



Book Reviews

Mbaku, John Mukum. *Corruption in Africa: Causes, Consequences, and Cleanups*. Lanham: Lexington Books, 2007, 402 pages, cloth; price not stated.

Professor John Mukum Mbaku's excellent book is a comprehensive analysis of the impact of corruption on society. It is a textbook *par excellence* that provides discussion questions intended to advance students' critical and creative thinking on each chapter of the book. The book contains a preface, an extensive list of acronyms, twelve chapters and an index. Indeed, the work augments and sheds further light on the author's brilliant publications on the nature and character of corruption in Africa.¹

In the preface, Mbaku introduces the reader to the complex concept of corruption. Though corruption has existed from time immemorial in all polities, it has recently emerged as an important global issue following the dramatic international political changes that occurred with the end of the Cold War. The events of September 11 in the United States also awakened interest in corruption as terrorists used corrupt officials and practices as means to carry out financial transactions while underground (p. ix). Though corruption is said to be *semper et ubique*, the author focuses on Africa mainly because this "Garden of Eden" with its abundant wealth in gold, diamond, copper, uranium, crude oil, and so on is one of the most underdeveloped regions in the world largely due to the effects of corruption (p. x).

The first chapter of the book is a general introduction that historicizes and contextualizes the study against the backdrop of the character of the weak African state (p. 2). The state is typically seen as responsible for maintaining law and order and providing public goods, but governments in Africa have seldom held up to this standard. The model of development intended to move the continent to greater heights following independence was statism, in which the government is in charge of resource allocation and intervenes in the market regularly in order to advance this objective. But this framework of development has failed to improve standards of living for a greater number of the population or foster and boost the economy (p. 4).

¹ See J. M. Mbaku, *Bureaucratic and Political Corruption in Africa: The Public Choice Perspective* (Malabar, FL: Krieger Publishing Company 2000); J. M. Mbaku (ed.), *Corruption and the Crisis of Institutional Reforms in Africa* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press 1998). He has published several articles on corruption including, but not limited to: "Bureaucratic Corruption and the Crisis of Institutional Reforms in Africa," *Business and the Contemporary World*, Vol. 8, No. 3 & 4 (1996); "Bureaucratic Corruption in Africa: The Futility of Cleanups," *The Cato Journal*, Vol. 16, No. 1 (1996); "Bureaucratic Corruption and Policy Reform in Africa," *The Journal of Social, Political and Economic Studies*, Vol. 19, No. 2 (1994).

In chapter 2, "Bureaucratic and Political Corruption: Definitions and Measurements," Mbaku fleshes out the concepts of and differences between bureaucratic and political corruption. He begins with different definitions and explanations of corruption that have been found in the literature which include: Tyranny, deviant behavior, the acceptance of rewards, *inter-alia*. Operationally, bureaucratic corruption is defined as "misuse of public office for private gain," while political corruption is defined as the use of laws and institutions to build political parties and help certain politicians become leaders of the state (pp. 11-13). Citizens in developing countries like Africa see corruption as theft of public resources by civil servants and illegal taxation of economic activity. Moreover, corruption could be displayed in the forms of nepotism, which is favoring friends, relatives, and acquaintances in the acquisition of goods, services, and employment (p.18). Other methods of corruption include, but are not limited to embezzling public funds, using public office to gain income for personal use, and requiring citizens to pay bribes for welfare or hospital treatment services (p. 22). There are two levels of corruption, defined as either "grand corruption" which involves high ranking officials and large amounts of money, or "petty corruption" which involves lower level civil servants and smaller amounts of money (p. 24).

Central to this chapter is the analysis of the dynamics of corruption as a major challenge in Africa. Measuring corruption is also a challenge because most corrupt activities occur in secret and very few, if any, governments subscribe to genuine accountability and transparency in their operations. Thus, the chapter suggests the examination of public financial records as a way of mitigating corruption. The situation is the same concerning auditing and compiling police complaints in order to reduce corruption.²

Chapter 3, "Corruption in Africa: An Overview of Causes and Country Experiences," focuses on the causes of corruption in Africa with special case studies on Nigeria, Ghana, Zaire, and Cameroon (pp. 38-64). These states are among the most corrupt in Africa, and in every instance their anti-corruption efforts amounted to appeasing fluff. Other common characteristics in these states are the lack of efficient and legitimate institutions and adherence to the rule of law. How can these vices be ameliorated? Mbaku suggests state reconstruction, democratization, constraints on the state, peace between groups, and promoting economic freedom (p. 51).

Other methods for cleaning up corruption in society might include, but not limited to drafting an adequate constitution, restructuring the "oligarchic" state, and implementing a "pro-people" government (pp. 78-79).

