Corruption, Politics, and Societal Values in Tanzania

Bruce Heilman
Ng'wanza Kamata
Laurean Ndumbaro

Although corruption is found in all societies, arguably, its impact is most severe in developing countries where political institutions have weak foundations and resources are scarce. This article examines corruption in Tanzania, an impoverished East African country that has been among the top finishers in Transparency International's annual rankings of the most corrupt countries in the world. Despite widespread attempts by the Mkapa administration to fight it, citizens remain bombarded with images of high-level corruption in the press and in their face-to-face dealings with public officials.

Williams (1999, 503) notes that most definitions of corruption tend to be "vague, elusive, and unsatisfactory." One of the problems in defining corruption is that it is closely related to societal moral and legal standards. These standards are seldom universal. In this article, we argue that corruption cannot be understood outside existing power relations in a given society. This is particularly true because corruption is socially defined. This article argues that the best way to conceptualize corruption is as a process in socioeconomic and political development that is more than a problem of individual morality or market imperfections. Understanding corruption requires a focus on morals, values, and ethics. In this respect, the struggle to curb corruption requires a change in societal values and not only a change in the behavior of public administrators, as many contemporary models emphasize. Because societal power relations are embodied in the corruption process, changing societal behavior requires the commitment of not only the top leadership but also all major actors in the society.

In order to highlight the socially constructed nature of corruption and the politics surrounding efforts to control it, we propose a two-level model that is discerned from the Tanzanian experience. The model is a modified version of the generally accepted categories of grand and petty corruption.[1] Although "grand" and "petty" are useful descriptive categories, their main problem is that they are of little analytical value. "Grand" and "petty" specify scale without capturing the reality of corruption as a political, economic, and social process. In most cases this categorization leads to legalistic solutions that are unlikely to contain the widespread abuse of office. In order to better understand corruption, we modify the descriptive categories of "grand" and "petty" to take into account people's perceptions of the different types of corruption. For the majority of Tanzanians, what is referred to as "grand corruption" could more accurately be termed "abstract

corruption" because it does not directly affect their everyday activities. However, what bothers the majority of Tanzanians is what the corruption literature calls "petty corruption," or what we term "real corruption." Real corruption centers on day-to-day interactions between the *wananchi* (citizens) and state agents. It involves such things as bribes related to traffic violations, nationwide school exams, or obtaining medical treatment. These are issues that affect the daily lives of citizens. The importance of thinking of corruption in terms of abstract and real is to illustrate social and political relations. Rather than merely describing two different types of corruption, we are interested in examining the differing political, economic, and social values that govern official behavior and how this affects the war against corruption in Tanzania. This can best be accomplished by taking into account that citizens' perceptions, and thus their norms and values, are shaped by how corrupt practices affect their lives.

Corruption in Tanzania and Changes in Societal Norms: The Historical Experience

One of the major characteristics of Max Weber's rational-legal administration is the separation of official activity from the spheres of private life. According to Weber, public officials neither own a part of the organization for which they work nor are allowed to use their positions for private gain. In this respect, Williams (1999, 505) argues that an explicit deal was worked out whereby in return for regular salaries, public officials were to forsake gifts, bribes, and embezzling public funds. Having developed from other forms of administration where there was little separation of public from private, the rational-legal model set new ethical standards for public administration.

One can argue that corruption, as carried out by Tanzanian public officials, emerged with legal-rational bureaucracy and was shaped by historically developed institutional processes rooted in the lived experiences of the people. The struggle for the separation of the public and private, with the view of making officials use their positions for public interest, started with colonialism and the attempt to impose a legal-rational administration on Tanzania. Although the legal-rational model of administration has been the ideal type organizational structure in the public and private realm, it should be noted that in underdeveloped countries meeting these standards of behavior has been difficult, the major reason being that the legal-rational bureaucratic model was developed in Europe and transplanted into an alien environment.

