

# No Peace without Tackling Corruption: Why Peacebuilders Should be Thinking About Corruption

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# Classic understanding of corruption



Individual “bad apple”, acting alone



Violating the rules—engaging in “one off” deviant behavior



For personal gain (generally financial)

# Endemic Corruption

Dimensions	
1	<b>Multi-actor and organized—a “team effort”</b> “a set of actors often connected in a network and ordered according to implicit rules”
2	<b>Institutionalized</b> Not “one-off” but underpinned by explicit or implicit rules
3	<b>A broader rationale</b> A collective social, political, economic purpose beyond individuals’ self-interest



# Corruption as a conflict issue

A vicious cycle

# 1. Corruption as driver/enabler of conflict

Corruption is a  
divider and  
worsens dividers

- Reinforcing marginalization
- Aggravating inter-group inequalities, exclusion, grievances
- Worsening stereotypes and 'othering' (moral 'evil')
- Undermining legitimacy and capacity of government institutions—reinforcing intra-group loyalties
- A tool for dominance and waging conflict



Financing Violence



Grievances that drive conflict



Undermining state legitimacy  
and capacity

# Conflict as a driver or enabler of corruption



Opportunities for corruption



Entrenches illicit wealth in state institutions



## 2. Peace vs. governance trade-off?

Ignoring corruption may lock societies into negative peace



## Security Sector Reform



## Decentralization and Power Sharing

3. Corruption-blind peacebuilding can exacerbate corruption

## 4. Anti-corruption can inadvertently fuel conflict

**Conflict Sensitivity:** Gaining a sound understanding of the two-way interaction between aid activities and context and acting to minimize negative impacts and maximize positive impacts of the intervention on the conflict.

# Ways anti-corruption and fuel conflict



PROCUREMENT



INVESTIGATIONS  
FOCUSED ON A  
SECTOR



RESISTANCE



ANTI-CORRUPTION  
WEAPONIZED



DISILLUSIONMENT  
DISEMPOWERMENT

What can be  
done?



## Anti-corruption

- Adapt AC approaches in contexts of conflict & endemic corruption—innovative, less adversarial
- Pay attention to **impacts on conflict and politics**



## Peacebuilding

- Address corruption in early post-violence stage
- Consider and mitigate **corruption impacts of peacebuilding interventions**

# Dealing with the challenge?

## Peacemaking process

- Inclusive peace processes
- “Doorstep conditions” in peace agreements

## Peacebuilding

- Implementation
- “Corruption sensitivity”
- Cross-sector and level coalitions

## Closing off international enablers

## Anti-corruption tools and approaches

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Additional publications and The Corruption in Fragile States blog can be found on the CJL Program website  
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## Additional Information

Scharbatke-Church and Chigas. Taking the blinders off: Questioning how development assistance is used to combat corruption. <https://www.corruptionjusticeandlegitimacy.org/items/taking-the-binders-off%3A-questioning-how-development-assistance-is-used-to-combat-corruption>.

Jackson (2022) Building anti-corruption resilience to combat entrenched corruption systems. U4. <https://www.u4.no/publications/building-anti-corruption-resilience-to-combat-entrenched-corruption-systems>.

The CJL blog, <https://www.corruptionjusticeandlegitimacy.org/blog/categories/peacebuilding-and-corruption> , has a number of pieces on the relationships of corruption and conflict.

Article on how conflict and corruption as a vicious cycle – also on how anti-corruption can be integrated more with peacebuilding: Hopp-Nishanka, U. *et al.* 2022. [“Breaking the vicious cycle: Entry points for anti-corruption in inclusive peace processes.”](#) U4 Issue 2022:6 Bergen: CMI and Berghof Foundation.

Christine Cheng report for the UK Stabilization unit on elite deals – not just on corruption and peace, but with implications.

Report and the case studies: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/elite-bargains-and-political-deals>

A podcast by Christine Cheng on the report: <https://soundcloud.com/warstudies/podcast-elite-bargains-and-political-deals-with-christine-cheng>

A paper on how anti-corruption efforts can inadvertently fuel conflict by Lara Olson and Diana Chigas.

<https://www.corruptionjusticeandlegitimacy.org/items/how-anti-corruption-efforts-can-inadvertently-fuel-conflict>

Article reviewing anti-corruption provisions incorporated into peace agreements: Robert Forster 2024. [\*Anti-Corruption in Peacebuilding Practice\*](#). U4 Issue 2024:8. Bergen: CMI.

Article on how anti-corruption can be integrated more with peacebuilding: Hopp-Nishanka, U. *et al.* 2022.

[\*“Breaking the vicious cycle: Entry points for anti-corruption in inclusive peace processes.”\*](#) U4 Issue 2022:6  
Bergen: CMI and Berghof Foundation.

### Final Notes

*On Corruption in America: And What Is at Stake* by Sarah Chayes (2020) <https://www.amazon.com/Corruption-America-What-Stake/dp/0525654852>