

# Examining the Root Causes and Consequences of Public Sector Corruption in Liberia

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**Abstract:** *This article provides a detailed exploration of the root causes and consequences of public sector corruption in Liberia. It aims to shed light on the systemic weaknesses that contribute to corruption within the public sector, including inadequate institutional capacity, ineffective regulatory frameworks, and a culture of impunity. By uncovering these underlying issues, the article seeks to highlight the structural vulnerabilities that perpetuate corruption and hinder efforts to promote transparency and accountability in governance. Furthermore, the article delves into the wide-ranging consequences of public sector corruption in Liberia, examining its detrimental effects on public trust, economic development, and social equity. By analyzing these consequences, the article emphasizes the urgent need to address corruption to foster sustainable development and social progress in the country. Through this comprehensive examination, the article aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of the complexities surrounding public sector corruption in Liberia. By shedding light on the root causes and consequences of corruption, the article seeks to inform discussions, policies, and initiatives aimed at combating corruption and promoting good governance. Ultimately, it is expected to serve as a valuable resource for stakeholders, policymakers, and advocates working towards the eradication of corruption and the advancement of transparent, accountable, and ethical governance in Liberia.*

## 1. Introduction:

Public sector corruption has remained an enduring and multifaceted challenge in Liberia, exerting detrimental effects on governance, economic development, and societal well-being (World Bank, 2019). The prevalence of corrupt practices within our public sector has raised serious concerns and has hindered our efforts to promote transparency, accountability, and sustainable development. Therefore, it is imperative to conduct a comprehensive examination of the root causes and consequences of public sector corruption in Liberia to gain a nuanced understanding of this critical issue.

Within our country, systemic weaknesses within institutional frameworks, combined with a lack of transparency and accountability, have been identified as key drivers of corruption (Transparency international, 2020). Inadequate institutional capacity, lack of resources, and ineffective regulatory mechanisms has created an environment conducive to malfeasance, undermining the integrity of public institutions and impeding progress towards good governance. The lack of effective oversight and enforcement mechanisms has further exacerbated the problem, allowing corrupt practices to persist unchecked. By shedding light on these underlying factors, I aim to provide insights into the structural vulnerabilities that sustain corruption, offering a foundation for targeted interventions and reforms.

Furthermore, the ramifications of public sector corruption extend far beyond the realm of governance, permeating various facets of Liberian society. The erosion of public trust, the distortion of economic incentives, and the perpetuation of social inequality are among the consequential impacts of corruption that demand attention (Human right watch, 2010). The adverse effects of corruption on public welfare, economic stability, and social cohesion underscore the urgency of addressing this pervasive issue as an impediment to Liberia's development trajectory. By delving into the intricate dynamics of public sector corruption in Liberia, I aim to inform discussions, policies, and initiatives aimed at combatting corruption and fostering ethical governance (UNDP, 2020). Through a nuanced understanding of the root causes and consequences of corruption, this article endeavors to serve as a valuable resource for stakeholders, policymakers, and advocates striving to advance transparent, accountable, and ethical governance in Liberia.

## 2. Conceptual Review

### 2.1 Corruption

Corruption can be defined as the misuse of public or private office for personal gain, where individuals or organizations abuse their entrusted power for illicit purposes, such as bribery, embezzlement, fraud, or favoritism, thereby undermining the integrity of institutions and processes (Transparency International, 2020).

### 2.2 Transparency

Transparency refers to the accessibility and openness of information related to a country's debt and financial obligations. This includes the disclosure of details about the borrowing and lending activities of governments, public institutions, and other entities involved in debt transactions. (Transparency international 2020)

## 3. Literature Review

The current state of corruption in Liberia presents significant challenges, as evidenced by various indicators. Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index consistently ranks Liberia low, with a score of 28 out of 100 in 2021, reflecting a situation of pervasive corruption (Transparency International, 2020). Similarly, the Mo Ibrahim Index of African Governance highlights the issue of corruption in Liberia, with the most recent report identifying corruption as a significant governance challenge (Mo Ibrahim Foundation, 2022). Furthermore, the World Bank's Worldwide Governance Indicators indicate challenges in governance and control of corruption in Liberia, with the control of corruption indicator reflecting the extent to which public power is exercised for private gain (World Bank, 2019).

