

West and West-Central Africa

Benin, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Cape Verde, Central African Republic, Chad, Côte d'Ivoire, Equatorial Guinea, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria, Sao Tome and Principe, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Togo

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Introduction

West and West-Central Africa includes some of the poorest countries in the world: of the 15 lowest ranking countries in the UN's Human Development Index, ten are in the region.¹ Several factors contribute to the persistence of regional poverty, and corruption is definitely one of them. Oil and gas have brought wealth to some in Nigeria, and both Equatorial Guinea and Chad are on the threshold of similar bonanzas. But the oil industry has historically provided opportunities for corruption on a massive scale, and the diamond wealth of Sierra Leone has nurtured conflict and corruption both there and in bordering countries.

Since independence from colonial rule in the 1960s, periods of dictatorship have alternated with military rule and one-party regimes, all of which have embedded corruption deep in political systems. Most countries have also seen periods of democracy, and recent years have witnessed a number of transitions to multi-party politics, frequently at the behest of international donors. Such transitions have exposed governments to greater public scrutiny. Democracy was restored in the regional 'superpower' Nigeria with the election of Olusegun Obasanjo as President in 1999. Recent elections in Ghana and Senegal offer further hope of a sustainable democratic future for the region.

A military coup and civil unrest in Côte d'Ivoire, previously an island of political stability and comparative wealth, shows how quickly change can come. In the volatile countries of Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone, a developing regional conflict has resulted in the displacement of hundreds of thousands of refugees. Many countries in the region are currently suffering from some form of military conflict, either with other countries or with rebel groups within their own borders – further reducing the funds available for spending on much-needed public services.

As democracy develops in some countries, civil society is beginning to establish itself. But the balance of power remains heavily weighted in favour of gov-

ernments. With limited independence for judiciaries, the strength of the fight against corruption is largely determined by political will.

News review

President Obasanjo has not had an easy ride since he made anti-corruption measures the centrepiece of his administration on coming to power. While he has pushed his reform programme forward, the pace of change has been slow, which was perhaps inevitable in a country where corruption is so deeply embedded. It took over a year for the legislature to pass Nigeria's Anti-Corruption Act, and the Anti-Corruption Commission it was intended to establish was only sworn in at the end of September 2000. Observers suspected that the delay was linked to a series of corruption scandals that broke out in the legislature. The most prominent was the impeachment in August 2000 of Senate President Chuba Okadigbo, who was alleged to have misused public funds.²

Much of the Nigerian government's initial work in fighting corruption has addressed the legacy of former dictator General Sani Abacha. The Obasanjo administration views one of its major tasks as retrieving the billions of dollars embezzled by Abacha and deposited in overseas banks in his five-year reign.³ The government has tried to enlist the support of financial institutions, but has so far had only partial success in reclaiming the funds.⁴ Repatriation of the wealth is a subject of keen interest to the Nigerian public.

In Senegal, the victory of Abdoulaye Wade in the presidential election of March 2000, and the subsequent success of his *Sopi* ('Change') coalition in the legislative elections in April 2001, brought an end to 40 years of rule by the Socialist Party of Senegal. Evidence is now being revealed of corruption links between major state-owned enterprises and the long-running administration of former president Abdou Diouf. In March 2001, the former manager of the National Railway Company of Senegal – who is also a prominent opposition politician – was arrested, accused of the mismanagement of public funds.⁵

Former president of Mali Moussa Traoré and several of his associates recently stood trial for 'economic crimes'. Traoré was accused of misappropriating 2 billion CFA francs (US \$2.6 million).⁶ Investigations are also continuing into the misuse of funds belonging to pension fund Caisse des Retraites du Mali (CRM). Those under investigation include Blaise Sangharé, CRM's former director and now head of a political party.⁷

The Chief Justice of Niger's Supreme Court denounced political parties for non-compliance with financial disclosure laws. According to the judge, only eight of Niger's 30 political parties submitted the required financial statements to the

Court's accounting office, and the statements that were submitted did not fulfil all the financial disclosure obligations the law demands.⁸

