



POLICY BRIEF

Arresting corruption in Africa Role of the youth

Edward Kahuthia Murimi

Young people are most exposed to and hardest hit by corruption in Africa. Corruption remains a major obstacle to the continent's social, political and economic transformation, and the causal relationship between corruption and instability is particularly worrying for African states. This policy brief argues that to reverse the corruption trend, it is imperative for the African Union, member states and their anti-corruption agencies meaningfully involve the youth in the anti-corruption agenda.

Key findings

- ▶ Corruption negatively affects development, stability, governance and democracy in Africa and the continent's youth have borne the brunt of this.
- ▶ Corruption is not only a driver of conflict but also affects peacebuilding in post-conflict situations. It can fuel large-scale organised violence when there is illegitimate use of public resources for private interests. It can also impede peacebuilding by weakening the effectiveness and legitimacy of public institutions and therefore risk renewed violence.
- ▶ The prevalence of corruption in many African states has also meant that the youth are not only victims of corruption but also perpetrators, as research shows they are increasingly tolerating and condoning corruption.
- ▶ Youth participation continues to be limited and superficial and the contributions of young people are not influencing core structural policy decisions. Youth structures and processes in most African states are on the back burner and as a result young people are not meaningfully contributing to the anti-corruption agenda.
- ▶ For young people to significantly contribute to the fight against corruption, states and other stakeholders in addressing corruption need to be clear and genuine about the timing of youth engagement in anti-corruption initiatives, the degree of their involvement, who among the youth is to be engaged and the level of control that young people have in driving such initiatives.

Recommendations

- ▶ African Union (AU) member states and institutions mandated to receive corruption complaints and create public awareness on corruption should use social media, music and other platforms in anti-corruption strategies and policies.
- ▶ Fighting corruption is a long-term endeavour and requires legislators at a national level to go beyond the criminalisation of corruption in national laws. With support from civil society organisations, there should be equal focus on changing societal attitudes, including those of the youth, that condone, excuse or celebrate corruption. School curricula should include content that inculcates a culture of integrity from early on.
- ▶ National anti-corruption agencies and institutions charged with witness protection should ensure that young people who wish to report corruption can do so safely.
- ▶ Legislators at a national level should enact access to information laws that enable young people to have access to information and records held by states. This will significantly reduce public sector corruption by making corrupt officials more vulnerable to detection.
- ▶ The AU Advisory Board on Corruption (AU-ABC) currently has 10 members, none of whom is within the age bracket of the AU definition of youth (15 to 35). State parties should amend the board's membership criteria in article 22(2) of the AU Convention on Preventing and Combating Corruption to include youth representative(s). The AU-ABC should also incorporate more youth-focused programmes.

Introduction

The African Union (AU) declared 2018 as African Anti-Corruption Year with the theme ‘Winning the Fight against Corruption: A Sustainable Path to Africa’s Transformation’. This focus is significant to the youth in Africa not only because of their large demographic size, but also because of the socio-economic challenges they face, some often as a result of corruption.

These challenges hinder the progress of Africa’s youth. Studies show that corruption is a major problem in Africa. According to Transparency International’s Corruption Perceptions Index 2017, out of all the regions of the world, Africa was the worst performer regarding perceived levels of public sector corruption. Globally, 11 out of the 20 countries perceived to be most corrupt are African countries.¹

An Afrobarometer survey in 2017 estimated that almost one in five respondents (18%) from 36 African countries had paid a bribe at least once in the previous year in order to obtain one of six government services: an identity document, household utility services, assistance from a public school, a public hospital, the police or the courts.² Other studies show similar negative trends on the prevalence of corruption.³

It is thus evident that corruption is a serious problem on the continent and has a detrimental effect on development, stability, governance and democracy. At the centre of this negative impact are the continent’s youth, defined in the African Youth Charter as people between the ages of 15 and 35. They have borne the brunt of corruption as this brief will demonstrate.