Corruption has had far-reaching effects on justice, economic development, and the delivery of public services in Liberia. In the justice sector, corruption has undermined the rule of law, eroded public trust in the judiciary, and impeded access to fair and impartial legal processes (World Bank, 2019). Economically, corruption has hindered investment, economic growth, and the efficient allocation of resources, contributing to income inequality and poverty (Human right watch, 2010). Corruption has also led to inefficiencies, reduced quality of services, and unequal access to essential services such as healthcare, education, and infrastructure, further eroding public trust in government institutions (Transparency international, 2020).

In West Africa, Liberia's position regarding corruption has been a significant concern, impacting regional stability and development efforts (Moh Ibrahim index, 2022). Within the broader African context, Liberia's struggle with corruption has contributed to governance challenges and hindered progress in achieving sustainable development goals (Transparency International, 2020). On a global scale, Liberia's position with regard to corruption places it among the countries facing significant governance and transparency challenges, impacting international aid and investment, as well as the country's standing in global governance and development initiatives (Transparency International,2020). The Afrobarometer, known for its robust research on public opinion and attitudes in Africa, has also highlighted the prevalence and impact of corruption in Liberia, providing insights into citizen perceptions of corruption, governance, and accountability (Afrobarometer, n.d.).

### 3.1 Root causes of Public sector Corruption in Liberia

#### 3.1.1 Weak Institutional Framework

The weak institutional framework in Liberia's public sector has been a significant contributor to corruption. Weak regulatory environments and oversight mechanisms, as reported by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), have created an environment conducive to the flourishing of corrupt practices (UNDP, 2019). This aligns with the broader understanding that inadequate regulatory structures provide fertile ground for corrupt activities to thrive, undermining the integrity of public institutions and fostering an environment of impunity (Kaufmann & Vicente, 2011).

Furthermore, the UNDP report identifies weak governance structures, inadequate institutional capacity, and limited resources as key factors that have hindered the effective implementation of anti-corruption measures in Liberia. This has resulted in a lack of capacity and resources for monitoring and enforcing regulations, ultimately contributing to an inefficient state and creating opportunities for corrupt activities to go undetected and unchecked (UNDP, 2019). This underscores the critical link between institutional capacity

and corruption, as deficiencies in governance structures and resources can compromise the state's ability to combat corrupt practices effectively (Olken, 2006). The report also highlights the challenges arising from inadequate training and expertise among public officials responsible for oversight and enforcement. Insufficient capacity and expertise in these areas can significantly impede the ability of regulatory and oversight agencies to fulfill their mandates, perpetuating vulnerabilities to corrupt influences (UNDP, 2019). This underscores the importance of investing in human capital and building the necessary skills and competencies to strengthen anti-corruption efforts within public institutions (Klitgaard, 1988). Weak institutional frameworks which is one of the major causes that flourish corruption in the public sector of Liberia, is an age old problem that has been in existence from time in memory. There is no supporting regulatory framework to combat corruption, which may lead to undermining the rules of law of the country and the leader may not be accountable to their people.

Moreover, the lack of resources allocated to regulatory and oversight agencies has further undermined their capacity to effectively discharge their duties and confront corruption within the state's institutions (UNDP, 2019). This aligns with the understanding that resource constraints can severely limit the effectiveness of anti-corruption initiatives, hindering the ability of regulatory bodies to monitor, investigate, and prosecute corrupt activities (Abbink & Serra, 2014).

### **3.1.2 Lack of Transparency and Accountability**

The lack of transparency and accountability within Liberia's public sector has been extensively documented in various reports. The Global Integrity Report has highlighted opaque decision-making processes and financial transactions as key contributors to corruption, including issues such as embezzlement of funds and bribery (Global Integrity, 2018). This underscores the critical role of transparency in preventing corrupt activities, as opaque processes provide fertile ground for malfeasance and undermine public trust in the integrity of public institutions (Mauro, 1998).

Moreover, the Global Integrity Report also noted that limited access to information and weak whistleblower protection mechanisms have hindered citizens from detecting and disclosing corrupt activities within Liberia's public sector. This lack of transparency and protection for those who report wrongdoing not only perpetuates a culture of impunity but also discourages individuals from coming forward to expose corruption, further entrenching its presence within the public sector (Global Integrity, 2018). This aligns with the understanding that effective whistleblower protection and access to information are crucial components of anti-corruption efforts, as they empower individuals to report misconduct without fear of retaliation and hold public officials accountable (World Bank, 2019). Transparency and accountability is a night mere in the public sector of Liberia, officials of government are not transparent and accountable to the people they lead. According to transparency international Liberia have (28 out of 100) reflecting a massive corruption within the public sector of Liberia. There is a policy in Liberia that flourish corruption called brown envelope, most of the laws and bills are pass in the public sector using the brown envelope policy. The brown envelope policy allow officials of government to be paid to affix their signature on documents that may be pass in to law without the consent of the ordinary people.

