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Research Writing

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HOW HAS CORRUPTION IN KENYA INFLUENCED THE ECONOMY AND POLITICAL STABILITY IN KENYA OVER THE LAST 20 YEARS

INTRODUCTION

Kenya has faced various problems like other countries, but corruption has severely affected many developing nations with progressing economic and political systems. It is rich in minerals and prospects, but corruption has greatly hampered its economic growth and political atmosphere over two decades. Kenya is one of East Africa's big economies, and the deep-seated malpractices and mismanagement continuously wear away Kenya's potential for growth and development. Corruption has deep roots in history. Its origins date back to the colonial period when those deceitful practices were brought about. It has been recognised that corruption is calculated as a country's billions of dollars every year, which diverts resources away from necessary services such as healthcare and education.

Key Terms:

1. Corruption: The Oxford dictionary defines it as double-dealing or fraudulent conduct by those in power, typically involving bribery
2. Impunity: The Oxford dictionary defines it as an exoneration from punishment or freedom from the injurious consequences of an action
3. Protest: The Oxford Dictionary is a statement or action expressing dissent or objection to something.

Research Design

The research problem at hand focuses on the permeating issue of corruption in Kenya and its noteworthy influence on both the economy and political stability over the last twenty years. This investigation tries to explore the complicated dynamics of corruption, revealing several essential aspects: who is affected, what specific kinds of corruption are shared, where these practices are most concentrated, when they have escalated, why they persist, and how they manifest in both economic and political contexts. The primary relevant parties affected by corruption in Kenya are government officials, businesses, and the people. Government officials engage in corruption, which wears away the public trust and accountability. Businesses may yield to corrupt demands or uneven playing fields while citizens face the brunt of inadequate public services and increased inequality. The research will examine various types of corruption, including bribery, embezzlement, and nepotism, as well as their impact on economic performance and political governance. The focal point will be on Kenya, especially in cities where it is most visible in public procurement and service delivery. Rural areas are also affected by some forms of corruption, which might also bring them into the case. This research paper will cover the period from 2004 to 2024, a time frame marked by tremendous political and economic changes in Kenya. Understanding the influence of corruption on the economy and political stability in Kenya is crucial as it provides insights into the barriers to development in this particular country. It highlights the need for governance reforms and accountability mechanisms to combat corruption and promote sustainable growth.

This research paper argues that corruption has distorted Kenya's economic development and political stability over the past two decades, appearing through widespread bribery, embezzlement, and nepotism, which have resulted in the improper allocation of resources, diminished public trust in government institutions, and increased social unrest. Addressing

issues are essential for fostering sustainable economic growth and restoring democratic governance in the country.

Corruption poses a significant barrier to entrepreneurship in Kenya, undermining the potential for economic growth and innovation. There is a misallocation of public resources that are intended for job creation and business opportunities, where the funds are pocketed by government officials instead of being put into the right places. Small-sized enterprises are also prompted to offer bribes to get licenses and are tempted to offer bribes to secure construction permits. The KBI survey conducted in 2007 showed that the proportion of those who responded did/did not make bribery payments over the previous year was 76 and 24 per cent. The bribes given by 50% of the respondents are above KShs. 1,000(Ngunjiri 10). Understanding that more than half of the whole population in Kenya lives below the poverty line, living below a dollar a day, this amount is quite high. This bribery creates obstacles for new businesses, including the need for bribes to obtain permits and licenses, which discourage legitimate entrepreneurial activities.

Corruption provides a breeding place for a culture of impunity. Kempe asserts that the culture of impunity evolved, and citizens believe that engaging in corrupt practices is necessary to navigate bureaucratic systems. This allows corrupt practices to multiply countless times, making it a more multidimensional problem that the Kenyan government has to resolve. Corruption creates a vicious cycle where corrupt individuals are rewarded, leading to more people engaging in unethical behaviours. People are more susceptible to engaging in illegal activities as a way of getting money without jobs, since they are affected by the unethical behaviours of the officials.

