The failure of Anti-Corruption Policies
A Theoretical Mischaracterization of the Problem

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Abstract:

With an increased awareness of the detrimental effects of corruption on development, strategies to fight it are now a top priority in policy circles around the world. Since Africa is home to most of the thoroughly corrupt countries in the world, it is no coincidence that the African continent has been the major target of this movement. To date, however, few successes have resulted from the investment. In fact, in some countries corruption even seems to have become more entrenched in step with the efforts to curb it. The aim of this paper is to advance an explanation to why this is the case. Drawing upon the cases of Kenya and Uganda – two arguably typical African countries when it comes to the problem of corruption and anti-corruption reforms – we argue that contemporary anti-corruption reforms in Africa have largely failed because they are based on a mischaracterization of the problem of corruption in contexts with systematic corruption. More specifically, our analysis reveals that while contemporary anti-corruption reforms are based on a conceptualization of corruption as a principal-agent problem, in the African context corruption rather seems to resemble a collective action problem, making the short-term costs of fighting corruption outweigh the benefits. Consequently, even if most individuals morally disapprove of corruption and are fully aware of the negative consequences for the society at large, very few actors show a sustained willingness to fight it. This, in turn, leads to a breakdown of any anti-corruption reform that builds on the principal-agent framework.

Key words: Corruption; anti-corruption reform; principal-agent theory; collective action problem; sub-Saharan Africa; Kenya; Uganda..

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Overall objective

If you drive on the beautiful roads in the mountains surrounding Cape Town in South Africa, you will eventually – and in the middle of nowhere – reach a road toll station with a sign on it stating that "This is a corruption-free zone". Similar signs can be found outside the Ministry of Water and Irrigation in the Kenyan capital of Nairobi, on the main campus of University of Nairobi, on the doors of the Kilwa district office and the Mwanza health office in Tanzania, as well as in many other places on the African continent. While these signs do not necessarily tell us the truth, they still give us an important key to understanding the real-life context of many African societies. If you have to explicitly state that a certain place is a corruption-free zone, this should say a lot about how epidemic corruption is perceived to be in society at large. More specifically, this should lead us to suspect that corruption is not the exception to the rule, but *the* rule. While to some maybe little more than a technical detail, we argue that this empirical insight can help us solve the puzzle in focus of this study, namely: *Why does corruption in Africa prevail despite a large number of efforts to fight it?*

In recent years the fight against corruption has become a major industry, involving all the international organizations (Mungiu-Pippidi 2006; Médard 2002). Since Africa is home to the majority of the most thoroughly corrupt countries in the world, it is no coincidence that the African continent has been the major target of this anti-corruption movement. Consequently, in the last fifteen years most African states have initiated anti-corruption reforms, supported by the international community. While not all elements of these reforms are in agreement on all terms, they still share a social construct of what corruption is about and how to challenge it. More specifically, contemporary anti-corruption reforms typically follow the policy implications stemming from *principal-agent theory*. Within this framework, corrupt acts are conceived of as the result of an information and interest asymmetry between an *agent* (either in the form of a bureaucrat or a ruler) – assumed to act in his or her own self-interest – and a *principal* (either in the form of a ruler or citizens), typically assumed to embody the public interest and hence being "a highly principled principal" (Klitgaard 1988). Ultimately, in line with this analytical construct, the main goal of any anti-corruption effort should hence be to increase the costs of corrupt acts for agents in line with Robert Klitgaard's (1988) observation that "discretion plus monopoly minus accountability equals corruption" (Lawson 2009; Rose-Ackerman 1978; Teorell 2007; Andvig & Fjeldstad 2001). In practice, this has meant the introduction of a wide range of formal mechanisms and institutions, including monitoring mechanisms, increased transparency, checks and balances, democratic election mechanisms, a free press, the establishment of independent anti-corruption agencies, wage increases for public officials, the strengthening of civil society, as well as the introduction of independent court systems (World Bank 2000; Stapenhurst & Kpundeh 1999; Van Rijckeghem & Weder 2001). To date, however, few successes have resulted from the investment. As a consequence, most African countries remain more or less as corrupt as before the anti-corruption reforms were initiated. In fact, in some African countries corruption even seems to have become *more* entrenched along with the efforts to curb it (Riley 1998; Szeftel 1998; Doig & Riley 1998; Kpundeh 2004; Johnston 2005).

A large number of researchers now agree that the overall failure of anti-corruption reforms is by and large the result of an implementation problem. In particular, there seems to be an absence of actors willing to enforce existing laws by reporting and punishing corrupt behavior and, as such, act as "principals" (Lawson 2009; Fjeldstad & Isaksen 2008; Svensson, 2005; Riley 1998; Kpundeh 2004; Ittner 2009). Even in places where media have traditionally done a relatively good job in exposing corruption, the levels of reporting and prosecution remain low (Harsch 1993). Building on this insight, this paper explores the motivational structure guiding the African population in the choice between corrupt and non-corrupt behavior. The results of an interview study conducted in Kenya and Uganda – two arguably typical African countries when it comes to the problems of corruption and anti-corruption reform – reveal that the failure of contemporary anti-corruption reforms in Africa can at least partly be understood as a consequence of that they are based on a mischaracterization of the problem of corruption in contexts with systematic corruption. More specifically, our analysis reveals that anti-corruption reforms in Africa fail as a result of that they ignore the collective action problem character of corruption in the African context. In line with the logic of collection action theory, we cannot assume the existence of "principled principals", willing to hold corrupt officials accountable, such as suggested by the principal-agent framework. Rather, the rewards and costs of corruption – and hence the existence of actors willing to enforce reform – should be expected to depend critically on how many other individuals in the same society that are expected to be corrupt (Aidt 2003; Lui 1986; Cadot 1987; Acemoglu 1995; Mishra 2006). In a context in which corruption is the expected behavior (such as it seems to be in Africa), the benefits of corruption should be expected to outweigh the costs, and vice versa. Consequently, insofar corruption is the expected behavior in a particular society we should expect monitoring devices and punishment regimes such as suggested by the principal-agent framework to be largely ineffective since there will simply be no actors willing to enforce them. This holds true even if we assume perfect information and even if everyone condemns corruption and realizes that a less corrupt outcome would be more beneficial for the society at large. In short, in a context in which corruption is the rule rather than the exception, any anti-corruption reform is likely to turn into what Elinor Ostrom (1998) calls a *second-order collective action dilemma*. Ultimately, since the supposed "principal(s)" are also corrupt and not acting in the interest of the society but instead pursuing his, her, or their narrow self-interests, anti-corruption reforms based on the principal-agent framework break down, such as we have recently witnessed in the African context.

In the remainder of this article, we develop this argument further. As such, in the next section we outline the principal-agent and collective action theories of corruption. We then show that the global anti-corruption agenda in general – and in sub-Saharan Africa in particular – has most closely followed the policy recommendations derived from the principal-agent framework, taking the existence of "principals" for granted. Next, on the basis of in-depth interviews with more than 60 Kenyan and Ugandan respondents, ranging from high-level public officials (including officials working in anti-corruption agencies) to local NGO representatives and journalists, we demonstrate that most actors on the ground conceive of corruption in terms of a collective action

problem.[1] The interviewees were selected as informants who share a professional commitment to working on corruption and anti-corruption issues. In order not to steer the respondents in any specific direction, and hence better be able to capture the "true" character of corruption, we let the respondents describe the problem of corruption in their respective country contexts without reservation or guidance. We conclude the paper by summarizing our argument and spelling out some potential alternative policy implications for the future.

