

Governance and Anti-Corruption Assessments: Rethinking the Added Value?

Global concern about strengthening democratic governance continues to grow. Related efforts in the Arab region had begun to emerge more forcefully at the turn of the millennium, but have varied since then, both in terms of scope and results. These efforts regained their momentum recently in the wake of the transformations that started in 2011. "Governance Assessments" -which belong to an area of work that is typically concerned with assessing various aspects of governance with a view to identifying successes and failures and informing future reform actions - are at the core of the ongoing global, and now also regional, debate on making governance reforms more effective.

Several international organizations are involved in promoting assessments of various areas of governance, including the World Bank, Transparency International, Global Integrity and others. The UN Development Programme (UNDP) also brings this topic into focus; its related work is best portrayed on the [Governance Assessments Portal](#). Anti-Corruption Assessments, which are usually seen as a sub-component of the broader area of Governance Assessments, have also been gaining increasing attention. Several related methodologies and tools are currently in use around the world, most of which are outlined in [UNDP's User's Guide on Measuring Corruption](#). The most famous among them, but also perhaps one of the most criticized, is [Transparency International's Corruption Perception Index](#) (CPI). More recently, other anti-corruption assessment methodologies started to draw attention, such as the Checklist for the Self-Assessment of the implementation of the UN Convention against Corruption (UNCAC) or methodologies concerned with the assessment of "Anti-Corruption Agencies", including the one developed by [UNDP on Capacity Assessments](#), and the one developed by the [U4 Anti-Corruption Resource Centre](#) on [Performance Evaluation](#). Nonetheless, and given the deficiencies in the various existing methodologies -a deficiency which many experts believe to be inherent in anti-corruption assessments - the quest continues, and more vigorously than before, for more suitable methodologies for assessments in the area of anti-corruption and more broadly in the area of governance. This discussion is bound to continue garnering further attention for many reasons, one of which is the ongoing debate on the post-2015 development agenda and whether to include governance in it or not, and if yes, how to measure related results.

UNDP's Regional Project on Anti-Corruption and Integrity in the Arab Countries (UNDP-ACIAC), which aims at strengthening cooperation and promoting collective action against corruption in Arab countries, works, among other things, on developing national governmental and non-governmental capacities to design and use anti-corruption assessments in a more effective manner. It does this through providing training, advice, and support to national stakeholders to conduct pilot assessments in two main areas: first, it supports the assessment of UNCAC implementation with a distinctive focus on activating the role of civil society in this process, such as in the example of its support to Tunisia; and second its supports the assessment of corruption risks and vulnerabilities in sectors that deliver basic services (education, water, health etc), such as in the example of its support to Morocco on the health sector.

Governance and anti-corruption assessments have proven to provide relevant data and material that helped to inform policy actions by governments, civil society and the business sector alike. The challenge, however, continues to be a matter of striking the appropriate balance between qualitative and quantitative data, and anchoring the assessment in the national context.

In a recent discussion paper, author and political scientist Francis Fukuyama, best known for his theory on "The end of History" proposes a new framework to measure governance. His analysis is based on a study of the challenges and inadequacies of current indices used to measure the quality of governance, which do not accurately portray the situation of countries, be they developed or developing. Starting off from four broad approaches to evaluating the quality of governance (procedural measures, input measures, output measures and measures of bureaucratic autonomy), Fukuyama argues that the quality of governance is better assessed when taking into account two criteria: autonomy and capacity. He stresses

that governance lies in the ability of a state to deliver goods and services to its citizens, and this ability depends on the level of professional expertise within its bureaucracy and the level of independence the latter has in conducting its tasks. Indeed, according to him, the interaction between the autonomy and capacity of a bureaucracy is telling of the quality of government. Parallel to this discussion, attention is often turned to the limitations of assessment data. One of the most recent examples is in an [article published by the New York Times](#). The article underlines that data is never raw or disinterested, does not accurately convey social frameworks or take into account the context. The author states that the potential of falsity increases proportionally to the amount of data collected, making the “haystack bigger”, while the “needle” is still buried deep inside.

The discussion around governance assessments is most likely expected to continue including the problematique of measuring "good" governance compared to measuring "democratic" governance. The discussion will undoubtedly attract both proponents and critics. Without doubt, governance and anti-corruption assessments have their limitations, but their value must also be recognized, not in the least because of their importance to anti-corruption practitioners in the field, exhibited by the steadily growing demand for more support in this area of work. Donors and Arab governments are yet to afford governance and anti-corruption assessments the attention they deserve. One may argue that the added value of these assessments goes far beyond the ability to generate actionable and action-oriented data - the "dream" of assessment practitioners and what related literature purports to be the ultimate success that assessments can achieve. Perhaps, a key lesson that emphasizes their importance beyond this matter can be derived from the experience of UNDP in promoting anti-corruption assessments in the Arab region. In its experience, supporting assessments, if anchored in and conducted through a national participatory process, such as the UNCAC self assessment, has an inherent value, regardless of the "technical" value of the data that is produced at the end. This inherent value is demonstrated in the ability of such assessments to bring stakeholders together around one table, to promote coordination and cooperation among them, and support them in creating and using a common language, identifying new ideas, and building momentum for reforms that are actually nationally-driven, and are potentially more sustainable because they are genuinely promoted and owned by the national players themselves. If the assessment process generates data that can be properly used to design and monitor these reforms, this would be great; but even if it did not, the process itself that is behind the assessment will most likely have an added value on its own.

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