

## **Corruption and Development in Africa: Challenges for Political and Economic Change**

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**Abstract:** Development is seen as the process by which a type of (social) change is introduced into a system in order to produce a better production method and improved social arrangement. It involves a structural transformation of the economy, society, polity and culture of a country. The level and rate of development of any particular society is influenced by so many variables such as the political culture, leadership and corruption. In Africa, corruption has been at the centre of development an impediment of true and real development in the society. Corruption has ravaged the entire African system, causing the continent to be the most corrupt in the world. If Africa is to be saved from this infection, the endemic presence of corruption must be dealt with. This paper therefore addresses the implication and impact of corruption in Africa and on African development; and suggested a way forward for the desired change.

**Key words:** Corruption % Africa % Development

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### **INTRODUCTION**

Corruption exists throughout the world, in developed and developing countries alike. In recent years there have been significant increases in the attention paid to corruption, in part due to (1) series of high level corruption cases in industrialized countries and (2) due to an increasing awareness of the costs of corruption throughout the world and (3) due to the political and economic changes which many countries are undergoing. Corruption in Africa is a development issue. African countries cannot bear the costs of corruption, which impedes development and minimizes the ability of governments to reduce poverty. Effectively addressing corruption in African countries has become a development imperative [1].

Corrupt practices span a wide spectrum, ranging from petty corruption whereby bribes are required before normal bureaucratic procedures are accomplished, to large scale corruption whereby considerable sums of money are paid in return for preferential treatment or access. Corruption occurs in the political, economic and administrative spheres. Corruption is worse in countries where institutions, such as the legislature and the judiciary are weak, where rule of law and adherence to formal rules are not rigorously observed, where political patronage is standard practice, where the independence and professionalism of the public sector has been eroded and where civil society lacks the means to bring public pressure to bear.

Once corruption becomes entrenched, its negative effects multiply. It induces cynicism, because people begin to regard it as the norm. It undermines social values because people find it easier and more lucrative to engage in corruption than to seek legitimate employment. It erodes governmental legitimacy because it hampers the effective delivery of public goods and services. It limits economic growth because it reduces the amount of public resources, discourages private investment and saving and impedes the efficient use of government revenue and development assistance funds [2].

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Strategies to limit corruption have to be realistic and achievable and tailored to the needs of particular countries. In other words, policies intended to address corruption have to be consistently implemented over the long term. Corruption is essentially a governance issue. Increased governmental accountability and transparency, enhanced public participation in decision making, strengthened public sector and civil society institutions and greater adherence to the rule of law will not only improve governance but will help counter corruption. Free and open competition is ultimately the greatest weapon against corrupt practices - whether political, economic or bureaucratic [3].

At the national level, specialized agencies and anti-corruption bodies can be extremely effective, but only provided that they have sufficient independence, authority and resources to function efficiently. Government actions alone will not be effective. A broad coalition against corruption, encompassing governments and the public, is necessary. In this, organisations and society, the press and the business sector all have a crucial role to play. Public opinion has to be supportive to anti-corruption efforts and public opinion is the major force in creating an environment in which corruption is not accepted or condoned. Public education as to the detrimental effects of corruption is important in creating public awareness and an active public response in support of anti-corruption measures. For this, free and professional press and media and accessible channels of information, are crucial [4].

While the ultimate responsibility of combating corruption lies with countries themselves, there is a role for both regional cooperation and international support. Many corrupt practices are localized or are confined within the boundaries of individual countries. Many more, however, are not. International business transactions have long been recognized as fertile ground for corruption. Much of the money gained as a result of corrupt practices is kept in safe havens outside of Africa. Some parties to corrupt activities may be based in neighbouring countries and those accused of corruption often simply move to other countries to avoid prosecution. Regional cooperation and development of regionally agreed legal mechanisms to address these problems would be useful, while international efforts to stop large scale corruption in business transactions are essential.

Corruption is now recognized as a global phenomenon, which has to be addressed coherently and consistently. The need for concerted action in Africa is evident. African countries have to become more integrated into the global economy and attract greater levels of foreign and domestic investment if they are to achieve the growth rate necessary to reduce poverty and improve the well being of their populations. Though, these will only make it possible to limit and not altogether eradicate corruption and to reduce the corrosive effects it has on African nations and societies.

This paper therefore provides an overview of corruption and the consequences of corrupt practices in Africa as these also affect and hinder political and economic development in Africa. It also discusses measures which have to be implemented at reducing the acts and consequences towards achieving a desired political and economic change.