Two Theories of Corruption

The predominant theory of corruption within both political science and economics today is the *principal-agent model*, popularized especially by the work of Susan Rose-Ackerman (1978) and Robert Klitgaard (1988). The principal-agent theory situates the analysis of corruption in the interaction and interrelations that exist within and without public bodies and is based on two key assumptions: 1) that a goal conflict exists between so-called *principals* (who are typically assumed to embody the public interest) and *agents* (who are assumed to have a preference in favor of corrupt transactions insofar the benefits of such transactions outweigh the costs), and; 2) that agents have more information than the principals, which results in an *information asymmetry* between the two groups of actors (Klitgaard 1988; Williams 1999). More specifically, according to this view, a collective body of actors is assumed to be the principal who delegate the performance of some government task to another collective body of actors; the agents. As in any situation where authority is being delegated, the problem from the perspective of the principal is that the agents may acquire specific information about the task at hand that they are not willing to disclose to the principal, or that they have private motivations other than the goal of performing the delegated task. Thus, in short, from the perspective of the principal-agent framework, corruption occurs when an agent betrays the principal's interest in the pursuit of his or her own self-interest. This betrayal is in turn made possible by the information asymmetry between the two groups of actors.

Depending on perspective, who is the agent and who is the principal in the principal-agent model may differ. In the classical treatment – which refers to situations of bureaucratic corruption – rulers are the principal and the bureaucracy the agent (Becker & Stigler 1974; Van Rijckeghem and Weder 2001). The problem here arises when the ruler cannot perfectly observe which law enforcers behave honestly since they do not possess all the relevant information that the agents have. For example, tax collectors are often better informed about the revenue potential of a particular tax base than is the top management of the Treasury. This, in turn, opens up for the opportunity for bribery. In line with the less classical perspective, on the other hand, it is not primarily the bureaucrats who need to be controlled, but the ruling elite. In this model – which mainly refers to situations of political corruption – rulers are hence modelled as agents and citizens as principals (Persson & Tabellini 2000; Adserà et al. 2003; Besley 2006). High-level government officials – represented by legislators or elected public officials – may institute or manipulate policy

and legislation in favor of particular interest groups (representing private sector interests and entities or individual units of public bureaucracy competing for higher budgets) in exchange for rents or side payments. In the end, this less classical model resembles the classical principal-agent framework in every respect with the exception that, instead of assuming benevolent principals "on the top", it takes another attribute for given – namely the presence of benevolent principals "on the bottom" in the form of ordinary citizens (Myerson 1993; Persson & Tabellini 2000; Besley 2006).

Regardless of how the principal-agent relationship is modelled, the policy implications following from this framework hold that, in order to reduce corruption, the principal should aim at negatively affecting the agent's motivations to engage in corrupt behavior. This could most effectively be done through control instruments that decrease the level of discretion among agents; limit the monopoly of agents, and; increase the level of accountability in the system (Klitgaard 1988). In the end, important to note is that, when applying the principal-agent perspective, analysts assume that the problem of corruption lies exclusively with the agent. As such, the principal-agent model always rests on the assumption that the principal will take on the role of controlling corruption (Klitgaard 1988; Galtung & Pope 1999; Rauch & Evans 2000; Andvig & Fjeldstad 2001; Mungiu-Pippidi 2006). By implication, if the supposed principal(s) are also corrupt and do, as such, not act in the interest of the public good, the principal-agent framework becomes useless as an analytical tool since there will simply be no actors willing to monitor and punish corrupt behavior (Andvig & Fjeldstad 2001). It is in this discussion *collective action theory* becomes relevant as a potential alternative analytical tool.

Collective action theories do not necessarily question the potential relevance of effective monitoring and punishment regimes as means to curb corruption such as suggested by the principal-agent framework. Rather, they question the underlying assumption that every society holds at least one group of actors willing to act like "principals" and, as such, *enforce* such regimes. This is because, quite in contrast to principal-agent theory, collective action theory starts from the assumption that *all* actors – i.e. rulers, bureaucrats and citizens alike – are maximizers of their own self-interest. However, this is not to say that all actors are per definition corrupt. Rather, within the framework of collective action theory, rationality is understood to be *bounded* – or, in other words; *interactive* or *reciprocal* – in the sense that it is highly dependent on shared expectations about how other individuals will act (Ostrom 1998; Aumann & Dreze 2005; Fehr and Fischbacher 2005; Gintis et al. 2005). Thus, quite contrary to what principal-agent theory suggests, collective action theory defies the view that strategic situations do in *themselves* give the "agents" the answer to the question what strategy is the most rational to opt for. Instead, the rewards of corruption – and hence the strategy any rational actor is most likely to opt for – should be expected to depend critically on how many other individuals in the same society that are expected to be corrupt (Aidt 2003; Lui 1986; Cadot 1987; Andvig & Moene 1990; Acemoglu 1995; Mishra 2006). Insofar a large enough number of actors are expected to play foul, *everyone* has something to gain personally from acting corruptly. Consequently, in a context in which corruption is the expected behavior (such as it presumably is in Africa) there will simply be no actors willing to take on the role of controlling corruption. This logic was nicely captured by the Swedish Nobel laureate Gunnar Myrdal already in 1968 in his important work about what he labelled the "soft state" problem in Asia. According to Myrdal

(1968: 409), the self-interested actor – including government officials at any hierarchical level, as well as ordinary citizens – would reason like this: "Well, if everybody seems corrupt, why shouldn't I be corrupt." As is well known, it makes no sense to be the only honest player in a "rotten game" since this will not change the game. No one wants to be a "sucker" (Levi 1988; Rothstein 2005). In the end, as should be clear, this structure of incentives leads to a collective action problem. That is, even if we assume perfect information and even if most people realize that they as a collective stand to lose from the ongoing corrupt practices and morally condemn them, if most others are expected to play foul, *everyone* will play foul (Karklins 2005). Thus, in a context in which corruption is the expected behavior, the implementation of anti-corruption reforms turns into *a collective action problem of the second order* (Ostrom 1998). In such a setting, monitoring devices and punishment regimes should be expected to be largely ineffective since there will simply be no actors willing to hold corrupt officials accountable. Aware of these differences in terms of the drivers of corruption between principal-agent and collective action theories, in the next section we turn to the question of along which line the international community has promoted reform.

