

Psychology and Corruption: The East African Experience

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Abstract: Psychology refers to the study of the mind while corruption refers to the act of abuse of office through bribery, nepotism, segregation, favouritism. It is the abuse of entrusted power for private gains. The social psychological drivers of this behavior still remain largely unknown. The study was underpinned by the Theory of Rational Choice. Research has revealed that psychological factors are very crucial determinants of unethical conduct such as cheating and lying. The East African region is well known globally in corruption circles. Among the main factors hampering the attempts to fight corruption are: lack of the political will and poor democracy levels in the countries' governments. The most recent 2018 Corruption Perception Index by Transparency International shows that Rwanda remains the least corrupt country followed by Tanzania and Kenya while Burundi is the most corrupt in the region. Uganda's global position is 152 out of 180 countries globally and it is the second to Burundi in the region. The paper will show how corruption is a matter of the mind as psychology is meant to be its study and review reports such as Transparency International and others to show the extent to which the vice has eaten the moral fabric in the institutions in the region. The paper will further attempt the main causes of corruption and highlight the challenges in the fight against corruption in the region. Lastly, the paper will make suggestions on how to change the mindsets of bureaucrats engaged in corruption shall also be made.

Keywords: Psychology, Corruption, Transparency, Segregation, East African region.

1. INTRODUCTION

Psychology refers to the study of the human mind. Corruption is defined as the act of abuse of office through bribery, nepotism, segregation, favouritism. Corruption can refer to a wide variety of actions and/or behavior which make a clear definition difficult. It is commonly defined as abuse of entrusted power for private gains and its psychological drivers remain largely unknown (Transparency International, 2010). It is also an inherent multi-level phenomenon. More so, it is a dynamic process and the outcome of that dynamic process. It is also defined as perversion or destruction of integrity (Moore, 2009). Abraham, Suleeman and Takwin (2018) define it as unethical, unfair and unjust as well as urgent to investigate. Corruption manifests itself as bribery, financial leakages, conflict of interest, embezzlement, false accounting, fraud, influence peddling, nepotism, theft of public funds or theft of public assets (Transparency International Uganda, 2016). Corruption in the East African region is not uncommon in spite of the governments' efforts to fight it. The bureaucrats always claim that they are underpaid thereby justifying their actions in asking for bribes for the services they offer, awarding job contracts, recruiting new staff etc. In some cases, female have been sexually harassed and if they do not yield to the advances of their bosses or their would be employers, they lose their jobs or do not get the jobs they aspire for. Dealing with the minds of the individuals is the sure way to eliminate if not reduce the levels of corruption in the region. The concerned governments, religious and civil organizations have a great role to play in this regard. The practice is deeply embedded in the minds of the office bearers and removing it completely is likely to take a long time and considerable amounts of resources in terms of sensitization on the evils of corruption.

2. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To document the trends of corruption in East Africa

2. To establish how Psychology influences corruption in East Africa
3. To establish the effects of corruption on the East African countries
4. To make recommendations on means to curb corruption through Psychology in East Africa

3. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What are the trends of corruption East Africa?
2. How does Psychology influence corruption in East Africa?
3. What are the effects of corruption on the East African countries?
4. What are the recommended means to curb corruption through Psychology in East Africa?

4. THEORETICAL UNDERPINNINGS OF THE STUDY

The study is underpinned and by **rational and choice** Theory. Rational and choice theory has long dominated the academic study of corruption, anti-corruption practice and policy approaches. It explains corruption as the function of calculating, strategic, self-interested behaviour. In this view, corruption is particularly likely to occur in situations of power asymmetry, where some individuals (agents) hold power over others (principals). Yet, rational choice explanations make assumptions about motivations that may not be valid. Psychology, political psychology, and behavioural economics in particular, have posed serious challenges to rational choice theories of human behaviour.

Mercer (2005) argues that rational choice theories “explain how one should reason, not how one actually reasons” (80) and they do not adequately explain how people “make decisions to reach an outcome” (81). In *Thinking, Fast and Slow*, Kahneman (2011) writes, “the definition of rationality as [logical] coherence is impossibly restrictive; it demands adherence to rules of logic that a finite mind is not able to implement” (411). Instead, as Kahneman’s work shows, human beings are susceptible to a variety of cognitive biases that shape their decision-making and behaviour in ways that do not conform to the predictions of rational choice and functionalist approaches. Reasons take different forms, negative and positive. Some people diluted their reason with biases to perpetrate their actions and they are enjoying doing so.

