



UNITED NATIONS  
ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR AFRICA



**International Conference Organized by UNECA and  
CODESRIA on:**

**Institutions, Culture and Corruption in Africa**

**Date: 13<sup>th</sup> – 16 October 2008**

**Venue: United Nations Conference Centre, UNECA, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia**

**Aide Memoire**

## **Introduction**

The United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) and the Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa (CODESRIA) are organizing an international conference on: "Institutions, Culture and Corruption in Africa" from 13<sup>th</sup>- 16<sup>th</sup> October 2008. The conference is one of the major activities being organized to mark the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of UNECA.

The issue of corruption has resonated in the discussions and policy decisions of major policy organs of the UNECA charging the institution to do more work in promoting research, knowledge generation, policy development and advocacy on the problem. In November, 2007, the *Committee on Human Development and Civil Society*, which is the policy organ of the ECA on governance, civil society and public sector management at its meeting in Addis challenged ECA, specifically the Governance and Public Administration Division (GPAD) to conduct more research, and upscale the discourse on corruption on the continent with a view to generating better policies and strategies for member-states to addressing the problem. Similarly, The ECA *Conference of Ministers of Finance and Economic Planning*, which is the overall policy organ of the ECA at its meeting in March 2008 reiterated the demand for ECA to actively engage the problem of corruption on the continent. This conference is a major response to those demands. The problem of corruption remains intractable in many African countries, which requires more innovative, creative and new strategic intellectual interrogation, which this conference aims to do. The conference seeks to promote an Africa-led discourse on the problem of corruption with a view to engendering new policy options and increasing the stock of stakeholders in the fight against corruption cutting across the spectrum of the academy, policy institutions, regional organizations, civil society and the international community.

## **The Problem of Corruption: Global and African Dimensions**

In conventional development discourse, corruption has been identified as a major obstacle to the promotion of effective governance, sustained economic growth and national development in the developing world, especially Africa. In the governance arena, corruption is seen as undermining the capacity of the state and its institutions to function efficiently and deliver public goods and services. It is also thought to compromise the electoral process whilst eroding trust and legitimacy in a polity. In the economy, corruption is blamed for encouraging wastage, promoting the wrongful allocation of scarce resources, distorting markets and competition, producing revenue losses, decelerating investment opportunities, privileging non-productive rent seeking activities, and fuelling economic policy distortions. In the social sphere, it is thought to generate inter-

group tensions and, sometimes, political conflicts. In other words, the view is widespread that corruption has an overall corrosive effect on national development.

Given the apparent pervasiveness of corruption in different regions of the world, it has come to occupy a frontline position on the global agenda, with international and regional institutions, national governments, the research and knowledge community, and civil society organizations taking it up as a major policy, political, advocacy and research challenge. The United Nations, the African Union (AU), the World Bank, the African Development Bank (AfDB), and other multilateral institutions have made it a priority area of attention, although there are marked differences in their perceptions and understanding of the problem. The UN and the AU have designed anti-corruption conventions, which provide international and regional frameworks and mechanisms for combating the problem. The AfDB is developing codes and standards in the financial sector aimed at addressing the problem, while the World Bank has developed a governance and anti-corruption strategy.

In a 2004 report, the World Bank estimated that public officials worldwide received more than USD1 trillion in bribes each year. In the UNECA 2005 African Governance Report (AGR), corruption ranked amongst the three topmost national problems that were identified besides poverty and unemployment. In countries like Cameroon, Morocco, Nigeria, and Tanzania, more than 25 per cent of the households surveyed in the report indicated that corruption is a major national problem. In all the 27 countries surveyed in the report, 35 per cent of the expert panels assembled to discuss the challenges of governance took the view that the Executive arm of government is corrupt. The police and judiciary were severely indicted in the survey result as two of the most corrupt public institutions. In the 2007 Transparency International Perception Index, out of the 52 African countries covered by the report, 36 scored below three, indicating a high rate of corruption, while 14 scored between three and five, indicating that corruption is perceived to be a serious problem. Only two African countries scored above five, suggesting minimal levels of corruption.

#### **Theoretical Discourse:**

While there may be consensus on the severity and consequences of corruption, there is disagreement on how to understand its roots and dynamics, and on the policy solutions for combating it. Amongst the theoretical explanations of the problematic in the African context, the institutional, public choice and cultural theories are easily the most prevalent. The institutional theory focuses on what it

considers as the weak institutional structures, processes and capacities of African countries, arguing that Africa operates more through informal structures and processes, with an 'economy of affection' that allows for flexible and manipulative rules of political and economic transactions in which negotiations through bribery are a major means of securing agreements, contracts and political consent. The rule of law is feeble, the contract regime is weak, the judiciary is incapacitated, procurement systems are compromised, public financial management is weak, and oversight institutions are either in themselves havens of corruption or ineffectual. Even when anti-corruption institutions exist, they mimic a dysfunctional public sector. The recipe lies in building institutions and invigorating them.

