

# The Nexus between Poverty and Corruption



# The Nexus between Poverty and Corruption:

*Quo Vadis?*

Edited by

Pregala Pillay, Sakhile Zondi,

Purshottama Reddy and Chris Jones

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*Anyone who has ever struggled with poverty knows how extremely expensive it is to be poor.*

—James Baldwin



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## FOREWORD

It is my great privilege and pleasure to make a small contribution to this book via this foreword. This book comprises a series of essays presenting definitions, classifications, and discourses on the interconnectedness of poverty and corruption, and the havoc that it wreaks, especially in developing countries. Pregala Pillay, Sakhile Zondi, Purshottama Reddy, Chris Jones, and the impressive list of co-authors and contributors to this book have been at the forefront of academic discourse, research, and engagement with society at large on issues of governance, corruption, and poverty and bring this deep understanding of the vicious cycle of poverty through the nexus with corruption.

I recall the great hope and exuberance in South Africa at the dawn of our democracy in 1994. The newest democracy at the time on the African Continent, in the developing world, and globally, held the great promise of bucking the trends typically seen in modern young democracies and dealing effectively with issues of poverty, high unemployment, inequality, and sustainable and meaningful economic growth. Sadly, 29 years later we are in a state of melancholy. One may even claim that we are on the brink of being a collapsed state. How did this great hope and euphoria so quickly evaporate? It happened because of a steady decline in ethical behavior in government, as well as in the private sector and society. The ethics, integrity, and formidable values that were sorely needed by those charged with the leadership and stewardship of our country in order to lead us to prosperity for all gave in to greed, the desire for power, self-interest, and corrupt behavior. This disintegration of ethics and morality put us into a downward spiral, which worsened poverty and unemployment, increased inequality, and just about destroyed the infrastructure and capacity to produce reasonable sustainable economic growth. Corruption perpetuates the cycle of poverty!

Breaking the cycle of corruption and poverty is essential if we are to put those countries affected back on track when it comes to addressing issues of poverty, high unemployment, and inequality, thus bringing greater prosperity for all. To understand where we are going, we must understand how we got here. How did we end up in this situation of entrenched corruption that robs society of its full potential? *The Nexus between Poverty*

*and Corruption: Quo Vadis?* enables us to gain a perspective that will hopefully aid in finding solutions to the challenges that we face in this regard. It will require a significant change in broad populist understandings of ethics, integrity, morals, and values, and a strong emphasis on accountability, consequence management, good governance, and responsible leadership.

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**SECTION A:**

**CONCEPTUAL, THEORETICAL AND  
LEGISLATIVE PERSPECTIVES**

# CHAPTER 1

## POVERTY AND CORRUPTION IN AFRICA: IMPLICATIONS AND CONSEQUENCES ON GOVERNANCE AND DEVELOPMENT

C. JONES, P.S. REDDY & S. ZONDI

**Key words:** Corruption; Development; Ethical leadership; Fraud; Governance; Inequality; Integrity; National Development Plans; Poverty; Public sector; Service delivery; Sustainable Development Goals

### Introduction

Corruption, according to the United Nations, costs the world more than \$2.6 trillion annually, and this has undermined efforts to reduce poverty globally. In 1995, the World Social Summit convened in Copenhagen concluded that poverty is a major threat to the future of humankind in developing nations, where it is endemic and permeates virtually every facet of the lives of local communities. The 2030 developmental agenda, which by and large involves the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) adopted by all United Nations member states in 2015, has as its core objective the vision of alleviating poverty and other deprivations that impact negatively on the global community. Even though there has been something of a reduction in poverty, the fact remains that the absolute number of those in extreme poverty is rising due to governance challenges and weak institutional mechanisms in some African countries, such as South Africa, Zimbabwe, Uganda, Rwanda, Ghana, Nigeria, Tanzania, Mauritius, and Ethiopia. In these countries, corruption impacts negatively on the socio-economic development endeavours of their respective governments. Corruption in the African public sector context is manifested in many ways including, inter alia, bribery, embezzlement, nepotism, favouritism, and procurement fraud (World Bank Group 2017). The lack of consequence management, weak judicial systems, and bad governance are key factors that generally result in poverty and derail sustainable development, especially in developing countries.

