**Overview of the Impact of Corruption on Economic development in Africa and Arab world**

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**Introduction**

Corruption, in all its forms, poses a formidable risk besetting all human communities. In order to be fully cognizant this phenomenon and its ramifications, one should recognize that corruption is a misdemeanor contrary to common sense though it is unanimously believed that it had been there for a long time, and that it had eroded states and their institutions .

The argument that the “utopian societies” or “utopian cities” are corruption-free is no more than an illusion that had preoccupied philosophers and abstractionist thinkers , who were completely unable to translate this state of mind into a feasible reality.

By definition, corruption is “ the abuse of power to achieve personal gains”. Unhealthy relationships between public institutions and their heads constitute an opportunity for the spread of corruption. Broadly speaking, this definition simplistically means that there is a distinction between the individual’s role in his public office and his/her personal role. It is also defined as “the abuse of influence to attain special profits and gains”.

With the spread of poverty and deterioration of health services, and the unfair distribution of incomes and wealth across the world, there are little or no growth in many countries, some of which, despite being rich in natural resources, have registered low income and growth rates.

Other countries, mainly the now-defunct Soviet Union, were not spared the dwindling growth rates despite the fact that they are in possession of highly educated manpower.

Several poor countries face difficulty grappling with graft owing to their inability to effectively harness their human and material resources, as they for the most part in need of institutional reforms.

Indeed, there is a global trend to explain the distinct experiences of countries, driven by “personal interests” encompassing concerns for securing an affluent and opulent life for the individual’s family and his group.

Some scholars label such an interest “avarice”, economists bill it “maximum utilitarianism”. Recent studies have indicated that rising corruption is inextricably linked to low levels of investment and economic growth. Graft does render productive, agrarian and industrial policies ineffective, gives rise to business that thrive within unofficial sectors in violation of economic and legislative laws.

Rising corruption actually hobbles foreign investments that often shrink from venturing into corruption-ridden milieus, albeit the endemic is ingrained into foreign investment structures. Unlawful payments usually drives price hikes and malpractices , as malfeasant officials promote unproductive investment in the public sector, thus neglecting the maintenance of the already existing ventures.

There is a good deal of studies that tackled corruption and its devastating effects on societies. Most of those studies indicate that graft is extremely detrimental to the structures of the countries experiencing mushrooming corruption. For instance, projections from Antonio Cost, senior official of anti-crime office in Africa, indicate that during the first years of the 21st century , two African Countries lost $ 5 billion each to corruption.

Further, numerous studies, including one conducted by the World Bank on the effects of corruption, revealed that an estimated thousand billion dollars are being annually squandered in both the developed and developing countries, because of corruption.

Back to the previous definition that corruption is “the abuse of clout to attain special profits and gains”. Corruption is also defined as “such acts practices by individuals from within and/or without government institutions in such a manner that it benefits employees, thereby allowing them to evade laws and policies, including by using new or existing legislation that help them realize immediate and direct gains.

Samuel Huntington defines corruption thus: “one of the criteria indicative of the absence of effective political institution that our current era has seen. Thus, corruption is not merely the result of behavior deviating from acceptable behavioral patterns, rather, it results from the deviation of the very customs from existing and usual behavioral patterns”."Behavior of public officials which deviates from accepted norms in order to serve private ends”. The dictionary definition of the term is “corruption is the antithesis to honesty and moral impairment , which is contrary to public interest”. It is also lexically defined as “ abuse of powers entrusted in ordinary or high ranking officials within an institutional work that authorizes them to exercise such powers for the purpose of using same within specific limits.

International law defines corruption as “The abuse of public office for private gains”. Social scientists branded corruption as a moral problem involving abnormal human behavior that deviates from the rudiments of social and moral code.

It should be noticed here that moral standards vary from one place to another, from one culture to another. For instance, Afro-Arab customs and traditions allow public officials to accept gifts and presents, while the European culture doesn’t.

In Islamic Shariah, provisions on corruption were correlated to those on banditry and its penalty as set forth in the Holy Quran:

“The only reward of those who make war upon Allah and His messenger and strive after corruption in the land will be that they will be killed or crucified, or have their hands and feet on alternate sides cut off, or will be expelled out of the land. Such will be their degradation in the world, and in the Hereafter theirs will be an awful doom;”.

