

Anti-Corruption Reform Approaches in Africa: Lessons and Insights from Zambia.

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Abstract

Anti-corruption approaches include institutional and extra-institutional processes and initiatives to address and prevent corrupt practices. These approaches aim to promote ethical behaviours and norms and to build systems within bureaucratic and societal contexts. While previous efforts focused on law enforcement, recent approaches have shifted towards creating political and legal environments that support more effective preventive measures. This includes nurturing anti-corruption behaviours within bureaucratic and extra-bureaucratic environments, promoting citizen oversight, and transforming societal norms and cultures that may otherwise rationalise or normalise corruption in public administration. This essay uses the Zambian anti-corruption experiences to put this into context. It concludes by providing valuable lessons and insights for institutionalisation and improving the ethical climate within African public bureaucracies. It shows that the Zambian anti-corruption strategies need better alignment with institutional culture to be effective. The National Anti-Corruption Policy has a robust plan for addressing these issues, including improving transparency in public service systems and organising integrity seminars for public officials. These strategies need to be implemented effectively to make a real impact. Improving public communication should ensure communal understanding of the effects of corruption in society. A communal approach should assist with identifying and contextualising narratives and framings relatable to ordinary citizens' ways of life. Like in most African countries, laws requiring senior government officials and politicians to utilise public facilities should be drafted and implemented. This will reduce the misappropriation of public funds by these officials while seeking medical attention and educating their dependents abroad.

Keywords: corruption; anti-corruption policies; Kenya; public integrity; Africa

Introduction

Even though anti-corruption reforms receive significant attention on the policy agenda due to the high political stakes around corruption and the involvement of various actors and institutions, they have seen limited success and are not given the priority they deserve in resource allocation. Beginning with the anti-corruption movement of the 1990s of ensuring effective law enforcement against corruption and moving toward more protracted organisational efforts and participatory, transparent and accountable approaches, realising

¹ This paper is a draft to guide a [*Bite-Sized Learning: Anti-corruption —Lessons and Insights from Africa*](#), organised by ECORYS' Unit of International Development, United Kingdom, on 20 August 2024.

more effective anti-corruption mechanisms in most sub-Saharan African countries have grown over time. Despite these changes, anti-corruption reforms remain ineffective, inappropriate, and expensive. In some cases, the necessity of specialised anti-corruption institutions in political environments where power and resources are concentrated with individuals in power rather than institutions has been questioned. With the persistence of less democratic governments and transparent public procurement processes, recent experiences across Africa also show that even specialised anti-corruption institutions are not immune to corruption (Onyango, 2024). With the expanding realities of state capture in Africa, corruption has evolved and has become the core feature of state politics. As a result, it has played a deleterious role in governance, eroding all mechanisms that would counter its spread in public life. The lack of success in anti-corruption reforms is rightly correlated to the nature of the political regime and market-oriented reforms, which have failed to induce transformative public leadership in African contexts.

In most cases where these reforms have faltered, it has been primarily due to ambiguous governance processes, often poorly coupled with unstable and hybrid African political regimes (Lawson, 2009; Muhumuza, 2016; Onyango, 2018a). However, where they have succeeded, such as in Singapore and some Asian countries (Quah, 2015), they have been considered islands of effectiveness, often anchored on political will and quality organisational leadership. These are two critical factors missing in most anti-corruption agencies across Africa due to the politics of patronage deeply anchored in corrupt transactions and allocation of resources. This notwithstanding, the focus on the degree of democratisation processes as stimuli for anti-corruption remains central, even though it may also lack a clear correlation to quality government (Rothstein and Teorell, 2008). Notably, transforming the broader governance environment is a promising starting point and is more likely to produce sustainable systems needed for effective anti-corruption reforms. In other words, anti-corruption systems can hardly work in isolation from other vital public institutions; after all, the latter are the key players in implementing anti-corruption policies.

At the same time, realising a democratic government and social norms for anti-corruption is a long-term solution that may take time and may not satisfy the persistent pressures on governments to tackle corruption more effectively. Still, the intractability of corruption requires democratic principles contained in responsible governance, accountable governance, and the quality of representative structures in a political system to address it effectively. Furthermore, the ineffective institutionalisation of Anti-Corruption Authorities (ACAs) has been linked to a lack of appropriate cultural factors to execute successful anti-corruption programs (Doig and Riley, 1998; Szeftel, 1998). This means that efforts by donors to determine policy priorities in recipient countries and subsequent standardisation and rationalisation processes (or reforms) in modern administrative systems have significantly contributed to increasing institutional

complexity and hybridity in public organisations (Onyango, 2018b). As a result, these unexpected reform outcomes have undermined African anti-corruption efforts (Bukovansky, 2002; Dzimbiri, 2009).

Even though ACAs are often specialised institutions and have increasingly emerged as autonomous legal entities, they are rarely politically independent in reinforcing the institutional integration of anti-corruption measures in most African country contexts, hence the need for political will. This becomes more complex when anti-corruption remains more rooted in current political events or a campaign drive and reform paradigms instead of standard operation procedures in the internal bureaucratic processes in public administration. The result has left pertinent institutional blind spots, making anti-corruption an external or a seasonal agenda in the institutional evolution of the bureaucracy in African countries. The major threat to the anti-corruption agenda is its primary anchorage in donors' engagement strategy. This has denied these reforms homegrown advantages and legitimation processes in the local bureaucracies. Put differently, they are seen as part of 'those requirements foreigners' expect the government to implement for the sake of aid. While this is changing as some ACAs across Africa are becoming more professionalised and corporate, much is still needed to localise anti-corruption programmes and norms in a public sector that reeks of corruption. In essence, like in the case of other 'developmental policies,' neo-liberal approaches such as those contained in New Public Management (NPM) and post-NPM approaches, anti-corruption measures have resulted in unintended negative consequences. These mega-trend outcomes combined with political objectives locally, such as the politics of regime consolidation, have produced a cocktail of institutional development trajectories for anti-corruption reforms in Africa.

