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**BUSINESS ETHICS AND GOVERNANCE**

**TERM PAPER**

**ON**

**Does the Kenyan Culture Contribute to Endemic corruption in Public  
Offices?**

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One of the greatest challenge that has faced Kenya and that has become a thorn in the countries fresh is corruption. Endemic corruption has become one of the most difficult problems to eradicate in Kenya, for both the public and private sectors. This possesses the question “**Does the Kenyan culture contribute to corruption?**”, and if it does “**how can it be changed?**”

### **Executive summary**

Endemic corruption continues to deny Kenya her rightful place in the world to becoming a responsible and progressive nation. The vice continues to drain the national coffers; to undermine provision of essential services such as healthcare and education to its citizens; It has led to collapse of key sectors and subsectors that focused on developments; it has also led to loss of many lives as a result of flawed election experienced in 2007; this has cost the country enormous goodwill support and the outlook by the international community of nations.

In this paper, I will seek to link the growing cases of corruption to underlying cultural shifts that includes attitude towards public resources, tribalism, materialism, individualism, moral relativism and prosperity gospel. In my view the urban leaders are slowly breaking from the influences of their ethnicity backgrounds and traditions and they are embracing cosmopolitan outlooks and attitudes. It is this emerging combination of cultures that fuels corruption.

Fighting corruption is total and vital necessary. This paper highlights some of the campaign angles needed to fight the growing spirit of corruption.

## **Introduction**

According to the Common Wealth Expert Group report on Good Governance and the Elimination of Corruption, cited in the book *Fighting Corruption-promoting Good Governance*, produced by the Common Wealth Secretariat 2000, Corruption is commonly defined as the abuse of public office for private gain. This definition has been used because of the widened scope of corruption and the abuse of all offices; both the public and private sectors, for self gain. Corruption may manifest itself in various ways and it is good to distinguish between Personal Corruption (which is motivated by personal gain) and Political Corruption (which is motivated by political gain). An advance distinction can be made between individual corruption and institutional or organizational corruption.

Corruption from a legal perspective tends to emphasize on behaviors and actions that are termed as crimes and involve the abuse of trust or the "inappropriate influencing those people in positions of authority for personal gain" i.e. bribery or blackmail. But trust and morality are social variables that cannot easily be defined or prescribed by law. While there are clearly examples of absolute corruption which might include grand theft and aggravated burglary by public officials, there are also many shades of grey. Hence it is not necessarily the case that "corruption is equal to immorality," at least in the minds of the public. E.g., tax evading or intentional failure to declare earnings may be a crime from a legal point of view, but in some countries where the government is widely considered as corrupt and parasitical, such action may be seen as "right or wrong" as a legal act of resistance against an oppressive state.

"Corruption" which is an English word often fails to do justice to the variety of meanings and practices that are considered good, one of these cases includes Gifts. Distinguishing gift-giving from bribery is hard but the morality of the gift exchange is only understood by the gift giver; the social context and ideas behind the reciprocity of the gift giving that govern such dealings is also not clear and the relationships that they create.

Endemic corruption in Kenya has indeed been difficult to eradicate and seems to be on the increase every day. Kenyan culture defined as: An integrated pattern of human knowledge, behavior and belief, which depends on the capacity for social learning and symbolic thought; or the set of shared values, attitudes,

goals, and practices that characterizes an organization, institution or a group' combined with low risk of punishment and detection; glaring opportunity for theft; and low salaries have conspired to turn Kenya into an exile state.

According to Transparency International's 2009 Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) In2009, Kenya was placed 146<sup>th</sup> out of 180 countries surveyed. The report measured the domestic and public sector corruption. Kenya recorded a CPI score of 2.2 indicating high perception of bribery. Countries corruptionwere measured on a scale from0 (perceived to be highly corrupt) to 10 (seen to have low levels of corruption). Seven reports were used to assess Kenya's performance on corruption and 95% of those interviewed thought Kenya was either corrupt or very corrupt.

Several institutions, committees and initiatives have been set up to fight corruption including Kenya Anti Corruption Commission (KACC), Governance, Justice, Law and Order Sector (GJLOS), parliamentary committees (e.g PAC, PIC) and Kenya Police. All these seem not to have any major impact on corruption or public perception on corruption. The past attempts to investigate and prosecute grand corruption in the country have resulted to no fruit leading to widespread public cynicism and skepticism.

### **Background and history of corruption in Kenya**

Kenya was invaded by Corruption in its infancy that is almost immediately after independence; this is when the country's political leadership saw and referred the occupation of public offices as an opportunity for personal embellishment and not as positions of trust to those who appointed them to those offices.