As this book demonstrates, public sector corruption is a scourge which corrodes public trust and investor confidence on the African Continent. It also severely undermines democratic gains and the credibility of nations in the global arena. The institutionalisation of strong moral values, integrity, and ethical leadership will undoubtedly influence good governance and permeate an ethical climate in the African continent. In this book, the authors highlight the nexus between poverty and corruption in selected African countries. It is anticipated that the respective country-specific case studies highlighted in this book will affect a strong ethical culture, thereby reducing the plague of corruption.

This publication attempts to mitigate the scarcity of scholarly research in poverty and corruption by focussing on the continental experiences documented within by various authors from diverse academic disciplines. The chapters are based on original desktop research and are presented sequentially and systematically to reflect contemporary trends and developments in poverty alleviation and corruption. The book analyses corruption's negative impacts on governments' poverty alleviation programmes, unpacks the efforts made thus far from a legislative and policy perspective, and examines anti-corruption programmes introduced across the African continent.

## **Background and context**

*Corruption is a major cause of poverty as well as a barrier to overcoming it. The two scourges feed off each other, locking their populations in a cycle of misery. Corruption must be vigorously addressed if aid is to make a real difference in freeing people from poverty.*

(Peter Eigen 2009)

This book is a collection of multidimensional and multidisciplinary essays on the definitions, discourse, and classifications (via extensive literature reviews and empirical research) of the phenomenon of poverty in different African settings and contexts, and more importantly what strategies can be adopted to combat corruption and realise the vision of Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want. The diverse contributions also seek ways to overcome these factors and posits and illuminates the experiences of the poor, giving them a voice against corrupt practices to enable deeper connections and meaningful engagement regarding solutions for the African Continent. Finally, through the unique collective lens of this pioneering book, we demonstrate how corruption has become a distinct feature of life on the African Continent and examine the impacts this has on a prosperous future

for the Continent's citizenry.

The literature on the state of global economic development in 2022 suggests that at least 1 billion people live below the global poverty line. For example, World Data Lab (2022) states that 42 African countries are in extreme poverty, and in 16 of those countries the poverty rate is rising. Poverty is typically measured in economic terms. The standard measure is the World Bank's definition of living on less than \$2.15 per day. The literature also explores the linkages between poverty and corruption and concludes that corruption by itself does not produce poverty; rather, corruption has direct consequences on economic and governance factors and intermediaries that, in turn, produce poverty.

Poverty and corruption remain stubbornly high in the sub-Saharan African region, where there has been little economic growth and poverty has escalated. A significant number of publications have therefore focussed on the nexus between poverty and corruption, often suggesting policy recommendations as corrective mechanisms. The United Nations (2022) regards corruption as an insidious plague that has various corrosive effects across the world. It undermines democracies and the rule of law, leads to violation of human rights, distorts global economies, and erodes the quality of life. Most recently, corruption associated with the COVID-19 pandemic undermined governments' endeavours to deliver urgent poverty relief programmes for the poor and vulnerable communities.

According to Transparency International (2019), the introduction of the Bretton Woods Institutions in 1999 marked a growing focus on the impact of corruption on governance and service delivery systems in developing nations in particular. This focus was further amplified by the introduction of the UN's Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), which in 2015 were upgraded to Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Through these goals, the UN aims to ensure that all global citizens have equal rights and access to economic resources and basic services. Corruption is the main factor that derails the attainment of human rights. It facilitates poverty and inequality across the sub-Saharan region of Africa. There is anecdotal evidence that many cases of poverty in the region result from the absence of integrated approaches to combat corruption.

The African Development Indicators (2022) show that extreme poverty levels across the continent stand at around 50% in rural areas, compared to 12% in urban areas. Unemployment, the violation of human rights, malnutrition, inequality, and social exclusion are key features of poverty

that characterise the region. Against this background, the theoretical evidence documented by various authors in this book points to the conclusion that corruption weakens governance systems and that intervention mechanisms are necessary to speed up development.

