike are infused by a great deal of ambivalence. Ambivalence arises when the formal rules dictating the provision of health service provision based on formal qualifications and entitlements clashes with social network expectations that are guided by more personalistic criteria. This distance between the formal and social normative frameworks leads to decision-making based on double standards as it is considered more important to give into the needs of the network rather than abiding to the formal rules and duties. The gap between these standards is most significant in Uganda and Tanzania. The fact that helping family or friends is considered a way of promoting social fairness in contrast to adhering to the formal rules of the office further adds to this ambivalence. The Tanzanian case showcases that stricter anti-corruption law enforcement under the new administration has complicated network-induced corrupt exchange, as the discretionary space to give into social demands is decreasing. Service providers testified that it is becoming very difficult to meet social expectations. Interestingly, it is the Rwandan case which shows how this formality-informality gap can be addressed and even harnessed in favour of better anti-corruption outcomes.

Contrary to Uganda and Tanzania, practices of petty corruption in Rwanda are much more limited and mainly exhibited in the form of favouritism among family members. This is due to the government's zero-tolerance approach to corruption. Particularly interesting though is that the social policies include an important behavioural aspect of social control of corruption. Following a corruption conviction, the names of corrupt perpetrators are publicised, alongside the names of their parents and communities of origin ("naming and shaming" approach). The government also relies on more specific policy strategies for the health sector, such as electronic queuing systems and the establishment of quality assurance and customer care units in health facilities.

Post-genocide Rwanda presents a most interesting case because anti-corruption and institutional reforms are celebrated as reforms '*Made in Rwanda*'. In its attempt to restore national identity and the notion of 'Rwandanness', the Kagame government has initiated a series of social policies with behavioural anchors, including the *Imihigo* performance contracts, in order revive traditional values of integrity and honesty.<sup>3</sup> Performance goals are set yearly for each community, whereby over-performers including the community of origin are socially and monetarily rewarded.

The Rwandan government's policies firstly address the pragmatic considerations of relying on the network, namely, as a way to ease access to health services. Secondly, they tackle important social functions of the network, as a form of group solidarity and status, by linking corrupt offences to shame and extending this to the most important social reference group of an offender, namely their family. Critically, this means that the government appeals to the pragmatic and social functions of the network, whereby the distance between formal rules and social obligations is effectively reduced.

#### 4.2 *Context Matters!* The Role of State Efficacy and Service Delivery

The three countries show considerable variance in terms of anti-corruption institutions and mechanisms set in place as well as the prevailing socio-economic context conditions which influence state and institutional efficacy and service delivery performance. Indeed, the Rwandan case demonstrates that strong and credible anti-corruption oversight and monitoring institutions play a significant role in deterring corrupt behaviour, as incentives of both service seekers and providers are shaped to a great extent out of fear of the severe punishments but also social repercussions. Furthermore, the comparison reasserts that attitudes and the proclivities vis-à-vis corruption are partly determined by socio-economic precariousness and negligent public service performance which drives highly pragmatic individuals to strategically engage in corruption to 'get things done'. In Rwanda, the local populace does not have to worry about 'making ends meet' as public services are accessible for

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<sup>3</sup> Other important government policies include Home Grown Solutions.

all and smoothly provided, thereby critically reducing the functional value and pragmatic utility of petty corruption. In cases where the state is not able to cater to their citizens' basic needs – bribery, favouritism and gift-giving fulfil a crucial pragmatic function. This is the case in Uganda – and, to a lesser extent in Tanzania, where petty corruption has become an essential feature of day-to-day transactions in public service delivery and highly pragmatic individuals justify their individual corrupt behaviour as they perceive corruption to be the default norm.

#### 4.3 Implications for Anti-Corruption

The research shows that peer pressure and group expectations of the network can in fact override individual incentives of network members, especially, as the imposed social costs outweigh personal benefits. Both of these factors account for the collective reproduction of social practices and norms of petty corruption. Against this backdrop, we have learnt that despite increased institutional oversight, social networks can play a crucial role in spurring petty corrupt practices which fulfil *both* social as well as pragmatic functions.

Insights from Rwanda give a first glance at the double-edged nature of informal social networks and how they can actually be utilised as policy entry-points for anti-corruption. It is precisely this important role that social networks have in the lives of citizens which make them critical to consider and effectively harness for better anti-corruption outcomes.