The public choice theory is rooted in the neo-liberal paradigm. According to this perspective, the "over-bloated" nature of governments provides incentives for corruption in which public officials, in the absence of restraining powers, behave as rational actors who maximally exploit the system to their benefit. Policy makers manipulate macroeconomic policies for pecuniary ends and promote various forms of rent-seeking activities. As such, in order to combat corruption, a wholesale restructuring of the state would be required, including measures aimed at downsizing it and prosecuting second generation of neo-liberal reforms. Of course, there is an affinity between the institutional and public choice theories: Public officials exploit the system to their advantage because of weak restraining institutions. Where the two approaches diverge is with regard to the policy options they promote.

The cultural theory contends that embedded in Africa's social structure - its values, mores and social organization - are normative traits that are conducive for corruption to thrive. The "traditional" mode of social relations, of kinship and the extended family system encourages patron-client relations in which political power is usually appropriated to benefit family, group and ethnic ties. Corruption thrives in this social milieu. The Weberian capitalist culture of "modern" social values of achievement, depersonalization and formalism in social interactions are mostly absent in the public sphere in Africa. The solution that is proposed is that Africa must "modernize" its traditional culture and social values to make them conducive to social development and "good" governance.

In criticism of the institutional, public choice and cultural perspectives on the sources and consequences of corruption, the neo-Marxist approach suggests that the problem is a structural one embedded in the capitalist commodity production process and the social relations woven around it. The unidirectional push for profit, which constitutes the motive force of a capitalist system, generates rent-

seeking behaviours of various kinds and promotes a Machiavellian approach to general economic transactions. Underhand or subtler corrupt practices constitute a locomotive force of the system. However, within the context of global capitalist hegemony, the neo-Marxist paradigm receives little or no attention or interrogation in intellectual and policy discourse on corruption issues.

The issue of corruption requires a critical, nuanced and historicized analysis, which takes on board the trajectory of Africa's development experience, the political and ideological context, the institutional, social, cultural and political forces, the conflicts and contradictions in global development encounters, and Africa's place in the global economy. In other words, the corruption question could benefit from more innovative theoretical/conceptual perspectives and policy interventions that could provide a more comprehensive basis for understand its basis, dimension, impact and consequences. The proposed conference is an invitation for the pursuit of this need for innovative and imaginative thinking for effective policy-making and meaningful advocacy.

**Objectives of the Conference:**

- Promote knowledge generation and knowledge sharing on corruption as a major governance issue;
- Review and critique extant theoretical paradigms on corruption, especially from the perspectives of institutions and culture, and facilitate a better understanding of the problematic in the African context;
- Assess the manifestations and dimensions of corruption in Africa;
- Locate the historicity, contexts, and dynamics of corruption in Africa;
- Review existing international, regional and sub-regional frameworks for combating corruption and their efficacy;
- Identify best practices in anti-corruption programmes at the local, national and international levels; and
- Engender new policy orientations for combating corruption in Africa.

**Conference Sub-themes:**

- Conceptual and theoretical approaches to corruption in Africa
- History, social structure, culture, and corruption in Africa
- Leadership and corruption in Africa
- Institutions, state capacity and corruption (Parliament, civil service, judiciary, executive, police and local governments)

- Civil society and corruption
- Poverty, social inequality, and corruption
- Globalization, multinational corporations and corruption
- Experiences of national anti-corruption institutions and programmes
- Money laundering networks, assets repatriation and foreign banks, institutions and governments
- International development partners, the aid regime and corruption in Africa
- Evolving international, regional and sub-regional frameworks and mechanisms on anti-corruption in Africa.

### **Methodology:**

A conference announcement was made calling for abstracts and papers to be considered for presentation at the conference by scholars and policy intellectuals within and outside Africa. The deadline for the submission of abstracts was 30th June 2008. Over 260 abstracts were received. About 45 papers will be selected from the short-listed. In addition, there would be lead papers to spark off the debate at every session to be presented by seasoned academics, policy makers and practitioners in the area of corruption. Apart from the opening ceremony of which heads of the three major regional institutions-African Union, African Development Bank, and UNECA, and also CODESRIA will be the special guests and a keynote presentation made by a distinguished African personality, the conference will be organized into the following sections:

### **Plenary Sessions:**

#### **Breakout Sessions;**

**Special Roundtable on: *Combating Corruption in Africa: Lessons Learned, Challenges and Policy Options.***

### **Participation:**

The conference will bring together major stakeholders on corruption in Africa, which include:

- Academics and scholars;
- Policy Makers and practitioners on corruption issues;
- Regional Institutions-AU, AfDB, UN Agencies and institutions etc ;
- Sub-Regional organisations-ECOWAS, SADC, IGPAD, COMESA, EAC, etc.

- Independent think-thanks and civil society organisations working on corruption within and outside Africa;
- International development institutions like the World Bank, OECD, and IMF etc;
- Other partner institutions working on the issue of corruption.

**Sponsorship:**

The organisers of the conference will only sponsor African based scholars and policy intellectuals, whose papers have been accepted for presentation, those invited to present lead papers and others invited to play designated roles at the conference. All other participants are to finance their participation at the conference. However, the organisers can assist with logistics in terms of providing information on hotels, transport from airport to hotel, etc.

Self-sponsored participants are to provide information on time on their participation for the organisers to provide the needed logistical assistance.

**Contact Information:**

For further details on the conference, please contact the two focal points for the conference:

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