International best-practice based on the experience of developed countries shows that poverty alleviation endeavours should include conventional approaches in which governments play a developmental role. In particular, it is recommended to implement integrated economic and socio-economic policies designed to reduce social inequalities, create sustainable jobs, and empower citizens with competitive skills. To achieve these objectives, anti-corruption strategies, rule of law, and consequence management should be prioritised.

## **Research Methodology, content, and structure**

In terms of research methodology, the various chapters in the book are grounded in desktop research. Authors present literature reviews of academic sources, including case studies and policy documents, which focus on distinct countries on the African Continent. Each chapter is a separate contribution, complete in itself, but at the same time directly linked to the book's core aims and objectives. Overall, this publication presents a multidisciplinary research approach exploring recent trends and developments on the nexus between poverty and corruption in Africa. Below is a synopsis of its 17 chapters, and the co-editors present below a synopsis of each of the chapters with a summation and concluding remarks in the final chapter.

Chris Jones, Purshottama Reddy, and Sakhile Zondi in this introductory chapter provide an overview of the book, demystifying the relationship between poverty and corruption, with a particular focus on selected countries on the African continent. They demonstrate, through a review of the background and context and a summation of each of the chapters, that poverty does indeed have its origins in corruption and is, at the same time, a serious impediment to overcoming it. The two blights complement each other, capturing entire populations in a never-ending cycle of gloom and wretchedness. Consequently, the scourge of corruption must be responded to aggressively if a positive impact on emancipating the populace from poverty is to be achieved. Corruption and poverty are rampant, pervasive, and endemic in Africa and there is no readymade solution to these deep-rooted ills and tribulations, given the varying circumstances and situations across the continent. A full, all-inclusive, and multipronged approach is imperative to respond to these challenges.

In Chapter 2, Evangelos Mantzaris, Pregala Pillay, and Chris Jones write that the perpetual and multidimensional reality of corruption in most countries in the African Continent has been one of the most important drivers of continental poverty. This reality has led to a loss of faith in governments and social upheaval, with serious consequences at all societal levels. The chapter begins with a brief historical background of several African countries and their experiences of corruption and its dimensions. The research questions concentrate on identifying the main perpetrators of corruption, its key factors and causes, its role in the expansion of poverty, and how it can be defeated. The empirical findings are rooted on the deep knowledge and understanding of eight academic, civil society, and legal researchers; civil servants; and businesspeople based in South Africa who were selected through judgmental sampling. The findings pinpoint the common understanding, roots, and repercussions of corruption at all levels and throughout Africa. The article ends with recommendations based on the research findings and international experiences.

Pregala Pillay and Sakhile Zondi focus in Chapter 3 on poverty and corruption within legislative and policy frameworks in South Africa. They argue that corruption damages the very fabric of the South African society and threatens the sustainability of local communities. The literature and empirical evidence suggest that corruption in South Africa has become endemic, undermining the democratic gains of 1994. It impacts governance, service delivery, socio-economic development, job creation, public trust in government, and investor confidence in the country. For example, the scandals involving Digital Vibes and state capture can be viewed as a direct attack on the country's judicial system and constitutional democracy. They also reflect the perpetuation of poverty and marginalisation of the voices of the poor. The objective of this chapter is to offer empirical evidence that demonstrates causal relationships between corruption and poverty in South Africa. The literature review focusses on the legislative and policy frameworks that promote anti-corruption activities and international best practice that should be considered in the process of working towards the institutionalisation of a morally upright and corruption-free society in South Africa. The findings bolster the efforts of theorists who have endeavoured to enhance understanding of the impact of corruption in modern societies. The chapter contributes fresh insight and further broadens the set of assumptions that scholars can employ to bring about a corruption-free public sector and fair and equitable local communities.



