



Praxis Note No. 66

MEKANIC:
Making sense of progress in
the defence and security
sector – implementing
lessons learned

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This paper describes the monitoring, evaluation, and most importantly learning methodology that Transparency International UK has developed for its defence and security programme, giving examples of the impact it has had.

Introduction

Transparency International UK's Defence and Security Programme (TI-DSP) is a worldwide programme dedicated to reducing corruption in the defence and security sectors. Described by UK Department for International Development (DFID) experts as "trying to penetrate the impenetrable", our work consists of seeking out fruitful entry points through which we can make progress with ministries of defence, armed forces, security forces and defence companies. We build on these entry points to create substantial and sustainable progress. Evaluation has thus consisted more of making sense of whether an entry point is or could be positive, than in formal reviews of well-defined projects.

Why focus on defence and security? For three strong reasons:

- Defence and security forces are often powerful in a nation and that power is easily misused, to the detriment of development, prosperity, democracy and poverty reduction.
- The defence sector is often extremely wasteful, with huge deals sometimes made solely as a means of self-enrichment or political enrichment, often through bribery.
- Defence and security is hugely under-examined, sometimes because it is dangerous to scrutinise defence and security, sometimes because the sector manages to stay hidden behind a

convenient wall of secrecy. NGOs and civil society organisations are often reluctant to challenge a technically complex and unappealing sector.

Our objective is simple: to enable change in secretive, repressive, and poorly structured defence and security sectors, so that they are no longer amongst the principal obstacles to development and to improvement in the lives of the poor and marginalised.

Since 2011, we have been implementing a Programme Partnership Arrangement, a type of core funding agreement with the Conflict, Humanitarian and Security Department at DFID. The Programme Partnership Arrangement style of funding is important to us as it facilitates our ability to innovate by allowing us to explore many possible entry points without knowing whether they would be fruitful. Some quickly turned out to be central to reducing corruption risks in defence and security; others turned out to be dead ends.

Integral to making inroads in this sector is our mechanism for evaluating successful and unsuccessful interventions.

We are having some success: an independent evaluation of our programme concluded in October 2012 that "the programme is highly innovative and, through its unrivalled expertise, is making ground-breaking advances in a sensitive and critically important sector".

Examples of innovation include:

- Focusing on Afghanistan because of a plea from a senior Afghan military officer for corruption-prevention training, despite the lack of an initial official sponsor to facilitate our work at the early stages. From this entry point, we have hugely built up our expertise in corruption issues in conflict zones, which in turn has made us more

effective in other countries – e.g. Lebanon and Honduras – than we otherwise could have hoped to be. Participants in MEKANIC meetings also proposed that we use the experience to address another entry point: changing military doctrine, which is how military forces learn. This is proving fruitful in several countries.

- Developing the **Government Defence Anti-Corruption Index (GI)** to monitor and compare integrity levels in defence and security ministries and armed forces across the world. As a result of this new project, TI-DSP is having an impact on defence corruption with an increased number of governments and civil society organisations in a wide range of countries around the world. Development agencies, including regional and country offices, as well as government defence establishments and companies that supply the former have acknowledged this index as a highly innovative and important tool.
- Piloting and successfully launching the **Defence Companies Anti-Corruption Index (CI)** introduced the work of TI-DSP to many more companies. Before developing this index, we had direct contact with approximately 30 companies. Since developing it, our expectations have become well known to 129 companies and 25 of them have notified us of changes to their anti-corruption systems based on their engagement with us. This is excellent leverage: the cost would have been unacceptably high to make an inroad into each of these companies directly.

What is MEKANIC?

MEKANIC is the process that we have developed to maximise the learning from

our programmes and to make sense of how our programme is impacting corruption in the defence and security sectors worldwide. MEKANIC is not limited to areas financed through our core funding but analyses our programme as a whole. When we started to look beyond traditional monitoring and evaluation and started focusing on learning, we brainstormed with various contacts and experts within and outside of Transparency International to identify which elements of monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL) could be useful for us. These elements now form the basis of MEKANIC.

MEKANIC stands for:

Monitoring
Evaluation and sense-making
Knowledge gathering and dissemination
Affirmation
Networks and their effectiveness
Influencing
Changing behaviour

The heart of the process is an all-day learning meeting every three months. It usually involves 10-15 people, including both TI-DSP staff and our senior advisers, and external people who have deep knowledge of the sectors from widely different perspectives. They can be defence ministry officials, defence ministers, defence company officials, defence journalists, academics and member of other Transparency International chapters worldwide. The meeting is an intensive review of a selection of projects, interventions and analyses of the defence and security sectors.