When practiced by senior government officials, Corruption will be highly risky as it would swiftly proliferate among low-ranking employees protected by the top brass in what can be described as “Top-Heavy corruption”.

The concept of corruption is often correlated to the concepts of reform and transparency; the former is the antithesis of adulation. Reformation implies bringing in goodness and righteousness, meaning that there is a desire to change things for the better, reforming the corrupt and safeguarding the straightforward.

Thus, the concept of reformation lends itself to the transformations meant for the elimination of corruption, changing the nature of governments and their practices, altering values and behavior patterns, rationalizing power structures, the equitable distribution of power by means of political modernization and democratization, reactivation of laws and statutes, boosting accountability mechanisms, broadening political participation, securing individuals’ security and freedoms and enabling them to get their rights.

The concept of transparency originally derived from the root verb “make things soft and tender” or minimize it”. In English, transparency means visibility. It is defined as “Utmost frankness between the government and people through parliament members and civil society organizations”. The operational definition of transparency is “Clarity and openness on administrative and financial corruption practiced by state institutions and all social segments”.

Political transparency means the possibility of distinguishing between political and administrative roles within the political system as per a specific mechanism that enables the grassroots to monitor the government, gather and access information. This can be done through full openness to public policies, decisions and procedures, in addition to enabling the general public to raise objections, enforce accountability in such a way as to boost the political system’s credibility and clears the way for the adoption of good governance.

This paper investigates the impact of corruption on development in Africa and Arab world, falling into three sections:

**1-Corruption and Development**

-Corruption negatively impacts development, as it results in the depletion of resources, the emergence of irregularities and defects in the key structures targeted by development. It also reduces economic growth and hampers development efforts.

-It leads to unfair distribution of natural resources, which are diverted towards corrupt transactions, or get leaked, into private accounts, given the poor performance of oversight bodies and lack of accountability. As such, the state would be unable to undertake service projects based on set priorities.

-It negatively affects the quality of transactions and contracts, as contractors usually provide poor quality materials due to collusive practices.

-Graft negatively affects investment milieus

-It affects the integrity of competitive ambiance as well as the efficiency which is a basic standard for market survival.

-Corruption conspicuously affects the sovereignty of the state. With the proliferation of corruption, economy would go bust, with the state becoming unable to manage same or meet the requirements of development.

Therefore, the state would have only two options to finance the development projects:

-Resort to local savings

-Recourse to foreign funding

Given the already scarce local savings, coupled with heavy debts and massive compensations, the state would opt for foreign funds, taking into account that foreign investors won’t venture into a country unless they find an attractive and tempting environment.

Further, foreign investors won’t undertake business projects in a country unless it has already obtained a recommendation from international fiscal organizations that never offer or recommend aid without the introduction of economic reform programs.

Due to widespread corruption, the state seeks to withstand reforms to the detriment of development. This occurs after massive amounts of money were squandered on the part of senior politician and influentials driven by their insatiable voracity for power and wealth, thereby remitting such sums to their personal accounts abroad.

Researchers from Massachusetts University estimate that over $ 187 billion were smuggled out of 30 African countries between 1970 and 1997, much higher than their foreign debts combined together.

To gauge the impact of corruption on economic development we should approach the following issues:

1-Consequent upon the traditional economic theory, corruption impedes economic growth by devouring the "superfluous economic investment", which negatively impacts local and foreign entrepreneurs. Thus , corruption becomes the key roadblock to sustainable development, poverty reduction, and good government performance.

2-Corruption affects the taxation sector , when it is possible for some individuals to present tax acknowledgments showing false tax figures which amounts to a violation of justice.

3-Corruption affects government expenditures , as it involves misallocation of public resources. For instance, it is noticed that some corrupt communities take care of insignificant activities, because they benefit corrupt officials. Also, many vital sector are closed down because they are deemed useless for influentials.

4-Corruption affects national currency as well as foreign stock exchange, thus generating two markets: an official stock market marked by scarcity compared to demand, and an unofficial one characterized by high prices, as cash is directed towards unplanned , illicit or undesired undertakings, at least from the community's viewpoint. This is similar to the diversion of foreign cash collected from market towards drug trafficking, and trafficking in contraband commodities, which ultimately leads to increasing payment balance deficit. It might also lead to government's inability to repay its debts and resort to foreign loans, which would plunge a country into an uphill economic hardship that hampers development plans, impinges on national sovereignty , and forces the state into undertaking structural adjustment programs and debt tabulation.