The history of precolonial Tanzania shows that at the time of partition of Africa, most societies did not have legal-rational administrations. The Hadza and Sandawi, for example, were stateless, and their existence was organized around hunting and gathering. The Maasai were stateless too. They were organized according to an age-set system. Property rights were fairly diffused. The tribe owned grasslands. Clans controlled water rights and owned cattle. Interdependence and personal ties were the dominant principles governing social relations (Sheriff 1980). Other societies

developed state structures and centralized systems of authority. Throughout the northeastern highlands and northwestern Tanzania, there were elaborate state structures with bureaucracies and standing armies. However, where states existed, they tended to be small. Communities had checks and controls over the actions of their leaders. Leaders were seen to personally embody the interests of the community. Chiefs were more the custodians of public property than its owners, as there were social pressures to redistribute wealth (Rodney 1980). Those who collected tributes or taxes could not accumulate a lot of wealth because there were societal norms that guided those processes (Sheriff 1980). Official power was often restricted to the execution of communal will by consensus of the villagers (Sheriff 1980).

Colonialism introduced the Weberian bureaucratic model of public administration with its separation of the state (public) and private property to Tanzania. However, the Weberian notion of public and private interests depended on the creation of a new society and the transformation of ethics and values. In Europe, the development of a legal-rational public administration was part of an overall process of societal change that accompanied industrialization and the creation of a modern market economy. It was linked to a rising bourgeoisie with a strong interest in reforming the state. In Tanzania, bureaucracy was associated with European domination. The relationship between the local people and the colonial state was that of subject and ruler. The state imposed duties on its colonial subjects. It transplanted legal-rational bureaucratic organizations developed in Europe into a new and inhospitable environment. Colonialism broke the organic link between society and their leaders and replaced it with a state that lorded over its subjects. Where the colonial state used existing chiefs, they were accountable to European officials rather than their own communities. In addition to ruling through existing chiefs, the colonial state also appointed local "native" administrators called *askaris*, *akidas*, and *jumbes* to collect taxes. These became brutal and corrupt officials because there were no established ethics for the collection of taxes, or rather, the colonial officials stressed results, even if this entailed the use of coercion and physical force. The British introduced indirect rule, whereby chiefs and *jumbes* were used to help in administration and collection of taxes. Tax collectors, including chiefs, used to retain a certain amount of tax money (Rodney 1980). This blurred the lines between public resources and private interests of state officials. Thus, the colonial state reoriented methods traditionally used by the society to hold its leaders accountable and set the stage for unaccountable public officials.

People paid taxes to the state without having any say over how these resources should be used. There was no state accountability for tax money after it was collected. There was no clear link between taxes and the creation of public resources to benefit the local community. Taxes were collected for an imposed colonial institution that lacked legitimacy and even a tangible daily presence in many parts of the territory. Local people did not mind if state money was appropriated for personal use because they had no input over its use and they received little or no benefits from the state. In fact, people felt it was better for African state officials to amass wealth rather than have resources transferred to a faraway and inaccessible state. People

knew that if they had problems they could go to individual African state officials and ask for help, as they did with their chiefs. In this respect, public accountability over the use of public funds was broken by colonialism. Further, during the anticolonial struggle, resistance to the state was encouraged, and a culture of praising those who avoided paying taxes or who used public office for private gain emerged.[2]

The breaking of the organic link between the state and society is key to understanding corruption in Africa. Ekeh (1998, 88) argues that there is a separation between public and private life in Europe but that both share a "common moral foundation." That is, what is considered wrong in private life is also thought to be morally wrong public behavior. However, colonialism in Africa created two different sets of morals, one that covered private actions and another that governed actions in public life. Contrary to the Weberian dichotomous categorization of society, Ekeh sees a three-level African society. The first level is called the "civic public" and is associated with the organs of the colonial state, including the military, police, and civil service. The second is called the "primordial public" and is centered on extended family, kin, and ethnic life and institutions (this would be considered part of private life in terms of Western culture). Finally, Ekeh also recognizes the values, morals, and interests of individuals and the immediate family (private realm). For Ekeh, behavior in the "civic public" of the state and its bureaucracies has no moral foundation (other than to appropriate resources), whereas the "primordial public" shares the same morals with the private realm.

Furthermore, the colonial order, which introduced legal-rational bureaucracies to Tanzania, was based on a strict legal, economic, political, social, and racial hierarchy that emphasized African duties and European privileges. There was little or no attempt by either the German or British colonial administrations to create a hospitable moral environment in which state institutions could take root. To the extent that ethical standards were emphasized, they were drowned out by the belief in European cultural superiority that shaped the way the legal-rational bureaucracy was established and carried out its functions.

