
Collective Action on Corruption in Nigeria: A Social Norms Approach to Connecting Society and Institutions

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H.E. Paul Arkwright CMG

It is my pleasure to welcome you to this National Launch of the Chatham House study on the Collective Action on Corruption in Nigeria: A Social Norms Approach to Connecting Society and Institutions commissioned and funded by the Department for International Development Nigeria.

A year after the May 2016 London Anti-Corruption conference, corruption still remains one of the biggest global issues of our time. I am not going to make a long and detailed argument about why corruption is a bad thing. It is well known that corruption is bad for people, bad for development and bad for business; indeed the impact on business has been significant in Nigeria. Corruption additionally fuels inequality, holds back economic development, and hurts the most vulnerable in society. In the end, it is a threat to the national interests of every country. No country is immune from corruption. Governments need to work together and work with partners from business and civil society to tackle it successfully. This is why the hugely successful London Anti-Corruption Summit last year, in which Nigeria played a major and positive role, was important to galvanise global action against corruption.

The UK and Nigeria are making good and sustained progress on commitments made at the Summit. For instance, both countries recognise the value of the Open Government Partnership in advancing transparency and good governance reform. Both have committed to reforms made together with civil society and are working together to embed these commitments into National Action Plans. Both countries are making progress on establishing beneficial ownership registers so looters can no longer, for example, use stolen funds to buy property in London and expect to keep this secret.

Why the study on the social norms of corruption? Tackling corruption requires systems to be in place, attitudes in society attuned to the effort, and a process to investigate, prosecute and sanction. Plugging loopholes and ensuring good management systems – the prevention agenda – is important, but so is justice. I am convinced that the Nigerian people want looters to be prosecuted and, if found guilty, given long sentences. I am proud to say the UK supports Nigeria in all these areas.

The administration of President Muhammadu Buhari has made fighting corruption a top priority and is investing heavily in this fight. Billions of naira have been recovered by Nigeria's anti-corruption agencies and there are many ongoing high profile investigations and prosecutions. I am sure that, like me, many others have seen the pictures of the large amounts of cash recovered from apartment blocks and similar locations. I was particularly struck by the picture of a huge stash of cash hidden in a cellar in a slum in Kaduna - millions of dollars hidden away next to extreme poverty where children cannot go to school and people are dying of disease. These efforts to combat corruption are essential, but cannot by themselves foster a sustainable, comprehensive reversal of long-established assumptions and practices. Behavioural insights are required to enhance public policy initiatives. Institutions need to connect with society in this crucial fight.

Corruption is challenging to eradicate. Nigeria's anti-corruption efforts must be underpinned by a deeper understanding of the social drivers of corruption. There must be insights into why people engage in, or refrain from, corrupt activity, and an understanding of the societal factors that may contribute to normalizing corrupt behaviours in the first place and desensitizing citizens to its impacts. That is why we commissioned Chatham House to conduct a study exploring social norms of corruption in Nigeria.

This Chatham House study was done in collaboration with the University of Pennsylvania's Social Norms Group, Nigeria's National Bureau of Statistics and teams from six Nigerian universities from all round the country. It provides in-depth analysis of social norms of corruption in Nigeria and puts forward options to generate action by a critical mass of local actors who want to forge a 'new normal.' I will not reveal here all

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the findings of the study as you will get that shortly from the Chatham House team. Let me just say that this study shows that Nigerians – no more than any other people – are not intrinsically corrupt. It shows that people's behaviour can and will change if the environment or options change. It also notes, however, that tough talk and fear-based messaging cannot be substituted for authenticity and exemplary behaviour. As long as the government's interactions with citizens continue to be marred by extortionate behaviour and expectations of bribery, the state deprives itself of the moral basis to lead in addressing the corruption problem. I believe that this study provides some new insights into corruption in Nigeria and hence some new ideas for tackling it. I hope it can generate further momentum for change and lead to results that positively impact on the lives of all Nigerians by improving government effectiveness and the delivery of services.