Furthermore, corruption spawns a class of corrupt heavyweights and bureaucrats, who are capital-oriented and apathetic to national interests, as they have come to control people's livelihoods , and are immune from accountability .

5-Money Laundering is a serious blight that gives rise to socio-economic and financial corruption, as it constitutes an illicit crime and ill-gotten gain. It also presents a considerable challenge to corporate firms, and is linked to unlawful activities and suspicious transactions that generate huge incomes that are extremely noxious to local and global economies, for they are carried out away from government oversight. Though some believe that money laundering is a contemporary crime. It is not. The term was first coined in the US in the period 1920-1930, when the US security men used the phrase to describe mafia acts of concealing their sources of income and proceeds so as not to be seized by authorities. In Europe, it transpired that Swiss banks laundered massive sums of money in favour of the German Nazi regime.

In developing countries, however, revenues from financial and employment corruption had considerably accumulated. Aware of the enormity of the crime, Ralf Laindr , a global expert on combating illegal banking practices, declared that the size of money laundering operations amounted to roughly $500 billion a year. Others estimate that the amount of money laundered by banks across the world reached $ 3 trillion , or 5% of the gross global production.

**2-Corruption and development in Arab world**

There is firm conviction amongst Arab national elitists that resistance of occupation and emancipation from colonization should be prioritized over freedom, political reform, democracy and social justice.

Therefore, the idea of setting up political accountability system, discussions on the nature of constitutional institutions, and achieving social solidarity , has been in limbo.

Though some Arab countries have, in varying degrees, managed to lay down constitutions and laws, create modern institutions, and open up to modern economic values, international relations, culture, and political ideology, none of them has been able to catch up with over 40 countries that embraced democracy. From 1947, the year in which the Pink revolution triggered in Portugal, up to the mid 1990s, freedom remained one of the key inadequacies that explain the reason why Arab and African countries are still lagging far behind in terms of fighting corruption. The requirements of freedom, including democracy, accountability, transparency, and political participation, should be immediately met and given a special attention.

-The nature of governance in the Arab world is based on the inequitable distribution of power as manifested in oligarchic hegemony, which essentially implies the predominance of one party over the other.

Altogether, problems arises due to the existence of obstacles to comprehensive development, as countries convinced with achieving superficial development without constructing socio-economic, cultural, political and ideological culture that paves the way for good governance based on politico-democratic participation.

Though corruption indicators are not adequately precise, as they are deemed flawed, they are helpful in identifying and comparing the ranks of countries in terms of practicing corruption and getting information on whether or not they are making headway in fighting graft, carrying out reforms and achieving development.

Thus, Arab countries are characterized by conflicting and paradoxical policies, as some announce they are combating bribes, while they are factually encouraging them.

Ali Al-Zu'abi and Khaldoun H.Al-Naqeeb support the proposition that the nature of Arab government systems are based on inequitable distribution of power values, as well as the oligarchic hegemony that essentially result in the predominance of one party over the other.

This further weekend the state in terms of undertaking development projects and creating job opportunities. In 2008 and 2009, Jordan saw numerous graft cases, mainly defalcation , which, some attributed to poor oversight and accountability mechanisms , as well as the increasing misappropriation of public funds billed "government money".

In effect, Jordan has been one of the first Arab states to be conscious of the jeopardy of corruption, hence the establishment of many anti-corruption agencies, mainly the organization for fighting corruption, which has been remarkably active in tracing corruption cases.

An opinion poll by Jordan's university center for strategic studies showed that Jordanians were unanimous that corruption was being practiced in the public and private sectors mainly due to poverty. Another study conducted by Taleb Awadh confirmed the validity and seriousness of the poll. The study indicated that the two sector's senior staff were particularly responsible for most of corruption cases. Thus, Jordan will be one of the region's leading countries in respect of combating corruption.

