

Using Sector-based approaches in high-corruption circumstances

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The World Bank held its 'Partnerships for Anti-corruption conference' in Washington DC on April 8-9, 2025, with some 400 worldwide anti-corruption practitioners participating. The third Plenary session was on the topic of tackling corruption in circumstances of State Capture, moderated by Dr Francesca Recanatini of the World Bank. There were four panellists - Dr Dani Kaufmann on the evolution of the concept of state capture and presenting his new State Capture Index, Prof Jodi Vittori on how state capture operates and the role that civil society can have in responding to a rise in state capture, Luis-Felipe Lopez-Calva on the impact of State Capture on progress against poverty, and Dr. Mark Pyman on how to use CurbingCorruption's 'Sector-based approach' in both normal and State Capture environments.

Clearly, from within a single organisation or a sector, you cannot meaningfully tackle state-wide capture from. *"In captured countries, no sector is safe from political interference"* to quote Professor David-Barrett in a recent article on State Capture¹. If, on the other hand, you are working at national level - pan-sector so to speak - there are two different ways you can use the sector approach. The first is to prioritise certain sectors where you have reason to believe that you can make some progress despite the political context. This is now becoming popular in national anti-corruption action plans². The second way is more institution-focused, covering all sectors, in which you set up a system at the top of government that requires anti-corruption plans to be established in every Ministry/Authority/Sector. You require follow up, quarterly monitoring, annual reviews of progress. Both can be used in conditions of high state Capture, though, in the case of single sector action with modest objectives only - to keep the sectors performing decently, to constrain the corruption, to keep the faith of your staff that good strategy will one day prevail again, to build capacity for a change in circumstances, to keep delivering services to citizens.

Why Sectors? Because sectors are an excellent, and powerful, locus for reform. Those working within their sector understand the issues, the professional language, the norms of the sector, the political specificities, the drivers of corruption issues. The professionals in the sector are competent, they understand the art of the possible even in difficult political circumstances. AND YET they are under-exploited and under-developed as a resource for reducing corruption.

You help practitioners facing state capture challenges by systematically strengthening the capacities, the competences, the responsibilities and the resourcefulness of the professionals in each sector.

I say this to you with conviction. Why? Because I have first-hand experience from two decades in very different sectors and a third decade in a pan-sector role. First, oil and gas - ten years as the Chief Financial Officer for Shell in high state capture regions like West Africa and China. Second, defence and security - leading Transparency International's global Defence programme over ten years, working on Defence and military reform in high-capture

countries. My compatriots – oil executives, military officers, Defence Ministry officials – had professional competence, pride in their professions, and a considerable openness to taking on anticorruption actions once they felt they understood it. BUT a lack of competence, a lack of ownership, their inevitable complicity in much of the corruption, also meant that they caved in too quickly in the face of corruption challenges. Third, ten years as an independent expert, including as a Commissioner in Afghanistan, then working in partnership with Professor Paul Heywood to develop the logic of a sector-based approach across the full range of other sectors, from Agriculture to Telecommunications. Our fundamental conclusion was that these professionals were an under-exploited resource that can – rather easily - be much more effective in leading change.

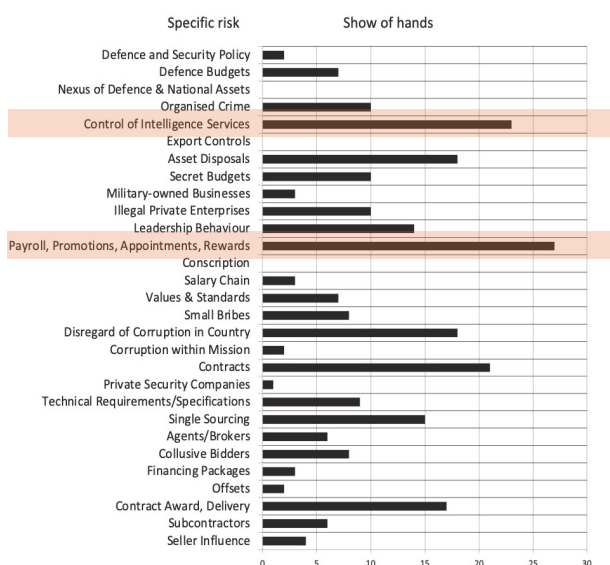
Single-Sector example - Defence

I hear you ask, 'But which sectors should we strengthen'? The answer is simple – your own! If you are the health minister, you work on health. If you are a water engineer, you work on water management. Take this example from the Botswana military³. Top generals and Ministry officials together reviewed the corruption issues in their sector – see the list of the 29 issues in the slide here - and voted by a show of hands on which of these were the most serious. The top two were corruption in personnel matters and corrupt control of the military intelligence services.

