Corruption in Africa South of the Sahara: Bureaucratic Facilitator or Handicap to Development?

by

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Abstract

Today, most African nation-states have been independent for forty years. Unfortunately, at forty, many of these nation-states have made either minimal progress or stagnated, in terms of socioeconomic growth and development. Despite the fact that the continent's problems are multifaceted, corruption, particularly in countries where it has become an integral part of the social fabric, is a major handicap to sustainable development. While it may not be possible to completely eliminate corrupt practices, there is urgent need to curb its prevalence. A proactive agenda designed to discourage corruption and entrench ethical standards and accountability in public service in African states is recommended.

Introduction

Corruption may be defined simply as the misuse of entrusted power for private gain (Transparency International 2006). Thus, corruption is the abuse of public office for private benefit. It includes bribery, extortion and other acts of misconduct, including fraud and embezzlement. It can lead to wasteful government spending, and can have a detrimental effect on economic growth and development. In terms of structure, corruption can be organized vertically - linking subordinates and superiors in a system of pay-offs and horizontally - linking several agencies or branches of government in a web of dishonesty and injustice. It entails unilateral and collective abuses by public officials (e.g. embezzlement, nepotism) as it links up private and public sectors through bribery, extortion, and fraud (Shehu 1999). Corruption, therefore, is related to the performance associated with a public office, and deviations from laws and procedures that regulate the conduct of public servants.

For more than four decades, corruption has spread like a hurricane throughout post-independence Africa. No country or region of the continent has remained untainted, to a greater or lesser degree, by the corruption pestilence. Since political independence, the twin evils of gross mismanagement of national economies and looting of national treasuries for deposit in European and offshore bank accounts became the trend in much of Africa (Ayittey 1992). In October 2006, then president of the World Bank, Paul Wolfowitz disclosed that Nigerian officials had stolen more than $300 billion of their nation's wealth over the last forty years (*The Guardian,* October 30, 2006; Ndibe 2006). But the problem is not confined to a few bad apples, though. As Chabal and Daloz (1999: 99) put it:

> Corruption is not just endemic but an integral part of the social fabric of life. For those at the bottom end of society, like lowly civil servants, the sale of the limited amount of power they possess is virtually their only means of survival. Higher up, extortion is one of the major avenues of enrichment; it facilitates social advancement and the upholding of one's position… it enables the political elites to fulfill their duties, to meet the expectations of their clients and, hence, to enhance their status.

By definition, corruption as a secretive transaction is difficult, if not impossible, to measure with certainty. Nonetheless, estimates of the cost of corruption to Africa are a window on the seriousness of the problem. The African Union in September 2002 estimates that corruption costs African economies more than $148 billion a year. The cost of corruption is not limited to sums of money lost but also costs of retarded development and increased inequalities, which are far more difficult to quantify (U4 Anti-Corruption Resource Center 2005). Whichever way you look at corruption, it has grave consequences for Africa. Economically, it contributes adversely to the depletion of national wealth (Transparency International 2006). In addition to the looting of public treasury, bribery, inflation of contracts, and brazen mismanagement, corruption accounts for the channeling of scarce public funds to uneconomic and highly-capital intensive projects, such as pipelines and refineries, dams, and power plants, at the expense of more necessary infrastructure projects, such as water and electricity supply, hospitals, schools, and roads. Furthermore, it distorts competition and fair market structures and, consequently, deters both local and foreign domestic investment. The evidence can be found in Africa's chronic underdevelopment.

Politically, corruption constitutes a handicap to democratic processes and institutions. In effect, corruption thrives where institutional checks and accountability are lacking. More than any other factor, bad leadership, coupled with the absence of a functional reward and punishment system through which a framework of values could have been instituted, have made possible the tragedy of corrupt enrichment and wastage of public resources (*The Guardian*, October 30, 2006).

Socially, corruption undermines people's trust in the political system, its institutions and leadership. In short, it corrodes and damages the social fabric of society (Transparency International 2006).

Furthermore, the devil-may-care approach to the extraction of natural resources contributes enormously to environmental degradation. What's more, the non-enforcement, or lack thereof, of environmental regulations has led to the dumping of hazardous chemical wastes from the West in Africa. Recently, officials in Cote d'Ivoire reportedly accepted shipments in Abidjan of toxic chemical wastes for undisclosed payment from a Dutch company that led to the death of some Ivoriens and the sickening of more than 80,000 people (*Associated Press*, September 26, 2006).

