

## Can Kenya succeed in eliminating corruption?

*Carolyn Waraga looks at the challenges facing the Kenya President as he tackles corruption in his government.*

Once again, Uhuru Kenyatta's administration has come under severe criticism for escalating levels of corruption. Recently, the Ministry of Devolution and Planning faced a second scandal in a span of six months that involved procuring pens at the price of \$85 each. When the former Cabinet Secretary was questioned, she said she was neither aware of the transaction nor responsible for procurement issues in the ministry. This culture of 'it wasn't me' has been thriving. Even some citizens seem to have accepted that corruption will always happen and have given up on demanding accountability from their leaders. Commenting on the latest revelations, a security guard summed it up this way: 'even if leaders are to steal they should steal just a little'.



Uhuru Kenyatta makes a live national address about the cabinet reshuffle

There has however been some internal and external pressure for the government to show commitment in fighting against graft. International donors, trading partners and the civil society have mounted pressure on Kenyatta's administration. This comes after Barack Obama's trip to the country when **the US President declared corruption as a cancer** that needs to be dealt with followed by **a similar plea from Pope Francis** during his recent visit in November 2015. In a bid to show commitment, Kenyatta has reshuffled the cabinet and removed all officials whose graft has been exposed. He emphasised that he wants a clean-hands government in order to encourage international companies and investors who have previously been deterred from doing business in Kenya as a result of corruption. Observers say that this reshuffle is a political move to secure the 2017 general election which is perceived to depend on the government's performance.

In addition to the reshuffle, **the President has launched a multi-sectoral fight** against graft that will involve the private sector especially when it comes to the procurement process with the government. The punitive measures advocated by the President are that those found guilty will be blacklisted and business licences withheld or recalled. The President has also said that corruption should be declared as evil and included in the education curriculum to create awareness of its negative impact on society. This course will start in 2016, with examinations at the end of the academic year.



Will all these plans have any impact on corruption? I do not believe that these will be a sufficient deterrent. As seen in the past, officials accused of corruption or even businesses such as banks that have not adhered to regulations have neither been disciplined nor put behind bars. The **Goldenberg scandal**, **Anglo-leasing scandal** among others seem to point to Kenya being a hotbed for corruption. The prosecution commissions did not extend themselves to get the culprits when the most powerful elites were implicated during investigations. This creates perverse incentives for public officials or other professionals because they can get away without serious consequences.

The fact that Kenya has an Ethics and Anti-corruption Commission (EACC) whose chairmen never serve their full tenure especially when they investigate corruption scandals should explain why awareness is not sufficient. Recently in a conference in Uganda, PLO Lumumba, a previous chairman of the Kenyan commission known for his integrity and intolerance for corruption **said, 'I was not supposed to fight corruption but to be seen to fight corruption'**. To add insult to the injury, the parliament has the right to disband the commission. This essentially makes the commission a puppet of potentially corrupt public officials; if the EACC officials do not dance to their tune, they will be sent packing.

The neighbouring countries, Uganda, Tanzania and Rwanda are beefing up their fight against this vice. Recently, Tanzania's President Elect Magufuli started his term on a very high note in a bid to change the public service and ensure no embezzlement of public funds. He has slashed expenditure in what he terms excesses in government officials' foreign trips and entertainment. 'What would Magufuli do?' has become a trend on social media to address what he would do to corrupt officials. I hope that if these countries succeed in fighting graft there can be spillover effects from which the Kenyan government can borrow a leaf.

What Kenya needs is strong and effective institutions that are intolerant to corruption and encourage good governance. This will take more than good leadership by the President. Cabinet reshuffles to bring in 'fresh blood' will not have any impact if the institutions are weak. As seen from Kenyatta's first cabinet which was composed of technocrats unlike politically elected officials previously under the former regime, new Cabinet Secretaries are not the solution given they will still operate within the weak institutions of which they can also take advantage. We need legislative reforms to ensure that all are equal before the law. If we can see the people found guilty of graft put behind bars with no special treatment, as happens in developed countries, then Kenya can be said and be seen to be fighting corruption.

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**The views expressed in this post are those of the authors and in no way reflect those of the Africa at LSE blog or the London School of Economics and Political Science.**

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