## **Section B: South Africa in focus**

In Chapter 4, Cheryl Mohamed Sayeed reflects on the effects and challenges of poverty and corruption from a policy governance perspective between 2016 and 2021. Poverty remains prevalent around the world despite global efforts towards its eradication and it is exacerbated by the prevalence of corruption. At the local level, petty corruption remains pervasive, limiting access to basic services, especially by the poor. Corruption thus adds a barrier to efforts aimed at poverty reduction, as less-wealthy citizens are unable to access even basic services. This chapter examines the relationship between poverty and corruption, highlights the consequences of the latter on the poor, and examines this in the context of governance. It explores various case studies of fraud and corruption in the South African public sector and concludes that there is an inextricable link between poverty and corruption: poverty causes corruption and corruption causes poverty. It further demonstrates that bad governance, reflected through the prevalence of corruption, results in weakened institutions, which in turn reinforces the position of the poor, keeping them trapped. The challenge is for the government to implement its existing policies and ensure accountability, transparency, and application of the rule of law in its efforts to ensure that all citizens, irrespective of their socio-economic circumstances, have fair and equitable access to services. These elements represent the first steps towards poverty reduction.

In Chapter 5, Chris Jones argues that moral values are decisive factors not only in the life of an individual but also of a nation. Responsible citizenship needs good character and values like trees need roots. The chapter poses a number of key questions. Why does one need good character and moral values? Are moral values about the “value” one places on oneself? Can moral values make a difference in one’s life? Jones addresses the vicious cycles of corruption and various forms of poverty and suggests that viewing character and moral values as important determinants could help to address and mitigate corruption and poverty, two of the major challenges facing the African Continent. It is mainly written from a qualitative methodological research perspective and includes autobiographical and participatory views. The findings indicate that a single individual can never have an impact on their community or society if they do not apply strong moral values. We need people who exhibit integrity, trust, honesty, justice, accountability, and humility. Jones argues that moral values make one successful (prosperous) and gives meaning to one’s life. Without sound character and moral values, corruption is the default order of the day, promoting poverty and undermining well-being. One’s philosophy of life must be as simple as possible. It must

rest on certain basic foundations or values. If evils such as selfishness, obsession with power, greed, and an appetite for corrupt actions are in one's personal arsenal, it will certainly be very difficult to make good moral choices. Everyone must take a stand against corruption and poverty so that confidence in constitutional democracies across the continent can be strengthened. The chapter thus aims at influencing people's decisions, actions, behaviour, and attitudes to lead to greater accountability, transparency, social justice, honesty, and well-being.

In Chapter 6, Vasanthi Naidoo, Purshottama Reddy, and Sakhile Zondi focus on corruption and poverty in a local government context. There is unanimous agreement that corruption is a crime against humanity. The literature review points to corruption being defined as the misuse of public resources for private gain. Corruption is one of the primary reasons for poverty and inequality that perpetuates hopelessness in local communities, particularly in developing countries. Globally, the negative impacts of corruption are evident with flawed governance systems, poor economic growth, and the escalation of poverty. Owing to the rampant corruption in South Africa, local government performance is sub-optimal, leading to major service delivery failures, violent protests, and increasing poverty levels. Against this background, the chapter provides a broad overview of corruption and poverty in the South African local government context with specific reference to eThekweni Metropolitan Municipality in KwaZulu-Natal Province. eThekweni Municipality is the largest contributor to both the provincial gross domestic product and the corruption statistics. Corruption Watch has ranked eThekweni Municipality the fourth most corrupt municipality in the country from 2012 to 2021. The authors investigate the correlation between corruption and poverty and resultant impacts on the livelihoods of the citizenry of the municipality, contending that the lack of corruption detection mechanisms and consequence management in local government catapults indigent communities into an unbreakable chain of poverty. The literature review endorses the view that corruption is the fundamental cause of slow socio-economic development in Africa, one of the poorest continents in the world. The chapter presents selected case studies of fraud and corruption in local government and eThekweni Metropolitan Municipality in particular. It concludes with recommendations in the broader context of good governance to combat corruption and alleviate poverty, with a view to enhancing the lives of indigent communities.

