

# An Examination of Societal Values and Norms and Its Impact in the Fight Against Fraud and Corruption: A Case Study of the Sisaala People in the Lambussie Traditional Area of the Upper West Region

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## Abstract

The issue of fraud and corruption has become a subject of immense concern. In fact, it has become extremely vital to the academia and a global subject to the extent that it enjoys attention from every facet of the societal set up. Moreover, fraud and corruption continue to dominate the central discussion of the mass media, religious deliberations, the epicenter of political criticisms and the talk of the society as a whole. Imperatively, the adverse effect of these acts cannot be overemphasized especially when compared to the excellent societal norms and values which is anticipated to serve as a guide and mirrors that reflects societal expectations on the path of this life in every sphere. Several scholars in the academia have raised concerns on the issue of fraud and corruption and its corrosive effect on the progress and development. Undeniably, many African nations are crippled by this social menace and Ghana is not an exception. (Kaufmann, Daniel; Vicente, Pedro 2005). Furthermore, revealed that there is superfluity of anti-corruption laws in Ghana yet there exist huge implementation gaps. Hence, this paper thus, sought to identify the value based norms, practices and systems which are also considered to be anti-corruption norms among the Sisaala of the Lambussie Traditional Area and its impact as well as how to blend with the conventional anti-corruption laws to effectively fight the menace of corruption. As such the paper uses a qualitative research method and the result revealed that the Sisaala in LTA has value based norms, best practices and systems such as death by logging, banishment, fines, hooting or shaming, swearing, invoking of curses and threat of punishment by awesome and uncompromising deities such as 'Nansie' (the God of lightning and thunder), Tebuor (earth God), various deities associated with landforms such as ponds/streams, hills and the ancestors. This can blend with the conventional anti-corruption laws to effectively fight corruption.

**Keywords:** Societal Values, Norms, Fraud and Corruption

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## 1.0 Introduction

Corruption and fraud are chronic sociological phenomena that occur with varied degrees and sizes in practically all countries on a worldwide scale. Domestic resources are allocated by each nation for the control and regulation of corruption and the discouragement of crime. Anti-corruption strategies are sometimes grouped together under the label anti-corruption. Furthermore, global programmes such as the United Nations Sustainable Development Purpose (Goal) 16 have a specific goal of significantly reducing corruption in all of its forms (Doss, 2020).

Ian Senior, a well-known economist, defined corruption as "an action to secretly provide a good or a service to a third party in order to influence certain actions that benefit the corrupt, a third party, or both in which the corrupt agent has authority" (Morris 1991). Morris, a political science professor, defined corruption as the illegitimate use of public power to benefit a private interest. Daniel Kaufmann, a World Bank economist,

expanded the idea to include "legal corruption," in which authority is misused within the bounds of the law since individuals in positions of power often have the ability to write laws to protect themselves. Corruption and fraud have the impact of increasing costs and building time, lowering quality, and decreasing benefit in infrastructure (Marco, 2017). The act of fraud, on the other hand, entails the use of deception to persuade the owner of funds or assets to hand them over to an unauthorised entity. For example, corporation cash are misdirected into "shadow companies" and ultimately into the coffers of dishonest personnel, foreign aid money is skimmed, scams, election fraud, and so on.

Furthermore, corruption and fraud are complicated phenomena that can occur on a variety of sizes, and they have steadily evolved into one of Ghana's most pressing social issues (GII, 2012; 2015). In Ghana, the indigenous Sissali speaking people of the Lambussie Traditional Area (LTA) in the Upper West Region have seen their status deteriorate into several tribes and ethnic groups communities. The sorts, frequency, and extent of corrupt practices among the Lambussie aristocracy have not only increased, but have also become a worrying social concern, similar to poverty everywhere in the country (World Bank, 2018).

Corruption and fraud can range from minor favours between a few people to acts that harm the entire community, organisations, political structure, and even the entire country. Corruption and fraud are so common in today's culture that they've become ingrained in the fabric of society, with corruption serving as one of the symptoms of organised crime (systemic corruption). Corruption might be compared to an epidemic in most parts of the world, including the African continent. For a country like Ghana, the corruption index continues to rise to dangerously high levels (Elliott, 1995).