This paper looks into these trajectories while evaluating the status of anti-corruption efforts in Africa. Anti-corruption approaches should be viewed as widespread standardisation and rationalisation processes integrated into developing and implementing anti-corruption reforms in the public sector. In sub-Saharan Africa, anti-corruption these have typically focused on four main areas: 1) investigation and prosecution of suspects, 2) corruption prevention through simplifying procedures and monitoring conflict-of-interest situations, 3) public education via media and government programs, and 4) coordinating intergovernmental organisations involved in anti-corruption efforts (Meagher, 2004:1). In addition, the efforts to combat corruption have seen advancements in strategies such as strengthening the capabilities of public institutions through localised bureaucratic training undertaken by more consolidated anti-corruption agencies like those in Kenya. Recently, governments have also established anti-corruption courts and specific anti-corruption policies to fortify the legal framework of anti-corruption reforms.

Nonetheless, the current analyses have not profoundly explored the institutional frameworks and paradigms that underpin current anti-corruption reforms. These paradigms, however,

remain grouped into three main approaches: interventionism, managerialism, and organisational integrity (Michael, 2004; McCusker, 2006; Larmour and Wolanin, 2013). Some critics argue that these approaches oversimplify anti-corruption efforts by overlooking the role of networks and partnerships that are characteristic of corrupt environments (Larmour and Wolanin, 2013). These networks and partnerships have become standard features of anti-corruption reforms as influenced by the New Public Governance or Networked Government megatrends in public sector reforms. Another thing is that the main three approaches have produced highly fragmented instead of more integrated reform activities. For instance, Naidoo (2013:1) argues that formal state interventions in South Africa have primarily concentrated on enhancing monitoring and oversight of public institutions. This translates strategic anti-corruption intentions into strict intra- and inter-institutional measures. The following section will examine these approaches by citing various examples from Africa.

Interventionism, managerialism, and organisational integrity anti-corruption reforms

Interventionism, managerialism, and organisational integrity approaches are broad reform frameworks which can be further categorised into three dimensions: a) universal approaches based on good governance and neoliberal development theories, such as NPM and post-NPM reform paradigms; b) *state-centred approaches* embedded in government policies and structures; and c) *society-centred* approaches seen in education programs and anti-corruption campaigns by pressure groups and civil society organisations (Kpundeh, 2004; Larmour and Wolanin, 2013; Onyango 2024). These categories have led to analytical complexity and, at times, generate inconsistent information when measuring the performance of anti-corruption reforms in African countries. While universal approaches focus on broad international development interventions, state and society dimensions focus on localised anti-corruption reforms. African governments have pursued this multi-layered approach when designing and implementing anti-corruption reforms involving inter- and intra-institutional organisational setups (Johnston, 2005).

Either way, these approaches are part of the "good governance" agenda in the continent that began more decisively during the democratisation wave of the 1990s. A point worth noting is that in Anglophone Africa, anti-corruption reforms date back to the colonial government's Prevention of Corruption Ordinance in the 1940s. In the 1990s, the political elites implemented anti-corruption reforms in a way that would balance the donors' political interests while minimising adverse side effects, such as loss of political control at home. The consequence was a complexity that hindered the effective institutionalisation of anti-corruption reforms in public administration, leading to poor organisational commitment and political will to implement anti-corruption efforts in Africa.

Despite these challenges, anti-corruption efforts have paved the way for comprehensive accountability reforms in Africa. Countries like Kenya, Tanzania, and Zambia have implemented accountability measures in their own ways despite dealing with prevalent corruption in the public sector. These efforts have come with establishing constitutional commissions or oversight institutions and offices of the auditor general and fostering collaboration among stakeholders and interest groups in the fight against corruption. The section that follows provides a detailed exploration of these anti-corruption approaches. In this analysis, anti-corruption approaches encompass institutional and extra-institutional processes and initiatives aimed at addressing and curbing corrupt practices, changing behaviours, and building and strengthening systems within bureaucratic and societal contexts. While these anti-corruption efforts typically centre on the behaviour of public officials, they may also aim to promote anti-corruption behaviours within bureaucratic environments to encourage citizen oversight and transform societal norms and cultures that may otherwise rationalise or normalise corruption in public administration. Consequently, it is assumed that the desired cultural and normative orientations should transcend ethnic identities and patronage politics that undergird it. The proceeding subsections will further examine these bureaucratized and rationalised processes and how they have been implemented within African public management.

Interventionism

Interventionism is an approach to preventing corruption through law enforcement as stipulated in Article 36 of the United Nations Convention Against Corruption (UNCAC). This approach sees the police as the primary enforcer of anti-corruption strategies in collaboration with other law enforcement mechanisms. It assumes that stopping or preventing the offender (or corrupt individuals) from repeating the offence protects society (Larmour and Wolanin, 2013: xv). It can be divided into bottom-up and top-down interventions (Hollyer, 2012). Bottom-up interventions provide information to recipients of governmental programs through education and public awareness campaigns. This emphasises empowering citizens to exercise political rights through electoral systems and allowing the public to directly curb abuses by corrupt officials (Hollyer, 2012:1). On the other hand, top-down interventions require specific government agencies, mainly the Ombudsman and Anti-Corruption Agencies (ACAs), to oversee the activities of state agencies and to audit and sanction public officials. Creating such structures should facilitate the monitoring and intervention of corruption incidents.

