Fighting High-Level Corruption in Africa: Learning from Effective Law Enforcement

This project is the first comparative study of law enforcement efforts targeting high-level corruption in Africa. The focus on enforcement practice promises to generate new evidence regarding investigations and prosecutions in Nigeria, Tanzania, and Malawi.

Project Summary

Law enforcement in Africa, ranging from investigations and punishment of corrupt officials to asset recovery, plays a principal role in combating corruption but it often is seen as inherently problematic due to the scale of the corruption problem, lack of resources, and external influences. However, a growing number of high-profile cases across the continent offer important insights into the conditions and factors shaping law enforcement.

This project is the first comparative study of law enforcement efforts targeting high-level corruption in Africa that aims at identifying the enabling and constraining factors and conditions for effective enforcement practice. This focus promises to generate new evidence that has been missing in anti-corruption research, contributing to a more comprehensive understanding of what is needed to successfully target those involved in grand corruption. The project analyses the various investigative and legal tools available in criminal proceedings, as well as innovative legal strategies.

What constitutes 'effective' law enforcement will take into account what is deemed so by different actors (political leaders and law enforcement officials at different levels and different agencies). The project compares the law enforcement response to high-profile corruption scandals in Nigeria, Tanzania, and Malawi, where high-level corruption is rife but has been targeted by the authorities.

Policy and Programming Implications

The research findings will be fed directly into policymaking and law enforcement in the three countries. Additionally. the project's findings will be relevant beyond the three countries studied as they offer insights for the global anti-corruption debate more broadly.

The Global Integrity Anti-Corruption Evidence (GI-ACE) research programme **supports 14 projects** around the world **generating actionable evidence** that policymakers, practitioners, and advocates can use to **design and implement more effective anti-corruption initiatives**.

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Research Questions

The analytical and comparative framework differentiates five principal factors shaping law enforcement activities:

- Influence exercised by politicians, officials, superiors, and other national actors aimed at either strengthening or obstructing law enforcement in the context of the countries' political economy / political settlement.
- Foreign involvement by donor agencies and foreign interests.
- The legal framework, including criminal, private, and procedural law, to identify effective and flawed legislation and the ways it is employed by legal actors.
- The institutional architecture, focusing on the capacities of law enforcement agencies including the mandate, organization, resources, and personal qualities and leadership of individuals that are key to criminal prosecution, asset recovery, and civil litigation.
- The individuals who are prosecuted, punished, and have had their assets seized, as well as those suspected to be involved who do not face prosecution. Who are they and where do they come from? What are they accused of? Are they only small fish or are they the main perpetrators?

Methodology

This research requires a qualitative approach due to the sensitive nature of high-level corruption. The researchers will employ a mix of social-scientific and legal methods. They mainly conduct semi-structured interviews with key individuals in government, donor agencies, civil society organizations, and law enforcement agencies. In addition, the team will conduct desk research and analyze the legal framework.

Research Team Members

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