

Speech: Tackling corruption is a task for everyone

It is my pleasure to welcome you to this National Launch of the Chatham House study on the Collective Action on Corruption in Nigeria: A Social Norms Approach to Connecting Society and Institutions commissioned and funded by DFID Nigeria.

A year after the May 2016 London Anti-corruption conference, Corruption still remains one of the biggest global issues of our time.

I'm not going to make a long and detailed argument about why corruption is a bad thing. It is well known that corruption is bad for people, bad for development and bad for business; indeed the impact on business has been significant in Nigeria.

Corruption additionally fuels inequality, holds back economic development, and hurts the most vulnerable in society. In the end it is a threat to the national interests of every country.

No country is immune from corruption. Governments need to work together and work with partners from business and civil society to tackle it successfully. This is why the hugely successful London Anti-corruption Summit last year, in which Nigeria played a major and positive role, was important to galvanise global action against corruption.

The UK and Nigeria are making good and sustained progress on commitments made at the Summit. For instance, both countries recognise the value of the Open Government Partnership (OGP) in advancing transparency and good governance reform. Both have committed to reforms made together with civil society and are working with civil society to embed these commitments into National Action Plans.

Both countries are making progress on establishing beneficial ownership registers so looters can no longer, for example, use stolen funds to buy property in London and expect to keep this secret.

Why the Study on the social norms of corruption? Tackling corruption requires systems to be in place, attitudes in society attuned to the effort, and a process to investigate, prosecute and sanction. Plugging loopholes and ensuring good management systems – the prevention agenda – is important. But so is justice. I am convinced that the Nigerian people want looters to be prosecuted and, if found guilty, given long jail sentences. I am proud to say the UK supports Nigeria in all these areas.

The administration of President Muhammadu Buhari has made fighting corruption a top priority and is investing heavily in this fight. Billions of Naira have been recovered by Nigeria's anti-corruption agencies and there are many ongoing high profile investigations and prosecutions. I am sure that, like

me, many others have seen the pictures of the large amounts of cash recovered from apartment blocks and similar locations. I was particularly struck by the picture of a huge stash of cash hidden in a cellar in a slum in Kaduna – millions of dollars hidden away next to extreme poverty where children don't go to school and people are dying of disease.

These efforts to combat corruption are essential, but cannot by themselves foster a sustainable, comprehensive reversal of long-established assumptions and practices. Behavioural insights are required to enhance public policy initiatives. Institutions need to connect with society in this crucial fight.

Corruption is challenging to eradicate. Nigeria's anti-corruption efforts must be underpinned by a deeper understanding of the social drivers of corruption. There must be insights into why people engage in or refrain from corrupt activity, and the societal factors that may contribute to normalizing corrupt behaviours in the first place and desensitizing citizens to its impacts. That is why we commissioned Chatham House to conduct a study exploring social norms of corruption in Nigeria.

Chatham House Study

This Chatham House study was done in collaboration with the University of Pennsylvania's Social Norms Group, Nigeria's National Bureau of Statistics and teams from six Nigerian universities from all round the country. It provides in-depth analysis of social norms of corruption in Nigeria and puts forward options to generate action by a critical mass of local actors who want to forge a 'new normal'.

I won't reveal here all the findings of the study. You will get that shortly from the Chatham House team. Let me just say that this study shows that Nigerians – no more than any other people – are not intrinsically corrupt. It shows that people's behaviour can and will change if the environment or options change.

However it also notes that tough talk and fear-based messaging cannot substitute for authenticity and exemplary behaviour. As long as the government's interactions with citizens continue to be marred by extortionate behaviour and expectations of bribery, the state deprives itself of the moral basis to lead in addressing the corruption problem. We must all walk the talk and be seen to do so.

I believe that this study provides some new insights into corruption in Nigeria and hence some new ideas for tackling it. I hope it can generate some further momentum for change and lead to results that impact positively on the lives of all Nigerians by improving government effectiveness and the delivery of services.

Conclusion

I will end by emphasising that this issue of tackling corruption is for everyone.

I acknowledge that merely understanding the social influences of corruption

won't eradicate corruption. However, it's a crucial step in the journey of ensuring a collective action to do so. I firmly believe that, with the right effort, we can turn back the tide of corruption.

We owe this to the poorest people in the world – we owe it to ourselves. The world and our global economy can't afford not to tackle corruption.

The UK continues to stand with Nigeria in this important process