To conclude, I wish to emphasise that this issue of tackling corruption is universal. Whilst I acknowledge that merely understanding the social influences of corruption will not eradicate corruption, I do believe, however, it is a crucial step in the journey of ensuring a collective action to do so. I firmly believe that, with the right effort, the tide of corruption can be turned. We owe this to the poorest people in the world and we owe it to ourselves. The world and our global economy cannot afford not to tackle corruption.

The UK continues to stand with Nigeria in this important process.

Raj Patel

The title of this report is *Collective Action on Corruption in Nigeria: A Social Norms Approach to Connecting Society and Institutions*, and I just want to start off by talking about what we mean by a social norms approach.

The key question motivating this report – and I think it is one that policymakers, including all of you, really care about – is why do corrupt practices persist, and how do we change them? The structure of this question is quite similar to other questions that policymakers face in their daily work: why do pernicious practices (like child marriage, open defecation, domestic violence, and so on) in general persist, and how do we change them?

What is key and integral to our approach is that these two questions are intimately linked. We need to know why a particular practice persists and sustains itself in order to understand the kind of policy intervention we ought to design to induce behavioural change. And what the social norms approach emphasizes – and I am going to lay my cards on the table here – is the set of social expectations that underlie behaviour. So we need to figure out what those are – and it is important to remember that they might be social norms, but they might not, more on that later – before we can devise policy solutions.

Another important aspect of our approach is that the framework we use to understand corruption is as a set of interactions amongst people, amongst individuals, that is, real life flesh and blood human beings. In other words we try to understand it as a social phenomenon driven by a set of beliefs. We think corruption is stable because the beliefs that support it are self-reinforcing and resistant to change.

It is worth mentioning at this point, I think, that we take a neutral social scientific approach to this work. We are not interested in moralizing, or playing the blame game, or disparaging any particular sectors or institutions found in Nigerian society. We are not interested in talking about metaphorical beasts of corruption either.

I will tell you why we are not interested in playing the blame game: it is the fact that corruption is so frustrating – the reason it is so frustrating is that it represents a situation where everyone (or almost everyone) realizes that it is a problem, that is, that corruption is a problem. And everyone (or almost

everyone) also has a preference to live in a society that is free of corruption, or at the very least has comparatively less corrupt behaviour than the status quo. I want to suggest that even the front-line bureaucrat who is asking for a bribe in whatever context, would probably prefer to live in a high honesty, low corruption society than a low honesty, high corruption one. And that is what makes this whole thing so frustrating. If it is true that everyone agrees there is a problem, and everyone has a preference to change, why hasn't it happened yet?

Well, our approach sheds some light on that problem. It is because corruption is a stable phenomenon, whereby everybody has an incentive to continue to engage in it because of a set of interdependent beliefs (even if some of those beliefs are false, which is what our evidence suggests). Social expectations of this sort are difficult to change because they are resistant to change.

But I do want to push a kind of cautious optimism here, because I want to stress the idea that just because social expectations are resistant to change does not mean they cannot change. Corruption, in our view, is not driven by evil actors or unchangeable conditions, but social expectations. And you can change social expectations. In fact, we give you some tools to do just that in the policy recommendation section of our report.

So the takeaway to the social norms approach is to find out what the types of beliefs driving a practice are, and then to devise a policy response to attempt to change them. But you might ask: how exactly do you find out what types of beliefs underlie the behaviour you are trying to change? You go out into the world and try to find them, try to measure them. That is what we did – we did a specialized social norms survey. We worked with around seven Nigerian university departments and organizations, including the National Bureau of Statistics, and carried out around 4,000 surveys in six states and the Federal Capital Territory. We also did interviews around the country.

We did not use the word 'corruption' in the survey because we did not want to prime the respondents into giving us responses that they thought we wanted to hear. We wanted to get at their true beliefs, so we tried to be as morally neutral as possible in the framing of the questions. We also asked them about their factual beliefs, moral beliefs, and legal knowledge surrounding the practice in question.

