

Africa after the Africa Commission: What Priorities for the German G8?



Working Group Report

Combating corruption in Africa: What can donors do?

Alina Rocha Menocal

Alina Rocha Menocal introduced the session by exploring reflections on dos and don'ts for donors in combating corruption in Africa. She began by highlighting the significance given to governance in the Commission for Africa and its pivotal role in enabling reform in all other areas of development. Alina also emphasised the vicious circle African states are subject to:

- Widespread prevalence of corruption undermines efforts to improve governance;
- Improved governance is essential to reduce the scope of corruption.

Alina went on to talk about the Commission for Africa's (CFA) recommendations at the international level to overcome this vicious circle. These include the strengthening of existing multilateral initiatives such as the NEPAD Peer Review Mechanism and endorsement of international anti-corruption conventions. Whilst offering concrete recommendations about tackling corruption and promoting good governance at the international level, Alina went on to argue that the CFA falls short by failing to offer country level recommendations for tackling corruption. Alina supported the CFA assumption that governance is primarily the responsibility of African countries and people, but argued that there is a role for donors to play, particularly in supporting internal reform processes.

Alina then shifted the focus of her presentation to look at opportunities for donor engagement in supporting good governance and anti-corruption initiatives at the country level whilst also highlighting those actions which donors should avoid. An important point emphasised by Alina was the recognition that not liking corruption and being able to do something about it are two very different things.

Key Dos and Don'ts for donors:

- Avoid dogmatism in the fight against corruption. Whilst burdensome, particularly for the poor and marginalised, not all forms of corruption are equally corrosive and have, in some instances not proven insurmountable obstacles to development as China and Vietnam demonstrate;
- Adopt a 'principled pragmatic' approach with context specific strategic interventions that do not impose overly idealised standards in anti-corruption measures;
- Engage with local political processes and societal structures rather than relying on narrow technical solutions to corruption and poor governance;
- Recognise the challenges and opportunities posed by democratisation processes. Assumed benefits of democracy do not emerge naturally and Africa has seen the emergence of many 'hybrid regimes' in which corruption has become more prevalent or at least more visible;

- Support long term holistic approaches to anti-corruption which focus on accountability and transparency;
- Support vertical and horizontal accountability mechanisms;
- Continue to support civil society, media entities, judicial reform and the rule of law but do not neglect parliaments and political parties as they too can play a crucial role;
- Adopt a united and more coherent approach in encouraging Freedom of Information laws in Africa in line with internal advocacy structures;
- Publish more explicitly information relating to aid distribution and utilisation;
- Ensure systematic monitoring and evaluation of anti-corruption and good governance initiatives to improve practices and share lessons.

Concrete actions for the G8:

- Continue the momentum of Gleneagles and more explicitly embrace the goals established there;
- Recognise the primacy of governance reforms and political institutions in achieving 'Growth and Responsibility';
- Ensure remaining four G-8 members ratify the UN Convention Against Corruption immediately;
- Support NEPAD's APRM;
- Provide support for the effective documentation and dissemination of the APRM's procedures, processes, findings and lessons learnt.

Heather Marquette

Heather Marquette followed by presenting some of the findings of her ten years of research and field work on donors and anti-corruption work. Heather indicated that her experience repeatedly exposed the same 'big' issues among a range of multilateral and bilateral donors and their tackling of corruption which she defined in her 'seven big issues for donors'.

Heather started by summarising these issues for donors in fighting corruption, emphasising the need for political sensitivity in donor support for what are essentially internal initiatives. She then went on to expand each area in detail before asking what the priorities and challenges are for the G8.

1. What priority should corruption have for donors?

- Donor priorities in fighting corruption: the level and corrosiveness of corruption varies in different country and contextual settings.
- Donors need to differentiate between a) corruption perpetuated by the poor against the poor, b) corruption that takes place in all countries, c) the systematic rape of a country by its leaders and/ or outsiders.

2. How can we measure political will to fight corruption?

- There is no common definition of 'political will'
- There is a need for extensive, in-depth qualitative political analysis and country specific knowledge.
- Donors often suffer to achieve this knowledge base because of the frequent rotation of staff.
- It is difficult to identify country level champions particularly as states do not always behave in a predictable and logical manner.

3. What role can women play?

- It is possible to challenge the assumption that an increase in the number of women in public office will reduce corruption.

- Research has demonstrated that women are just as likely to be corrupt. It is in fact their limited exposure to corruption networks that limits their apparent involvement.
- Heather argued that wider participation strategies are potentially undermined when women's participation is used as an anti-corruption strategy.

