Commonwealth Africa Anti-Corruption Centre, its responsibilities and prospects

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Our continent has and is still suffering from the deadly disease of corruption. For us as a Commonwealth, the countries of Africa have a special responsibility to take the fight against corruption to another level... It is imperative that our countries unite to fight this common enemy. No country can singularly fight corruption and succeed. Strength will be found collectively in the prestigious CAACC we are gathered here to launch.

Vice President of Botswana, Dr Ponatshego H. K. Kedikilwe, MP

Introduction

Corruption is a pervasive problem in both the developed and developing world. In Africa, issues around corruption have plagued the continent, leading to stunted development, weak institutions, lack of investment and a general attitude of mistrust towards governance and its institutions. Improvement in current levels of corruption requires strengthening of anti-corruption institutions. Strong regional support for strengthening oversight institutions like anti-corruption agencies is sine qua non.

Commonwealth member countries are generally doing comparatively better than their global counterparts; this is believed to be largely due to the shared Commonwealth tradition of democracy, common law and public administration.

Recent assessment of the leadership capabilities of African heads of governments found that eight of the ten top leaders are Commonwealth countries and none of the 19 Commonwealth leaders were rated in the lowest quartile of the 52 African countries assessed. Nine of the ten most peaceful were Commonwealth countries, headed by Botswana. Aside from quality leaders, Commonwealth governments are generally more effective and have a more consistent rule of law compared to non-Commonwealth countries and out of 47 countries in the world classified as ‘not free’, only four are Commonwealth countries.

Very few Commonwealth countries are rated by major international development institutions as fragile, and the record of Commonwealth countries with regard to corruption is generally good. Only four of the Commonwealth countries appear at the bottom according to Transparency International’s corruption perception index, because amongst Commonwealth members, there is no room for complacency when it comes to corruption.

The above notwithstanding, many developing African countries, whose public sectors are hampered by corruption, poor management and inadequate public services, have made little or no progress towards achievement of the MDG’s. This underscores why the Commonwealth facilitates co-operation and building of an anti-corruption agencies’ association in Africa that can ensure an effective public administrative, responsive and efficient corruption-free public service. A central part of the Commonwealth’s endeavours is to help member countries face up to corruption and tackle its destructive impact.

Fighting corruption in Commonwealth Africa will also help in fighting poverty and make an important contribution for developing and delivering the MDG’s. In doing this, the Commonwealth Secretariat helps to make the vision of international development a reality.

It is worthy of note that the Commonwealth is ideally placed in its strategic efforts to foster genuine partnerships between all member states. Its effectiveness is built upon the ‘ownership’ by its members, and the trust and confidence that member countries have in the Commonwealth Secretariat to work on this important agenda for the Commonwealth countries in Africa.

Commonwealth response to corruption

The Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) mandate in 2005 obliges the Commonwealth Secretariat to support member states to develop and adopt measures and strategies to combat corruption and improve governance (CHOGM mandate, 2005). To this end, the Commonwealth Secretariat prioritised anti-corruption work to strengthen good governance through reduction in corruption, thereby promoting accountability and integrity in the Commonwealth.

An anti-corruption project was developed by the Governance and Institutional Development Division in 2008 to assist countries in implementing their national anti-corruption policies by mobilising all key institutions and other stakeholders involved in monitoring, detecting and responding.
to corruption related issues. This in-country anti-corruption project started off in African Commonwealth countries – Botswana, Zambia, Ghana, Lesotho, The Gambia, Sierra Leone, Seychelles, South Africa, etc. – before expanding to the Caribbean region – Dominica, St Lucia, Grenada and St. Vincent – and to Sri Lanka and Malaysia in Asia.

**The Association of Anti-Corruption Agencies in Commonwealth Africa**

Following years of in-country work implementing national anti-corruption agencies (ACAs) across the Commonwealth, particularly in Africa, a decision was made in 2011 to bring all heads of ACAs in Commonwealth Africa to a conference in Botswana. A direct result or outcome of the first conference was the creation of a practitioners’ network of heads of ACAs in Commonwealth Africa, now known as the Association of Anti-Corruption Agencies in Commonwealth Africa.