Why Has Corruption Persisted in Africa?

As the old saying goes, where there is poverty, there is corruption. As Adam Lerrick (2005:2) puts it, "Corruption is not just one of the causes of intractable poverty in Africa. It is the root cause." A vast portion of the poverty must be blamed on internal political corruption (Mojtabal 2006). While political corruption can be found everywhere, including Western democracies, where politicians sell themselves to corporate interests, what is perhaps unique to Africa is the infiltration of corruption in the civil service, leading to vast continental poverty. As Mojtabal (2006:1) has argued, "such corruption creates a culture of self service and disregard for the situations of others. With the infiltration of corruption to every aspect of society, from education to the economy, corrupted civil servants make it difficult, if not impossible, for the already impoverished African population to escape their undesirable situations.

Although recent reports indicate that Africa South of the Sahara has become a business destination for foreign investment (*Time*, March 23, 2009), one of the biggest challenges facing Africa is the need for better governance, both in terms of less corruption and better economic policies (Kristof 2006). The last five decades of post-independence Africa has been marked by the prevalence of corruption that has spread like brush fire across the continent. Politics, political process, economic exchange, and public service have become synonymous with corruption in many African countries. Systemic corruption, arising from the wrongful conduct of the political leadership and top-level echelons of government bureaucracy, engenders a collapse of institutions designed to contain the malfeasance.

While corruption in some form or the other is known in every society, in Africa it is apparently exceptional. In the poorest countries, Chairman of Transparency International, Huguette Labelle notes that "corruption levels can mean the difference between life and death when money for hospitals or clean water is at play" (TI *Corruption Perceptions Index* 2008). Due to under-the-table bribes, hospitals, for example, often leave patients seeking medical attention with no assistance, while school administrators and teachers demand bribes to pass students in examinations (Mojtabal 2006). In short, corruption has permeated almost every fabric of society in many countries in Africa South of the Sahara (BBC News Opinion Survey 2004). Of the 180 countries surveyed in the Transparency International *2008 Corruption Perceptions Index*, 26 percent were African. The West African region, for example, had a mixed report card: eight countries ranked in the bottom 20: Cameroon, Cote d'Ivoire, Gambia, Guinea Bissau, Sierra Leone, Equatorial Guinea, Chad, and Guinea. However, Cape Verde, Ghana, Mali, Benin, Niger, Mauritania, Nigeria, Togo, and Liberia improved their ranks. Currently, Somalia ranks as the number one most corrupt country.

Corruption, because of its pervasiveness in many countries in Africa South of the Sahara, is detrimental to social, political, and economic development in a variety of ways. A program of sustainable development is contingent on several conditions, including principled and purposeful leadership; prudent, rational and far-sighted decision-making; and optimum use of available resources. Corruption tends to undermine all these conditions, in terms of public cynicism and erosion of confidence on corrupt leadership; irrational, shortsighted and ill-motivated decisions; and squandering of resources on ill-advised or unsuitable projects. The result has been developmental stagnation, poverty, cynicism of the political leadership, and disillusionment and hopelessness on the part of the masses and the deprived.

This paper is not intended to suggest that the average African is, by nature, more averse to honesty and integrity than anyone else. The basic difference is that some societies, notably Western democracies, have institutions, laws, and conventions, which not only effectively discourage corrupt activities but also severely punish those who engage in it. Given that effective legal, political, social, and moral sanctions are an essential part of the counter measure against corruption and abuse of public trust, this paper argues that minimizing the pervasiveness of corruption may be difficult but achievable. To combat the pernicious problem would require putting in place appropriate anti-corruption and legal machinery; and prosecute, without fear or favor, violations of public service codes of conduct. The very low incidence of corruption by the governing elites in countries like Denmark, New Zealand, Sweden, Singapore, Finland, Switzerland, Iceland, and the Netherlands is present, thanks to rational-legal bureaucratic practices, is evidence that corruption can be contained.