The story of when corruption was embraced in Kenya became obvious in the 1977 and 1978 when Senior Government officials openly participated in smuggling Ugandan coffee through lake Victoria Port, in Western Kenya. Nobody was reprimanded for these crimes and this started a culture of impunity. When the former President Daniel Moi was in office nothing changed. All the players of corruption remained the same and the corruption culture of disrespect for public property and impunity was blooming.

## **Culture and corruption in Kenya**

Culture is generally defined as the set of shared values, attitudes, practices and goals that characterizes an organization, institution, group or an organization. The Kenyan culture encourages the members of the society to be involved in the social activities, intermarriages, interactions, urbanization and integrated schooling; Kenyan communities which are increasingly homogeneous in their lifestyle, thoughts and outlook. In this term paper, I have grouped the Kenyan culture based on two Communities namely; Kenyans from urban cultural community being different from those in the rural cultural community. This does not imply that Kenyans from different tribes, speaking different languages and having different religious beliefs that their morality, the view of money and material or wealth possession is different in many ways and on average they are similar. This culture is influenced by many factors such as corruption, colonialism and property grabbing. This emergent culture is characterized by growing individualism, Materialism, Moral Relativism, Tribalism/racism, Power-distance and Prosperity-gospel.

### **a) Individualism**

#### **Individualism is defined as:**

- i. A doctrine that the interests of the individual are of ought to be ethically paramount.
- ii. The conception that all rights, values, and duties originate in individuals.
- iii. A theory maintaining the political and economic independence of the individual and stressing individual action, conduct, practice, initiative and interests.

In Kenya, the fact of individualism is best explained by the neglect or destruction of anything termed as public or that is collectively owned. Instead of allocating nations resources to public schools, hospitals and universities the resources are misused by privileged Kenyan.

### **b) Materialism**

Most people want to acquire what they do not possess and for that reason they are always enslaved by the very things they want to acquire. William R. Bradford -Anwar El-Sadat. This great, though disastrous, culture can only change as we begin to stand off and see... the chronic materialism which has become the

way of life and the model for cultures around the world. Materialism is when a person seeks to have all the physical items they think they should have and desire to have.

Materialism in Kenya is manifested by the grand architecture, ability to own multiple cars and expensive dressing. This has led to a growing desire for housing that has made the price of land and houses for middle-income citizens to a very high level. Following this competitive nature and desire of materialism has pushed and made a large section of the Kenyan population to engage in corruption and corrupt activities in order to be in the same level with their classmates, associates, colleagues and friends. Through most of the Kenyan citizens don't differentiate between bribes and exaltation they end up being exploited by those that possess power and command the wealthy world. This is also clearly depicted by different shows in the media houses including "Who Owns Kenya" this keeps the citizens on the move of accumulating wealth and material property.

### **c) Moral Relativism**

Moral relativism can be defined as the view that morality, ethical standards and individual positions of what is right or wrong are culturally individually considered. Everybody can decide what is right for them based on what they refer has morally right or wrong, which also can be influenced by the infidel beliefs, values and cultural practices. Moral relativism says, "It's true for me, if I believe it."

Bhikkhu Bodhi, an American Buddhist monk, wrote: "By assigning value and spiritual ideals to private subjectivity, the materialistic world view, threatens to undermine any secure objective foundation for morality". The end result for all this is the widespread moral erosion. To counter this trend, simple moral exhortation is inadequate. If morality is to act as an efficient guide to the code of conduct that is embedded in a more comprehensive spiritual system which will help ground morality in a transpersonal order.

In Kenya moral relativism has given different citizens both Christians and Muslims a mind to engage in all manner of corrupt practices without the risk of being detested by the community. To justify search practices extensive misuse of taxes by government in the view for the benefiting the community. Kenya having a weak legal system that cannot even prosecute those who have been involved in the corruption

cases. This universal evil of moral-relativism which is creeping in the country slowly is probably becoming one of the largest contributors to the current state of corruption affairs.

#### **d) Gifting and reciprocity**

Gift-giving is seen as the act of transferring a present or gift from one person to another. A gift can be anything of value, though large or small in value. The gift can be in the monetary, material or something else of value. A gift should be a voluntary free transfer that does not require any form of compensation or reciprocity action. A voluntary gift is not gratuity or a tip either provided in full or partial compensation for some personal gain or a bribe offered to an agent in expectation of some desired opportunity that one does not have a right of access.

Traditionally gifts and small tokens are given with respect to expressing gratitude and appreciation in business settings. Corruption can be seen as bribery or extortion of money or something of value from a third party by an agent.

Public employees in Kenya are considered to be the most corrupt agents since all the citizens in one way or the other require or need to access the public offices hence have to give a bribe.