Anti-corruption reform – and its failure

With an increased awareness of the detrimental effects of corruption on development outcomes, strategies to fight corruption are now a top priority in policy circles around the world. In fact, in recent years the fight against corruption has become a major industry, involving all the international organizations, including Transparency International (TI), the World Bank (WB), the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the United Nations (UN), European Union (EU), European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD), World Trade Organization (WTO), and the Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) (Mungiu-Pippidi 2006; Médard 2002). There is no doubt that the African continent is the major target of this movement (Szeftel 1998; Médard 2002; Kpundeh 2004; Lawson 2009). Africa is home to most of the corrupt countries in the world. In addition, it is home to the largest number of "losers of corruption" in the form of poor people. Consequently, supported by the international community, most African states have initiated anti-corruption reforms during the last fifteen years. While, at the rhetoric level, much has been said about fitting these anti-corruption reforms to specific country settings, the most frequent approach has until today been to use the "toolkits" of ideas provided by the international community in line with the logic of a "one fits all" approach (Kpundeh 2004: 127). More specifically, as a large number of researchers before us have demonstrated, the anti-corruption efforts in most developing countries have commonly followed the logic of principal-agent theory (Andvig & Fjeldstad 2001; Riley 1998; Lawson 2009; Johnston 2005; Ivanov 2007). As such, the policy instruments used have primarily been designed to influence the number of transactions over which public officials at various levels have discretion, the value of the bribes offered (i.e. the scope of gains from each transaction), the probability of being detected, as well as the loss incurred by being detected (i.e. the penalty for corrupt activities) (Klitgaard 1988; Shah 2007). In particular, reforms are targeted to reduce discretion of public officials through privatization and deregulation; reduce monopoly by promoting political and economic competition, increase accountability by supporting democratization (for political accountability) and

bureaucratization (for administrative accountability); improving salaries of public officials, thereby increasing the opportunity cost of corruption if detected; improving the rule of law so that corrupt bureaucrats and politicians can be prosecuted and punished, and; encouraging greater transparency of government decision-making through deepening democratization, decentralization, as well as through the creation and encouragement of civil society watchdogs (Ivanov 2007; Lawson 2009). More specifically, to "close the loopholes for corruption" (UNDP 2004: 9), the international community prescribes a "holistic anti-corruption strategy" (Langseth et al. 1999; Galtung 1998) which should increase public awareness; encourage the reduction of rents by means of economic liberalization, deregulations, tax simplifications, de-monopolization, and macro-economic stability; reduce discretion through administrative and civil service reform, including meritocratic recruitment and decentralization, and; increase accountability by building up institutions such as auditing and accountancy units, through legal reforms such as judicial strengthening, and by encouraging public oversight through parliament, an independent media, and a more vibrant civil society (see, for example, World Bank 2000; Transparency International 2000; UN 2004; UNDP 2004).

In sum, the contemporary global anti-corruption agenda involves a large number of structural reforms aimed at reducing the opportunities and incentives for corruption in line with the logic of the principal-agent framework. The great influence of the principal-agent model is not at least evident if we consider more recent reform efforts in the two countries in focus of this study. To address the corruption problem, the National Resistance Movement (NRM) government in Uganda and the National Rainbow Coalition (NARC) government in Kenya have both developed comprehensive strategies that have at their core a number of institutional and legal reforms designed to promote good governance and curb malfeasance. These instruments include such measures as constitutional reform, the encouragement of an active parliamentary culture, the re-organization of the public services, the decentralization of decision making and service delivery, means to encourage civil society participation and an active media, and the implementation of radical privatization programmes. In addition, both countries have introduced a large number of legal instruments to combat corruption in the form of various laws and legal control bodies. The Kenyan government has, for example, enacted the Anti-Corruption and Economic Crimes Act and the Public Officers Ethics Act. Kenya has moreover ratified the United Nations Convention against Corruption and signed the African Convention on Preventing and Combating Corruption and the African Union Anti-Corruption Convention, which requires African government officials to declare their assets, adhere to ethical codes of conduct, provide citizens access to government information about budget spending, and to protect those who blow the whistle on state fraud. In addition to the introduction of a large number of new laws aimed at preventing corruption, a variety of institutions with the same aim have been introduced, among them Kenya Anti-Corruption Commission (KACC), the Steering Committee on Corruption, the Ministry of Justice and Constitutional Affairs, the office of the Auditor General, and the office of Permanent Secretary for Governance and Ethics. The NARC government has moreover carried out a "radical surgery" of the judiciary with the stated aim of cleaning it of corrupt judges, magistrates and lawyers. A judicial commission of inquiry into the Goldenberg affair – the most notorious corruption scandal

under the Moi government – was also established. Similar to Kenya, Uganda too has developed a fairly elaborate legal and institutional framework aimed at fighting corruption. The Inspectorate General of Government (IGG), provided for in the 1995 constitution, is the national ombudsman and lead anti-corruption agency. Its anti-corruption strategy is comprised of three components; enforcement, prevention and institution building. Additional institutions aimed at combating corruption in Uganda include the Directorate of Ethics and Integrity (DEI); the Auditor General (AG), which is the overall audit institution responsible for auditing government income and expenditure; the Criminal Investigation Department under the police; the Public Procurement and Disposal of Public Assets Authority and the Parliament; the Director of Public Prosecution, the Public Accounts Committee of Parliament (of which the main responsibility is to review the annual report of the AG on public accounts of government organizations), the newly established Anti-Corruption Court; as well as a number of special tribunals, of which the most recent is the Judicial Commission of Inquiry into corruption in the Uganda Police Force. Laws that have been enacted over the years to fight corruption include the Penal Code Act of Uganda Chapter X, the Prevention of Corruption Act, and the Leadership Code Act of Uganda.

   In sum, in both Kenya and Uganda – as well as in the majority of other African countries – a large number of indirect and direct strategies have recently been adopted in an attempt to curb rampant corruption. Global Integrity (2008) celebrates the institutional reforms enacted in many of the sub-Saharan African countries, and ranks both Kenya's and Uganda's anti-corruption laws "very strong" (100 out of 100), suggesting that the legal-institutional framework in most African countries – including the ones in Kenya and Uganda – have all it takes to pave the way for success. Yet, reality tells a very different story. While it is fair to argue that the international community has been extremely successful in drawing attention to a previously neglected problem, as well as promoting formal institutional and legal reform in a large number of developing countries, most observers agree that these anti-corruption efforts have not reached the same level of success when it comes to actually curbing corruption (Riley 1998; Szeftel 1998; Doig & Riley 1998; Kpundeh 2004; Johnston 2005). That is, despite extensive resources being channelled into the fight against corruption, there are very few success stories to tell when it comes to the actual *implementation* of anti-corruption reforms (Lawson 2009; Ittner 2009; Brinkerhoff 2000; Fjeldstad & Isaksen 2008; Svensson 2005; Meagher 2005). As a consequence, corruption in most African countries remains rampant even today. The lack of success is not at least evident if we consider the absence of improvement in Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) (Figure 1). When TI started to collect expert views on corruption in 1998, the average CPI for the African countries included in the sample was 3.6, indicating widespread corruption. In 2009, after eleven years of efforts to fight corruption, the average CPI had decreased to 2.9, indicating even more rampant corruption.