Interventionism has succeeded and failed in various contexts in sub-Saharan Africa and elsewhere in the global South. For example, Uganda's anti-corruption campaign significantly reduced the misappropriation of funds in school capital expenditures. The campaign arguably led to improved health outcomes from a public health program in the same country and reduced electoral support for corrupt politicians in various settings. Additionally, Hollyer

(2012:2) found that governmental audits reduced misspending in infrastructure projects in Indonesia and led to more efficient healthcare spending in Argentina. However, the interventionist approach also has some shortcomings, mainly if applied in isolation from key institutional variables like political will and appropriate legal framework (Larmour and Wolanin, 2013). In the case of Uganda, for instance, Hollyer (2012) noted that both top-down and bottom-up interventions only changed the incentives and information available for administrators, citizens, and politicians rather than directly reducing corruption. Interventionism, therefore, rarely prevents the local capture of political-administrative institutions by influential networks of both public officials and private organisations.

Moreover, even in countries where interventionism has seen successful outcomes in specific sectors, these strategies have failed in others. Interventionism is also criticised for taking place when the damage has already been done, and it is unlikely to redress the situation in cases where existing legislation does not allow for effective enforcement of anti-corruption efforts (Lamour and Wolanin, 2013). For instance, Doig et al. (2005:66) found that, in addition to internal inconsistencies, Tanzania's Prevention of Corruption Act failed to present a "meaningful deterrent through the option of the imposition of substantial and proportionate fines". Again, in the case of Malawi, Dzimbiri (2009) maintains that top-down interventionism has been characterised by partial measures "focusing mainly on sanctions, and not the source [and] questions about causes of corruption are not being handled" (Dzimbiri, 2009:60). Certainly, interventionism rarely works in situations where acts such as bribery or kickbacks take place through mutual agreement and within closed networks (Smith, 2007; Onyango, 2012). Under such circumstances, the covertness of corrupt exchanges is unlikely to be reported if relevant agencies do not act upon them (Onyango, 2019). Efforts to mobilise adequate evidence against corrupt suspects have been challenged in court and have hardly been successful, especially with the big players in the corrupt deal.

It is essential for interventionism to have significant resources, which are often unavailable to many governments and ACAs. Law enforcement units have, therefore, applied selective criteria in determining priority cases (Doig et al., 2005; Kpundeh, 2000). This has seen major cases being shelved to avoid 'political confrontation' that would erode ACAs political legitimacy and image. Managing interventionism may thus result in disregarding some instances of corruption when more egregious cases are at hand. For example, in the case of Malawi, the bureau has at times complained about numerous cases being shelved due to a lack of money for investigation and shortages of staff to handle investigations and bring the culprits to book (Doig et al., 2005:60). A similar trend was observed in Uganda's Inspectorate of Government and has been witnessed in Kenya (Kpundeh, 2000; Tangri and Mwenda, 2006).

Rothstein (2011) and Persson et al. (2010, 2013) also contend that, since corruption in Africa can be understood in terms of collective theory, an approach based on a principal-agent

institutional model like interventionism may get caught in a social trap that can worsen corruption, especially in the context of weak institutional capacity in many African countries. The implementation of anti-corruption reforms is subject primarily to political expediency on the part of the ruling elite. As a result, the principal-agent structures on which such interventions are built limit the effective enforcement of anti-corruption laws due to "collective action efforts that can deflect, curb, or undermine the force and effect of formal anti-corruption mechanisms" (Naidoo, 2013:1).

Managerialism

Managerialism focuses on establishing appropriate systems, procedures, and protocols. It assumes that preventing harm from occurring in the first place is more desirable than dealing with the consequences afterwards (Larmour and Wolanin, 2013). Bureaucrats are categorised into three groups: 1) Those who want to do the right thing but need guidance. 2) Those who are too timid to operate outside the rules but may still bend the rules for personal gain. 3) Corrupt individuals who operate entirely outside the rules. In managerialism, all rules can be subverted depending on the organisational design and culture (Onyango, 2017). Attempts to apply one set of rules to deter differently motivated individuals rarely succeed (McCusker, 2006). This might explain why anti-corruption efforts are fragmented, intercepting the less scheming corrupt but not the more damaging, highly planned exploits of others (McCusker, 2006:8). It also ignores the market forces that may influence the ethical decisions of political-administrative actors, let alone the institutional distortions like seen in public procurement corruption.

Managerialism has been a critical focus of accountability reforms in sub-Saharan Africa's good governance agenda through Structural Adjustment programmes. For instance, in a comparative analysis of Kenya and Nigeria, Lawson (2009) discovered that structural strategies were implemented to reduce corruption in public organisations by limiting the discretionary powers of bureaucrats. This suggests that centralised bureaucratisation processes are associated with corruption (Klitgaard, 1988). Managerialism is based on New Public Management (NPM) reforms, which include "privatisation and deregulation, reducing monopolies by promoting political and economic competition and increasing accountability by supporting democratisation (for political accountability) and bureaucratisation (for administrative accountability)" (Lawson, 2009:74). For example, Tangri and Mwenda (2006) and Doig et al. (2005) have indicated that anti-corruption reforms in Uganda were linked to various donor organisations. These aimed to establish effective structures as part of "a holistic strategy considered the most effective in reducing corruption opportunities, as well as increasing the likelihood of being caught and punished" (Tangri and Mwenda, 2006:102). Managerialism was thus connected to the transformation of non-democratic political regimes through the pursuit of anti-corruption reforms as outlined in the good governance agenda (Szeftel, 1998).