The lack of transparency and accountability in the public sector has broader implications for governance and development. Transparency and accountability are essential for fostering public trust, attracting investment, and promoting economic growth (Treisman, 2000). By contrast, opacity and unchecked corruption can deter both domestic and foreign investment, undermine the efficient allocation of resources, and erode public confidence in the government's ability to deliver essential services (Kaufmann, 2005).

### **3.1.3 Political Interference**

Political interference in the operations of public institutions has been identified as a significant driver of corruption in Liberia. A study by the International Crisis Group (ICG) emphasized that when political figures exert undue influence over administrative processes, appointments, and resource allocation, it undermines the independence and integrity of public institutions (ICG, 2020). This aligns with the broader understanding that political interference can compromise the merit-based selection of qualified personnel and distort the allocation of resources, ultimately eroding the effectiveness and credibility of public institutions (Bardhan & Mookherjee, 2000). Political interference has contributed to the politicization of public institutions, leading to the appointment of unqualified individuals and the mismanagement of public resources. This politicization not only undermines the professionalism and competence of public institutions but also fosters a culture of patronage and cronyism, where loyalty to political figures outweighs merit and competence in appointments and decision-making processes (ICG, 2020). Such practices not only diminish the quality of governance but also create opportunities for corrupt activities to thrive, as individuals appointed based on political connections may prioritize personal interests over the public good (Klitgaard, 1988).

The politicization of public institutions can also compromise their ability to deliver essential services and uphold the rule of law. When appointments and resource allocation are influenced by political considerations rather than professional merit, it can lead to inefficiency, mismanagement, and a lack of accountability within public institutions (Treisman, 2000). This, in turn, undermines

public trust and confidence in the government's ability to serve the interests of the citizens and uphold the principles of good governance (Bauhr & Grimes, 2017).

### **3.2 Consequences of Public Sector Corruption in Liberia**

#### **3.2.1 Economic Impact**

The culture of corruption associated with the Liberian government has indeed had a profound impact on the economic well-being of its citizens. The adverse effects of corruption extend beyond the loss of government revenue and mismanagement of public resources. In fact, corruption has been identified as a significant barrier to economic growth and development in Liberia. Studies have shown that the prevalence of corruption in the public sector has led to a reduction in foreign investment, as potential investors are deterred by the risks associated with operating in an environment characterized by corrupt practices and lack of transparency (World Bank, 2019). The consequences of reduced foreign investment are far-reaching, as they impede private sector growth and limit job creation opportunities. This, in turn, exacerbates unemployment and hampers the overall economic prospects for the country's citizens. Additionally, the misallocation of public funds due to corruption has a direct impact on the delivery of essential public services. As funds intended for vital infrastructure projects, healthcare, education, and social welfare programs are diverted for personal gain, the quality and accessibility of these services are compromised, further exacerbating socio-economic disparities and hindering poverty alleviation efforts (Transparency International, 2020).

Furthermore, the erosion of the rule of law resulting from widespread corruption undermines the confidence of both domestic and international stakeholders in the country's governance and legal framework. This lack of confidence can further deter investment and impede economic growth, as a robust legal and regulatory environment is essential for fostering business confidence and attracting investment (Human right watch, 2010).

#### **3.2.2 Social Impact**

The social impact of public sector corruption in Liberia cannot be overstated. The diversion of public funds away from essential services such as healthcare, education, and infrastructure has had far-reaching and detrimental effects on the well-being of the population, particularly the most vulnerable and marginalized communities (World Bank, 2019). The consequences of corruption on essential social services are profound. The misallocation of resources due to corrupt practices has perpetuated poverty and hindered efforts to alleviate socio-economic disparities. For instance, the lack of investment in quality education and healthcare resulting from corruption has limited access to essential services for many Liberians, particularly those in rural and underserved areas. This has not only impeded individual opportunities for advancement but has also hindered the overall social development of the country (Transparency International, 2020).