5. LITERATURE REVIEW

5.1. Trends of Corruption in East Africa

Of the East African countries, Uganda ranks second most corrupt in the region due to poor democracy and lack of political will to deal with the problem (Kemigisa, 2019). According to the latest Corruption Perception Index 2018 by Transparency shows that Rwanda is the least corrupt of the East African countries followed by Tanzania and Kenya while Burundi is the most corrupt nation (ibid).

In Uganda, there are records of corruption in government offices though efforts have been made to fight it. Uganda’s score in fighting corruption is only 26% and its position is 152 out of 180 countries (Transparency International, 2018). With the discovery of oil and the prospect of substantial windfall oil revenues coming on stream in the relatively near future, Uganda is bound to face major challenges with regard to the problem of corruption. Uganda has made great efforts at establishing systems to fight corruption. By 1970, the Prevention of Corruption Act (1970) had been enacted; then the Inspector General of Government Statute (1988), the Anti-Corruption Act (2009) and the Enforcement of the Leadership Code of Conduct Act (2002) were also put in place. However, the implementation of corruption prevention and detection and of anti-corruption enforcement has been particularly weak. In a recent study of 114 countries, Uganda was found to have had the largest implementation gap, in which it was scored very highly (99%) on having a very good legal framework but was awarded 45% for having weak implementation record, giving an implementation gap of 54% (Global Integrity Report, 2009). In an attempt by the Ugandan Government to stem this trend, an International Conference attended by delegates from the Commonwealth countries in the region was held in Kampala Uganda in May 2019. It was the 9th Regional Conference of Heads of Anti-Corruption Agencies. In this conference, the delegates called upon Anti-Corruption Agencies in Commonwealth Africa to strengthen co-operation and partnership with local, regional and international Civil Society and media (Kampala Communiqué, 2019).

In Kenya, the levels of corruption have been rising since colonial times. Kenya's score is 27% in fighting corruption and its position is 144 out of 180 countries (Transparency International, 2018). Attempts had been made earlier on in 1956 to check on corruption in the country but had yielded minimal effect. Partly as a result of mounting donor pressure, in 1991 the Kenya government amended the Prevention of Corruption Act to increase criminal sanctions for graft. This still had no discernible effect and in 1993 the government took a step further and created a special anti-corruption investigative unit within the police ostensibly separate from the rest of the force. The unit arrested a few junior traffic policemen for taking small bribes but did little else before its registry and offices mysteriously burnt down. In 1997, again under donor pressure, the Act was amended and the Kenya Anti-Corruption Authority (KACA) created. It is for this reason that the Kenya Anti-Corruption Coalition (KACC) was formed in October 2001 at the International Anti-Corruption Conference (IACC) in Prague. It brought together a number of groupings involved in the fight against corruption in Kenya including the Attorney General, the police anti-corruption unit, representatives of civil society including TI-Kenya, the Kenya Private Sector Foundation, religious leaders and members of the cross-party African Parliamentarian Network Against Corruption (APNAC) Kenya Chapter (Githongo, 2002). Besides these attempts, Kenya signified its commitment in the fight against corruption by becoming the number one position in the world to ratify the United Nations Convention Against Corruption in December 2003 in Merida, Mexico. It had earlier on signed an agreement at the African Union Convention on Preventing and Combating Corruption in the same year and ratified the AU Convention in 2007. The National Anti-Corruption Steering Committee was established to complement the Kenya Anti-Corruption Committee in the fight against corruption in 2004 (Kenya Anti-Corruption Authority, 2019).