The Prevalence of Corruption in Africa

Some scholars argue that corruption is an unavoidable consequence of the development and modernization process (Alam 1989; Bayley 1966; Huntington 1968). The developmentalist approach takes the view that corruption is inevitable during the modernization phase and, to the extent that it easies the transition to institutionalization, it can even be seen as being functionally useful. Alam (1989: 442), for example, observes that in modern bureaucratic systems, corruption is "an attribute of all principal-agent relationships." In each state, the citizen or principal grants the government (or the designated agent) the authority, for example, to impose and collect taxes, and in exchange, the agent provides the principal with public goods and services, including health care, security and crime control. Corruption occurs when the agent, in the performance of official duties, sacrifices the interests of the principal for those of the agent. For example, the agent can violate the stipulated procedures guiding the conduct of the agent, illegally appropriate public resources for his own use or engage in illegal taxation of private economic activities in a bid to draw extra-legal income (Mbaku 1998; Merville and Osborne 1990; Anderson and Hill 1986).

By and large, corruption provides public officials with opportunities to generate extra-legal income. Selling access to controlled sectors of the economy, extending favors to entrepreneurs or direct appropriation of public resources by public officials for their own private use, and thus, undermines the public interest. Evidently, both private citizens and business enterprises seeking access to government services contribute significantly to corruption, since without the offer of tantalizing bribes, most political and bureaucratic corruption would be limited to illegal taxation, favoritism, and appropriation of public benefits by public servants. Hence, the most important source of extra-legal earnings by public officials accrues from illegal payments made by business owners seeking favorable treatments for their enterprises (Mbaku 1992; 1998).

Corruption: Bureaucratic Facilitator or Handicap to Development?

While most observers agree that corruption has an adverse impact on Africa's development, others though maintain that corruption enhances the development process; that is, it speeds up the development machinery (see Frisch 1995). With respect to the latter viewpoint, the most bandied benefit of corruption is that it effectively 'lubricates' the wheels of an otherwise rigid bureaucracy, thereby making it more responsive to the needs of clients, be they entrepreneurs or ordinary citizens, seeking the services of a public agency. Corruption is said to minimize bureaucratic red tape, eliminating bottlenecks and facilitating a more efficient, flexible, and responsive system. But this widely held viewpoint has been faulted. For example, corruption has not improved access to the bureaucracy for historically marginalized groups, such as poor rural dwellers and the vast majority of the urban working-poor (Mbaku 1998).

More importantly, the notion that corruption is beneficial and functions to grease a rigid bureaucracy raises the question of *qui bono*? Certainly, corruption may be beneficial, but only to the privileged elites. In a rapacious corrupt system, the ruling elites use public resources at their disposal not only for self-aggrandizement, but also to buy over competitive elites, particularly those like the military brass who have the capacity to destabilize or even overthrow the incumbent government. Perhaps, that explains why, in many African countries, defense receives a lion share of budgetary allocations, most of which, in good conscience, cannot be justified, despite the absence of any clear or present danger or potential threat to national security (UNDP 1990, 1995). In Nigeria, for example, particularly during the military regimes of Generals Ibrahim Babangida and Sani Abacha respectively, presidential largess in the form of cash 'gifts', oftentimes, running into millions of dollars, allocations of choice real estate in brasher residential urban locations, cushy political appointments for military officers and the military's civilian hangers-on, were freely and capriciously doled out, all in a bid to co-opt those who were perceived to pose a threat to the junta, as well as reward supporters and a coterie of praise singers. These military juntas, indeed, were patrimonial regimes, in which the dictators monopolized power and used any and every means necessary to ensure their survival through the militarization of social life and the copious dispensation of public resources to reward cronies and allies and to buy off critics. While levels of poverty and deprivation significantly increased in Nigeria, the institutionalization of corruption and the transfer of national resources between the competing elites gave the appearance of political stability and enabled the military junta to maintain a monopoly on power (*The Guardian*, August 29, 1999; October 26, 1999).

