

# Pass-mark bribery in Nigerian schools

## Strong incentives and weak consequences for corruption

### Summary

- Pass-mark bribery is common in Nigeria's schools. However, according to the second household survey conducted in 2018 by the Chatham House Africa Programme's Social Norms and Accountable Governance (SNAG) project, over 87 per cent of survey respondents thought parents should not pay bribes to secure a passing grade for their child in an examination, against eight per cent in favour.
- Respondents also believed that a significant number of other parents did, in fact, pay bribes. In Adamawa, Enugu and Lagos states, respondents thought 40 per cent of parents paid bribes, despite less than 11 per cent feeling that this was acceptable.
- Parents are likely to pay bribes because they believe this guarantees a pass mark for their children in an examination. However, many disapprove of this form of bribe-giving.
- There are opportunities to target petty bribery in schools if interventions tap into widespread disapproval by supporting parental participation in schools, the use of technology and social media for reporting bribe solicitation, and the expansion of anti-corruption education for young people. More sustainable solutions would result from concrete measures which address the broader problems in the political economy and decision-making processes of Nigeria's education sector, as well as the myriad of enabling factors that create strong incentives and weak consequences for corruption.

Leena Koni Hoffmann  
and Raj Navanit Patel



## Introduction

Corruption is often driven by complex social characteristics and informal rules, which by their nature are challenging to research and hard to prove with certainty. This makes it difficult to identify appropriate and effective solutions. However, evidence-gathering on corruption is starting to focus more systematically on the social relationships and cultural contexts that sustain corrupt practices.<sup>1</sup> Social norms research, in particular, is gaining attention in anti-corruption efforts and policymaking, as it serves as a diagnostic tool to assess the behavioural causes of various types of corruption and the social factors that create a tolerant environment for such practices.<sup>2</sup>

Understanding both how corruption functions as a collective practice and the social markers that determine what actions are acceptable or disapproved of by citizens is crucial to improving the success of anti-corruption efforts. The social consequences of failing to adhere to collective expectations have a powerful influence, both on individual behaviour<sup>3</sup> and on whether the level of coordination and cooperation necessary for collectively and sustainably tackling corruption can be galvanized and maintained.<sup>4</sup>

The Chatham House Africa Programme's Social Norms and Accountable Governance (SNAG) project<sup>5</sup> adopts an approach based on social norms methodology to systematically test for shared beliefs and expectations that inform individuals' behaviours and their choices to engage in or refrain from, or to accept or reject, corruption.<sup>6</sup> With a primary focus on Nigeria, and working with methodology developed by our research partners at the University of Pennsylvania's Center for Social Norms and Behavioral Dynamics, SNAG implemented its second national household survey in Nigeria in 2018,<sup>7</sup> investigating the social beliefs that motivate different forms of corruption.<sup>8</sup> This briefing paper is one in a series of three, providing analysis of data from the different survey scenarios on three separate behaviours: the diversion of government funds for religious community use; bribery in exchange for improved grades in national examinations; and vote-selling.

---

<sup>1</sup> Kubbe, I. and Engelbert, A. (eds) (2018), *Corruption and Norms: Why Informal Rules Matter*, London: Palgrave Macmillan.

<sup>2</sup> Jackson, D. and Köbis, N. C. (2018), *Anti-corruption through a social norms lens*, U4 Issue 2018:7, Chr. Michelsen Institute, Bergen, Norway.

<sup>3</sup> Bicchieri, C., Lindemans, J. W. and Jiang, T. (2014), 'A structured approach to a diagnostic of collective practices', *Frontiers of Psychology*, 5:1418. For more on social norms theory and methodology, see Bicchieri, C. (2016), *Norms in the Wild: How to diagnose, measure and change social norms*, 1st edition, New York: Oxford University Press.

<sup>4</sup> Marquette, H. and Peiffer, C. (2015), *Corruption and Collective Action*, Bergen, Norway: U4 Anti-Corruption Resource Centre, Chr. Michelsen Institute.

<sup>5</sup> Chatham House (undated), 'Social Norms and Accountable Governance (SNAG)', <https://www.chathamhouse.org/about-us/our-departments/africa-programme/social-norms-and-accountable-governance-snag>.

<sup>6</sup> Throughout this paper corruption is used in the commonly defined sense of the abuse of entrusted power or public office for private gain: World Bank (1997), *Helping Countries Combat Corruption: The Role of the World Bank*, Washington, DC: The World Bank: p. 8, <http://www1.worldbank.org/publicsector/anticorrupt/corruptn/corruptn.pdf>.

<sup>7</sup> The Local Understandings, Expectations and Experiences Survey of 2018 was implemented in collaboration with Nigeria's National Bureau of Statistics (NBS), the Independent Corrupt Practices Commission's Anti-Corruption Academy of Nigeria (ICPC-ACAN) and a network of academics and researchers based in Nigerian universities. (See Acknowledgments.)

<sup>8</sup> This survey tested whether and how people engage in corruption because they hold certain beliefs about what others in their community think and believe. The component on petty bribery in schools included a vignette-based question.

The survey scenario on petty bribery in schools assessed the role of social beliefs and expectations in the practice of bribe-giving by parents or guardians to obtain a pass mark or improved grades for school-going children in a national examination. This paper presents analysis of the survey data which underscores the critical importance of understanding the social influences of different forms of corruption. The research also shows how the effectiveness of anti-corruption interventions hinges on the proper diagnosis of which forms of corruption are underpinned by social norms, and which practices are driven by other shared beliefs. For example, practices can be motivated by descriptive norms (norms which people follow because of what they expect others to do), customs (behaviours that motivate individuals to act because they meet an immediate need), or unmitigated circumstances.

## **Context: corruption in Nigeria's education sector**

Schools play a significant role in the overall socialization process of children. The beliefs and expectations that will underpin their behaviour as adults are often developed or reinforced in learning environments. In societies where corruption is widespread, and where children witness authority figures such as parents and educators engaging in corrupt practices, the value of integrity is eroded.<sup>9</sup>

**In societies where corruption is widespread, and where children witness authority figures such as parents and educators engaging in corrupt practices, the value of integrity is eroded.**

Corruption in primary and secondary education is particularly corrosive to social trust and limits the development of educated, competent and public-spirited individuals with ethical standards and a sense of common citizenship, while normalizing the acceptability of corruption among future adults.<sup>10</sup>

Corruption also impedes the role of the education sector in supporting personal development, building a skilled workforce and contributing to the enhancement of societal well-being.<sup>11</sup> Common examples of corruption in the education sector include the embezzlement and diversion of funds, equipment and school

---

<sup>9</sup> Chapman, D. W. and Lindner, S. (2016), 'Degrees of integrity: the threat of corruption in higher education', *Studies in Higher Education*, 41(2): pp. 247–68, doi:10.1080/03075079.2014.927854.

<sup>10</sup> Transparency International (2013), *Global Corruption Report: Education*, Routledge.

<sup>11</sup> Transparency International (2009), *Corruption in the Education Sector*, Working Paper # 04/2009, <https://www.transparency.org/en/publications/working-paper-04-2009-corruption-in-the-education-sector>.

supplies; procurement fraud; examination malpractice; sexual exploitation;<sup>12</sup> nepotism; favouritism; and bribery. While all these forms of corruption contribute to significant whole-of-society consequences, these are considerably worse for students from low-income backgrounds and poor communities, because they are often the victims and rarely the beneficiaries of corruption. For example, nepotism and favouritism often lead to the hiring of unqualified and unmotivated teachers, who are then difficult to dismiss, resulting in poor-quality education. Corruption in procurement can mean that classrooms are poorly equipped, and when families are made to pay bribes or duplicitous ‘fees’,<sup>13</sup> this amounts to a regressive taxation for those who can least afford it, additionally disadvantaging poor students and placing the developmental benefits of equitable quality education further out of their reach.

### **Box 1. Examples of corruption in the education sector**

- Illegal charges are levied on children’s school admission forms, which are supposed to be free.
- School places are ‘auctioned’ to the highest bidder.
- Children from certain communities are favoured for admission, while others are subjected to extra payments.
- Good grades and exam results are obtained through bribes to teachers and public officials. The prices are often well known, and candidates are expected to pay up front.
- Examination results are only released upon payment.
- Schools nullify the consequences of failing exams by admitting or readmitting students under false names.
- There is embezzlement of funds intended for teaching materials, school buildings, etc.
- Substandard educational material is purchased due to manufacturers’ bribes, instructors’ copyrights, etc.
- Schools or politically connected companies monopolize the provision of meals and uniforms, resulting in low quality and high prices.
- Teachers on the public payroll offer private tutoring outside school hours to paying pupils. This can reduce teachers’ motivation in ordinary classes and reserve compulsory topics for the private sessions, to the detriment of pupils who do not or cannot pay.