Jordan shares some financial irregularities in common with many Arab countries, as foreign aid accounts for 15 % of its gross domestic production (GDP), which is reflective of poor public participation (in overseeing the country’s fiscal policies). This made it easy for the authorities to misappropriate public funds, without being brought to account. To combat corruption, Jordan incriminated graft as enunciated in the letter addressed by His Majesty King Abdullah II to the Prime Minister Adnan Badran in which he ordered the formulation of an anti-corruption authority based on law 63 for 2006. The king also ordered that the authority answers directly to the Premier, thus giving it a legal status with financial and administrative autonomy. This came after Jordan had realized that corruption is extremely inimical to comprehensive development.

Additionally, the Council of the Nation on Nov.1, 2006 passed the financial disclosure law, and authorities worked hard towards the revitalization of audit and ombudsman office as per law 11 for 2008, besides the reactivation of the Cabinet’s financial committee.

**3- Volume of corruption in AU member countries**

Despite the fact that 15 year have passed since the African Union superseded the African Unity Organization , during which time huge funds were offered to African countries, these countries are still experiencing deepening economic backwardness, and social underdevelopment ; they also suffer from political atrophy with respect to international power balance, and failure to run internal affairs. This totally retarded economic growth in such countries, which failed to adopt good governance, reduce corruption levels and downsize debts as evidenced by Africa’s competitiveness index, global prosperity index as well as the global financial integrity.

An initial reading of the African reality indicates that there is a host of serious problems facing the African countries, with corruption ranking fourth, followed by socio-economic, political and security impediments.

Civil wars and simmering political conflicts, with ethnic and tribal dimensions, which are stoked by ruling elites and sponsored by business mafias, pose a serious threat to the unity of African countries on the developmental , social and ideological levels. Besides, foreign debts depletes the continent's gross production despite debt forgiveness on the part of Paris Club, Hebeck initiatives, and assistance from the IMF, the WB and international donor conferences. Budget deficits accounted for 150 % of the GDP and 600% of total export value.

Notwithstanding the fact that Africa has abundant natural resources to the tune of 1.7-2 trillion dollars, which are mainly concentrated in agriculture, water and tourism. According to the projections of the International Bank of Construction and Development, the value of the continent’s deposits of precious metals crossed 14 trillion dollars. Hopes are low that the ruling elites, which plunged such countries into backwardness due to the mushrooming corruption, would rationalize their political, economic and financial policies.

The living conditions in the AU's countries are increasingly worsening as manifested in famine, poverty, deteriorating health and education services, sanitations and potable water, if any, as well as fake development programs. This can be ascribed to the fact that ethnic and military ruling elites, which are heavily involved in corruption, do lack political will. Reports by the International Transparency showed that Africa is the world's most corrupt continent, and that 31 out of 44 African countries, covered by the organization's corruption index for 2005, got less than three scores , while, in 2009, 42 countries registered less than 3.4 on the index .

Further, of the 180 Countries covered by the index in 2008, all African countries, except Botswana, rated very low in ranking, whereas other African states took the last six ranks on the index.

In 2009, a survey of 180 countries, conducted by the same organization, found that all African countries, saving Botswana, were staggering in ranking on the outfit's corruption index.

In the same vein, a report from the World Bank titled "Indicators of Development in Africa for 2010" highlighted that the amount of funds smuggled outside Africa stood at almost $ 1.8 trillion clandestinely invested or deposited into foreign banks in favor of ruling elites that politically and economically dominate African countries' resources one country stood first , with 89.5 billion dollars smuggled out of the country.

As we have just mentioned, though corruption is a general phenomenon existing in all human communities irrespective of their economic progress or rank on development indexes, it presents a major problem to the continent, as it is regarded as a structural trait reflecting weak bureaucratic abilities, the pastoral nature of the state that boosts corruption nexus, and the hijack of the state in many African countries. Analyses vary as to the root causes of graft: some ascribe it to the political culture of many countries that allows or tolerate corruption, while others hold that international interests and multi-nationals' practices are to blame for entrenching corruption in Africa.

Attention should be drawn to the fact that the difficulties facing Africa didn’t only stem from deep ethnic, linguistic, religious and cultural difference, but also from the policies followed by the colonial powers that only sought to deplete the natural resources, distort national identity, and deepen ignorance, poverty and unemployment.

The African Union’s adoption of the anti-corruption protocol constitutes a quantum leap, which is emblematic of its perception of the heavy political cost of corruption. It is also reminiscent of African nations’ aspiration to get rid of the endemic, hence the substantive efforts which are being exerted by African civil society organizations and media outlets.

