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## Patronage Driven Corruption Undermining the Fight against Poverty in Uganda

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**Abstract:** *Uganda has been a den of corruption for a long time, a “disease” that has eaten up the entire society. Surprisingly or not, the Ugandan political machine has ensured that this practice thrives to benefit its interests at the expense of the majority poor. This study reveals that Uganda’s patronage and corruption quandary emanated from the British Colonial administrative system which was based on using a section of local people to rule over the rest and consequently rewarded them for supporting their policies and interests. With the intentioned absence of democratic rule, institutions that could condemn, exert public control and demand accountability from public officials never developed. As a result, evidence shows that despite Uganda’s strong anti-corruption framework, patronage and corruption have continued to thrive largely due to the failure of anti-corruption institutions to enforce the anti-corruption framework making the fight against corruption a losing battle.*

**Keywords:** Colonial legacy, patronage, weak institutions, corruption, poverty

### Introduction

Corruption presents itself in a variety of forms and though more prevalent in developing countries it surely takes a good share of developed countries’ budgets as well. This has led countries and international organizations to theorize and formulate different kinds of response scenarios in form of measures to curb this ever present malady. It’s nearly impossible that one looks at a newspaper without stories on corruption scandals around the world, an indication that corruption isn’t a problem for a select few but for all countries around the world.

As for developing countries, present-day scholars have gone ahead to create connections between colonialism and the current state of affairs prevailing in different countries. In this line of analysis, a number of quantitative research both within and across nations, have related colonial-era policies and institutions to post-independence variations in economic growth (Englebert, 2000; Acemoglu, Johnson, and Robinson, 2001; 2002) and corruption, (Treiman, 2000). One strand of this literature indicates that Europeans adopted different colonization policies with different associated institutions. In places where Europeans couldn’t settle due to high mortality rates, the colonial administration established extractive institutions. Though a number of studies about patronage have been done on Uganda (Titeca 2006; Mwenda and Tangiri 2005; Maraka, 2009) patronage and donor reforms (Tangiri and Mwenda, 2011), cronyism (Tangiri and Mwenda, 2001), none has addressed the dilemma of why despite the presence of an excellent legal and institutional framework for anti-corruption in Uganda, corruption keeps increasing. In this article, we address this predicament by showing the large implementation gap causing the failure of anti-corruption efforts that undermine the fight against

poverty to be a result of a complex relationship involving British colonial policies, patronage and weak institutions.

We also examine the applicability colonial legacy perspective to Uganda's context and along the way answer the questions of whether or not patronage and corruption in Uganda originated from the British colonial administration. Next we try to find out why the fight against corruption in Uganda has failed?, lastly we also look at how the weakness of anti-corruption institutions in the fight against corruption has affected poverty reduction efforts. In the following sections, we take a look the definitions of corruption paving way for the analysis of the different perspectives on corruption particularly, socio-cultural, economic and political perspectives. We then look at the British colonial legacy and the origin of patronage in Uganda. Building on the preceding section, we explore how political patronage and corruption exist in Uganda today. Afterwards, we analyze why anti-corruption measures have failed by emphasizing the weakness of institutions, and effects of corruption on government's efforts to fight poverty respectively. Lastly, we conclude and offer some recommendations. .

### **Conceptualizing Corruption**

Most research done on corruption usually begins by not only stating what corruption is but by also demonstrating how tough it is to assign a precise meaning to this concept. In the context of developing countries, the World Bank has singled out Corruption as the biggest challenge to economic and social development (World Bank, 1997). This however doesn't mean that this malady is absent in developed countries, corruption is seen to respect no society and transcends boundaries of developed and underdeveloped countries as it does in democracies and dictatorships (Lui, 2007). To democracies for instance, corruption strikes the basic principles on which democracy rests particularly impartiality of institutions, and transparency than it does in dictatorships. Therefore corruption is globally present and widely resented (Rothstein and Teorell, 2008).