<sup>12</sup> According to Transparency International, sexual exploitation/extortion, or ‘sextortion’, ‘[...] occurs when those entrusted with power use it to sexually exploit those dependent on that power. It is a gendered form of corruption that occurs in both developed and developing countries, affecting children and adults, vulnerable individuals (such as undocumented migrants crossing borders) and established professionals’. Transparency International (2020), ‘Breaking the silence around sextortion: The links between power, sex and corruption’, [https://images.transparencycdn.org/images/2020\\_Report\\_BreakingSilenceAroundSextortion\\_English.pdf](https://images.transparencycdn.org/images/2020_Report_BreakingSilenceAroundSextortion_English.pdf). For further research on the links between corruption and sexual exploitation, see Carnegie, S. (2019), *Sextortion: A crime of corruption and sexual exploitation*, London: International Bar Association, available at: [http://www.andi.com.co/Uploads/Sextortion-report-July-2019-A5\\_637122900887317440.pdf](http://www.andi.com.co/Uploads/Sextortion-report-July-2019-A5_637122900887317440.pdf).

<sup>13</sup> Borcan, O., Lindahl, M. and Mitrut, A. (2017), ‘Fighting corruption in education: What works and who benefits?’, *American Economic Journal: Economic Policy*, 9(1): pp. 180–209.

- School property is used for private commercial purposes.
- Pupils carry out unpaid labour for the benefit of staff.
- Teacher recruitment and postings are influenced by nepotism, favouritism, bribes, or sexual favours.
- Teachers or officials take advantage of their office to obtain sexual favours in exchange for employment, promotion, good grades, or any other educational good.
- Examination questions are sold in advance.
- Examination results are altered to reflect higher marks, or examiners award marks arbitrarily in exchange for bribes.
- Examination candidates pay others to impersonate them and sit exams for them.
- Salaries are drawn on behalf of ‘ghost teachers’ – staff who are no longer (or never were) employed for various reasons, including teachers who have died. This affects *de facto* student–teacher ratios and prevents unemployed teachers from taking vacant positions.
- Teachers conduct private business during teaching hours, often to make ends meet. Absenteeism, a form of ‘quiet corruption’, can have severe effects on learning outcomes and *de facto* student-to-teacher ratios.<sup>14</sup>
- Licences and authorizations for teaching are obtained on false grounds.
- Student numbers are inflated (including numbers of special-needs pupils) to obtain better funding.
- Bribes are paid to auditors for not disclosing the misuse of funds.
- There is embezzlement of funds allocated by the government or raised by local non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and parents’ organizations.
- Politicians allocate resources to certain schools to gain support, especially during election periods.
- School management and operation is influenced by informal arrangements driven by political interests.

Source: Kirya, M. (2019), *Education sector corruption: How to assess it and ways to address it*, U4 Issue 2019:5, p. 4, Bergen, Norway: U4 Anti-Corruption Resource Centre, Chr. Michelsen Institute, <https://www.u4.no/publications/education-sector-corruption-how-to-assess-it-and-ways-to-address-it>.

While the frequency and scale of corruption in education is universally difficult to measure, its manifestation in the form of growing inequality, endemic poverty and underdevelopment are visible. Corruption in Nigeria’s education sector plays a role in the steady decline in quality, learning and assessment outcomes as well as the increase in poverty, inequality and underdevelopment.<sup>15</sup> When monies

<sup>14</sup> Arbache, J. S., Habyarimana, J. and Molini, V. (2010), *Silent and lethal: how quiet corruption undermines Africa’s development efforts (English)*, Africa Development Indicators, Washington, DC: World Bank Group, <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/316051468009960660/Silent-and-lethal-how-quiet-corruption-undermines-Africas-development-efforts>.

<sup>15</sup> Campbell, J. (2018), ‘Corruption Denies Millions Access to Quality Education in Nigeria’, *Council of Foreign Relations* blogpost, 18 September 2018, <https://www.cfr.org/blog/corruption-denies-millions-access-quality-education-nigeria>.



intended for building schools, purchasing supplies, or training and paying staff are diverted into private pockets, the quality and availability of education is negatively affected. An underfunded education sector will underserve pupils and fall short in supporting them to reach their full potential and improve their life chances.

Under-resourced learning environments also contribute to enrolment and attendance gaps. The Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) published in 2018 by Nigeria's National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) estimates that some 9.1 million Nigerian children who are of school-going age are not attending school.<sup>16</sup> This cohort of out-of-school children is much greater in the north than in the south of the country, and the situation has been worsened by years of insecurity and the COVID-19 pandemic.

## **Compared with almost every other African country, Nigeria habitually underfunds its education needs, despite the steady rise in its population.**

Compared with almost every other African country, Nigeria habitually underfunds its education needs, despite the steady rise in its population. The education sector receives significantly less than the minimum of six per cent of GDP and 15–20 per cent of public spending recommended by UNESCO.<sup>17</sup> In 2018, Nigeria's federal government allocated 605.8 billion naira (€1.3 billion) to the education sector – just 7.1 per cent of the budget – with the Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC)<sup>18</sup> receiving 100 billion naira (€218 million)<sup>19</sup>. According to budget analysis by BudgetIT, the sectoral allocation for education has declined from 12.28 per cent of the federal budget in 2015 to 6.48 per cent in 2020 – its lowest level for five years.<sup>20</sup> Poorly-trained and underpaid teachers and poorly-equipped school facilities mean that many young Nigerians do not attain a basic proficiency in literacy and numeracy.<sup>21</sup>

The underfunding of education has contributed to the increased privatization of the sector and to stark disparities in educational opportunities for the wealthy and poor in Nigeria – with the rich being able to afford the highest quality

<sup>16</sup> National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) (2019), 'Nigeria – Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey/National Immunization Coverage Survey 2016–17, Fifth round (MICS) and NICS (third round)', <https://www.nigerianstat.gov.ng/nada/index.php/catalog/59> (accessed 3 Feb. 2021). See also UNICEF (2018), *Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey 2016-17 National Survey Finding Report*, February 2018, <https://www.unicef.org/nigeria/sites/unicef.org.nigeria/files/2018-09/Nigeria-MICS-2016-17.pdf>.

<sup>17</sup> UNESCO recommends countries spend 25 per cent of their national budget on education if they wish to spur rapid development.

<sup>18</sup> UBEC was established by the Compulsory, Free Universal Basic Education and Other Related Matters Act of 2004 with a mandate to formulate policy guidelines for the implementation of the Universal Basic Education Programme, a reform programme launched in 1999 to ensure the quality and access of basic education for all.

<sup>19</sup> Using an exchange rate at 3 February 2021 of N458.049:€1, xe.com (accessed 2 Aug. 2021).

<sup>20</sup> BudgetIT (2020), *2020 Budget: Analysis and Opportunities*, <https://yourbudget.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/2020-Budget-Analysis.pdf>.

<sup>21</sup> Adeniran, A., Onyekwena, C., Onubedo, G., Ishaku, J. and Ekeruche, A. (2019), *Is Nigeria on track to achieving quality education for all? Drivers and implications*, CSEA Case Study 4, July 2019, [http://cseaafrica.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/190710\\_Summary-Nigeria\\_Final.pdf](http://cseaafrica.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/190710_Summary-Nigeria_Final.pdf).

of education, both at home and abroad,<sup>22</sup> while the overwhelming majority of the population is failed by underfunded state facilities. It is imperative that efforts to tackle corruption in education succeed if Nigeria is to realize Goal 4 of the Sustainable Development Goals, which calls for ‘inclusive and equitable quality education for all’.

Finally, Nigeria’s education funding crisis is worsened by corruption, which drives ‘the diversion of funds meant for the education sector’,<sup>23</sup> and is further complicated by the devolution of responsibility for education in Nigeria between the federal, state and local governments.

## Bribery and anti-corruption efforts

Both rich and poor parents want the best possible future for their children. In addition, school-going children are under great pressure – despite inadequate facilities – to acquire good grades, secure higher school or university admissions and achieve qualifications to improve their life chances. These aspirations and expectations, in a context where high-quality education is scarce, pushes people to seek advantages, even if this means engaging in improper or illegitimate practices.

According to Transparency International’s Global Corruption Barometer, 16 per cent of African citizens who used school services paid a bribe in the previous year. Across the five key public services surveyed, the poorest people were twice as likely to pay a bribe as the richest people.<sup>24</sup> For Nigeria, bribery rates for those using public schools in the previous 12 months increased from 25 per cent in 2015 to 32 per cent in 2019. A survey conducted in 2019 by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) on bribery in Nigeria<sup>25</sup> found that bribes paid for passing examinations at university/school or improving grades accounted for 3 per cent of all payments made by citizens to public officials. Of the six types of private sector employees cited in the study, teachers in private schools had most commonly been given bribes over the 12 months prior to the survey.<sup>26</sup>

---

<sup>22</sup> For an appraisal of the strong preference and demand for British education among Nigerian elites for their children, please see Page, M. T. (2021), *West African Elites’ Spending on UK Schools and Universities: A Closer Look*, Working Paper, Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, [https://carnegieendowment.org/files/Page\\_AfricaUK\\_Corruption\\_1.pdf](https://carnegieendowment.org/files/Page_AfricaUK_Corruption_1.pdf).