Vasanthi Naidoo, Purshottama Reddy, and Sakhile Zondi focus in Chapter 7 on poverty and corruption in the provincial government in KwaZulu-Natal

(KZN), South Africa. They note that KZN has the second highest population growth in the country and was ranked second in the 2020 Analysis of Corruption Trends Report (Corruption Watch SA 2020:3-4). Accountability and the implementation of consequence management are among the province's governance challenges when it comes to eradicating corruption. This chapter analyses the "ecosystem" of corruption, examining root causes, actors and *modus operandi* in Kwa-Zulu Natal, as well as its effects on service delivery and poverty. The authors aim to identify incidences of corruption, highlight policy and legislative measures utilised to prevent and address corruption, and examine the reasons behind the non-implementation of consequence management mechanisms. Desktop research was conducted on the existing literature in journals; annual reports; and other reports and investigations by the provincial department, Chapter 9 institutions, Corruption Watch, the Auditor General, and the media. The research findings reveal a lack of consequence management, financial maladministration and negligence, officials colluding with service providers, incidents of unauthorised and irregular expenditure, vacancies in key positions in the forensic department, a skills deficit among forensic investigators, the intimidation of witnesses, a lack of uniformity in the implementation of provincial consequence management policy, guilty individuals escaping sanction through resignation or transfer to other departments, and corruption being deemed prescribed debt. The authors recommend that corruption should be exempted from debt prescription; that officials accused of corruption should be suspended on half pay until proven guilty or innocent; that guilty officials should always be dismissed and placed on a Public Servants Register for Corruption; and that officials under investigation should be sanctioned from applying for new posts, promotions, or transfers to other departments. They also recommend monitoring, disciplining, and training officials found guilty of negligence or irregular/unauthorised expenditure, as well as monitoring expenditure and tracking incidents of irregularity so that corruption can be detected early. These measures will strengthen internal controls and improve the execution of fiduciary duties.

In Chapter 8, Syanda Mthuli, Nikita Singh, and Purshottama Reddy highlight how corruption erodes the efficiency and effectiveness of public sector performance in South Africa. In sub-Saharan Africa, public sector performance is critical in addressing one of the Continent's most pressing challenges – that of poverty. Public institutions address the needs of the people, especially the poor and vulnerable in society, who were also those most severely affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. Corruption runs rampant in South Africa in the face of limited resources and the effects of the pandemic. Based on a non-empirical, qualitative analysis of secondary

data, the findings demonstrate that the delivery of public services – on which the poor and vulnerable unequivocally depend – is severely affected by corruption, undermining neoliberal policies designed to improve public management and service delivery. This represents a development challenge in South Africa, as financial resources are wasted, value for money is not realised, and funds are corruptly diverted away from the provision of basic public services that are increasingly needed. Overall, corruption not only diverts resources away from development, it also detracts from effectively and efficiently meeting the needs of the poor and stifles overall public sector performance. The study is premised on the need for performance-based management, value for money, and quality control as crucial notions that underpin the drive towards realising not only the now-infamous neoliberal policy standpoints but also South African policies that are informed by the concept of public value. These are all key components to be tackled in empowering public sector institutions to contribute to poverty alleviation – which is an essential vision for the future.

## **Section C: Africa in focus**

### ***Zimbabwe***

In Chapter 9, Luckmore Chivandire, Munyaradzi Saruchera, and Pregala Pillay provide a descriptive analysis of poverty and corruption in the Zimbabwean context. For a country endowed with more than 40 types of minerals, it remains a mystery why almost 50% of Zimbabwe's population of 15 million lives in extreme poverty, surviving on less than US\$29.80 per month. The country is endowed with a wealth of natural resources, yet citizens' quality of life tells a different story. Corruption has been cited as one of the major reasons poverty levels are high in this resource-rich country. Ordinary citizens are paying the price in the form of poor and obsolete infrastructure, water shortages, economic instability, and poorly supported education and healthcare services. This chapter identifies and critically discusses the nature and causes of corruption in Zimbabwe and analyses its impact on poverty, exploring the linkages between corruption and poverty in the country. The authors adopt Johnston's (2000) governance model as the theoretical foundation and framework of their analysis. The model postulates that corruption disturbs governance processes, weakens governmental institutions, interrupts government service provision, and undermines the rule of law. This can lead to a reduction in the government's ability to provide basic social and other services for the citizens, particularly the poor. The literature review reveals various avenues of corruption in

Zimbabwe, including land grabbing, procurement malpractices, overpricing, theft through agricultural subsidies, and mineral smuggling. Moreover, it highlights how corruption has led to the misallocation of resources towards rent-seeking activities instead of economic production of goods and services. This has had a negative bearing on economic growth, job creation, and tax revenues.