### **5. Network-Driven Anti-Corruption Interventions**

#### 5.1 The Adoption of Network-Driven Approaches in the Field of Behavioural Public Health

In behavioural science, community-level behavioural change can be achieved by following different social influence strategies, depending on the intervention's main goals, the problem to be tackled given a certain context, and the postulated underlying theoretical assumptions for programme change to attain such goals. These may seek to change individual-level perceptions and attitudes, community-level behaviours and practices, and/or attempt to reach as many individuals from the population as possible. While the latter is mostly achieved through mass educational and media campaigns, the former two strategies rely predominantly on peer pressure. A network-driven intervention thus stipulates the power of peer influence and has two main tenants that can lead to positive anti-corruption outcomes: *social diffusion* (to disseminate information and new attitudinal and behavioural trends), and *social norms change*. Experimental research from the field of behavioural public health

has indeed documented sustained immediate behavioural effects of network-driven interventions (Latkin and Knowlton, 2015).<sup>4</sup>

There are two main types of network or ‘peer-driven’ interventions: (1) an ‘*egocentric*’ network-driven intervention, which seeks to tackle a specific high-risk behaviour among a strategically relevant personal network of closely knit individuals as the target population; and (2) interventions of ‘*sociometric*’ networks, defined as a set of individuals bound together by specific ties in a given setting, where the target population is more loosely defined. Both intervention types harness the power of social ties and play on social referents with social credentials – peer educators, community opinion leaders, or trendsetters – to act as agents of change.

They differ in that the first type targets sharing rituals and collective norms of reciprocity that stir a network-prescribed behaviour or practice of high risk, mainly by reducing functionality.<sup>5</sup> At the core of such interventions lie the social organisation and regulation of said practices in contexts where the network provides critical practical and emotional support to balance hardship by means of community solidarity and socio-economic exchange.<sup>6</sup> The second type of sociometric network-driven intervention seeks to change behavioural climates and patterns following one or a combination of the following strategies: 1) *social diffusion* through behavioural spill-overs and cascade effects, whereby critical information and even critical products (for example, medicines) are disseminated and behavioural trends emulated and adopted; or/and 2) *social norms change*. For a collective social norm to change, individual-level normative attitudes must change first (i.e. their positive beliefs about a maladaptive practice), followed by normative attitudinal change of the group which then translates into factual collective behavioural change (Bicchieri, 2017; Mackie et al., 2015; Paluck, 2009).<sup>7</sup>

Before designing a network-driven intervention, we need to understand how sociality, namely social influences, processes and organisations – promote behavioural trends and how aspects of social support, exchange and influence could be utilised to sustain behavioural change. Our study has yielded important insights into network inventories, including locally-specific factors and critical context conditions that are linked to positive and negative anti-corruption outcomes. Furthermore, we have been able to gather critical information about structural and functional network properties that tell us something about the stability and frequency of network-prescribed interactions (notably, the strength of social ties, the type and level of social support provided and the potential for within-network interpersonal conflict).

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<sup>4</sup> For a critical review, consult this reference.

<sup>5</sup> The concept and methodology of ‘peer-driven intervention’ was first developed in the 1990s as an alternative to provider-client outreach models, to prevent the spread of infectious diseases such as HIV (Broadhead et al., 1998, also Grund, 1993).

<sup>6</sup> The mutual exchange of support in network settings hinges on an individual’s perception of fellow network members as being cooperative and supportive (Mitchell et al., 2014), alluding to the potential risks due to collective action and free rider problems (Mani et al., 2013).

<sup>7</sup> Relevant studies include Paluck (et al., 2016), Paluck and Shepherd (2012) and Kim (et al., 2015).