In light of the above, corruption has been commonly defined as "the abuse public power for private gain" (Amundsen, Sissener, and Soreide, 2000). World Bank's definition of corruption takes a slightly different format as "the use of public office for private gain" (World Bank, 1997). To Deflem, corruption is defined in reference to the illegal acts related to power offices, institutions and other politically related spheres (Deflem, 1995). Yet Rothstein and Teorell define corruption as "the violation of non-discrimination norms governing the behavior of holders of public office that are motivated by private gain" (Rothstein and Teorell, 2008). If an analysis of most definitions of corruption is made, many illegal activities such as bribery, extortion become either part of corruption or are understood as distinct from corruption. Thus, the concept is broadly defined or sometimes not defined at all (Williams, 1981). All in all, this study adopts Johnston's definition which takes corruption to involve "the abuse of trust, generally one involving public power, for private benefit which often, but by no means always, comes inform of money" (Johnston, 2005, 11)

### **Perspectives on Corruption**

The search for a clear understanding of corruption has led researchers to consider a broad range of perspectives to unravel its causes. Here, we take a look at three perspectives; the social-

cultural, economic, and political perspective to which we believe can highlight the intricacies of Uganda's corruption quandary, help trace its origin and causes, discover why efforts to fight it have failed, and provide a basis for devising relevant measures of eliminating corruption.

#### *Socio-cultural perspective*

In the field of sociology, social problems are defined as “conditions growing out of human interactions that are considered undesirable by a significant number of people who believe they can be resolved through preventative or remedial action” (Merton and Nisbet 1961, 92). One of the classifications of social problems is from the socio-cultural perspective where crime is categorized. Corruption is a crime against humanity since it deviates from the legally accepted standards of society such as norms and rules. Where corruption exists, meaningful development can hardly occur. Therefore it is a disintegrative social factor which often hinders social, political and economic development of nations

Contextually, corruption is perceived differently depending on the differences in societal norms (Bardham, 1997). This makes the generalization of measures to curb corruption questionable since what constitutes an act of corruption in one country could be entirely acceptable in another. Take for instance the culture of gift giving which to some countries is part and partial of their life, does it qualify as corruption? Much as past literature has thrown a lot of criticism at the culture of gift giving equating it to bribery and a justification for tolerating corruption (Hope, 2000), perceiving this culture as act of corruption seems unfair to such societies that have practiced it for centuries. In this respect, while the custom of gift giving on one hand signifies the importance of social relations (Steidlmeier, 1999), on the other hand it is an illegal exchange that goes against other society's rules and regulations. Therefore, for clarity, a lucid demarcation should be made on issues of culture and corruption in different societies if an acceptable definition of corruption and its composition is to be reached.

#### *Economic Perspective*

The economic perspective on corruption tries to explain how economic factors impact the spread of corruption and its effects on society. Economic theory on corruption such as public choice argues that corruption just like rent seeking is a result of poorly channeled self-interest that seeks to maximize at the expense of the public good (Mbaku, 1998) Taking for instance grand corruption or even petty corruption in the civil service; these two can seriously hamper the ability of the state to provide services and at the same time can act as an extra tax on citizens in the process of accessing services.

Petty corruption in form of bribes by public officials has been justified in some circles as a way through which public officials meet their cost of living due to low salaries earned from government jobs (Pope, 2000). Yet Kaufmann in his “grease-the-wheels” argument asserts that, “bribery can be an efficient way of getting around burdensome regulations and ineffective legal systems” (Kaufmann (2011). This argument is however lacking especially if considered in the public sector context where public goods are allocated irrespective of who is paying the highest price. Indeed, Ades and Di Tella (1997), conclude that corruption acts mainly as “a sand-in-the-machine”. Therefore to root out this justification in public office, civil service reforms including increased pay and rotation of workers should be implemented in order to disrupt informal links

from developing.

Furthermore, corruption has also been correlated with income inequality and poverty since proceeds from corruption most likely accrue to the well-connected members in society who happen to be the “haves” other than “the have-nots” (Gupta, Davoodi, and Alonso-Terme, 2002). One of the major roles of government is to ensure equitable distribution of resources however; corruption distorts this redistributive role of the state and ensures that better connected individuals get opportunities to climb up the economic ladder (Tanzi, 1998). Accordingly, Shleifer and Vishny argue that, to succeed in shifting away resources from productive activities like education and health which has a direct bearing on the life of the poor requires a high degree of secrecy to keep the network intact and secure (Shleifer and Vishny, 1993). In other words, corruption is possible simply because those involved have protection and assurance.

