

# From Fragility to Resilience: SOAS-ACE's contribution to an emerging paradigm

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## Key messages

- Although SOAS-ACE has aimed to promote better development via effective anti-corruption, it has also produced a range of insights that are critical for building resilience
- The fragility to resilience paradigm hinges on the creation of sustainable rules and institutions to promote resilience in fragile settings but donors have tended to use vertical enforcement approaches in such settings. SOAS-ACE offers an alternative approach that identifies the sectors and entry points to foster greater horizontal support across political, economic and societal groups for resilience reforms and institutions
- As multilateral institutions and donors increasingly shift to a “fragility to resilience” approach in fragile contexts, and as they commit to greater collective action through country platforms – SOAS-ACE’s approach to anti-corruption can help guide stakeholders involved in these platforms to jointly identify and support opportunities for anti-corruption reforms in ways that can promote the evolution from fragility to resilience

## What is ACE?

The Anti-Corruption Evidence (ACE) research consortium takes an innovative approach to anti-corruption policy and practice. Working with a multi-country coalition of 12 partners over five years, ACE is responding to the serious challenges facing people and economies affected by corruption by generating evidence that makes anti-corruption real and using those findings to help policymakers, business and civil society adopt new, feasible, high-impact strategies to tackle corruption.

Anti-Corruption Evidence  
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SOAS' Anti-corruption evidence (SOAS-ACE) research consortium has pioneered new ways to tackle corruption in support of more inclusive and productive development. Highlighting the shortcomings of top-down monitoring and enforcement efforts to effect change in complex political settlements, SOAS-ACE has instead called for horizontal approaches to enforce rules between interdependent groups and networks that are more effective at checking each other's actions in key sectors. Over time, these horizontal networks can help to establish formal institutions for the rule of law and allow for the types of vertical enforcement mechanisms that are too often prematurely attempted by development partners.

Because of SOAS-ACE's emphasis on horizontal enforcement, its [work](#) has involved extensive research into the political settlements, social orders, and development prospects of diverse countries and sectors to identify peer networks that would benefit from rule-following reforms for development. SOAS-ACE's power, capabilities, and interests (PCI) framework has guided this work. Where PCI factors can be found to exist together in a given sector, horizontal networks are possible.

Fascinatingly, although SOAS-ACE has aimed to promote better development, it has also produced a range of insights that are critical for building resilience. This likely owes to the fact that most SOAS-ACE countries are designated as [fragile contexts](#) by the OECD. Fragility, by [definition](#), is an imbalance of higher risks and lower coping capacities to address risks, their root causes and ensuing crises. In these fragile settings, SOAS-ACE's research program has had to grapple with complex risks that were impediments to anti-corruption and development prospects, and therefore required solutions for resilience.

The need to promote resilience outcomes in fragile contexts is increasingly recognized in the development community. In fact, there is now an emerging "[fragility to resilience](#)" paradigm among donors and multilateral institutions that makes resilience the central approach to help states and societies overcome fragility. The success of this paradigm will hinge on whether it can foster the rules, institutions, and systems to promote resilience in fragile settings with poorly regulated political settlements. While vertical enforcement approaches to anti-corruption remain the norm

amongst partners in these settings, SOAS-ACE offers an alternative approach that identifies the sectors and entry points to foster greater horizontal support across political, economic and societal groups for resilience reforms and institutions.

Below are highlights of SOAS-ACE's diverse contributions to resilience – from cultivating the "dual use" interests of local elites to promote climate resilience in Bangladesh and targeting rent-seeking in Tanzania's rice value chain to promote greater food resilience across East Africa, to charting a resilient path for communities out of artisanal refining in Niger Delta, and creating rapid, self-regulating, and scalable networks for health crisis response and resilience.

## Climate Resilience and Dual Use Functions in Bangladesh

In Bangladesh, climate resilience is vital owing to frequent and catastrophic floods and cyclones. The government has mandated that infrastructure projects have a dual use function of promoting development and climate resilience. However, SOAS-ACE [found](#) that climate resilience projects were consistently undermined through corrupt practices, including embezzlement of funds and shoddy construction using substandard materials and methods. Considering ineffective top-down measures, SOAS-ACE identified cases where the same implementers had done better work and followed rules owing to horizontal monitoring and enforcement by local elites. Using the PCI framework, SOAS-ACE found that local elites had the *power* and *capabilities* (together with communities) to keep construction agencies in check on a wider scale but lacked the *interest* to intervene for climate projects because these projects did not sufficiently incorporate dual functions for economic activities and social services that were of immediate value to elites. To address the issue, SOAS-ACE recommended the involvement of local elites and communities in the design of dual use infrastructure in ways that would maximize socio-economic benefits. For instance, embankments that are supposed to serve as roads, or cyclone shelters that double as schools and health clinics would do so more effectively. This approach would more directly align to local elites' interests for dual use infrastructure and thereby

incentivize their monitoring (with communities) of building processes – resulting in widespread horizontal checks and balances over the work in support of development and resilience outcomes.