FIGURE 1. CORRUPTION PERCEPTIONS INDEX 1998-2009
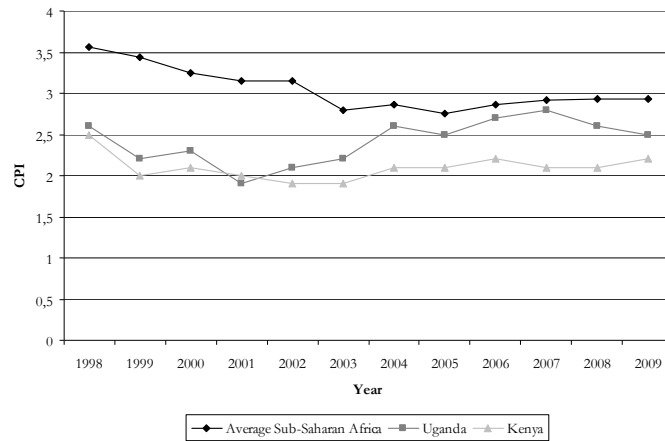
Comment: CPI runs from 0 to 10, a score of 10 indicating no corruption. The countries represented in the sample include Angola, Benin, Botswana, Cameroon, Chad, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Cote d'Ivoire, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Gabon, Gambia, Ghana, Kenya, Madagascar, Malawi, Mali, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, Niger, Nigeria, Republic of the Congo, Senegal, Seychelles, Sierra Leone, South Africa, Sudan, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia, and Zimbabwe (Source: Transparency International various years).

Uganda and Kenya are by no means any exceptions to the bad performance of anti-corruption reforms in the African context. According to Global Integrity (2008) the gap between the legal framework and its actual implementation is "large" in Kenya and "huge" in Uganda. That is, while both countries have a strong legal anti-corruption framework they still struggle to translate those laws into practice. In fact, since TI introduced its measurement in 1998, the level of corruption in neither Uganda nor Kenya has been anything else than rampant, revealing very bad performance on behalf of the institutional framework in place in the respective countries. In 1998, Uganda and Kenya had a CPI of 2.6 and 2.5 respectively. Today, Uganda has an index of 2.5 while Kenya has an index of 2.2, revealing very limited progress, if any. In fact, both Kenya and Uganda are still today – after many years of anti-corruption efforts – deemed some of the most corrupt countries in the world, being ranked number 130 and 146 respectively out of 180 nations.

Taken together, contemporary anti-corruption reforms in the African context have a rather dull track record when it actually comes to preventing the spread of corruption. In fact, it seems like contemporary anti-corruption reforms have not only failed to prevent the persistence of corrupt activities, but in some instances they even seem to have created *new* opportunities and incentives for corruption, even if they have removed some old ones (Doig & Riley 1998). This fact is acknowledged by Riley (2000) who argues that: "(...) the diverse forms of corruption are dynamic and often intractable. As is well known, reform efforts may actually generate new forms of corruption." Warigi (2001) in a similar vein concedes this point: "[d]onors have largely shaped blueprints for privatisation and economic reform. But the trend of liberalisation that swept the region in the post-Cold War era, though designed to accelerate development and enhance governance, has presented its own opportunities for corruption." In particular, it seems like the introduction of democratic elections and increased transparency has in many instances led to

increased levels of corruption instead of vice versa. Cross-country empirical studies consistently find the most corrupt countries located halfway between authoritarianism and democracy (Montinola & Jackman 2002; Sung 2004; Bäck & Hadenius 2008). In other words, newly introduced democratic institutions are now one of the major arenas for corrupt activities in many developing countries.

Since the survival of any norm ultimately depends upon its effective implementation (McCoy & Heckel 2001), there is a great need of an increased understanding of the sources of the failure of contemporary anti-corruption reforms. In the next section, we turn to this issue.

## Previous explanations to why anti-corruption reform fails

Researchers and policy makers now seem to agree that the failure of contemporary anti-corruption reforms are not so much the result of a lack of resources as of the absence of stakeholders – including government, civil society, non-governmental organizations, and ordinary citizens – willing to act as "principals" and, as such, enforce existing laws and policies (Riley 1998; Robinson 1998; Kpundeh 1998, 2004; Johnston 2005; Amundsen 2006; World Bank 1994). This insight goes hand in hand with the commonly held assertion that without a strong political will, anti-corruption reforms are bound to fail (Williams and Doig 2004; Brinkerhoff 2000; Kpundeh 1998; Johnston and Kpundeh 2004; UNDP 2004; World Bank 2000). Across Africa, both the reporting and conviction of corrupt cases remain extremely low (Doig & Riley 1998; Riley 1998; Kpundeh 2004). Moreover, corrupt politicians often stand good chances for re-election (see, for example, Chang et al. 2007). That is, quite contrary to what the principal-agent framework assumes, rather than punishing corrupt politicians at the polls, voters seem to "display relative indifference to the moral culpability of elected officials" (ibid: 3). The same kind of indifference to corrupt activities seems to hold true for rulers as well. While most regimes taking power in Africa have denounced the corruption of their predecessors and given a promise to clean things up as part of the justification for their claim on office, reports from the continent – as well as from other thoroughly corrupt countries – reveal that many anti-corruption efforts seem to ultimately have become entangled in the very corrupt networks that they were meant to fight (Mungiu-Pippidi 2006; Ittner 2009). In other words, while political actors often talk of accountability and integrity this by itself does not seem to translate into a genuine and credible commitment to detect and penalize unethical behavior. This gap between rhetoric and practice is not at least evident if we consider the many high-profile corruption scandals that have taken place in Africa during the last couple of years, including the Goldenberg and Anglo Leasing scandals in Kenya and the Global Fund scandal in Uganda.

As a result of the lack of willingness among both rulers and citizens to effectively monitor and punish corrupt behavior, many researchers now argue that real-life rulers and citizens are seldom as highly principled principals as the principal-agent model assumes (Aidt 2003; Bayart et al. 1999; Chabal & Daloz 1999; Andvig & Fjeldstad 2001; Bardhan 1997; Médard 1986; Shleifer & Vishny 1998; Williams 1999). In sum, despite the fact that most contemporary ruling elites of the developing world – Kenyan and Ugandan elites included – have come to power on an anti-corruption reform platform, it simply seems like any real "political will" among rulers and citizens

alike to actually sustain the battle over time is lacking (Szeftel 1998; Riley 1998; Brinkerhoff 2000; Kpundeh 1998; 2004).

Since the successful implementation of the principal-agent anti-corruption framework ultimately relies on the existence of actors willing to act as "principals" by holding corrupt officials accountable, the failure of anti-corruption reforms in Africa should not come as a surprise. Yet, in the end – as argued by Karklins (2005) – only if one understands the incentives for taking part in corrupt activities – and for not acting honestly – can one arrive at promising strategies to bring about change. In other words, unless we assume that everyone are simply liars and as such never had any real intention to fight corruption, in order to be able to provide a better specified explanation to why contemporary anti-corruption reforms in the African context – as well as in other contexts with systematic corruption – fail, we need to incorporate also the individual-level motives that can explain why the African population continue to engage in corrupt activities even though they possess both the means and the information needed to act differently. In an attempt to do so, a large number of scholars have argued that the reason why a majority of Africans ultimately choose corrupt alternatives before non-corrupt ones is that they do not morally disapprove of corruption; what is considered a bribe in the Western context is simply considered a gift in Africa (Bardhan 1997; de Sardan 1999; Hasty 2005; Rose-Ackerman 1999). Yet, as common as this explanation might be, quite contrary to what these scholars suggest, surveys reveal that there is in fact decisive moral disapproval of corruption in most African countries. When asked by the Afrobarometer (2006) whether they consider it "not wrong at all," "wrong but understandable," or "wrong and punishable" if a public official: 1) decides to locate a development project in an area where his friends and supporters live; 2) gives a job to someone from his family who does not have adequate qualifications, and; 3) demands a favor or an additional payment for some service that is part of his job, a clear majority of Africans deemed all three acts both wrong and punishable (Figure 2).