### *Political Perspective*

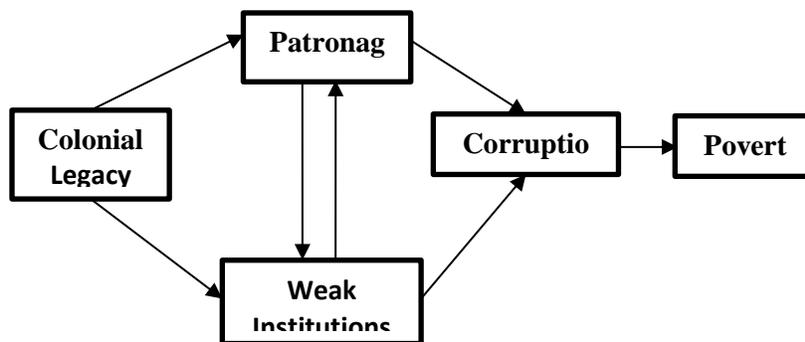
Citizens elect leaders with an understanding that they will take care of them. Most democratic countries indeed fulfill this wish by providing for their citizens transparently and in the most convenient ways. Similarly, La Porta et al, (1999), shares a related view that “good governments contribute to success in economic development”, definitely with the intention of enhancing the quality of life for their citizens. That said, Shleifer argues that government performance is determined by political needs (Shleifer and Vishny, 1993). Such needs are heavily reflected in the kind of governance that exist in a particular context, consequently, it is plausible to say that different governance structures such as democracies and dictatorships have political needs shaped by their beliefs and how they benefit politically.

On that basis therefore, political perspective on corruption normally takes the shape of political patronage and corruption which varies with the type of political system in question. To this end, the nature, scope, and potential of political corruption might take different forms in a democracy compared to that in a dictatorship. Thus political corruption can reveal itself in a variety of forms such as clientelism, patronage, nepotism, and so forth with a range of characteristics (Bratsis, 2003). Political corruption indeed is a complex phenomenon and for its terrorizing impact to be clearly understood, it is imperative that we find out why it is more visible in some societies than others, its origins, and what majorly explain its existence. Overall, institutions and policies are shaped by those in power to stay in power and amass resources (La Porta et al, 1999). This perspective can closely be related to the situation in Uganda as will be explained in the subsequent sections.

### **Methodology**

The study uses a qualitative approach mainly a review of different literatures on colonialism, patronage and corruption. In addition, both international organizations’ websites such as the World Bank and IMF to mention but a few, and as well as institution websites of agencies in Uganda have been searched for information and possible data that has been used to illustrate how Uganda rates in terms of corruption with other countries in Africa.

**Figure 1:** A Framework for the study of patronage, corruption and the failure of anti-corruption



### Colonial legacy and the Origin of Patronage in Uganda

Before the arrival of the British imperialists, the area now known as Uganda was made up of different Kingdoms that had different administrative structures and relationships based on trade and military might (Ward, 1991). Notably among them were Buganda and Bunyoro Kingdoms. The first signs of imperial aggression came with the arrival of protestant and catholic missionaries in 1877 and 1879 representing the interests of Britain and France respectively. The rivalry between the two Christian factions sooner than later exploded into war in 1892 of which the Protestants with the help of the Imperial British East African Company came out victorious (Ward, 1991).

Two years down the road, the British government formally declared a protectorate over Uganda, and Christianity came to dominate the political arena of Buganda and Uganda later on. The alliance between the British and Buganda led to the signing of the 1900 Buganda Agreement and the eventual extension of British rule to other parts of Uganda. Britain needed local collaboration to make her occupation of Uganda effective and cheap and chose patronage as the best way to deepen this new found relationship with Buganda. The Kingdom received big chunks of land and its officials were given permission to collect taxes on behalf of the colonial government (Moncrieffe, 2004). Buganda local chiefs became elevated to fill most of the positions in the colonial administration (International Crisis Group, 2012), in addition to becoming sub-imperialists in other parts of Uganda. This indirect system of using Buganda to rule over other Ugandans became systematized later on as reflected in the appointment of Ministers and majority public servants to imitate the tribe of the president at a time.