## **CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATION**

**Corruption:** Corruption is a term that has been perceived in various ways by various scholars. Its conceptualisation has attracted in recent past competing and numerous views and approaches. It is therefore seen as a worldwide phenomenon which has long been with every society in the world. It has been identified as the bane of most political and economic problems in societies [5]. Corruption is again considered as an enemy of economic development because of its various vices. A nation that condones corruption is often besieged with a lot of economic, political and social vices.

Khan (1996) defines corruption as an act which deviates from the formal rules of conduct governing the actions of someone in a position of public authority because of private - regarding - motive such as wealth, power or status [6].

“Corruption is the perversion of integrity or state of affairs through bribery, favour or moral depravity” ... It takes place when at least two parties have interacted to change the structure or processes of society or the behaviour of functionaries in order to produce dishonest, unfaithful or defiled situations” [7]. In other words - corruption is a systematic vice in an individual, society or a nation which reflects favouritism, nepotism, tribalism, sectionalism, undue enrichment, amassing of wealth, abuse of office, power, position and derivation of undue gains and benefits. Corruption also includes

bribery, smuggling, fraud, illegal payments, money laundering, drug trafficking, falsification of documents and records, window dressing, false declaration, evasion, underpayment, deceit, forgery, concealment, aiding and abetting of any kind to the detriment of another person, community, society or nation [8]. Again careful study of the presentation of Otite shows that corruption transcends bribery but includes “treasury looting and also the deliberate bending of rules of the system to favour friends or hurt foes. It is clearly the evidence of absence of accountability, law and order.”

Corruption exists everywhere in the world and it becomes the norm particularly if the chances of being caught and severely punished are low and if it is a generally accepted or tolerated mode of behaviour. Corruption in Africa is a development and social issue which becomes an impediment to change and a serious constraint on economic growth and poverty reduction. Corruption in African countries has become endemic, as such, it is found almost in all aspects of life. Endemic corruption implies a breakdown of the rule of law and in most instances a loss of state legitimacy. It perverts the normal use of connections, networks and reciprocity and leads to increased personalization of power. As a result, people come to rely on connections and favours instead of formal political, social and economic rules and illegitimate use of state resources becomes acceptable. Where corrupt practices have become entrenched, large scale corruption by which government officials amass large fortunes co-exists with petty corruption by which officials at almost every level request payment to perform tasks or provide services which they should be doing as part of their job. An average African comes to see corruption and the inefficiencies and distortions it creates, as an inevitable facet of life. Over-time, the public sector becomes dysfunctional, the legal system proves ineffectual and the institutions of government lose legitimacy. Such degraded situations cause growing percentages of economic and administrative activity to become informal, thereby further widening the gap between the government and the people.

In the final analysis, corruption can be described as the conscious attempt or deliberate diversion of resources from the satisfaction of the general interest to that of self (personal) interest. The disdain for corruption is clearly felt mainly on ground of morality. There is no doubt that it inflicts some sorts of adverse effects on any society where it exists and persists until such society is purged of its immorality [9].

**Development:** Development has been one of the most ambiguous terms in social sciences discourse and it continues to generate debate among various scholars. Development in human society is not a one-sided process but rather a multi-sided issue. Individuals perceive development as increase in the skill and ability; they view it as maximum freedom, the ability to create responsibility and so on [10].

Dudley Seer (1977) sees development to mean not only capital accumulation and economic growth but also the condition in which people in a country have adequate food and job and the income inequality among them is greatly reduced. It is the process of bringing about fundamental and sustainable changes in the society. It encompasses growth, embraces such aspects of the quality of life as social justice, equality of opportunity for all citizens, equitable distribution of income and the democratisation of the development process [11].

Development is all about the capacity of members of the society to actualise themselves by participating actively in the social engineering of their life and destiny. It entails the ability of the individuals to influence and manipulate the forces of nature for their betterment and that of humanity” [12].

Rodney (1972) sees beyond the individual or people’s perception of development and conceived development whether economic, political or social to imply both increase in output and changes in the technical and institutional arrangement by which it is produced. In other words and more importantly, development is a multi-dimensional concept and in spite of the various conceptions, development is basically about the process of changes which lies around the spheres of societal life [13].

From the above descriptions, it is clear to us that there is a linkage between corruption and development. In other words, there is a direct reaction of the devices of corruption on development. If, for instance, development is conceived to include the capacity of a government or system to manage resources efficiently to improve the well being of the citizens and then corruption can be thus regarded as one of the main obstacles to good governance and development. In Africa,

therefore, the system lacks the capacity to manage its resources effectively and efficiently to improve the quality of life of the African people because corruption has become significantly a major threat to good governance and expected development.

## **CORRUPTION AND DEVELOPMENT IN AFRICA**

Since the post-colonial Africa, corruption has been a cause for concern because it diverts already limited funds, undermines economic progress and impedes policy changes required for development.