In the struggle to end alien occupation, resistance against the state was actively encouraged by African nationalists. Avoiding taxes and obligations to the state while at the same time demanding rights were hallmarks of the anticolonial struggle. Unfortunately, after the colonialists left, the nationalists inherited the alien colonial institutions. Ekeh notes that in Nigeria, embezzlement and soliciting bribes in the "amoral" civic public to feed resources into the "moral" primordial public became expected behavior (Ekeh 1998, 106). Although Ekeh focused on Nigeria, his approach is also pertinent to Tanzania. For example, the misuse of public funds or the demand of a bribe to perform a service by a public-sector employee does not surprise Tanzanians. However, the same type of behavior by someone on a family or friend's wedding committee is unthinkable. In Tanzania, as in Nigeria, there exist two sets of values governing public behavior. Whereas the misappropriation of resources in the "civic realm" is tolerated, such behavior in the "primordial realm" of the extended family and clan is not.

The postcolonial state continued with colonial practices. With independence, a policy of Africanization brought into public ranks some chiefs and African officials who continued to see the state as an arena for plunder. This is attested by the fact that the first high-ranking official to be implicated in corruption in Tanzania was a chief.[3] Like the colonial state, the independence government made little, if any, effort to explain to the people that public services depended on their taxes. The abolition of the development levy in late 1960s worsened the situation. The development levy was the only truly country-wide tax that affected most Tanzanians. It was very unpopular because it was based on the colonial head and hut taxes. However, the abolition of the development levy nonetheless broke a direct link for most people between their tax payments and the existence of the state. It made people think that the state had all the money it needed to maintain itself. The fact that all foreign aid passed through the state continued to give an erroneous impression to the public. People did not feel that public wealth belonged to them. They could not see a direct link between their taxes, public wealth, and the repayment of foreign debt.

During the socialist transformation years, from 1967 to 1985, abstract corruption grew roots. Despite the leadership code and other socialist norms, public officials, particularly at the managerial level of parastatal organizations, continued to use their offices for private gain. As the first President battled with the International Monetary Fund over structural adjustment, a declining state-controlled economy facilitated the creation of a vibrant informal sector. Smuggling was rampant, as was public officials accepting bribes and favors in return for allocating scarce resources. Official salaries fell to below the level of subsistence, adding further incentives to look for side incomes. Using neoliberal-inspired theories concerning the negative effects of state control over the economy, observers such as the World Bank associated corruption in Tanzania with an overly regulated economy and the administrative allocation of resources associated with *ujamaa*.[4] Donors touted liberalization as a way to cut back on the opportunity for rent-seeking behavior on the part of state officials. However, the increased role of the private sector in allocating goods and services did not cut down on corruption. Instead, corruption became increasingly sophisticated as the relationship between the state and the private sector grew in complexity. In fact, under the liberalization policies of second President Ali Hassan Mwinyi (1985–1995), corruption seemed to spiral out of control. It was as if everything and everyone had a price. In November 1994, donors froze aid to Tanzania after government officials were said to be condoning the nonpayment of taxes by businesspeople (Kiley 1994). In March 1995, the late Julius Nyerere, the highly influential retired first President of the Republic, shocked the nation and the ruling party CCM (Chama cha Mapinduzi/Party of the Revolution) by accusing top CCM leaders of allowing corruption to get out of hand. In a phrase that has now become commonplace, Nyerere declared that the country "reeked of corruption."

During his first election campaign, Tanzania's third President, Benjamin Mkapa, made fighting corruption a national priority. There is a general sense that corruption is not as blatantly practiced under the Mkapa

regime as compared to that of his predecessor. High-profile moves such as forming the Prevention of Corruption Bureau and revamping laws and state regulations dealing with corruption mark a break with the previous government. However, despite these moves and the arrest and trial of the Mwinyi government's former Minister for Works, one of the lingering questions facing Tanzanians is what can be done to reduce the levels of egregious corruption that proliferate in the country.

