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Episode 12: Corruption's Two-Way Street: How UK Bribery and Illicit Flows Drive Global Corruption | Conversation with Phil Mason, Anti-corruption policy advisor

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Hisham Allam

Hello, everyone. Welcome to DevelopmentAid Dialogues, I'm your host Hisham Allam. Today, we will explore the world of anti-corruption with a true pioneer in the field, Phil Mason. Phil has played a crucial role in shaping global anti-corruption efforts from the corridors of power in the U. K. to international conventions. He has been at the forefront of combating corruption in both developed and developing countries. We will explore the evaluation of anti-corruption strategies challenges that practitioners face and the innovative approaches that are redefining the right against corruption today. Let's jump right in and welcome our guest. Phil, how are you doing?

Phil Mason

Thank you very much indeed. Hisham thank you it is very nice of you to have me.

Hisham Allam

Phil, you've been a pioneer in the anti-corruption field with DFID since 2000, right?

Phil Mason

That's correct, yes.

Hisham Allam

Could you start by sharing how DFID first approached the issue of corruption and what did the initial focus was?

Phil Mason

It may be surprising for most listeners to know that most donors, never really approached, corruption until the late 1990s, even though we'd been in developing countries for many decades before that. Um, and there's a story to tell on that, and we'll touch some of those reasons as we go through. So, for us, and for me, it began when the Department for International Development was created in 1997, and the first head of that department, Claire Short, transformed the way she wanted us to look at international development, and she wanted DFID to think globally, and be concerned in regard to corruption, not just to criticize developing countries for being corrupt, but to actually see the role of the UK as a facilitator of corruption. And in particular, she had in mind the British companies that would go out abroad and bribe for contracts and



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at home, the British banks and the financial system that would become the repository of corrupt leaders' funds flowing into London and the city of London. And she was very concerned about that aspect of corruption.

I was tasked with devising DFID's very first anti-corruption strategy, and she very pointedly asked us to think about three things. One was to continue to try and help our partner countries in dealing with the corruption in those countries. But innovatively, she wanted us to address what she called the supply side of corruption.

And that was the bribery by our companies and the taking of illicit financial flows into our country. So that was the domestic side, the second prong of our strategy. And the third area was to work globally in the international system to make the international framework much more joined together when we began in 2000, there was literally no global international cooperation on international corruption issues.

So initially my focus was very much at home. I spent most of my first five years in my role, addressing the role of our home government departments where attitudes were let's say very permissive of company behavior. There was a sense that companies had to behave in the way they did when they went into foreign markets.

There was a sense of when in Rome do as the Romans do and there was no real sense that we could do anything differently. Different otherwise we'll just simply lose the contracts to other players and perhaps even more surprisingly, there was nobody in the UK government who saw that the taking of illicit finance from other countries couldn't actually see that was a problem. In fact, they saw it as a way disappointing, not just a problem. Well, 20 years ago, things have changed a bit and that was the rather bleak horizon that we were facing in DFID trying to change Whitehall around. The biggest effort we made to begin with was on the bribery legislation. Our bribery laws at that stage in 2000 dated from 1889, 1906 and 1916. So, there were 95 years old at that stage. There'd never been a prosecution for overseas bribery in all those years. And there were, very few worried minds in the treasury, for example, about how money laundering, worries were seeing it as a problem. So those were our initial focuses as Clare Short came in for to DFID in 1997.

Hisham Allam

How did this approach differ from the traditional development agencies at that time?

Phil Mason

Well, I think the two biggest changes that I saw, and it goes back to my opening comment about how donors had not dealt with corruption previously in the UK, for example, had been in many of our partner countries for 10, 20, 30, 40, 50 years on yet.

Somehow, we'd never really taken corruption as an issue. And I think that was to do with the way in which we managed and organized our projects. We were able to immunize ourselves from the local environment. If you went back to a typical development project, which was run in the 1970s and 1980s. It was pretty much staffed by UK nationals, seconded out there to run the project. There were the finance officers who kept control of the finances. Hardly anything went into the local system. And in that way, you can ring fence everything you do. And even if you're in a very, corrupt country, you can make sure that your aid project doesn't suffer from that same corruption.