Burkina Faso suffered critical damage to its international standing following UN accusations in December 2000 that it was involved in smuggling weapons to rebels in Sierra Leone and Angola and exporting conflict diamonds, collected by the Revolutionary United Front (RUF).⁹

Sierra Leone is still suffering from a civil war between government forces and RUF rebels, backed by Liberia's President Charles Taylor. Although the elected government enjoys widespread support at home and abroad, it also faces criticism because of corruption. Permanent Secretary Soloku Bockarie in the Ministry of Education was sentenced to seven years' imprisonment after he was found guilty of larceny and corruption.¹⁰ In response, the Minister of Justice and Attorney General Solomon Berewa formed a Corruption Prevention Unit, attached to the President's Office.¹¹

'If you want to do business in Liberia,' reported a US newspaper, quoting a local entrepreneur, 'you do business with Taylor.'¹² In January 2001, President Taylor invited the legislature to approve the Strategic Commodities Act, effectively giving him exclusive rights over all of Liberia's natural resources. The opposition described the Act as 'theft by legislation'.¹³ In May 2001 the UN imposed sanctions on Liberia because of its role in the Sierra Leone conflict and illegal diamond trading, adding to an existing embargo on arms sales to the country.¹⁴

When the then military leader of Côte d'Ivoire, General Robert Guei, faced defeat in the presidential election in October 2000, he attempted to halt it by stopping the count. But he was forced from power when hundreds of thousands of Ivoirians took to the streets. Guei had justified his coup in December 1999 in part because of rampant corruption in the administration of former president Henri Konan Bedie. Ivoirians made it clear that Guei was not providing any solutions.¹⁵ Côte d'Ivoire's current president, Laurent Gbagbo, faces the immediate challenge of reconciling his government with voters in the north, whose preferred candidate, Alassane Ouattara, was prevented from standing by trumped-up allegations about his citizenship. The media have already accused ministers in the new government of corruption.¹⁶

In Ghana, intervention by the media played an important role in ensuring that the presidential election in December 2000 was relatively free and fair. President John Kufuor's inaugural address, which marked an end to 19 years of rule by Jerry Rawlings, announced a policy of 'zero tolerance' of corruption. Though the new government acted quickly to prevent outgoing ministers and officials from stealing public assets, including official cars, it has yet to articulate a firm anti-corruption strategy.¹⁷

The democratic system in Benin has been regarded as one of the better established in West Africa, but this reputation was shaken in the presidential election of March 2001. The leading opposition candidate pulled out of a second round of voting, accusing the government of electoral fraud. The second round concluded with a choice between President Mathieu Kerekou and a senior minister in his own government.

President Paul Biya of Cameroon, increasingly under pressure over alleged human rights abuses,¹⁸ announced that he would prioritise the fight against corruption. A national Anti-Corruption Observatory was established in January 2000, and the government went on to establish Observatories within specific ministries. Cases have been uncovered – including fraud within the Education Ministry – but some questioned how far-reaching the Observatories will actually be.¹⁹

Equatorial Guinea has enjoyed dramatic financial advantages since oil production commenced in 1996, but the extent of corruption was such that President Teodoro Obiang Nguema forced the Prime Minister and his cabinet to resign in February 2001.²⁰ The President of the Supreme Court and the President of the Constitutional Court were also dismissed after a special anti-corruption commission exposed the embezzlement of funds in the judiciary.²¹ The new prime minister, Candido Muatetema Rivas, claimed that his priority was fighting corruption.²²

Inter-governmental groupings in the region have taken steps during 2000–01 to strengthen the campaign against corruption. In June 2000, the eight member Economic and Monetary Union of West Africa (UEMOA) signed a Transparency Code for the Management of Public Finances, calling for a ‘qualitative change’ in the conduct of public finances.²³ In November 2000, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) held the first meeting of a new Inter-Governmental Action Group against Money Laundering in Dakar.²⁴ As part of the growing regional concern with corruption, attorney generals and ministers of justice of ECOWAS countries issued the Accra Declaration on Collaborating against Corruption in May 2001. Member states began to develop a Community Protocol on Corruption and called for international assistance in the recovery of national wealth that had been stolen and deposited abroad.²⁵

Anti-corruption campaigns: rhetoric and reality

Anti-corruption campaigns have been launched both by newly elected governments – as in Ghana, Nigeria and Senegal – and by governments trying to improve their images in advance of elections, as in Togo. Pressured in some instances by the international community and popular protest, governments in the region have established anti-corruption institutions as part of this.