<sup>23</sup> Samuel, G. (2018), ‘How Corruption is Affecting Basic Education in Nigeria’, IACC Blog, International Anti-Corruption Conference Series, <https://iaccseries.org/blog/how-corruption-is-affecting-basic-education-in-nigeria>. Cases of education sector corruption at the federal, state and local level are very common. In September 2018, a former chairman of the State Basic Education Board (SUBEB) – a state-level offshoot of UBEC, established to address the inequality and quality of educational opportunity at the basic level – in Benue state was sentenced to 12 years’ imprisonment after being found guilty of embezzling 91.5 million naira (€200,000) meant for the training of teachers. The chairman was also found guilty of taking a bribe of 14.9 million naira (€32,500). Conversions were calculated using an exchange rate at 3 February 2021 of N458.049:€1, xe.com (accessed 2 Aug. 2021). Independent Corrupt Practices & Other Related Offences Commission (ICPC) (2018), ‘N97 m SUBEB Contract Fraud: ICPC Secures 7 Years Jail Term for UBEC Officer, 12 years for Ex-Benue SUBEB Chairman’, News Release, <https://icpc.gov.ng/2018/09/26/n97m-subeb-contract-fraud-icpc-secures-7-years-jail-term-for-ubec-officer-12-years-for-ex-benue-subeb-chairman>.

<sup>24</sup> Young people aged between 18 and 34 years are also more likely to pay a bribe than people aged 55 and over. See Transparency International (2019), *Global Corruption Barometer Africa 2019: Citizens’ Views and Experiences of Corruption*, Berlin: Transparency International, [https://images.transparencycdn.org/images/2019\\_GCB\\_Africa3.pdf](https://images.transparencycdn.org/images/2019_GCB_Africa3.pdf).

<sup>25</sup> United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) (2019), *Corruption in Nigeria: Patterns and Trends: Second survey on corruption as experienced by the population*, Vienna: UNODC, [https://www.unodc.org/documents/nigeria/Corruption\\_Survey\\_2019.pdf](https://www.unodc.org/documents/nigeria/Corruption_Survey_2019.pdf).

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

Bribery in the education sector changes according to context and does not affect all people equally. In some cases, bribe-giving takes place in response to demands from teachers and education providers. In others, it occurs due to unwritten expectations that poor levels of remuneration ought to be topped up or paid by parents when the government fails to pay salaries in publicly-funded schools. Notably, bribe offers may also occur in the context of local gift-giving practices. Sometimes the distinctions between these motives and dynamics are clear, but it can be difficult to isolate them<sup>27</sup> when they occur amid systemic dysfunction or informality.

With the average size of bribes for passing grades in Nigeria estimated at 5,051 naira<sup>28</sup> in 2019, bribes and other informal payments for school services amount to an added tax that is most detrimental for those who can least afford to pay. Due to underinvestment and slipping standards in public schools, many Nigerian families turn to private providers. However, when parents are asked to pay bribes in addition to the higher cost of private schooling, their children can be put at further risk of unrealized potential and lifelong poverty if the bribe demands are unmet.<sup>29</sup>

In such a context of gross underinvestment in public schools, limited choices and the stiff competition for places, poor checks and weak oversight, providers of education services are presented with routine opportunities to extort or demand bribes from parents and other service users.<sup>30</sup> This situation may also lead to parents offering bribes as a remedy for an under-resourced and severely skewed learning environment, where merit and hard work are not the sole determinants of success. Thus, petty bribery practices in schools can become a symptom of several underlying and interconnected political and socio-economic problems, which then combine with the nature of high-stakes assessment systems (i.e. single national examinations) to create perverse incentives in an inefficient system that fails the majority of Nigerians and sabotages development efforts.<sup>31</sup>

---

<sup>27</sup> Bribe-giving is not always the result of a bribery demand or extortion. The survey for the present study did not ask questions to evaluate what people thought of bribe-giving based on the diverse motivations that can influence the behaviour. Bribe-giving may occur due to teachers threatening pupils with poor grades if they are not 'settled' or a parent offering a bribe to guarantee a pass mark. There are further distinctions that may occur in these contexts: bribes may serve as a remedy for poor teaching or inadequate preparation for an examination; or as the easy solution for a pupil from a wealthy family who has not prepared for the examination; or even as a form of security for concerned parents who believe others pay bribes and that this has contributed to skewing the outcomes of the examinations and put their children at risk of being failed. Therefore, bribery can occur as a settlement, solution or security. These distinctions have not been explored in the present study, but certainly warrant further investigation.

<sup>28</sup> The 2019 UNODC survey estimated that the average size of bribes paid (in Nigerian naira) '[for passing an] exam at university/school or [improving] grades' was 11,669 naira in 2016, decreasing to 5,051 naira in 2019. Meanwhile, the prevalence of bribery in relation to schoolteachers and lecturers declined from 14 per cent to 11 per cent in urban areas and from 11 per cent to 9 per cent in rural areas.

<sup>29</sup> Hallack, J. P. and Poisson, M. (2007), *Corrupt schools, corrupt universities: What can be done?*, Paris: International Institute for Educational Planning.

<sup>30</sup> Transparency International (2013), *Global Corruption Report: Education*.

<sup>31</sup> Monica Kirya (2019) shows that: 'Often there are features of the education system and of a country's political economy that create incentives for corruption. For instance, high unemployment rates combined with unclear hiring and firing guidelines, create an environment in which favouritism in recruitment can flourish. Similarly, poor education facilities, combined with high competitive single (as opposed to continuous) assessment systems, create incentives for families to purchase private tutoring, which may give rise to opportunities for corrupt gain. In such instances, reforms must address the underlying incentives for corruption in order to be successful'. For a comparative and broader look at education sector corruption, see Kirya, M. (2019), *Education sector corruption: How to assess it and ways to address it*, U4 Issue 2019:5, p. 4, Bergen, Norway: U4 Anti-Corruption Resource Centre, Chr. Michelsen Institute, <https://www.u4.no/publications/education-sector-corruption-how-to-assess-it-and-ways-to-address-it>.



## A social norms approach to tackling corruption

In practical terms, social norms are at work when:

Most people in the relevant community conform to a certain behaviour; most of the people in the relevant community believe they *should* conform to that behaviour; and there is a preference<sup>32</sup> to conform with the group.<sup>33</sup>

Social norms are ‘shared understandings about actions that are obligatory, permitted or forbidden’<sup>34</sup> which ‘govern many parts of our everyday lives ranging from economic and political decisions to cultural practices and are thus an important element of any social group’.<sup>35</sup> Social norms surveys serve to identify whether a behaviour or collective practice is driven by a social norm, or by other beliefs or factors. The diagnostic tool provided by the approach in this case enhances understanding of people’s expectations and judgments of collective practices, as well as of the role of shared beliefs and social pressures in sustaining them. When these practices are detrimental to society, a social norms approach offers insights for designing interventions to promote collective behavioural change.

Informal rules of behaviour such as social norms are driven by the beliefs we have about how people important to us (for example, parents, teachers, friends, colleagues, supervisors, religious leaders and so on) think and behave, and how they expect us to think and behave. Such beliefs inform how we normally act in society and in specific situations. These rules inform what we understand as ‘normal’ and what we think are the behaviours which are acceptable to the people whose opinions and behaviours matter the most to us.<sup>36</sup> This in turn influences the choices and decisions we make. Social norms are particularly ‘sticky’ and difficult to change<sup>37</sup> because of how they shape collective behaviour; are sustained by mutual expectations;<sup>38</sup> and are reinforced by sanction.

In social norm literature, distinction is often made between the empirical and normative parts of social norms. The empirical part refers to behaviours that are assumed to be common, and the normative part suggests behaviours that are considered acceptable or what people think other people should do. In high-corruption contexts such as Nigeria, people are likely to engage in petty forms of corruption because they believe that others in their community do so too, even though they know and believe that what they are doing is wrong and unacceptable.<sup>39</sup>

<sup>32</sup> Preference here refers to the disposition to act in a specific way in a specific situation. Preferences can be conditional or unconditional on expectations about other people’s behaviours and beliefs.

<sup>33</sup> See Bicchieri (2016), *Norms in the Wild*.

<sup>34</sup> Ostrom, E. (2000), ‘Collective Action and the evolution of social norms’, *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, 14(3): pp. 137–58.

<sup>35</sup> Appfelstaedt, A., Freundt, J. and Oslislo, C. (2021), *Social norms and elections: How elected rules can make behavior (in)appropriate*, ECONtribute Discussion Paper, No 068, February 2021, retrieved from <https://www.econstor.eu/bitstream/10419/231493/1/1750745291.pdf>.

<sup>36</sup> The group made of people whose opinions and behaviours matter the most to us, and who influence how we make decisions, is known as our reference network.

<sup>37</sup> Bicchieri, C. and Mercier, H. (2014), ‘Norms and Beliefs: How Change Occurs’, *The Jerusalem Philosophical Quarterly*, 63, pp. 60–82.

