

# VULNERABILITIES TO CORRUPTION APPROACH TOOLKIT

*Combating Corruption Through Transparent  
and Accountable Governance*

Developed with support from the  
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Vulnerabilities to Corruption Approach Toolkit

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## FOREWORD

The International Republican Institute (IRI) is dedicated to advancing global freedom and democracy. We bring people and their government representatives together through open communication and transparent governance. IRI motivates citizens to engage with their governments and works to ensure all voices are heard. We help politicians and government officials to be responsive and accountable to the people and to strive for fair and effective democratic leadership. We educate citizens on how to influence policy, and work with politicians to quickly and effectively respond to constituent needs with sustainable solutions.

With 35 years of experience working in more than 80 countries, IRI uses long-standing in-country partnerships, political expertise and regional knowledge to foster more citizen-focused governments and help communities address governance shortfalls, including corruption. In 2014, as part of our ongoing anti-corruption efforts, we created the Vulnerabilities to Corruption Approach (VCA). The VCA uses qualitative means to identify potential problems in government and government processes. IRI then guides communities to develop a collaborative plan that will address those problems and foster long-term transparency and accountability.

## HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

This guide is a resource for interested partners to begin working on strong anti-corruption initiatives and is intended to shed a light on IRI's unique VCA. The guide presents a compilation of best practices to help your government and local community take their first steps together in a medium-term collaborative anti-corruption effort.



Many factors contribute to government corruption. However, there are three conditions that are particularly conducive to corruption:

1. **Perverse incentives** - When government policies or processes unintentionally create opportunities for corruption.
2. **Lack of transparency** - When the public does not have clear access to or understanding of how government policies or processes are conducted.
3. **Limited accountability** - When the consequences for corruption are weak or non-existent.

IRI's VCA helps address these challenges by bringing government and citizens together to identify potential problem areas in government processes and develop workable solutions. IRI does this through a qualitative assessment that accounts for how power and resources are distributed—a political economy analysis—and how those in power view or perceive the current political system—its strengths, weaknesses and norms. This assessment is then reported to key decision makers and stakeholders like elected officials, civil society leaders, community activists, and public employees.

Subsequently, IRI supports these actors in developing solutions and a plan to address the identified problems. The solutions must be based on the principles of public transparency and accountability, culminating in a public event that highlight results and bolsters continued support for an anti-corruption agenda. Throughout this process, we work closely with both government officials and civil society groups, as IRI believes that when citizens are directly involved and receive strategic support, those committed to citizen-centered governance can begin to address the challenge of systemic corruption and improve government transparency and accountability.

The VCA involves the following steps:

- I. **Explore.** The first step is to determine the existence of political will and tentatively determine the focus of the assessment. For this IRI convenes a steering committee of key decision makers within the government and civil society and conducts a political economy analysis to understand the context and opportunities for corruption.
- II. **Assess.** IRI then conducts an assessment through consultations and interviews with government officials and other stakeholders, such as civil society and community leaders, and prepares an assessment report including findings and recommendations, which is presented to the steering committee for feedback.

- III. Enact.** Following the presentation of the assessment report and through a collaborative process, an action plan is developed to address the identified weaknesses and prevent possible corruption.
- IV. Showcase.** Finally, at the end of program implementation IRI shares the successes in identifying, addressing and reducing vulnerabilities to corruption and works with elected local officials, civil society and community leaders to create sustained political will and potentially expand the VCA to additional government areas or new municipalities.



The following pages describe each step and provide useful implementation tips.

In order for the VCA to be successful, it is essential to have a government leader willing to fully engage in the process. Having strong political will is critical to making the VCA's broad-based cooperative model work and plays a significant role in instilling integrity to the following phases. Before beginning the VCA, an assessment of political will should be conducted. This requires meeting with the government counterparts and asking key questions regarding their commitment to partner with IRI and their community on an anti-corruption agenda. Additional contextual information collected locally via pre-existing relationships or in-country presence is also needed to gauge whether these intentions are sincere and also to rule out potential limitations (e.g. a government team that is not empowered or qualified; ongoing or past corruption-related investigations) that might impede the implementation of the VCA.

Once political will is established, IRI then works with elected officials, their staff and civil society organizations to agree on which government departments, processes or other areas should be selected for the VCA. Once the priority areas are selected, it's important to set clear boundaries and expectations.