#### **e) Prosperity gospel**

Prosperity religious doctrine, good health, wealth gospel among others are religious beliefs found among many Christians who believe that God provides prosperity for those he favors. This religion belief held by many Christians that "Jesus blesses believers with riches" and the teaching that "believers have a right to the blessings of health and wealth and that they can obtain these blessings through positive confessions of faith and the 'sowing of seeds' through the faithful payments of tithes and offerings." is the gospel preached by many congregations.

In the modern society, theology has been expressed to be prosperous but the end results are different. In Kenya, adherence to prosperity gospel beliefs is more common amongst charismatic and Pentecostal religions. These prosperity teachings are based on interpretations of certain Biblical verses such as:

- Malachi3:10 - "Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, so that there may be food in My house, and test Me now in this,' says the LORD of hosts, 'if I will not open for

you the windows of heaven and pour out for you a blessing until it overflows" (New American Standard Bible).

- Deuteronomy 8:18 - "But you shall remember the Lord your God, for it is He who is giving you power to make wealth, that He may confirm His covenant which He swore to your fathers, as it is this day" (New American Standard Bible).
- John 2:4 - "Beloved, I pray that you may prosper in all things and be in health, just as your soul prospers." (New American Standard Bible).

This kind of prosperity gospel has been misused by those that want to exploit the Kenyan citizens. Most recent case was that of the Nigerian preacher whose sermon was on praying to single ladies to get instant husband. This never happened but it only left the Kenyan citizens a conned persons.

#### **f) Tribalism**

Tribalism which is a contributing factor to corruption for a long time has affected and slowed the economical developments of Kenya. Excessive form of tribal politics in the country has led to political assassinations, rigging of elections and election related violence.

Titus Naikuni the CEO of Kenya Airways; one time made a speech condemning the evil practice of tribalism. He described the potential damage posed by tribalism to Kenya's economic prospects. He said, " When people start looking at each other from a tribal point of view, and you are not employed because of your own credentials, then it starts affecting productivity." "...the results could be disastrous for an organization."

Those Kenyans who by virtue of their positions are privileged to steal public funds find ready protection from the politicians, journalists and trade unionists that come from their tribes. The war against corruption in Kenya will never be won until tribalism is controlled and the Kenyans to unit and always believe that they all belong to one tribe which is Kenya.

#### **Fighting Corruption**

The battle against corruption in Kenya calls for intense and extra-ordinary efforts from the government, private sector, and the Kenyan citizens. A multi-dimensional approach that includes corruption related

law enforcement and legislation; empowered corporate governance and ethics; strengthening of internal controls in all the government institutions; and continual campaigns through media by airing corruption programs and massive public education on corruption which will help to reduce opportunities for corruption, on time punish corruption infringement, change the public opinion and correcting unsound stereotypes that enable corruption.

On the cultural face, Kenya needs to deal with entrenched and emerging trends, social and moral dilemmas, attitudes, lifestyles, thoughts, and beliefs that oil the wheels of corruption.

The fight against corruption is essential to the hearts and minds of Kenyans and it will require full support of all Kenyan citizens and the change of opinion by political leaders, religious leaders, professional organizations, trade unionists, associations, business leaders and the media among others.

Without uncertainty corruption has a large negative impact on political and Socio-economic of the development of the Kenyan economy which at large also affects other African states and the world at large.

### **Business and Governance Issues**

#### **a) The ethical issues**

Corruption is naturally wrong; since it is a misuse of power and position and has a negative impact on the society. It undermines the integrity of all those that are involved and damages the organizations to which they belong. The truth that laws making corrupt practices criminal may not always be enforced is not a justification for tolerating corrupt practices. The right thing to do is to fight corruption in all its forms.

#### **b) The corporate issues**

Corruption slows down the economic growth of a corporate. Corruption also raises the cost of living and a country since; officials may initiate certain conditions to ensure that they get bribes, by delaying the business processes and discourage new ideas and innovations.

Corruption also negatively impacts: the promotion of inequality among corporate; reduces the quality of products and service since those in positions may be under qualified; the government funds might be

diverted to personal investments and other production activities. This leads to poor quality of life, low productivity and poverty. Donor's creditability to Kenya has also been eroded. Corruption has also led to weaker structural and institutional corporate governance.

## **Conclusion**

The contemporary Kenyan culture has contributed in some way to endemic corruption increase in Kenya. Cultural facts such as individualism, materialism, tribalism and ethnicity, have weakened Kenya's natural resistance against activities of corruption. To undo the impact of changing cultures, the country needs to engage in sustained public dialogue intended to emphasize the impact and cost of the vice emerging in the world that fuel corruption. This combined with precise law enforcement and legislation by the government; good corporate governance and ethics strengthening of internal controls in public institutions; will slowly but certainly undo the long march towards damage that corruption has brought to Kenya.

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