We wanted to open ourselves up for constructive external criticism from the beginning, not only from within our programme and the Transparency

International movement, but also from other experts in our specific sector to discuss sector-wide progress and challenges freely. This has been met with great interest from external experts, many of whom value a day when they can take a step back and focus on thinking strategically about how we can all learn from the current state of the sector.

The structure to the meeting is set by the headings of the MEKANIC acronym:

Monitoring

Within monitoring, we review our performance indicators and our monitoring and evaluation obligations to donors. We currently track 25 indicators quarterly, which cover impact, outcomes, and output measures. We usually discuss three to six of these in detail in the meeting, reviewing particularly with the external participants what is happening in the sector that could be impacting these metrics. For example, one of the indicators is “the number of nations that have instituted significant defence/security anti-corruption plans in the last three months”. This can initiate an active discussion of which countries are doing what and whether their actions constitute progress.

We also review the statistics regarding our website, Twitter and Facebook traffic during the quarter, including the downloading of reports and publications.

Evaluation and sense-making

We have three types of evaluation and sense-making discussions. First, we evaluate the impact of two to three of our current activities at each MEKANIC meeting. These are formal evaluations, such as the impact of our series of training courses in Afghanistan, based on detailed one-to-one interviews.

Second, and more commonly, we try to make sense of what we think is the current or potential impact of a project, a campaign or a tool, based on the expertise of the participants round the table.

Third, we discuss current topics relating to corruption in defence and security, and try to identify what other interventions or research would best advance anti-corruption activities in the sector. These discussions lead to many new ideas of how we might have more impact. We then go on to discuss one or two in more detail that we then pursue.

Knowledge gathering and dissemination

We systematically gather and disseminate knowledge to inform our learning. We keep meticulous and detailed meeting notes of every external meeting or event and disseminate them across the wider team. The totality of these notes for the quarter are re-reviewed before the MEKANIC meeting; key learning points, both of what we have learnt and of how we have learnt it, are presented and discussed at the meeting.

We dedicate part of the MEKANIC meeting to discussing more generally what all participants think we have learnt about defence and security anti-corruption, how we have learnt it, and what to do with that learning. Learning notes are prepared and shared with participants beforehand. We also review what we have done to disseminate our knowledge in the last quarter.

Affirmation

Affirmation is an activity that we have come to reluctantly. When we discussed evaluation with INTRAC at the time that we developed MEKANIC, they

commented that the best form for feedback was often to be found in comments and opinions of external stakeholders and participants, rather than in formal reports. We now collate comments and feedback in a series of 'scrapbooks' which feature quotes, photos, etc. for each of our work streams. Every six to nine months, we identify the key messages and themes arising from the totality of the scrapbooks. We also ask the external MEKANIC attendees for their feedback on what TI-DSP has achieved and what they pick up in their constituencies.

Networks and their effectiveness

Building effective networks is one of the areas where we are currently trying to do better. We have built eight to 10 networks in different communities, from defence companies to government defence establishments and civil society organisations. However, we have yet to find the ideal system for understanding their growth or impact.

We previously used a 'partnership scale' that allowed us to take stock of who we were working with and what impact these partnerships were having on the programme, but we have discontinued this as it was not proving to add value. This was partly because it was too blunt a measure – it gave no sense of the quality of the partnership – but also because we are particularly interested in those networks that we do not control, i.e. where our influence is spreading without us directing it or even being aware of it.

Influencing

We devote a substantial part of the MEKANIC meeting to discussing how we think we are having influence and how we can leverage or increase it.

Changing behaviour

Understanding how we change behaviour is central to sense-making. We have developed our theory of change of how we think we create impact in each area where we work (governments, military, police, companies, peacekeeping, etc.) and we use this as a basis to review progress. We revisit our theory of change periodically and are currently updating its evidence base.