Corruption is a serious problem in Africa and has a detrimental effect on development, stability, governance and democracy

Defining corruption

One of the most common definitions of corruption is by Transparency International, which describes corruption as ‘the abuse of entrusted power for private gain’.⁴ According to the World Bank, corruption is identified as ‘the abuse of public office for private gain’.⁵

The primary AU anti-corruption legal instrument, the AU Convention on Preventing and Combating Corruption, does not give a specific definition of corruption. It describes corruption as all acts, practices and offences that are forbidden in the convention.⁶

Some of these forbidden acts and practices include soliciting or accepting monetary and non-monetary benefits such as gifts, favours, promises or advantages by a public official in exchange for an act or omission in the performance of their public function.

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It further states that offering such benefits to public officials in exchange for their acts and omissions in the performance of their public functions, diversion by public officials of state property received by virtue of their position, and illicit enrichment and laundering constitute corruption.⁷

AU anti-corruption legal frameworks

The AU, Regional Economic Communities (RECs) and member states have done well with setting norms to address corruption. At a continental level, AU Agenda 2063 aspires to an Africa where ‘corruption and impunity will be a thing of the past’.⁸

Several AU instruments focus on corruption, the most comprehensive being the AU Convention on Preventing and Combating Corruption (AU Corruption Convention).⁹ This convention establishes the AU Advisory Board on Corruption which is mandated to, among others, promote the adoption and application of anti-corruption measures on the continent and advise governments on how to deal with the problem domestically.¹⁰

Other instruments that complement the AU Corruption Convention include the African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance,¹¹ the AU Convention on Values and Principles of Public Service and Administration,¹² the African Charter on the Values and Principles of Decentralisation, Local Governance and Local Development¹³ and the AU Declaration on the Principles Governing Democratic Elections in Africa.¹⁴

At a regional level, some of the anti-corruption instruments adopted include the Economic Community of West African States Protocol on the Fight against Corruption and the Southern African Development Community Protocol Against Corruption. While the existence of these instruments is undoubtedly positive, the challenge remains ensuring that the continental ideals as captured in the legal instruments are manifested through effective implementation at a state level.

Having the political will to fight corruption is an essential ingredient to effective implementation. As Nigerian President Muhammadu Buhari said regarding his country, there are enough laws, rules, regulations on good governance, anti-corruption commissions and agencies and there is perhaps no need for more. What was required, he argued, was to strengthen, adequately fund and motivate existing institutions to do their jobs.¹⁵

Corruption and Africa’s youth

The impact of corruption in Africa is well documented, but the extent to which corruption specifically affects young people on the continent is yet to be fully examined. Corruption not only has a negative effect on a country’s economy, but also on issues of governance, democracy and development. Economically, corruption is said to fuel inefficiency, and increases the cost of doing business because of illicit payments.¹⁶



AU AGENDA 2063 ASPIRES TO AN AFRICA WHERE CORRUPTION AND IMPUNITY WILL BE A THING OF THE PAST.

In terms of governance, corruption – for example by siphoning of millions from the state’s wealth – leads to government’s inability to protect, respect and fulfil the rights of its citizens, a core obligation of every state.¹⁷ On democracy, illegal campaign contributions and bribing politicians can undermine democratic systems, particularly when payoffs are made in exchange for legislative or regulatory favours.¹⁸

Corruption further leads to the phenomenon of state capture, aimed at changing the rules in the interests of the corruptor. Public policies are formulated to favour a few powerful individuals and businesses and not the public.¹⁹

The impact of corruption is widespread and cross-cutting. However, young people feel the negative implications the most. According to the AU, 65% of Africa’s population is below the age of 35, and it is projected that by 2020, three out of every four people in Africa will be on average 20 years old.²⁰