In addition, the application of societal values and norms, the conscious linkage of society and its institutions, as well as the application of acceptable standards and values in finding a solution to the issue of corruption, is referred to as an approach in combating corruption and fraud. Furthermore, the terrible consequences that society faces in dealing with the corruption and fraud that plagues its institutions and distorts its progress are huge, but it must start somewhere. The scenario is similar to what many ethnic communities face, especially indigenous Sissali speakers in the Lambussie Traditional Area (LTA) in the Upper West Region, necessitating the investigation.

## 1.2 Problem Statement

The frequency and scope of corrupt practices in the Lambussie aristocracy have undeniably increased to the point where they have become a serious social issue (World Bank, 2018). Fraud and corruption are not only widely despised and reviled, but they are also criminalised over the world because these two maladies tend to obstruct societal development while also causing a slew of societal issues. A social problem, according to Rubington & Weinberg (1971), is any socially delirious circumstance judged to be incompatible with a group's ideals, whose members have succeeded in publicising a call for action to repair the situation. The problem's resulting condition(s) must also be unsatisfactory, and hence incompatible with the community's desired overall quality of life. The term "quality of life" is used to describe how individuals are doing financially, physically, emotionally, socially, politically, and culturally. The quality of life is regarded to have deteriorated to the extent that certain components of social welfare are lacking (Burger & Luckman, 1996). One of the perplexing aspects of fraud and corruption that poses a significant barrier is how these two linked pairings are frequently perceived as different issues from organised crime or even each other. False accounting is at the heart of the majority of corrupt acts, yet those who study crime statistics on corruption rarely take this into account. For example, if money laundering legislation applies to the proceeds of any crime, how is organised crime and money laundering distinguished from other criminal activities such as procurement fraud, tax evasion, and grand corruption, all of which can occasionally involve committing 'organised crime' offences.

Unfortunately, corruption and fraud have risen to such frightening levels in most societies that many people are left asking what happened to the rich societal ideals and norms that guided the people, and what exactly has led to the enormous growth in the incidence of fraud and corruption. As has been often said, today's society is rotting due to corruption and fraud (World Bank, 2018, GII, 2019).

Furthermore, it is a fatal error to believe that corruption has no victims. Corruption has severe economic, social, and political consequences. Scholars must go deeply into the topic to come up with the involvement of society in all of these difficulties in order to determine the degree of the problem and the best strategy to address it. As a result, this essay looks at societal values and norms, as well as their impact on the fight against fraud and corruption, with a focus on the Sissali people of the Lambussie Traditional Area (LTA) in the Upper West Region.

## 1.3 Objective of the Study

The main purpose of this paper is to thoroughly examine social values and norms and its impact in the fight against fraud and corruption with a case study of the Sissali speaking people of the Lambussie Traditional Area (LTA) in the Upper West region of Ghana.

The specific objectives include:

- i) To explain and define the concept of fraud and corruption in relation to Sisaala community.
- ii) To investigate the main causes of rise in corruption, fraud and its associated financial malfeasance among the Sisaala people of the LTA.
- iii) To analyse the societal values and norms of the Sisaala traditional area and its role in curbing fraud and corruption in the Sisaala traditional area.

## **2.0 Literature Review**

### **2.1 Theoretical Review**

According to Defee, Williams, Randall, and Thomas (2010) successful research should be conceptually anchored. The purpose of a theory is to clarify issues and provide guiding principles and guidance for explaining and interpreting social occurrences (Oтите and Ogionwo, 2000). As a result, the research was guided by the Rational Choice Theory.

#### **2.1.1 Rational Choice Theory**

Rational Choice Theorists, on the other hand, say that people's behaviour is mostly shaped by estimates of costs and rewards of activities. As a result, people try to breach the law if the rewards outweigh the risks of doing so (Lamert, 1951; Hagan, 1994). People's behaviour is mostly shaped by practically hedonistic calculations, according to Rational Choice Theory. As a result, as long as the opportunity cost of inaction is greater than the cost of choosing a certain course of action, it pays for an individual to act, no matter how bad the consequence may be to society as a whole (Nuodio, 2010).

