

Civil service reform and anti-corruption: Does ethics training reduce corruption in the civil service?

The project designs and implements state-of-the-art ethics training courses with civil servants in Nepal and Bangladesh and evaluates their effects on corruption and (un)ethical behaviour in a field experiment.

Project Summary

What is the impact of ethics training on corruption in the civil service? This project builds on the insights of the ‘Civil Service Reform and Anti-Corruption Project’ (funded under Phase 1 of the ACE programme), which sought to identify which civil service management practices are effective in reducing corruption in the civil service. To shed light on this question, the project conducted civil service surveys in ten countries in four developing regions. With 23,000 participants, it produced the largest cross-country survey of bureaucrats in developing countries ever conducted. Among other findings, the survey showed that one common management practice—ethics training—does not correlate with lower corruption or more ethical behaviour of civil servants.



In response, several governments asked for guidance on how to design effective ethics trainings for civil servants. The current project will provide evidence of the effects of such trainings, surveying corruption and (un)ethical behaviour of 1,200 civil servants in Nepal and Bangladesh over time while providing state-of-the-art ethics training. The effectiveness of the training will be examined in a field experiment to provide rigorous evidence on how to design ethics trainings that work.

Policy and Programming Implications

The research will provide insights for those who seek innovative tools to reduce corruption in the public sector and promote ethical behaviour among civil servants. The findings will directly inform the efforts of government partners in Nepal and Bangladesh to develop and continuously implement ethics trainings that promote ethical behaviour of civil servants. The insights will help civil society and international organisations to monitor and evaluate the implementation of anti-corruption policy in the two countries, as well develop anti-corruption strategies more broadly.

The Global Integrity Anti-Corruption Evidence (GI-ACE) research programme **supports 14 projects** around the world **generating actionable evidence** that policymakers, practitioners, and advocates can use to **design and implement more effective anti-corruption initiatives.**

Research Questions

- What is the impact of ethics training on corruption in the civil service?
- What types of effects do ethics trainings have on the attitudes of civil servants toward corruption, the (un)ethical behaviour of civil servants, and the wider capacity of organisations to provide public goods?
- To what extent do the effects of ethics trainings last over time?
- Can ethics trainings promote ethical leadership practices that have wider effects on reducing corruption in the civil service?

Methodology

The project principally relies on a randomised field experiment and a panel study of participants to examine whether the state-of-the-art ethics trainings can reduce corruption in the civil service. The field experiment can provide guidance on whether ethics training has positive causal—rather than merely correlational—effects, and thus provide robust evidence on whether ethics training does, in fact, work to reduce corruption. For the field experiment, a randomly assigned treatment group of civil servants will be trained in the first period; a ‘wait-listed’ control group of civil servants will be trained in the second period.

The field experiment and panel survey will be complemented by semi-structured interviews to inform the design of the ethics training courses, particularly to adapt the training to the local context. Interviews will further be conducted after completion of the training to generate supplementary qualitative evidence for its effectiveness.

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