This perpetuates poverty and economic stagnation, making it hard for Kenya to make progress in its citizens' standard of living. It also creates barriers for new businesses wanting to venture into Kenya because investors are sceptical and less likely to invest in a corrupt-sick country.

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Wachira Maina, the Kenyan constitutional lawyer, suggests that, after the post-election chaos between 2007 and 2008, the Independent Review Commission recommended many reforms to solve what it called institutionalised impunity. But just months after their recommendation, the next-in-line to the ECK had returned to type, becoming entangled in corruption on a level that ECK had not reached. The culture of impunity had long been a fulcrum for corrupt and unethical behaviours among leaders, despite invariable efforts that were put in by the Kriegler Commission. The culture of impunity had long been a fulcrum for corrupt and unethical behaviours among leaders, despite invariable efforts that were put in by the Kriegler Commission. People suffer most when in desperate need of services, and monetary capabilities limit them from living under fundamental human rights because most of their rights are violated.

Kenya Human Rights declares that “discussions of corruption, human rights violations, and impunity tend to take place in the abstract, focusing more on the perpetrators and the legal issues involved, and leaving out the many silent victims of these acts. The human rights violations and economic crimes that have occurred in Kenya over the years have left in their wake countless victims unheard of and denied justice, and their grievances and injuries have no redress. The victims and survivors range from those individuals and families who were the victims of political assassinations and killings, torture, inhuman and degrading treatment, arbitrary arrest and detention; disappearances, abductions and extra-judicial killings.” People had suffered brutally

because of the impunity that had already been entrenched in the country.

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Corruption is a significant driver of the high unemployment rates in Kenya. Douglas says that many people have blamed corruption as the source of high unemployment in Kenya.

Corruption involves many cases, for example, where there is a biased selection of employees for jobs through illegal means like bribery, nepotism, and favouritism.

It has led to inefficiencies and a lack of accountability in hiring processes. Qualified individuals are overlooked for positions, and nepotism makes it hard for those who are unacquainted with the hiring of individuals. This worsens inequality and the country's unemployment. Pervasive corrupt practices have led to disenchanted youth populations and economic deceleration in Kenya, where skyrocketing unemployment rates are attributed to corruption as a significant cause. Corruption leads to the improper allocation of public resources, which means that funds intended for job creation and economic development are pocketed by corrupt officials. People cannot access jobs, which gives them no other options than taking to the streets and soaking into crimes, including extortion, prostitution, and murder, for survival. The study by Douglas also found that corruption in Kenya has also been evidenced in cases whereby the elites who have been elected to represent the mass embezzle funds which would have been used to develop marginalised areas and come up with economic facilities such as industrial sectors, for instance, tea processing plants, coffee factories, sugarcane factories, and dairy processing plants. People from these marginalised areas are unable to move from disadvantaged status because they are not given that chance by these corrupt officials who embezzle funds. This perpetuates the vicious cycle of poverty among marginalised groups, aggravating the staggering index of income inequality in Kenya.

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The same study also noted that sometimes the Kenyan government disburses funds with the sole purpose of creating self-employment opportunities for the youth, such as the Kenya Youth Funds. These funds aim to boost young innovators and budding entrepreneurs. These funds are also supposed to be used to provide the youth with technical skills that will help them create employment opportunities instead of staying idle and scrambling for the few job opportunities due to the ever-increasing population. However, these funds, such as the National Youth Service funds, have been squandered by the leaders. These funds would have solved the issue of unemployment, but corrupt leaders made it impossible by personalising the funds intended to change the lives of youth. The research also highlights how corruption within the public sector leads to inefficiencies and a lack of transparency in hiring processes. This results in qualified individuals being overlooked for positions, while jobs are often awarded based on nepotism or bribery, further worsening unemployment.