FIGURE 2. MORAL APPROVAL OF CORRUPTION
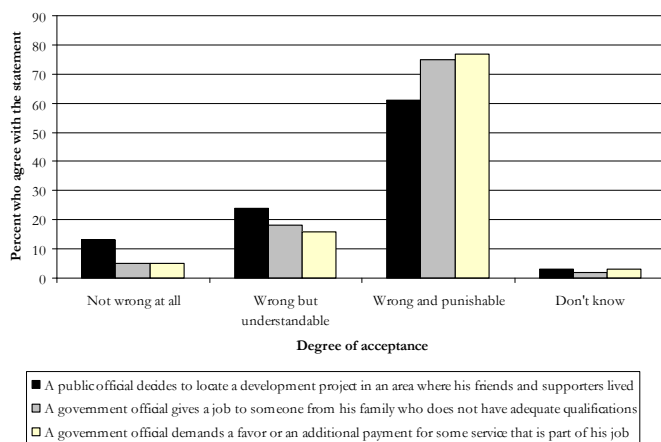
Source: Afrobarometer 2006.

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More specifically, 61, 75 respectively 77 percent (55, 72, respectively 84 percent in Kenya and 34, 63, respectively 62 percent in Uganda) of the respondents find the acts both wrong and punishable, while 24, 18, respectively 16 percent (26, 21, respectively 11 percent in Kenya and 35, 29, respectively 29 percent in Uganda) find them wrong but understandable, and a mere 13, 5, respectively 5 percent (16, 6 respectively 3 percent in Kenya and 31, 7, respectively 8 percent in Uganda) find them not wrong at all. In other words, the idea put forward by, among others, Heidenheimer (2002) that the public acceptance of what is commonly understood as corruption varies significantly across cultures does not find much support here. Yet, despite this fact, the average African in the end chooses not to punish corrupt behavior, but instead serves to perpetuate the corrupt system. In the next section, we show that this outcome – and hence the persistence of corruption in Africa – can at least partly be understood as a result of that corruption in the African context to a significant extent shares the characteristics of a collective action problem.

The collective action problem of corruption

As previously argued, in line with the logic of collective action theories, we should expect people to choose to act corruptly as long as they expect most other people to be corrupt. This should be the case even if they all realize that they as a collective stand to loose from the ongoing corruption and even if most agents morally condemn corrupt practices (Karklins 2005). The logic behind this kind of behavior is in turn that, in a thoroughly corrupt setting, the costs of being honest are comparatively very high since this will not change the game (della Porta & Vannucci, 1999). Unwilling or incapable of bearing the costs, people will instead continue to "choose" corrupt alternatives before non-corrupt ones. Consequently, to use Ostrom's (1998) words, in a context in which corruption is the expected behavior, the successful implementation of any anti-corruption reform turns into a *collective action problem of the second order.*

The aim of this section is to explore whether the problem of corruption in the African context can in fact be understood as a collective action problem. We thus explore what ultimately motivates people in the African context to act corruptly, and hence makes them serve to perpetuate the corrupt system rather than to undermine it. To the extent that collective action theories of corruption hold true, we should expect people to engage in corrupt practices not because they morally approve of them or do not understand the negative consequences for society at large, but because most other people are expected to be corrupt, making the short-term benefits of engaging in corrupt behavior greater than the costs. In this context, important to take into consideration is that, to properly understand what ultimately motivates people to act corruptly rather than honestly in a corrupt environment, you ultimately need to understand the pay-off structures for *both* behaviors in a particular context. As such, we need to explore both the pay-off for behaving honestly and pay-off for playing along with the corrupt game. As we shall see, there are great negative pay-offs involved for all actors when it comes to acting honestly, whereas the positive pay-offs for acting corruptly are likely to vary considerably across groups.

The costs of acting fairly

Why do Africans not report and punish corruption despite the existence of an institutional and legal framework designed to facilitate such actions? Quite in line with theories of collective action, the majority of the Kenyan and Ugandan informants interviewed for the purpose of this study bear witness of a real-life context in which it is meaningless to report corruption since this will not make any difference anyway. Since everybody is expected to be corrupt, there is nobody to report to that will actually try to change the system:

> …the money is here, the money is up there, but you report to whom? You report to someone who has already been bribed. So I could have reported to the supervisor but then how would I know; maybe part of the money was given to the supervisor? And then it ends there. So tomorrow somebody else comes and everything continues.

Another informant expresses a similar view:

> You report and nothing is done. You can report and nothing is done to the other party but instead they turn to you. You can report and someone sees you in the street and says 'you have reported me'. So the machinery has not been strong enough to grab these law breakers. So people say 'why should I?'

In the end, since no one wants to be a "sucker", everybody will continue to engage in corruption as long as corrupt behavior is the expected behavior:

> There is complacency. Everybody does it, so whether it is bad or good everybody does it anyway. Am I the one who is going to change the world? Those are the kind of things you see in the behavior of people.

Another informant paints a similar picture of the situation:

> People have a sort of schizophrenia because … when they have a chance to express themselves, like they had in [the last elections], they tell you they don't want it, they don't like it. On the other hand that's the way things work. And sometimes they want it for themselves. Like you will see people saying 'well I'm not going to vote for my MP because he didn't give me a job'. You know, or he didn't bring enough jobs to us... You know, so there's sort of schizophrenia in the way that people [behave]…

A lively discussion with two reporters at a Ugandan newspaper explicitly reveals the collective action dilemma character of the engagement in corrupt activities in the African context:

> *Interviewee A:* People see it [and think it is morally wrong] but have nothing to do. They see it as the order of the day. It has become normal. They don't care because they want to access something and if you want to ease the way of getting it you have to involve corruption and you solve your problems. So it is very hard to eliminate it.
>
> *Interviewee B:* …I feel guilty at the end of the day but it's the society.
>
> *Interviewee A:* Exactly. Because ethically we are not supposed to, but the circumstances...
>
> *Interviewee B:* Anyway that is life… Anyway, you look at the surroundings, it is the circumstances… It is that feeling that if I don't take it, it is going to be taken by somebody else.

In the end, it is important to acknowledge the real power of expectations in terms of the costs of challenging the status quo. Many of the people interviewed bear witness of a real-life context in which acting honestly – and hence being a "sucker" – is not only meaningless and a waste of time,

but brings with it considerable costs for the individual. In many instances people who refuse to take advantage of their positions to enrich themselves are regarded as stupid and may even face ridicule:

> If you have an office but have not stolen – if you have not helped your family – they are actually going to curse you. They actually remind you that one time you will not be there. So there is a pressure from everybody that you should take as much as possible. In fact, we who don't take are abused and told we are useless.

A Ugandan politician describes a similar scenario:

> In fact, [people] laugh at you sometimes when they find you are at a certain level and yet you do not have as much money as they would expect you to have.