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Now, Claire Short had a very different view about what our role in aid should be. She wanted to engage the partner country at the top table in her words. She wanted us to have an influence, for example, on the health system as a whole, Not just running a lot of small projects, substituting for the incapacity of a developing country in providing health services for x numbers of years and those of our listeners who were around at the time will remember the big move towards what was called budget aid, which was about putting our aid resources, not into individual projects, but into the national budget of those countries. But, of course, the moment you start to put external resources into a national system away from small projects that you can manage yourselves. You then have to worry about the national system. And that's where the corruption issues started to arise. And so, in a sense, the wish to have that bigger stake in the development journey created the need to worry about corruption anyway, even though Claire had come along with some even stronger reasons for wanting to worry about corruption.

And so, the differing approach of thinking around, the UK as a provider, as it were, or facilitator of corruption came out of this sense that we needed to lift ourselves out of small projects and into the national development dialogue that has changed, obviously, over the 20 years, we've moved much further backwards in the sense of budget aid no longer exists. In fact, a lot of donor money rarely goes through governments now because of the corruption problems. So that was the biggest main shift from minute projects into systemic, concern for development dialogue. The second big issue was dealing with the domestic agenda at home. I remained one of the only donors in our donor community to really be engaging with my domestic departments, for very many years. And I guess if you step back even further, the bigger picture was that we've actually started to address corruption, confronting corruption, rather than just ignoring it. It had been part of the wallpaper for so long, but now we're actually confronting it. And that was the journey that I was taking about to embark in in 2000.

Hisham Allam

Corruption is often viewed as a technical problem that can be solved through technical solutions?

Phil Mason

Very much so, and it's, unfortunately, it remains very much the donor perspective, I fear to say.

Hisham Allam

You have emphasized its political nature, could you elaborate on why it's crucial to view corruption as an intensely political phenomenon?

Phil Mason

If you look at, as I did, all donor strategies on anti-corruption that have been published over the last 20 years, they are all still predominantly technocratic. And by technocratic, what I mean is that their underlying assumption appears to be that they are not. The problem of corruption is a deficiency in the knowledge about how not to be corrupt, and hence it's amenable to assistance by donors like ourselves through training courses on anti-corruption practices. So, if we just train enough people to know how to spot corruption and address it, then somehow the problem will go away. And I sense that that capacity building approach, um, is to respond to corruption, makes this assumption that somehow when that



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knowledge is embedded in public officials, that somehow the behavior change will occur and the outcomes will be improved against corruption. And of course that hasn't happened. We've spent 20 years running training courses and given lots of certificates out and lots of exchange visits on how to do anti-corruption and yet to be honest, and we'll come on to this towards the end, nothing really has changed. And if anything, corruption has got worse. A typical example of that, that I saw many occasions would be on a topic like public procurement.

Hisham Allam

Could you give us an example of this?

Phil Mason

Yes, Pakistan was one example where I saw where the World Bank spent a lot of time in the early 2000s on reforming Pakistan's public procurement system. And the general kind of shape of that project would be to leave after the project, and after lots of training, a mountain of documentation that details exactly how to undertake every single step of a public procurement exercise to ensure that there's no corruption. So, there will be forms on how you run a tender, how you write an advert, how you assess a tender, how you let the tender, all of those sorts of processes. We could provide manuals for how to do that. And yet we often wondered then why corruption still happened in public procurement in those sorts of countries. What we failed to do was to understand the political context in which those officials are operating. They may have all the knowledge and all the processes at their fingertips, but the processes, the environment in which they're operating, still provided lots of incentives to be corrupt opportunities to be corrupt and very little sanctions from being corrupt when you got found out. And I think it's taken some time to realize that corruption goes much deeper than this sense of lack of process or lack of knowledge. In many countries, corruption is despite the word corruption, which implies a kind of deviation from a norm. Corruption is the system itself. It has grown to the point where the political elites rest on the management, their management of corrupt processes. They secure their stability through, corrupt measures. And further down the chain, minor officials are almost given license to operate because the laws are not there to, or the laws are not implemented to sanction it.