These numbers mean that Africa is not only the most youthful continent but also that young people are the most exposed to corruption as students, voters, workers and customers.²¹ This exposure to corruption occurs in many ways: from demands for bribes to secure admission in learning institutions,²² get employment, obtain business permits and licences, to being bribed as voters and receiving cash handouts from politicians to cause violence during elections.²³

Institutionalised corruption is one of the push factors for the migration of young people from and within Africa

Young people in South Africa for example believe that their employment prospects are compromised by corruption – for example by the jobs-for-pay scandal and nepotism in recruiting employees.²⁴

In Zimbabwe, young people who work as vendors reportedly must bribe authorities for permission to sell wares on the streets or get vending bays.²⁵ Funds set aside for youth empowerment have not been spared either – an example is the theft of nearly US\$100 million in Kenya’s National Youth Service.²⁶

Institutionalised corruption is one of the push factors for the massive and often dangerous migration of young people from and within the continent. Some African youth are prepared to risk their lives in this exodus to escape to apparently kinder environments in Europe to improve their prospects of a better future.²⁷ The plight of the youthful migrants is further exacerbated by demands for bribes along migration routes.²⁸

Of concern is the reality that African youth are not just victims of corruption, but are engaging in and tolerating corruption. It is alleged that the youth, ‘despite pronouncements and aspirations for legitimacy as equal partners,



YOUNG PEOPLE ARE THE MOST EXPOSED TO CORRUPTION AS STUDENTS, VOTERS, WORKERS AND CUSTOMERS

have colluded in dysfunctional relationships of expediency and opportunism – working the system as they hustle to eke out a living and gain advantage'.²⁹

Research conducted by the Institute for Security Studies shows that young South Africans are increasingly conscious of fraud and corruption and the negative impact these have on their future.³⁰ The research was done to better understand the factors that influence the voting behaviour of young South Africans between 18 and 24.

However, for some young South Africans the impact of corruption has resulted in the perception being created that a job in government means access to lucrative business and an 'easy way' to make money.³¹

Youth surveys by the Aga Khan University demonstrate how youth in East Africa are increasingly tolerating and condoning corruption. Findings from these surveys indicate that 58% of young people in Tanzania believe it doesn't matter how one makes money as long as one does not end up in jail.³² In Uganda, 55% of youth admire those who make money by hook or by crook.³³ In Kenya, 30% of young people believe corruption is profitable.³⁴

On average, 40% of youth in all three countries would readily take or give a bribe. These findings indicate that if the war on corruption is to be won in Africa, the youth need to not only meaningfully participate in the anti-corruption agenda at all levels, but must also stop being drivers of corruption.

Corruption and state instability

Corruption can cause and fuel large-scale organised violence when there is illegitimate use of public resources for private interests. This is especially true if resource control is based on social identities, creating inequalities that further aggrieve marginalised groups.³⁵

War economies, it is argued, are founded on corruption as parties to conflicts rely on criminal syndicates, fraud and bribery to facilitate the conflicts, for example through acquisition of weapons.³⁶ Corruption is also blamed for fuelling conflict 'where nepotism or patronage networks exclude vast swathes of the population from decision-making and access to resources'.³⁷

In Africa, this exclusion arguably affects young people the most. This should be cause for concern because

some studies have concluded that the intensity of conflict in terms of casualties increases in countries with exceptionally large youth populations.³⁸

There are suggestions that the risk of political instability increases when autocratic states face a youth bulge.³⁹ In the September 2018 UN Security Council session that focused for the first time on corruption and conflict, human rights and anti-corruption activist John Prendergast said corruption was at the root of the conflicts in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, South Sudan and the Central African Republic.