Cameroon's anti-corruption campaign: a paper tiger?

Cameroon's appearance at the bottom of a ranking of 99 countries in Transparency International's 1999 Corruption Perceptions Index dealt a severe blow to domestic and international confidence in the nation's political process. But it still took two years for the government to realise that its posture of indifference to rampant corruption in the country was doing no favours for Cameroon's reputation.

Goaded by threats from the World Bank and the IMF that they would withdraw support for the economic recovery programme if nothing was done, the government reluctantly joined the anti-corruption bandwagon. The measures Cameroon took in 2000–01 marked a definite step forward, although they are still far from sufficient.

The creation of a national Anti-Corruption Observatory seemed to offer the most potential. The Observatory is responsible for monitoring the measures taken in the government's anti-corruption programme.

While the 15-member body served to raise awareness about corruption issues among government officials, its work seems far from convincing one year down the line. Despite meeting several times at Prime Minister Peter Mafany Musonge's office, little concrete action has been taken.

The Finance, Education and Transport Ministries set up their own anti-corruption observatories to complement the national body. Several months after their creation, they too are short on achievement, although the Finance and Education Ministries took punitive measures against certain officials.

Meanwhile, Cameroon's recent qualification for debt relief under the HIPC Initiative is expected to help it secure CFA Fr 218 billion (about US \$300 million) from the Bretton Woods institutions over the next three years. This sum is earmarked for construction of schools, hospitals, roads and other public amenities. The funds will be deposited in an account at the Bank of Central African States. In a bid to ensure transparency in the management of the money, a 19-member consultative committee was appointed to examine all expenditure from the account. At the head of the committee is Minister of Finance Michel Meva'a Meboutou, assisted by a representative from civil society.

In spite of the new Observatories and this attempt to prevent a windfall in donor money from going astray, the fight against corruption is far from over in Cameroon. The campaign has inevitably been criticised by some as a paper tiger. The critical steps of forcing officials to declare their assets and prosecuting those guilty of corruption have still to be taken. Some fear that the government lacks the political will to commit itself this far.

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Creating an institution, however, does not ensure its effectiveness. According to Mike Stevens, a World Bank specialist in public sector reform, far from lacking institutions to fight corruption, many countries in the region actually have too many.²⁶ The greatest challenge for new governments is to transform existing institutions with inherited weaknesses before vested interests 'dig in'. A key issue in several countries, therefore, is whether new governments should declare an amnesty for those who acted corruptly under previous regimes.

With the political and donor benefits that accrue to governments that are perceived to be fighting corruption, many anti-corruption crackdowns in the

region are unfortunately little more than public relations exercises. Anti-corruption efforts must be backed by political will if they are to stand any chance of proving effective. In assessing their merit, the challenge is to distinguish between substantive reform and rhetoric.

In Mali, the commitment of President Alpha Oumar Konaré is seen to be behind early successes in an anti-corruption campaign launched in 1999.²⁷ The President, who is in his last term and therefore not responding to the pressure of re-election, is personally involved. The anti-corruption commission has issued a

The challenge in assessing anti-corruption efforts is to distinguish between substantive reform and rhetoric.

series of reports that reveal embezzlement within state-owned enterprises and other public bodies, and a number of senior officials have been arrested.