As per the categorization made by Acemoglu et al. (2001), Uganda was one of those countries seen as unfit for British settlers which forced the colonial administration to concentrate on putting up extractive institutions to aid in the drawing out of resources. The construction of the Uganda railway to connect Uganda to the East Africa coast so as to fasten the movement of both agricultural and natural resources such as cotton and copper was a clear testament to that effect (Bamber, 2001). Alternatively, colonies that were found fit for European settlement, received high numbers of European settlers who went ahead to demand institutions similar to those in Europe to protect property rights, guard against government expropriations, rule of law to mention but a few (Acemoglu, Johnson, and Robinson, 2001; Lange, Mahoney, and Vom Hau, 2006). Consequently, political, social and administrative institutions that sprung up were heavily reliant on, and meant to facilitate the interests of the British colonial administration.

According to Ruzindana, (1997, 134) the colonial period offered no possibility that the

indigenous people employed in the public service, could be seriously involved in corruption because major decisions were made by the colonial officials. Thus, through the indirect rule policy that was based on coercion and subjugation of one tribe against others, there was no room for democratic rule, and as result, institutions that could condemn, exert public control and demand accountability from public officials never developed. Thus, the actions of the British to distribute incentives based on who was loyal and supportive of their policies was clearly a patronage strategy that later on became evident in Ugandan politics and administration.

Upon the attainment of independence in 1962, the elites who took over Uganda's administration inherited a colonial administrative system that used a mixture of favors and excessive force to accomplish their own agendas. These elites abolished the independence constitution resulting into the postponement of elections and out of this situation, "corruption emerged reflecting not merely economic greed but also the realities of political survival since the continued support of the rulers was based on patronage which could only be sustained by a continuous flow of favors to one's followers" (Ruzindana, 1997, 134). Thus, patronage politics in Uganda- then and now- can be seen as a direct progeny of the British colonial system. It was used then and is still being used to ensure that the interests of those in authority are served.

### **Patronage and Corruption in Uganda today**

Museveni's accession to power as the President of Uganda in 1986 was cherished and indeed supported by many people both within and outside of Uganda. In his book, "What is Africa's problem"? Museveni concluded that Africa's problem was leaders who overstayed in power (Museveni, 1992). In his 28 year reign until now, Museveni undertook reforms as prescribed by World Bank and IMF inform of structural adjustment programs at least until 1995. This meant not only shifting key economic decisions from the state to the private sector but most importantly, it was a restructuring of Uganda's politics which had seen previous governments use state control of the economy to build political support either through rewarding their supporters or buying off potential opponents.

Between 1992 and 1995, his reforms aimed at reducing the size of government but back tracked after 1996, as he entered a period of electoral politics. The president realized that to win over an ethnically diverse population, he needed to accommodate the interests of powerful elites and at the same time provide at least a minimum level of public goods for the masses. Paradoxically, the interests of the powerful elites are in most cases inconsistent with those of their constituents. Whereas the general population is more concerned with good roads, hospitals, schools etc, the elites are more interested in private goods such as positions of power, high paying jobs and opportunities for corruption (Johnston, 1997). Through these, Museveni has created a political machine and with the help of the army, he seems destined for life presidency.

Considering the massive theft of state funds that has rocked the country recently in form of corruption scandals involving powerful government officials on whom no action has been taken, it is plausible to say that patronage and corruption have been well exercised in Uganda. Since 2007, government has been involved in a number of high profile scandals and despite compelling evidence presented against some of the ministers and ruling party officials, justice has not been served due to political interference from the highest office. The failure of responsible institutions to prosecute corrupt officials citing political interference has led majority

of Ugandans to believe that through these scandals, the ruling party systematically secures funds for its patronage network.

**Table 1:** Major patronage driven corruption Scandals

<b>Corruption Scandals</b>	<b>Amount</b>	<b>Officials Implicated</b>
CHOGM1 (2007)	\$ 27 Million	Former Vice-President Prof Gilbert Bukenya, Prime Minister Amama Mbabazi Current Minister for ICT John Nasasira & his Deputy Foreign Affairs Minister Sam Kutesa
Global Fund (2008)	\$38 Million	Former Health Minister Jim Muhwezi and his
Temangalo (2008)	\$4.3 Million	Prime Minister Amama Mbabazi, & Businessman Amos Nzeyi
National ID (2010)	\$7.5 Million	Former Minister for General Duties Kiddu Makubuya, Former Internal Affairs Minister Kirunda Kivejinja & Local Government Permanent Secretary Steven Kagoda
Bicycle scam (2011)	\$1.7 Million	Permanent Secretary Ministry of Local Government
Pensions (2012)	\$66.7 Million	Ministry of Public Service Officials
OPM2 (2012)	\$19.7 Million	Principle Accountant in Prime Minister's Office