The story in Tanzania on corruption is better than the counterparts; Uganda and Kenya though this does not exonerate it from the evil of corruption altogether. Tanzania ranks position 99 out of 180 and scores only 36% in the fight against corruption (Transparency International, 2018). In 2014, high profile arrests and charges have targeted members of the ruling elite and top public officials including two former senior cabinet ministers on corruption and abuse of office charges. In 2008, a corruption scandal led to the resignation of the Prime Minister. In 2016, there was the indictment of the two actors in the infamous Tegeta Escrow Scandal as well as the head of the Tanzania Revenue Authority. The drive has also gone for petty cases of corruption resulting in the suspension and dismissal of public officials and changes in key personnel in law enforcement agencies. The Tanzanian Government, besides launching Phase 111 (2017-2022) of its National Anti-Corruption Strategy and Action Plan, the government has established the Economic Corruption and Organized Crime Division of the High Court and the Prevention and Combating of Corruption Bureau (PCCB) which recently recovered USD 26.9 Million in public monies during the past two financial years (AfroBarometer, 2017). One important point to note is that strong Presidents have endorsed the fight against corruption, as one of their main presidential goals have been the main drivers of change in Tanzania's fight against corruption. The current President, Dr. John Pombe Magufuli has won admiration of most of the African citizens in his fight against corruption and generally making attempts to save state funds by avoiding wasteful expenditure. However, there are many shortcomings that are eminent in Tanzania's endeavour to fight corruption. Enforcement continues to remain limited and capacity, staff and resources are lagging. These revelations and actual changes demonstrate in Tanzania indicate that corruption is becoming an act that is not tolerated by the population and therefore business – in this case being corruption – cannot be carried out “as usual”. Tanzania however remains a corrupt country although change is occurring and the country is taking on the path towards ‘good governance’. However, in its trajectory corruption might still increase for a certain period of time, over the long term corruption will decrease.

In Burundi, research on corruption indicates a worrying scenario because it is ranked worst in the region in terms of involvement in corruption. Its global score in fighting corruption is 17% and the position is 170 out of 180. It is only 10 positions from the worst nation in the fight against corruption (Transparency International, 2018). It is unfortunately one of the poorest countries in the world with a GDP per capita of USD 170 (Africa Report, Number 185) depending mainly on agriculture for its income. The efforts to combat corruption notwithstanding through the establishment of anti-corruption agencies, there is a deepening crisis which threatens to jeopardize the peace that is based on development and economic growth bolstered by the state and driven by foreign investment (ibid). Since 2005, the political situation in the country has relegated Burundi to the lowest

governance rankings, reduced its appeal to foreign investors, damaged relations with donors; and contributed to social discontent. More worrying still, neo-patrimonialism is undermining the credibility of post-conflict institutions, relations between former Tutsi and new Hutu elites and cohesion within the ruling party, whose leaders are regularly involved in corruption scandals (ibid). In Burundi, state power since independence has mostly been in the hands of the Tutsi ethnic group and who have controlled state resources resulting into unfair wealth distribution and fueling conflict. The civil strife in the years 1993 to 2003 did not threaten the Tutsi political and economic domination at all. The ruling party simply continued to engage in corruption and perpetuate an ethnically diverse oligarchy (ibid). It is absurd to note here that the ruling party is trying to interfere with the private sectors such as banking and thwarting efforts to improve private businesses. Bearing in mind the small economy, the overbearing state control simply jeopardizes the peace building process.

The case of South Sudan is very much like that of Burundi. In the global rankings, its position is 178 out of 180 and the score in fighting corruption is a paltry 13%!(Transparency International,2018) This is very sad for a country which has just got its independence and is hoping to attain economic developments for its citizens who have suffered the ravages of war for decades. There is no political will to implement anticorruption or transparency measures – and even if there was, it is questionable whether the country would have the necessary capacity to do so (South Sudan Country Evaluation Brief, 2016). South Sudan's violent kleptocracy has distorted the country's institutions, heaping catastrophic consequences on the national monetary reserve and creating an atmosphere in which too many hands are left to freely and repetitively reach into the public treasury with impunity. Services remain undelivered, business practices undermine the rule of law and corruption abounds (A deba. B and the Enough Project Team, 2019).

As for Rwanda, it ranks among the least corrupt countries not only in Africa but globally. In fact, its position in world analysis is the 48th less corrupt country with a score of 56% in fighting against corruption (ibid). The political regime in the country has tried its best to make sure it cultivates in the minds of Rwandans that corruption is an enemy to the development of their country. The country is trying to recover from the genocide which occurred in 1993 where close to a million lives were lost due to the conflict between the Hutu and Tutsi. In 2018, Transparency International Rwanda (TI-RW) has 15 years of experience in the fight against corruption. The start was not easy but with a vision, hardworking and committed staff they contributed to the promotion of good governance in Rwanda. The fight against injustice and corruption and other related offences cannot be won if citizens are not involved(Transparency International Rwanda, 2018). The Rwandan road in the fight against corruption got institutionalized in 2004 where Transparency International-Rwanda but the chapter was accredited in 2011 by Transparency International Secretariat. In 2009, there was signing of Memorandum of Understanding for better citizen participation between the office of the Ombudsman, Rwanda National Police and the Rwanda National Prosecution Authority. In the same year, the rural communities were sensitized on their rights and provided with legal aid, information on the fight against corruption was also disseminated. In 2013, provision of online services to report corruption was made by the government. The objective of Transparency International-Rwanda Strategic Plan for 2015-2019 is to focus on community engagement in the fight against corruption. There is evidence that these strategies are paying dividends to the country.