Political will is not in doubt in Nigeria, where President Obasanjo has made fighting corruption a priority, but it is too early to judge the effectiveness of his efforts. Critics complain that Obasanjo has made too little headway. After a year's delay, the

Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Commission came into being in late 2000. Its Secretary P. E. Odili called for patience. The Commission will end its training programme, which includes legal courses for selected judges in every high court in the country, by the end of 2001.²⁸

In Benin, President Kerekou made the 'moralisation' of public life a key element in his political programme, though there is little evidence that action has been taken in prominent corruption cases. However following his re-election in March 2001, the President retained Minister of Finance Abdoulaye Bio-Tchané, who has a strong record on fighting corruption in public finance.²⁹

Observers still need to be convinced that President Gnassingbé Eyadéma has turned over a new leaf in Togo. Eyadéma's 34-year rule, strongly criticised by human rights activists, saw aid disbursement blocked by donors because of lack of progress with democratisation. In January 2001, President Eyadéma acknowledged the negative impact of corruption. Stressing that corruption had become a real 'flaw for the country's economy', he made a strong statement against graft and embezzlement and pledged to fight them. The year 2001, he said in January, 'will be the year of an overall action against corruption, economic sabotage, mismanagement and permissiveness'.³⁰ But few concrete steps have been taken.³¹

After taking office in Senegal in April 2000, President Abdoulaye Wade also declared his determination to combat corruption on a number of occasions. In particular he announced an audit of all state-owned companies and other institutions involved in managing public funds.³² Subsequently, at a meeting in January 2001 organised by Forum Civil, the Senegalese chapter of Transparency Inter-

national, President Wade discussed with NGOs the building of a ‘national coalition’ against corruption.

Despite these and other gestures, some of his initiatives have been queried by critics, who note the absence of action in cases of corruption or mismanagement where there is no political benefit to the government. In March 2001, Mbaye Diouf, former manager of the National Railway Company of Senegal and a prominent politician in the opposition Socialist Party, was arrested for alleged mismanagement of public funds – one month before legislative elections were due.³³ In a number of cases in which members of the former ruling party, accused in auditors’ reports of misappropriation or embezzlement, joined Wade’s Senegalese Democratic Party, legal proceedings were not pursued. Most notably former president of the Senate Abdoulaye Diack, now an active supporter of President Wade, confessed in April 2001 to the misappropriation of public funds while the Socialist Party to which he belonged was in power. No action was taken against him.³⁴ Observers, including Forum Civil, called on the government to avoid any political discrimination in acting on the results of the audits.

Across the region, it is clear that the rhetoric of fighting corruption has to a greater or lesser extent been adopted by political leaders. However, many countries have yet to see firm action in rooting out corrupt officials or the establishment of strong anti-corruption institutions.

Transforming the public sector

‘To many Africans, public institutions ... are synonymous with poor quality services, corruption and inefficiency,’ reported a World Bank study in June 2000.³⁵ Numerous factors have been identified as encouraging corruption within the region’s public administrations: over-centralisation of power, lack of media freedom to expose scandals, the impunity of well-connected officials, absence of transparency in public fund management, clientilism and low salaries. In authoritarian regimes, ‘control systems and counter-powers are precarious because there is no culture allowing the use of expertise or freedom of expression’, according to Jean Cartier-Bresson, who argued that ‘bad governance is at the root of the development of corruption’.³⁶

Reform programmes supported by the World Bank, the UNDP and other donors focus on improving the efficiency, accountability and transparency of public services, while reducing the scale of public sector activity through privatisation. Such efforts are nothing new: they have been the focus of structural adjustment programmes since the 1980s. But donors continue to prioritise actions in these sectors with growing attention to corruption. While the need for reform is

clear, often the programmes themselves have been as controversial as their effectiveness has been questionable.³⁷

As one step in the process of rationalising public services, a number of governments have carried out manpower audits with striking findings. In Nigeria, the Accountant General reported in April 2001, following a manpower verification exercise, that the government had discovered 40,000 staff on the payroll who were no longer employed.³⁸ The same fraud is replicated elsewhere in West and West-Central Africa. In February 2001, Cameroon's Civil Service Ministry revealed that monthly salaries were paid to 7,000 personnel who had no official function, or who had left their posts years before.³⁹ In Equatorial Guinea, the anti-corruption commission revealed in December 2000 that more than 2,100 civil servants on the payroll did not exist, mostly within the Defence and Education Ministries.⁴⁰ The continuing need for cleaning up the civil service is clear.