Your sector – Start with common understanding Example: Botswana, Defence²

- Sector professionals have different understandings of 'corruption' in their sector
- Peer discussion of a one-page list of the sector issues is transformative
- Peer voting to identify core issues is similarly powerful. Use closed voting in sensitive or hierarchical settings

BOTSWANA – PEER VOTING ON DEFENCE CORRUPTION RISKS



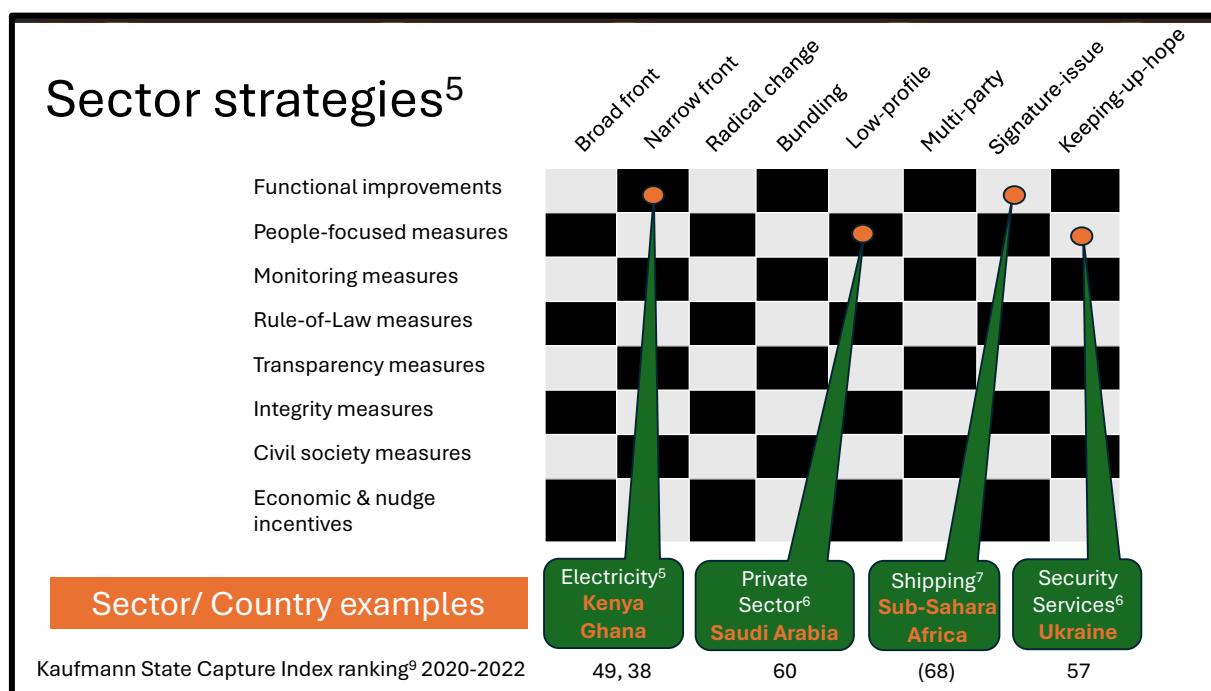
Botswana Defence is an example where the level of State Capture is low: the Kaufmann State Capture Index (KSCI) score is 32¹⁰, comparable with Poland.

To take an example at the other end of the spectrum, consider Ukraine³, in the period 2008-2013. This was the worst period of President Yanukovich, before the Maidan uprising in 2013: the KSCI score was 79.2, comparable with DRC today. I and my TI defence team were working with the Security Services and the Defence Ministry. They were entirely un-reformed and there was extensive political interference. BUT the second-level security and defense leaders we worked with were both proud and smart: they had a highly developed sense of what reforms they could implement without making their political masters

nervous, or get them fired, or put them in deeper danger. Their chosen tool was 'training', because training is very low-profile and under-valued.

