

LE DEBAT DE WATHI

January-February 2016

INTRODUCTORY NOTE



HOW TO FIGHT AGAINST CORRUPTION?

1. Why this theme?

- **Because** corruption through its various forms weakens the states of West Africa and undermines stability. It is a scourge that impedes any process of economic and human development. Each year, countries in the region lose significant points of economic growth because of corruption.
- **Because** corrupt practices are widespread at all levels of the economic, social and political sphere. Scandals and proven cases of corruption abound in countries of the WATHI Zone. When companies pay large amounts of money to politicians, senior officials and managers of public and semi-public companies to obtain contracts under conditions that go against national interests, it affects the economies of the countries of the region and their ability to meet the basic needs of their populations.
- **Because** the bribes given almost systematically to public officials by ordinary citizens in order to obtain benefits or bypass certain bureaucratic obstacles is just as detrimental to the creation and sustainability of an efficient public service. Characterized as petty corruption, the daily practices observed in most countries of the region blur the boundaries between what is acceptable and what is not, and lead to a widespread systemic corruption.
- **Because** corruption is a threat to the proper functioning of democracy. The frequent practice of corruption in the political area, particularly during electoral campaigns with vote buying, bribery of opposition figures to join the ruling party or mass distribution of goods such as rice bags and t-shirts, infringes the rules of democracy. The use of embezzled public funds or private fortunes of dubious origins to influence the selection of political leaders during presidential, parliamentary and local elections, plagues the political systems in the region.

- **Because** some forms of corruption are accepted or legitimized by the people who associate them with a social norm. It is a common practice to give money or other "gifts" to paid public officials in return of an administrative act.
- **Because** corruption habits end up being considered as normal and associated with African cultural norms. Corrupt practices that impede the improvement of the well-being of the majority of the population, and particularly the poorest groups, have nothing to do with a specific culture. Cultural arguments to justify corruption give a bad image of the countries of the region and attack the ethical foundations of West African societies.

2. What are the main topics to be explored?

- The various forms of corruption observed in the region and identification of the most harmful practices.
- The acceptance of certain corrupt practices seen as forms of solidarity: the issue of bonus or gifts given by public service users
- The responsibility of policy makers, administrative authorities in the widespread corrupt practices in public services.
- Corruption in the political space: the issue of vote buying during elections, the issues of unlawful financing of political actors and more generally the issue of political patronage.
- Corruption as a hindrance to an efficient administration: the issue of the malfunction of administrative services, the distrust of the people in the public servants and simple measures that could help to resolve it.
- Justice and the various forms of corruption: the question of impunity linked to corrupt practices in the area of justice, the independence of judges and prosecutors regarding political power and the possible measures to improve the capacity of judicial systems in the region to fight effectively against corruption.
- Corruption in the health sector: payments for treatment supposed to be free; small gratuities given to hospital staff for a "special" treatment; the identification of responsibilities and the possible responses.
- The effectiveness of the anti-corruption institutions in the countries of West Africa: their independence, their human and material capacities to deliver results
- The security forces and petty corruption: the bribes given during daily routine police checks; the perception of the police as the "most corrupt" service in the administration; the assessment of the income generated by corruption of the security forces; the links between the observed petty corruption and the grand corruption of senior officials.

- Corruption in the education system: the purchase of diplomas and student assessment scores; the sale of examination subjects; the practice of sexual favors in return for good grades in high schools and universities.
- The impact of the grand corruption in the economies of the region: corruption involving multinational and other large local and foreign companies; corruption in calls to tender and procurements; actual destinations and beneficiaries of the proceeds from corruption.
- Assessment of current means and measures to fight against corruption in the countries of the region; the existing mechanisms and protocols of regional organizations and their effectiveness; good and bad examples in the region regarding anti-corruption efforts, the constraints and limitations of recent initiatives.
- Identification of the priority measures and reforms in the fight against corruption; operational measures that can be taken immediately in the countries of the region; the distribution of tasks and responsibilities in the collective effort, civic actions at the country and regional levels that can have a positive impact on the fight against corruption.

3. How to participate in the debate?

- Contributions by experts of the issues discussed are welcome but observations, testimonies, opinions and proposals from all citizens are equally so.
- We particularly welcome articles that refer to one or more specific countries, are based on concrete examples and include recommendations for action and reform.
- You can request that your identity not be made public, though WATHI must know it. In this case, choose a pseudonym and send a biography that gives an idea of your area of expertise or your work.
- You can submit short articles (500-1000 words) or longer ones (1500-2000 words). Although the maximum length of a contribution is 2000 words, short articles are more likely to be selected and published. All articles must be accessible to the general public, well written and structured.
- We invite you to send a biography of 50 words, and preferably one of your pictures of very good quality along with your article submission.

Please send your articles here or at infowathi@wathi.org

The debate is also taking place on WATHI's Facebook and Twitter accounts:

Link to Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/WATHI-Think-Tank-34628593222353/?fref=ts>

Link to Twitter: https://twitter.com/WATHI_Africa