IRI's team uses two tools to determine the assessment's focus (what processes will be assessed) and scope (e.g. agency, municipality, sector):

- **STEERING COMMITTEE**

A steering committee is an effective management tool to organize resources and direct progress. IRI will partner with local authorities to form a VCA steering committee consisting of politicians, public officials and citizen representatives to identify priorities and select interviewees for the assessment.

- **POLITICAL ECONOMY ANALYSIS**

IRI's team conducts a basic political economy analysis (PEA) to gain a clear understanding of the current political and economic context. The PEA looks at motives, relationships, and distribution of power between different groups and individuals. Based on the steering committee's guidance and the PEA results, recommendations will be made of where the VCA could best be implemented.

## IN PRACTICE: SEIZING POLITICAL WILL IN ULAANBAATAR

In 2014, IRI conducted a VCA in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia. Combatting corruption was a top priority of then-mayor E. Bat-Uul, who requested the VCA and provided the necessary political will for it to be conducted. Having a close partnership with the mayor enabled the team to pinpoint potential areas of corruption and come up with meaningful measures to stop it.



## USEFUL TIPS: WHAT IS A PEA?

Upcoming elections, changing citizen priorities, shifting public opinion and media reporting can all alter the political landscape, making it especially important to keep tabs on the local situation. A Political Economy Analysis (PEA) is a method to understand why and how political and economic power relations influence the structures, systems and current events in a community, organization, or a society. Because political realities often change, IRI believes the PEA must be an ongoing process.

While a PEA can be done in a number of different ways, the VCA specifically focuses on the following questions:

- What are the systemic causes of the vulnerabilities?
- What is the risk level of the vulnerabilities?
- Who can mitigate the vulnerabilities?
- Who are the champions of or obstructionists to reform?
- What are the resources and timeline necessary to mitigate vulnerabilities?

A more expansive PEA process should be implemented depending on the country context.

The “Assess” component comprises the following steps:

- 1. Assemble an assessment team.** IRI will assemble an assessment team, including IRI specialists and expert partners. The assessment team is essential for the successful implementation of the VCA. The assessment team members will set the tone, shape and scope of the interview process, and will ultimately write the report. Accordingly, an assessment team should include the following elements:
  - The optimal team size will depend on several factors, such as available resources and the assessment’s scope, but should include a minimum of three people.
  - An assessment team should include a range of expertise, including members who are familiar with the government process or specific area being examined. A strong three-person team may include a governance specialist, evaluation specialist and individual with considerable local or regional-specific experience.

It is important that assessment team members remain neutral during the assessment. This neutrality should be stressed throughout the process.

- 2. Select interviewees.** Determining who to interview is a key step that will significantly shape the scope and implementation of the VCA. It is important to interview a wide range of stakeholders, including political party leaders, government officials, civil society members, civically-engaged citizens, and private sector and public employees. Interviewees should be chosen based on the recommendations of the steering committee to make sure that they are representative of the community.
- 3. Prepare the interview protocol.** An interview protocol determines the questions, boundaries and goals for the interviews in advance. Interviews with government officials, civil society members and community leaders enable the VCA to gain a more detailed understanding of the vulnerabilities, threats and opportunities to address corruption in each community. Developing a clear and effective interview protocol will enable personnel to conduct high-quality interviews. The protocol should allow interviewers to explore both vulnerabilities to corruption and their potential solutions.



4. **Conduct analysis.** When collating data, it is critical to identify patterns or key areas that require additional analysis. It is reasonable that some areas may have received more attention during the assessment, while others may have been overlooked, and thus it may be necessary to conduct additional interviews or research to reconfirm or gather more information.
5. **Validate analysis.** Once the data is collected, the assessment team should meet with and seek feedback from the steering committee in what is known as a “validation workshop.” In this workshop, committee members can confirm, refute or offer additional context and insights on the assessment team’s findings. This helps the team to verify perceptions about political will and accurately detail findings and recommendations for the final report.
6. **Prepare the final report.** After the steering committee reviews and validates the report, IRI prepares the final Vulnerabilities to Corruption Assessment Report, which includes findings and recommendations for addressing vulnerabilities to corruption.
7. **Present findings and recommendations.** The final step is for the assessment team to present the assessment report to government officials and prominent community and citizen groups. This presentation is essential to getting decision makers both inside and outside government on board with the process of combatting corruption. Presenting clear facts alongside realistic solutions demonstrates that the assessment team is prepared to act as partners in the reform process.