Between TI and the Defence Ministry's own training academy we trained over 1000 Colonels in a 5-day course on defence anti-corruption. We also took 15 senior officers and prosecutors for intensive 3-month secondments to TI. The feedback from the participants was always the same. "We welcome this deeper knowledge, we cannot use it now, but this means we can take fast action if the political environment changes". And the circumstances indeed changed dramatically for the better in 2014.

When you are developing strategies within any one sector, Professor Heywood and I in our book 'Sector-based actions against corruption' propose nine strategy options, ranging from action on a 'broad front' through to 'keeping-up-hope'⁴.



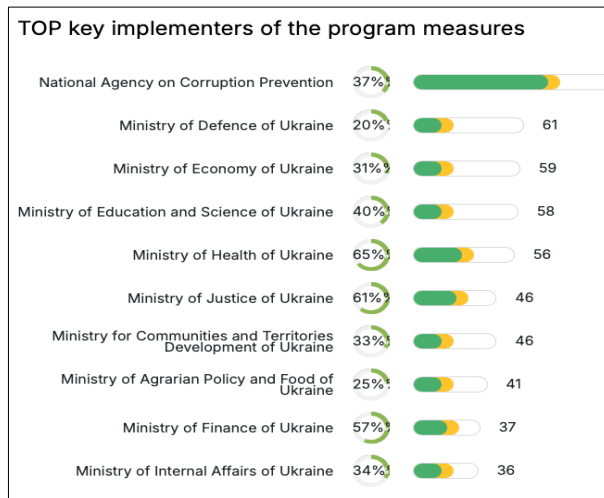
You will not be surprised to hear that there are few successful 'Broad front' strategies in high state capture countries. Progress is more likely and more assured with the more focused strategies, whether on a narrow front, deliberately low profile, or focused on just a signature issue^{5,6,7}.

Pan-Sector example - Ukraine

Ukraine is using a pan-sector corruption-prevention approach at the moment⁸. Their National Agency on Corruption Prevention (NACP), the lead entity at national level, defines 167 sectors, 144 of which have active programmes. In the first half of this figure slide you can see their quarterly reporting of progress, showing the Ministries of Defence, Economy, Science and Health having completed the most actions in the most recent quarter. In the second half of the figure, you see a separate Index that Ukraine's NACP has developed for comparing the scale of corruption in each sector⁹. Here are the index results for 2024, showing the 18 worst sectors. The figure shows that law enforcement agencies are in the worst position, followed by Customs, the Economic Control Dept and Land Management.

All sectors - Set up a national control/monitoring system

Example: Ukraine (144 reporting entities)³



Rank	Ukraine Sector Corruption Index ⁴	Index 2024
1	Law enforcement agencies	7.18
2	Customs (for business entities)	6.99
3	Control and supervision of economic activity	6.86
4	Land relations, Land management	6.76
5	Border control and crossing the state border	6.58
6	State and municipal medicine	6.51
7	Patrol police activity	6.28
8	Military sphere	6.27
9	Higher education institutions	6.25
10	Forestry	6.15
11	Management of state-owned enterprises	6.13
12	Ministry of Internal Affairs (service centres)	6.01
13	Judicial system	6.00
14	Customs (for individuals)	5.96
15	Management of communal property	5.78
16	Connection and maintenance of utilities	5.61
17	Public procurement for roads	5.69

Kaufmann's State Capture Index¹⁰ shows the progress that Ukraine has been making, from the score of 79.2 out of 100 in the Yanukovich period through to 57.4 in 2020-22. The OECD too has recently praised Ukraine's extensive anti-corruption efforts¹¹.

To finish. There are many brave actors fighting corruption - politicians, judges, journalists, civil society, AC authorities, development banks and others. But if you want a more permanent, institutional solution, whatever the level of State Capture, you need to be building anti-corruption capability into the DNA of each sector and of each sector professional. We recommend that you take two actions now: First, download our book from the publisher - it is Open Access, free – and require all your staff to read it. Second, examine in detail what Ukraine has been achieving these last five years

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