Further, the notion that corruption enhances economic growth by channeling scarce capital resources to the most enterprising individuals in society is not consistent with the evidence, at least, in the case of Africa. For example, it is common knowledge that aid money to Africa has been grossly pilfered. In 1996, it was estimated that about $30 billion of aid to Africa, an amount double the annual GDP of Ghana, Kenya and Uganda, ended up in foreign bank accounts (Celarier, 1996). Levine's study (1975) of Ghana show that most of the income appropriated through corrupt means were stashed in foreign bank accounts, used for the purchase of luxury imports or simply frittered away in a vain and frivolous show of wealth. On the contrary, little or none of the ill-gotten wealth was invested locally. Recently, a Ghanaian minister of transport was forced to resign his position for reportedly paying $100,000 to his American concubine (*The Ghanaian News*, September/October 2006). In former Zaire, the personal fortune of late president Mobutu Sese Seko was estimated at nearly $4 billion in early 1984, most of which were lodged in Swiss banks. By 1997 when he was forced out of power, the worth of his personal fortune was estimated at $8 billion, an amount almost the equivalent of his country's external debt (Hope 2000; *Time* Magazine, September 7, 1992; Sandbrook 1985).

Similarly, the reported looting of the Nigerian treasury during the various military regimes has robbed the country of the opportunity for economic development. Unsubstantiated estimates suggest that a colossal amount to the tune of $500 billion may have been stolen from the Nigerian treasury (*The Guardian*, August 29, 1999). Like in the Democratic Republic of the Congo or Nigeria case, and elsewhere in Africa, little or none of the enormous misappropriated public funds were invested locally. Evidently, corruption has taken a huge toll on the economic growth and development of Nigeria. In spite of the country's relatively large earnings from oil export, many Nigerians remain impoverished, and the country is stuck with blighted and crumbling infrastructures. Furthermore, in its recommendations regarding policy challenges and institutional reform designed to speed up development in Africa and the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) notes that the available evidence suggests that Africa South of the Sahara is one of the regions most affected by capital flight. According to the Report (UNCTAD 1999:102):

> It has been estimated that 70 per cent of privately owned wealth (excluding land) was held abroad in 1992, and that Africa's private capital stock would be about three times higher than it currently is if that wealth had simply been retained at home. Assets of such a magnitude could make a crucial contribution to Africa's economic take-off if they could be mobilized for productive investment.

One of the supposed benefits of corruption is that it facilitates bureaucratic procedures, making the system more efficient, flexible, and responsive to the demands of various clienteles. This beneficial effect is, at best, dubious. The bureaucrats probably mount many of the bottlenecks in the bureaucratic structures of the African countries intentionally for the purpose of using them as bargaining chips to extract bribes from clients seeking government services. Certainly bureaucratic bottlenecks make efficient operations difficult and represent needless additional costs to business enterprises. Entrepreneurs are willing to pay bribes to bureaucrats in a bid to minimize these costs on their business. Institutional reforms are required otherwise bureaucratic roadblocks may become institutionalized as a permanent source of extra-legal income for corrupt public officials (Mbaku 1998).

Regardless of the benefits of corruption, certainly, its negative effects dwarf the supposed benefits. The corroding effects of corruption impact the development process at several levels: administrative, economic, political, and social (Hope and Chikulo 2000; World Bank 1997; 1996; 1979).

Administrative Development

Corruption has a damaging effect on administrative development and efficiency, which can create extensive problems for afflicted systems. Corruption also affects professionalism in the public service and leads to frustration on the part of the few honest public officials. For example, appointments into positions of power in the public service, even those demanding specialized knowledge, tend to be made by political criteria rather than merit. It leads to the misuse of human resources, inefficiency, and wastage. Each time such an appointment is made, efficiency and development are compromised. Another fallout is that damage to administrative efficiency and development stems not only from the likely incompetence of the beneficiary of the patronage but also from the general demoralization of the technically competent subordinate personnel, who are often frustrated by their subordination to those with political clout but inept. In essence, every time ignorant and incompetent people are used obstructively and wastefully at the helm of government agencies and public enterprises, competent personnel who serve under them are wasted too in the process, and the country loses at both ends (Ake 1991).

Furthermore, where corruption is institutionalized, as in most African countries, the building of a competent, efficient, and professional public service is seriously impaired. Recruitment into the public service is not based on the principle of meritocracy but on patronage, social connections, or some other political policies of ethnic balancing, such as 'quota' system. As a result, the public service can easily become bloated with mediocre talent. And given that promotion decisions are based more on 'godfatherism' or nepotism and subservience to the boss than competence and experience, subordinates would pander to the whims of their superiors in the effort to capitalize on promotion opportunities. The consequence of all of this is that corruption not only demoralizes but also incapacitates the public service and, in the process, the society is worse for it.

