



Institute for Governance Reform-IGR

Bridging knowledge and policy

www.igrsl.org | info@igrsl.org

31A Wilkinson Rd. Freetown

Critical Perspectives of Governance Vol VII

How Informal Norms & Value Systems Aid and Restrain Corruption in Sierra Leone.



1. Introduction

Sierra Leone is making strides in the fight against corruption. Since the enactment of the ACC Act in 2000, there has been a progressive march by civil society actors and anti-corruption advocates towards institutionalising the fight against corruption, even if that desire has not been reciprocated by political elites. In 2008, former President Ernest Bai Koroma signed into law the revised Anti-Corruption Act that gave prosecutorial powers to the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) among others. In the last six months president Bio has appointed a dynamic and forward-looking ACC Commissioner and the government appears to be showing some level of commitment towards enforcing the rule of law with established rules and procedures to minimize waste in the economy. The results of progress in the last two decades has been validated as Sierra Leone has achieved the US Government benchmark on control on corruption under the Millennium Challenge Corporation programme.

However, as we celebrate world corruption day on 9th December, Sierra Leone still has a long way to go in meeting integrity standards to better manage the economy more efficiently¹. Economic indicators have not made much progress since the war, while social indicators such as education, health and water remain a source of concern. The ACC was ostensibly established in 2000 to pursue and fight public sector corruption. The focus of the commission is largely guided by Transparency International's definition of corruption i.e. as "abuse of entrusted power for private gains". Formal institutions such as the police, politicians and social service providers such as health and education authorities and their patrons have all been targeted. There is a belief amongst development partners and national policy actors that building integrity systems to make institutions respect formal rules can in the end make Sierra Leone less corrupt. While this approach is helpful, this paper argues that privileging the application of formal rules in the fight against corruption in societies where dominant informal rules and value systems are rooted and contradict western understandings of integrity, will not address the underlying causes and drivers of corruption. The paper, makes this argument by using interview data collected from 1000 citizens across the country around questions of local norms and value systems that impinge on personal integrity and public attitudes towards corrupt practices when they have a vested personal interest.

This paper is part of IGR's advocacy campaign to elevate the fight against corruption beyond formal institutions to include informal transactions, routinized local practices and values' systems that undermine public confidence and trust. The paper aims to inform reflections on the fight against corruption as we commemorate *International Corruption Day*.

2. Theoretical Framework - Why are Informal Institutions Important for Nation Integrity?

Institutions are generally defined as "the rules of the game" (Douglass North, 1990), i.e. "humanly devised constraints" or enabling factors that structure human interactions. The state of Sierra Leone comprises "a complex web of institutions" that govern public behaviour, but also shape the wider society. Institutions can be formal, i.e. enshrined into laws or as regulations, or informal, i.e. "created, communicated, and enforced outside of officially sanctioned channels" (Helmke & Levitsky, 2004). We emphasise the importance of this distinction for the fight against corruption because, around the world, success in reforms is a function of the interaction between formal institutions articulated by the government and informal institutions governing everyday practices. Effectiveness in the fight against corruption can be undermined by existing informal institutions that "create incentives to behave in ways

¹ Sierra Leone is the 130 least corrupt nation out of 175 countries, according to the 2017 Corruption Perceptions Index reported by Transparency International. Corruption Rank in Sierra Leone averaged 130 from 2003 until 2017, reaching an all-time high of 158 in 2008 and a record low of 113 in 2003.

that alter the substantive effects of formal rules, but without directly violating them” (Helmke & Levitsky, 2004).

Informal institutions, for instance, shape how justice is delivered, drug supplies reach hospitals, farmers get fertilizers and seeds, or capital projects for employment and infrastructure are designed and implemented. In other words, what society understands as corruption may be different to what is defined by law. This happens because social norms and attitudes are influenced by value systems rooted in historical and cultural experiences. Naturally, informal institutions heavily influence and can even determine the productivity of the state where the state may be either young, superficial and with limited social penetration and focus on appropriate norms and values. This distinction is important especially to Sierra Leone. When compared to countries where the fight against corruption is succeeding such as in Rwanda and Botswana, there is a noticeable penetration of the state by energy to rebuild socio-cultural norms towards more progressive attitudes focused on integrity, confidence, service and trust. On the other hand, anti-corruption programmes in many countries have often been unsuccessful not because they have failed to produce and deliver the expected results such as prosecution and conviction of corrupt public officials, but have faltered because societal attitudes remained underdeveloped. It is for this reason that understanding informal rules, social norms and values are important for the fight against corruption.