Abstract Corruption

To many Tanzanians "abstract corruption" consists of events removed from their daily lives with no immediate tangible consequences. In abstract corruption both individual businessmen and individual public officials benefit. The only loser is an abstract, ill-defined public interest that is represented by the state. Much as in the colonial days when the public had little concern over African officials appropriating state resources, the abuse of public trust and the misuse of authority by high-ranking state officials are tolerated if not condoned by society. For example, when a person is appointed to high public office the general expression among the public is "*ameula*" or "*ameukata*," which literally mean "he has eaten" or " he has prospered." Civil servants who retire into poverty because they did their jobs honestly are pitied or laughed at because they did not accumulate resources when they had the chance. This attitude can partly be explained by the failure of the general public to establish a link between public property and their taxes. People do not realize that the misuse of foreign loans leads to government debt that must be repaid. There is also a limited realization that the embezzlement of public funds cuts down on the money available to invest in social services or to pay state pensions. In part, the failure to hold public officials accountable is also a result of patronage politics whereby groups that benefit from high-level corruption work to perpetuate the notion that abstract corruption does not adversely affect individuals or society and therefore, as such, is not bad.

Although abstract corruption does not have the same directness as the real face-to-face experiences that average Tanzanians have in their dealings with police, health workers, or educators, it nonetheless has important political and economic ramifications. Perhaps more importantly, it profoundly affects societal values and norms concerning the expected behavior of public officials and large-scale businesspeople. The Chavda scandal illustrates the impact of this type of corruption in shaping impressions about how the "system" works in Tanzania. The Chavda scandal centered on the alleged misuse of DCP (Debt Conversion Program) funds by Vindyadhas Girdhar Chavda. The DCP was designed to promote investment in Tanzania by converting Tanzanian debt into local-currency loans for economic projects.[5] It began in 1988 when Vindyadhas Girdhar Chavda and his brother Pichandra Girdhar Chavda applied for a $3.5 million loan under DCP to replant sisal farms. The brothers promised to create 1,400 jobs and earn $42 million in foreign exchange within ten years. They got the money, but they didn't accomplish the task. Newspapers reported that the Chavda

family diverted DCP funds outside the country by buying fictitious machines and spare parts. The press also reported that high-ranking government officials threatened the life of an MP, the late T. Sanga, who exposed the scandal. Augustine Mrema, the powerful Minister for Home Affairs, personally promised to ensure that Chavda would be prosecuted. Mrema, a populist politician in the mold of the late anticorruption campaigning Edward Sokoine, failed to fulfill his promise. The Chavda family escaped prosecution, the state-owned banks absorbed the loss from the bad loan, and Mrema lost his job.[6]

Real Corruption

Corruption has become part and parcel of daily life. Over time, both people who give bribes and those who receive them have internalized this behavior. It has become a norm to the extent that people assume most public servants receive bribes. Some people believe that without bribing, they cannot get fair treatment. Evidence of the widespread nature of real corruption can be seen in popular language, where a variety of terms are used to mean "bribe." The terminology and the way it changes over time serves the purpose of disguising and making corruption more socially acceptable. The way Kiswahili corruption terms are used also illustrates two aspects of popular culture. First, it reveals the fact that the public is aware of the illegality of the practice. Second, it reflects a general feeling that if corruption has to be carried out, it should not be flaunted. Specialized terms for corruption differentiate between various types of bribes that are solicited or offered. A few terms help to elaborate what is being suggested here. In Kiswahili there are three common terms that mean "corruption" and/or "bribe." These words are *rushwa*, *hongo*, and *mulungula*. The commonality of these words is based on the fact that when used, most, if not all people, will understand what is meant. These terms have been in usage for many years, and they continue to be used today. However, those who solicit and receive bribes do not use these words. They use other words that are more polite and disguised. Such terms include *chai* (tea), *kitu kidogo* (something small), and *mshiko* (something that greases hands).[7] There are other terms, but these suffice to shed some light on how corruption continuously generates its own lexicon.

Reducing the Incentives for Corruption

Many factors account for the emergence and persistence of corruption in Tanzania. The government-commissioned Warioba report identifies a number of other factors besides those discussed above, including implementation problems of law and order, administrative laxity and lack of accountability, lengthy and difficult procedures for obtaining public services, and managerial weaknesses of state organs. Scarcity also contributes to the widespread nature of real corruption. For example, if state-controlled resources or services are in high demand, this creates a potential market for corruption. Officials responsible for allocating scarce resources become

involved in corrupt practices because many people who would like to have a particular resource or service are prepared to pay bribes in order to obtain what they want. For example, in the late 1970s up to the mid-1980s, the Tanzanian economy was in a crisis characterized by shortages of essential goods and services. The major suppliers of consumer items were public enterprises like the regional trading companies and cooperative shops. Since these were the only legally recognized points for obtaining many goods in short supply, those employed by these corporations became powerful and demanded bribes from retail shops and consumers.