**Source:** Major Media Houses in Uganda

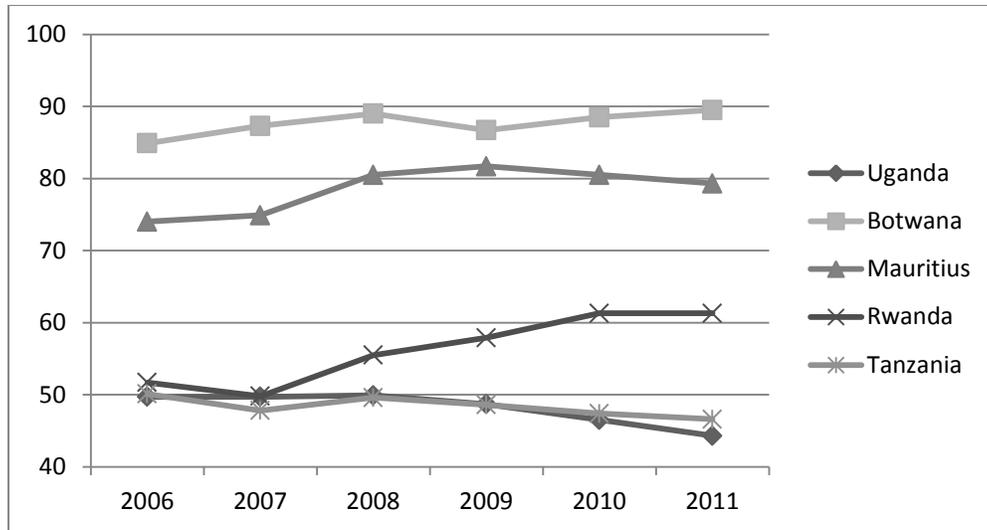
The Ibrahim Foundation (2011) index on corruption in bureaucracy ranked Uganda among the worst performers in this category with a score of 28.6 compared to Rwanda for instance with a score of 57.1 in 2010/2011 (Ibrahim Foundation, 2011). Considering corruption in government and public officials both elected and appointed, a dimension that assesses the level of vested cronyism in, and corruption of, public officials, Uganda's performance again leaves a lot to be desired. When compared to Africa's best performers, say, Botswana and Mauritius and as well as Uganda's neighbors Tanzania and Rwanda in the year 2010/2011, Uganda's performance is rated as "poor", an indication of how leaders are at the fore front of embezzling government resources ( Inspector General of Government, 2011)

**Figure 2:** Corruption in government and of Public Officials

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1 CHOGM is an abbreviated form for "Commonwealth Heads of States meeting"

2 OPM refers to "Office of the Prime Minister"



Source: Ibrahim Index of African Governance, 2011

Districts creation in Uganda as opposed to extending services closer to the rural people, has been to widen Museveni’s political patronage net (Green, 2010; Crook, 2003). Uganda had a total of 33 districts in 1986 when President Museveni came to power. This number had grown to 114 districts by 2010 and considering that there were only 56 districts in 2002 (MoLG, 2013), the rest have normally come as promises on the eve of election years. “As noted in *Acholi Times* article on July 16<sup>th</sup> 2012, creation of districts signifies jobs, council allowances, and new Members of Parliament plus bureaucrats’ salaries with more control over resources”. Mwenda and Tangiri (2005) concur that “state elites have dispensed government controlled economic resources such as jobs, credits, licenses, contracts social services to select groups and persons whose support they wished to secure.” Through such a structure, the ruling party keeps its supporters happy and the network running.

The economic and political marginalization of Northern Uganda and the subsequent development of the south and west have been given a patronage connotation. As the south and the west were experiencing economic, political and social transformation, the North has been ravaged by unending conflict of the Lord’s Resistance Army. Government’s lack of commitment to end this war was attributed to (1) desire to suffocate and punish the North for not supporting Museveni’s regime (Boehm, 2011), and (2) prolonging this war was for purposes of rewarding Museveni’s military leaders (Mwenda and Tangiri, 2005), thanks to Ministry of Defense’s classified budgets. As a result, Northern Uganda has lagged behind due to decades of fighting until 2005 leaving Northern Uganda impoverished (UBOS, 2010).

