

Corruption and the urban poor

THE URBAN POOR live lives that are often extra-legal – the places they work, where they live, the jobs they do, the ways in which they can access financial resources or goods and services, and their existence itself with regards the legal mechanisms that grant them recognition – all these are often negotiated in regions that are not covered by the law, nor contained within the bounds of what is illegal. This lack of a clear, well-publicized, well-implemented regulatory framework of the lives and working conditions of the urban poor has meant their continued victimization by clandestine mechanisms. Of these, corruption is the most prolific, occurring in various interactions, and especially with reference to the services or resources that are monitored and regulated at the local level. The following article provides an easy, step-by-step description of how these issues were addressed within three towns in Indonesia. We encourage you to begin a dialogue with the implementers of the project, and share with them your experiences at the local level. Most importantly, if you decide to test the methodology below, do share your learnings with them.

Participatory corruption appraisal: A methodology for assessing how corruption affects the urban poor*

By ‘Corruption and the Poor’ Team

In countries where corruption is systematic and structural, corruption affects different classes of the population differently. A lot of this difference is connected to the power that they have and the power they can access. There are five underlying factors which define poor people’s situation in respect of power and corruption:

- The poor lack financial resources
- The poor lack information, knowledge and formal education
- The poor lack support from the legal system and the police
- The poor lack a voice in public discourse
- The poor lack connections to those who have power

The poor, who are by definition marginalized, excluded, oppressed and exploited are at the mercy of those who have gate-keeper posi-

tions which control access to goods and services. They may also be illiterate and unaware of the formal costs of these goods and services they need to access.

In contrast, those with power over other people (and particularly over the poor) are able to extort illegal levies from them for services which, legally, should be available free or for an agreed and publicized cost. They can do this because they have control over these kinds of goods and services which are desired by others and for which extortionate costs can be charged. They can also do this because long experience has taught them that there will be no punishment and that they are virtually immune.

The poor are, therefore, mostly *suppliers* of bribes, particularly those extorted from them, and suffer disproportionately to others with more

power or access to power. The resources they own are very limited. And their ability to pay extra for anything is thus equally limited. Whereas those with disposable income (albeit limited) can afford to pay illegal levies to get goods and services they need, the poor often cannot – and thus go without.

In countries which are systematically corrupt, the poor have great difficulty in affording very basic services that they need, like health, education for their children, water, land for building, and access to particular goods from government programs targeted to them (like free or subsidized food). The poor have to make trade-offs as they decide how they should spend their very limited money, and sometimes this excludes them from services, or only gives them access to services of inferior quality.

A Corruption Framework

The poor suffer basically from two kinds of corrupt practices: active corruption and passive corruption:

Active corruption is where the poor are forced to pay by the richer or more powerful citizens with whom they interact with in their daily lives. Passive corruption, on the other hand, refers to the fact that the poor have to live with the consequences of the corrupt behavior of people around them at the state, the institutional or the individual levels.

It is always difficult to get information about corrupt practices because they exist in confidential and hidden behavior and are rarely exposed. An oral culture defines and decides who will pay what to whom. It is also difficult to get information about corruption as to how it affects the poor, and the perceived risk that talking about corruption could result in some form of retribution.

This document describes a methodology tried in three urban locations in Indonesia between 2000-2001 as part of a project called “Corruption



and the Poor”, which was successful in eliciting information regarding corrupt practices that affected the poor, and their own ideas as to how these problems could be overcome. The methodology is based on three principles:

- The principle of participation – the individuals in the community are invited and freely agree to participate in the sessions.
- The principle of local ownership – all the information gathered from the community is given back to the community, and the community is involved in deciding what should be done with the information.
- The principle of action research – the research is intended to lead to action that improves the situation, and such action is documented so that we can learn more about the efficacy of such action.

The Objectives of Participatory Corruption Appraisal

The general objectives are:

- To understand the harmful effects of corruption on the lives of poor people;
- To communicate such information widely to policymakers and the general public;
- To help the communities in which the PCA has taken place to plan and to act to reduce corruption.

Steps in the Participatory Corruption Appraisal Methodology

Step 1: Identify an organization which has the trust of the poor in the general area in which you seek to get information. This will usually be an NGO that has an existing program in that area (e.g. savings and credit, building a cooperative, health services, education services), but it could be a local community association.