The scope of anti-corruption research and practice has expanded to include measures aimed at not only establishing appropriate institutions but also enhancing and maintaining their capacity. As a result, collaborative frameworks for implementation involving accountability institutions, the public sector, and Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) have gained popularity in the last decade (e.g. Onyango, 2024). Johnston and Kpundeh (2004:2) point out that anti-corruption reforms require involvement in "a variety of political, economic, and social processes and institutions" to address legitimacy issues (De Maria, 2007; Mwenda and Tangri, 2005). They also note that social action coalitions in developing countries, although not well-developed, may enhance the development of political capabilities, thus benefiting anti-corruption reforms. Information-sharing, resource mobilisation, and openness among organisations have set the stage for necessary institutional arrangements for reforms (Onyango, 2019a;2024).

In many African countries, social coalitions are not as strong as in Singapore and Hong Kong (Kpundeh, 2000; Onyango, 2019a). Governments often create anti-corruption reforms without involving key stakeholders, mainly civil society organisations (CSOs), in order to maintain political control and coordination. CSOs have frequently criticised governments for not being committed to anti-corruption reforms (Kpundeh, 2000; Johnston, 2005). As a result, anti-corruption reforms in developing countries suffer from weak civil societies, limited institutional capacities, and a lack of political will. This has led to an institutional model of a managerial approach being constrained by inadequate resources, politicised control, and institutionalised low morale and high inertia (Doig et al., 2005:24). As a result, anti-corruption agencies are prone to facing the same problems as any other public sector institution, but donors and their performance expectations fail to recognise this (Doig and Williams, 2005:251).

It is argued that African anti-corruption efforts often fail because they do not address the cultural aspects necessary for successful public sector reforms. According to Dzimbiri (2009), the potential benefits of public sector reforms will not be realised without a shift in existing values, attitudes, and beliefs. Szeftel (1998) criticises managerialism for oversimplifying the state's role and making problematic assumptions about African politics. However, managerialism has helped establish Anti-Corruption Agencies (ACAs) and other accountability institutions, which have made some progress in building technical capacities and creating multi-stakeholder coalitions involving public and private sectors. Examples of these coalitions include the National Anti-Corruption Forum in South Africa, the Anti-Corruption Coalition Uganda, the Ghana Anti-Corruption Coalition (GACC), and the African Parliamentarians' Network Against Corruption (APNAC). These coalitions aim to bring about cultural and normative changes that discourage corruption. The organisational integrity approach has been developed to address cultural aspects of corruption within organisational environments.

Organisational Integrity

The organisational integrity approach requires organisational leaders to establish social norms or an ethical culture that would act as a buffer towards corrupt practices. It is primarily influenced by organisational culture and “refers to the integration of an organisation’s operational systems, corruption control strategies and ethical standards” (Larmour and Wolanin, 2013: xx). It treats corruption as a social process where the managerial model “invariably fails because of a failure to address the atmosphere of integrity surrounding institutions [and] to incorporate the cognition, motivations and actions of individuals” (Warburton, 2013:221). Indeed, “there is significant evidence that corruption is often sustained as an organisational culture and can (only) be combated with targeted effort in individual organisations one at a time” (Schneider and Bose, 2016:1). According to Braithwaite (1989).

[...] the incidence of deviance is largely governed by the dynamics of shame in the community. Hence, if criminal behaviour is nourished by not subjecting it to shame, it tends to be encouraged as a group norm. A similar relationship is thought to exist between crime in the community and corruption in an organisation (cited in Larmour and Wolanin, 2013: xx).

The organisational integrity approach focuses on organisations rather than on individuals. It assumes that any deviant behaviour in an organisation stems more from the nature of the organisation than from the nature of the individual. By socialising individuals to adhere to its rules and regulations, an organisation creates behaviours, responsibilities, and norms for its workers (Simon, 1997). A public bureaucracy operating within the organisational integrity model should, therefore, instil values of public duty and ethical culture at every level of its organisational structure. Such social norms or values mean that the public sector should be managed in the public interest; hence, most ACAs envision entrenching public values of transparency, confidentiality, accountability and integrity. The workplace culture emphasises deontological values, where administrators should be inclined to regard their positions as a calling to serve the public (Jabbara and Dwivedi, 2005; Onyango, 2017).

Boardman and Klum (2013:83) contend, “ethical standards are not simply an end in themselves. There are significant benefits to be gained from raising the ethical tone of an organisation.” This should improve organisational effectiveness and integrity as it will affect decision-making processes, staff commitment, job satisfaction, and staff turnover. As a result, an organisation’s reputation, competitiveness, and ability to attract and retain quality staff are enhanced, among other benefits. A strong ethical culture involves a sense of common purpose and a broad understanding of and support for administrative mechanisms (Boardman and Klum, 2013). This points to article 6 of UNCAC, which requires ACAs to tackle corruption through participation, transparency and accountability.

As such, it is crucial to have channels for reporting incidents of corruption, handling complaints and grievances, and building high levels of trust among staff. It is essential to focus on achieving goals rather than questioning the legitimacy of organisational practices and to instil a strong sense of public duty. However, there is no one-size-fits-all model of an ethical culture. According to Boardman and Klum (2013:85), an organisation's culture is shaped by its members' shared values and attitudes, influenced by the organisation's functions, structures, systems and procedures, staff profiles, histories, and most importantly, the values of its leaders. An ethical organisational culture also requires respect for individual conscience, participatory management, and performance assessment based on objective rather than subjective standards. Ethical codes are considered part of an organisation's efforts to assign individual roles and specify values, responsibilities, rules, alternatives, and facts upon which employee decisions should be based.