Most structured societies respond to deviant behaviour by putting in place some control mechanisms, including punishment to dissuade offenders, either informally or formally. Effective fraud and corruption management is based on the deterrence theory, which is frequently used to explain community restraint of individuals and groups from pursuing selfish goals, as rational choice theory would predict (Nuodio, 2010). The deterrence model assumes that because fraud and corruption do not pay and are penalised, criminalising the unauthorised and unlawful acquisition and use of any resource will reduce the number of those who conduct fraud and corruption.

### **2.2 Concept of Fraud and Corruption**

Fraud and corruption are phrases that are used all throughout the world. Both developed and poor nations are affected. It is the exploitation of wealth or power for personal benefit. Corruption, as defined by Transparency International and quoted by Kolstad et al. (2008), is the misuse of entrusted power for personal gain. Furthermore, the United Nations Convention Against Corruption (UNCAC) does not have a single definition of corruption. Corruption, on the other hand, is a multi-faceted phenomenon. It is defined by a combination of domestic and international economic, political, administrative, social, and cultural aspects.

#### **2.1 The Concept of Fraud and corruption in Sissala Traditional Area.**

Corruption is a symptom of larger dynamics, not an inherent kind of behaviour. It is the product of interactions, opportunities, strengths, and weaknesses in socio-political systems, according to Gupta et al. (2002). Individuals, groups, organisations, and institutions that fill civil society, the state, the public sector, and the corporate sector have access to and control over these areas. It is, above all, the outcome of numerous players' dynamic relationships (Minto and Edoardo, 2022).

Ethnographic approaches to analysing corruption and fraud emphasize the importance of sociocultural norms and practices in understanding corrupt behaviour, emphasizing that culture is a dynamic social construct that interacts with the broader political and economic context. A literature review on ethnographic research on the functioning public administrations, especially in Africa (Anders, 2005; Blundo and Olivier de Sardan, 2006), reveals three main findings. First, evidence that the public sector in some Sub-Saharan African countries is undergoing an informal privatisation process (Anders, 2005; Blundo and Olivier de Sardan, 2006).

Rather than implying a lack of rules, this process is marked by an abundance of complicated de facto norms that conflict with official regulations and obscure the lines between legal and illegal behaviour. Second, the lines between corrupt practices and other behaviours or acts are frequently blurred because corruption is embedded in larger everyday practices that are not necessarily corrupt but frequently enable and legitimize wrongdoing. Interactive and dynamic networks are a prevalent component of Africa's social environment, and they're an important part of the day-to-day techniques used by those who work in and use governmental administrations and services. This emphasizes the value of social bonds, or the moral need to aid one's relatives (Anders, 2005; Olivier de Sardan, 1999). Personalizing ties with public officials is thus a preventative technique that requires ongoing investment in the form of corruption.

According to Hornby, (1995) fraud is; (i) the act or instance of fooling someone in order to get money or things in an illegal manner. (ii) a person who deceives others by claiming to have abilities, skills, or other

qualifications that he or she does not have, an impostor. Moreover, corruption is defined as dishonesty and criminal behaviour by those in positions of authority or influence, according to the same dictionary. The Sisaala language explains fraud to entail more than fooling others in order to obtain money or products illegally. since it involves lying, misinformation, misrepresentation of facts or reality, false pretence, and imposition, the second term is closest to the Sisaala idea of fraud. When someone claims to be or have abilities, skills, or powers (natural or supernatural) with the objective of illegally getting, acquiring, or accessing a resource of any kind, this is fraud. Similarly, the Sisaala conceptual definition of corruption is very broad and includes more than just dishonesty and criminal behaviour by persons in positions of power. The powerful and the powerless, old and young, male and female are not distinguished in the Sisaala environment of corruption. Cheating, lying, stealing, misleading, misinforming, and any other behaviour that results in the illegitimate gain of money, products, land, or other material or spiritual resources is considered a corrupt practice.

Acts of fraud and corruption are described as unethical, condemnable, criminal, and punishable in both English and Sisaala definitions. If a member of the community is proved to be corrupt, he or she can be punished. As a result, the Sisaala encourages community members to follow the golden rule of treating others as they would want to be treated. The ethical and moral ideals of fairness, justice, equality before the ancestors, and fear of God have a strong influence on how the Sisaala relate to one another.