Examples of effect

We are now on our eleventh MEKANIC meeting. Some of them have led to major insights, others just to multiple smaller ones. Some of the more significant are the following:

Anti-corruption lessons learnt from Afghanistan and how they might be implemented in future stabilisation operations. It was pointed out to us at one MEKANIC meeting that nobody had ever thoroughly examined why corruption in Afghanistan, since the intervention in 2001, was ignored initially and only received attention much too late as a 'mission-critical' issue. External MEKANIC participants highlighted the value any such experience could have if they were to be implemented in future stabilisation operations. As a direct result, we implemented a research project to examine this question, based on in-depth interviews with 70 international and Afghan senior stakeholders. Together with two recent visits to Afghanistan to assess the International Security Assistance Forces (ISAF) and other anti-corruption progress, this research is directly informing our post-2014 engagement with Afghanistan and with the nations funding the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF).

Police anti-corruption and civil society oversight. While our programme originally focused mostly on defence (the armed forces, defence companies, ministries of defence, and so on), one MEKANIC discussion inspired us to take a closer look at the police. Despite being very different in developed countries, police and military forces have a lot of factors in common in developing countries. As a result, we followed up in several different ways: producing a research report on police corruption and civil society oversight; surveying more than 40 national chapters of Transparency International as to their priorities, thoughts and concerns around engagement with the police; gathering a small number of police experts including former senior officers and civil society leaders; and developing the methodology for a possible police index similar to our Government Defence Anti-Corruption Index.

We were initially reluctant to expand our scope from defence to also include the police, but MEKANIC helped us to overcome that reluctance through hearing strong arguments from within our programme and from external experts.

Using ‘implementing partners’ and magnifying the impact of our work through other autonomous organisations and actors. At another MEKANIC meeting, we realised the importance of ‘implementing partners’. The discussion included Transparency International national chapters but very much focused on external organisations that pick up our work without us encouraging them or being initially aware, and the magnifying impact this has for our work.

One case in point triggering this realisation was an invitation we received to a high-level dialogue and strategic brainstorming

session on the governance of African armed forces, jointly organised by the Institute for Security Studies Africa (ISS), the Africa Governance Institute (AGI), and the Open Society Initiative for West Africa (OSIWA). These organisations know us well and have realised the importance of addressing corruption in defence and security, but the trigger for this event was the realisation by the African Union and African militaries that corruption was a key driver for coup d’états in many of their countries.

Other examples, all well captured in our scrapbook, include our work being picked up by the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), the Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO) and government establishments. In addition, defence companies have directly implemented recommendations based on our indices, at times without us being aware of this initially.

‘Bite-sized’ publications and attracting interest beyond a technical/sophisticated focus. The strong importance of including media into the MEKANIC process has been outlined above. One specific discussion involving a former BBC journalist is a particularly good example. It helped us to constructively pick up feedback on how to make our reports more readily accessible for those with limited time to study the full report, beyond the sector-specific technical detail and reports of usually more than 50 pages. The MEKANIC idea, which has since been implemented, was that we should have bite-sized reports as well – shorter publications based around the executive summaries, both in print and online.

Simultaneously tackling the supply and demand side of corruption in defence and security. Another recent MEKANIC

idea has been to take the seven most difficult questions for companies to answer in our Defence Companies Anti-Corruption Index (CI) and turn them into a bidding template for defence contracts. This bidding template could then be used by governments (e.g. ministries of defence) requiring companies to ask these questions of themselves when they bid for contracts. This has been jointly suggested by external MEKANIC participants from both governments and the private sector as a promising way of simultaneously addressing the demand and the supply side of corruption in defence and security. There is already good progress with three governments, informed by our close engagement with defence companies through the index.

Other smaller examples include suggestions to examine the extent of military-owned businesses in developing countries, the extent of overt and covert military or security control around natural resource assets, the fraud, corruption and waste in large offset programmes, and ways in which internal audit can really assist defence anti-corruption efforts in a developing country.

Why we think MEKANIC works

We believe the following points have made MEKANIC a success story for us and the key tool to inform our learning, strategy, and ideas for future projects.

The quarterly meeting is designed for both internal and external participants. External participants make a huge difference; they come from different backgrounds and contribute different areas of expertise such as policy making, practical experience on the ground, academia and media. We invite people who we think can contribute ideas, challenges and proposals on how

defence and security corruption can be better tackled. Often they are distinguished people, but their presence is based on them contributing; it is not part of stakeholder engagement, improving donors relations, or other secondary reasons.

