

Curbing corruption in the police in Rwanda

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In the last few years, the Rwanda National Police (RNP) has adopted the reduction of corruption as one of its main objectives. Despite the positive social consideration of their work, the police is still perceived as one of the most corrupt institutions, and traffic police, in particular. Their efforts to curb corruption involve the collaboration with other public institutions and civil society organisations working against corruption, and include preventive and reactive measures.

Query

What are the measures to curb corruption in the traffic police in Rwanda and with what results?

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Introduction: Overview of corruption in the police in Rwanda

The Rwanda National Police (RNP) is a highly regarded institution (second to army) in Rwanda. According to the Rwanda Governance Scorecard 2019 (Rwanda Governance Board 2019), the level of confidence in the police is 96.5%. This trust has been maintained over the last years in response to years of public sector purges that helped to significantly improve the police and military's accountability to civilians.

Nonetheless, the police continue to be perceived as one of the most corrupt institutions in the country. According to the Rwanda Bribery Index 2018 (TI Rwanda 2018), traffic police are, after the private sector, the second out of eighteen institutions with the highest likelihood of bribery (15%). This percentage shows a rising tendency, since in 2017 the likelihood was 11% and in 2016 it was 9% (TI Rwanda 2018). Other studies show similar perceptions. According to the 2013 Global Corruption Barometer (GCB) (Transparency International 2013), the police is perceived as the most corrupt institution with 21% of respondents

Main points

- The police in Rwanda is one of the institutions most trusted, but, at the same time, it is perceived as highly corrupt.
- To ensure the well-being of police officers, discipline and ethics are considered key to prevent corruption.
- Investigation and encouraging citizens to report corrupt actions are measures against corruption exercised by the police.

feeling that it is corrupt or extremely corrupt in Rwanda. A study by Baez-Camargo et al. (2017) found that 49% believed police officers engaged in corruption.

Following the Rwanda Bribery Index 2018 (TI Rwanda 2018), the highest prevalence of bribery happens in the traffic police reaching 14% in 2018, which is more than in 2017 (11%) but considerably less than in 2016 (20%). According to the 2013 GCB, 23% of respondents reported paying a bribe to the police (Transparency International 2013a).

The perceived prevalence of corruption is similar in urban and rural areas: 13% of the respondents of a survey answered that corruption in the police

happens all the time in rural areas, versus 10% with the same answer in urban areas (Baez-Camargo et al. 2017). The perception of occasional corruption is however higher in urban areas than in rural areas, being 40% and 36% respectively (Baez-Camargo et al. 2017).

The causes of corruption in the police, according to the Commissioner Inspectorate of Services and Ethics Department from the Rwanda National Police in 2016 (interview),¹ vary from greed, individual character and lack of supervision. The former commissioner pointed to key differences between the military and the police to explain the causes of corruption in the police. In the army, he explained, they teach every single day (at the beginning and at the end of the day) values and patriotism. This practice is not as intense as it should be in the police, which is more conceived as an administrative job. According to the former commissioner, there is limited commanding control in the police, and low professional integrity especially among the new police officers who are more vulnerable. In his words, “it takes time to become policemen, to really own the role and responsibility”.

In addition, another factor is that police officers are very exposed to potential corrupt exchanges because of their frequent interactions with the community they work with, as Transparency International Rwanda points out. In fact, according to the 2017 East African Bribery Index (EABI

2017), the highest likelihood of encountering bribery was recorded at the police service in the region. In Rwanda, 29% of respondents interacting with the police were asked or offered to pay a bribe (EABI 2017). Police officers whose integrity and commitment to policing are below the minimum required standards for such work are especially vulnerable in those interactions.

These differences suggest that the relationship between one’s job in terms of believing in its importance, being proud of holding that position and a sense of responsibility to what that job represents for the society, might have an impact on individual behaviour when faced with the temptation of corruption.

Nevertheless, bribery is not the only form of corruption in Rwanda’s public institutions. Patronage, favouritism and nepotism continues to be a challenge within the public service. Studies show that existing patronage is usually based upon kinship or party lines (Baez Camargo and Koechlin 2018). Despite changes to traditional views on bribery, often it is expected from civil servants to give preferential treatment to family, friends or people offering gifts (Baez Camargo and Koechlin 2018). Nepotism and preferential treatment tends to take place more often at the local level (Commonwealth Secretariat 2017).

