

Research Project

Corruption, Conflict and Cities in West and East Africa

Third-party funded project

Project title Corruption, Conflict and Cities in West and East Africa

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Organisation / Research unit

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This research project explores the relationship between corruption, conflict and political transformations in urban contexts. The key research question is:

Under which conditions do legitimate and inclusive urban politics emerge and stabilise in post-conflict societies?

Although corruption is a pervasive feature of African politics, state-of-the-art research shows that its effects on political legitimacy and social cohesion are highly context-specific. However, there are evidently certain arenas where corruption plays a volatile role, with the dynamics of urban politics tending to spill over into national politics. The conflicts in Côte d'Ivoire and Kenya showed that practices and accusations of corruption performed in key cities triggered the outburst of wider social conflicts, and they still exacerbate the post-conflict situation. Whereas there is much literature on the relationship between corruption and political order in Africa in general, there is little evidence-based understanding of more focused sites in which such processes of political authority and legitimacy are articulated, and the diverse ways in which corruption plays out on types of political transformations, in particular during and after conflicts.

Conceptually drawing on Joel Migdal's "state in society"-approach (Migdal 2001), this research project explores **practices of corruption and its political effects** in volatile urban sites. In particular, the empirical investigation seeks to, *firstly*, systematically understand the effects of corruption in the provision of selected public urban goods (i.e. land tenure) on the legitimacy and authority of public institutions; *secondly*, identify critical junctures (e.g. elections) in which tensions around corruption in these arenas erupt on a local or national level; *thirdly*, develop a typology of corruption, conflict and political change.

Methodology. Based on well-established qualitative, interpretive and comparative methodology, the fieldwork is undertaken in multi-site case studies in four African cities in Kenya and Côte d'Ivoire. The cities constitute 'hotbeds' of national politics in their respective countries, which in turn have seminal regional influence. The fieldwork is conducted by two senior scholars and two PhD students. It builds on existing knowledge and experience of the countries as well as established networks with local and regional academics, researchers, policy-makers in Africa and elsewhere. We seek to develop multi-stakeholder forums of significant actors in the cities and on a national level.

Expected results. The findings from the project will thus make following three main contributions: *Analytically*, it will significantly enhance the evidence-based understanding of the relationship between corruption and conflict in Africa, and the types of political transformations which are triggered in urban contexts. *Empirically*, it will provide comprehensive and detailed qualitative data on the political effects of corruption in the provision of key public goods in urban areas. *On a policy level*, it will allow the identification

of particularly critical moments and practices threatening social cohesion and political legitimacy. The analysis will provide an in-depth understanding of the actors and practices of such urban politics, the meanings of corruption for state and non-state actors, and the effects of corruption on local and national political order, teasing out types of political transformations with regard to their legitimacy and stability. The typology of corruption, conflict and political transformation will be a tool for policy-makers and development cooperation to develop conflict-sensitive and empowering decision-making processes.

Keywords governance, corruption, urban studies, Africa, Côte d'Ivoire, Kenya

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2794923	Förster, Till	Akindès, Francis, Professor	Université de Bouaké	01.10.2014	31.07.2022
2795107	Förster, Till	Murunga, Godwin R., Professor	The Institute for Development Studies, University of Nairobi	01.12.2013	31.07.2022
4528486	Förster, Till	Edouard Adé, Professor	Université Catholique de l'Afrique de l'Ouest	01.01.2018	31.07.2022