In practice, when a public organisation has strong and well-regulated anti-corruption norms, administrators will report or prevent instances of corruption that may hinder efficient service delivery. This way, the organisational integrity approach goes beyond organisational structures of managerialism, combining organisational structures with an appropriate organisational social mindset or norms (ethical culture) to effectively control corrupt activities within and outside the organisation. However, in many African states, codes of conduct have been drafted in response to pressure from anti-corruption campaigns, as well as conditionalities imposed on them by aid donors (coercive pressures) or through other isomorphic mechanisms like mimicry and normative pressures. Thus, in some African contexts, ethical guidelines may have been copied from elsewhere and adopted as an accountability tool and an exercise of compliance (Doig et al., 2005).

Numerous sources have suggested that efforts to instil an ethical culture in public organisations have been ineffective in Africa. For instance, in a study examining the 1996 South African Constitution, Raga and Taylor (2005) argued that “government and society cannot promote and enforce ethical behaviour solely through the utilisation of ethical codes of conduct or through the promulgation of a plethora of legislation”. Instead, the approach must be holistic, with all sectors of reform complementing each other to create and sustain ethical practices (Boardman and Klum, 2013). To address corruption, public bureaucracies should go beyond just accepting a code of conduct and establish mechanisms that allow administrators to report corruption. The following section examines these main approaches to anticorruption reforms, their institutional history, and how they have evolved over time in Zambia. Despite some differences, which primarily depend on contextual factors, the Zambian case reflects the state of anticorruption reforms in African public administration.

Development and institutionalisation of Anti-Corruption institutions in Zambia

Implication of Political change to anti-corruption

The institutional development of anti-corruption efforts in Zambia has steadily progressed since the 1980s despite facing challenges such as inadequate legal framework, communication and coordination, financial resources, and tools to investigate technology crimes. There is also an increased level of public tolerance for corruption. Additionally, there are challenges in the highly centralised structure and approach to anti-corruption interventions, inadequate staff with high turnover, reluctance by the public to report corruption or lack of public confidence, and inadequate specialised skills for staff members (ACC Strategic Plan, 2022-2026). These challenges are, however, not unique to Zambia's Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) alone. Other ACAs, for example, in Kenya, Tanzania and Nigeria, are grappling with the same issues. Anti-corruption strategies have been part of Zambia's political and economic discourses for decades. In mid-July 2024, President Hakinde Hichilema [fired the entire ACC board for being corrupt](#). This may mean that ACC has an opportunity for political will, which is critical for its performance. According to the recent Afrobarometer (Round 9 – 2021/2022) survey, there is also a likelihood of a shift regarding the prevalence of corruption. When asked whether the level of corruption in Zambia has increased, decreased, or stayed the same over the past year or 12 months, most Zambians (35.8%) said that it has somewhat decreased, 22.8% said it has remained the same, and 7.1% said it has somewhat increased.

The current anti-corruption institutional infrastructure in Zambian public administration has built on the democratisation wave that ushered in President Frederick Chiluba's era that was characterised by the dawn of multi-party democracy and the end to President Kenneth Kaunda's one-party state that gave little leverage to ACC. The rolling out of more protracted and donor-sponsored Public Sector Reform Programmes (PSRP) in 1993 under the Chiluba Administration expanded the Anti-Corruption Commission's (ACC) legal framework in 1996. This era of political transition highlighted the need for and support of improving the ACC by establishing appropriate legal mechanisms. Subsequent governments and reform programmes, such as the Public Service Management Programme (PSMP) under President Rupiah Banda's government, continued to build on this change by enacting legislation to strengthen the ACC further, resulting in the institutional development of the ACA as described below:

Act No. 14 of 1980 was repealed and replaced by the Anti-Corruption Commission Act No. 42 of 1996, establishing the ACC as an "autonomous body." In 2010, Act No. 42 of 1996 was repealed and replaced with the Anti-Corruption Act No. 38 of 2010, which was also repealed and replaced with the current Anti-Corruption Act No. 3 of 2012. This was done to strengthen the fight against corruption and domesticate and streamline relevant provisions of regional and international instruments (ACC Strategic Plan 2022-2026:1).

In spite of facing challenges in balancing politics, donor interests, and development, various Zambian governments since Frederick Chiluba's Administration have made significant strides in expanding democratic spaces and integrating anti-corruption strategies as a vital part of the public sector reforms. Like Kenya's Civil Service Reform Programme (CSR), which was launched around the same time as Zambia's PSRP, Zambia's anti-corruption reforms were integrated into the public institutions to align government activities and policies with the broader political transformations. As reported elsewhere in Africa (e.g. Githinji and Holmquist 2012), democratic expansion has been linked to the dawn of new legislation and the creation of ACAs. Democratic reforms focused on constitutional changes, neo-liberal economic policies, parliamentary autonomy from the executive, and other crucial changes for donors. The structural development of anti-corruption reforms in Zambia cannot be discussed in isolation from the more significant political changes the country has experienced since the 1990s. It is worth noting that, with these changes, anti-corruption approaches have also improved in finding more practical strategies – from the Corrupt Practices Act No. 14 of 1980, Anti-Corruption Commission Act No. 42 of 1996, Anti-Corruption Commission Act No. 38 of 2010 and the Anti-Corruption Act. No. 3 of 2012. These changes have introduced varied legal thresholds needed to improve the institutional environment for anti-corruption.