The drive to improve transparency in public administration has been adopted as a policy by the African Development Bank, which is working to promote good governance in borrowing countries. In June 2000, the Economic and Monetary Union of West Africa (UEMOA) adopted a Transparency Code for the Management of Public Finances at a meeting in Dakar.⁴¹ The finance ministers who signed the document acknowledged the weakness of their financial management systems and called for 'qualitative change' to achieve 'transparency and better management of public funds'. The code includes guidelines for greater transparency in budget procedures, more clearly defined responsibilities within administrations, the implementation of adequate judicial frameworks and other mechanisms for the monitoring of public funds. In addition, UEMOA recommended measures such as enhancing the training of public service personnel and wider dissemination of reliable information about how state monies are allocated.⁴²

Privatisation

A key aspect of the dynamic to transform public services is privatisation. The push to privatise has received fresh momentum from a growing awareness that the inflow of foreign capital and improvements to services may depend on the elimination of public sector monopolies. The problems caused by these monopolies are evident throughout the region. Investigations by Mali's anti-corruption commission last year revealed corruption across a swathe of state-owned enterprises. One of the most prominent led to the conviction in May 2001 of the former CEO of the Société des Télécommunications du Mali, one of the country's largest corporations. He was sentenced to two and a half years' imprisonment and a large fine.⁴³

Privatisation featured strongly in the programme outlined by President Obasanjo of Nigeria after coming to office in 1999. A National Council of Privati-

sation (NCP) was established and a series of sectoral steering committees were formed in September 2000.⁴⁴ The NCP, whose board includes senior ministers and the Governor of the Central Bank, is slated to see through the divestiture of a large number of state-owned enterprises – from oil marketing and cement production, to banking and insurance.

However, privatisation processes – not just in Nigeria – are fraught with opportunities for cronyism. In Benin, the privatisation of the petrol-marketing monopoly SONACOP, one of the largest enterprises in the country, was the focus of attention for the domestic media and the political opposition.⁴⁵ On completion, control of the company was handed to Séfou Fagbohoun, a close associate of the President. In July 2000, the Minister of Finance took the newly privatised entity to court over financial improprieties during the bidding process.⁴⁶

International pressure for change

Multilateral and bilateral donors play a central role in pressing for governance reform in West and West-Central Africa. While grants and loans have for years been conditional on the adoption of structural adjustment programmes and the downsizing of civil services, donor concerns at how their funds are disbursed have led to a new interest in methods of curbing corruption.

In June 2000, the EU signed a new agreement in Cotonou governing its trade and aid relations with the African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) group of states. This agreement goes further than its predecessor, the Lomé Convention, in targeting inadequate governance and serious corruption as grounds for blocking aid. The EU invoked the anti-corruption clause in the new agreement for the first time in June 2001 when it declared its wish to open consultations with the government of Liberia.⁴⁷ Even under the Lomé Convention, however, proven corruption could trigger a suspension: in 1999 the EU halted aid to Côte d'Ivoire following the embezzlement of US \$25 million, and funds remained frozen after the new government was formed in October 2000.⁴⁸

An influential new instrument, particularly in Western Africa, is the HIPC initiative, which provides debt relief to the world's most 'heavily indebted poor countries'. The criteria that a country needs to meet before becoming eligible under the initiative can include good governance, accountability for public funds and the adoption of a national anti-corruption strategy. Of 23 countries worldwide that have already reached 'decision point' under the HIPC initiative, 12 are in West and West-Central Africa – the most recent being Chad.⁴⁹ But there is considerable controversy as to whether the terms on which debt relief is granted are sufficient to prevent the corrupt use of the proceeds.