In Kenya, 30% of young people believe corruption is profitable

He argued that war in these and other countries 'will remain more beneficial than peace for those at the centre of conflict and corruption' and that such wars will remain 'good business' for those perpetrating the atrocities.⁴⁰ These three countries also happen to have large youth populations.⁴¹

Corruption has particularly fanned election-related violence in some African states. Human Rights Watch, in its report of the 2007 elections in Nigeria, observed that 'there is a direct relationship between corruption and political violence – many public officials use stolen public revenues to pay for political violence in support of their ambitions'.⁴²

The words of a leader in one of the member states, as quoted in the report, aptly capture how the political elite use young people to perpetuate violence for political mileage: 'They [local politicians] will just come and gather the youth to cause mayhem – not even for N5 000 (\$38), just N1 000 or 500. To someone who is doing nothing, N50 (38 cents) can be something to him'.⁴³

Corruption is not only a driver of conflict, but also affects peacebuilding in post-conflict periods. This is particularly relevant to African youth because of the important role they have as peacebuilders. It is contended that corruption impedes peacebuilding by weakening the effectiveness and legitimacy of public institutions, undermines economic recovery and discourages investment, all of which increase the risks of renewed violence.⁴⁴

In view of the negative effects of corruption to society as a whole and even more acutely to the youth, it is imperative to deliberately and meaningfully involve the youth in addressing corruption.

Engaging the youth

Corruption has a negative impact on the daily lives of young people in Africa. It therefore follows that they have a right to participate in efforts to rid the continent of corruption. Article 11 of the African Youth Charter guarantees every young person the right to participate in all spheres of society, but this right is yet to be fully realised in most African states, including state parties to the charter.

It is contended, and this would hold true for many African states, that young people's participation continues to be limited and superficial in that they are included in one-off discussions where their contributions do not influence core structural policy decisions.⁴⁵

Young people in Africa continue to raise concerns that their governments often treat them as a threat as opposed to important stakeholders. This mistrust is further exacerbated by the reality that youth structures and processes in most African states are on the back burner with the youth continuing to play second fiddle to other national priorities.⁴⁶

Young people need to be involved in the design phase of anti-corruption projects as active participants

These challenges to youth participation in decision making, policy formulation and implementing programmes within policies have also meant that anti-corruption efforts miss out on the contributions and talents of a significant segment of the population.

Engaging the youth as partners in the process, while not sufficient on their own to end corruption, is an additional and essential measure in addressing the problem.⁴⁷ To ensure that young people meaningfully contribute to the war on corruption, states and other stakeholders need to be clear and genuine about the timing and degree of involvement, who among the youth should be engaged, and the level of control that young people have in driving the anti-corruption agenda.

With regard to timing, young people need to be involved in the designing phase of anti-corruption projects so that they are active participants from the start and not mere recipients of a 'finished product' that they are then expected to work with.⁴⁸

The question of who among individual youths and youth associations is to be involved in the anti-corruption agenda is equally important. The youth are not a fixed category, and given that they are not a homogenous group,



CORRUPTION CAN CAUSE
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young people think differently and are motivated by different things.

Therefore for the youth to be real partners in the fight against corruption, the AU, member states and national anti-corruption actors are advised to target young people and youth associations with a predisposition to the cause as opposed to targeting young people en masse.⁴⁹ This includes ensuring involvement of young women, young people with disabilities and youth in rural areas.

Youth involvement

The AU has made important strides in institutionalising youth engagement. Important frameworks include the African Governance Architecture Youth Engagement Strategy 2016-2020⁵⁰ that informs the annual Regional Youth Consultations.

In 2018 these consultations have been held in Botswana, Senegal and Morocco under the theme 'Leveraging Youth Capacities for the Fight Against Corruption in Africa'. The Regional Youth Consultations can rightly be celebrated as best practice, despite a few problems.

These include inadequate follow up on resolutions from the consultations and slow translation of the aggregated youth voices into policies at the continental, regional and state levels. Other examples both on and outside the continent of youth engagement in addressing corruption are highlighted below.