And we often see that public official, particularly, for example, police officers, you know, classic cases around the developing world of police officers right down to the junior ranks being asked to contribute up the chain, up the management chain for, for example, political finance funds for the ruling parties.

And so hence the roadblocks that you tend to see in developing countries charging small amounts to drivers for fake traffic offenses have often been proven to be a rare, fairly systematic method by the political elite to raise funds for their own interests. And so, without taking any account of those political factors, then all the training in the world, as has been proven, I fear over the last 20 years, all the training in the world about how to do anti-corruption just falls by the wayside. It's like water into sand, and it's fatal for any anti-corruption response, not to appreciate that these are intentionally political issues.



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Hisham Allam

Few weeks ago, when we were discussing this episode, you were disappointed from the efforts done by the donors for competing anti-corruption.

Phil Mason

Very much so, and I think what's, what's astonished me, and this is not just since I left DFID, I was making the same points throughout my career in DFID, clearly not very successfully, but, you know, agencies are intensely bureaucratic edifices. They operate in their own working procedures. And one of the points which disturbed me in a way was that we tend to approach the problem of corruption in this very technical way in exactly the same way as we approach any other development challenge. So, education or health or infrastructure or whatever the problem is. We have simply shoehorned corruption into the methods of working that we adopt for everything else and education, health, training and resourcing and kitting people out for those sorts of issues may be appropriate there.

But the failure to recognize this intense political pushback that often happens in anti-corruption, means that we have not succeeded as much in anti-corruption, as we have done in some of the other technical areas. And I think the problem is that we have tended to see the problem, and shaped the conceptualization of the problem into the ways in which our methods can respond to it.

So, for example, instead of inventing new ways of working that can reflect the political context, we kind of shoehorn the problem into the comfortable delivery patterns that we're used to providing. So, for example, we feel we're very good as donors at providing training courses. And so, surprise, surprise, one of the big responses for anti-corruption is to, run lots of training courses to try and train people on integrity and those sorts of issues.

And I think that is the biggest flaw that I have seen and continue to see in the donor response. So, we don't have a capacity and partly because I think donor agencies are straight jacketed by their own operating procedures. We can't take corruption out of the standard procedures that donor agencies have.

Hisham Allam

Quite enlightening. You work at DFID uniquely focused on supply side issues, including the responsibilities of developed countries in combating corruption. Can you explain why this focus is vital and how it has evolved over time?

Phil Mason

Yeah, so Claire short's perspective was that corruption is very much two-way street. We couldn't just as we had tended to see, and think about the problem. Can't just see it as a problem of the developing country and in the developing country, we as a major developed economy and financial center, helping to sustain some of those problems. When I first went to developing countries in my corruption brief, I had an immediate pushback from some of my interlocutors in my partner countries, and they would say.

When you stop sending your companies abroad and bribing for their contracts, and when you stop your British banks taking our leaders money. Then we can have a conversation about where the problem of corruption actually sits. And



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pleasure felt very strongly that we as DFID couldn't do our work in developing countries, particularly in messages on the importance of good governance, if they could turn back to us with such criticism, we had to recognize that we were part of the problem and hence the supply side aspect, which, as you said, was new to anybody, any donor, country, very few donors thought inwardly about these sorts of, impacts that the host governments were having. And initially it was my focus was on the attitudes of my other domestic departments, particularly my interior ministry, what we call in the UK, the home office on the bribery legislation, which they just didn't really see that there was a problem with, even though there'd never been a prosecution in 95 years. Their reaction was, well, this must make it a perfect deterrent. Clearly nobody's bribing overseas because there's never been a prosecution. Well, of course that wasn't entirely the case and as I hinted earlier, the Treasury's view on money laundering was, well, isn't this bringing business into the UK?

Isn't that a good thing? What's the problem? And so, DFID's engagement on the supply side was to try and broaden that perspective into the reputational and global footprint that the UK was having on many of these issues. And then setting up some specific mechanisms, which again, still remain, unique in amongst the donor aid funded community. But the critical aspect that we saw was that there was a very great reluctance to put domestic resources into an international focused activity. The moment we said that we were prepared to put aid funds, which again was a very unusual at that time. I mean things have changed in the last few years about using aid funds at home on other topics. But for that time, when we said we were prepared to use our aid funds to support some specific mechanisms to deal with this, we had an open door. And we made a lot of progress, quite quickly.