## Rice and Resilience in East Africa

SOAS-ACE's [research](#) on Tanzania's "rice bowl" traces the patterns of rent-seeking that emerged in the aftermath of the East Africa food crisis in 2008, and which has significantly undermined regional resilience. Following the food crisis, governments within the region agreed to high import tariffs (75%) on rice to encourage local production in the face of considerable food scarcity. Tanzania's rural transformation, combined with this high import tariff, had the result of protecting small-hold farmers from external markets while enabling a widening number of them to increase production. Tanzania is now the only self-sufficient rice producer in East Africa, with the highest food security resilience. However, rent seeking and collusion among political elites, smugglers, and actors higher up in the value chain have worked to keep rice prices artificially high, obstruct the regional tariff regime and threaten the food security of neighboring countries that depend on the country's rice exports.

Consistent with the PCI framework, SOAS-ACE research has identified the prospects for creating a uniform tariff that would align the power, interests, and capabilities of regional governments to horizontally enforce trade reforms and raise the resilience of East African countries to food crises. Where rent-seeking traders opt to stockpile rice to manipulate market prices, the new tariff regime would allow for easier imports to counter this stockpiling – thereby promoting freer trade that promotes greater resilience within the region, resulting in increased rice affordability, shared prosperity with producers, and higher government revenue.

## Artisanal Refining, Coping and Transformation in Niger Delta

SOAS-ACE's [research](#) in Niger Delta shows how artisanal refining took root as a negative coping capacity to deal with low livelihoods prospects, poor access to electricity, and the need to adapt to large extractive operations in their vicinities, which presented environmental and health threats but also opportunities to illegally siphon and sell oil from pipelines. Artisanal refining (siphoning) has given rise to a coping economy comprised of local service providers, mainly women that have in some instances re-located to these refining areas to receive work from refiners. SOAS-ACE's work has detailed the considerable difficulties in trying to reform the energy sector more broadly, owing to highly networked corruption. However, it has proposed an alternative reform strategy to support these refining communities in ways that directly align with principles for boosting [resilient capacities](#) – namely absorptive, adaptive, and transformative capacities.

The SOAS-ACE strategy involves support for refining communities with health services to mitigate the effects of pollution on refiners (absorptive capacity), with solar-powered generators to meet their energy needs (adaptive capacities), and with facilitation of alternative livelihoods, including new methods of modular refining that could be introduced in the sector (transformative capacity).

This is a powerful example of SOAS-ACE's creativity to help foster the conditions for new types of horizontal networks that could leverage the power, capabilities, and interests of reformers within government, development partners and local communities who want alternative means of livelihoods and access to energy.

## Multiple, adaptive networks in the face of health crisis

Among SOAS-ACE's most creative and elegant concepts of how anti-corruption measures can drive resilience is its [proposal](#) for multiple, adaptive networks to deal with health crises. As previously [argued](#), SOAS-ACE's notion to establish redundant (overlapping) functions between partners within adaptive networks can simultaneously promote adaptive solutions for resilience, anti-corruption, and scalability.

**Resilience:** With partners in a network having redundant functions, this redundancy can act as back up capacities so that if several organizations on the front line of a crisis response are compromised or overwhelmed, other organizations can quickly step in. This arrangement strikes a balance between efficiency and effectiveness.

**Anti-corruption:** The prospect of a closely monitored consortium might already deter corrupt agents from seeking to join, but if not, their performance would be horizontally monitored by peers in the network. In lieu of drawn-out procurement processes to provide funding to the best implementing partners, the network would reveal the highest performing partners during implementation. The top performers would then receive subsequent awards while second-best

partners could be maintained as back up capacities to ensure operational resilience in the response.

**Scalability:** The use of multiple partners and resources to form a crisis response network allows for large-scale outcomes instead of awarding funds to a single partner with less operational reach.

## Looking forward

As multilateral institutions and donors increasingly shift to a “fragility to resilience” approach in fragile contexts, and as they commit to greater collective action through [country platforms](#) – SOAS-ACE's approach to anti-corruption can help guide governments, international partners and societal stakeholders involved in these platforms to jointly identify and support opportunities for anti-corruption reforms in ways that can promote these countries' long march from fragility to resilience.

SOAS-ACE's approach of horizontal enforcement might even apply to larger political settlement challenges that could require donor-backed coordination and commitment mechanisms to facilitate new interests and capabilities for cooperation between powerful actors, which the country platforms can provide.

### About the Anti-Corruption Evidence (ACE) Research Consortium:

ACE takes an innovative approach to anti-corruption policy and practice. Funded by UK aid, ACE is responding to the serious challenges facing people and economies affected by corruption by generating evidence that makes anti-corruption real, and using those findings to help policymakers, business and civil society adopt new, feasible, high-impact strategies to tackle corruption.

ACE is a partnership of highly experienced research and policy institutes based in Bangladesh, Nigeria, Tanzania, the United Kingdom and the USA. The lead institution is SOAS University of London. Other consortium partners are:

- BRAC Institute of Governance and Development (BIGD)
- BRAC James P. Grant School of Public Health (JPGSPH)
- Centre for Democracy and Development (CDD)
- Danish Institute for International Studies (DIIS)
- Economic and Social Research Foundation (ESRF)
- Health Policy Research Group (HPRG), University of Nigeria Nsukka (UNN)
- Ifakara Health Institute (IHI)
- London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine (LSHTM)
- Palladium
- REPOA
- Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB)
- University of Birmingham

ACE also has a well established network of leading research collaborators and policy/uptake experts.

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