Religion and attitudes towards corruption in India and Nigeria

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Background to the project

- Part of a 5 year (2005-2010) DFID-funded RPC on ‘Religions and Development’ (www.rad.bham.ac.uk)
- UoB lead institution (Profs Carole Rakodi & Gurharpal Singh), with additional partners in UK & 4 focus countries – India, Nigeria, Pakistan & Tanzania
- RaD officially finished in March 2011 and is in final dissemination stage
WP – ‘Religion & attitudes towards corruption in India & Nigeria’

- Team 1 (UK) = Dr Heather Marquette (International Development Department) – *team leader/India*; Dr Insa Nolte (Centre for West African Studies) - *Nigeria*, both University of Birmingham
- Team 2 (India) = Prof Vinod Pavarala, Dr Kanchan K. Malik, both University of Hyderabad
- Team 3 (Nigeria) = Dr Antonia Simbine, Nigerian Institute of Social & Economic Research; Dr Emmanuel Aiyede, University of Ibadan
- Sites/religions
  - India: Amritsar & Chandigarh, Punjab (Sikhism) and Hyderabad, Andhra Pradesh (Hinduism)
  - Nigeria: Kano (Islam), Abuja (all), Owerri (Christianity/AFT) and Ibadan (Christianity/Islam)
Doing away with assumptions

- In the (scant) literature, 2 assumptions come through (Beets 2007: 72):
  - ‘faithful adherents to religion will refrain from corruption because of the inherent theft, dishonesty, illegality, and mistreatment of others’
  - ‘those who are not faithful adherents of religions are more likely to engage in corruption because of an absence of religious guidance’
- So why then are many of the world’s most corrupt countries also the most religious?
As a British diplomat in 1960s Pakistan said, ‘Religions have been speaking out against murder and adultery for thousands of years, and yet people still kill each other and cheat on their spouses. Why should we expect it to be any different with corruption?’
Approach to the research

- DFID-funded so must aim for country-led research
- Original proposal suggested mixed-methods research but consultation within team led to a qualitative-constructivist approach based on Pavarala’s (1996) study of elite attitudes toward corruption in India
- Social science approach, not about theology → our job is to focus on the relationship (if any) between religion and attitudes towards corruption, not to produce in-depth theological analysis of religious texts
  - Research positionality key issue (i.e., 2 Hindus, 2 Christians [1 Anglican & 1 Catholic], 2 agnostic-ish)
- Interdisciplinary team – 3 political scientists, 2 sociologist, 1 anthropologist
Approach (cont.)

- Methodological components:
  - Textual analysis/development of literature reviews (key stage!)
  - Semi-structured interviews & focus group discussions
  - 240 participants in total (including leaders/members of religious organisations, policy-makers, private sector, NGOs, media, academics, university students & people with specific responsibility for anti-corruption policy design & implementation)

- Approach allowed us to:
  - Avoid limitations of previous, largely survey-based studies (e.g., the famous – in Barrington, NH anyway – tattoo!)
  - See both religion and corruption as ‘lived experiences’
Analytical categories

- 8 broad sub-categories emerged through open coding (also segregated on basis of region-social group-religion)
  - On being ‘religious’
  - Religion and value systems: ethical codes of conduct
  - Definitions and perceptions of corruption
  - (Knowledge of) discourses on corruption in religious texts
  - Religion and people’s attitudes towards corruption
  - Tradition, modernity and corruption
  - The role of religious organisations in promoting ethical conduct
  - The accountability of religious organisations
Main findings

- MF 1: Religion in personal definitions of corruption
- MF 2: Religion, trust and corruption
- MF 3: The problem of ‘modern living’ and consumerism
- MF 4: Prevention and punishment – even God cannot fight corruption!
MF 1: Religion in personal definitions of corruption

- No respondents expressed toleration regarding any form of corrupt behaviour; strong condemnation across the board
- India – largely voiced along secular lines (e.g., impact on poverty, trust in government, trust in society)
- Nigeria – always voiced firstly along religious lines, with only some respondents then offering secular definitions (absence of fear of God, all social ills – including homosexuality as well as bribery)
- Condemnation in both countries of deeply entrenched, ‘systemic corruption’
- Many respondents admitting to having to engage in corruption because of the system, but went through process of ‘othering’ to explain this
- Suggests corruption as a collective action problem

(Persson et al 2010)
Informant voices (MF1)

- Defining corruption --
  - I: Government makes laws and policies which are good, but the problem is with the implementation of these policies – because of corruption. One, you are siphoning off the money meant for welfare, and secondly, you are not performing your duty sincerely.
  - I: It is the total destruction of the administrative system and justice ethics. It is total destruction.
  - N: Honestly, lack of fear of God is the causative agent of corruption. We only say it [fear of God], but we don’t act on it.
  - N: Corruption really is a canker worm. It is one of the things the devil has sown into the world.
Informant voices (MF1, cont.)

