

Preface

It took some time from when I started studying the corruption problem and teaching on anti-corruption until I came to the conviction that *political* corruption is much more of an impediment to development in the developing world than is bureaucratic corruption.

First, I worked for the U4 Anti-Corruption Resource Centre, as its first director and later in different roles as topic expert and training facilitator and presenter. Second, I have been able to include the issue of corruption in several research and commissioned studies on Palestine, Uganda, Angola, Bangladesh, Ghana and Nigeria. Slowly, the conviction took root and evolved.

This book has therefore been in the making for a long time. Some of the ideas on political corruption were ‘aired’ in a very early working paper, entitled ‘Political corruption, an introduction to the issues’, and published as a CMI Working Paper in 1999. This little introduction became widely downloaded, read and cited (downloaded 65,000 times and cited 375 times), and this huge interest in the topic of political corruption inspired and compelled me to take it further.

Some recent reports argue that the anti-corruption efforts of national and international civil society activists, international organisations and donor agencies – as well as well-meaning governments and politicians in the developing world – have had very little success in curbing corruption. The amount of academic work, activism and professional advocacy on anti-corruption has exploded over the last two decades, awareness is high, and the international legal anti-corruption framework is in place. Still, the aggregate indexes and country evidence tell us that the success stories are few, so obviously there is something fundamentally wrong with the prevailing analysis and approach.

This book is a modest attempt at getting the analysis back on the track I believe it should be. This ‘track’ is based on the following four main arguments.

One, political corruption is very different from bureaucratic or administrative corruption. The problem with political corruption is that it serves a function beyond greed and personal enrichment; it may keep the regime together and afloat. Furthermore, political corruption not only gives the incentives for controlling the state, it is also a means to maintain control of the state. The rulers will have no political will to eradicate political corruption as it gives them wealth and power, whereas bureaucratic corruption can be eradicated if the rulers so desire.

Two, political corruption has two core elements: it is about getting the money in and it is about reinvesting in safeguarding the hold on power. The first, extractive political corruption, is mainly for the purpose of wealth and status. It is extractive when political power-holders are enriching themselves, their family and relatives, their political friends and allies, and their ruling parties and governments. The second, power-preserving political corruption, is when power-holders are using the proceeds and other funds, state or private, to maintain and/or strengthen their hold on power in illicit or immoral ways. Power-preserving corruption is one of several mechanisms of power abuse that incumbent leaders employ to safeguard their vital interests: wealth, status and power.

Three, political corruption is serving the interests of the ruling elite, and therefore it cannot be solved by technical–administrative measures alone. The rulers will have no interest in curbing their powers.

Four, consequently, political corruption should be seen as power abuse, as a democratic problem, and it should be addressed as a political problem. Technical and administrative anti-corruption measures can solve some of the bureaucratic corruption problems, if there is a political will to do so. Even authoritarian governments may want to do this when it gives them legitimacy and when it serves the purpose of getting rid of rivals to power. Power abuse can only be countered by political action.

The first chapter of this book outlines these arguments in more detail, and the following seven chapters take the arguments further by giving some flesh and bones to the different forms of political corruption as experienced in the seven countries.¹ Unfortunately,

¹ All mention in this volume of individuals, institutions, businesses and regimes stated to be corrupt and power-abusive have been named previously in the news, in academic reports, CSO and official reports, and these are duly referred to.

the overall picture is rather bleak – the corrupt power-preserving methods are often quite effective, even though they sometimes backfire.