### **2.3 Causes of Fraud and Corruption**

If the corrupt gain exceeds the punishment multiplied by the likelihood of being found and prosecuted, an episode of corruption and fraud has occurred. Others have proposed a fourth variable of "morality" or "integrity" because a high degree of monopoly and discretion combined with a low degree of openness does not always lead to corruption or fraud. The moral dimension has an intrinsic component that refers to a "mental health problem," as well as an extrinsic component that refers to circumstances such as poverty, insufficient remuneration, inappropriate working conditions, and inoperable or over-complicated procedures that demoralise people and causes them to seek "alternative" solutions. The increasing epidemic of fraudulent and dishonest behaviours among Sisaala populations is blamed on a variety of factors. There is currently little scientific evidence that identifies a single or group of causes of fraud and corruption.

### **2.4 Corruption and Fraud in Ghana**

Since the country's independence, corruption has been rampant and a thorn in the flesh of all successive government. It has always played major role in the political message and as a selection of winning political parties. Ghana's score and rating on the Transparency International Corruption Perceptions Index has improved marginally since 2006, with the country now ranking higher than Italy and Brazil, according to the World Bank's 2015 report. However, in Ghana, there is a growing sense that government-related corruption is on the rise. Ghana was ranked 73rd on the Corruption Perceptions Index (World Bank report 2020).

### **3.0 Research Methodology**

The focus of this study is on the subject that one can only make some educated guesses about. Personal direct observations, informal interactions with individuals, groups, and opinion leaders, including the Totinawa, chiefs, and headmen of several communities, form the basis of this paper's research. This qualitative data also includes informants from drinking establishments, markets, and barbershops, as well as gossip from significant people.

### **4.0 Result and Discussion**

The terrible problem of fraud and corruption in their villages has been attributed to a number of factors. The law of numbers, poverty, economic difficulties, cultural invasions, and social change, which leads to redefinitions and loss of some social ideals, are the key causes being harped on for the astounding growth in cases of fraud, financial malfeasance, and corruption in Sisaala villages. The political class and bureaucrats have also demonstrated a lack of political will to combat fraud and corruption.

The rule of numbers states that as the population expands, so will crime, such as fraud and corruption. According to the idea, population expansion and crime are linked. However, because there can be a reversed relationship between criminal behaviour and population increase, an exclusively direct causal correlation between expanding population and rising crime can be controversially problematic.

During talks with Sisaala community members, poverty or economic difficulties came up frequently as a key cause of fraud and corruption. When people are faced with great poverty, they may be compelled to act in socially undesirable ways (McNeely, 1995). Poverty is herein defined broadly to include, but not limited to, one's ability to provide for basic needs such as food, housing, and clothing. Lack of access to material resources, excellent healthcare and education, safe drinking water and sanitation, and all other prerequisites and means to a happier and higher quality of life as a matter of right are also markers of poverty. This description is consistent with the UNDP's synthesis of poverty as a denial of human rights, which was published in 2003. Imperatively,

those rights that are inherent to the person and belonging equally to all human beings.

The values of universality and indivisibility, empowerment, participation, transparency, and accountability are all part of the human rights-based approach to poverty alleviation. Poverty as a multi-dimensional issue will better capture the nature of poverty in the LTA, as well as its role as a contributing factor to the rise in fraud and corruption. The truth is that poverty is more than a lack of income, while this is not meant to minimize the impact of poor or insufficient long-term income on a person's vulnerability to illicit activity. Underdevelopment and poor quality of life result from the interaction of the various characteristics of poverty. The extremely poor's survival strategies may involve anti-social behaviours such as stealing, fraud, and corruption, to name a few.

In LTA Sissala speaking communities, cultural invasions and change have led to redefinitions and the loss of some social values, as well as an increase in fraud, corruption, and cases of financial wrongdoing. In the areas of religion, linguistics, business and trade, music, social life, and many other aspects of Sisaala culture, Western European and frontline cultures of other ethnic groups, such as the Dagara or Dagaaba, Wala, all of the Upper West Region, have influenced the Sisaala culture and value system.