5.2. How Psychology Influences Corruption in East Africa

The main driver of corruption is socialization and the two ways in which socialization engenders institutional corruption are: seduction and surrender. Seduction is motivated both internally through biases and ways of perceiving situations that are difficult to resist and externally through immersion in an environment which one doesn't realize is changing one's moral attitudes or moral standards(Moore,2009; Kobis,2018). More often than not, these seduction forces work in tandem and one being affected does not realize how their environment is attracting them to change because the attractiveness of changing plays into all the internal reasons why people are also attracted to corruption(ibid). Compliance with one's immediate referent others such as peers, workgroups erodes one's moral standards and understanding of acceptable behaviour. This is referred to in other terms as habituation whereby exposure to different stimuli of increasing aversiveness weakens reactions to stimuli. The second way of succumbing to the pressure of corruption through socialization is surrender. This is also called de-sensitization whereby repeated exposure to the same stimulus progressively weakens reaction to the stimulus (Moore, 2009). In one of the definitions of corruption,

it is referred to as infection, contagion, taint. In this context, the new individual joining an already corrupted environment gets swallowed up into the environment (ibid). As postulated by Abraham, Suleeman and Takwin (2018), the psychological factors influencing corrupt are categorized into various major perspectives in psychology such as psychoanalysis, behaviorism, cognitive and multi-level socio-cultural approach in individual, group and community settings. The psychodynamic approach emphasizes on oedipal conflict related to authority, envy and defensive mechanism. As for the behavioristic approach, it explains corruption as the function of reinforcement existing in the environment. The rational-analytical approach emphasizes that corruption is a result of calculative-rational decision making based on loss and benefit. The socio-cognitive approach emphasizes on the cognitive bias (knowledge, belief, perception) working on interpersonal and intergroup setting. The cultural approach emphasizes the roles of cultural orientation (collectivism, uncertainty avoidance and power distance) and social norms (injunctive norms and descriptive norms) in explaining corruption (ibid).

5.3. Effects of Corruption on the East African Countries

On the effects of corruption on the countries where it is rampant, Kobis (2018) identifies the following as the effects of corruption in any given nation: depletion national wealth, over-exploitation of the environment, threatening democracy, disproportionately affecting the most vulnerable parts of society, increasing inequality and poverty and undermining trust among other people. Besides world scholars, the importance of corruption is recognized by other networks such as the poll online activist Avaaz which in 2014 surveyed 116,000 people in 194 countries to assess the most significant obstacle to global well-being. The results of the survey indicated political corruption on top of the list (ibid). Abraham, Suleeman and Takwin (2018) argue that corruption weakens the actualization of human potentials, decreases the capacity of the perpetrator as a moral agent capable of considering the moral meaning in every fact of life, has inter-generational detrimental impacts from past to present, from present to future, creating erosion of trustworthiness norms, decreases confidence in political representation, lowers the dignity, pride and competitiveness of a nation.

6. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This was basically a review of literature concerning Psychology and Corruption in East Africa. Secondary data was obtained from books, journals, papers, academic reports and other documents. Desk research findings were used to establish what the Psychology and Corruption stand for, the link between the two phenomena, the status of corruption in the East African region, the main causes of corruption, the challenges in fighting it and the suggestions on how to combat it through working on the mindsets of the bureaucrats involved in the unwanted practice.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS ON HOW TO USE PSYCHOLOGY TO CURB CORRUPTION IN EAST AFRICA

One important step in fighting corruption is evidence-based anti-corruption programmes (Kobis, 2018). A psychological factor such as the presence of another person in situations which are corruption prone could be one way to mitigate corruption tendencies. Harsh punishment though one of the most scary measures has not yielded the expected results in stopping corrupt behavior (ibid). In Rwanda which happens to be one of the countries ranked favourably as the least corrupt in the East African region, once an individual is proved corrupt, they refund the money obtained through corrupt means, loses the job, is imprisoned and is denied a government job forever. This kind of scenario is what (Kobis, 2018) describes where making a corrupt offer to a non-corrupt agent can lead to trouble and the probability of detection is high and the corrupt agent runs the risk of punishment especially in low corruption environments. In the East African region, at least all governments condemn the practice of corruption and have put in place laws to deter it. Corruption therefore marks a crime according to all the national codes of law and international conventions (ibid).