**Institutionalisation of an annual peer review conference**

The conference sought to broker the exchange of ideas and practices among Commonwealth ACAs and to encourage the sharing of expertise in areas where they have a comparative advantage. The host and venue for the heads of ACAs annual conference rotate among member countries. This led to the institutionalisation of an annual peer review conference/meeting of the heads of agencies – the 2011 conference was held in Botswana, 2012 in Zambia and 2013 in Mauritius – where heads of ACAs reviewed country presentations and shared transferable experiences through South-South co-operation and peer learning.

**Secretariat to co-ordinate the affairs of the association**

The second conference for heads of ACAs in Commonwealth Africa was held in May 2012 in Livingstone, Zambia. The conference informed the heads of the need for a secretariat to co-ordinate the affairs of the association. The heads were invited to confer with their respective governments to consider the possibility of sponsoring and hosting the association’s secretariat. The Botswana Government offered a proposal to host the Commonwealth ACAs secretariat in Gaborone.

**From secretariat to centre**

Having received Botswana’s concrete offer to host the secretariat for the Association of Anti-Corruption Agencies in Commonwealth Africa, it was decided to change the concept of a secretariat to a centre – naming it the Commonwealth Africa Anti-Corruption Centre (CAACC) – mindful that centre functions are more encompassing than that of a secretariat. An anti-corruption centre undertakes a hive of anti-corruption activities.

**Launching the CAACC**

In February 2013, the Vice President of Botswana, Dr Ponatshego H. K. Kedikilwe, and Commonwealth Deputy Secretary-General Masire-Mwamba jointly commissioned the CAACC, culminating in the signing of an agreement document to operationalise the centre on 25 February 2013. About 200 high commissioners, ministers, MPs, judges and senior government officials from Botswana as well as heads of ACAs and anti-corruption officials from
the Commonwealth and development partners, among others, attended the launch.

**Agreement**

The agreement document signed between the Commonwealth Secretariat and the Government of Botswana, and endorsed by the heads of ACAs, enjoins the following:

- The Commonwealth Secretariat committed to the centre up to £1 million, £250,000 per year, for an initial period of four years to cover activities and programmes
- The Government of Botswana committed, on its part, an in-kind contribution of five fully paid staff, office accommodation and provision of training facilities
- ACAs would have to pay travel costs for their officers to access the centre’s programmes and activities

**Goals of the centre**

The overarching goal of the centre is to reduce corruption in Commonwealth Africa. The centre specifically seeks to:

- Improve agencies’ capacity and capability to combat and prevent corruption
- Strengthen collaboration of regional agencies
- Improve education and awareness of forms of corruption, and of the role of agencies

The centre is expected to achieve the above goals by providing training, research and other anti-corruption initiatives for all Commonwealth African countries, in areas such as investigations, public education and prevention, prosecution, monitoring and evaluation, and professional ethics. The centre will also co-ordinate solidarity initiatives among association members in support of those facing hostile political and media campaigns. Further, the centre is designed essentially to become the prime vehicle for improving co-ordination and strengthening the capacity of ACAs in Commonwealth Africa. This would lead to the effective and efficient delivery of anti-corruption services in African Commonwealth countries, and increased citizen trust and confidence in the agencies.

**Operationalisation of the centre**

Based on a request from the Government of Botswana to the Commonwealth Secretary-General after the launch of the centre, the Commonwealth Secretariat released the adviser (governance) for a period of six weeks to help operationalise the centre. Given the goals and objectives of the centre, if the centre was to perform its main functions prescribed in the agreement document, project design document and the strategic plan, it would require staff to co-ordinate its key functional areas – training activities, research activities, communication and political affairs, and administration portfolios. To this end, an organisational structure and job descriptions were designed for the centre. Designated staff positions at the CAACC are currently as follows: centre manager, training co-ordinator, research co-ordinator, communication and political affairs co-ordinator, and administrative officer positions.
A comprehensive training plan based on the mapping of Commonwealth Africa ACAs training needs, a project design document and strategic plan have been developed. The training plan outlines type of course, course objectives, target group, collaborating partners, duration and cost.