This reflected the African countries’ desire to give upon artificial interest, and instead adopt practical procedures that sometimes transcend the agendas imposed by foreign powers.

Statistics indicate that there are shocking figures for poverty in Africa, the poorest in the world, followed by Asia and Latin America. Former South African President Nelson Mandela once described poverty in Africa as a tunnel none but God knows its end. Statistics also indicate that the number of the world's poor reaches 2.1 billion, 76% of whom live in Africa. According to these statistics, the continent is home to almost 59.3 million destitute people, though the continent is highly endowed with rich natural and human resources. This means that corruption has crossed astronomical figures.

One of the countries in Africa, which has massive oil reserves; yet, the majority of people there are suffering from grinding poverty due to misadministration and mismanagement of the country's potential. Oil revenues go to few decision-makers, as the people are still being deprived of their right to benefit from their resources. Thus its annual per capita income is no more than USD 1319. In addition, its people are also suffering from diseases, death and post-death woes. Those who survive death face a plethora of problems and hardships that threaten their very existence as human beings lacking housing, food, water, electricity, health care, safety, security and education opportunities.

During the annual forum for the US-Africa trade held in August, 2010, former US Secretary of the state , Hillary Clinton, said : " Trade barriers , poor infrastructure and corruption hamper African trade and its diversification. Though there is a law in the US, Africa's growth and opportunity Act, that permits the Sub-Saharan African countries to export 6,400 kinds of duty-free goods, expansion of trade was not as expected. Oil products constitute the bulk of Africa's exports to the US".

Though the region is home to 12% of the world's population, it only contributes 2% of the gross global production. This is because of several challenges, including poor infrastructure, political instability, and corruption that costs the continent about USD 150 billion. Clinton also criticized rising customs tariffs , corrupt border officials, and bureaucracy that impedes Africa's inter-trade and curbs regional economic integration.

On the other hand, the World Bank's deputy head for Africa highlighted that " Over the past decade, Africa has netted an average growth rate of 4. 5 %, which put it on equal footing with the other world countries".

However, the sinister global investment attacks on Africa has posed a threat to the continent that has plenty of huge resources, including minerals, oil, agriculture, fisheries, and forestry, which are not properly harnessed. This resulted in African countries missing a very big opportunity, not to mention the fact that the continent's population amounts to about 934 million, who are still backward in terms of human development.

Africa has a strategically important geographic location, with an area of 30.190 sq km. It has massive resource deposits in that 17 out of the world's 50 minerals are available in Africa. Besides, the continent has so vast agricultural areas that it can become the world's bread basket, given that it is traversed by 13 large rivers , including River Nile that runs 6,695 km, which increased its irrigation capacity to over 42.5 million hectares . The continent is also featured by its fertile lands, heavy rains, and diverse agricultural seasons, in addition to the fact that the area of arable land is estimated at 35% of its landmass, only 7 % of which is cultivated. Nonetheless, such huge potential never reflects positively on the achievement of development.

There are growing fears that military interventions would make Africa subject to the hegemony of France, America and Israel that seek to achieve their own interests. For this purpose, such countries set up military bases across the continent.

In his book "Wars of Wealth Sources", US security analyst, Michael Klare, said: "Africa will be the target and scene of the upcoming wars among struggling powers". Also, Dr. Jack Sewf, director general of the UN's Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), said, " The race among food importing countries for agricultural lands in other countries for the purpose of boosting food security threatens the creation of a new colonial order".

Evidence abounds of the devastating effects of foreign investment on Africa. The links that have recently established among African and European markets have had negative impacts on development across the continent. These include economic collapse, inflation, and high currency rates, all of which resulted in increasing the size and scale of administrative and financial corruption in Africa.

In conclusion, Africans and Arabs are aspiring for serious reforms that reflect positively on the quality of life as well as socio-economic, political and cultural aspects of life.

We are hopeful that such aspirations will be realized if the scourges of corruption, depredation, dependency and neocolonialism are entirely surmounted, something that hinges on the political will of leaders and decision-makers.

It is worth mentioning that there is a great deal of Arab and Islamic investment ventures in Africa that would reduce reliance on western donors. This issue was hotly debated by the conference “The World of Islamic Financing –Africa 2009”, which estimated that the investment on the continent could exceed one trillion dollars.

Postscripts

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