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The Corruption Chameleon
A case study of corruption within a Malawian NGO

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Abstract

Over the last decade, a growing consensus has emerged within the development world that corruption is the single greatest obstacle to reducing world poverty. The simplicity of this statement, however, masks the complexity of the issue, as corruption itself is a complicated multi-faceted phenomenon with multiple inter-related causes and effects. Both the term and the concepts underpinning it are highly problematic, as the shape and tone of any discussion on the topic is dependent on who is defining it.

The majority of recent literature on corruption has tended to focus on the role of a single actor: the state. Despite their growing influence, NGOs on the other hand, appear to have attracted only cursory inspection. This thesis attempts to rebalance this by examining corruption with specific reference to development NGOs, and is based around a central hypothesis that they are not impervious to its influences. It seeks to contribute to the understanding of the nature, form, and dynamics of corruption within NGOs operating in a development context.

Based on a detailed case study of an INGO operating in Malawi, the research findings highlighted the nature and extent of internal corruption; indicating that NGOs are subject to similar types and levels of corruption as faced by the broader societies in which they operate. The thesis concludes that whilst Western forms of combating corruption can be effective, they are insufficient to counter deeply entrenched neopatrimonial networks underpinning it. The most effective mechanism for countering such forms of corruption was found to be the same as those supporting and protecting it: access to, and support from, high-level political connections and insider networks. Whilst the key deterrent remains the implementation of a strong internal control system, its overall effectiveness is dependent on support at the highest levels. Instrumental to this is also the presence of a “principled” principal, with sufficient political-will to counter political-interests that may be vested in maintaining the status-quo.

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Explanation of Thesis Title

In many parts of Africa the chameleon is both loved and hated (Wendland & Hachibamba, 2007), with the image itself having a strong resonance in story and myth (Anders, 2002a). In the context of Malawian mythology, it is a morally ambiguous creature (Schoffeleers & Roscoe, 1985:17-38). Its image been used as a metaphor to depict survival strategies under the authoritarian regime of Hastings Kamuzu Banda (Mapanje, 1981), who ruled Malawi from 1961 to 1994, and, more recently, to describe Malawian politics and politicians since the advent of multi-party elections in 1994 (Dzimbiri, 1998; Englund, 2002). Nazombe (in Collier, 1992:293) makes specific reference to the reptile's "cunning and elusiveness", which he sees as the reason it was selected as a totem by two of Malawi's most renowned poets.

A reptile, the Chameleon's eyes are able to move independently from each other, allowing it to observe two different objects simultaneously and giving it the ability to maintain a 360-degree arc of vision around its body, scanning the surrounding environment for any potential threats. In addition, the Chameleon is able to change colour and blend in with its surroundings, giving it an extremely effective form of camouflage.

For these reasons, I have elected to use the chameleon as the metaphorical representative of corruption, and the networks that operate and protect corruption, and include it in the title of this thesis.

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Abbreviations

ACB	Malawi Anti-Corruption Bureau
ADMARC	Agricultural Development and Marketing Corporation
AVI	Australian Volunteers International
CONGOMA	Council for Non-governmental Agencies in Malawi
CPA	Malawi Corrupt Practice Act no 18 of 1995
CPI	Corruption Perception Index
DPP	Democratic Progressive Party
EUR	Euros
GBP	Great British Pounds
GNI	Gross National Income
IAASB	International Auditing & Assurance Standards Board
MCP	Malawi Congress Party
MYP	Malawi Young Pioneers
MWK	Malawi Kwacha
NSO	National Statistical Office
NORAD	Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
INGO	International Non-Governmental Organisation
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation & Development
OVC	Orphan and Vulnerable Children
PAC	Public Affairs Committee
Press	Press Corporation
PWC	PricewaterhouseCoopers
SIDA	Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency
TI	Transparency International
UDF	United Democratic Front
UN	United Nation
USD	United States Dollar
WB	World Bank

Case Study Specific Abbreviations

CBP	Community Based Programme
CBPC	Community Based Programme Coordinator
CD	Country Director
DCD	Deputy Country Director
ERP	Emergency Relief Project
FC	Financial Controller
GSC	General Secretariat of NGO-International
HRM	Human Resource Manager
KG	Kindergarten
MC	Medical Centre
NA	National Association / Member of NGO-X
NGO-Int	International Federation of NGO-X
NGO-X	International NGO Based in Malawi
NO	National Office
RD	NGO-International Regional Director
RO	NGO-International Regional Office
VDC	Village Development Committee