- Collective action problem –
  - I: *Corruption is spreading like forest fire in our country and it is difficult to survive or stand apart, like a small green plant in the forest, without it. Although I am a God-fearing person conducting my business honestly, I gave five lakh rupees [GBP6700] for admission of my daughter [to school] because they were demanded of me.*
  - N: *My religion influenced me not to be corrupt, but if you look at the future of yourself and your family, you just have to engage in it [corruption] to get what you want.*
  - In both countries, the word ‘normal’ was often used by informants, i.e., ’Most people see corruption as normal‘.
MF 2: Religion, trust and corruption

- Clear emphasis on lack of trust in both countries
- Makes use of religious organisations as potential anti-corruption partners difficult because religion good at *intra-group* not *inter-group* trust
  - Exercise caution where there’s already inter-group conflict, for ex.
- Religious organisations seen as part of the problem (a.k.a. why we didn’t also do the research in Tirupati!)
  - ‘We make God a stakeholder in our corrupt activities’ (Director of an Anti-Corruption Bureau, India)
- Despite this, in both countries there was a sense that religion *should* make a positive difference
- Some emphasis on (improved) values education
Informant voices (MF2)

- I: Religion has also become one of the sources of income. You become a God man or a God woman and exploit the sentiments of the public.

- I: You cannot get a work executed in Tirupati without giving bribes there. So, all these religious persons we talk about sitting on top of the hill, being good human beings to everyone, they are not. For them, ‘I pray to God’ and ‘I am corrupt’ are two separate issues.

- N: If you are Brother Good in the church – you know how to pray well, regularly attend church services, even clean the church – but if you don’t bring money to the church, your pastor will not recognise you. But when you are able to bring in money, nobody will care to know where you got it from.

- N: The religious leaders are preaching prosperity in such a way that people are tempted to indulge in corrupt practices so that their names are mentioned in the church bulletin.
MF 3: The problem of ‘modern living’ and consumerism

- Values education facing stiff competition from other messages in society that value material success
- Corruption blamed on ‘consumerist’ and ‘materialistic’ aspects of modernisation & globalisation
- Flaunting wealth used to be seen to be bad behaviour, but now encouraged...bragging about corruption to show off how important you are!
- India – tied into debates about modernity; Nigeria – tied into debates about westernisation
- Religion/religious organisations seen as part of the problem more than as part of the solution
- In both countries, a version of ‘simple living, high thinking’ was argued to be a necessary antidote
  - Gandhism as an anti-corruption strategy?
Informant voices (MF3)

- **I:** A schoolboy is demanding a vehicle nowadays. His father’s salary is not that much...because of his son’s fighting daily, his father is forced to provide him with a vehicle. And college-going students are going for 4-wheelers. That too BMWs! If he is a son of an IAS officer or a minister, they are going for BMWs and Ferraris. That is what is forcing their parents to indulge in corruption.

- **I:** People are indulging in corruption because of consumerism – I want my iPod, my dress, my accessories. It has become a mode of self-aggrandizement.

- **N:** We are in a materialistic world where people are getting desperate by the day; they want to make it by becoming rich, so the moment they are given a position, what first comes to their mind is what they can make of it.

- **N:** People engage in corruption because they want to satisfy [materialistic] needs, expectations and pressures.
MF 4: Prevention and punishment – even God cannot fight corruption!

- Main point of difference between the 2 countries (with no real differences between religions):
  - India – there is no point thinking about religion because of this collective action problem; only prevention and punishment will help
  - Nigeria – if only people could be more religious, there would be no corruption!
Next steps

- 3 working papers so far (available at www.rad.bham.ac.uk)
- 2 articles under review (Public Administration & Development and Development in Practice)
- 2 book chapters by end December
- 3 more journal articles based around main findings – advice welcome!!!
- Country teams also developing their own dissemination plans
- Developing methodology on attitudes further with Paul Heywood (and others?) as part of FP7
- Dissemination to policy makers → U4, DFID, World Bank, EC, Christian Aid, Oxfam etc
Many thanks for listening!

Further comments/questions welcome – h.a.marquette@bham.ac.uk or +44 (0) 121 414 2296 or heather.marquette (skype)