

Preface

This book was first mooted at a roundtable discussion on anti-corruption in Africa, hosted by the Commonwealth Secretariat at Marlborough House in London in March 2015. The international experts present at this event agreed that more research was needed to show ‘what works’ in the struggle against corruption in Africa, and the Commonwealth Secretariat agreed to co-ordinate the research.

In September 2002, the African Union estimated the cost of corruption to African economies at more than US\$148 billion a year — which could seem like a drop in the ocean when compared with the US\$800 billion to US\$200 trillion being laundered globally each year, as estimated by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) in 2015.

The international community has recognised the damaging effects of corruption on development in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Goal 16 of the SDGs requires states to ‘promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels’. This should be achieved by reducing illicit financial flows, strengthening the recovery and return of stolen assets, reducing bribery and corruption, and developing effective, accountable and transparent institutions at all levels.

The Commonwealth is delivering on the global anti-corruption agenda in a practical way. The Commonwealth Secretariat demonstrates the Commonwealth’s commitment to support anti-corruption efforts of member countries through capacity-building, research, exchange of best practices and sharing frameworks, and devising template solutions to common problems.

In Africa, the Commonwealth Secretariat provides practical development support for national anti-corruption agencies. This includes long-standing support to establish the Association of Anti-Corruption Agencies in Commonwealth Africa, a regional network linking national agencies across the 18 African member countries. Like other Commonwealth regional networks it promotes collaboration and learning by brokering the exchange of best practices and helping to benchmark agencies’ capabilities while also facilitating peer reviews and secondments between members.

The Commonwealth Africa Anti-Corruption Centre is a partnership between the Government of Botswana and the Commonwealth Secretariat. The centre’s programmes are designed to address capacity constraints at all levels within national agencies, from heads to operational staff. It was launched in 2013 and by 2016 some 7,000 personnel had benefited from its programmes and training.

The Commonwealth Secretariat has been active in research as well, undertaking a diagnostic and benchmarking survey to identify gaps in anti-corruption policies and procedures in national agencies in Commonwealth Africa. It has helped to identify weaknesses in how agencies manage exhibits and proceeds of crime and developed a Commonwealth standard operating framework to help improve the systems.

The five countries featured in this book – Botswana, Lesotho, Mauritius, Rwanda and Seychelles – were selected because of their relatively strong scores on Transparency International's 2014 Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) or because they had registered a significant improvement in their scores over the previous decade. These countries, while continuing to experience challenges arising from corruption, have made significant progress.

The book identifies the institutions within each country that have taken the lead in reducing the impact of corruption, and accounts for the factors – both technical and political – that have enabled these institutions to implement successful anti-corruption strategies. The policies they have adopted in their campaigns are similar. All five countries see the value in strengthening legal and institutional frameworks; improving government effectiveness and building a competent public service; protecting whistleblowers and mobilising every section of the society to engage with the anti-corruption drive; reforming public finance management; and investigating and prosecuting public officials at all levels.

Differences arise only in the approaches they adopt, reflecting unique national experiences in a shared history of colonialism and neocolonialism. Having gone through a painful process of reconstruction after the 1994 genocide, Rwanda opted to strengthen systems on several fronts simultaneously rather than progressively introduce reforms in selected areas and sectors, and adopted a clear and emphatic position of zero tolerance for corruption. In Botswana, where the elites tend towards consensus building and support for anti-corruption institutions, 'the central theme ... is that no single factor' explains why the country has been ranked as Africa's least corrupt. In contrast, the Mauritius research shows that 'the key factor' behind recent successes 'has been the continuous political will and support' of successive governments – a commitment that is 'visible, forceful and convincing'. The restoration of civilian rule and the democratisation process in Lesotho guaranteed citizens protection of their rights and civil liberties and changed the environment for reporting corruption. Seychelles, having plunged to the rank of 63 on the CPI in 2006, showed remarkable improvement over the next decade to emerge as the second best nation in Africa with a rank of 43 on the 2016 Index.

Finally, with the many examples of anti-corruption activities contained here, the research challenges the falsehood that developing Global South economies are somehow more corrupt than Western economies. Whether in the reform of legal and institutional frameworks, reports on prosecutions or fraudulent cross-border activities, the research throws up numerous examples of the international dimensions of corruption, particularly with respect to asset repatriation and money laundering.

This international dimension is evident in a tale of corruption in the Seychelles of the 1990s. '[T]he banking sector provided a myriad of avenues for corruption as Seychelles created and self-promoted itself as an offshore banking jurisdiction [which was] apparently being used for money laundering and/or the financing of narco-terrorism.'

It was on show at the launch of Botswana's updated Extradition Act, which the government promoted as 'important in ensuring that corrupt persons may not escape punishment from their countries of origin by hiding in Botswana ... Government wishes it to become known both within and outside Botswana that ours is a country in which public and private business can be carried out honestly.'

Then there is the case of one Masupha Sole, the first to be prosecuted in a wave of corruption trials in Lethoso at the start of 1999. Sole, a chief executive in charge of the donor-funded multibillion-dollar Lesotho Highlands Water Project, was sentenced to 18 years in prison on 11 counts of bribery and 2 of fraud. What made the case extraordinary was that at least 12 bribe-paying multinationals were also in the dock. Acres International, a Canadian engineering consulting firm, was one of those convicted of paying bribes to win contracts and ordered to pay a fine of US\$2 million.

These and other examples of the international dimension in this book leave no space for equivocation: simply put, the principle beneficiaries of corruption in Africa (one could say, 'partners in crime') are inside and outside Africa. This international dimension requires no less than the international response given in Goal 16 of the SDGs, mentioned above.

Each country case study provides lessons learned, considers challenges still to be faced and makes recommendations. This research will help Commonwealth governments in Africa to gain a greater understanding of corruption and to formulate the most effective responses.