The same picture seems to hold true in Kenya:

> …if you get into a state institution and you walk in with one suit and one shamba, and you walk out on your retirement with one suit and one shamba, you will be considered foolish. So you go there and eat. You eat, you yourself, your family, then the whole patron client kind of thing now [is] created. That you eat on your behalf, but also let some crumbs fall for us who are with you.

The stigma attached to honest behavior becomes evident even if we consider how rare it is for a minister or public official who has been alleged for corruption to step down voluntarily. On the contrary it is those who fight corruption who are stigmatized:

> There is some stigma associated with fighting corruption. There is a lot less stigma associated with being corrupt. People know that you are corrupt but will still go ahead and have a conversation with you. But the moment you start fighting corruption then you are stigmatized.

The punishment of the non-corrupt does, however, not always stop with stigmatization and social exclusion. There are also other reasons why African citizens often refrain from punishing the corrupt. The unwillingness on behalf of ordinary citizens in Africa – and maybe especially the poor – to report corruption should be understood in a context in which the state, partly due to corruption, has since long lost the ability to provide public goods on a broader basis – to the extent it ever had the ability. In such a context, the "big men" are the main providers of public goods. Since the state is by and large conspicuous by its absence, the big men are the ones who contribute the most to school fees, weddings and funerals in their home villages. According to a public official in Uganda, it is within the limits of this vicious circle that people do not question where the money actually came from and punish corrupt behavior:

> They are grateful, whenever they go to church they pray for that one. They don't mind in whatever way he gets the money. And they don't care as long as he is supporting their community. So in that area people will never raise their voices against that person because he gets the money, funds the wedding, supports the building of a church which they have failed to afford. Then that one is a hero. So they do not look beyond that.

A representative of an international donor agency confirms this view:

> For someone in the position of need, if someone comes and sorts out school fees for your children which you otherwise could not afford, you are going to praise that guy and say 'you are a great guy and doing a good job'. People look at him and say 'he is our man'.

Other informants describe the situation in a similar way:

> …people are seeing their relatives and friends in high offices and they don't care how they get the money as long as the money is going to the village and they benefit. And therefore nepotism and

sectarianism comes in – and conflict of interest – and nobody cares as long as they are gaining. And in my view that creates a problem of fighting corruption so who will complain?

Given these circumstances, people in the end choose to protect the corrupt rather than punishing them:

> [People protect the corrupt] because either they are their relatives or they see them as part of a solution to the bigger problem of corruption like 'Ok if the other people are eating let also our person eat'. So they see it as a solution not as a problem. And therefore they don't demand…

In other words, given the weak – and thoroughly corrupt – character of the African state, for most poorer citizens the alternative to punish the corrupt is no alternative at all since they cannot afford to bite the hand that feeds them. For the segments of the population being lucky enough to have a job in the formal sector, the fear of loosing one's job, or even life, seems to hold many people back:

> [People do not report because] … they fear loosing their jobs. They see it is bad but they fear reporting. The reporting system is corrupt itself.

Other informants hold a similar view:

> The laws are there but the implementation is not easy. […] we have enough [resources] […] but the environment is spoilt. We usually make recommendations that such and such public officer should be removed. Now the organisation where he is working sits together and defeats your recommendation so what is that? You go to court, they go behind you. You can see the magistrate frustrate you and buy off the witnesses. They can intimidate them. And too, because corruption is mainly a white collar crime, it means that my juniors would be the ones to testify against me but they fear their jobs and their lives. So eventually we find that the cases we take to court, very few succeed because of those reasons.

> …[reporting] is risky because if you are going to do it well you are going to step on some peoples' toes and they are certainly not going to like you. We lose friends, we make it difficult for so many to get along with many people because some people see you with Charles who works with TI which the other time released a report which was attacking government official A. Then they will think if you are a public official, if you are seen with Charles you are giving information to Charles on what is going on in your department. So it is a bit frustrating sometimes. We lose friends, the job is risky, for instance we receive anonymous calls people threatening us telling us 'don't do anything about that issue don't even issue a statement'. And in this country, as for so many other countries in Africa, it is so easy for people to disappear. It is very easy for someone to die under mysterious circumstances. And that may appear as it was accidental when it was planned… So we move cautiously.

A former public official in Uganda bears witness about the significant and, for most people, unbearable sanctions involved in reporting corrupt practices. In the end, he lost his job because he reported a corrupt colleague to the Inspectorate of Government. On the question whether it was worth it, the clear answer is no. And of course he would not do it again: "If you lose your job and no one protects you it does not make any sense." Why, then, did the other people in his position not support him by reporting or complain? The answer is clear: "…the others feared. If you are a whistleblower in Uganda they sack you…" The risk of being a whistleblower seems to be especially present if you report someone in a high position. As one public official puts it:

> If you have evidence you can go and report. But it depends on who you are reporting. If it is maybe something very important up there people think they will get to know who did the report and then they will somehow get you into trouble.

Being a whistleblower in a context in which corruption is the norm is, in sum, related to extremely high risks. Maybe the most telling story in this regard is the one about the faith of John Githongo, Kenya's former Permanent Secretary in Charge of Governance and Ethics under President Kibaki. When Githongo accepted the post, he signed to be an "anti-corruption champion", running a unit working out of the State House and enjoying direct access to the president's office. However, soon enough Githongo became aware that – to the extent that he actually fulfilled his duties and acted like the watchdog he had signed to be – not only his career but even his life was at risk. Githongo was even told that the Kenyan intelligence would "put something in [his] tea" if he went public with what he knew about the political elite's involvement in corruption (Wrong 2009: 222). In 2006, John Githongo eventually had to flee the country after having realized that even President Kibaki and his closest men had turned his back on him.

While the story about the faith of John Githongo may sound like it is taken from a bad movie, it by and large reflects the situation of actual and potential whistleblowers in the African context. In the end, according to the majority of the informants, the fear of repercussions – together with a feeling of being part of a vicious circle of corruption that nobody alone can afford to break out of – seem to be the main motivations for people not to report and actively challenge corruption. As long as most people expect most other people to be corrupt, the relative – and in many instances *absolute* – costs of playing fairly and actively challenge corruption are simply too high. However, this is not to say that the benefits of being engaged in corrupt practices are equally distributed across groups. In the next sub-section, we explore this matter further.

The benefits of acting corruptly

According to the Kenyan and Ugandan informants there are huge discrepancies across groups when it comes to the distribution of benefits derived from acting corruptly. More specifically, the closer to the top you find yourself in the hierarchy, the more likely it is that you are going to benefit in *absolute* terms from engaging in corrupt practices, maybe even in the long run. At the other extreme you find ordinary citizens, and especially the poor segments of society. Among the members of this group, corruption is not actively supported, but rather pragmatically accepted for the simple reason that it facilitates life, either by maximizing efficiency in achieving objectives which would otherwise be out of bounds, or by minimizing risks, such as avoiding trouble with for instance the police or the courts. In both cases, corruption is used as a means of bypassing unpredictable (or predictably inefficient) institutions:

> …most people will be doing it involuntarily, because if you look at the institutions which are taking the bribes, it's the police which means they are in a situation where they are threatened with some sort of punishment or some sort of pain if they do not pay the bribes. There's a little bit of coercion in it, but there's also the element that people are trying to maybe skip the queue or save time or whatever by paying bribes...

