

## **ABSTRACT**

The narrative about Africa's development prospects has changed over the last decade, and it is now one of optimism; but not without an undertone of some skepticism. Recent growth rates and economic and social indicators show impressive progress and the benefits of years of economic reforms and engagement with development partners. However, low rankings in corruption-perception indicators in international surveys raise questions and concerns. Will corruption, weaknesses in institutions and governance diminish the capacity of governments to deliver improvements in well being for their citizens on a fair, equitable and sustained basis?

Corruption, once a matter for much whispering in private and public forums, is now at the centre of the development policy agenda for countries on the path of reform. It is prominent in research and discussions on governance and the role of the developmental state that some see in Africa.

Corruption is a global concern. But for Africa it is a critical issue of governance and arguably the x-factor, the toxin, in its economic performance. High Corruption is a flashing signal that something is wrong and there is an injustice. The use of public office for private benefit, and the prevalent violation of rules or norms of the society to gain private advantage can destroy the very fabric of society. Corruption takes a toll on the economy through various channels of decision making and economic and social interactions.

Africa's development experience and position at the bottom of the corruption-perception scale after decades of nation building inevitably raise several questions. A fundamental one is what in the politics, economics, institutions and the norms fosters such high corruption? What foments persistent weak governance, limited accountability and transparency, and episodes of conflict that restrain progress and the possible achievement of development goals?

The lecture raises issues and questions, provocatively, whether Africa had a false start in nation building. The early years saw fierce competition for control and consolidation of political and economic power and redistributive policies. Would this have set the pattern of abuse of public trust and rent seeking behavior that has become embedded in the management of public affairs? Some of the many forms of corrupt practices occurring in secrecy and not disclosed in daily life, and public perceptions are considered. It is to underline the manner in which corruption can influence public attitudes and behaviour, and shape the economic environment. Furthermore, gleaning from the experience with anti-corruption initiatives elsewhere in the world, there is a conclusion that corruption is a complex and potentially intractable problem and an enormous challenge for policy-makers to fight.

Economic transformation is the grand vision that inspires African institutions and cooperation for prosperity, peace and security. That vision should mean breaking the cycle of high corruption and low growth and locking into the virtuous dynamics of a sustainable low- corruption high -growth environment. It is better to stay on the path of economic efficiency and a level playing field. It

starts with a credible commitment to pursuing, with good faith and rigour, an effective anti-corruption policy embedded in law and practice as a central pillar of a comprehensive development strategy. It needs to be well aligned with the values and rules of the society with broad popular support. The voice of the citizenry can be a powerful force for change and sustainable development.