Moreover, the impact of corruption on infrastructure development has had a direct effect on the daily lives of citizens. Inadequate infrastructure, resulting from the mismanagement of public resources, has hindered access to basic amenities such as clean water, electricity, and transportation, particularly in remote areas. This lack of access further exacerbates social inequalities and limits opportunities for economic and social advancement, particularly for those living in poverty (World Bank, 2019).

The World Bank (2019) highlights that the social consequences of corruption in Liberia are not only detrimental in the present but also have long-term implications for the country's social development and the well-being of its citizens. Addressing corruption in the public sector is therefore crucial not only for improving governance but also for fostering social development, reducing poverty, and promoting equality of opportunity for all Liberians.

Efforts to combat corruption and ensure the effective allocation of resources to essential social services are essential for addressing these challenges and fostering a more equitable and prosperous society for all Liberians.

#### **3.2.3 Political Impact**

Public sector corruption in Liberia has not only had economic and social implications but also far-reaching political consequences. The erosion of public trust in government institutions due to corrupt practices has significantly undermined the legitimacy of the government and democratic processes (Transparency International, 2020). When citizens perceive that their government is rife with corruption, it leads to a breakdown in trust and confidence in the ability of the government to serve the best interests of the people. This erosion of trust can have profound implications for the stability and effectiveness of the political system.

Furthermore, corruption has contributed to a lack of confidence in the rule of law and the justice system, leading to a breakdown in the social contract between the government and its citizens (World Bank, 2019). When the public perceives that the legal and justice systems are compromised by corruption, it undermines the fundamental principles of fairness, equality, and justice upon which a functioning democracy depends. This can lead to widespread disillusionment with the political system and a loss of faith in the ability of the government to uphold the rule of law.

Moreover, corruption has been linked to political instability, as it can fuel social unrest, undermine the credibility of political leaders, and weaken the overall governance of the country (World Bank, 2019). When corruption is pervasive in the public sector, it can lead to widespread dissatisfaction among the population, leading to protests, demonstrations, and other forms of social unrest. This can create a volatile political environment, making it difficult for the government to effectively address the needs of its citizens and maintain stability. The World Bank (2019) emphasizes that the political implications of corruption in Liberia are significant, as they can undermine the foundations of democratic governance and political stability. Addressing corruption in the public sector is therefore crucial for rebuilding public trust, strengthening democratic institutions, and promoting political stability in the country.

Addressing corruption is essential for restoring faith in the government, strengthening democratic institutions, and fostering a stable and effective political system for the benefit of all Liberians.

### **3.3 Efforts to combat Public Sector Corruption in Liberia**

#### **3.3.1 Legal and Regulatory Frameworks**

The legal and regulatory framework in Liberia includes the passage of the Anti-Corruption Act of 2008, which established the Liberia Anti-Corruption Commission (LACC) as an independent agency responsible for investigating and prosecuting cases of corruption. The LACC has the authority to probe public officials, including the President, Vice President, and members of the Legislature, and has been instrumental in holding accountable those involved in corrupt practices (Liberia Anti-Corruption Commission, n.d.). The establishment of the Anti-Corruption Act and the LACC represents a significant step in the fight against corruption in Liberia. By creating an independent body with the power to investigate and prosecute corruption cases, the government has demonstrated its commitment to addressing the issue at the highest levels of governance. This is essential for promoting transparency, accountability, and the rule of law in the public sector.

Furthermore, the LACC's authority to investigate and hold public officials accountable, including high-ranking government officials, is crucial for ensuring that no one is above the law when it comes to combating corruption. This sends a strong message that corrupt practices will not be tolerated, regardless of an individual's position or influence within the government.

The Liberia Anti-Corruption Commission (n.d.) emphasizes that the establishment of the LACC and the passage of the Anti-Corruption Act represent a significant milestone in the country's efforts to combat corruption and promote good governance. However, it is also important to ensure that the LACC is adequately resourced and supported to carry out its mandate effectively. This includes providing the necessary funding, staffing, and training to enable the commission to fulfill its responsibilities and operate independently.

#### **3.3.2 Institutional Reforms**

Institutional reforms have been put in place to strengthen anti-corruption efforts in Liberia. For example, the Liberian government has worked to improve transparency and accountability in public financial management through the establishment of the Public Financial Management Law and the Public Procurement and Concessions Commission. These reforms aim to enhance oversight of public funds and reduce opportunities for corrupt practices in government procurement and financial management (United Nations Development Programme, 2018).