The apparent erosion of traditional administrative, judicial, and legislative powers of the Totinawa, as well as a lack of executive political will to combat societal ills at the local community, district assembly, and national levels of governance, are two major factors contributing to the rise in fraud, financial malfeasance, and corruption in the LTA. The majority of the participants decried the central government's failure to grab the bull by the horns, which has eroded the powers of the totinawa (community owners) and other community leaders. Fraud and other criminal activities must be made unappealing to anyone considering a career in fraud and corruption.

#### **4.1 Traditional Sisaala Anti-corruption tools and institutions**

The rising prevalence of fraud and corruption in Sisaala and other Ghanaian communities necessitates immediate action to reduce the growing incidence and devastating effects of fraud, corruption, and financial mismanagement on community development.

#### **4.2 Anti-corruption Tools**

The traditional Sisaala had numerous instruments and social institutions for addressing fraud, corruption, and other sorts of misbehaviour before colonial rule and the subsequent foundation of Ghana as a nation state. 'Death by logging,' banishment, fines, hooting or shaming, swearing, invoking of curses, and threat of punishment by awesome and uncompromising deities such as 'Nansie' (the God of lighting and thunder), Tebuor (earth God), various deities associated with landforms such as ponds/streams, hills, and the ancestors are among the traditional Sisaala anti-corruption tools.

#### **4.3 Anti Corruption Institutions**

Depending on the gravity of the matter, the aggrieved individual and his or her immediate extended family elders, who normally form an assembly, may decide on the tool to be used. Murder, threats of death, witchcraft, poisoning, and the use of psychic powers to harm others are typically addressed by the Totina of a certain community as the presiding judge. A Supreme Council of Family Heads (Kumbesse) and their Deputies of the Kumbeele assist the Totina. Cases are typically heard at the Earth God's (Tebuor) precincts, such as 'Kabiri' in Lambussie and Gbingbaala, 'Tembile' in Billaw, and so on. The Supreme Council is extremely powerful, led by the Totina and assisted by the Family Heads and their deputies. The Earth God or other deities acting via the former, who comprise a notional appeal court, rarely examined or contested the Council's decisions on cases presented before it. Despite the fact that the Supreme Council of Elders has combined and total judicial, executive, and legislative powers, its actions and inactions are scrutinised by the community's Earth God, who speaks through a diviner or soothsayer.

The Family Elders Assembly and the entire Village Supreme Council are two anti-fraud/corruption institutions in every Sisaala community in the Lambussie Traditional Area. Furthermore, indigenous professional institutions like as hunters, undertakers, musicians and praise singers (Gokeh), magicians (Tiiwa), and fighters are not prevalent (Heyooro). These professional organisations have internal systems in place to deal with small transgressions by members before they escalate to the point where the Totina and his supreme council of elders become involved.

#### **4.4 Corruption and Fraud: General Perspective**

Personal observations and informal group discussions create the impression that, despite people's wishes and repeated requests for corruption to be stopped, the problem has been growing over time. Money and material possessions are in high demand. The get-rich-quick mentality has pushed the traditional Sisaala communities in the LambussieParamountcy's fine old social values to the background. Many complaints and regular reports of teenagers engaging in fraud, stealing, cattle rustling, and other dubious and unlawful behaviours for the goal of

illegally benefiting themselves lead one to believe that corruption is not falling but rather rising. There seems to be a rising belief that money and materialism are the only ways to get out of poverty and into social acceptability.

Honesty, empathy, collective ownership of resources (including children), justice, fairness, and fear of God are all classic Sisaala social values.

#### **4.5 The Sisaala Value System**

A value system is a group of people's shared set of values, beliefs, and attitudes. Some human values, such as the right to life and property, education, health, religion, and employment, are universal. Values, on the other hand, may be unique to members of a certain ethnic group, such as the Sisaala.