<sup>38</sup> Scharbatke-Church, C. and Chigas, D. (2019), *Understanding Social Norms: A Reference Guide for Policy and Practice*, Medford, MA: Henry J. Leir Institute for Human Security, The Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy, Tufts University.

<sup>39</sup> Rothstein, B. (2000), ‘Trust, Social Dilemmas and Collective Memories’, *Journal of Theoretical Politics*, 12(4): pp. 477–501.

With regards to causation, descriptive norms are often more powerful than normative ones in determining behaviour, and can have a compounding effect when overblown narratives of pervasive corruption take root.<sup>40</sup> Evidence from the first national household survey in Nigeria, in 2016,<sup>41</sup> shows that social norms that are accepting of corruption are overstated and without evidence, but that there is nonetheless a widespread perception that ‘everybody does it’, which can lead to a self-fulfilling prophecy and ultimately entrench a ‘social trap of corruption’.<sup>42</sup>

### **Box 2. Measuring local understandings, expectations and experiences**

Measuring the behavioural drivers of a practice requires the identification of specific elements that underpin it, such as people’s awareness of the behaviour, their personal beliefs about the behaviour, social expectations, conditional preferences and so on.

The Africa Programme’s Local Understandings, Expectations and Experiences Survey contained questions to identify the following aspects of selected collective practices:

**Behaviour:** the occurrence and frequency of a practice.

**Factual beliefs:** the beliefs people hold about the practice.

**Personal normative expectations:** the expectations that people individually hold about the behaviour – these are not automatically social.

**Empirical expectations:** the expectations that people hold about how others behave with respect to a particular practice (i.e. whether a person thinks most people conform to a behaviour).

**Normative expectations:** the expectations that people hold about how others think others *should* behave with respect to a particular practice (i.e. whether a person thinks that other people think that most people should conform to a behaviour).

**Conditionality:** A practice can be conditional or unconditional on expectations about other people’s behaviours and beliefs.

**Reasons for behaviour:** these could be moral, practical, or due to structural constraints such as the underfunding of institutions (see Box 3).

<sup>40</sup> Bicchieri, C. and Dimant, E. (2019), ‘Nudging with Care: The Risks and Benefits of Social Information’, *Public Choice*, doi:10.1007/s11127-019-00684-6.

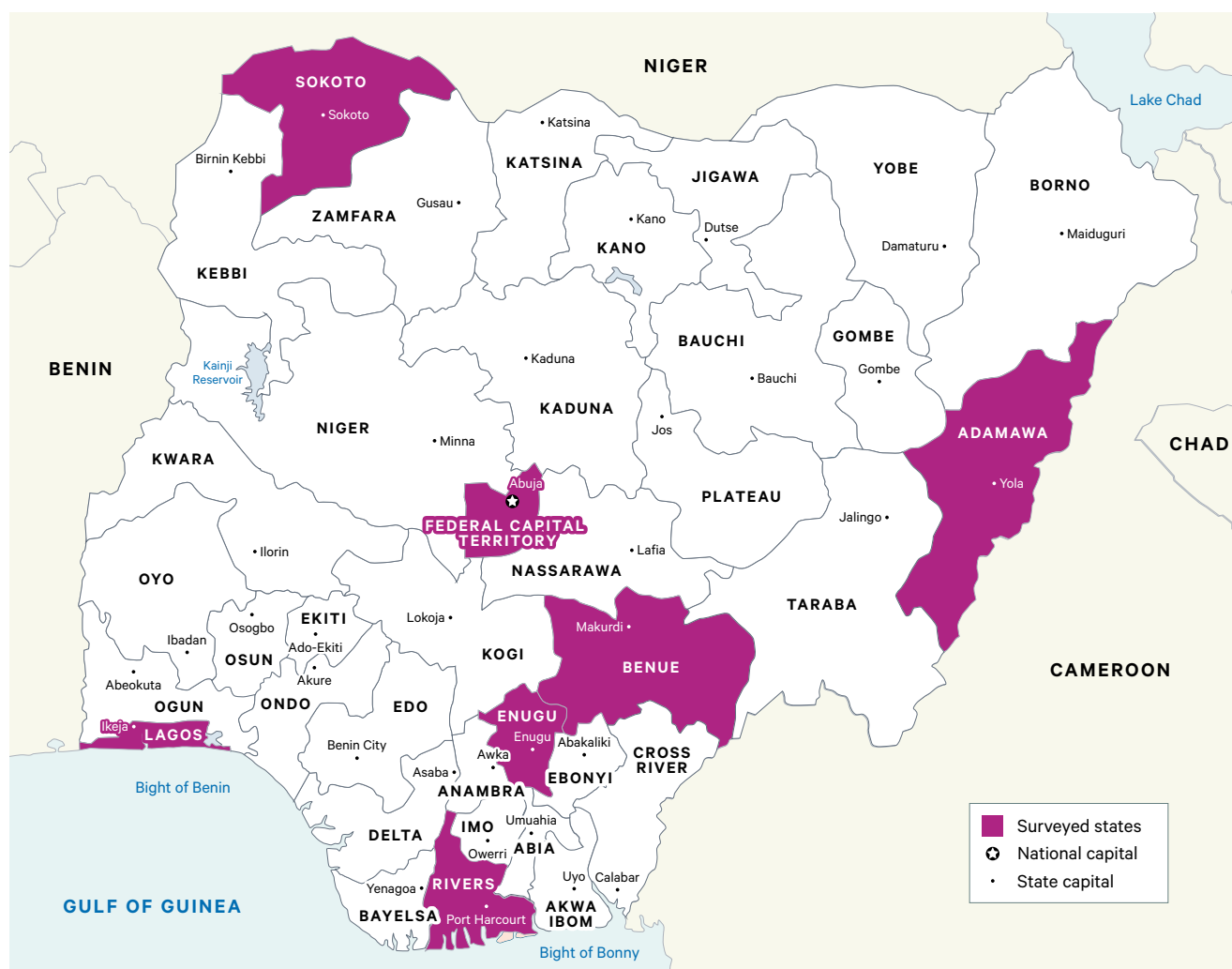
<sup>41</sup> Hoffmann, L. K. and Patel, R. N. (2017), *Collective Action on Corruption in Nigeria: A Social Norms Approach to Connecting Society and Institutions*, Chatham House Report, London: Royal Institute of International Affairs, <https://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/default/files/publications/research/2017-05-17-corruption-nigeria-hoffmann-patel-final.pdf>.

<sup>42</sup> Köbis, N. C., Troost, M., Brandt, C. O. and Soraperra, I. (2019), ‘Social norms of corruption in the field: social nudges on posters can help to reduce bribery’, *Behavioural Public Policy*, pp. 1–28, doi:10.1017/bpp.2019.37.

## Sample design

The survey implementation partner, NBS, developed and recently updated its National Integrated Survey of Households (NISH) frame covering all 36 federal states in Nigeria and the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) of Abuja, with 200 Enumeration Areas (EAs)<sup>43</sup> per state and in FCT-Abuja. This NISH master sample frame was constructed out of the original master frame of the National Population Commission (NPC) for the Housing and Population Census of 2006, which established 23,280 EAs (30 EAs for each of Nigeria's 768 local government areas – LGAs – and 40 EAs for each of FCT-Abuja's six Area Councils). The 200 EAs that make up the NISH frame are grouped into 20 independent replicates with 10 EAs in each replicate.

**Map 1.** Chatham House Africa Programme Local Understandings, Expectations and Experiences Survey, by state, 2018



Source: Chatham House. Note that the boundaries and names shown and designations used on this map do not imply endorsement or acceptance by Chatham House or the authors.

<sup>43</sup> Enumeration Areas (EAs) are geographic units demarcated for the purpose of data collection.

The Chatham House Africa Programme's Local Understandings, Expectations and Experiences survey of 2018 drew the sample for its survey from the NISH frame of 200 EAs. The survey involved a total number of 5,600 households<sup>44</sup> across urban and rural areas in FCT-Abuja and in six of Nigeria's 36 federal states: Adamawa, Benue, Enugu, Lagos, Rivers and Sokoto. Implementation was carried out through a test-run phase and pilot before the full roll-out from November to December 2018.

The demographic dynamics found in the seven case studies offer insights into shared beliefs and expectations of petty bribery in schools in Nigeria, as well as uncovering local specificities. Lagos state, which includes Nigeria's largest city, and the FCT are the most ethnically and religiously diverse locations covered in the survey, and they have the highest concentrations of both public and private schools. Lagos is Nigeria's and West Africa's major commercial centre; Abuja is Nigeria's seat of government and the centre of political power and government-resourced patronage networks. Sokoto, Adamawa and Enugu states are Nigeria's first-, fourth- and tenth-ranking poorest states respectively, while Benue state is considered to be Nigeria's 'food basket' because of its high agricultural productivity. Finally, it should be noted that although Rivers is one of Nigeria's richest oil-producing states, its population suffers low development outcomes in the politically contested Niger Delta region.