Nonetheless, as these approaches complement each other, some tend to be more pronounced than others at a particular level in the organisational evolution of ACAs in Zambia as elsewhere across the developing countries. An advanced stage of organisational evolution presumably seeks cultural (normative) transformation, enhancement of endogenous processes, institutional integration, and embedment of anti-corruption reforms in public bureaucracies. Legislation environments on issues around corruption are, however, incredibly instrumental in allowing such kind of organisational evolution and related bureaucratic processes. This explains the concert of legislation partly ushered in through the formulation of the first National Policy on Anti-Corruption in 2009, as seen further below.

Legal framework for anti-corruption

Within the broader good governance political framework contained in the National Development Plan (8NDP) 2022 - 2026, the legal infrastructure for anti-corruption in Zambia has evolved as the government grapples with the problem of corruption in public affairs. This shift not only came with the formulation of specific policies like the first National Anti-Corruption Policy (NACP) in 2009 and its revised version in 2023 but also involved constitutional reforms. For example, in 2016, the Republican Constitution was amended, leading to the enactment of the Public Finance Management Act No.1 of 2018 and the Public Procurement Act No. 8 of 2020, among others. Since the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) plays a crucial role in law enforcement and prevention, which often intersects with the functions of other oversight or Law Enforcement Agencies, anti-corruption reforms have been implemented through various

laws that apply to both the public and private sectors. These include the Public Service Code of Ethics, the Parliamentary and Ministerial Code of Conduct Act, etc., which are supposed to promote integrity and ethical leadership in public affairs and service. Others include the Forfeiture of Proceeds of Crime Act No. 19 of 2010, the Prohibition and Prevention of Money Laundering Act, the Public Interest Disclosure (Protection of Whistle-blowers) Act No. 4 of 2010, and Companies Act No.10 of 2017. While this multiplicity and layering of legislation of anti-corruption efforts is commonplace across Africa, as elsewhere, Zambia stands out in establishing its anti-corruption legal framework compared to other African countries. For example, many African countries do not have laws that protect whistleblowers, which is crucial for effectively implementing anti-corruption policies (Uys, 2022; Onyango, 2021). Other countries like Ghana do not have clear anti-corruption policies. At the same time, Kenya has only recently passed the National Policy Ethics and Anti-Corruption Policy in 2018 and has yet to adopt the whistleblowing policy into law. This diverse legal framework implies that ACC needs to have clearly defined legal boundaries for when and how to intervene and collaborate with other law enforcement agencies and public institutions. This has often been a challenging issue in anti-corruption efforts across Africa due to conflicts over institutional sovereignty, among other reasons (see Onyango 2019).

Despite the legal complexity, institutional duplicity, and overlaps, anti-corruption systems are gradually being established in the public sector. Efforts to institutionalise these systems are now becoming more coordinated through clear policies. For example, through the Integrity Committee Programme, ACC “seeks to institutionalise the prevention of corruption in the public and private sector. Hence, the Committees are premised on the rationale that it is the responsibility of each respective institution to internally prevent corruption and related malpractices from occurring within its spheres of influence” (ACC, 2023: viii). In line with the organisational integrity approach, a report of *the Evaluation of the Integrity Committee Programme 2023* has shown that despite the implementation challenges, the Integrity Committee Programme will be instituted in every government agency as an internal corruption prevention measure “in order to ensure that individual organisations are responsible for corruption prevention in their respective organisations” (ACC, 2023:8).

Other public innovations, like the adoption of e-government platforms, have tremendously assisted in streamlining transparency in access and public service transactions. The 2022 Zambian Bribery Payment Index (ZBPI) Survey Report highlights that the implementation of E-GP in public procurement has improved accessibility and decreased instances of corruption. This improvement is attributed to the direct interaction between civil servants in procurement and companies. In other words, aside from the influence of democratic governance systems, other institutional factors are important in influencing anti-corruption reform outcomes. These factors, as we can see in this case, may involve institutional innovation (see, for example, Adam

2020). However, a democratic environment is more likely to lead to such innovations in the public sector. This means democratic deficits in Zambia could explain why ACC is grappling with the effective adoption of digital technologies as an anti-corruption tool, as observed in the National Anti-Corruption Policy, which states:

Adoption of technology in crime control and data management places critical value to enhanced anti-corruption measures such as prevention, investigations and prosecution. Regrettably, there is slow adoption and access to technology occasioned by limited infrastructure, investment and competencies to support such innovations in anti-corruption (NACP, 2009:11).

The National Anti-Corruption Policy (NACP)

In most African countries, anti-corruption efforts have been held back by lacking a clear legal framework to integrate relevant strategies and systems into the public and private sectors. While anti-corruption laws in many countries fall under standard legal structures dealing with economic crimes, recent initiatives have developed specific anti-corruption policies. The 2009 National Anti-Corruption Policy aims to coordinate, harmonise, and involve all stakeholders in implementing these systems and laws across the public and private sectors. Zambia is one such country that has specific anti-corruption policies. Programmes like the Integrity Committee have been anchored on the National Anti-Corruption Policy. The 2023 National Anti-Corruption Policy (NACP)¹⁰ *provides that corruption prevention should be mainstreamed in the routine business of government agencies and the private sector by introducing Integrity Committees in public departments and at public points of service delivery.*

The NACP presents a comprehensive approach covering all the approaches mentioned earlier, ranging from law enforcement to prevention and public participation to public sensitisation and political responsibility, among other areas. The NACP provides the legal basis for implementing the integrity committees in Zambia as an anti-corruption policy instrument. It has multi-sectoral and stakeholder consultation designs that prioritise institutional contextualisation and sectoral-specific dynamics when dealing with corruption and ethical concerns in the public and private sectors. More specifically, NACP has sealed off coordination breeches in anti-corruption reforms by promoting effective collaborative mechanisms between Law Enforcement Agencies and other government institutions. It is noted in NACP that;

Inadequate coordination and communication among Law Enforcement Agencies also affect investigations and prosecution of cases. Targeted joint operation teams are sometimes constituted for [the] purposes of bolstering and expediting investigations and prosecution of specific corruption matters. These *ad hoc* administrative arrangements, however, often contribute to inefficiencies, ineffectiveness and duplication of efforts. This

is compounded by [the] lack of a central automated system for [the] management of cases and data across institutions (NACP 2023:10-11).