3. Data on Norms, Value Systems and National Integrity

3.1. Indigenous aphorisms and slangs underpinning National Integrity System

Indigenous languages in Sierra Leone use interesting creative imagery and parables to make points and guide social behaviours. These aphorisms convey traditions and value systems handed down by tradition from generation-to-generation, and it is these informal and hidden institutions or norms and values that may support or undermine formal rules. This section presents a few examples of aphorisms that are frequently spoken within public corridors that shape the interactions between public officials and the ways in which they discharge their duties.

1. ***Mammy Koker*** – Krio slang – meaning secretly doing paid job outside your official duties. In other words, stealing from your official work hours
2. ***Kukujumuk***: This aphorism means that secret deals are only known to those involved. Frequently used by Mendes and Krios.
3. ***Wae You Yams White, na for coba am***: This Krio aphorism literally means that one must make sure you cover your yams if they are sparkling white. Figuratively, this aphorism has both negative and positive connotations. On the one hand, it means: be modest about your accomplishments as this is given as advice to hide one’s fortune so that you do not hurt others. On the other hand, it is widely understood within the public sphere that when you are using your position to benefit from public resources, it is best to try to hide your affluence. The implications for this is that, it can be difficult to identify and enforce the ACC law on unexplained wealth to corrupt individuals – especially in a society that adheres to this informal practice.
4. ***Bud wae dae eat res na farm, nor dae tok bok***: This Krio aphorism means that a bird that is feeding on a farmer’s field is never noisy. This aphorism can have two interpretations: It can

be seen as advice to keep one's eyes on the ball, or continue to eat and do not attract unnecessary attention to yourself.

5. ***Kono yie Kono fa:*** This is a Kono aphorism that means that a Kono man cannot kill or betray another Kono man. This saying is a large driver signifying Kono solidarity and brotherhood comes first, even it comes up against the public interest.
6. ***Baraka sika baraka fa:*** This Suso aphorism is widely used as Krio slang as “*Hand go hand cam*”. Locally this meaning signifies reciprocity, or the practice of giving and receiving. It is normally used in informal transactions to mean: if you support me, I will support you. If you bend the rules for me, I'll do likewise for you.
7. ***Wusai you tie cow na dae eh dae eat:*** This Krio aphorism means that a cow eats where it is tethered. This aphorism is associated with former-president Stevens in the one-party era and connotes that you can use your office as your own grazing field.
8. ***Dis na we turn:*** It is our turn. This is a slogan derived from a political culture where two dominant ethno-regional parties have ruled Sierra Leone in turn. Both the SLPP and APC utilise identity politics as a strategy to maintain power in order to put supporters in a favourable position to access public resources.

3.2. Survey data on informal norms, attitudes and perceptions

This section provides data based on a recently conducted survey across five districts on attitudes and perceptions of ‘corruption’ in informal transactions and social practices. The findings point to a number of social norms that impinge upon integrity. The survey consisted of twenty-one questions that focused on three issues: a) accountability in management of funds contributed by sympathizers during funerals that occurred in the last 24 months; b) trust and perceptions of various informal sector workers; and c) perceptions about the proposed commission of enquiry on officials of the formal administration. The aim is to understand citizens’ attitudes and perceptions about corruption occurring in the informal sector and the implications for building national integrity systems in the formal sector.

The study chose to investigate the accountability of funds for funerals because not only is death very important to every Sierra Leonean, it is moment of pain, and a time when honesty and sincerity are most required in support of the deceased family. Most funerals usually involve the management of funds donated by relatives and friends. Too often, the rules guiding the management of funeral contributions lie outside state regulation. Funeral funds are organized and managed by close relatives or people considered to be friends to the deceased family. Results of this survey are

- 1000 respondents interviewed in 100 communities in Bo, Bombali, Western Area and Koinadugu
- 79% of respondents lost someone very close (family member, friend or benefactor) to them in the last 24 months. Gender of the deceased: 56% male, 44% female.
- Socio-economic status of deceased households: 35% have a large family needing attention; 24% have no property inherited; 13% are considered a better off family; 5% contain widow or widower.
- 93% of respondents said a committee was established to manage burial funds while families and friends of 97% of respondents made financial contributions to the bereaved family.
- Mainly family heads (34%) uncles (28%) and neighbours or community elders (13%) managed resources for the funeral.
- 62.7% said that funds were sufficient and 30% said the funds were not enough for funerals.
- Funds were insufficient because 64% reported that either someone diverted or stole money, gave no proper update or no proper recording of how money was managed. Another 19% stated that more sympathizers turned up to the funerals than expected.