Corruption undermines public confidence in institutions and governance. The Office of the Auditor General, which has been responsible for the financial audits of government bodies since 2011, found that at least 20 out of the 47 counties had budgetary irregularities in 2015 (Alexia VAN RIJ 14). This proves how uncertain it is for the government to allocate its budget and accomplish all projects that add social value to Kenyan citizens. People find it hard to trust their leaders, with the knowledge that most of them operate with unfair distributions of public resources. Surveys carried out by Transparency International consistently show that a large percentage of Kenyans view corruption as a significant problem. For instance, a recent report indicated that over 80% of Kenyans believe that corruption is widespread in the government, leading to a pervasive sense of distrust towards public officials and institutions. The more distrust towards public officials and institutions grows, the higher the odds of more unrest both

politically and economically in Kenya. The opposition spirit is fed slowly until a coup d'état is planned out, and chaos arises from those internal conflicts. The confidence people have in public institutions is deeply impacted by the unforgiving corrupt nature of the police in Kenya, and it is on the frontline of this incumbent issue that the Kenyan government fails. Peace and security are undermined, leading to a more intensified atmosphere in the country.

Corruption jeopardises budgetary allocation in the energy sector. A future decarbonised global energy is expected to need cumulative funding of at least \$110 trillion between now and 2050, representing an average of 2% of GDP per year in perpetuity (Benjamin 1). The energy sector remains at high risk of corruption as more budgets are allocated to this sector, with institutional corruption standing in the way while countries make strides towards climate change mitigation. Financial elites such as property owners, local businesspersons, corporate directors, or investors have used their monetary and fiscal resources as an underlying form of economic power to subvert it and take advantage of different climate protection pathways. The money that is invested in different vital social sectors is swallowed by corrupt practices, leaving no room for intended developmental services by the government. The expenses in these areas become inadequate, which lowers the revenues received by the government in the end. Benjamin's research has documented that political leaders use positions of power to allocate resources for renewable energy (including solar energy) to their ethnic groups rather than fairly or adequately; moreover, 30% of renewable energy businesses in Kenya reported expecting to have to pay bribes as a part of their normal business operations. It exacerbates the tensions among ethnic groups, which might give rise to tribalism and divisions among Kenyans. This also stretches the income inequality in the country as people from certain tribes tend to get more affluent than those who are underprivileged.

Corruption significantly hinders access to public service. Kenyan police have consistently been ranked as the most corrupt institution in the country, and this continues to be the case despite the ongoing attempts at police reforms (Ruth). The police are vested with the arduous responsibility of maintaining law and order and preventing crimes to warrant the security of the entire citizenry. The issue is that they are in the heat of corruption, which places them on the verge of being scrutinised more often. The corruption transcends the individuals in the Kenya police service to other societal structures and institutions. Former U.S. Secretary of State Clinton noted in a speech in Nairobi that “the absence of strong and effective institutions has consented to ongoing corruption, impunity politically spurred violence, and a lack of respect for the rule of law.” Transparency International reported that police in eighty-six countries were judged the fourth most corrupt public institution after political parties, followed by public officials generally, and parliaments and legislature in that continuum (Transparency International, 2010). Police should not be corrupt for people to access services, but unfortunately, it is the most corrupt public institution that appears to hold countless cases of corruption whereby a citizen has to pay for a statement in case there have been crimes committed against that citizen’s rights have been inflicted upon.

Corruption has led to outrageous protests that turned into the deaths of innocent individuals.

The current outrageous protests are the results of the corrupt administration and deep culture of Kenyan officials who got entrenched in the pool of corruption. According to Aljazeera, At least 309 people have been killed in recent anti-government protests in Kenya, says the national rights watchdog, as activists gear up for a new round of protests. Leaflets have been posted on social media with the hashtags “Occupy Everywhere”, “Ruto must go”, and “Reject

Budgeted Corruption”. The protests were mainly triggered by corruption, a longstanding issue in