Professional action learning programmes in corruption monitoring, evaluation and assessment, and investigation and prevention were delivered within the period. Partner organisations pulled together for the programme included: UNDP, UNODC; Deloitte (South Africa); Botswana’s Directorate on Corruption and Economic Crimes; AusAid; and University of Zambia. The aim of the programme was to build an M&E capacity within ACAs in Commonwealth Africa to effectively measure and assess corruption and the impact of anti-corruption initiatives to inform effective policy making at these agencies. Many ACAs recently indicated their intention to establish new units to perform measurement and assessment duties and therefore requested the centre to train their staff to form the core mass for the M&E units to be created in the agencies. Beyond these initial pilot programmes the comprehensive training plan is being implemented.

It is expected that the centre will transform the existing community of ACAs in Commonwealth Africa into a vibrant network providing active exchanges on best-fit practices and sharing solutions to common problems. The centre will provide training, research and political initiatives for all African Commonwealth countries in areas such as investigations, public education and prevention, forensics, prosecution and asset tracking.

**Partnerships**

The centre has the potential to grow beyond Africa because the Commonwealth family has much to learn and share with each other. The centre, since its launch, has attracted and received enquiries and interests of collaboration from international development partners and stakeholder organisations. A development partners and stakeholders’ conference was organised in Gaborone, Botswana, to provide opportunity for international development partners and other stakeholders to discuss their collaboration with the centre. Such collaboration presented a vast scope for local and international institutions to complement the centre’s resources in assisting member countries in their effort to reduce corruption.

Over 30 participants from international organisations, development partners and other stakeholders attended the conference. The conference was very successful in meeting its objectives. The international organisations indicated areas (such as research, training, help desk, etc.) on which they would like to collaborate with the centre. Notable international organisations who pledged collaboration with the centre included the World Bank, UNODC, Transparency International, UNDP, Basel Institute of Governance, Institute of Security Studies and the University of Pretoria, among many others.

**Rooting out corruption**

The centre’s strength, in part, is the fact that the Association of Anti-Corruption Agencies in Commonwealth Africa is a forum consisting of the heads of these agencies. The operations of the centre are initiatives shared by the heads and take place with their direct involvement and interest. This personal buy-in greatly enhances the shared commitment and sense of ownership. The centre provides a one-stop-shop for reaching out to all the African Commonwealth ACAs – as such, doing business with the centre means doing business with all the ACAs in Commonwealth Africa.

**Conclusion**

The priority agenda of combating corruption is in line with the mandate from the Commonwealth heads of government commitment to root out systemic corruption at both national and international levels. The Commonwealth Secretariat established the network of ACAs in Commonwealth Africa for South-South collaboration and learning.

The network seeks to broker the exchange of ideas and good practices among African Commonwealth countries and to encourage the sharing of experience in areas of comparative advantage, general political buy-in processes and pressures for reforms. The CAACC has been established as the prime vehicle for improving co-ordination and strengthening the capacity of ACAs in Commonwealth Africa.

The centre seeks to transform the ACAs into a vibrant network providing active exchanges on ‘best fit’ practices and sharing solutions to common problems. The active involvement of the heads of ACAs in the establishment of the centre and their ownership of the same is a sign that Africa and the wider Commonwealth are committed to rooting out corruption, demonstrating that it has the potential to grow beyond Africa, as the Commonwealth family has much to learn and share with each other.

All the African Commonwealth countries have pledged to support the centre, which will provide a South-South exchange of ideas, technical skills and best practice to combat corruption. The Association of Anti-Corruption Agencies in Commonwealth Africa plays a vital role in developing programmes for the centre, including the sharing of technical expertise and policy advice, the provision of a help desk based at the Anti-Corruption Agency and specialist training in forensic investigation and asset tracing. The CAACC is a visible and tangible demonstration of the Commonwealth commitment to support its members’ anti-corruption efforts, with the potential for replication in Commonwealth countries across the world.