Thus, politically led patronage right from the executive to the lower street level bureaucrats has crippled civil service performance and its ability to deliver services efficiently prompting resentment by the general population. The influence of higher officials in the functioning of institutions not only exacerbates the already weak institutional capacity, but also affects the intended contribution of these institutions to service provision. Andrew M. Mwenda in his blog on April 13<sup>th</sup> 2013 made this description of President Museveni, “our president will tolerate a lot of things- public officials who loot the treasury with impunity, incompetent

ministers and civil servants who delay dams and roads or build substandard or ghost hospitals and schools. .... however if anything posed an existential threat to his power, Museveni will be quick, uncompromising and decisive”<sup>3</sup>. This is a clear indication of how far the Ugandan leadership is willing to go to ensure its continued stay in power.

### **The Failure of Anti-Corruption Efforts “Fighting a Losing Battle”**

The burgeoning of corruption in Uganda is not due to lack of effort to fighting it but the complex system that allows those involved to go scot-free. Uganda’s political machinery benefits off corruption and sees the fight against corruption as one that can bring about its own downfall. As put by Mwenda, “President Museveni co-opts powerful elites from Uganda’s different religious and ethnic factions and by giving them positions of power, privilege, and influence in government, he is able to create a bridge between himself and their followers”<sup>4</sup>. This way, Museveni has used his unlimited powers to create a “more personal, patronage-based, executive-centered and military reliant regime” (International Crisis Group, 2012)

Uganda’s large institutional framework for anti-corruption that includes the Inspector General of Government’s (IGG), the anti-corruption court, the Criminal Investigation Department under the police, the Directorate of Ethics and Integrity (DEI), the Public Procurement and Disposal of Public Assets Authority, the Auditor General (AG), and the Public Accounts Committee of Parliament have all been side stepped (Tangiri and Mwenda, 2006; Inspector General of Government, 2011). As reflected on the research framework, the central government through patronage heavily influences the activities of the anti-corruption institutions by protecting those under its network. This leaves the IGG for instance unable to prosecute those with connection to the central government (African Peer Review Mechanism, 2009; Global Integrity, 2011). In essence, these anti-corruption institutions will only peruse individual of no interest to the central government. As a result, such institutions have lost credibility and public trust to come true on their objective of fighting corruption.

According to global integrity, Uganda has the largest “implementation gap” of all the countries covered in the report (Global Integrity, 2007). The implementation gap metric is used to capture the gap between a country’s anti-corruption laws and the actual enforcement of those same laws. Uganda’s legal framework for anti-corruption was ranked as “excellent” (98%); however, enforcement of this same framework was ranked as “very poor” (51%). In fact, as long as corrupt officials remain loyal to the president and the ruling party, there is very little chance of concrete action ever being taken against them. This is a clear indication of how patronage has seized the activities and decision making of the anti-corruption institutions to ensure its survival.

According to World Bank, the perceived growing culture of impunity for grand corruption has limited the effectiveness of Anti-Corruption measure (World Bank, 2011). The 2006 Freedom House report denounced the wide spread patronage and corruption in

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3 <http://andrewmwendasblog.blogspot.kr/2013/04/what-keeps-museveni-in-power.html>

4 <http://andrewmwendasblog.blogspot.kr/2012/08/ugandas-anti-corruption-rituals.html>

government<sup>5</sup>. Corruption has become an accepted way of life in Uganda (Maraka, 2009), to the extent that anyone appointed or elected to public office wants to take advantage of their appointment to enrich themselves. This only serves to show that much as Uganda has a variety of institutions mandated to fight corruption with a good legal basis from which to execute their duties, the decisions on who to prosecute lie outside these institutions and thus the large implementation gap.