As such, NACP formalises the integration of anti-corruption mechanisms in the public sector, sometimes through mandated collaborative efforts, which forms the basis for assessing and appraising institutional and individual performance in the public sector. This is similar to how the institutionalisation of anti-corruption mechanisms is being implemented in other corruption-prone political systems like Kenya, which also adopted the National Ethics and Anti-Corruption Policy in 2018. The policy obligates institutional executives to comply with implementation requirements and activities of anti-corruption reforms, as most institutions have implemented anti-corruption initiatives. However, challenges still stand in the way regarding effective policy coordination, monitoring, evaluation and reporting in the public sector concerning the implementation of anti-corruption strategies and systems. This is because “[m]ost stakeholders have not been participating in policy implementation, as they feel the National Anti-Corruption Policy belongs to the Anti-Corruption Commission and that they would be performing functions of the Commission” (NACP 2023:12).

This situation may indicate a lack of awareness among civil servants about the NACP and deficiencies in the institutional culture within the public sector. According to the ZBPI survey, integrity committees remain ‘unknown’, with 61.3% not aware of the existence of the committees (ZBP1 2022:3). The situation could also point to underlying issues with the design of NACP implementation in the public sector. According to the recent Afrobarometer survey (Round 9 – 2021/2022), most Zambian citizens (63.2%) do not report corruption because of the fear of retaliation or other negative consequences. Less than half (34.4%) stated they could report corruption without fearing retaliation or other negative consequences. The two scenarios may indicate deficits in public information and sensitisation, a lack of policy ownership in the local public institutions, as well as a widespread prevalence of corruption and a lack of citizen confidence in anti-corruption efforts in Zambia. Using strategies from the organisational integrity approach to anti-corruption, like building institutional capacities through more protracted collaborative efforts, may help address these gaps, as shown below.

Stakeholder Collaborations and Partnerships

NACP works on the general understanding that anti-corruption efforts belong to all. Partnerships and Inclusivity are fundamental guiding principles in the Zambian anti-corruption campaign. NACP seeks to leverage partnerships across the public sector and with other stakeholders, such as civil society and international and regional organisations; therefore,

The fight against corruption calls for concerted efforts from both public and private institutions. This demands for an all-inclusive development of strategic partnerships and

alliances that facilitate coordinated implementation of anti-corruption activities (NACP, 2023:14).

Most notably, partnerships in anti-corruption efforts under the leadership of ACC have made strides in asset recovery and NACP policy ownership. In the asset recovery, the ACC has leveraged bilateral and collaborative agreements locally, regionally and internationally to recover stolen money and other assets. For example, more recently,

The Steering Committee meeting of the UK Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) under the Support to Zambia's Multi-Agency Approach to Fighting Corruption programme on 20 March 2024 in Lusaka was a testimony to the strong leadership and commitment of Zambia's key anti-corruption and accountability institutions to move ahead together to recover Zambia's stolen assets (Basel Institute of Governance, 21 March 2024).

This meeting reportedly revealed significant progress in coordinating anti-corruption strategies targeting asset recovery, which has led to freezing or seizing assets. For example, "the National Prosecution Authority (NPA) recovered K777 million (approximately US\$30 million) through forfeitures related to high-profile financial crimes" ([Zinkala June 27, 2024](#)). However, several challenges stand in the way of asset recovery and anti-corruption tools in Zambia. Public wastage is prevalent in the Zambian public sector, which means the recovered assets are less likely to contribute to economic development. Secondly, the suspects are not being prosecuted. In a recent address, President Hakainde Hichilema responded by calling on the judiciary to impose appropriate and stringent sentences on those found guilty of corruption. As such,

He said a balanced approach is needed and highlighted the importance of legal measures such as fast-track courts, asset recovery, and forfeiture laws [being] employed to reclaim embezzled resources to deter future misconduct ([ACC website](#)).

While Zambia acknowledges the challenges it faces in its efforts to combat corruption, it also recognises that structural issues typical of developing and democratising countries pose significant obstacles. These challenges link corruption to the political transformation of the state. In simple terms, developing economies are more susceptible to corruption due to weaker institutions and less institutionalisation in society, which in turn leads to democratisation problems (for further details, see Onyango, 2021).