4. *What role does culture play? (Using religion as a 'proxy' for culture)*

- Despite the re-emergence of culture studies, the definition of 'culture' remains contentious.
- Economics-led literature argues that there is a correlation between corruption and religion with different religious groups proving more corrupt than others.
- This type of research needs greater attention because it has serious implications for development policies.
- Highlighted DfID's research on the subject in India and Nigeria as a current example.

5. *Can civic education be used to fight corruption?*

- Civic education plays a significant role in changing the political culture of a country, particularly in relation to corruption.
- It can be used to convince the public not to engage in corrupt activities and also to challenge the corrupt activities of others.
- However, donors often fail to recognise the significance of civic education. One-off campaigns and poorly designed and delivered educational programmes can be more detrimental than no education at all.
- Adversely, civic education can also undermine trust in all institutions which can be dangerous for emerging democracies, for example, where fledgling institutions need to garner public support.

6. *What role should civil society play?*

- Donor support to civil society is fundamental if done effectively.
- Comprehensive and inclusive strategies which engage a wide range of civil-society actors, working collaboratively through broad based social movements can be highly effective.
- However, in reality, social movements have not emerged around corruption and questioned why this was the case. Using Transparency International as a case study, it is possible to demonstrate the limitations of international organisations in fostering in-country social movements.

7. *What should donors do when corruption is uncovered?*

- It is fundamental that corruption is at the top of the agenda.
- Donors need to be committed to an honest and systematic approach to sanctions, even if this results in the cutting of aid or suspension of projects.
- Donors also need to be more open about alternative possibilities when sanctions are not the appropriate mechanism dealing with corrupt practices.

Heather concluded by emphasising the significance of corruption and its continued presence. Referring to one of the more positive actions of Wolfowitz, she argued that now corruption is at the top of the agenda, public debate is urgently needed to unbundle the issues.

Discussion

Some of the points raised in the discussion included:

- There should be an emphasis on governance and corruption in the G8 discussions, and the messages of the CFA on governance should be taken fully on board.
- There should also be an emphasis on accountability and transparency

- Debate on whether any level of corruption is acceptable, regardless of different levels of corrosiveness
- Belief that African mechanisms for Africa should be supported
- Essential that UK and other G8 countries rigorously support efforts to repatriate looted assets. Ratifying the UN Convention against Corruption is not enough; violators need to be prosecuted, even if it is G8 country multinationals.
- It is often the poor and marginalised who suffer when corrupt regimes siphon off aid money and increase the aid debt.
- Donors/rich nations have the most control over their own actions rather than over the actions of others, and therefore should assume responsibility over their own behaviour in the fight against corruption by addressing the supply-side of the problem, etc.
- Questioned whether there was unequivocal research evidence proving the correlation between improved governance and a decline in corruption.
- Donors are very hypocritical both in terms of their own behaviour and also their differential treatment of countries struggling with corruption.
- Different types of corruption need defining
- Asian miracle provides a clear example of where, despite high levels of patronage, fiercely effective governance mechanisms can lead to development and economic growth.
- Need to look at the governance practices of the G8 themselves and end a tolerance at home for corruption.
- An improvement in infrastructure could lead to a decline in corruption and should be prioritised
- G8 have the power to set an example on the supply side by signing the UN Convention against Corruption as well as other international agreements and rigorously enforcing them.
- G8 should enter into a partnership with African states to encourage, help and support governments using existing mechanisms including NEPAD's APRM.
- G8 can help ensure that African governments are accountable to their people, for example, by focusing aid on education (although corrupt people are often educated too!)

Key Messages for the G8

- To have the G8 set an example to tackle corruption on the supply side by ensuring amongst other things that the four remaining G8 members (Canada, Germany, Japan and Italy) ratify the UN Convention against Corruption immediately.
- It is not enough to have members ratify such conventions but members must also demonstrate commitment by providing adequate resources and giving real teeth to competent authorities to fully implement their commitments. Past corrupt practices such as loans knowingly given to corrupt dictators should not be overlooked.
- Donors, on their own, cannot tackle corruption in country. Rather, they should see their role as supporting ongoing internal processes for reform. The German G8 must therefore emphasise the central role of governance and institutions; and should send a strong signal in support of governance and political reforms intended to increase accountability and transparency at the country level. (Keep language of Africa Commission and Gleneagles).
- The G8 needs to set an example by publishing in a more systematic way information on aid, including amounts and how it is meant to be spent and making this information publicly available. This should also include how and when sanctions for corrupt practices should be applied in a way that is transparent and consistent.