Anti-corruption efforts by the police

To curb corruption is a significant goal for the police in Rwanda. Its significance responds to a

¹ Interview conducted by Nieves Zúñiga in July 2016 as part of the research led by the University of Nottingham and the University of Birmingham for the EU project Anticorrp.

strong anti-corruption policy and ambitious public sector reform promoted by Kagame's government to establish a system of effective monitoring and little or no tolerance to deviations associated to corruption (Baez-Camargo and Passas 2017). The police address the challenge of corruption from different angles, using both preventive and reactive measures, and in partnership with other public institutions such as the Office of the Ombudsman and the Rwanda Investigation Bureau, as well as in collaboration with civil society organisations like Transparency International Rwanda.

Preventive measures

Fair salaries and perks

In 2016, all police officers' salaries were doubled in an effort to eliminate a potential motivation of corruption in the police (The Chronicles 2019).

In addition, the police, as well as the army, receive certain privileges to support them financially. For example, they can do their shopping for convenient prices and without paying taxes in a duty free shop specially created for them (Karuhanga 2013). The cooperative bank Zigama Credit and Savings Bank (ZCSB) offers convenient financial conditions to the army and the police. Other perks are to have lunch at work for a monthly fee (it changes depending on the rank), that for the lowest rank equals the cost of a single lunch in a popular restaurant (interview).

Professionalism, discipline and ethics

One of the main changes in the police has been its professionalisation. Since its reform, police officers are hired and promoted based on their education (the minimum requirement is to have a bachelor degree) and preparation. Promotions are also

dependent on merit and on undertaking training courses.

As part of its efforts to maintain professional standards and ethics, the RNP created an ethics centre in 2012 (The New Times 2012). Some of the topics taught in this centre are how to handle citizens professionally, conflict management and resolution, post-conflict management and stabilisation (The New Times 2012). According to the Commissioner Inspectorate of Services and Ethics Department (interview), every month a different police officer is sent to the ethics centre to receive training. When they come back, they teach their colleagues about becoming an agent of change.

Police discipline is one of the priorities linked to prevent corruption. According to the RNP strategic plan 2013-2018 (RNP 2015), "police discipline will be enforced by ensuring the effective skills development of recruits and existing staff, in line with the RNP's policing responsibilities and priorities to work towards service excellence. In this regard, RNP management will, at all times ensure that all police officers perform their duties to the best of their abilities and their conduct bears the mark of professionalism and discipline" (RNP 2015). The Police Disciplinary Unit, police disciplinary committees and the Police Disciplinary Centre were established to hold police officers accountable when they are involved in corruption. Another preventive measure is the rotation of police officers to different areas of work.

The police also attend regular awareness-building training sessions offered by the Office of the Ombudsman, spearheaded the institution of anti-corruption in Rwanda (OSIEA and TI Rwanda 2017).

Accountability and recognition of good practices

A mechanism of accountability in the RNP is the performance appraisal (The New Times 2011). All police officers signs their contract of performance for the whole year detailing their responsibilities and goals for the year ahead. The superior checks if the officers have fulfilled their missions. Depending on the evaluation, the officer will be recognised with a promotion or salary increase (interview).

These performance appraisals are in line with the government's approach to monitoring and evaluation following the decentralization process in Rwanda. Performance contracts, called Imihigo, were introduced in 2006 to address the need of the central government and the citizens to ensure the accountability of local governments. According to some studies, this mechanism enhance the accountability of local authorities in part due to the media coverage of the results and repercussions on the public image as a result, but it also enhances the control of the central government over local governments (Nicaise 2015).

Raising awareness

Every year, public institutions, including the Rwandan National Police, celebrate anti-corruption weeks with sensitisation campaigns, media shows, and meetings between authorities and citizens. One of the main messages in those events is the negative consequences of corruption for the whole country, and in particular the link between corruption and the lack of development. Talk shows on radios and TVs and social media are also used to motivate local communities and citizens in general to report against corruption.