A good way of fighting corruption is to change the descriptive norms of society. Descriptive norms as opposed to the injunctive ones are more malleable and less stricter in defining corruption (Abraham, Suleeman and Takwin, 2018). If the East African society would adopt an injunctive norm of corruption which define it as wrong and unethical, there would be fewer cases of corruption than we have today.

In order to improve public governance, the East African authorities should “walk the talk” and take bold steps to curtail corruption. Civil society should actively pursue its watchdog role and organize mass mobilization against corruption and donors should prioritize good governance (Africa Report,

Number 185). If donors could deny aid to governments that are performing poorly in terms of curbing corruption, perhaps they would be stricter than they are currently.

Another strategy which the East African governments could adopt is good governance which includes all the necessary technical ingredients to fight corruption: improved legal framework, citizens' access to information, independent monitoring and regulatory organizations, depoliticized civil service managers, transparent tendering processes and public servants recruitments, and reform of the natural resources sector (ibid).

The East African governments should review the anti-corruption law to extend the powers of the anti-corruption agencies, strengthen the control of illicit enrichment and protect informants.

Activation of the recruitment committee of the Civil Service Ministry and integration of civil society in its composition and publicize widely the recruitment and appeal procedures is yet another means to curb corruption in the region.

The East African governments should ensure the declarations of assets and conflicts of interest are mandatory and public for all politicians and senior members of the Revenue Authorities, procurement units, privatization and anti-corruption institutions.

Inclusion of civil society representatives in the procurement units within ministries is yet another means the East African governments use to fight corruption. They should limit by decree the categories of public contracts with a secret nature incompatible with any publicity or competition; and change the composition of the committee in charge of the qualification of these contracts by entrusting the chairmanship to a senior judge.

The East African governments should pass a law on access to administrative documents and publish on the Internet financial details of the state and public companies, such as the budget adopted and implemented by ministries and agencies, budget amendments, other public accounts, procurement contracts, etc.

Establishment of the anti-corruption fora is one way the East African governments should establish set out in the national strategies for good governance involving companies, universities and rural and urban associations, and establish a citizen's oversight commission to monitor public procurement practices, influence peddling, corruption in the land administration and illicit enrichment of public servants and politicians.

Conduct of social audits is something the East African governments should do and an assessment of the "national integrity systems", the government's anti-corruption performance, the business climate and privatization processes.

The donors should do the following in the East African region according to (Africa Report, Number 185):

- i) Support civil society efforts against corruption, including training to improve knowledge of public finance, procurement and legal control.
- ii) Include social audits in development projects and suspend projects where corruption has been proved.
- iii) Link budget support to the implementation of independent institutional checks and balances and to progress in terms of governance and transparency of the administration.
- iv) Conduct a performance audit on donor-backed institutional checks and balances and support them only after securing guarantees of their independence and conducting a performance audit.
- v) Ask the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) to publicly release its assessment in the East African region of the implementation of the UN Convention against Corruption.

8. CONCLUSION ON PSYCHOLOGY AND CORRUPTION IN EAST AFRICA

Analysis of the available data on the status of corruption in the region indicates that the vice is still rampant in the region. The countries in the region though they may have set up anti-corruption agencies are yet to implement the policies set up by those agencies. Though there are attempts in a number of countries to fight corruption, it is not quite easy to do if the political regimes do not take stern measures as is done in Rwanda and Tanzania. Though Tanzania has still along way to go, the presidency has demonstrated on several occasions its commitment to fight corruption. The two

countries if they continue in that trajectory will be cases worthy of emulation not only in East African region but in Africa and the world at large. Political will stands out as a determinant in combating corruption as demonstrated in the cases of Burundi and South Sudan so far the worst in the region and before the leadership in these countries stand up to condemn and punish the perpetrators of the cancer of corruption, nothing shall be realized in their countries' socio-economic development. By the look of things, other players such as donors have to come in to assist in a fundamental measure to assist East African governments to fight this enemy of development.

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