In both Kenya and Uganda the price for not at least passively accept corruption is very high. If you do not pay a bribe, you will simply be without service. A Ugandan public official explains how the system works:

It is becoming a culture in Uganda that people have this idea in their head that if you are going to that office, you have to pay some money to get a service. Everyone has that, even me… Maybe I am promoting it, but if you don't do it you will lose. It will be at your own cost.

Other informants agree that paying bribes is often the only way to get things done:

Bribes are bad but sometimes it is necessary to bribe, especially when you have attempted to get what you wanted and you could not get it. And if someone tells you 'if you do abcd you will actually get it'. And when you do it and you get it tomorrow it will be the order of the day, the fashion.

Like me, after completing my course I don't have the transcript in my hand but I know that at the next level, if I go there, people will tell you 'your results have disappeared'. Assume I am called for an interview tomorrow and I have to come with all my documents. Should I miss the interview or part with 10.000? So sometimes you are in a state where you are actually forced to, yet you know that you are not supposed to.

…bribery still pays off and if it continues to pay off, like you wouldn't get that service without paying, if that continues then how can you fight corruption? […] it's within peoples systems and it's hard to get it out.

…the perception of bribery to the police is that everybody knows that it is a wrong thing. But there is also the general consensus that it is a system… You cannot go away out of such a situation. So the reason why it is going ahead is because of the way it works to ensure that people move ahead. […] like if you asked somebody who wants to really play and to move according to the law, he says that if a policeman stops him and you have a problem that you can fix with one thousand shillings, and the process that you go through, if you are ready to go through the process, at the end of the day you will waste time, you will waste more resources, so its not that people are not willing to participate in eradicating this, but the prevailing environment, the institution, the process that they go through in fighting this thing is in itself more costly than the bribe they give to the policemen.

For many ordinary citizens, it is especially expectations about what the elite will do that drive their corrupt behavior:

…even the people see that the State has failed to commit to its own pledges. Then they say 'who are we?' If the State is allowing people like this [high-level public officials] to continue with looting, why should I be stopped from giving a clinical officer a hundred shillings to get faster health care services? People say 'go to hell'. It's a pragmatic... The way of living…

The regime is becoming oppressive and there is a lot of corruption with impunity and the rest of the public is saying 'what can we do?'

Corruption somehow started from the top. When you had those ministers taking money…, one who has been there for three years and is now a millionaire. So what can other people do? They join the rest.

However, despite appearances, the collective action problem of corruption is not as one-sided as it may look.. Even actors higher up in the hierarchy – such as low-level public officials and political elites – seem to feel a pressure to passively support the corrupt game rather than actively taking part in it for their own private, absolute gain. In particular, the informants describe a system in which the commercialization of elections in the form of vote-buying in many instances runs in both directions. The price for not paying back is hence a major motivator for many public officials to engage in corrupt practices. The politicians are in the hands of the electorate as they feel the pressure of bringing a piece of the national cake back home in order to get re-elected:

> …you have these things which are largely western, like an MP and the electorate, but the relationship here is a very different one. People expect their MP to attend to their personal needs, they expect the MP to provide water to provide electricity, pay school fees, hospital bills to be paid. So what people want from their MP is actually things they shouldn't want and… I mean, civil society, we try to do some work. Public education work and say that 'stop treating your MP like an ATM'. but its just ehh… It doesn't fit people's realities.

In fact, as a result of already widespread corruption, both in Kenya and Uganda the introduction of elections seems to have further encouraged corruption rather than preventing it. According to the view of public officials in Uganda the government became more corrupt from 1996, which was the same year presidential elections were held, because it now needed to buy votes:

> Before that [the president] did not need any popularity at all for anything. He was doing what he thinks is right for the country. But now he had to make some people happy so that next time he is elected they can help him.

> …I think in the Ugandan case [democracy] has encouraged more corruption than it has removed because the big people are slaves now also. They also fear those people who are down. Those days they did not care about it, they were doing what they thought was right.

Given the fairly weak infrastructural power and low degree of democratic legitimacy of many African leaders, we should not be surprised to learn that democratic institutions are used as a means to "buy" support from the population. While leaders before the introduction of democratic institutions could survive by only receiving loyalty from a few powerful actors, they now need to reach out to the broader population in order to be able to stay in power. However, this is not to say that leaders continue to engage in corruption only because the costs of not doing so are too high. A large number of informants quite on the contrary describe a system in which high-level officials benefit more than any other group in society from perpetuating the status quo. Leaders are in other words often perceived to be the "winners" of the corrupt game. As such, what ultimately drives them to engage in corrupt practices is greed rather than survival. Money is simply "too sweet to resist":

> It is greed that makes people become corrupt. They don't have feelings for others… They are self-centered.

> They [i.e. public officials] will just say 'I will get something good out of it, I am going to buy a car, I am going to build my house'. It is a selfish thing, greedy. A greedy sense of attitude. Selfishness.

Referring to a Bugandan idiom, an international aid worker in Uganda admits that greed is a main motivator for engaging in corrupt practices:

> …in Buganda you say 'if you are dividing a cake, make sure you give yourself the biggest part'. That has the connotation of corruption; 'take care of yourself well if you have the means to do it'.

Another Ugandan informant gives his view on how greed drives politicians to be corrupt:

> It is not poverty. It is just a question of greed, just bad manners. Wanting to amass and amass and amass, for yourself and then you also want to bring in your brothers, your friends…

He continues:

> [Political elites] see corruption as a paying enterprise. It is no longer risky, unless maybe you have misappropriated very little, the moment we are talking about huge sums of money, then in case the scandal gets into the public limelight the only thing you can suffer is maybe that your name is

appearing in the media reports. But it will stop at that. What you will only suffer is embarrassment. And that itself is not deterring many. If you look at the situation where I am able to misappropriate say 500 million USH and that will enable me to do lifetime investments even for my children and grandchildren. The fact that you are going to talk about me and the public sees me as having done some unethical, it will be quickly forgotten. And I will be able to access my loot and start enjoying it. And even some of those people who would be against me I would even use some part of that money to buy them, to buy their loyalty, to buy their friendship back. So that is what is happening in this country.

Taken together, drawing upon the cases of Uganda and Kenya, the two last sub-sections of this article have illustrated the collective action problem character of corruption in the African context. As demonstrated, in a context in which corruption is the expected behavior, very few actors see any point in reporting and punishing corrupt behavior. The relative and absolute costs of doing so are simply too high. In addition, at least in the short term, the benefits of passively or actively engaging in corrupt activities seem to outweigh the costs, making most people choose corrupt alternatives before non-corrupt ones. However, important to say is that not all actors seem to benefit as much from perpetuating the corrupt system. Rather, thoroughly corrupt systems seem to distribute the benefits of corruption unequally across groups, top officials being the group gaining the most in absolute terms and hence having the greatest incentives to perpetuate the status quo. In the final section of this paper, we discuss the policy implications following from these empirical insights.