External MEKANIC participants thus far have included the Permanent Under-Secretary of State of the Norwegian Ministry of Defence, the Head of Anti-Corruption of DFID, the U.S. Air Force's top debarment and suspension official, a former Swedish ambassador, the former chairman of the UK Serious Organised Crime Agency, the Deputy Head of the UK Stabilisation Unit, the Managing Director of Transparency International's International Secretariat, journalists from Al-Jazeera, the BBC and Bloomberg, and monitoring, evaluation and learning specialists. Several of the external participants have asked to participate as regular attendees.

The inclusion of media representatives is a critical angle, particularly in terms of advocacy and campaign impact and strategies. This idea originated from research of Professor Mungiu-Pippidi, who found that the common feature of effective civil society anti-corruption projects was the integral inclusion of journalists.¹

After each external engagement, whether a conference, a seminar, or a meeting with external participants at our offices, detailed meeting notes of points of interest and learning are written and distributed to the team and to senior advisors. As

¹ Alina Mungiu-Pippidi et al, "Contextual Choices in Fighting Corruption: Lessons Learned", NORAD Evaluation Department Study, July 2011. The study is available at <http://www.norad.no/en/tools-and-publications/publications/publication?key=383808>.

mentioned above, these notes form the basis for our MEKANIC discussions on knowledge gathering and dissemination. This is 'raw' knowledge.

Each MEKANIC meeting results in a detailed report, together with action points that are subject to follow-up in the subsequent MEKANIC meeting, to ensure that we use what we have learnt and develop ideas for further discussion. It is noteworthy that the action points coming out of the first MEKANIC meeting in July 2011 were very specific and focused on details, such as connecting with an organisation or following up after a meeting. Action points have since evolved to also increasingly reflect the more strategic discussions at MEKANIC meetings and are thus now more focused on overarching issues and bigger themes.

In the process, and over the course of several MEKANICs, we realised the potential of looking at how we learn, not only what we learn. As an example, instead of stopping at noting that there is much to be gained from working closely with journalists to achieve better impact, we have come to realise that continuous engagement with the media can help us to much better define what 'better impact' looks like.

Another key factor making MEKANIC such a useful process is its integration into everyone's daily work. While some time and resources are necessary to prepare for MEKANIC, particularly elements such as the review of quarterly performance indicators from specific projects, this is well integrated into all team members' schedules. The point is not to force a creative one-off effort, but to ensure that the quarterly MEKANIC meeting functions to turn the thoughts that have come up in earlier discussions into concrete steps to help us achieve results more effectively.

One of the reasons MEKANIC has been so successful for us is that we have not stopped at learning but have also used MEKANIC to improve our work. This is important because any system that leads to improvement has a much greater chance of being sustained, as opposed to a process that stops at identifying lessons learned without implementing them. Our strong focus on improving our work is also underlined by our approach to pay equal attention to what we think does not work.

Our research is at the heart of our influence, and MEKANIC has benefited our research tremendously. As previously demonstrated, we have identified a clear link and overlap between monitoring, evaluation and learning; and research: monitoring, evaluation and learning highlight something that might be interesting, and intensive research is then used to investigate it further. Additionally, existing research is refined and tailored based on MEKANIC feedback.

Challenges

There are of course things that did not work as we had planned, for example using a partnership scale to make better sense of our networks. We ultimately felt that the scale was not telling us much beyond what we knew already and it seemed somewhat static despite us trying to track how relationships developed.

We would also like to include the media even more, which unfortunately sometimes proves difficult given their short-term schedules.

We will continue MEKANIC as long as the programme exists, and we foresee the costs to remain rather modest. Apart from one or two flights per year and a few nights in affordable accommodation, the

main resources are staff and senior advisor time and preparation. These costs seem well worth the benefits, given how crucial MEKANIC has become for our programme overall.

Conclusion

MEKANIC has become the central meeting event and strategic learning tool of our programme. The combination of serious, in-depth discussion of the content of what we are learning and experiencing – kept honest and stimulated by the presence of outsiders – and the strategy-making that comes out of these discussions, has proved to be immensely creative. Although we have set the

framework for MEKANIC, it is and should be a concept that continues to evolve, which is part of the process of learning.

There have been numerous participants from the Transparency International movement, including from the International Secretariat in Berlin (such as the managing director) as well as from various Transparency International national chapters. There is strong interest from various parts of the Transparency International movement in implementing this approach.

We recommend that others look at this approach and consider if it might benefit them also.