Economic Development

The effect of corruption on economic development is equally devastating. One of the most damaging effects of corruption on economic growth and development is the promotion of inefficiency and greed (Theobald 1990). Corruption makes it possible for many grossly inefficient public enterprises to remain in operation at the expense of public subsidy. Bureaucrats can intentionally distort public policies in a bid to create opportunities for graft. For example, a government-commissioned report of a probe into the performance of the now disbanded Nigeria Airways revealed the existence of rapacious corruption in the airline. According to *The Guardian* (February 18, 2000):

> … Insurance premiums were being paid on non-operational aircraft in foreign currency. At one point, although Nigeria Airways Limited had only two operational airplanes, insurance premiums were being paid for 26 aircraft. Worse still, the report found that annual premiums ranging from $18 million to $22 million were paid out as insurance cover whereas in every case only $6 million which was the prescribed premium got to the underwriters.

For sure, there are similar sordid tales of corruption in tens of hundreds of other Nigerian public firms, agencies and branches of government. This single example clearly illustrates the detrimental effect that unbridled corruption has on economic growth and development in African countries.

In addition to the promotion of inefficiency at the macro level, corruption also encourages inefficiency at the micro level. Public servants who extract extra-legal income adopt a devil-may-care attitude to their work. They do as little work as possible but make incomes far in excess of what their position and status would legally entitle them. Through bribery, extortion, embezzlement, and contract kickbacks, many public officials can live an easy life with limited productive work, which is detrimental to the productive process (Clarno and Falola 1998).

Another negative effect of corruption on economic development is that the cost of supporting the public service is significantly increased. For example, the costs of public projects are usually inflated in order to generate kickbacks for members of the tender's board, based on a pre-determined percentage of the contract value. Even worse, a lot of public projects, for which costs have been wholly or partially paid in advance, are either abandoned or project cost revalued, usually always upwards. In many African countries, some public projects are known to have been awarded two or even three times to the same firm, its parent company or a different contractor anew. In some terribly bad cases, the project remains uncompleted. Meanwhile, millions or billions of dollars of public funds would have gone down the drains, without a commensurate tangible result. The various steel projects in Nigeria, for example, are cases in point, where the Nigerian governments have reportedly spent billions of dollars in the past thirty years on construction of steel plants and yet have nothing to show for it.

Capital-intensive technologies appear to be more prone to corruption. This accounts for the "cemetery of white elephants" or "cathedrals in the desert" - abandoned super highways, uneconomic dams, industrial plants - that litter the African landscape. Many of these projects were never completed or operate at installed or required capacity, or were grounded due to wrong technology, all promoted through corruption (Frisch 1995).

For example, Nigeria has four completed and once functioning oil refineries, but due to negligence and lack of maintenance, those refineries have either been abandoned or operate at minimum capacity, such that the country, the sixth largest oil exporter, imports refined petroleum products. In effect, scarce resources, whose allocation should have been guided by development priorities, are wasted on projects, which contribute little or nothing to the development process because of the narrow selfish interests of the decision makers.

Contract awards for public projects are one of the most important conduits for siphoning of public funds. When kickback percentages are as high as 20 per cent, or even more, in some cases, these percentages are added to the costs paid by the country concerned. While the extra value goes to line private pockets, it is a loss to the public and overall development. Government tenders boards, whether at local, state, or national level, like the customs department, the passport office of the immigration department, import license division of the Ministry of Finance, the foreign exchange section of the central bank, to name a few, are some of the agencies or branches of government that are considered 'juicy', ostensibly because of the opportunities they provide for the generation of large extra-legal income. Because of this attraction, in the 1980s, many Nigerian university students, including those graduating in medicine, pharmacy, law, architecture, and engineering, preferred to work in the Department of Customs and Excise than in their chosen professions. This predilection speaks volumes not only about the preeminence that material acquisition, whether by legitimate or corrupt means, enjoys in society but also the state of national consciousness.