**Table 2:** Percentage of prosecution cases involving public corruption which resulted in a conviction

<b>Result of cases</b>	<b>2009</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>2010</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>2011</b>	<b>%</b>
Conviction	2	33	15	38.5	44	31.2
Withdrawal	2	33	9	23.1	10	7.1
Dismissed	0	0	11	28.2	43	30.5
Acquitted	1	17	4	10.3	15	10.6
Closed administratively	0	0	0	0	24	17
Other (Order delivered)	0	0	0	0	5	3.6
Not stated	1	17	0	0	0	0
Total completed	6	100	39	100	141	100
Ongoing cases	2	-	49	-	130	-
Percentage resolved cases that required more than 12 months	-	0	2	5.1	14	8.5

**Source:** Anti-corruption Court, 2009-2011

The trend in conviction of prosecution cases at the anti-corruption court shows a declining rate. By 2011 for instance, while 30.5% of cases resulted into dismissals, 10.6% were acquitted and 7.1% withdrawn, revealing the difficulties and interferences experienced in acquiring evidence especially in cases involving high level government officials. Where evidence has been more than compelling to warrant conviction, the IGG for instance without giving any reason, would abandon the case. Thus, just like in the colonial days when institutions catered for the interests of the British colonial administration, today’s anti-corruption enforcement agencies indirectly exist for the benefit of the state’s political machine. Consequently, majority of these convictions (31.2%) in 2011 are a reflection of cases involving low ranking bureaucrats without political connections.

Lack of political will has commonly featured as a cause for failure of anti-corruption efforts (Brinkerhoff, 2000; Johnston, 2005, 11; Kpundeh, 1998; Persson, Rothstein, and Teorell, 2010). This however shouldn’t be a problem in the face of strong institutions, for it’s the duty of such institutions to fight off such interference by making sure that rules are applied to everyone impartially. Nonetheless, in the case of Uganda, the ailing nature of institutions has enabled corrupt officials to instead hide behind these same institutions and despite President Museveni constantly waging numerous wars against corruption, his rhetoric has not translated into credible action making the fight against corruption an impossible one. On this note, Johnston argues that,

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5 (<http://www.freedomhouse.org>)

“weak institutions not only allow citizens and officials to seek illicit gains, at times with impunity; but also create incentives for more corruption as people seek protection in an uncertain environment” (Johnston, 2005, 38)

To this end, regardless of the continued availability of resources to fight corruption especially from the international community, corruption in Uganda has continued to thrive (Persson, Rothstein, and Teorell 2010; Transparency International, 2006; 2010)<sup>6</sup>. This has made donors to threaten tough action in form of suspending aid disbursements until government takes credible measures against those involved in corruption. Even then nothing seems fruitful as political elites and bureaucrats protected by the patronage network continue to embezzle public funds and manipulate reforms to reproduce patronage and other practices that help them stay in power (Mwenda and Tangiri, 2005). Therefore unless anti-corruption institutions independently exercise their authority and overcome the web of patronage, the fight against corruption will always be a losing battle.

### **Effects of Corruption on Ugandan Poor**

Ugandan government channels resources to the grassroots through the decentralization process (Bashaasha, Mangheni, and Nkonya, 2011). Unfortunately, local governments in Uganda, the highest being the district simply provide another layer of bureaucracy for misuse and capture of public funds by local government politicians and bureaucrats (Reinikka and Svensson, 2004), or call it the “decentralization of corruption”. According to Transparency International (2008)’s corruption perception index, rampant corruption jeopardizes the fight against poverty. Thus corruption has a direct bearing on the persistent levels of poverty (Chetwynd, Chetwynd, Spector, 2003). It is therefore no wonder that poverty has remained a bedfellow of most Ugandans with 62.9 per cent living on \$2 a day (World Bank, 2013)

The World Bank estimates that Uganda receives over 16% in direct official funding annually as development assistance. For instance in 2008, 2009 and 2010, the country received USD 1,641,470,000, 1,784,700,000 and 1,723,470,000 in aid respectively (World Bank, 2013). Unfortunately the poverty head count still stands at 24.5% (\$1.25), and 62.9% (\$2) below the poverty line. The main contributing element to this level of poverty has been corruption due to lack of transparency and citizens participation in development process. In his concept of “Official Moguls”, a concept of “reach out and squeeze someone”, Michael Johnston categorizes Uganda among the official moguls, a group of nations where powerful politicians and their favorites hold all the cards, and essentially, “few individuals take over and own everything” (Johnston, 2005). Indeed this is a perfect profile that fits Uganda’s situation considering that 50.7 percent of income is held by the top 20 percent of the population and a majority 62.9 percent earns only \$ 2 a day (World Bank, 2013).