I think it is important that we be clear about what exactly we mean by 'social expectations.' In the study, we use Cristina Bicchieri's definition of social norms, which are made up of two different kinds of expectations. These are: (1) empirical expectations, basically expectations about what other people will do in a given situation. And (2) a normative expectation, basically an expectation about what other people expect you to do in a given situation. The thought is that, if you hold these two expectations about a given behaviour, you will conform to that behaviour – you will conform to that norm. And if you do not conform to that norm, you will be sanctioned in some way (sanctions can be innocuous like gossip, or they can be extreme and violent).

Consider an example that I was told about just the other day. Apparently, there is a social norm in Nigeria about handing things to people with your right hand. If you give something to someone with your left hand, then you may get sanctioned – that is, the person might say, 'do not give that to me with your left hand. Give it to me with your right hand.' I probably would not violate this norm because I am right-handed, but say I did – say I gave something to someone with my left hand and they sanctioned me in some way – that might put the thought in my head that other people expect me to give them things with my right hand, not my left hand. This would be a normative expectation in the sense described above. If I observe other people doing that, namely, I see that other people also give things to people consistently with their right hand, then that might give me the empirical expectation. And I will probably start giving things to people with my right hand. All you left-handed people probably have learnt this by now.

Another example is tipping in the United States. In the US, you're expected to tip at least 15 – 20 per cent after a meal to the waiter. And if you do not, you might get sanctioned. If I was with a close friend who did not tip after a meal, I might say something like 'hey, you should really leave a tip.' Or if I was with an acquaintance, I might gossip about them to close friends: 'I was at dinner with this cheapskate the other day.' Maybe I would not, but you know who definitely would? The waiter. In fact if you did not tip consistently, the staff at that restaurant would know exactly who you are. They would say, 'here comes the cheapskate', or 'here comes the European', or 'here comes the English person.' Because you might be a cheapskate, or just ignorant of the norm (like Europeans, like an English person), or both.

I also want to stress one last distinction before moving on to the findings. The kinds of behaviour I just described are driven by what we might call interdependent beliefs – that is, they are beliefs that are dependent on what other people think and do.

But it is really important, from a policy perspective, to figure out if what is driving a particular behaviour is independent or interdependent. You might have beliefs that drive behaviour that are not dependent on what other people think or do. For example, using an umbrella when it is raining outside is like this, as is brushing your teeth. I do not care if you all use an umbrella or don't when it rains outside – I will use my umbrella because I don't want to get wet. And I do not care if you brush your teeth or not, I value having healthy gums and a clean mouth, so I will brush my teeth. Well, I might care if you do not brush your teeth and you talk too close to me, but even so, that will not govern my choices regarding the brushing of my own teeth!

Moral rules and moral convictions also work like this – if you have a strong moral conviction about not killing people, or about not eating meat, then you should not care about whether other people kill others or eat meat. You will not kill people or eat meat because of personal moral conviction. This is important because whether a behaviour is independent or interdependent will govern the kind of policy response required to change it.

What our findings suggest is that there are social norms governing the solicitation of bribes amongst law enforcement officers in Nigeria, but there are empirical expectations governing the giving of bribes. So law enforcement officers might ask for bribes because they experience pressures from within their relevant reference networks to do so, but people generally give bribes because they see other people doing it, or they expect other people to do it, or because it is just a way to get out of administrative hurdles.

On to our findings: as I mentioned, social norms of corruption seem to be limited to specific contexts and sectors in Nigeria, like law enforcement. Second, if the environment or options are changed, behaviour will change. People give bribes in many instances because it might just be an efficient way to circumvent inefficient rules and administrative hurdles. It is quicker and cheaper to give a bribe than it is to go through official processes, which take a while. Bribes are also usually less than fines, making it easier to give a bribe.

We also found that collective action is impeded because in some places people have misconceptions about what other people think. That is, they systematically make mistakes about what other people think.

To return to the point about social norms amongst law enforcement officers, our research suggests that there seem to be both upward and downward pressures to engage in corruption amongst law enforcement officials. Senior law enforcement officers expect lower ranking officers to solicit bribes from the public, and lower-ranking officers expect senior officers to do so.