## USEFUL TIPS: SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR QUESTIONS ON CORRUPTION

Corruption is a sensitive topic and interviewers must be careful to ensure that interviewees are comfortable and can provide honest feedback. In order to do this, two key points must be established prior to the interview:

### CONSENT

It is important that the people you speak to understand the purpose of the interview and the topics that will be discussed. Assessment team members must keep in mind the delicate political situation in which the interviewee may find him or herself. The interviewee should always have the option of remaining anonymous.

### EXPECTATIONS

The interviewee should have a clear understanding of the possible effects of their participation in the VCA. By setting clear and well-defined expectations upfront, potential misconceptions about the assessment team's intentions and use of the VCA can be eliminated or minimized.



## IN PRACTICE: SYNTHESIZING THEMES

The VCA allows participants to adjust and adapt their focus as the process unfolds. For example, in Ivano-Frankivsk, Ukraine, the steering committee first set the focus and scope on the local housing association. However, after preliminary conversations with locals, VCA participants and IRI experts determined that construction and land development were more vulnerable to corruption and thus a more appropriate topic of focus. By the end of the assessment, it became clear that while all were issues of concern—housing, construction and land development—the underlying problem was mistrust between government and civil society.

## USEFUL TIPS: THINK GLOBALLY, ACT LOCALLY

It is crucial to include local partners when going through the assessment process. Local partners offer valuable insights and can be catalyzers for change.

In Cambodia's Kampot province, IRI partnered with Transparency International Cambodia to expand the reach of the VCA to include a network of in-country reform-minded officials, community leaders and civil servants.

Once the assessment report is public, it is time to develop and implement an action plan to address the identified vulnerabilities. The assessment team—working with the government and citizen participants—will determine the next steps and solutions. The best practices outlined below can be useful in developing and implementing an action plan:

- **Generate actionable solutions.** The action plan should list specific and practical solutions that the government or civil society organizations can reasonably implement. Although most of these are likely to be specific to government officials, it is important to highlight civil society recommendations, including opportunities for building skills and capacity to hold government accountable.
- **Leverage the steering committee.** The VCA steering committee can be a great resource for validating and promoting the action plan to the government and citizens. Committee members can provide valuable assistance in making sure the action plan is implemented, either by directly helping to carry out some of the suggestions or by monitoring the plan's execution.
- **Establish a task force.** Public pressure on the government to fix the problems identified is an important part of the VCA. A citizen-led task force is one way to achieve this pressure and generate public support for the action plan. The task force differs from the steering committee in that it requires more of its members' time and is highly focused on delivery of specific outcomes, such as policy changes.

Public awareness of anti-corruption efforts is essential to building public trust and increasing government transparency and accountability. Strong public anti-corruption initiatives demonstrate the value of citizen-centered governance to citizens and government officials. By publicly presenting the results of their anti-corruption work through a capstone forum, stakeholders improve the odds their work will be sustained and replicated across the government and other localities.

Continual communication and targeted engagement with public leaders and elected officials is important in order to broaden the use of the toolkit and better address corruption. It is also critical to explore additional ways of increasing political will, such as holding consultations with elected officials, meeting with civil society groups or briefing relevant government employees on the results of the VCA.

Ultimately, the VCA's objective is to identify and remove barriers to citizen-centered governance. This includes improving poor public awareness of new regulations, initiatives and societal expectations. By initiating consistent public and political engagement on anti-corruption measures, the VCA encourages responsive, transparent and accountable governments that serve citizens and inspire citizens to expect an accountable and functional system.



## IN PRACTICE: TRANSPARENT ULAANBAATAR ACADEMY

As part of the VCA process, IRI supported the Transparent Ulaanbaatar Academy (TUA) in partnership with the Capital City Governor's Office (CCGO). The TUA has become an established forum for best practices of transparency and accountability in the public sector. The TUA curriculum was developed jointly with the Mongolian Learning Corporation, in consultation with CCGO, with the goal of creating interactive and innovative ways of combatting corruption.

Each TUA consists of between five and 10 days of trainings on topics such as: principles of public service, conflict of interest regulations and access to information. During the trainings, participants also learn about case studies and engage in group discussions. More than 250 public officials have participated in the IRI-facilitated trainings. The program has been institutionalized and changes in local leadership do not appear to have diminished the political will for pursuing an anti-corruption agenda.







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