### ***Critical Network Properties and Context Conditions***

Network properties that are critical include social norms of reciprocity, which are prevalent in the three countries. Reciprocity is not only a source of strain and ambivalence – but directly facilitates corrupt exchange, whereby a vicious circle of corruption is reinforced. It is here where conventional anti-corruption efforts and reforms are essentially undermined by the ‘negative-feedback loops’ diffused among ordinary citizens. The root problems to be addressed are not only faulty collective action out of ‘rational irrationality’ (cf. Cassidy, 2009),<sup>8</sup> but also enculturated aspects of sociality and social norms themselves. A network-driven intervention could work through social norms of reciprocity by diffusing positive feedback and new normative attitudes. This could lead the way to promoting change in conventional wisdoms of corruption, reassessing the value and consequences of certain socio-cultural practices and ultimately decreasing their functionality. We have seen that context matters, whereby a network-driven intervention is more likely provide remedy in contexts where a minimum degree of state efficacy and institutional oversight are warranted. Otherwise, corruption will continue to fulfil its highly pragmatic function.

Social networks should be stable, as more static network structures are more likely to lead to cooperation and much needed interaction between key co-operators, such as social referents (Rand et al., 2014). One key indicator is social proximity and the type of social tie that sustains a network. The fluid character of some social networks may generally pose a problem as illustrated by the Ugandan case, where even the closest network of relatives and close friends is susceptible to uncooperative behaviour and within-network corruption. The Ugandan case also illustrates how socio-cultural values of ostentation and greedy behaviour can lead to interpersonal conflicts that actually destroys social networks. A social influence strategy involving social referent acting as peer educators, opinion leaders and trendsetters requires for said referents to have social credentials and to enjoy a minimum of social trust vested in them by fellow network members.

### ***Avenues for network-driven interventions in East Africa – a first appraisal***

Context conditions, as well as network properties and factors are most favourable in Rwanda and Tanzania – given the crucial changes in their government’s anti-corruption approaches and efforts and a higher degree of network stability. This has opened a window of opportunity for behavioural interventions to be tested. In the case of Rwanda, where petty corruption has taken on a secretive and clandestine character given the harsh punishments and monitoring tools set in place, a network-driven intervention could be designed to eradicate high-risk behaviour of favouritism and gift-giving among

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<sup>8</sup> People tend not to take into consideration the long-term aggregated negative effects [of corruption for society] as a whole (ibid.).

health workers and their personal networks of relatives and close friends. In Tanzania, on the other hand a socio-metric network intervention aimed at changing the social acceptability of corruption could be an option, while seeking to change conventional wisdoms of petty corrupt practices based on notions of reciprocity.

Following this line of reasoning, a network-driven intervention may be more challenging to implement in Uganda, where corruption as a social norm has reached endemic levels. Furthermore, social networks are rather fluid and therefore more prone to within-network corruption and more susceptible to free rider, collective action and coordination problems.

### ***Proposing a logic model and theory of change for network-driven interventions***

The discussion above points to the centrality of influential and highly connected individuals to act as social referents who can promote the diffusion of critical information, as well new normative and behavioural trends. For that matter, we propose to follow an “*ITMC logic model*” presupposing the following theory of change: during the ‘inception’ phase (*I*), the local context and the prevalence of network factors is assessed, including the type and nature of locally prevailing social networks. During the ‘trendsetting’ stage (*T*), anti-corruption champions actively diffuse information that challenges conventional wisdoms about corruption, clarify the detriment of corruption at the expense of communities, and set new attitudinal and behavioural trends to be emulated. During the third stage (*M*), more allies convinced of the anti-corruption cause are ‘mobilised’ and geometrically recruited (beginning from a single *seed*) from within the social network to further spread the word and diffuse new behavioural trends. During stage four (*C* for actionable ‘change’), the new attitudinal and behavioural trends translate into large scale behavioural change at the community and population level.

## **6. Concluding remarks**

Pragmatic and social drivers related to social networks spur the propensity of individuals to engage in collective practices of petty corruption – including bribery, favouritism and gift-giving. Crucially, these practices related to social networks are inherently ambivalent and two-edged in nature. Accordingly, we propose that social networks can also be harnessed to elicit behavioural and attitudinal change for favourable anti-corruption outcomes. In particular, contextual preconditions and crucial network properties should be taken into account when designing behavioural anti-corruption intervention. An ‘old’ key lesson learnt from this critical assessment is that anti-corruption interventions, conventional or behavioural, are highly context-dependent. Any target population

should therefore be empirically assessed to inform intervention design and underlying theory of programme change – which should be realistic, feasible and tailored to local needs and circumstances. The postulated network-centred approach to anti-corruption presents interesting avenues for further (experimental) research.

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