## Research findings

They paid money so that they will teach that girl [...] Uncle was telling them answers, especially Latifa. Uncle said A, C, D, D [...] and later they will be saying don't cheat during exams. (Pupils of Air Force Primary School, Lagos<sup>45</sup>)

The education sector in Nigeria is a rich context for bribe solicitation, bribe-giving and extortion, yet Nigerians, as represented in our survey, overwhelmingly believe that parents should not pay a bribe for their children to receive a pass mark in a national examination. Respondents were primarily asked about what they believed others in their community thought about parents giving bribes in exchange for a child's pass mark.<sup>46</sup>

---

<sup>44</sup> 800 households were surveyed in each state and the FCT.

<sup>45</sup> Conversation between pupils of Air Force Primary School, Lagos, recorded by Banjo Damilola in a 2018 investigative report for Premium Times Newspaper into forgery, bribery and malpractice. Damilola, B. (2018), 'Investigation: How forgery, bribery, exam malpractice booms at Lagos primary schools', *Premium Times*, 11 October 2018.

<sup>46</sup> Respondents were not prompted to think of or distinguish between the different motivations for this behaviour. Additionally, the questions did not explore whether respondents thought bribe-giving was due to solicitation or extortionate behaviour by teachers, or whether bribes were voluntarily offered as 'gifts' by parents. This suggests that there is significant scope for further research into the reasons and dynamics of bribery behaviour in this context as well as for disaggregating the various motives of individuals engaged in the practice.

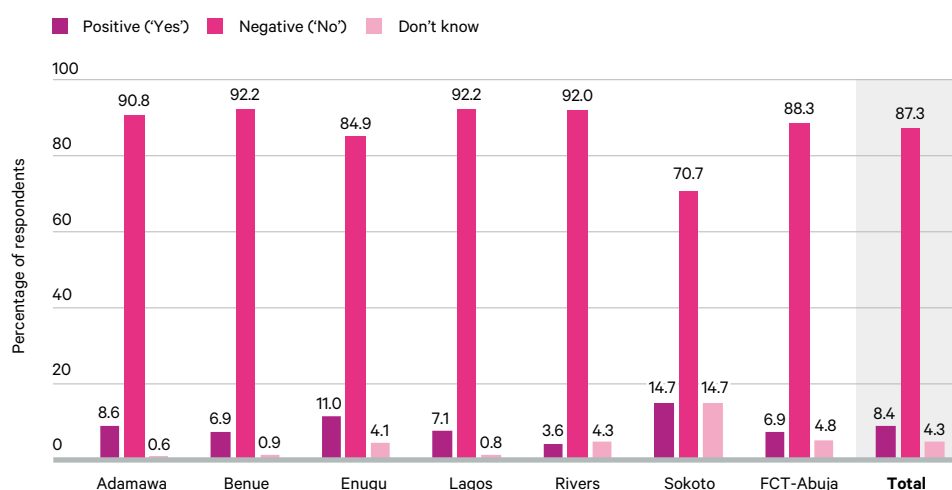
## What do people think about the practice of examination pass-mark bribery?

Over 87 per cent of survey respondents<sup>47</sup> thought parents should not pay bribes to secure a pass mark for their child, against eight per cent who were in favour of the practice. This means a large majority of individuals across the board held negative personal normative beliefs about examination pass-mark bribery – that is, they thought paying a bribe was an unacceptable practice, even though it might occur frequently. Sokoto state is somewhat of an outlier here. More respondents in that state (14.7 per cent) held positive normative beliefs about the practice, with an equal number not knowing whether parents should pay for their children to receive a pass mark.

**Figure 1.** Personal normative beliefs surrounding pass-mark bribery

### Question:

Do you think parents should pay for their children to receive a pass mark in a national exam?



Source: Local Understandings, Expectations and Experiences Survey 2018.

## What do people think parents in their community do for their children to pass a national exam?

The survey found variations in respondents' empirical expectations regarding pass-mark bribery across the surveyed states. Respondents in Adamawa, Enugu, and Lagos, for example, held high empirical expectations with respect to pass-mark bribery; this means they believed that 4 out of 10 (or 40 per cent) of people in their community paid for their children to receive a pass mark in a national exam.

<sup>47</sup> The survey did not directly measure perceptions or opinions about corruption, but instead included questions on what respondents expected others in their community to do, and what they believed other community members should do, with regards to paying for a pass-mark for their school-going children.

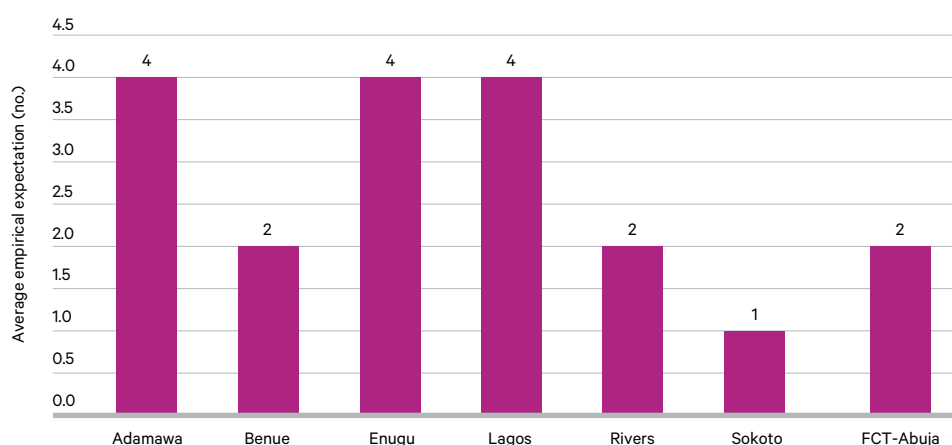


Such variation points to an important discrepancy between what people feel is the right way to behave (their personal normative beliefs) and how they believe other people in their community actually behave (their empirical expectations). Respondents across all states (except Sokoto) held low positive personal normative beliefs (Figure 1) relative to the high empirical expectations (Figure 2).

**Figure 2.** Empirical expectations surrounding pass-mark bribery

**Question:**

Think about the people in your community, such as your family, friends, neighbours, and colleagues. Out of 10 people in your community whose children attended a public secondary school in the last year, how many parents do you think paid for their children to receive a pass mark in a national exam?



Source: Local Understandings, Expectations and Experiences Survey 2018.

**Box 3. Moral vs practical motivations**

Moral justifications for behaviour are grounded in overarching normative principles and intrinsic values. For example, a parent may be motivated to pay for their children to receive a pass in a national examination because they believe they have a parental obligation to ensure their children's success, even if that requires cheating. Moral reasons motivate individuals to undertake actions independently of what others do or expect them to do, because they believe they are morally obligated to do so.

Practical reasons, on the other hand, are grounded in people's day-to-day realities, such as whether the relevant action will meet an immediate need. For example, a parent may be motivated to pay for their children to receive a pass in a national examination because they believe that not doing so will disadvantage their children. This would be especially true if they believe other parents will, in fact, be cheating – practical reasons are dependent on the social and economic context for the decision.

## Reasons for parents to pay bribes (or not) so that their child may pass a national exam

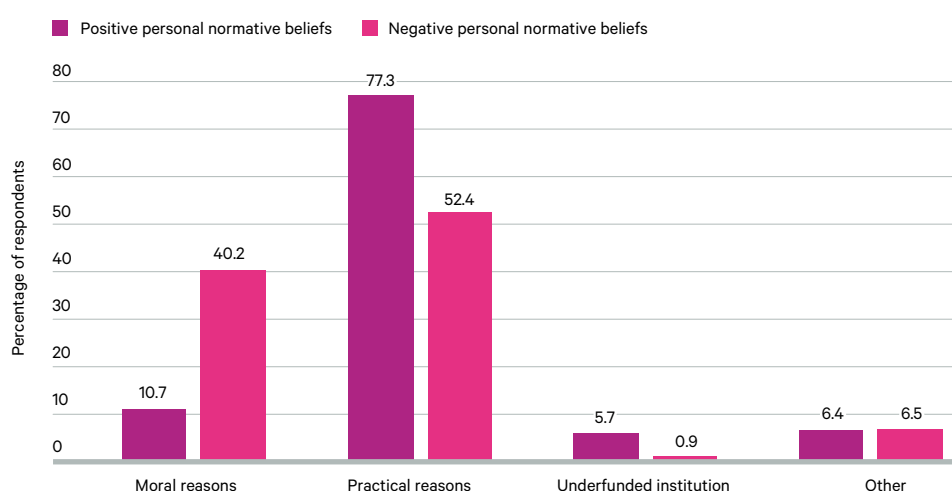
**Figure 3.** Why should people pay (or not pay) pass-mark bribes?

**Question:**

Why do you think parents of a child should pay for their children to receive a pass in a national exam? (Positive personal normative beliefs)

**Question:**

Why do you think parents should not pay for their children to receive a pass in a national exam? (Negative personal normative beliefs)



Source: Local Understandings, Expectations and Experiences Survey 2018.