What is interesting here is that there is moralistic and value-laden language surrounding non-compliance, which indicates a social norm at work, so you have this odd situation where typical moral judgments seem to have been flipped upside down. Those who do the morally correct thing – standing by their moral

convictions and the law by not engaging in bribery – are the ones who are called evil and wicked. Those who do the morally questionable thing, i.e. asking for bribes, are not. Being called these things, and the loss of privilege and status that these names indicate, by people in your reference network creates strong social pressures to conform to the norm.

We also found what seems to be a case of people being systematically mistaken about other people's beliefs - indeed, other people who are in their own community. For example, in Enugu, around nine out of ten people said that it was wrong and illegal for a police officer to ask for a direct payment for a traffic violation instead of going through the official process, but they also thought that five out of ten of their fellow citizens thought that the officer should ask for a bribe. So you have a situation where people are systematically making mistakes about the beliefs of their fellow citizens in a way that makes collective action hard. This is because it is exactly these kinds of false beliefs that give rise to the sense of fatalism and inevitability about corruption, which makes it seem like such a hard problem to overcome. Of course you would think it impossible that corruption could be overcome if you assumed half of the people in your community believe that law enforcement officers should ask for bribes and you personally think that it is wrong and illegal for law enforcement officers to do so. These false beliefs need to be dispelled for anti-corruption collective action to become possible.

The second behaviour we looked at was regarding a government health facility employee asking for a payment for a hospital bed; a bed that you should legally be entitled to for free.

On the diagram, you can see the shorter lighter blue bar in the middle of the other two. This bar represents responses to 'do you think it is wrong for a health facility employee to ask for payments for a hospital bed?' I think Adamawa came in highest for 'yes' but, that is still a relatively low figure, with just over 20 per cent agreeing that one should pay. You can see the two other bars – 'do you think a government health facility should ask for a payment', and a high percentage of respondents across the board said yes.

What is really interesting here is that when asked about whether it was illegal for a government health facility employee to ask for a payment for a hospital bed, lots of respondents also thought it was illegal. That is the yellowish bar. So here you have a situation where most respondents didn't think it was wrong, in fact, they thought the nurse should ask for a payment, but nevertheless they thought or knew it was illegal. So what is going on here? Despite the fact that many respondents thought that asking for a payment for a bed was illegal, they found it less objectionable than bribery at the checkpoint. Presumably, this is because respondents might view this as funding an under-resourced service, as opposed to being extorted at a traffic checkpoint. These experiences must feel different.

People view paying for a hospital bed as making a private transfer for something that ought to be a public transfer. They are funding a government institution, and they can see where this money is going. Nevertheless, we should remember that asking for a payment for a hospital bed amounts to a regressive tax, as it puts the burden on the poorest, who can bear it least, as wealthier people can already afford to go to private hospitals where they pay for healthcare.

I will end on that, and hand over to my colleague Leena, who will go through the rest of the findings and the policy recommendations. Thank you.

Dr Leena Koni Hoffmann

Alongside the social beliefs and expectations that Raj discussed, our research found that there are systemic factors that combine with these kinds of social drivers to sustain behaviours associated with the misappropriation of public funds. We found that behaviours related to misusing or abusing public funds

seem to thrive in Nigeria because of the nature of the social contract. The way in which the social contract is established in Nigeria is very important to understanding how corrupt practices become entrenched. In our analysis, we found a very local social contract governing the relationship between citizens and public officials – and we found this at all levels.

This means that, for the most part, Nigerians believe that to access to a public good – protection, welfare or any kind of social service – they need a personal or social link to a public official. To get access to anything, you need to know someone. It is all about who you know. The social expectations underlying the behaviour of people who control government resources is that they both *would* and *should* distribute these resources to people with whom they have a personal or social connection. Therefore, if a community needs a road built, they need someone from ‘their place’ to be the state governor. If this is not the case, they get nothing.