A commitment to controlling "real corruption" is related to economic growth. In places like Tanzania, an improvement in the economy is needed to guarantee reasonable pay and retirement benefits for public workers. This is particularly important because economic hardship widens the opportunity for corruption as it keeps salaries and retirement benefits below subsistence levels. Situations of scarcity and low pay, however, are not the only adequate explanation for the persistence of real corruption in Tanzanian society. It is possible for corruption to continue even after salaries are improved or scarcities eliminated. There are also cases of places of work where corruption has not found a breeding ground but the pay is low. What then explains the continuation of corruption within the society? It is clear that both societal norms and anticorruption enforcement measures are important.

Creating New Societal Norms

Although the need to empower citizens has been stressed since the days of *ujamaa*, the actions of state officials demonstrate that this remains rhetorical rather than a practical goal. Despite the fact that the government's top leadership has been calling on people to participate in the war against corruption, it has not created a base for people's involvement. Instead, top leaders in Tanzania are sending the public mixed messages. Speeches, newspaper articles, editorials, and conferences stress the need to fight corruption. However, the actions of leading members of society send an equally clear message: those who raise questions about corrupt behavior or try to hold leaders accountable will suffer the consequences. In a number of ways people have been discouraged and disappointed by how leaders and the government handle reported corruption cases. Often people are reported for being corrupt and no action is taken against them. In some cases, as the Warioba Report observes, "People are worried that if they mention names of corrupt elements they will become victims of persecution by state organs in collaboration with the people they accuse" (URT, 1996).

Leadership and the Creation of New Societal Norms

A key question facing Tanzania is the leadership's commitment to embarking on a campaign to reshape societal values. Do leading state officials really want to restructure the behavior of state officials in a way that is likely to adversely affect the interests of some of the most powerful actors in

the society? The Warioba report stated that the lack of political will in fighting corruption has made it difficult to curb the misuse of public office. Without making basic changes in the relationship between the governed and those who govern, it is difficult to imagine serious actions being taken to curb corruption. Those who engage in abstract corruption are powerful. People understand the costs of accusing the well-connected with engaging in corruption. The rumors surrounding the death of Sokoine, coupled with the expulsion of Mrema from the ruling party, attest to public recognition that anyone seriously involved in the anticorruption campaign will face personal costs with few direct personal benefits.[8] Under such conditions it is difficult to see how societal values can be reshaped to support the Weberian model of public administration based on the dichotomy between public and private interests. Strict enforcement of rules and regulations may deter corrupt practices in the short run. However, this strategy will not lead to a sustained and meaningful reduction in the misuse of public authority based on the internalization of new norms for public behavior.

Notes

[1] Grand corruption is associated with high-ranking officials using public office for private accumulation (primitive accumulation). It involves high-level agents of the state who make decisions involving large public contracts. In Tanzania, petty corruption has mainly been associated with underpaid civil servants who solicit bribes in order to make ends meet.

[2] This perception is rooted in how public officials behaved over time. Because no action was taken against corrupt officials in the past, public offices are seen as a means of making money for personal well-being. This is not, however, to suggest that the public does not appreciate public officials who fight corruption. Two anticorruption politicians, Edward Sokoine and Augustine Mrema, had widespread popular support.

[3] The corruption case involved Chief Abdallah Fundikira, who was a minister in the first independence government in the 1960s.

[4] *Ujamaa* is the Kiswahili term for the policy of African socialism that was ushered in by the Arusha Declaration of 1967.

[5] The DCP was jointly administered by the state controlled Bank of Tanzania, the Co-operative and Rural Development Bank, and the National Bank of Commerce.

[6] Information on the Chavda scandal was gleaned from the following newspapers: *Business Times* (Dar es Salaam), July 23, October 15–21, and October 29–November 4, 1993; *Sunday News* (Dar es Salaam), October 24, 1993; *Family Mirror*, December 1993; and *Shaba* (Dar es Salaam), April 26–May 2, 1994.

[7] These terms are based on a survey conducted in Dar es Salaam in January 2000.

[8] Although it was never proven that foul play caused Sokoine's death, many Tanzanians harbor the suspicion that powerful interests adversely affected by his anticorruption campaign arranged the road accident that resulted in his death.

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