Hisham Allam

You raised some key points there. What role should developed countries play in fighting corruption within their own borders?

Phil Mason

The starting point as a developed country, we have to be self-aware of our own global footprint, and assess the impact, not just on our own narrow self-interest of our own national interest, for example, snatching as much of the income available for financial services that is available out there for funding coming into London, as opposed to going to New York or Dubai or elsewhere, but a sense of how much, you know, and what effect that has on the broader, global position. It was astonishing to us when we first did our number crunching, again for Minister Short. We discovered that in Nigeria, more money was coming out of Nigeria through corruption and illicit flows coming out of Nigeria.

Hisham Allam

And what is the source of this money? Mining?

Phil Mason

Well, no, this was the specific case that attracted our attention at the time was the Abacha scandal. So sunny Abacha and his sons in the late 1990s when we looked at the financing in around Nigeria for that period, we discovered that the entire donor community had put about a billion dollars' worth of international development assistance into Nigeria, and yet the



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Abacha regime had stolen 6 billion out of the other end of the bucket, as it were, and so set up a kind of scenario that we, across the globe, most likely, I mean, Nigeria wasn't unique in these sorts of problems. We just had a very solid case to look at the numbers. But if more money was coming out of developing countries than we as donors are putting in, we as donors were losing the plot as it were, and not focusing on some of this illicit finance, which was coming out of developing countries. We were actually losing ground in terms of the development journey.

And so that I think was one of the critical, kind of sea changes in our attitude that we had to look at what was happening to that money and that money was coming to London. It was coming to the overseas territories, the British Overseas Territories. It was coming to New York and other places.

And so, we as developed countries were playing quite a vital role in allowing all that to happen. And it was ludicrous from a DFID perspective for us to be plowing a billion dollars into a country like Nigeria. If six times that amount was coming out the other end through corrupt practices, which we ourselves were in a sense facilitating.

Hisham Allam

DFID established aid funded UK law enforcement units to investigate and recover stolen assets. How did this initiative come about and what impact has it done on anti-corruption efforts in developing countries?

Phil Mason

I'm very proud of the legacy that I left or my team was able to leave through these police units that we created. Claire Short asked us, how can we get UK law enforcement to be thinking more about looking at cases from developing countries and our initial soundings of the UK police were not encouraging. UK police have an awful lot of responsibilities to consider. Being domestically focused, their concerns were very much about meeting the concerns of local UK taxpayers who were not themselves concerned very much about the problems of money being lost in Nigeria or British companies winning contracts, in developing countries through bribery. The lack of interest, in law enforcement, and secondly, the very inefficient way in which, if a case should ever arise, they dealt with them very ineffectively. So, for example, in the UK, we have 43 different police units, comprising our national police force. So every county basically in the UK has a, has its own police force.

And the way in which a foreign bribery case would be dealt with before our police units were created would be for the allegation to be sent to the local police force in the county in which the headquarters of the company were residing. And so that could be anywhere in the country. So, the bribery could be occurring in any developing country.

But if the headquarters happened to be in Lincolnshire or Sussex or West Midland, it would go to that local constabulary and of course expecting a local police force to be able to deal with a complex international case where, the skills of forensic accounting or investigation or even ability to contact the other police force in those other countries were very limited, was a recipe for total inactivity.



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Hisham Allam

What about the offshore registries, British Virgin Islands, Cayman? Is it under the British crown?

Phil Mason

Well, our overseas territory is a very complicated system, I mean, UK law enforcement doesn't, doesn't, reach into the jurisdictions of, no, they're all separately, they're all separately constituted and which is part of the problem.

Hisham Allam

So became, tax havens because they are giving a lot of secrecy and privileges for people who are seeking tax avoidance, hiding money, making a very sophisticated networks of offshore companies.

Phil Mason

They are indeed, yes, and it remains one of the biggest challenges, I think, to the UK, which is responsible for their international relations as it were, and I argued very strongly inside Whitehall all my years that our responsibilities as leaders the metropolitan power on the impact of overseas territories having on the global community warranted us being able to do a lot more with those territories.