- Of the committees established to manage burial funds respondents were least impressed with the committee managing the finances. Approximately 40% of respondents noted trust in the committee that handled funeral service/prayers; 35% said they trust the committee to handle refreshments while 13% reportedly did not trust the finance committee.
- Communities have different interpretations of what they think of the person who poorly managed their burial funds. See table below

What respondents think of person who poorly managed burial funds

<i>Responses</i>	Bo	Bombali	Koinadugu	W/ Rural	W/ Urban	Total
<i>Corrupt and greedy</i>	28.6%	37.5%	50.0%	69.2%	77.8%	53.5%
<i>Minor theft but not too bad</i>	28.6%	50.0%	33.7%	30.8%	11.1%	31.3%
<i>Made a mistake</i>	28.6%	12.5%	14.3%	0.0%	11.1%	13.2%
<i>Response to survival instinct</i>	0.0%	0.0%	2.0%	0.0%	0.0%	1.4%
<i>Don't know</i>	14.3%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.7%

- Nearly 58% of respondents said they will not recommend a head of committee who poorly managed burial funds for an important position in their community. Overwhelmingly, 95.8% of respondents will not choose the head of their last funeral committee in charge of their personal property, land or wealth, nor would they be willing to engage in a joint business with the person.

3.3. Trust of Informal Sector Workers.

The revered German sociologist Max Weber placed a lot of emphasis on ethics as the main driver of societal growth and economic advancement. If a large share of an economy is driven by the right ethics, it is possible for growth to occur. With only 20% of adult Sierra Leoneans having bank accounts², a large volume of transaction occurs outside of the formal system. Informal sector workers such as mechanics, construction workers and carpenters which form the middle-level manpower for Sierra Leone, and ethics across this sector are important for trust, economic growth and job creation. From construction of private homes to the repair of vehicles and motorbikes (indigenously known as Okadas) informal sector workers across this sector remain the backbone for many economic programmes targeted by the formal sector and are critical to drive and push forward capital investments. Questions in the following section highlights respondents' experiences and trust in the informal sector which forms a large part of the ecosystem for businesses to thrive.

- The survey asked respondents if they trust a mechanic enough to repair their car or Okada in their absence. Only 31% said yes. The majority, 73.8%, reported that they can only allow a mechanic to repair their car/Okada if they are around or have a trusted representative/driver. This lower trust for mechanics is in urban settings like Freetown and Bo than in the other three districts.
- About 66% of respondents stated that if they are building a house they will not trust a building contractor enough to give him/her the money to buy materials for construction. Only 27.9% are confident enough to give money to their building contractors.
- About 70% of respondents in Freetown stated they do not trust their housemaids enough to take care of their property or money in their absence. Only 27.2% do.

² Assessment of financial inclusion in Sierra Leone (2015)

- Across all five districts only 40.2% of respondents believe that they can trust a paid labourer to harvest their crop in their absence. There are higher levels of distrust for farm labourers in the Western Rural, Bo, and Bombali districts than Koinadugu.
- Only 44.4% of respondents believe they would agree to take a loan to start a joint business with someone in their community with no hesitation or fear of getting duped or cheated.

3.4. Perceptions about corruption in Formal Institutions.

Perceptions of African societies about formal sector corruption have been well debated. The Nigerian historian Peter Ekeh in 1975 propounded the concept of the two publics, meaning that African states are bifurcated into two, with both a primordial public and a civic public. The former refers to traditional cultural/customary practices (primordial public), while the latter reflects formal bureaucratic practices inherited from western colonial powers. For Ekeh, legitimacy is invested in the primordial public and public actors have no problem stealing from the civic public to support the primordial public. His legitimacy is vested in the primordial public, whereas the civic public is a foreign entity that can be raided to serve local needs and expectations. Ekeh attributes this to the historical influence of colonialism, which has had long-term implications on how societies operate and function. Hence, African societies have dual legal (traditional and formal justice systems) and political systems (chiefdom governance and public-sector governance). Both publics combine to influence how people perceive these two spheres and the roles that they play, or should play, in society. In the public realm politicians most often draw support from traditional systems such as secret societies, hometown associations and extended family to strengthen their power base in the public sector, and in turn, use public offices to support local communities and institutions financially. To apply this concept, the study gauged respondent's reaction to the GoSL's proposed Commission of Enquiry on the outgone administration.