Besides imposing significant costs on public projects, corruption also imposes extra costs on ordinary citizens. For example, where corruption is very prevalent, it is not uncommon for government hospitals and health centers to demand bribes from patients before services are rendered. First, public health services, including the compensation of health care workers, are subsidized from taxes/public funds; and second, those seeking health services are charged bribes, for oftentimes poor quality service. In effect, the people are subjected to a 'double jeopardy'. In some cases, prescription drugs and other essential medical supplies, which are intended for government-run hospitals, are diverted to private clinics and pharmacies. Consequently, these corrupt activities severely limit the quality of health care services that can be provided. While corruption generates benefits for the elites, it imposes needless costs on society, and can have devastating effects on development.

Clearly, corruption increases the cost to African countries of doing business (Hope 2000). Fraud, theft, kickbacks, illegal commissions, embezzlement, and other forms of graft simply inflate the final costs of contracts, equipment, supplies and services. The further implication is that these corrupt practices not only increase government expenditures without commensurate tangible results, but scarce funds are siphoned off, eventually leading to the need to increase revenues through higher taxes or by borrowing or by scaling down, or even abandoning, otherwise important development projects.

Political and Social Development

Corruption affects political development and stability in various ways. First, in countries where corruption is systemic, political repression and suppression, particularly of political opposition and regime critics, becomes the most characteristic feature of political life, and domination and subordination the main political relationship. Second, corruption also affects political stability because it leads to military interventions in the political process, oftentimes resulting in the overthrow of not only authoritarian regimes but also democratically elected governments. It is on record that corruption is the most frequently cited reason for *coup d'état* in Africa. Third, the impairment of political development and stability is directly related to socioeconomic growth and development. National development is handicapped in an atmosphere of political instability and uncertainty, with the result that effective long-term planning is jeopardized (Hope 2000).

The social impact of corruption is the creation of an atmosphere of tension, dishonesty, and weak and/or selective law enforcement, which, in turn, breeds cynicism and erosion of faith in the political and administrative system. For example, the misallocation of resources rewards the indolent and those with the right connections, resulting in a disconnection between reward and effort (Ake 1991). But most importantly, in countries where corruption is pervasive, coupled with weak law enforcement or the absence of the rule of law, the corrupted value system engendered encourages the perception that corruption is not only normal but a survival strategy or the means to get ahead.

The need to curb corruption in Africa is great:

- In the past four decades, corruption is probably the only "industry" in post-independence Africa that has maintained steady growth. Economic, political, and social development have either stagnated or degenerated into crises management.

- The litany of woes that has bedeviled Africa – disease, famine, illiteracy, poverty, ethnic rivalry, assassination of political opponents, political instability, and wars – have been orchestrated by the ruling elites, in their unbridled pursuit of self-aggrandizement and a monopoly of state power.

- Weak institutional structures adopted at independence, which gave public officials almost unlimited powers to intervene in private economic activities and politicize public resource allocation, have facilitated the emergence of corruption as a lucrative growth industry.

- Corruption and other forms of malfeasance have thrived partly because most post-independence African states were unable to develop and sustain independent law enforcement and judicial institutions that are germane to the maintenance of the rule of law. In many countries, even law enforcement agencies and the judiciary systems that are supposed to implement the laws have been tainted by corruption.

As intractable as the corruption pestilence seem, is all hope lost in stemming the tide? And what should be done? As the mass of poor and deprived Africans look forward to a better future, the need for the reorganization of the neo-colonial state through institutional reforms becomes imperative. The appropriate foundation for a fundamental reconstruction of institutional structures hinges on a number of factors:

- A well-designed set of rules through democratic processes. Democracy, however defined, must be based on popular participation, the rule of law, accountability, and transparency in governance.

- An environment that encourages free economic exchange and creation of wealth, proper and equitable allocation of public resources, and alleviation of mass poverty and deprivation.

- Creating a climate that makes engagement in corrupt practices difficult. Hence, imposing stiff punishment for corrupt conduct; one of the most effective ways of dealing with corruption.

And equally important is a functional independent judiciary in the battle against corruption. It is pertinent to mention that, in many African countries, some half-hearted attempts have been made to combat corrupt practices and unethical violations. In this regard, some countries have enacted laws and established institutional mechanisms to enforce ethical conduct.