However, the constitutions of these territories and the unit inside the foreign office which runs the overseas territory relationships are very fixed in the view that their local constitutions give them complete autonomy on many of these issues, and therefore it's the responsibility of, for example, Kenya to liaise directly with Cayman and BVI on these, on any matters relating between the two, and London takes a kind of back step on all of that.

Now, that's a position that I've criticized and I've written comprehensively on some of the reasons why that situation has arisen. You're absolutely right, it remains a weak link in the, in the UK's international, reputational, framework.

Going back to the UK's law enforcement, which was even more kind of problematic and directly problematic for us, we established through use of aid funds, some police units, that would look specifically at British companies, bribing in developing countries and the UK financial system, taking developing countries, leaders' money, and they have been reasonably successful in terms of certainly raising the UK's profile on these sorts of areas. They remain unique. We're not aware of any other donors who have managed to do what we have done. And I think the influence has been quite unparalleled in terms of shifting the attitudes of quite a lot of other white hall departments. We've had had some signal successes those of you may remember the James Ibori case, and the confiscation of his assets. He was a state governor in from Nigeria. He stole a couple of hundred million dollars' worth and he fled Nigeria to Dubai for a couple of years, and the nature of the relationship between the UK and Nigeria was such that the Nigerian authorities recommended that we should extradite him back to London for him to stand trial for money laundering offences.

He had used some of his stolen money to buy mortgages on properties and that constitutes a money laundering offence in the UK as the money was tainted. And so, Mr. Ibori stood trial alongside some of his associates in London for offenses, which, in practice, were largely committed in Nigeria.



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The biggest offenses were in Nigeria, stealing all that money, but he stood trial, was convicted in London of these offenses, served a jail time. Unfortunately, we secured a confiscation order against his assets. That case is still going on. More than 10 years after his conviction. They're still trying to access that, recovered, those assets that remain contested by Mr. Abori's lawyers. It's been very slow to try and do that. And many of these cases tend to suffer because they need information and evidence from the developing country itself. Now, we happen to be in a very good position with Nigeria on James Ibori. Both sides recognize that this was a bad case to need to prosecute.

But in many other cases. That informant, that corporation is not forthcoming. And so, it does make a very difficult, situation. I think one of the other dimensions of the Boris case was that we also were able to prosecute his solicitor, the lawyer who was helping him, do the mortgage, the convincing and the buying of the properties and things.

And I think this raised the issue. At one of the earliest moments of the importance of professional enablers, which has increasingly come on to the agenda that those types of people, the accountants, the lawyers, the estate agents who help corrupt leaders process their money through, systems in London, for example, are equally culpable. And in our case, we managed to get that solicitor prosecuted and jailed as well. So again, that's, opened up the horizons for what's possible to do when you're thinking around asset recovery.

Hisham Allam

Thank you, for the explanation. You were part of the negotiations for the UN Convention Against Corruption in 2003. What were the key hurdles during these negotiations and how did the final agreement shape global anti-corruption policies?

Phil Mason

Yeah, UNCAC was possibly the core change in the global framework that we were wanting, to see and it came very early in our, in our period. It was a surprisingly uncontentious negotiations and I think the mood at the time was it captured the kind of gestalt, if you like, of the global community that something had to be done on corruption. There's a lot of pressure from civil society, particularly transparency international to do something. And so, the negotiations themselves were very, very quick. There were very little, contested issues, the developing country, block their own. Their main concern was to make sure that we had provisions on asset recovery. Primary concern was to make sure that there was a process for returning stolen assets, which had been kind of hedged into the likes of our jurisdictions and developed countries wanted a much stronger, stance on prevention, activities in the first place to try and prevent, the corruption from happening and to certainly criminalize and sanction it when it was, discovered.

And both of these went through relatively smoothly. It was said to me that the politics of UNCAC only really came afterwards. So, by contrast, it took just two years to negotiate the text of the convention. It took a further five years to agree the review mechanism. And I think the review mechanism started to show up some of the deep entrenched differences between particularly the developed community and the developing community on the problem of corruption.