- Respondents were asked a question about how they reacted the last time a close relative/friend/member of your church/mosque or community was alleged to have misused public funds. There were mixed responses. About 30% stopped associating with them, while 14% provided moral support and 9.9% prayed for them; 3.9% warned them to stop and 1.2% raised monies for them.
- When asked if they support the government's Commission of Inquiry (COI), an overwhelming 81.6% said yes. There were more males than females that voiced support (84.3% support the COI than women (79.0%). Almost every respondent (98.4) in Bo district support the inquiry, while 85.6% in the Western Region, 74% in Koinadugu and 68.3% in Bombali remain supportive. Higher percentages of support for the COI cannot be unconnected with the vigorous awareness raising campaign by GoSL officials in the districts. When analysed by age, more youth (84.3) support the COI than persons above 35 years (80.8%) and the elderly (78.3%).
- The survey asked whether respondents think the COI will help in the fight against corruption in Sierra Leone. A slightly lower (73.8) number of respondents agreed. Respondents were also asked if they have asked their close relative/friend or benefactor who is a civil/public servant on how they acquired their wealth. Nearly 75% said they have never asked this question, while 23.6% said they have.

<i>Do you think the government's COI will help in the fight against corruption?</i>						
	Bo	Bombali	Koinadugu	W/ Rural	W/ Urban	Total
<i>Yes</i>	91.9	64.3	57.6	86.0	80.2	73.8
<i>Don't know</i>	7.3	18.5	18.0	2.0	11.4	13.3
<i>No</i>	0.8	15.7	24.4	12.0	7.9	12.4
<i>No opinion</i>	0.0	1.6	0.0	0.0	0.5	0.5
Grand Total	100	100	100.0	100.0	100	100

Have you ever asked your close relative/friend or benefactor who is a civil/public servant how they acquired their wealth?

	Female	Male	Grand Total
<i>no</i>	76.3	72.8	74.6
<i>yes</i>	22.0	25.4	23.6
<i>prefer not to say</i>	1.8	1.8	1.8
Grand Total	100	100	100

4. Conclusion and recommendations

The data presented above on aphorisms and the integrity of transactions within informal practices shows that both formal and informal norms and values shape the integrity systems of the country. However, the focus on informal values and norms as a set of enabling factors for aiding, abetting or mitigating corruption remains largely silent in government and international development institution's programme and policy response. To stem the growth or advancement of corruption, both bureaucratic or "informal institutional quality" should be considered as central elements of state capacity (Fukuyama, 2004), i.e. as enabling factors that can either hinder the state from properly implementing its policies. There is a sincere need to promote professionalism and the need to place a check on norms and values that continue to perpetuate patronage practices.

As we have seen in various aphorisms and public rejections of their very kit and kin who defraud contributions meant for funerals, informal norms, values and institutions do not always work against formal ones. They can also reinforce them and often do much of the enabling and constraining that we attribute to the formal rules and practices that are necessary to fight graft. If institutions are a useful concept for analysing state effectiveness, then informal institutions which largely undermine state effectiveness by conflicting with the formal institutions that are embedded in the stated aims of government codified in policies, laws and regulations also need deliberate policy attention. To make formal institutions support state effectiveness in the fight against corruption, we recommend the following.

1. There is ample evidence that political leaders and civil society actors have significant roles to play in shaping and changing attitudes, perceptions and practices. The impact of the presidential debate on voter perceptions in the last election has been well documented³. Drawing this experience, intensive behavioural change education by the GoSL's newly established civic education programme, the media and civil society on the effects of existing social norms and its effectiveness of the formal sector is strongly recommended.
2. Increase the GoSL's capacity in ending impunity, enforcing formal rules and changing leadership behaviours with an emphasis on performance standards and systems.
3. Banking institutions should look into promoting greater financial inclusion that can extend coverage to informal transactions.
4. Deep ethnographic research into understanding wider cultural norms and values that promote corruption need to be better understood; how public officials and politicians feel about public demand for corruption needs to be addressed, and the role that anti-corruption campaigners can play to frame their messaging to better impact value systems, norms and practices.

³ Knowledge Attitudes and Practice Surveys March 2017, June 2018- Standing Together for Democracy Consortium.