IT-led policing

One of the measures to prevent corruption has been the establishment of e-policing, especially in departments more vulnerable to corruption such as traffic and road safety. The digitalisation of services, such as registration of vehicle inspections, computer based examination for provisional driving licences, electronic ticketing of traffic fines and installation of CCTV cameras, have not only improved the quality of service delivery but it has helped to prevent corruption by minimising physical contact between police officers and citizens. It is important to notice that digital mechanisms on its own do not necessarily prevent corruption, reason why its use must be accompanied to efforts to install anti-corruption attitudes in those using them.

Reactive measures

Prosecution and investigation of corruption

Corruption in the police is legally regulated. Presidential Order n° 30/01 of 09/07/2012 on the specific statute for police personnel, Article 33,(3) stipulates: "Any police officer shall be prohibited to demand or receive personally or through a third person, even out of his/her duty hours, bribes, gifts/donations, commissions and other gratuities/tips of any kind whatsoever likely to undermine the confidence of the people, honest, good conduct, truth and justice". Ministerial Instructions n°003/12 of 17/09/2012 establishing the police code of conduct considers faults punishable by dismissal from Rwanda National Police in Article 30, (4) that: "He is dismissed from Rwanda National Police any police officer who is suspected of having been involved himself or through a third party in corruption without interfering into court rulings".

By December 2018, at least 300 police officers had been dismissed for corruption since 2016 (Xinhua 2018). In June 2019, 20 senior Rwandan police officers, the majority of them superintendents and chief inspectors, were fired for corruption (APA News 2019). In addition, 101 junior police officers, including constables and sergeants, were suspended from duty because of corruption and their cases given to the prosecutor (APA News 2019).

Officers suspected of corruption are taken to the Police Disciplinary Unit where they are separated from their duties for one to various months, according to the severity, for disciplinary measures and re-education (Rwanda National Police 2015). The unit may determine that an officer be transferred to another section of the police. According to the police laws, even when an officer is not prosecuted in a court of law, they are subject to internal discipline, detention, suspension and even dismissal should their behaviour be suspect (Baez-Camargo et al. 2017).

The RNP has various organisms dedicated to fighting corruption. The Criminal Investigation Department focuses on crimes other than corruption, but coordinates anti-corruption units in all sections of the police. A special directorate responsible for investigating financial crime exists within this department which specifically focuses on investigating corruption and financial crimes (Implementation Review Group 2013). In 2017, the Rwanda Investigations Bureau was established to investigate serious crimes against the state; the bureau has a mandate to investigate embezzlement of public funds and corruption (Rwanda Investigation Bureau 2019).

The Rwandan National Police plays an important role in anti-corruption work as it performs both

investigation into its own members, and receives corruption complaints at the local level (Open Society Initiative for East Africa and TI Rwanda 2017). It collaborates with the Office of the Ombudsman, usually conducting the investigation of corruption cases under the Criminal Investigation Department (OSFEA and TI Rwanda 2017).

Whistleblowing

Rwanda guarantees protection of witnesses under articles 36 to 37 of the Act of 2003, article 34 of Organic Act No. 61/2008 of 10 September 2008 in the leadership code of conduct. These laws guarantee basic protections to witnesses in trials for criminal offences and to those who report crimes (Implementation Review Group 2013).

Law No. 35/2012 of 19/09/2012, the formal whistleblowers legislation, provides a formal framework for protecting whistleblowers, for example, by criminalising reprisals against whistleblowers and prohibiting the suing of whistleblowers. However, the law presents challenges when declaring these provisions: whistleblowers are expected to report to “empowered organs”; types of reprisals applicable for sanction are not listed; and affirmative actions to protect whistleblowers are not considered.

Non-reporting of corruption in Rwanda is common, as the Rwanda Bribery Index shows that 27.7% of respondents would not report an act of corruption for fear of reprisal or for fear of self-incrimination (TI Rwanda 2018d).

The Rwandan police is one of the channels to denounce corruption. They have a specialised hotline for corruption complaints. Furthermore, in 2014, 250 submission boxes throughout the country allowed citizens to offer anonymous

feedback about police conduct (Nichols-Barrer et al. 2014).

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