Examples of objective data and their use to combat corruption

A. Sources of objective data

These include:

(i) Registers of all political donations

(ii) Registers of personal assets held by or on behalf of politicians and senior public servants on taking and relinquishing office

(iii) Payrolls and personnel records

(iv) Financial accounts, prime financial records and detailed budgets

(v) Contracts, contractual amendments, procurement records, goods received notes

(vi) Financial evaluations

(vi) Official correspondence whether on paper or electronic media (both internal and external).

(vii) Training programmes delivered and instructions issued to staff

Various routine checks can be made between these data. Automatic checking can be undertaken using modern computer systems as a matter of routine, for instance, payrolls checked against personnel systems and establishment structures. These records are the basis of the work discussed in the next section.

B. Powers of Oversight and Enquiry

Oversight and enquiry responsibilities for administrative data should be set out clearly and allocated to specified officials, including:

(vi) Oversight of procurement activities

(vii) Market oversight for the prevention of anti-competitive behaviour

(viii) The inspection of records relevant to probity and financial management processes

(ix) Oversight of public accounts to establish their validity

(x) Review of major public investment decisions

(xi) Arrangements for the receipt of complaints of mal-administration and the examination of such complaints

(xii) Arrangements for the investigation into allegations of corruption and prosecution as necessary

The essential feature of these activities is that roles need to be clearly established and powers need to be invested in individuals if they are to perform important investigative work that will otherwise be resisted by those who are acting corruptly and those in the private sector who are not ordinarily answerable to government in a day to day capacity (eg authority to demand access to personal bank accounts). Such arrangements can be astonishingly deficient.

If these roles function correctly then spending decisions and contract awards can be checked against political donations; personnel records can validate payrolls to ensure that ghost workers have not been introduced; goods received and contract values checked against payments made to ensure that invoices are not overstated and where they are to examine linkages between relevant officials and suppliers; changes to favoured suppliers identified and reviewed when new officials and politicians assume office; and budgets checked against spending levels and the scale of disbursements made from the centre to local services to reveal the extent to which budget provision is being diverted from its intended purpose.

C. Cohesion and Parliamentary Engagement

Formal procedures should ensure that intelligence is shared across government by relevant officials with oversight responsibilities and close collaboration is maintained between the oversight functions on the developing nature of corruption.

Key oversight appointments should be made by parliament including oversight of final accounts, review of mal-administration complaints and investigation of corruption. Oversight office holders should report to parliament on the exercise of their responsibilities each year, adequate time being allocated for detailed consideration (perhaps at committee level with a concluding debate on the floor of the house) and reports to parliament and relevant parliamentary proceedings should be published on official websites.

Without proper arrangements for inter-agency collaboration, parliamentary scrutiny and public awareness then commitments to combat corruption can vanish into an administrative fog. This is not to say that parliaments themselves always adhere to the highest standards. They also require processes of accountability to help ensure their own integrity.

D. System development

The development processes of new systems should always have a key remit to combat corruption and the development board should have a senior responsible official to secure this objective and experts should be made available to support detailed design work.

New systems present a major opportunity to achieve many beneficial features to combat corruption including automatic data matching between systems and superior audit trails. Major renewal programmes can be defined with this in mind but more limited developments can incorporate features that can be useful and will form the basis of future incremental development.