Within the subset of respondents who believed parents should not pay pass-mark bribes to teachers (see Figure 1), 40.2 per cent believed it was wrong for moral reasons, while 52.4 per cent believed it was wrong for practical reasons. Overwhelmingly, respondents who held positive normative beliefs cited practical reasons for giving bribes (77.3 per cent); they believed bribery met the need of gaining an advantage in an examination and achieving a passing grade. There was a small minority who held positive normative beliefs because they felt that they were funding an underfunded institution (5.7 per cent).

## Pass-mark bribery: Empirical and normative expectations and personal normative beliefs

The survey found a close match between respondents' beliefs about the number of parents in their community who paid pass-mark bribes (empirical expectations) and their beliefs about the number of community members they thought were in favour of the practice (normative expectations – see Figure 4).<sup>48</sup>

<sup>48</sup> Figure 4 represents average empirical and normative expectations as percentages for the purposes of comparison.

**Figure 4.** Beliefs and expectations surrounding pass-mark bribery: summary of survey findings

**Question:**

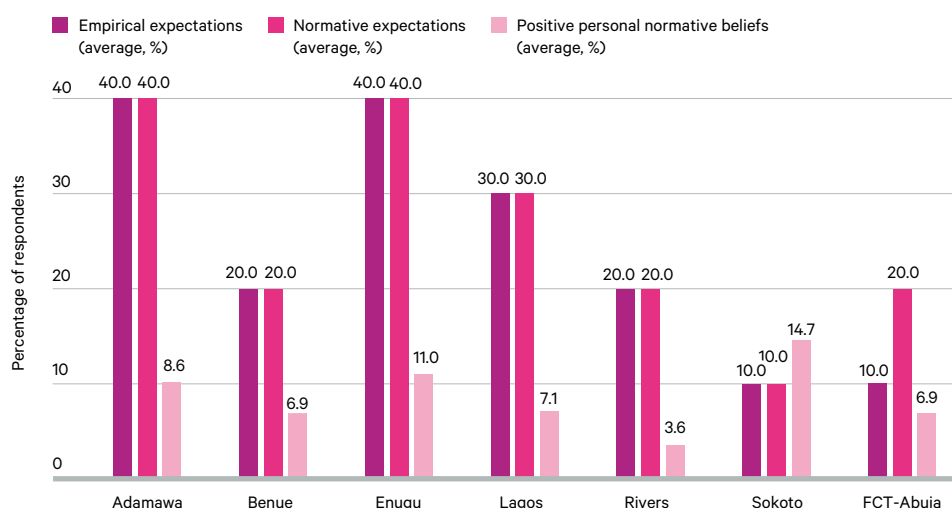
Out of 10 people in your community whose children attended a public secondary school in the last year, how many parents do you think paid for their children to receive a pass mark in a national exam? (Empirical expectation)

**Question:**

Out of 10 people in your community whose children attended a public secondary school in the last year, how many of them do you think said that the parents of a student should pay for their children to receive a pass mark in a national exam? (Normative expectation)

**Question:**

Do you think parents of a student should pay for their children to receive a pass mark in a national exam? (Personal normative beliefs)



Source: Local Understandings, Expectations and Experiences Survey 2018.

However, people's beliefs about social expectations in their community and their own personal expectations of how other community members should behave did not match. As Figure 4 shows, in most communities, respondents thought a high number of people supported and approved of the practice of pass-mark bribery, even though most respondents in the same communities personally disapproved of the practice. In Adamawa and Enugu, for example, residents thought that 4 out of 10 (or 40 per cent) of parents paid a pass-mark bribe to the teacher and also thought that 4 out of 10 (or 40 per cent) of community members approved of this practice, but when asked about what they personally thought, only 8.6 per cent and 11 per cent of respondents, respectively, actually thought that parents should pay the teacher (see also Figure 1).

This mistaken belief about the views of others in the community is called pluralistic ignorance. It can lead members of a community to think a practice is more acceptable – because it appears common – than it really is, even though most members of the community disapprove of the practice and would prefer it to stop. Sokoto notably ranked the lowest in terms of empirical expectations, with respondents believing that only 1 out of 10 (or 10 per cent) of parents paid

bribes in exchange for pass marks, even though respondents in Sokoto state also had the lowest negative personal normative beliefs about the practice – less than 71 per cent believed conclusively that it was unacceptable to pay bribes.

## Legal knowledge surrounding pass-mark bribery

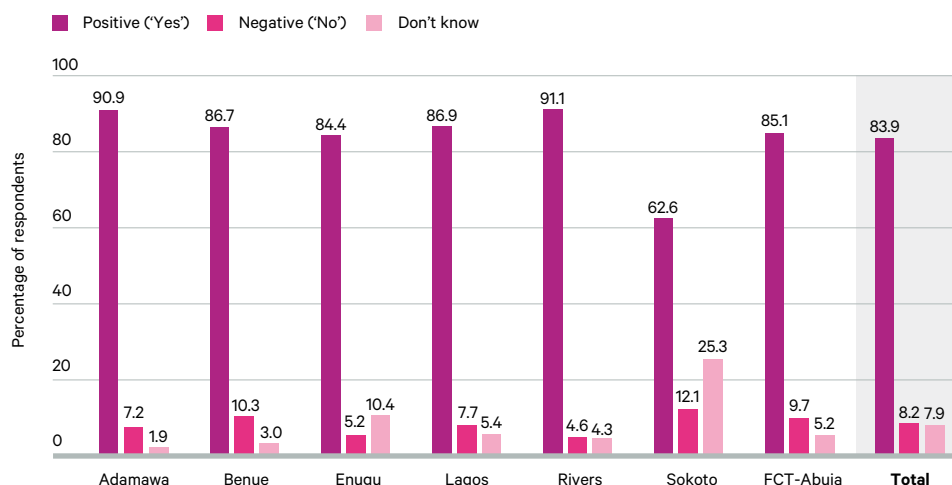
Just under 84 per cent of people interviewed for this survey believed that it was illegal to pay a teacher for ensuring a pass mark for a child in a national examination. Across states, the percentage of respondents who either did not know that pass-mark bribery is illegal under the Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Offences Act of 2000,<sup>49</sup> or who thought that it was legal, varied between as little as 8.9 per cent in Rivers, and as much as 37.4 per cent, or more than one-third, in Sokoto.

In fact, Sokoto provides a striking example of the ambiguity surrounding examination processes and payments. It is very likely that a lack of transparency and irregularity of examination procedures – as well as the multiple, overlapping and unreceipted payments demanded of parents by schools and examination boards – is driving confusion surrounding legal rules.

**Figure 5. Legal knowledge surrounding pass-mark bribery**

### Question:

Do you think that it is illegal for parents to pay for their children to receive a pass in a national exam?



Source: Local Understandings, Expectations and Experiences Survey 2018.

<sup>49</sup> See the Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Act, 2000, available at Independent Corrupt Practices & Other Related Offences Commission (undated), <https://www.icpc.gov.ng/wp-content/uploads/downloads/2012/09/corrupt-practices-act-2010.pdf>.

## Implications for anti-corruption efforts

Because corruption in the education sector of Nigeria is so deeply entrenched and reflective of wider society, tackling the phenomenon requires a holistic, systemic approach. Yet its pervasive nature makes determining priority areas and approaches rather difficult. Still, interventions which will simply target the specific behaviour of bribery for the purposes of ensuring a passing grade would amount to a piecemeal approach and would be inadequate for dealing with the root causes that sustain the systemic scale of corruption in the sector. Concrete measures that address the broader problems in terms of the political economy, power dynamics, decision-making processes, and the myriad of enabling factors that create strong incentives for corruption – as well as weak consequences – would result in more sustainable and less reactive solutions.<sup>50</sup>

At the level of petty bribery in schools, it is critically important to broaden the scope of investigation to explore the motives of individuals and design measures that address these specific motivations. As the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) observed in a 2012 report on corruption in education in Serbia:

The most effective prevention measures are those that target the motives of individuals or entities to initiate – or agree to – corrupt transactions and break the law. In education, the perpetrators are seldom criminals. They are mostly regular participants in the system. Their motives to bend or break rules are, often enough, rooted in a perception that education is failing to deliver what is expected, and that bypassing rules is a possible, sometimes even the only available, remedy. Participants in an education system that addresses their needs in the course of its legitimate operation will not have much reason to engage in corruption. Provided there is an effective system of monitoring and control, they will also have little opportunity to do so.<sup>51</sup>

The findings of this study strongly highlight the need for further studies into the motives of individuals and dynamics within Nigerian schooling environments which contribute to or enable corrupt practices in education. In terms of public engagement in educational settings, the increasing decentralization of primary-secondary education management to the subnational and local levels, through reform efforts such as UBEC and SUBEB, presents an opportunity for increased engagement, participation, and local oversight by community actors – especially parents – at the local level. Supporting parental and communal participation in schools – not just on paper – can create opportunities both for real and meaningful sanctions for disapproved behaviour and for promoting accountability. This is particularly important given that most respondents in the survey disapprove of the practice of pass-mark bribery. The approval or disapproval of a practice by important members of one's reference network is a powerful incentive for behavioural change and sustains reasons for compliance with a behaviour. Compliance tends to be weak with practices which, although

<sup>50</sup> For a comprehensive list of methods and models for assessing corruption risks in the education sector in a specific context, including political economy analysis/power and influence analysis, and systems mapping and analysis; and the Integrity of Education Systems (INTES) approach, see Kirya (2019), *Education sector corruption*, p. 4.