Some observers question the extent to which good governance is truly prioritised in World Bank programmes. One of the World Bank's most controversial decisions in the region was to provide a loan to help finance the construction of a US \$3.7 billion oil pipeline from Chad to the Cameroon coast. The project roused strong opposition from environmental activists. But the project also has a potential corruption dimension. The pipeline will bring Chad an estimated US \$100 million a year in revenue – a significant proportion of the government's current

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budget – as well as important transit fees to Cameroon.⁵⁰ Critics have questioned just how much of that revenue will result in improved public services in two of the poorest countries in the world.

The World Bank defended its decision in June 2000 when it said it had devised a unique programme of controls in Chad and Cameroon to prevent the misappropriation of both loan finance and proceeds from future

oil exports. Its Africa spokesman Robert Calderisi said: 'There is no doubt there is a high risk of misuse of funds and we have constructed the arrangements, particularly in Chad, to insure as much as possible against that. Approval is only the first step in a long journey where all kinds of oversight are going to be exercised.'⁵¹ The Chad government is committed to using 80 per cent of oil revenues on health, education and other social projects. However, the World Bank may find it difficult to enforce commitments. Out of an initial US \$25 million to the Chad government, US \$4 million was reportedly diverted for the purchase of improved weaponry.⁵²

Critics of international pressure for good governance point to the role played by Western corporations and banks in fuelling corruption in the region. Speaking at the UN Millenium Summit in September 2000, Jerry Rawlings, then president of Ghana, attacked companies that pay bribes to win contracts and the banks that launder the proceeds of corruption. 'There will be less corruption in Africa if there is no place to hide the proceeds of corruption,' he said, 'or if the proceeds of corruption, once uncovered, are returned to their real owners, the people of Africa.'⁵³

Strengthening civil society

Power in West and West-Central Africa remains concentrated in the inner circles of governments, but some countries have seen a growth in civil society organisations and independent media since the spread of democracy in the 1990s. More voices have begun to emerge. Most are professionals or intellectuals in urban areas, while some operate from abroad. Their constituencies are found in the independent broadcast and print media, universities, churches and mosques.

Ghana's media: winning the day for the 2000 elections

After a dozen years of authoritarian control, Ghana's media was given a fresh start by the 1992 constitution. An entire chapter of this landmark document was devoted to guarantees of free speech and encouraging an independent media to act as a watchdog on government. That vision may finally have been realised in the elections of 2000.

Convincing allegations of unfairness tarnished the first election under the 1992 constitution. Opposition parties had less than four months in which to organise campaigns against a decade-old military regime, converted into a political party that appropriated state resources to pay for re-election. Representation in the state-owned media was heavily weighted in favour of the government.

In the years that followed, the private press began to flourish. A major step forward was the arrival of private radio in 1994 with the launch of the pirate station *Radio Eye*. Previously, the government insisted that the national technical broadcast capacity was limited and that use was restricted to the state media. Following the popularity of *Radio Eye*, the government was compelled to open radio and television to the private sector.

Though the governing party was returned to power in 1996, the elections were hotly contested with near-equal exposure provided for all presidential candidates by the increasingly assertive private media. Coverage of the campaigns, voter registration process and traditional party broadcasts, heightened interest and confidence in the electoral process as a legitimate means of political expression.

By the time of the 2000 elections, the stakes were high. President Jerry Rawlings had dominated politics for nearly 20 years. Completing two consecutive terms under the 1992 constitution made him ineligible to stand again. The leading candidates for both the

governing party and the opposition were largely untried personalities, fighting for the first time on a level field. The public perception was that the governing party would stop at nothing to retain power.

The media took centre stage. When the electoral roll was updated, showing more than ten million registered voters in a country of 18 million – of which 54 per cent is under 18 – the media led the nationwide protest. Forced to admit the existence of fraudulent names, the Electoral Commission cleaned up the register. The media continued to expose vote buying, the forgery of voter identification cards and the secret registration of voters.

They also provided a platform for informed debate throughout the electoral process in an environment where spin had always been king. News reports, analyses and interactive programmes in local languages and English brought politicians and the electorate together in a way never experienced before in Ghana's political history.