Summary and conclusion

The general idea behind our "bête noire" in this article, the principal-agent theory, is the following. If only formal institutions that negatively influence the "agent's" expected gross gain of being corrupt, increase the probability of getting caught, as well as increase the size of the penalty if detected are established, the corruption problem will be solved. However, as the overall failure of anti-corruption reforms in Africa should give an indication of, this formula seems to work considerably better in theory than in practice. The empirical results revealed in this article give us a potential explanation to why this is the case. More specifically, our study reveals that the failure of anti-corruption reforms in the African context can at least partly be understood as a consequence of that the problem of corruption in Africa to a significant extent seems to resemble a *collective action problem*. The implementation of anti-corruption reforms hence turns into what Ostrom (1998) calls a collective action problem of the *second order*. Accordingly, even if most people morally disapprove of corruption and are fully aware of its negative consequences for society at large, very few rational actors should have a clear-cut interest in establishing them, financing them or defending them (Falaschetti & Miller 2001). This is because non-corrupt institutions are *socially efficient* rather than redistributive, meaning that – for each particular actor or group of actors – the short-term benefits of corruption will outweigh the costs (Rothstein 2010). Hence, any anti-corruption reform based on the assumption that every society holds a group of actors willing to act as "principals" breaks down, such as we have recently witnessed in the African context.

The conceptualization of systemic corruption as a collective action rather than a principal-agent problem has significant policy implications. In particular, in order to successfully curb corruption, rather than "fixing the incentives" the important thing will be to change actors' beliefs

about what "all" other actors are likely to do when it comes to corrupt practices so that most actors trust most other actors to play fairly. According to a large number of scholars, this requires more revolutionary changes than the ones suggested by the principal-agent framework (Collier 2000; Johnston 2005; Mungiu-Pippidi 2006; North et al. 2009). As argued by Larry Diamond (2007: 119):

> Endemic corruption is not some flaw that can be corrected with a technical fix or a political push. It is the way that the system works, and it is deeply embedded in the norms and expectations of political and social life. Reducing it to less destructive levels – and keeping it there – requires revolutionary change in institutions.

In the literature, we find three conceptual pairs that describe such a "revolutionary" change. Referring to the failure of anti-corruption policies launched in many of the former East European communist countries, Mungiu-Pippidi (2006) suggests that the change required is one from a "particularistic" to a "universalistic" political culture. According to Mungiu-Pippidi, in the former, people do not even expect that public goods – including law and order as well as the distribution of public services – should be distributed according to universal norms about fairness and equality. Instead, the norm is that distribution follows status and patronage ("big man") systems or are based on belonging to clans or specific ethnic groups. In a universalistic political culture there is, on the contrary, a clear separation between the public and private spheres. A second conceptual pair that describes a potential revolutionary shift has been launched by Douglas North, John Wallis and Barry Weingast (2009), who differentiate between "limited access orders" and "open access orders". In the former, power is personal while, in the latter, power follows impersonal positions. Finally, the third suggestion has been launched by Rothstein and Teorell (2008) and consists of a distinction between partiality and impartiality in the exercise of government power. Impartiality is here understood in line with Weber's notion of legal-bureaucratic rule, implying that "when implementing laws and policies, government officials shall not take anything about the citizen/case into consideration that is not beforehand stipulated in the policy or the law" (Strömberg 2000).

Empirical studies confirm the view that countries that have managed to move from a thoroughly clientelistic system of rule to one in which corruption only plays a minor role have generally been subject to a co-ordinated, big push. Sweden is one interesting case in point in this regard. As described by Bo Rothstein (2010), it was not one or a few reforms that managed to move the Swedish society from a corrupt to a far less corrupt equilibrium, but a whole range of large-scale reforms. However, to the extent that a revolutionary change is in fact needed, we still need to answer the question of how to change the basic "modus operandi" of a society's institutions from "particularism-personalism-partiality" to "universalism-impersonalism-impartiality". That is, we need to know how societies can break out of "social traps" such as the one of corruption.

Unfortunately, while there is now a general consensus holding that variation in institutional quality is the major source of cross-country differences in economic growth and prosperity (Rodrik et al. 2004; Acemoglu et al. 2001; Collier & Gunning 1999; Knack & Keefer 1995; North 1990; Bates 2008), so far the question of how socially efficient institutions can be established has attracted surprisingly little attention both in economics, political science, and economic sociology. In fact, in

the recently published "Handbook of Political Economy" (Weingast & Wittman 2006), to which a large number of the leading scholars within the field have contributed, none of the sixty-seven chapters deals with the problem of how to establish socially efficient institutions. As a consequence, there is still very limited knowledge when it comes to the question of how the transition from a corrupt equilibrium to a less corrupt one can be made (Falaschetti & Miller 2001; Rothstein 2005). While socially efficient institutions operate in a few advanced contemporary countries and only in recent times, we in short know surprisingly little about what led to these successes (Greif 2006; Persson and Sjöstedt 2009). Given the devastating economic, political, and social impact of corrupt systems of rule, one of the most important tasks for future research is hence to find out more about the origins of high-quality institutions. Which are the factors that can explain why some countries end up with institutions benefiting the larger society, while others end up with thoroughly corrupt systems of rule?

Yet, while we have to wait for future research telling us about any more positive policy prescriptions as regards what we actually *can* do to curb corruption in thoroughly corrupt societies, we already know some things about what we should *not* do in our attempts to curb the collective action problem of corruption. Elinor Ostrom (1998) has for example pointed to the following; if a society tries one small effort after another when trying to establish efficient institutions, there is a considerable chance that each such small effort will fail and so it will appear as if no strategy is effective and from this people will conclude that nothing can be done. In fact, according to Ostrom, the worst of all worlds may be one where external authorities impose rules but are only able to achieve weak monitoring and sanctioning since a mild degree of external monitoring discourages the formation of social norms, while also making it attractive for some actors to deceive and defect and take the relative low risk of being caught. Moreover, according to the logic of collective action theory, increased transparency is likely to increase the level of corruption since this will make people more aware of the problem, encouraging even former non-corrupt actors to take part in the corrupt game.

In addition, empirical studies seem to support the notion that – in the few cases where societies have managed to move from a corrupt equilibrium to a less corrupt one – more direct approaches have been avoided (Rothstein 2010). In particular, it may be noted that the Swedish case reveals a clear parallel to the strategy launched by what most experts hold to be the most prominent military strategist of the 20th century, namely the British author Basil Liddell Hart. His famous "indirect approach" in military strategy holds that if the enemy was to be attacked directly, he would easily reinforce his strength at the position attacked and so be very difficult to defeat. To paraphrase a statement by Mr. Nuhu Ribadu, a former Nigerian anti-corruption official who – after having charged high-level officials in his country for corruption – was dismissed and forced to flee his country: "If you fight corruption, it fights you back".[2] Instead, as an alternative to the direct, principal-agent type of strategy, Liddell Hart's famous "second principle" of his indirect approach reads: "To defeat the enemy one must first upset his equilibrium, which is not accomplished by the

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[2] As reported in *The New York Times*, June 10, 2009, "Battle to Halt Graft Scourge in Africa Ebbs" by Celia W. Dugger.

main attack, but must be done before the main attack can succeed" (Danchev, 1999, Liddel Hart 1967). The "indirect strategy" implies that what is most important is to upset and inflict upon the enemy's psychological dislocation, which in the terminology applied here would be the same as changing what behavior can be expected by "the others" in the corrupt game.

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