Another interesting finding from the study is that people tend to evaluate the wrongfulness or illegality of a government official misappropriating public funds in very subjective ways. Those who engaged in such behaviour were subjected to very social sanctioning from within their own community, but were likely to be judged as corrupt by those from a different community. If the person who engaged in corruption shared some of the resulting wealth around – or carried other people along – then their actions tended to be viewed as a form of keeping up their side of a social contract. This type of fuzziness and blurring of the lines around which types of behaviour count as corruption severely undermines collective action against it. Instead, it creates a tolerance for corruption that can make it hard for legal sanctions to be effective or enforced.

In the context of this kind of corrupt behaviour by members of the same community, we found evidence of the presence of a social norm of corruption in the moralistic, value-laden language people used to describe public officials who did not conform to the model of using their position to benefit their community. The language used to describe norm violators in this context gives us an interesting insight into some of Nigeria’s social values. When a person is seen as not carrying people along in a redistributive sense, that person is likely to be described as being difficult, mean-spirited, stingy or even evil by members of their reference network. When someone refrains from stealing government money for their own use, that person is seen as not being smart. There is a perception that this person passed up the chance to get rich. This suggests that, in Nigeria, it is actually honest and trustworthy behaviour that is more than likely to receive a negative reaction from an individual’s reference network.

I will briefly highlight the final set of findings. Within the same context of the misappropriation of government funds, we found strong gender biases in people’s expectations and judgements of this behaviour. We found that the gender of a government official who takes public funds is an important factor in people’s beliefs and evaluations of that behaviour. The general trend from the survey indicates that most Nigerians think that women are less likely than men to engage in corruption. Almost six out of 10 people thought it was unlikely that a female government official would take public funds for personal use, while only four out of 10 people thought it would be unlikely that a male government official would behave in this way. The survey findings support data collected during interviews that suggests that most Nigerians believe women are less likely to engage in corruption, but there is a worse perception of corrupt women than corrupt men.

Again, we found evidence of negative social sanctions related to language and characterization of corrupt practices by women, which indicates the presence of a gendered norm of corruption in Nigeria. There are two important and related rationalizations for this. First there is a general perception, rooted in religious views, that women are purer than men, more righteous, less selfish and that this quality of moral purity is

God-given and part of a woman's nature. The second, which is the correspondent opposite of views of women, is that men are less charitable, more selfish, and have greater financial and social responsibilities. These sets of rationalizations are really rooted in moral and religious-based values, but also in entrenched norms of gender roles. A man's corruption is therefore explained and justified by social beliefs, but women do not get the same cover in relation to the same behaviour. A woman's corrupt actions are judged more harshly; the assumption is that she is perverting her pure nature.

These expectations and attitudes have important implications for anti-corruption approaches. Due to these gendered norms around corruption in Nigeria, the social sanctions component of anti-corruption interventions must be designed with an awareness of the potential gender impact. As a result of women's higher exposure and sensitivity to sanctions, care must be taken that social campaigns against corruption do not burden women further. Campaigns that moralize about women's behaviour may end up hurting them in terms of gender equality. Social campaigns and other types of strategies against corruption should instead increase, encourage and deepen women's participation, particularly as women tend to be more severely affected by corruption. In the final analysis, when we speak about anti-corruption strategies in Nigeria and many other places, women are often poorly consulted, under-consulted or even excluded from policy-making and programming design.

These four broad sets of findings that Raj and I have outlined, in our report and briefly this morning, show that there are very important contextual factors, societal beliefs and expectations that have contributed to normalizing corrupt behaviour in Nigeria. To change collective behaviour under such conditions, we really need collective action.

I am going to outline our main recommendations based on a social norms approach for designing behavioural change campaigns moving forward, and encouraging collective action against corruption in Nigeria.

Government at all levels must adopt a systemic approach in the way it does public policy. Procedures and practices must be reassessed from the point of view of citizens. How can the avoidance of corruption be encouraged? The government and public institutions have to move more quickly to remove administrative hurdles and complexities that create opportunities. A collective behavioural-change approach requires routine procedures that are simple, clear to respond to, and easy to comply with. For example, options for settling traffic law penalties using mobile platforms can change the incentives around bribery behaviour. Corruption reporting and addressing complaints can also be facilitated using mobile technology. The goal should be that routine interactions are convenient. Procedural changes should also be complemented by interventions that encourage social norms of honesty and positive behaviour. Whether good or bad, norms are enforced by incentives and sanctions.