Step 2: Identify a community that you would like to engage with. This needs to be a community in which there are considerable numbers of poor people. Depending on the country and the culture, there may be slum areas that are uniformly poor, or there may be communities in poor areas of a city that are relatively homogenous, or there may be a large number of poor people in a heterogeneous community. It also needs to be either a community with a clear administrative division or a community which is self-identified and in which people know each other and know who belongs. The community should be small enough so that it is easy for members of the community to come together for meetings.

Success in working with the community will only come from the willingness of people in that community (particularly community leaders) to cooperate with the NGO and you.



IN THE INTRODUCTORY MEETING with the community it may be essential to do the following:

- Wealth Classification: Ask the people for their own classifications for poor, middle-income and rich. They are to give 7 characteristics of each and draw a picture to illustrate these categories.
- Community Mapping: Ask participants to draw a map of their community (in rough order – borders of the community, rivers; streets; administrative sub-divisions; public facilities, institutions; houses of formal village leaders). The participants then mark the houses of the poor, middle-income and the rich. The group ends up with a map of the their community that illustrates the locations of the poor in the community.

Later, in the focus group discussions, it will be essential to go back to this map and be able to review it and add additional data especially about public institutions in that community.

At this point the facilitator introduces the idea of “unofficial payments” and ask for people’s experiences (e.g. “if you want to place your child in school, how much do you have to pay?”) The facilitator asks for a number of experiences verbally and then gives the participants cards and asks them to write down the amount of money they paid over the last year at each institution each time. The facilitator, with the participants can fill in a table like below:

Institution	Instance of Corruption	Average amount of bribe	Frequency of the bribe	No. of people who paid
Police	Traffic ticket	10,000	1	3
	Community fight	350,000	1	1

Note: There may be more than one kind of bribe at an institution.

Step 3: Identify and train field workers – individuals from the NGO or community association who are able and willing to learn about the methodology and carry it out in the community. This involves developing skills in participatory Focus Group Discussions (FGD) and interviews.

Step 4: Make the first visit to the community and over 10 days undertake 4 Focus Group Discussions and conduct 25-30 interviews.

Step 5: Write up the information that has been gathered from the people and organize it in a way that it can be presented back to the people.

Step 6: Make your second visit to the community, perhaps over 2 days. Over a half-day present the assembled information back to the community and discuss follow-up actions. Then during the same visit hold a public meeting (with the agreement of the community) in which the findings from the appraisal and the action plans proposed are presented to a larger audience (local government officials, local NGOs, local traditional leaders, local journalists). Here the idea is to amplify the voice of the community, and seek others’ involvement in addressing the problems caused by corruption.



The man says: "That's that shabby house close to the house of the village chief."

The Second Visit

The second visit takes place approximately three weeks after the first visit, the organizers will work closely with the local organization to identify and invite the different stakeholders to:

- 1) The community meeting which includes the original participants and other local leaders from the community who are outside the identified poor.
- 2) The stakeholders meeting which involves local NGOs, citizens' associations, local media and may include representatives of the service agencies that interact with the community.

The community meeting centers around a presentation focusing on the purpose of the research, a summary of the various corruption cases and perceptions together with their problem ranking, a summary of causes and effects, a summary of possible solutions and provide information from the interviews. This meeting should spend a considerable amount

of time on solutions – checking with the larger, more diverse group whether the solutions will work and how they can be implemented.

The stakeholders meeting also has the presentation component but here the ideas for follow-up action to carry the work further are discussed e.g. working with community, advocacy and publicity.

Summary

This methodology allows outsiders, working with insiders, to understand and systematize information concerning corruption in poor communities, and its impact on the poor. It also allows insiders to think through what they might do to improve their situation, and introduces

them to some people who might help them to do this.

This methodology has been tried in the limited context of three urban slum areas in three towns in Indonesia – Yogyakarta, Jakarta and Makassar. It seems to the organizers that the ideas in this methodology have promise of wider application and they ask that people try them out, modify them and test the modality themselves. The practical experience of the methodology lies with Yayasan Bina Swadaya.

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“All weakness tends to corrupt,
and impotence corrupts
absolutely.”

- Edgar Z. Freidenberg

“The more corrupt the State
the more numerous the laws.”

- Cornelius Tacitus



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