Africa presents a typical case of the countries in the world whose development has been undermined and retarded by the menace of corrupt practices. A series of reforms have been carried out in all the African countries so as to make the system (African states) efficient and result oriented. However, the anticipated gains of such efforts or reforms have not been visible due to series of factors which include that of corruption. Without doubt, corruption has permeated the African society and anyone who can say that corruption in Africa has not yet become alarming is either a fool, a crook or else does not live in this continent [14]. The situation has gone so bad to the extent that which ever way one views corruption, it involves a violation of public duty or deviation from high moral standards in exchange for (or in anticipation of) personal pecuniary gains. It is connected with moral and dishonest acts [15]. The effects of corruption are felt in the political and social, as well as the economic, spheres. Although the direct costs of corruption may be high in terms of lost revenue or funds diverted from their intended use, the indirect costs in terms of the economic distortions; inefficiencies and waste resulting from corrupt practices are more problematic over the long-term and thus make it more difficult to address. Corruption increases the costs of doing business, wastes resources, hence radically reduce revenues accruing to the state. It also results in poor service delivery, "moonlighting" or multiple concurrent sources of employment and refusal to perform normal functions without additional payment. Moreover, corruption deepen poverty and make it difficult for ordinary people to get ahead as the result of their own efforts. There is increasing evidence that the social and economic cost of corruption disproportionately affects the poor, who not only suffer from the lack of services and efficient government, but who are also powerless to resist the demands of corrupt officials. Different arguments have been put forward to explain the pervasiveness of corruption in Africa these include poverty, the personalization of public office, the political culture and the inability of leaders to overcome their colonial mentality in respect of their perception of public office [16]. To these end the fortunes of some African heads of state were published by French weekly (May, 1997) as presented by (George Ayittey, 2002) are as follows:-

- C General Sani Abacha of Nigeria -- \$20billion.
- C President H.Boigny of Ivory Coast -- \$6 billion.
- C General Ibrahim Babangida of Nigeria --\$5billion.
- C President Mobutu of Zaire -- \$4billion.
- C President Mouza Traore of Mali -- \$2billion.
- C President Henri Bedie of Ivory Coast - \$300million.
- C President Denis N'gnesso of Congo -- \$200million
- C President Omar Bongo of Gabon -- \$80million.
- C President Paul Biya of Cameroon -- \$70million.
- C President Haite Mariam of Ethiopia -- \$30million.
- C President Hissene Habre of Chad --\$3million. -- To mention but a few [17].

If corruption is relatively confined, growth will not be unduly affected. In other words, growth would be higher and more evenly distributed without corruption. Also, if the 'profits' from corrupt practices are re-invested into the economy,

the negative effects of corruption may be somewhat mitigated. According to a United Nations estimate in 1991 alone, more than \$200 billion in capital was siphoned out of Africa by the ruling elites. This amount was more than half of Africa's foreign debt of \$300 billion (George Ayittey, 2002). This wealth resulting from corruption also forms part of capital flight and on an annual basis, exceeds what comes into Africa as foreign aid [18].

Ayittey (2002) therefore argued that "the inviolate ethnic of the ruling elite in Africa is self-aggrandizement and self-perpetuation in power. To achieve those objectives, they take over and subvert every key institution of government to serve their needs and not that of the people. The Aid service, Judiciary, Military, Media and Banking. Even various commissions with lofty ideals that are supposed to be non-partisan and neutral are also taken over and debauched" [19].

The effects of corruption in Africa can be analysed from three main perspectives - The political, economic and socio-cultural.

From the political view point, corruption has the capacity of engendering political instability, breakdown of law and order, brain drain, inefficiency of the public service among others.

Viewed from the economic perspective, corruption is no doubt an enemy of economic development in the international scene, as it gives the continent a poor image in the international scene and it gives the continent poor image in interpersonal and business relationships [20]. More so, a nation that condones corruption is often besieged with a lot of economic and social vices. Economic and social infrastructural facilities are vandalized to create room for unnecessary replacement and purchases or conversion to personal use. Trade and commerce cannot thrive, as investors will be unwilling to invest much trade or business in this part of the world, the overall resulting effects of all these malpractices will be increase in the rate of inflation, unemployment and decline in output, foreign reserves and deterioration in the standard of living of the people [21]. In the socio-cultural context, corruption apart from engendering poverty has the capacity of changing the social values of a good and progressive society dramatically to nothing else than the crazy pursuit of wealth affluences, power and society recognition. People no longer appreciate the virtues of good morale, conduct and practices. Without doubt corruption has eaten deep into the fabric of the African people and the African society and it continues with the people almost permanently. Africa presents a typical case whose development and the desired change have been undermined and retarded by the menace of corrupt practices.