Chapter 4, which is titled "The Impact of Corruption on African Economies," the author explains how corruption is sometimes viewed positively. First, corruption makes it possible for the private sector to gain access to civil service/servants and participate in policy design. Indeed, it is suggested that the opportunity for corruption may actually serve to enhance the quality of public servants (p. 89).³ Also, corruption has been seen as a way for marginal-

² B. A. Odunsi, "Police and Human Rights Infractions: The Need for Reform," in E. I. Udogu (ed.), *Nigeria in the Twenty-First Century: Strategies for Political Stability and Peaceful Co-existence* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press 2005), pp. 185-205.

³ D. H. Bayley, "The Effects of Corruption in a Developing Nation," *The Western Political Science Quarterly*, Vol. 19, No. 4 (1966): 719-732.

ized groups and individuals to gain access to political and economic markets; again, this has not occurred as individuals still must pay bribes to gain access (p. 100).

The chapter further discusses and enumerates the negative impacts of corruption, which include: civil servants and politicians do not perform their duties; costs of goods and services are inflated; finance of public service activities depend on the domestic economy; demoralized civil service, mistrust in government, and waste of human capital; ineffective civil service . . . ; inability to effectively trade and seek foreign investment from other countries; government agencies such as border control are ineffective; and lack of respect and involvement in the government by the people (pp.103-108). Indeed, paradoxically, it is even claimed that poor people pay more in bribe than rich people in the Nigerian case.⁴

The fifth chapter is sub-titled "The International Dimension of Corruption." It alludes to the efforts of such international organizations as the United Nations, the Organization of American States, the International Chamber of Commerce, Transparency International, the World Economic Forum, Interpol, and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development to tackle corruption globally. This interest gathered momentum at the end of the Cold War as exasperated citizens particularly in civil society groups began demanding accountability and transparency in their governments – as the world advances further toward economic interdependence (p. 118). The World Bank, the IMF, and the UN developed anti-corruption policies that can deny loans and grants to governments that have not sufficiently addressed corruption – that negatively affects African states which still depend heavily on foreign aid (p. 131).

Chapters 6-9, with a useful unified theme, discuss corruption cleanups in Africa. Thus, chapter 6, "Corruption Cleanups in Africa: Traditional Approaches," provides some distinct strategies for reducing corruption (pp. 140-144). The first is societal approach, in which society agrees on a definition of morality and norms that allow them to identify corrupt behavior. The government, all things being equal, is expected to detect corrupt behavior and inform the public. The second is legal approach that names the judiciary, the police, and mass media as the vehicles for combating corruption, therefore requiring that laws exist to constrain public officials from corrupt behavior. The third is the market approach which is based on the belief that there is a discernible relationship between the market and corruption and therefore, government intervention should be limited. The fourth is political approach that calls for decentralization of power. This approach enlarges the political space enabling people to have access to the political system as ways to mollify corruption. The problem with these approaches, though, is that the institutions involved are supposed to be legitimate, but in much of Africa they are mostly corrupt (Mbaku 2007, 143).

Chapter 7 discusses "Corruption Cleanups in Africa: Lessons from Public Choice Theory." Corruption as seen through public choice theory involves attempts made by individuals

⁴ USA-Africa Dialogue Series, Nigeria: Corruption and Democracy. Remarks made at the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU), Quarterly Seminar/Colloquium, University of Ibadan, on January 31, 2007, delivered by Nuhu Ribadu, Executive Chairman, Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC). Title: Nigeria, the EFCC and the Challenges of Democratic Reform in Nigeria. See also, E. I. Udogu, *African in the Millennium: The Political, Social and Economic Discourses on the Way Forward* (Lanham: MD: Lexington Books, 2007), pp. 159-167.

and groups to avert existing rules in order to gain income and wealth for themselves. Public choice theory emphasizes "bottom-up, inclusive, participatory, and people driven approaches to institutional reforms (p. 151)" It also suggests a democratic approach to state reconstruction and economic freedom of the people. Public choice scholars use interest group theory to show how different incentives in private and political markets explain different outcomes (pp. 167-168). Changing and reforming incentives in political and economic markets has the propensity for minimizing corruption and other forms of opportunism.

Chapter 8, "Corruption Cleanups in Africa: The Role of Institutions," focuses on the role of institutions in the cleanup of corruption. Institutions can be defined as constraints that influence human interaction and structures of political and economic markets (pp. 182-183). Mbaku believes that institutions should be locally focused and must reflect needs, interests, and cultures of citizens involved so that they could feel as though they are stakeholders. Institutions can be formal, i.e. constitutional, and informal, i.e. based on customs and traditions (p. 184). To be successful, formal institutions must create incentives that are compatible with those generated by informal and traditional institutions (pp.186-187).