Voting took place on 7 and 28 December 2000. Radio stations monitored events, reported irregularities from polling stations and focused the attention of election officials on areas where there were procedural deficiencies. Results were announced from polling stations themselves in order to block further avenues for falsification.

On the second polling day, armed men drove through polling stations, ostensibly to maintain order. Incidents of voter intimidation, shots being fired and the destruction of ballot boxes were reported. But radio stations encouraged voters not to be intimidated and urged the security forces to uphold their constitutional duty to protect the citizenry.

The election was saved. The opposition won a relatively free contest against an incumbent perceived to be almost unbeatable. The role of a free media in helping this to happen will always be remembered.

TI-Ghana

The trend should not be exaggerated. Where civil society is beginning to emerge, it does so from a particularly low quantitative base. Across the region, civil society groups are poorly mobilised and have little influence on state action, a status compounded by the presence of conflict, low rates of literacy and the tight rein that governments keep on independent radio and television. Senegal is a rare exception, while Nigeria's media and NGO community has also shown itself to be vigorous and varied.

Religious groups can provide a sturdy platform from which to rally popular disenchantment with existing standards of governance in the region. Both Islamic and Christian groups have sent clear messages condemning corruption, although there is wide variation in the degree to which religious groups are prepared to occupy a political space. Two conferences of the Federation of Christian Councils in West Africa, held in Ghana during the last year, prioritised corruption, and the Roman Catholic church in Cameroon said the problem was destroying the economy and people's consciences.⁵⁴ The President of the Seventh-Day Adventist Church in Nigeria decried the high level of corruption in government circles, following the recent Senate scandal.⁵⁵ Nigeria's Catholic church attacked the 'tidal wave' of corruption in the country.⁵⁶

NGOs with a governance focus are spreading, mirroring the gradual strengthening of civil society as a whole. This development also reflects the efforts of international donors to find partner organisations outside government. NGO reliance on external support brings further dangers, however, as civil society organisations are often seen by politicians as a questionable form of non-parliamentary opposition.

Soji Apampa of the Nigerian NGO Integrity argued that NGOs that formerly focused on human rights or freedom of expression under military dictatorships, turned to the issue of good governance when the 'freedom fight' was won.⁵⁷ The shift reflected the new priorities of donors, he said. In Nigeria, NGOs are actively engaged in the fight against corruption. Under the auspices of the Nigerian chapter of Transparency International, an NGO conference was held in Lagos in May 2001 that explored how new NGOs in the anti-corruption fight might work together as a broad coalition.

In Burkina Faso, there is much less scope for civil society action, though there is a specialist anti-corruption NGO, REN-LAC. Describing the state of affairs in the country, Halidou Ouédraogo, from human rights group Union Inter-africain des Droits de l'Homme, confirmed Soji Apampa's remarks: 'At this time we still have basic problems with the system of President Blaise Compaoré, whose policies become more unpredictable and authoritarian. When we have passed this stage, we too will start campaigns for good governance.'⁵⁸

Conclusion

International surveys suggest that West and West-Central Africa may include some of the most corrupt political systems in the world, but political changes over the last year offer some glimmer of hope. With a number of recent transitions to democracy, mechanisms for public accountability are becoming stronger and governments have launched anti-corruption campaigns, though these may be little more than public relations exercises in certain cases.

Public sector reform and privatisation have also moved up on the agenda, promising some improvement in transparency and accountability. However some of the worst corruption cases during the past year were actually facilitated by the process of privatisation.

International donors have played an important role in these developments in the region, but critics cast doubt on how far donors' funding decisions are being driven by a concern to improve governance.

Civil society is gradually gathering some momentum, though it remains unclear how its activities can be incorporated within decision-making processes. Partnerships between civil society and international institutions are growing, but governments remain wary of sharing decision-making and information.

Corruption remains deeply ingrained. Even where official anti-corruption campaigns prove sincere, and civil society becomes still stronger, corruption will continue to take a heavy toll on the poorest. And there is no guarantee that reforms will run smoothly, above all when conflict in Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone, combined with the change of regime in Côte d'Ivoire, accentuate the region's underlying volatility.

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