## **COMBATING CORRUPTION IN AFRICA**

"Corruption involves choices- it does not just happen. Fraud and corruption require that people both choose to engage in corrupt practices and have the opportunity to do so. Strategies to address corruption therefore have to address the element of choice as well as that of opportunity. They have to make corruption a high- risk and low- gain, as opposed to a low-risk and high-gain, endeavour. Such strategies have to be country-specific and what works in one country may not necessarily work in another" [22]. Measures to address corruption have to be put in place in and by individual countries themselves. In virtually all African countries where corruption is widespread and entrenched there is need to re-establish governmental legitimacy and re-build institutions as well as hitting hard at corrupt practices. Combating corruption is neither straightforward nor easy, but it is not impossible. "A good number of countries have moved from being generally quite corrupt to a situation in which corruption exists but is not widespread and pervasive. It is true that many of the industrialized countries did this over time, as political and economic competition became institutionalised and as adherence to the rule of law became more widespread" however, a number of African countries have made series of effort with dealing with corruption, many others have not made any serious attempt. Out there at the governmental and at the non-governmental level exists a growing awareness in most African countries of the need to forcefully address corruption.

The problem and consequences of corruption are not only felt in Africa - it has more than ever become increasingly a global issue, as the costs are felt beyond national borders. African countries must therefore constantly develop new strategies to meet the changing challenges which corruption presents. The need to prevent and combat corruption requires

a consistent, coherent, broad-based approach and a long-term perspective. It has also shown that leadership, political will and public support are essential to the success of any anti-corruption effort and that the causes and not just the consequences of corruption must be addressed. Political leadership is required to both set an example and to demonstrate that no-one is above the law by setting a high profile focus on specific actions which can be extremely useful in sending a strong signal that corruption will not be tolerated. Indeed most African countries have long had legislation to prevent corrupt practices and stringent penalties for those found engaging in them, including blacklisting, seizing of assets, mandatory dismissal from public office and some time, legal action. In most cases however, these have been ineffectual because they have not been invoked or because important figures have been exempted. Political will is therefore essential to ensure that anti-corruption legislation and administrative measures are enforced [23].

Again, governments implementing anti-corruption measures have to demonstrate seriousness and achieve results to build public confidence. This implies that they will have to pursue longer-term governance improvements and institution building goals as well as focus on specific actions which can have an impact in the short term.

Attention should be given to a mutually supportive broader policy of reforms - reducing government involvement in the economy, streamlining government functions and limiting the discretionary decision making authority of officials will reduce opportunities for corruption, while economic reforms can eliminate the government monopolies and economic distortions which facilitate it.

Again, there is a need for African countries to develop institutions such as the civil service, parliament and the judiciary, which in turn will create interlocking systems of oversight and self-regulation. All of these institutions have to be free of corruption themselves and active players in the fight against corruption. Rule of law is also important to guarantee protection of human rights, ensure governmental predictability, create a climate conducive to private sector activity and domestic and foreign investment and to enforce adherence to formal rules of behaviour. Court rulings have to be protected from political interference and judicial independence has to be assured. A functioning and professional legal system and access to justice are also necessary. Further more, parliaments should create the legislature frame work for addressing corruption, as well as promoting governmental accountability and acting as a check on the executive. The creation of a meritocratic civil service is a basic requirement for limiting corrupt practices and rebuilding public confidence in the government bureaucracy. Similarly, a culture of honesty and professionalism needs to be created and this incentives as well as sanctions have to be employed.

Corruption cannot be seen in isolation. Its effects permeate societies. Without the active involvement of civil society, including the private sector and the population at large, it will not be possible to combat corruption. Societal attitudes can either encourage or discourage corruption. Changing attitudes is also a slow process, but the creation of a normative environment in which corruption is not condoned is essential. Until the public at large is convinced that corrupt practices do not pay, they will continue [24]. Anti-corruption strategies in Africa will be most effective when they are participative and inclusive of all stakeholders in the society. Participatory efforts should be made possible in order to ensure that the reforms (anti-corruption strategies) and political will to act against corruption and to strengthen governance generally is sustainable [25].

## **CONCLUSIONS**

Corruption in Africa is costing the continent so much and restricting its development. The consequences and effects are also on the increasing side. In a bid to improve its (African) reputation and ensure an environment conducive to rapid economic and political change, Africa must be prepared to look inward at tackling the problems that is besetting the continent for a long time. It is hoped that many of the reforms which some African countries are establishing if sincerely implemented will over a long time create the conditions which make corruption both more difficult and more risky to engage in.

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