Apart from sharing universal principles with the rest of the world, the Sisaala have developed their own set of values to guide their behaviour and interactions with their neighbours. Essentially, the Sisaala value system comprises all of the group members' common views, attitudes, and ideologies. The Sisaala ethnic group believes in a single God who must be worshipped through intermediary deities and ancestors. God must be contacted through the lesser gods and their ancestors who are believed to be residing in the Kingdom of God, due to the Almighty's profound awe. The social order of the people has had a significant impact on the Sisaala understanding of God. One does not and should not approach the Totina, a village chief, an elder, or any other person of authority and power directly among the Sisaala unless they are accompanied by a dignified personality or leaders. Meeting persons in positions of authority and power without passing through an elder or honourable member of the community is absurd and disrespectful to the Sisaala people.

The traditional Sisaala religion emphasizes the sanctity of life and humanity's oneness. Murder, suicide, and threats to take someone's life are not only illegal, but also criminal. Strangers and community members are treated with respect and are given every courtesy and protection. The Sisaala people's value system places a premium on principles of fair play, fairness, equality, and human dignity. Fairness, justice, accountability, respect, and love for all are at the heart of relationships with kin and strangers alike.

#### **4.6 The Sisaala Value System as an Anti-Corruption Tool**

The anti-corruption instruments of the Sisaala value system are effective. Because a strong belief in the social ideals of fairness, justice, accountability, love and empathy for others, and the fear of God can guide people to eschew fraud and corruption, proper child nurturing and exposure to the core cultural values of the Sisaala can serve as anti-corruption tools, especially when beliefs are supported by self-discipline and the willingness to do the right thing most of the time.

Unfortunately, recent rises in the number of fraud and corruption cases in our communities imply that the traditional Sisaala value system is under attack and losing relevance. Traditional Sisaala anti-corruption techniques and organisations have lost their effectiveness due to a conflict of cultures, particularly when polytheism was supplanted by monotheism. There is now just one almighty God who has the patience to wait for a future criminal judgement. As a result, the Sisaala belief in one God and intermediate deities has mostly been supplanted by a patient, kind, and forgiving God. The period of judgement and punishment has been postponed from now to a distant future after death, according to Christian and Islamic doctrines. The Sisaala belief in deities such as Kabiri (Earth God), Nansia (God of Lightning and Thunder), and other spirits were uncompromisingly swift in delivering justice and regulating the affairs of mankind on behalf of the Almighty God before the Christian and Islamic interpretations of monotheism arrived.

Furthermore, in the past, the ability to provide basic essentials such as food, shelter, and clothing to one's family, as well as the acquisition of a few cattle, were the most important factors. Today's scenario is different. The race for material and financial wealth is on. People nowadays will go to any length to gain fortune. As a result, many people are prone to unlawful activities such as stealing, fraud, corruption, and misuse of their employers' time, money, and material resources. A flawed redefinition of societal ideals and what makes a higher quality of life appears to be taking place. The carelessness in maintaining the virtues and ideals embedded in the communities' unwritten standards of conduct has been attributed to alien beliefs and the embrace of foreign values.

Since of the erosion of their powers by the arms of government following the establishment of the nation state during the colonial era and post-independence Ghana, some Sisaala anti-corruption social institutions like supreme councils of elders, assemblies of household heads, and professional or craft associations are no longer as powerful as they once were.

#### **5.0 Summary and Conclusion**

The Sisaala contextual definitions of fraud and corruption are broader and more flexible than those in Hornby (1995)'s Oxford Advanced Learners' Dictionary of Current English's 5th edition. Fraud and corruption, as well as any other sort of illicit acquisition of money, materials, or even non-material resources, are all crimes that must

be condemned, abhorred, and punished.

Poverty, poor agricultural practises, climate change and low yields, economic adversity, social change leading to a redefinition of the Sisaala social value system, and the onslaught of monotheism are some of the major factors contributing to the rise in cases of fraud and corruption in LTA Sisaala Communities.

The Sisaala social organisation, like other societies, has developed a set of social ideals that influence members' behaviour in all parts of life over time. Shaming, penalties, and banishment, as well as the threat or invocation of a spiritual death sentence, are among the anti-fraud and corruption tactics and institutions in the Sisaala value system. In the fight against fraud, financial misconduct, and corruption in our communities, these Sisaala anti-corruption measures and institutions can still be useful. This would necessitate a re-engineering of nurturing techniques and cultural norms at the household and community levels.

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