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Kenya that has been deeply embedded in the political and public service sectors since independence. The protests were fueled by the widespread frustration over the extravagant lifestyles of public officials and the misappropriation of public resources. Many citizens felt that the political elite were enriching themselves at the expense of the populace, leading to demand accountability and reform. According to a survey by Kenya’s Ethics and Anti-Corruption Commission, the country’s interior, health, and transport ministries are the most corrupt. The study showed that the size of the average bribe doubled in 2023. One is most likely to experience corruption and unethical practices in the Ministry of Interior and Coordination of National Government (47.1%), Ministry of Health (13.2%), and Ministry of Transport, Infrastructure, Housing, Urban Development and Public Works (5.8%). This infuriates citizens who pay taxes and get exploited as they buy services from these public institutions, leading to strikes and violent actions done by those who have experienced enough of the matter. It lowers the standard of living of citizens when they don’t access services from ministries that are more important in sustaining the health of Kenyans.

Corruption leads to the loss of critical beneficial contracts in Kenya. The 2024 National Trade Estimate Report shows that U.S. companies have raised concerns about the length of time required for Kenyan Customs to release shipments, as well as the use of a complex and inefficient process that involves many steps with uncoordinated offices, despite implementation of a single window system. Many U.S. companies have commented that Kenya’s one-stop customs clearance system does not operate as intended and that pre-arrival processing of electronic documents is ineffective. This discourages cross-border business people and hinders the efficient importation of goods into Kenya. “According to the Office of the United States

contracts meant to develop the East African nation because senior government officials seek a bribe before awarding such jobs” (Muhammad, VOA). The Kenyan government is going bankrupt the more it loses these significant investments from foreign companies due to corruption by the administrative bodies in charge of designated economic realms.

There is an increase in poverty due to economic mismanagement and corruption in Kenya. Broken rules, policies not followed, and policies that are not fit for the institutions have led to the occurrence of despondency carried out by corrupted officers. The nature of corruption in Kenya is primarily institutional corruption. The most affected institution in Kenya is the Police, which takes the first place on the list with a percentage of 48.1% according to the National Survey on Corruption and Ethics¹⁷), followed by other government institutions such as the judiciary and the health sectors. The Kenyan government is deeply involved, which worsens the inequality in the country and perpetuates the chain reaction of hunger and poverty in the country. There is a likelihood that each time one seeks police security services, a service seeker is likely to be asked for a bribe 1.41 times. To liberate an arrested person, one is likely to be asked to pay a bribe 1.28 times and to report a crime or write a statement, a service seeker is likely to be asked for a bribe 1.1 times. There is a likelihood that each time a service is sought in the Traffic Police, one is likely to be asked for a bribe 1.45 times, County Health Department 1.05 times, and in the Police 1.02 times. There is a likelihood that each time a service is sought in the Traffic Police, one is likely to be asked for a bribe 1.45 times, County Health Department 1.05 times, and in the Police 1.02 times. Corruption has some severe consequences for government projects across various areas. It is likely to increase prices and inflate project costs, cause delays in project completion, lead to poor quality projects, and distort public spending

structure, with a bias towards great value, high intricacy investments into new projects as opposed to maintenance and operations(Adam& Fazekas,2023).

Conclusion

Corruption remains a critical challenge, fundamentally obstructing the nation's economic progress and undermining its political stability. Over the last twenty years, Kenya has been plagued by corrupt practices such as bribery, embezzlement, and nepotism, which have not only drained resources from essential public services but also eroded the foundational trust that citizens place in the government. This research has demonstrated that corruption has profoundly affected Kenya's economic performance and political landscape, leading to resource misallocation, diminished foreign investment, reduced public trust in government, and a pervasive culture of impunity.

The political view in Kenya has been shaped by corruption, which often displays itself in support and electoral malpractices. These practices not only carry on the cycle of impunity but also contribute to political voicelessness among citizens, leading to social unrest and a lack of faith in democratic processes. This results in political instability, which deters domestic and foreign investment, further impacting economic performance and development.

As we look into the future, addressing corruption should be prioritised as a way to attain sustainable economic growth and political stability. Comprehensive strategies that include strengthening institutional frameworks, promoting civic engagement, and empowering independent anti-corruption bodies will be crucial in this journey

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