<sup>51</sup> Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (2012), *Strengthening Integrity and Fighting Corruption in Education: Serbia*, Paris: OECD Publishing, doi:10.1787/9789264179646-en.



common, meet with disapproval, and can be stopped by informing people publicly what the majority think privately – if the approval or disapproval of others solely influenced behaviour.

Locally-owned forums for discussion and participation (political, supervisory and social) make it possible for parents and others in the community to discuss and formulate actions based on their personal beliefs on petty bribery in schools, which are shared by the majority in their community to a greater degree than might otherwise have been thought.<sup>52</sup>

Leveraging positive shared beliefs and values which already exist in the community can be a very powerful driver for change. An equal impact can be wrought by using communication campaigns<sup>53</sup> that address descriptive norms, uncover pluralistic ignorance (mistaken beliefs about what others do and approve) and popularize a community's true beliefs.

## **Civil society organizations and other community groups can play an important role in supporting parents and local communities to act on their disapproval of bribery for grades.**

Strengthening local ownership and participatory community engagement on schooling and educational outcomes is also a valuable part of smart and sustainable interventions: in particular, the type of feasible interventions that are incremental in nature and relatively less threatening to embedded informal networks of corruption. While the education sector is in serious need of comprehensive reform, sweeping changes, for example at the federal level, will ultimately have to be anchored and sustained through strong multi-stakeholder coalitions at the local level.

Civil society organizations and other community groups can also play an important role in supporting parents and local communities to act on their disapproval of bribery for grades: for example, by providing expertise in setting up community monitoring programmes at the state and local level, and using 'scorecards' to monitor specific forms of corruption. In relation to bribery solicitation and extortion, scorecards can be developed specifically to track the frequency of these demands, and comparisons made between various schools in a community. It should be noted, however, that as long as paying a bribe addresses needs such as obtaining a pass mark and topping up the poor and infrequent pay of teachers, the latter will remain

---

<sup>52</sup> According to Petit and Zalk (2019), through debate and deliberation, communities can 'overcome conformity and ensure harmful behaviours are not enacted simply because people wrongly believe their peers approve of them'. Petit, V. and Zalk, T. N. (2019), *Everybody wants to belong: A practical guide to tackling and leveraging social norms in behaviour change programming*, Penn SoNG (University of Pennsylvania Social Norms Group) for UNICEF, <https://www.unicef.org/mena/media/4716/file/MENA-C4DReport-May2019.pdf>.

<sup>53</sup> Please note that communications campaigns contribute to positive outcomes when they are combined with improved services and consequences for rule breaking. Ibid.

strong incentives for this practice. Therefore, programming<sup>54</sup> will have to also address these practical motivations, including the issues related to teacher recruitment and pay, to be effective. Furthermore, new social expectations – specifically, empirical expectations about what other people do – have to be induced. Thus, programming should be able to demonstrate that bribery is not necessary for guaranteeing success in examinations,<sup>55</sup> rather that there is an enforceable meritocratic system in place, with consequences for violating the rules.

Information and communication technologies (ICTs) have been a game-changer in corruption monitoring and can facilitate citizen action in making complaints and giving feedback on bribery. Increasingly, SMS systems and social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter are being used as tools for reporting and for citizen activism.<sup>56</sup> Complaint mechanisms – both internal and external<sup>57</sup> – powered by digital technology can be a constructive means for parents/clients and other users to confidentially report and publicize the solicitation and payment of bribes (extortion demands), and thus can contribute to the creation of some social consequences – such as public shaming and loss of credibility – for education providers. It is also important that disciplinary action and legal sanctions follow substantiated complaints, in order to change the perception that there are no consequences for misconduct.

India's 'I Paid a Bribe' website is a well-known example of a successful platform for crowdsourcing and publicizing complaints about corruption.<sup>58</sup> It exemplifies a model that can be reimagined as a league table that ranks (and shames) schools in communities according to bribery solicitation behaviour and the school's performance in addressing corruption. UBEC, which is mandated to formulate guidelines and minimum standards for basic education in Nigeria as well as to ensure effective monitoring and to improve transparency and accountability, can play a critical role in supporting such complaint mechanisms, as part of its corruption detection strategy.<sup>59</sup> It is crucial, however, that complaint mechanisms and 'corruption league tables' are legitimate, accessible, equitable and transparent, and are designed to guarantee confidentiality in order to prevent the retaliatory

---

<sup>54</sup> Programming will probably also need to address solicitation and payment of bribes through different approaches. It is, however, important to bear in mind that moralizing language is unlikely to reduce bribery specifically when it meets the urgent need of passing a high-stakes examination. Bribery can be easily justified under such circumstances.

<sup>55</sup> Not many people would risk their children failing an exam by refusing to pay a bribe, especially if it has been demanded by someone who controls or can change the outcome of the examination. Such repercussions are too severe for most people, particularly if there is a low chance of legal remedy.

<sup>56</sup> ICTs for promoting transparent and accountable governance also include open-data initiatives, digital right-to-information platforms, interactive geo-mapping, information management systems, voice reporting and citizen journalism. Bertot, J. C., Jaeger, P. T. and Grimes, J. M. (2012), 'Promoting transparency and accountability through ICTs, social media, and collaborative e-government', *Transforming Government: People, Process and Policy*, 6(1): pp. 78–91.

<sup>57</sup> For example, on social media or through an ombudsman.

<sup>58</sup> <http://ipaidabribe.com>.

<sup>59</sup> In 2017, the World Bank conducted a technical assessment of the Universal Basic Education (UBE) programme, which revealed several weaknesses, including in areas relating to promoting transparency and accountability, as well as operationalizing citizens' engagement. UBEC committed to institutionalize citizen feedback through the strengthening of grievances redress and stakeholders' consultation. It also committed to operationalize a fraud and corruption/complaints redress mechanism within 12 months. The completion of this task was to be validated by the ICPC and Servicom office on grievance redress. See World Bank (2017), 'Proposed Credit [for a] Better Education Service Delivery for All Operation', Program Appraisal Document, <http://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/839251498183393835/pdf/BESDA-PAD-May-30-2017-06012017.pdf>.

targeting of users – parents, pupils and other citizens.<sup>60</sup> Additionally, issues of limited internet access, high data costs and low ICT capabilities can constrain the effectiveness and equitability of ICTs for bribery reporting.

A lack of clarity on legitimate payments and the financial needs of schools is commonly used by education providers to demand fraudulent fees and other informal payments – which are, in reality, bribes. In contexts such as Sokoto state, where more than one-third of respondents did not know that it was illegal to pay a bribe for ensuring a pass mark, improvements in the quality of financial management and oversight, and, especially, in the clear communication<sup>61</sup> of types of fees can help dispel this confusion.<sup>62</sup>

Values, integrity and anti-corruption education is a growing area of anti-corruption work in Nigeria. There are ongoing efforts to integrate anti-corruption education into school curricula – where it adds value, inculcating ethical standards, minimizing the tolerance of corruption, and encouraging public-spirited behaviour in young citizens – and to provide age-appropriate learning materials that feature values-based content. Nigeria's anti-corruption bodies (in particular the Independent Corrupt Practices Commission – ICPC) have been developing and implementing modules and ad hoc training on integrity and ethics for classrooms and after-school programmes, as well as establishing anti-corruption clubs in both public and private schools.<sup>63</sup> The ICPC, in partnership with civil society and NGOs such as the UNODC, has also developed and implemented a National Values Curriculum (NVC) for school students, an NVC Teacher's Guide, and other anti-corruption modules and resources.<sup>64</sup> Other significant integrity promotion initiatives include the Catch Them Young Initiative<sup>65</sup> developed in 2018 by the NGO Step Up Nigeria, which uses creative storytelling as a vehicle for anti-corruption education for young people.

As much as these efforts are vital for stimulating conversations about public integrity and teaching non-tolerance of corruption, they need to be combined with other intersectoral approaches that target the enabling environment, structural barriers and weak consequences for corruption in Nigerian schools. That said, a country's school system is often a microcosm of the country itself, and the values and norms of a society – both positive and negative – can be embedded and deployed at scale in such environments.

---

<sup>60</sup> Wood, A. (2011), *Overview of NGO-community complaints mechanisms*, Global Accountability Discussion Series, No. 2, World Vision International.

<sup>61</sup> In the languages spoken by parents and through channels used by them.

<sup>62</sup> Please note that communication campaigns are not effective on their own, particularly in a context of scarce resources and opportunities combined with perverse incentives. Social pressures and structural issues cannot simply be changed by communication campaigns.