The G77, the developing country block, were very anxious about making sure that the review process should not produce comparisons between countries. They were very nervous about the prospect of creating rankings of which countries were doing better than others, very concerned about the intrusion into national sovereignties.



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They wanted to keep the whole process very strictly government to government, and not involving any other non-governmental processes. So that was a very strict, narrow perspective that we had to deal with. And the way in which we ended up, we did end up with a milestone achievement.

It's the UN's first peer review process. First time that they've, adopted a peer review mechanism, but it has tended to be extremely technical. So, it looks largely at whether the formal laws exist, whether the bodies that are required are in place, not whether those bodies are actually doing anything effectively, or whether the laws are actually being applied.

And that's a critical, aspect of the review mechanism at this stage. And there's absolutely no follow up discussion. So, unlike other review mechanisms, where the reports which are produced are then discussed in a plenary session, and the country is challenged and questioned on the findings, there's absolutely no follow up on, UNCAC reports, they're simply, posted on the UNCAC website, they're often very lengthy, three, four hundred pages, are not unusual, and focused very much on, the technical detail of whether one particular provision in the law of one country adequately complies with what's required under the convention.

And indeed, it feels to me very much remains a scandal that not even the full reports are required to be published. About half the countries refuse to publish the full reports, so they publish just an executive summary, about a 10, 20-page summary of the report, which is not really helpful given that one of the ostensible reasons for having these very extensive reviews is to try and help countries understand where their gaps are and then allowing developing agencies to be able to plan technical assistance to repair those gaps. And so, the biggest problem in UNCAP has been to essentially hold members to account. That's been the hardest thing to do.

Hisham Allam

I'm curious to ask you about your involvement in niche areas like money laundering, financial intelligence and mutual legal assistance. How do these areas intersect with development work?

Phil Mason

Yeah, we found that this was very important in the sense that these are areas, particularly money laundering, risk assessments on financial issues, financial flows across borders. All of these are very new to development practitioners. I mean, if you think about how we as donors build up our development processes, they tend to be bilateral. So, you have a country program in a developing country. Anything that goes outside the borders tend not to be the concern of the donors program. Well, when I was reviewing an anti-corruption commission in a small Asian country, they said to me that once they knew that money had left. country, it had gone to one of the offshore centers in their region. They gave up. They said, there's no way that we know how to engage with the regional offshore center to be able to even enquire about where this money has gone after it's gone through you.

And they had no capacity to collaborate on trying to recover that money to trace it on and to get it returned. And I think helping those sorts of places to understand how to, for example, write, letters of mutual legal assistance to get those offshore centers to collaborate. That's been one of the biggest step changes that I think we've been able to make.



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We in DFID supported the creation of the International Center for Asset Recovery at the Basel Institute in Switzerland, which specializes in helping countries to engage with other jurisdictions. That they hadn't done that before because it was a very niche area and certainly donors who are more used to thinking about health and development, health issues and education issues and those sorts of things never really got involved in law enforcement and those sorts of areas.

So, I think it has had impact in the sense that nowadays, there was a lot more international engagement going on, and certainly compared with 20 years ago, there are many, many more cases of assets being recovered from particularly developed countries and being returned to developing countries for productive use.

Hisham Allam

Phil, according to what you have said, how should development agencies today integrate anti-corruption into their broader development agendas and what challenges might they face in doing so?

Phil Mason

One of the problems I think is that there's an issue within agencies and then I think there's an issue between agencies and other government departments. Internally, I think, anti-corruption has too often been seen simply as a governance issue, advisors' problem. Um, and I think we need to integrate it much more into the other sectoral approaches. So, education and health and infrastructure projects need to have corruption lens much more centrally than they do at the moment.

There's a tendency for them to simply think of corruption as, their corrupt governance partners the government's advisers issue to deal with and that's difficult for an agency because these sectors do tend to be quite rigid as professional carders. They tend to form very strong identities within the agency, and they're often competing for resources.

So, getting that cross-cutting approach on anti-corruption is, I think, one of the biggest challenges. But we do need, to get anti-corruption out of the governance box. I think more generally, if you take a step back, between agencies, the development agencies and other government departments, corruption is generally tend to be seen as the development agency's problem and not the problem, for example, of the foreign office or the trade ministry or other types of departments, and we argued inside Whitehall in the years before I left that we needed a much more all of government approach, which could bring some of the other levers that our government has to play on corruption and not just see it as a development agency problem.