The Public Financial Management Law represents a significant step towards enhancing transparency and accountability in the management of public funds. It provides a legal framework for the effective planning, allocation, and utilization of public resources, as well as for the monitoring and reporting of government expenditures. By establishing clear guidelines and procedures for financial management, the law aims to reduce the risk of mismanagement, embezzlement, and other forms of corruption within government agencies.

Furthermore, the establishment of the Public Procurement and Concessions Commission is another critical reform aimed at reducing opportunities for corrupt practices in government procurement. The commission is responsible for overseeing the procurement process, ensuring fairness, competitiveness, and transparency in the awarding of contracts and concessions. By implementing stringent procurement regulations and oversight mechanisms, the commission aims to minimize the risk of bribery, favoritism, and

other corrupt activities in the allocation of government contracts and concessions. The United Nations Development Programme (2018) underscores the importance of these institutional reforms in strengthening anti-corruption efforts in Liberia. By improving public financial management and procurement practices, the government is taking proactive steps to mitigate the risk of corruption and promote good governance. These reforms are essential for building public trust, attracting investment, and fostering sustainable development in the country.

### **3.3.3 Civil Society Engagement**

Civil society engagement has indeed played a crucial role in the fight against corruption in Liberia. Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and advocacy groups have been actively involved in raising awareness about corruption, monitoring government activities, and advocating for anti-corruption measures. For instance, organizations like the Center for Transparency and Accountability in Liberia (CENTAL) have been at the forefront of advocating for transparency and accountability in public institutions and have been instrumental in pushing for anti-corruption reforms (Center for Transparency and Accountability in Liberia, n.d.).

The involvement of civil society organizations in the fight against corruption has been instrumental in complementing government efforts and ensuring that the issue remains in the public spotlight. These organizations have played a critical role in raising awareness about the detrimental effects of corruption on society and the economy, mobilizing public support for anti-corruption measures, and holding government officials accountable for their actions. Furthermore, civil society organizations have been actively engaged in monitoring government activities and advocating for reforms to strengthen transparency and accountability. This includes initiatives to enhance access to information, promote citizen participation in governance processes, and push for the implementation of anti-corruption policies and legislation.

The Center for Transparency and Accountability in Liberia (CENTAL) is a notable example of a civil society organization that has been actively involved in advocating for anti-corruption measures. Through its advocacy efforts, research, and public awareness campaigns, CENTAL has contributed to shaping the public discourse on transparency and accountability in Liberia. The organization has also been involved in monitoring government activities, conducting research on corruption issues, and providing recommendations for policy reforms to combat corrupt practices. The Center for Transparency and Accountability in Liberia (n.d.) highlights the importance of civil society engagement in the fight against corruption, emphasizing the need for continued collaboration between civil society organizations, the government, and other stakeholders. By working together, these organizations can leverage their expertise, resources, and grassroots networks to drive meaningful change and contribute to building a more transparent and accountable society.

## **4. Conclusion**

The examination of the root causes and consequences of public sector corruption in Liberia reveals a complex and multifaceted issue that has far-reaching implications for the country's governance, economy, and society. The root causes of corruption, including weak institutional capacity, lack of transparency, and political interference, have contributed to a pervasive environment of malfeasance and mismanagement within the public sector. This, in turn, has led to a range of consequences, such as reduced public trust, hindered economic development, and social inequality. However, amidst these challenges, there are also signs of progress and hope. Liberia has taken significant steps to address corruption through legal and regulatory reforms, institutional strengthening, and civil society engagement. The establishment of the Liberia Anti-Corruption Commission and the enactment of laws aimed at improving transparency and accountability demonstrate the government's commitment to combating corruption.

## **5. Recommendation:**

It is imperative for Liberia to prioritize comprehensive reforms and interventions aimed at addressing systemic vulnerabilities and combatting corruption effectively. This includes strengthening regulatory and oversight mechanisms, enhancing institutional capacity, and allocating adequate resources to support anti-corruption efforts. Furthermore, efforts should be directed towards promoting transparency, whistleblower protection, and fostering a culture of accountability within public institutions. Depoliticizing administrative processes, implementing merit-based appointments, and safeguarding the autonomy of public institutions from undue political influence are also crucial steps in this journey. By addressing corruption and promoting transparency and accountability, Liberia can unlock its economic potential, attract investment, and improve the delivery of essential services to its population, ultimately fostering sustainable development and improving the livelihoods of its citizens.

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