Conclusion: Lessons and Insights

While anti-corruption efforts should not be pursued in isolation from broader governance or political reforms, they remain a litmus test for the government's openness, accountability, and responsibility. In essence, creating an anti-corruption culture or realising an ethical climate is an

optimal characteristic of more democratic political and administrative systems. These systems are still lacking in most African contexts that balance economic development and democratisation, as well as external influence and the ills of colonial legacies. The Zambian case is no different from these realities despite the country's overall transformative experiences over the years. A few lessons or insights can be drawn from this discussion:

First, the anti-corruption strategies in Zambia are not aligned with the institutional arrangements and culture. This results in a lack of ownership of policies in the public sector, as evidenced by civil servants' low adoption and understanding of Integrity Committees. Therefore, African Anti-Corruption Agencies (ACAs) should focus on providing more collaborative training and technical assistance in the public sector. Zambia's National Anti-Corruption Policy (NACP) has a robust strategic plan to address this issue, but it needs to be implemented more effectively. For example, its policy implementation plan matrix 2024 – 2028 seeks to, among others, Strengthen Accountability and Integrity in Democracy and Political Governance, which is core for creating the needed ethical climate for anti-corruption reforms. Other specific strategies also include (a) *rolling out technical support for the operations of the e-GP system to improve the transparency and efficiency of public service systems* and (b) *organising targeted joint Ethics and Integrity Seminars for Public Officials*. This is part of *sensitisation engagements for Political Office Holders on Anti-Corruption and Integrity* and (c) *the Private Sector and Conduct Capacity Building in Corporate Governance*. These are highly effective strategies if realised.

It is important to note that many of these strategies are based on a good governance agenda heavily influenced by donors. This implies that the NACP strategies are not unique to Zambia; instead, they represent a one-size-fits-all approach many African countries are pursuing. Kenya's NEAP strategies are the same without necessarily becoming part of the institutional logic of the public sector. There is a need to find a more homegrown anti-corruption strategy that would allow public sector officials to be at the heart of anti-corruption efforts across Africa. How to accomplish this will largely be fashioned by each country's distinct politics and citizen engagements.

Second, law enforcement and prevention mechanisms as anti-corruption policy tools remain complex as they require cross-sectoral and institutional commitments, which are rarely achievable in the public sector. Depending on the profile and sector of intervention, more functional and practical approaches should be identified and prioritised. For instance, political corruption should attract a combination of prosecution and recovery, as well as public sensitisation on the case to avoid such cases being seen as political persecution, as commonly seen across Africa. In his already-mentioned address, President Hichilema recognised this by stating that.

The fight against corruption requires a clear, succinct, and holistic policy to strategically curb this negative vice. We must ensure that those who steal from the public face the full consequences of their actions. Corruption is akin to theft, and we must all be involved in stamping it out. Misunderstandings arise when minor thefts receive harsher sentences than those stealing millions from the government ([ACC website](#)).

Given corruption's corrosive impact and how it impoverishes most African populations (leading to indirect deaths, e.g. due to poor road conditions and lack of medicine and medical facilities, etc.), persecuting suspects needs more radical legal approaches. In addition to existing measures, some African countries like Kenya, Nigeria, Zambia, and others may need to adopt sunset laws on death sentences for high-ranking political and civil servants to ensure that the consequences of corruption are greater than the gains they receive. While asset recovery is a step in the right direction, in some cases, it often accounts for only a small percentage of the stolen funds related to corruption. As a result, suspects, especially the political elites, continue to steal enough for their political campaigns and for legal fees to cover the repercussions if caught. Oft suspects of political corruption have taken advantage of loopholes in the anti-corruption laws to frustrate asset recovery. Hence, other tools like Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) are formulated in instances where the anti-corruption agency or the Public Prosecutor fails to receive the initial sentence recommended against the suspect. Furthermore, the management of recovered assets is essential. Debates have arisen over whether recovered assets have been used in a manner that can benefit the economy. Therefore, ACA or Asset Recovery agencies should devise more transparent management and allocation of assets recovered from corruption.

Third, public confidence is critical for anti-corruption initiatives and laws to succeed. Whistleblowing and whistleblower protection cannot work in an environment with low public trust. This might explain why Zambians hardly report corruption cases despite having the Public Interest Disclosure (Protection of Whistle-blowers) Act No. 4 of 2010. A critical component of this would be to improve communal understanding of the effects of corruption in society. Public communication should bring together formal and informal social actors, such as traditional leaders, churches, and civil society organisations.

A communal approach to anti-corruption should be able to identify and contextualise narratives and framings relatable to ordinary citizens' ways of life, as well as their centrality in the fight against corruption. Therefore, developing curricula in primary and secondary schools, as anticipated in various anti-corruption policies, is a step in the right direction. However, more concerted efforts are needed regarding the capacity building of the personnel, collaborative mechanisms with the education stakeholders and developing appropriate ways of inculcating anti-corruption culture in syllabuses.

Fourth, to tackle corruption, we need to implement laws requiring senior government officials, politicians, and their dependents to utilise public schools, hospitals, and transport systems. Many officials and their children attend expensive private schools abroad, which is beyond their means based on their salaries. This lifestyle leads to corrupt practices in order to maintain it. It

is important to note that officials and politicians who are detached from public realities lack the understanding and commitment necessary to improve public services. Mandating the use of public facilities by politicians and senior officials could lead to increased investments and improvements in these services, ultimately reducing the deleterious impact of corruption on public infrastructure.

Some of the insights above require strong political will and active, informed citizen participation to be implemented. One fundamental deficit in anti-corruption reforms in Africa is the lack of robust citizenship—ignorant, parochial citizens divided alongside their ethnic groups. This lack of active citizenry also threatens the creation or realisation of democratic systems. So, even though most Africans are increasingly demanding democratic systems over other forms of government, according to the round 9 Afrobarometer survey (2021/22), there is a challenge with citizen mobilisation and active citizenry. Promoting citizens' voices and agencies is key to successful and sustainable African anti-corruption efforts. This can be seen in less corrupt countries like Norway, where citizen agencies have empowered institutions over the influence of those in power. This is different in Africa, where power still lies more in the hands of individuals than institutions, with severe consequences for public affairs.

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