So, for example, diplomatic corruption. Pressure and diplomatic influencing can play quite a vital role at the top level. And I think those are some of the issues that we, as development agencies need to think a lot more about.



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Hisham Allam

Speaking about these efforts and tools, what innovations in anti-corruption efforts have you seen over the past two decades that have had significant impact and what do you see the most promise for the future?

Phil Mason

The biggest shift that I saw is the awareness that instead of trying to make bad people good through laws or training or integrity and those sorts of issues, what we need to be doing and have been trying to do is to try and simply reduce the scope for them being bad and that means that some of the ways of reducing the room for maneuver have been the biggest innovations that I've seen. So, transparency measures, for example, things like asset declarations, open procurement, e-governance, restricting the scope for misbehavior, I think, raises the risk of being discovered and I think those types of measures have been much more effective than simply trying to prosecute your way out of corruption.

My policemen always used to say to us that we would never prosecute our way out of a problem. We need to try and find ways in which people don't do it in the first place. So those transparency measures, I think, have become very important alongside that big data, the ability to manage lots of lots of data on, for example, public reporting, enabling you to create little heat maps of where corruption actually exists in the system.

That's important because it creates a much bigger picture, but I think it's important for both of those, both transparency and big data that there are actually sanctions at the end. There are consequences when information reveals corruption having taken place. We were all very impressed I think years gone by when the Indian initiative of I paid a bribe was created, but that was quite cathartic in the sense that allowed people to report corruption, but there was no follow up. And I think the important aspects of these processes is there has to be an effective follow up that actually then ends up restricting the scope for misbehavior. Law enforcement, I know, are looking for IT enabled ways in which they can explore these complex financial connections and we were witnessing even, 10 years ago, the capacity of some of the analytical tools now that can create maps of interconnections between individuals, addresses, flows, banking in minutes, rather than hours and days that it used to take them to do that on paper. So, I think those are the kind of innovations that are really quite exciting.

Hisham Allam

My last question, what key lessons have you learned from your career, fighting anti-corruption that affected your personal life?

Phil Mason

Um, that's an interesting one, I think, never to give up. There's very little evidence and very few examples of effective anti-corruption to be seen. I think that is one of the problems. The lessons that I took from my 20 years was that using the same methods for remedying development issues in health and education, for example, are not adequate for corruption. The system is one that is very good at fighting back. So, our partner government, is part of the problem, and I think that's a conundrum for all agencies. They are in a relationship across the development space on working in harmony with the government and yet in regard to corruption, I think we need to rethink how we engage with governments who are themselves core to some of the corruption issues that are in those countries. I think that's one big lesson. Secondly, that



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follows from that, I'm disappointed that we haven't really changed our way of working to confront that. As I said earlier, we tend to frame the problem to suit the way we work, rather than the other way around. Thirdly, we still impose upon ourselves a lot of constraints in design of our programs.

So, we still tend to organize our work in 3-to-5-year projects. We still try and impose a rigid forward looking log frame on disciplines, expecting a very linear process of continual growth and advancement and progress. It's very difficult for a project to accept a backward step and yet all of those are the kind of classical aspects of corruption.

It takes a very, very long time, decades, if not a generation to deal with some of these things. And our donor processes are simply not equipped. And I think getting the anti-corruption approach out of that straight jacket, I think it's one of the critical things that we need to be thinking about, but I don't see an easy route to achieving that.

Hisham Allam

Phil, it has been an absolute privilege having you on this podcast today. Your journey through the field of anti-corruption work, both with DFID and on the global stage, is a real inspiration. For those of you turning on, we hope this conversation has shed light on the multifaceted nature of corruption and the innovative strategies needed to address it. If you found this episode insightful, stay with us for more engaging discussions with leading experts in the field. Until next time, I'm Hisham Allam signing off, and this has been DevelopmentAid Dialogues. Stay tuned for more conversations on innovation, sustainability, and the future of development. Goodbye.