We found that there is considerable scope for more effective communication and targeting of sectors and communities with information on the human cost of corruption, particularly the impact of corrupt practices on public services. People become desensitized to mind-boggling figures – in the millions and billions - in headlines about corruption scandals. This type of communication is informative, but not necessarily actionable. People respond when messages are personal, relatable and connect with their interests. For example, the work that Follow the Money, a community action organisation, has done in places like Zamfara and Ogun State in tracking government expenditure and checking it against results on the ground has been effective in galvanising community efforts against corrupt officials. These types of organisations collect and publicise public finance information in local languages using SMS. Advocacy around public sector transparency is critical to collective action against government corruption. When communities receive targeted information, when their financial literacy is boosted, and when their

community media networks are strengthened, they will act and sanction negative behaviour. There is also positive scope for targeting young people with social norms messages through traditional and social media networks, and even for school-age kids under 15 through citizenship and civic education programmes. The bottom line is that collective action cannot happen without a sense of ownership.

Another key recommendation that we would like to make is for a move away from fear-based anti-corruption messaging and interventions. Sensational and extreme language does not work when people are not convinced that the behaviour change necessary would actually make a difference. The evidence we found is that people actually become desensitized when they are overexposed to overly tough anti-corruption messaging, especially when the corrupt behaviour has reached impunity levels and people do not see evidence that legal sanctions are being enforced. This does not mean that positive corruption awareness language will automatically work. Drafting and disseminating messages requires a delicate balance so messages do not backfire or become counter-productive.

The next recommendation is that anti-corruption efforts in Nigeria need to highlight and empower trendsetters that can galvanize behavioural change. Our research found that the behaviours and actions of political actors in this country play a big role in setting social trends. The process of creating and enforcing new norms and standards of integrity, honesty and fairness requires their full participation. In addition to political actors, I would like to highlight some general qualities that trendsetters tend to exhibit. They tend to have high levels of autonomy and independence, and are resilient to norms or expectations that go against their sense of moral justice. They also have strong beliefs about their ability to succeed in specific tasks. There are people like this in Nigeria. Dr Attahiru Jega is one. In a country of over 170 or 180 million, there are at least a few thousand trendsetters! Such individuals need to be highlighted and empowered to drive communal change. Where there are challenges with identifying real trendsetters, carefully crafted community media can be used to model new behaviour and norms to encourage social change.

We found examples of this in India and Peru, with cable and radio soap operas that modelled new behaviour around gender equality. In Nigeria, the example of the TV show called *Shuga*, developed by the MTV Staying Alive Foundation, has been very effective in raising awareness of the health dangers of risky sexual behaviour. There is exciting scope for a role for educational entertainment – edutainment – to stimulate collective action. A related approach to this is one that helps to uncover and change people's mistaken beliefs about how other people feel about corruption. Trendsetters can share this information and influence fellow community members to change their behaviour to match their beliefs.

Our research shows that most Nigerians think corruption is wrong, so there clearly is a coordination problem. Trendsetters are critical to bridging this problem and their efforts can be boosted through social marketing strategies that can drive public approval and foster critical mass action towards social change.

We need to uncover people's false perceptions of other citizens' attitudes to corrupt practices and develop strategies to make this phenomenon known. In this way, we address people's mistaken beliefs that other people accept corruption and do not want this to change. Social marketing strategies built around urging people to act in keeping with their personal values can generate critical mass support for social change.

Our final recommendation is that the behavioural change approach of this research holds huge benefits for Nigeria's entire process of anti-corruption policymaking and even other government actions around other social challenges. We believe a more conscious and thoughtful approach to understanding how average Nigerians experience public policy in their day-to-day lives would actually maximise policy effectiveness and ultimately reduce costs.

Our empirical research shows that most Nigerians believe corruption is wrong. If corruption is to be reduced, the work now must be to translate this shared belief into a sustainable coalition for collective social change.

Thank you for listening.