### *Uganda*

In Chapter 10, Robert Mukobi, Pregala Pillay, and Evangelos Mantzaris focus on corruption and poverty in Uganda. It is widely believed that corruption is an obstacle to development and poverty reduction in Uganda. Despite multiple poverty eradication initiatives over the last few decades, poverty remains widespread and in recent years has been attributed to corruption. There are, however, dissenting views which hold that corruption is like any other development challenge with a nominal influence on the current poverty levels. Further arguments follow the line that even corrupt regimes in the region have in the recent past registered significant economic progress, while honest ones have regressed. The contradicting standpoints suggest that the relationship between corruption and poverty has not been thoroughly supported by empirical research. This study fills this knowledge gap. Much as we need to exercise caution in determining this linkage, our overall argument in this paper is that corruption has a major bearing on the current poverty levels in Uganda. To justify this argument, this empirical study utilises national, continental, and international primary and secondary sources and reports to examine how corruption contributes to poverty in Uganda. The findings show that corruption undermines economic growth by lowering revenue meant to finance government programmes, discourages domestic and foreign investment, lowers the quality of infrastructure, and undermines value for money in public acquisitions. It also demonstrates that corruption is detrimental to citizens' access to healthcare, education, safe water, and environmental conservation, with a bearing on the current poverty levels in Uganda. Based on the study's findings, the authors recommend that to achieve sustainable poverty reduction the government should establish apposite strategies to enhance accountability and transparency, adherence to the rule of law, meaningful citizen participation, deeper democratisation, increased oversight and scrutiny, and economic reforms in order to revive the country's moribund economy.

## ***Rwanda***

In Chapter 11, John-Mary Kauzya states that Rwanda is challenged by poverty and corruption when it comes to implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Africa 2063 Development Strategy. The chapter discusses the legal framework, policies, and strategies that Rwanda has deployed since 1994 to address these two challenges. First, the in-country understanding of poverty and corruption is discussed. Then the values and principles of the 2030 Agenda are juxtaposed with the aspirations of the Africa 2063 Agenda and Rwanda's 2015 Constitution and other legal provisions in the country to assess the legal ecosystem and the government's resolve to fight corruption and poverty. The chapter illustrates that the values and principles which underpin respect for the public interest and discourage corruption in public governance are promoted by a people-focused leadership that keeps corruption at low levels to allow the implementation of the policies and strategies of poverty eradication. Rwanda experienced corruption in its public sector institutions prior to 1994, when the country reached its lowest point for corruption – a time when impunity was at its peak, culminating in the genocide of 1994 engineered mainly by government agents. The chapter provides hope that the fight against corruption and poverty is not lost but warns that corruption must be removed to enable poverty eradication. Home-grown poverty eradication strategies and the institutional ecosystem for preventing and fighting corruption in the country are assessed. The research is based on a review of government policies, laws, and reports. The author has advised the Government of Rwanda on governance since 1995 and this experience further informed the drafting of this chapter.

## ***Ghana***

In Chapter 12, George Scott reasons that the quest for a silver bullet to end poverty and its twin challenge of corruption persists across Africa. In line with the book's objectives, the views of Ghanaians were sought on whether technology is the panacea for corruption-induced poverty. Scott investigates how technology is used to address poverty induced by corruption in three thematic areas: the economic setup, human capital development, and infrastructure development. A sample of 400 citizens in Ghana provided quantitative data via a questionnaire using Google Forms. Qualitative data was gathered via a focus group discussion and through monitoring radio and online platforms. The data analysis showed that technology can indeed be a panacea for corruption-induced poverty in Ghana. Scott recommends