For example, in 1975, Nigeria established a Public Complaints Commission to investigate complaints of administrative wrong doing by public officials. In the same year, a decree establishing the Code of Conduct Bureau which was enacted and later incorporated into the 1979 and 1989 Constitutions, respectively. Today, another agency, the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) has as its mandate to curb the menace of corruption, protect national and foreign investments in the country, and identify illegally acquired wealth and confiscate it. Ethiopia and Cote d'Ivoire have established similar bodies with provisions governing the receipt of ill-gotten gains, misuse or waste of public property, corrupt practices and acceptance of undue advantage. And the ombudsman system, designed to curb ethical violations, has been experimented with in a number of African countries, including Ghana, Namibia, Nigeria, Sudan, Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe (Rasheed 1995).

However, in spite of these initiatives, corruption remains unabated, and the failure of these attempts clearly illustrate that there are no quick fixes for minimizing, let alone eradicating, corruption. They also illustrate that what is at stake in African politics and public service is not just power but wealth, and that corruption is intertwined with the broader politics of power and accumulation. Some of these initiatives have either been partially successful or generally unsuccessful for a number of reasons:

- Much of the large-scale corruption has largely involved politicians themselves and senior bureaucrats who are part and parcel of the governments in power. Obviously, the will and commitment to expose or stamp out corruption is lacking.

- Inducements from foreign enterprises seeking business opportunities are oftentimes too enticing to resist for the elites who make decisions on those matters.

- The nature of governance has basically remained undemocratic, unaccountable and patrimonial. It is futile to complain bitterly about corruption and still keep intact the very system that breeds it.

This is not to suggest that corrupt practices do not exist in democratic systems. Today, many governments in Africa South of the Sahara underwent the electoral process but are, nonetheless, reportedly rife with corruption and political patronage. It can be argued that although these governments were democratically elected, they were essentially patrimonial and unaccountable. In a system where patronage is well entrenched, it would be difficult to expect measures against unethical conduct to be enforced with any degree of seriousness. Thus, while corruption occurs in both democratic and non-democratic systems of government, there is no doubt that democratic governance is a *sine qua non* for any meaningful efforts to effectively combat corruption on a sustained basis.

In addition, a proactive agenda designed to discourage corruption and entrench ethical standards and accountability in public service in Africa should include the following measures:

- Fostering and promoting enabling conditions of service to enhance professional and ethical standards
- Implementing sound policies on recruitment, training and public personnel management
- Institutionalization of professional values
- Promoting a psychology of service in public and political life
- Upholding the integrity of public institutions of accountability
- Fostering popular participation to ensure the accountability of governance
- Urgent need to enforce ethical behavior at the international level if grand-scale corruption resulting from international business transactions in developing countries, including Africa is to be curtailed (Rasheed 1995).

Conclusion

Without a doubt, it is a fact that corruption permeates almost every strata of public life in most African countries. Having reached pandemic levels in some countries, it is one of the leading causes of economic decline in those countries. Corruption appears to be a hydra-headed monster. Given the nature, structure, and scale of corruption in many African countries, it may not be totally eliminated anytime soon. But it can, at least, be minimized, if there is a concerted will to tackle the problem.

Although some have argued that corruption has beneficial effects, in terms of the relaxation of bureaucratic red tape, it has been shown that patrimonial rule and patronage system have detrimental effects on Africa's economic, political, and social development. In the absence of democratic institutional arrangements that make the engagement in corrupt practices difficult, prevent systemic corruption-funded patronage, as well as limit state intervention in private exchange, the political leadership will attempt to over-regulate economic activity, as has been the case in most of Africa, in the process of exercising monopoly control. Obviously, over-regulation not only complicates the activities of businesspeople, but also discourages productive investment. It also creates bloated, expensive, corrupt, and inefficient bureaucracies, which has been an important constraint on sustainable growth and development.

Thus, the most effective approach to deal with corruption in Africa is for each state to make, and effectively enforce, constitutional provisions for accountability of public officials, and guarantee participatory democracy, which encourages popular participation of civil society to ensure accountability and transparency of governance. Although the constraints to Africa's development are multifaceted, tackling corruption has become necessary, if the continent is to make any progress, in terms of administrative efficiency, economic growth, and political stability that it so desperately needs. It is only through the initiation of public policies and institutional reforms based on genuine democratic principles and public accountability that African countries can realistically wage a sustained successful attack on the entrenched bastions of corruption that have handicapped their developmental progress.

Note

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