Corruption in Uganda being politically motivated has resulted into government’s inability to govern its citizens effectively. The inability of political institutions to reach out to citizens and give responsive services has seriously hindered the quantity and quality of public services consequently affecting the poor who mostly depend on them (Chetwynd, Chetwynd, and

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6 [www.transparency.org/cpi](http://www.transparency.org/cpi)

Spector, 2003). In other words corruption increases poverty through its influence on governance. Consequently, this explains why sectors such as health are given lower priority than say defense where budgets are classified and thus easy to misuse.

At the broadest level, corruption has brought inefficiencies in public expenditure by diverting resources to easily corruptible sectors and has distorted the allocation of resources and policy decisions (Hite, 2006). It basically “aggravates the living conditions of the poor people by distorting the entire decision making process connected to public sector programs”. In 2012, the office of the Prime Minister and Ministry of Public Service lost 60 billion Uganda Shillings (around \$22 million) and 360 billion Uganda Shillings (around \$131 million) respectively to corruption (Mwenda 2013). The biggest percentage of this money was mostly allocated for different projects and services related to the general public and considering that the poor are most dependent on government services, is fair to say that corruption of this kind indeed affects poverty reduction efforts further complicating their already difficult situation.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

All said and done, the implementation of a strong legal and institutional framework for anticorruption in Uganda has faced many challenges with recent developments casting doubt on government’s commitment and sincerity to address corruption. It is therefore not a surprise that despite Global Integrity ranking Uganda strongly in terms of the quality of her anti-corruption law, the ranking was “very weak” in terms of enforcing this law (Global Integrity, 2009).

As shown in the discussions above, this institutional weakness emanated from the British colonial system, which designed its administrative system to reward those who supported its interests. The Ugandan elites groomed by this system chose to stick with the same system upon the attainment of independence. This practice has had a great bearing on how institutions in Uganda fight both patronage and corruption with politicians in high political offices exerting their influence on the activities of anti-corruption institutions. The lack of independence of especially the Inspector General of Government has seen several high ranking government officials off the hook despite embezzling huge sums of public funds. Thus while other “countries have made fighting corruption and provision of public services through impartial institutions the cornerstone of their administrative authenticity, ruling elites in Uganda have made trading patronage among themselves the fulcrum of democratic politics”<sup>7</sup>.

Owing to the above discussion, this study argues that corruption in Uganda has been systematic and intentioned by those in power as a rewarding system to the loyal and supportive elites of the ruling party, something that has become a culture at all levels. The tight grip held by political elites upon the activities of the anti-corruption institutions has made it impossible to fight patronage and corruption leaving the poor who mostly depend on government struggling to even fulfill the basic of needs. In this way, it is plausible to say that corruption undermines political development, flourishing where national institutions and guarantees of economic rights are weak. And much as corruption doesn’t explain all that is wrong in Ugandan society, it surely does negate all that is right in it and thus an indication of a deeper malady in need of urgent

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7 <http://andrewmwendasblog.blogspot.kr/2012/12/graft-thinking-out-of-box.html>

attention.

Unless anti-corruption institutions win back the legitimacy and support of the public in doing the job for which they were established to do, there is completely no reason for such institutions to be trusted in the fight against corruption. In the meantime, this study proposes citizen led interventions that are completely out of the reach of the political machine. This can take the form of widening and protecting citizens' political involvement in national aspects that directly affect them. This can reduce their susceptibility to exploitation; boost their ability to effectively participate in politics and be able to check on the self-interested behavior of political elites and bureaucrats who make and implement policies respectively. When achieved, maintaining a steady patronage network with the needed discretion will become difficult for corrupt officials curtailing the network in the process.

Additionally, in Uganda where majority of the people have less access to information, the media and civil society can play a crucial role by exposing corrupt officials yet at the same time pointing out the options available to the public to take action in such matters that directly affect them. The media and civil society may not only expose corrupt officials but can also take lead in agitating for institutional reforms aimed at giving a platform on which citizens' views regarding the running and management of public offices is done. This way, both the media and civil society can act as mediators between the government and its citizens in ensuring public finances are handled with respect and put towards proper use. These and more can open up the government and in the process reduce the discretion that makes it possible for government officials to divert public resources for their own benefits.

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