Integrity clubs in Mauritius and Kenya: There are about 113 integrity clubs established in secondary schools across Mauritius whose main aim is to nurture a culture of integrity. Mauritius's Independent Commission Against Corruption conducts regional seminars targeting members of the clubs (students) where they are exposed to information on how to initiate and lead anti-corruption initiatives.⁵¹

In Kenya, the Ethics and Anti-Corruption Commission is continually supporting the establishment of integrity clubs in every institution of learning. The commission has further developed a manual to guide the establishment of integrity clubs in learning institutions.⁵²

I WATCH in Tunisia: This organisation brings together young men and women with the aim of preserving the gains made after the Tunisia Revolution in 2011. Its primary focus is on transparency and corruption

premised on the belief that corruption is what triggered the revolution. Its activities are targeted at ensuring there is transparency in political events, including pre- and post-election monitoring and voter education.⁵³

Fair Play Anti-Corruption Youth Voices: Fair Play is a global movement of young artists speaking out against corruption. It holds a bi-annual competition where young bands can submit music videos online that tackle issues around corruption in their community. The best bands are selected to perform at the International Anti-Corruption Conference. Fair Play was created in 2010 and since then has reached over 10 000 000 people through 400 music videos by bands from over 90 countries.⁵⁴

Thai Youth Anti-Corruption Network: This is a student-led network started in 2012 by a group of 36 students who all pledged to 'refuse to be corrupt'. In one year the network grew to 4 000 students in 90 universities. The network organises conferences and camps to raise awareness among students on the negative effects of corruption, and uses Facebook as the space to coordinate activities and exchange ideas.⁵⁵

Conclusion

This policy brief demonstrates that corruption in Africa is pervasive and denies the youth their rights and opportunities. It denies them access to employment and education. Rampant bureaucratic corruption frustrates their endeavours to be self-reliant.

Succeeding in the fight against corruption ultimately requires the presence of some fundamentals, for example respect for the rule of law irrespective of social or political status, institutional independence of anti-corruption agencies, media freedom, an independent judiciary and political will to fight corruption.

The youth cannot work in isolation, but excluding this important constituency in anti-corruption efforts will also mean there are minimal chances of success. Young people must however be proactive. They must demand a say in designing anti-corruption initiatives and a seat in anti-corruption institutions such as the AU Advisory Board on Corruption.

Equally important, young people's demands must go beyond the clamour to be consulted on the continent's

governance to ensuring that policies, strategies, programmes and legal reforms are churned out of their aggregated voices. In doing this, they must ensure that they themselves are not corrupt in the first place.

Notes

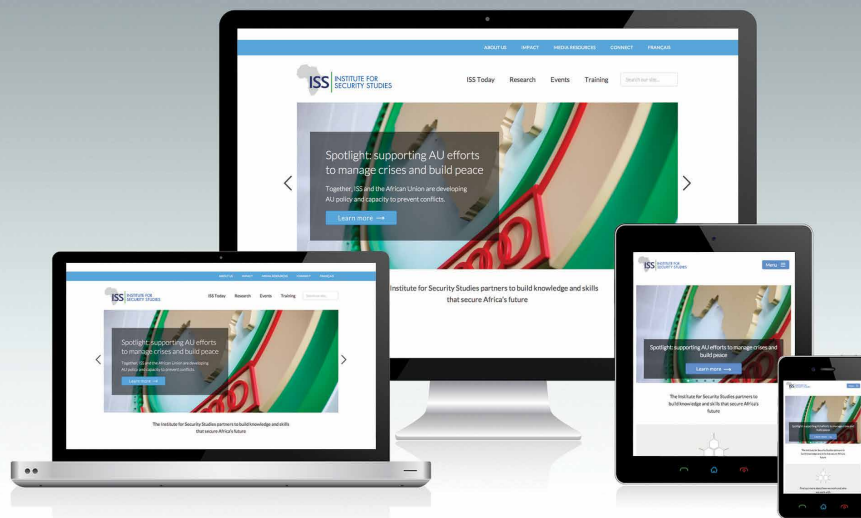
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