The author, in chapter 9, offers his readers an excursion into "Corruption Cleanups in Africa: Public Financial Management,". There, he contends that corruption in the public sector is determined in relation to the management of public resources. The private sector uses resources to create wealth; the public sector is supposed to provide the population with public goods and services. Corruption occurs when the actors in the public sector use public finance to amass wealth for themselves (p. 198). Budgeting is closely analyzed in this chapter as it is seen as the most important aspect of public financial management but incidentally tends to be the most corrupt. Budgets are supposed to be comprehensive, accurate, regularly created (e.g. annually), codified into law, and transparent. The budget has been improperly managed in Africa. Nevertheless, strategies to clean up budgets include, but are not limited to:

Holding political leaders accountable through sanctions and checks and balances; budgetary discipline, which involves the executive and legislative branches in drafting the budget; a "Medium Term Expenditure Framework" which provides the government with information about future budgets and the opportunity for civil society to participate; budget comprehensiveness meaning that all public money should be accounted for, thus ensuring that all public money is used to benefit society; a legitimate taxation system that is fair, equitable, and broadly based, as well as transparency in how tax money will be used; statutes which demonstrate how to allocate resources in the budget that include all citizens; objectives such as alleviating poverty; bringing in marginalized groups; and efficiency in terms of finding the most cost effective way to meet the most needs. The budget must also go through the legislative process of debate, modification, approval and then authorized by law (pp. 201-236).

Chapter 10 offers a crucial discussion of "Corporate Governance and Corruption." It focuses on the role of corporations in fighting corruption. A "corporate governance model" is needed to allow companies to maximize profit while meeting the needs and concerns of stakeholders (p. 283). Businesses are important instruments for creating wealth in the pri-

vate sector that could eradicate poverty. Unfortunately, regulation of corporations has been inefficient, expensive and ineffective in African states. The state should be a partner with the private sector to create wealth. Thus the state is responsible for making and enforcing legislation that benefits and creates adequate corporate governance – that should, among other things, encourage accountability and transparency.

Chapter 11 is about “Corruption Cleanups in Africa: A Critique of Advice from Institutional Experts.” There Mbaku discusses corruption cleanups in terms of advice issued by experts. The first institution the author discusses is United States Aid for International Development (USAID), which began anti-corruption efforts in the 1990’s. For example, USAID, like Freedom House, seeks to increase accountability, change incentives and reform government so that it could become more responsive to its own people. Unfortunately, the challenge to these reforms is that governments have often interfered with and sometimes sabotaged such modifications intended to help improve the economic and political conditions in the continent (pp. 311-329).

Transparency International was founded to fight global corruption. Mbaku finds that it has come up with helpful tools to fight corruption in its Source Book of 2000, but it requires an appropriate institutional environment – which in turn requires democratic reconstruction of the state (pp. 329-342).

The United Nations has developed measures to combat corruption, beginning with the UN Declaration against Corruption and Bribery in International Commercial Transactions in 1997. This measure implored member countries to take action against all forms of corruption and to criminalize corrupt officials (p. 344). He argues that the UN Convention against Corruption is a particularly significant measure because it is a legally binding document that involves a large number of countries. Unfortunately, the convention is undermined by the lack of national cooperation and the need for citizens to be involved in state reconstruction. So, it takes much more than signing declarations to curb corrupt practices in the continent. There must be adequate sanctions against polities not complying with anti-corruption measures. Nonetheless, he is encouraged that international organizations are interested in obliterating corruption and that they can provide financial resources and policy advice to those fighting corruption; yet, legitimate institutions must exist to enforce these reforms (p. 347).

Mbaku’s final chapter deals with “Democratic Constitution Making and State Reconstruction in Africa: Challenges and Prospects.” Here he centers his analysis on the need for crafting democratic constitutions and reconstructing the state in Africa so that it could become more relevant to a majority of the population. Mbaku argues that constitutional government, particularly the practice of constitutionalism – is the best vehicle for combating corruption, eradicating poverty, enhancing wealth, and ensuring the peaceful coexistence of the population through division of powers, constraints on state custodians, and implementation of the rule of law (p. 351).

A major challenge to reform, however, is the presence of entrenched groups that are going to resist change, as they will seek to preserve the status quo that benefits them. The author believes that Africans can overcome this challenge through grassroots efforts and help from external actors especially from Africans in the Diaspora (p. 359).

The book, which is highly recommended, should be very useful to interdisciplinary researchers, including those in politics, sociology, business and economics. It is a publication

that can prompt the informed public to join forces with civil society organizations in Africa to combat the bane of corruption, which has contributed to Africa's underdevelopment.

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