<sup>63</sup> *Daily Trust* (2019), 'Children's Day: ICPC Establishes 1,500 Anti-Corruption Clubs in Schools', 28 May 2019, <https://dailytrust.com/childrens-day-icpc-establishes-1500-anti-corruption-clubs-in-schools/>; ICPC (2018), 'ICPC Launches Students' Anti-Corruption Clubs for Private Schools in Nigeria', Press Release, 2 May 2018, <https://icpc.gov.ng/2018/05/02/icpc-launches-students-anti-corruption-clubs-sacs-for-private-schools-in-nigeria>.

<sup>64</sup> For more information on efforts by anti-corruption agencies in Nigeria to address corruption in the education sector, see UNODC (2017), *Innovations by anti-corruption agencies in fighting corruption using the education sector – an ICPC Nigeria perspective*, Vienna, Open-ended Working Group on the Prevention of Corruption, 21–23 August 2017, on Education in Schools and universities on anti-corruption efforts (article 13, paragraph 1 (c) of UNCAC), [https://www.unodc.org/documents/treaties/UNCAC/WorkingGroups/workinggroup4/2017-August-21-23/Contributions\\_NV/Nigeria\\_EN.pdf](https://www.unodc.org/documents/treaties/UNCAC/WorkingGroups/workinggroup4/2017-August-21-23/Contributions_NV/Nigeria_EN.pdf).

<sup>65</sup> Step Up Nigeria (undated), 'Catch Them Young Initiative', <https://stepupnigeria.org/catch-them-young-initiative>.

## About the authors

**Dr Leena Koni Hoffmann** is an associate fellow of the Africa Programme at Chatham House and the Nigeria country lead for the Social Norms and Accountable Governance (SNAG) project. She is also an honorary senior fellow of the Global EverGreening Alliance. From 2016–20, she was a technical adviser to the Permanent Inter-State Committee for Drought Control in the Sahel and a Marie Curie research fellow at the Luxembourg Institute of Socio-Economic Research (LISER) in 2013–15. Her research focuses on Nigeria’s political and social history; democracy, corruption and governance; cross-border cooperation and regional integration; and food security, trade and gender in West Africa.

**Dr Raj Navanit Patel** is a postdoctoral fellow at the Department of Philosophy, Politics and Economics at the University of Pennsylvania and a core member of the Penn Center for Social Norms and Behavioural Dynamics. He is also a social norms adviser for the Chatham House Africa Programme’s SNAG project. His research focuses on normative issues surrounding the provision of public goods in Africa, South Asia and Latin America. He previously worked at the US Department of Homeland Security. He holds a PhD from the University of Pennsylvania and an MPhil from the University of Cambridge.

## Acknowledgments

The authors are very grateful to our project partners in Nigeria, without whom the data on which this research is based would not exist.

Nigeria’s National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) provided expertise, advice and training, and we would like to thank Dr Yemi Kale (statistician general), Tunde Adebisi, Biyi Fafunmi, Lola Talabi-Oni, Shamsudeen Lawal, Lucky Ogidan, Bridget Ebhodaghe and Peter Adanegbe. We are also very grateful to Rakiya Onize, David Kudevi, Okere Akujobi Uchegbulam, Abdulkadir Mohammed Sumda, Geoffrey A. Agu, Odey Timothy Ite, Odeh Gowon and Moses Sanda Dabai, the NBS field personnel who worked with our survey teams in the field to provide advice and help ensure the safe and smooth conduct of the survey.

We are thankful to our survey teams across Nigeria for their advice on the survey script and the translations, and for their hard work, commitment and dedication to ensuring quality research and data gathering, often in very difficult circumstances. We are grateful to our partners at:

- The Department of Agricultural Economics and Extension, Modibbo Adama University of Technology, Yola, Adamawa – with a survey team comprising Philomena Mathew Demshemino, Maryam Muhammad Jika, Abba Hakim Abubakar and Mark Polycarp, and led by Elizabeth Adebayo, professor of agricultural economics.

- The Department of Political Science, Faculty of Social Sciences, Benue State University, Makurdi, Benue – with a survey team comprising Tough Benjamin Terzungwe, Dr Rhoda Dewua Ebi, Ingyer Mercy Mnguzamber and Dr Adole Raphael Audu, and led by Professor Euginia Member George-Genyi, Department of Political Science.
- The Department of Philosophy, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, Enugu – with a survey team comprising Ijeoma Igwe, Dr Elias Chukwuemeka Ngwu, Doris Ijeoma Okohu-Ajah, Chukwudi Christopher Nwokolo, and led by Dr Anthony Ajah, lecturer, Humanities Unit, School of General Studies.
- The NBS and the Anti-Corruption Academy of Nigeria (ACAN), FCT Abuja – with a survey team comprising Mark Faison, Yetunde Mosunmola, Ahmed Abdul and Akindele Ogunleye, and led by Rakiya Onize of the NBS.
- The Christopher Kolade Centre for Research in Leadership and Ethics (CRLE), Lagos Business School, Pan-Atlantic University, Lagos – with a survey team comprising Azeezat Ajibola, Chika Nwogu, Ibironke Ojesebholo and Nonso Malachy Anagboso, and led by Dr Kemi Ogunyemi, director of CRLE and senior lecturer in business ethics, managerial anthropology and sustainability management.
- The Department of Sociology, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Port Harcourt, Rivers – with a survey team comprising Dr Aaron Anyanabia, Dr Adaku Ubelejit-Nte, Theophilus Akujobi and Dr Grace Udoyen, and led by Dr Chioma Daisy Onyige, senior lecturer, Department of Sociology.
- The Department of Sociology, Faculty of Social Sciences, Usmanu Danfodiyo University, Sokoto – with a survey team comprising Hauwakulu M. Dantake, Abubakar Jibril, Muhammad Shehu and Risikat Rufa'I, and led by Dr Sulaiman Y. Balarabe Kura, Department of Political Science.

The Social Norms and Accountable Governance (SNAG) project benefits greatly from the Chatham House partnership with the Center for Social Norms and Behavioural Dynamics at the University of Pennsylvania and, in particular, from the involvement and expertise of Cristina Bicchieri, S. J. P. Harvie Professor of Social Thought and Comparative Ethics at the University of Pennsylvania.

The authors would also like to thank Elizabeth Donnelly, former deputy director of the Africa Programme at Chatham House, for providing research guidance and editorial input; and Fergus Kell, Tighisti Amare, Catherine Harris and their former colleague Justine Kavanagh, of the Africa Programme, for logistical support, research assistance and field management of this project. Thanks also go to Jo Maher and Vera Chapman Browne for their skilful editing of this work, and to the U4 Anti-Corruption Resource Centre at the Chr. Michelsen Institute in Bergen, for permitting the reuse of its material in Box 1.

Chatham House would like to thank the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation for their generous financial support for this project, and the Foundation's On Nigeria programme team in Chicago and Abuja for their input and support.



### About the Chatham House Africa Programme

The Africa Programme develops policy-oriented research on issues affecting individual states of Africa, their international relations and the continent as a whole. A reputation for independence and influence enables the Africa Programme's research to impact on policy, in support of building a sustainably secure, prosperous and just world. Since its establishment in 2002, the Africa Programme has become a world-leading centre for independent policy research and debate on Africa's politics and socio-economic change. By working with the best international experts, the programme is a hub for thought leadership on Africa, producing reliable analysis and disseminating findings globally through its convening power and extensive networks.

The Social Norms and Accountable Governance (SNAG) project, supported by the MacArthur Foundation's On Nigeria programme, seeks context-specific solutions to address collective problems like corruption, through an evidence-based understanding of the drivers that sustain these problems.

**For more information, please contact:**

Tighisti Amare, Assistant Director, Africa Programme, Chatham House

T: +44 (0) 20 7957 5718

E: [tamare@chathamhouse.org](mailto:tamare@chathamhouse.org) | [@AfricaProg](https://twitter.com/AfricaProg)

<https://www.chathamhouse.org/about-us/our-departments/africa-programme>

---

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical including photocopying, recording or any information storage or retrieval system, without the prior written permission of the copyright holder. Please direct all enquiries to the publishers.

Chatham House does not express opinions of its own. The opinions expressed in this publication are the responsibility of the author(s).

Copyright © The Royal Institute of International Affairs, 2021

Cover image: Pupils during a school lesson at the Federal Government College in Kwali, Abuja, Nigeria on 12 November 2018.

Photo credit: Copyright © Thomas Imo/Photothek/Getty Images

ISBN 978 1 78413 487 7

This publication is printed on FSC-certified paper.  
[designbysoapbox.com](http://designbysoapbox.com)

Independent thinking since 1920

MacArthur  
Foundation



CENTER FOR  
**Social Norms  
and Behavioral  
Dynamics**  
University of Pennsylvania

**Chatham House, the Royal Institute of International Affairs, is a world-leading policy institute based in London. Our mission is to help governments and societies build a sustainably secure, prosperous and just world.**



**CHATHAM  
HOUSE**

**The Royal Institute of International Affairs  
Chatham House**

10 St James's Square, London SW1Y 4LE

T +44 (0)20 7957 5700

[contact@chathamhouse.org](mailto:contact@chathamhouse.org) | [chathamhouse.org](http://chathamhouse.org)

Charity Registration Number: 208223