



HANDBOOK OF GOOD PRACTICES

PREVENTING CORRUPTION IN HUMANITARIAN OPERATIONS

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PREFACE

Transparency International (TI) has long held that the most damaging impact of corruption is the diversion of basic resources from poor people. Corruption in humanitarian aid is the most egregious form of this, as it deprives the most vulnerable poor people, the victims of natural disasters and civil conflicts, of essential life-saving resources. Humanitarian assistance aims to save lives and alleviate the suffering of people in times of crisis. Yet these noble ambitions do not immunise emergency responses from corrupt abuse. There were numerous examples of corruption during the massive Asian tsunami humanitarian response, and examples of substantial diversion of aid resources have been reported recently in Afghanistan, Iraq, Liberia and Somalia.

In response to this concern, TI launched a programme in 2005 to diagnose corruption risks specific to humanitarian operations and to develop a set of good practices aimed at mitigating those risks. The first, diagnostic phase culminated in the publication of a report on *Mapping the Risks of Corruption in Humanitarian Action*, in 2006.

The second or research phase was carried out by a joint team from the Feinstein International Center (FIC) of Tufts University, the Humanitarian Policy Group (HPG) of the Overseas Development Institute, and TI. The objective of this research, carried out during 2007-08 in partnership with seven of the leading international non-governmental humanitarian organisations, was to develop the evidence base for this handbook by interviewing agency managers and staff in headquarters and field offices. The research conclusions and recommendations were presented in *Preventing Corruption in Humanitarian Assistance: Final Research Report*, published in 2008.

In addition, TI commissioned HPG to carry out two case studies of aid recipient perceptions of corruption, to complement the above-mentioned research, also published in 2008. TI staff also researched other sources of good practice in combating corruption, from the humanitarian community as well as from other sectors.

We hope that this handbook will offer guidance and support to the many people in the humanitarian sector who devote their lives to alleviating the suffering of the most vulnerable people. The handbook is dedicated to their work, to their resilience and courage to support those who are most in need: the victims of natural disasters and civil conflict.

Christiaan Poortman
Director, Global Programmes
Transparency International



MANAGEMENT LEADERSHIP

WHISTLE-BLOWING MECHANISMS FOR STAFF

A. Role against corruption

Whistle-blowing mechanisms enable and encourage staff to speak out against corruption, and are a public demonstration of the will to fight it, alongside beneficiary **complaints mechanisms**. A confidential and independent mechanism (whether internal or external) helps create an environment intolerant of corruption, in which staff feel safe to blow the whistle without fear of reprisal. Rather than being considered disloyal to colleagues, whistle-blowers should be regarded as being loyal to your organisation and its values. As well as empowering staff, whistle-blowing mechanisms increase accountability and allow valuable programme learning about corruption risks. Whistle-blowing channels can also be used for providing advice to staff and receiving suggestions on addressing suspected corruption.

B. Implementation measures

- **Make it a staff duty to blow the whistle against corruption**
Oblige staff to report suspected violations of your **code of conduct**, and give them the right to do so in confidence and safety. Be clear that your organisation also has a duty – to investigate impartially and protect from reprisals staff who report in good faith. Stay aware of the whistle-blower's morale: confidentiality is essential and ostracism by colleagues can be almost as damaging as physical threats. Try to reward genuine whistle-blowers (e.g. in performance appraisals) – they can too easily end up suffering more than those they are reporting on. If whistle-blowers end up leaving the organisation, it may be a sign that your system has some weaknesses.
- **Ensure all staff understand the entire process**
Design a comprehensive rollout, including staff **training**, to make sure your whistle-blowing mechanism is well-known not just at your headquarters but at field level. Be explicit about who staff report to, where to go with questions, what can and can't be reported (not general grievances against colleagues), who is responsible for investigations, and the investigation process. Reassure staff that reports will be confidential to the greatest extent possible while permitting an adequate investigation.
- **Give staff user-friendly ways to blow the whistle**
Staff should be able to report in familiar, culturally appropriate ways: overseas hotlines may intimidate many local agency staff, so provide a choice, e.g. via the internet, telephone or in writing to an independent external organisation, or internally to a supervisor, HR officer or specially trained 'focal point' member of staff.
- **Ensure that investigations revealing corruption result in action**
Investigations should result in clear decisions made via consistent principles, and must lead to appropriate **disciplinary action** against perpetrators if your whistle-blowing mechanism is to have credibility.

You'll need

- Resources to roll out the whistle-blowing mechanism throughout your organisation, and to review its comprehension and acceptance by staff.
- An organisation-wide network of qualified, impartial investigating staff.

Challenges

- Fear of reprisals. Work hard to earn staff trust – both in the safety of the whistle-blowing mechanism, and that using it really can result in change.
- The need to distinguish between valid and invalid complaints, and to deal with malicious or frivolous reports (which should be subject to discipline). Dealing with vindictive anonymous letters or reports requires especially careful and discreet inquiry into their context and circumstances.

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