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CPI 2023 for Sub-Saharan Africa: Impunity for corrupt officials, restricted civic space and limited access to justice

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This year's Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) shows mixed results in Africa, with significant improvements in a few countries. However, most African countries experienced stagnation, maintaining the region's consistently poor performance, with an unaltered regional average score of 33 out of 100. Ninety per cent of countries in Sub-Saharan Africa scored under 50.

Despite a [regional survey](#) ranking corruption among the most important problems that Africans want their governments to address, the 2023 CPI shows that countries in Sub-Saharan Africa have a long way to go in their fight against corruption.

Seychelles (CPI score: 71) remains the top scorer in the region, followed by **Cabo Verde** (64) and **Botswana** (59). **Equatorial Guinea** (17), **South Sudan** (13) and **Somalia** (11) perform the lowest with no sign of improvement.

Corruption impacts the most vulnerable

Despite an [economic growth rate of 3.3 per cent](#) in 2023, Sub-Saharan Africa continues to grapple with extreme poverty, affecting about [462 million people](#). The region's persistent challenges stem from decades of severe underfunding in public sectors, exacerbated by corruption and illicit financial flows siphoning resources away from basic public services. Addressing social and economic issues remains ineffective, often at the expense of the most vulnerable population. Corruption [in justice delivery mechanisms](#) disproportionately affects the poorest citizens and those who depend primarily on public services, such as people living with disabilities or [women and children](#), hindering the realisation of global and regional development goals.

Weak checks and balances threaten democracy

Cases of corruption and related challenges in justice systems in the region range from reports of bribery to [extortion and political interference in justice systems](#) of countries like **Nigeria** (25), to the [dismissal and imprisonment of magistrates](#) accused of corruption in **Burundi** (20), and all the way to the [denial of justice](#) for victims of human rights violations in the **Democratic Republic of Congo** (20). These examples underscore the justice system's crucial role in safeguarding basic human rights and social equity.

Democracy across Africa is also under pressure with a rise in the number of [unconstitutional changes](#) in some of the lowest-scoring countries, including **Mali** (28), **Guinea** (26), **Niger** (32) and **Gabon** (28), with [insecurity and corruption](#) cited as the main underlying reasons. Since 2020, there have been [nine coups](#) in the Sahel region and Central Africa.

Country to Watch: Gabon

Gabon's (28) performance in the CPI is on the decline, despite its reputation as one of the most prosperous and stable countries in Central Africa. The dominance of the Bongo family in the country's political scene for over five decades has allowed little room for transparency and

accountability. Recent [surveys indicate](#) that nine out of ten Gabonese disapproved of the government's anti-corruption performance and feared reprisals for reporting corruption.

A military coup took place in August 2023, only a few hours after Ali Bongo was declared the winner of the presidential election held earlier the same month. While the coup was unconstitutional, political opposition leaders and civil actors saw it as an opportunity to end over half a century of the Bongo family's rule in the country and help restore order after what they considered chaotic elections. The new military-led government prioritised the fight against corruption, emphasising the reactivation of an anti-corruption task force to investigate all projects that contractors received money without completing the work.

A stronger rule of law: A step towards ending impunity

This year's CPI results are a stark reminder that the independence of the judiciary and functioning of internal accountability mechanisms, such as codes of conduct and processes to remove judges, should be at the forefront of policymaking in the region.

In the **Democratic Republic of Congo** (20), the General Inspectorate of Finance (IGF) plays a central role in the intensified anti-corruption efforts under President Felix Tshisekedi. Over the past five years, the IGF has uncovered numerous cases of mismanagement of public funds and corruption in several institutions, including the president's office. However, justice has been slow, especially for cases involving politically exposed persons. During an interview in July 2023, President Tshisekedi [expressed dissatisfaction](#) with the judiciary's performance during his tenure.

Political opposition leaders and civil society representatives criticised President Macky Sall and his administration in **Senegal** (43) for using the judiciary to settle political scores. In a [joint letter](#), prominent Senegalese figures, including university professors, journalists, authors and former ministers, called on President Sall to take immediate steps to restore peace and ensure the independence of the judiciary. As the 2024 presidential election approaches, [tensions are mounting](#), as seen during the violent repressions against protestors and restrictions on internet access.

In **Zambia** (37), the auditor general, accountant general, former secretary to the treasury and 15 other officials from the Ministry of Finance were [arrested in March 2023 and charged with corrupt practices](#) after receiving various payments for fictitious activities. These arrests resulted from an [investigation by Transparency International Zambia](#) on the siphoning of millions of dollars in the Ministry of Finance.

Despite adopting the African Union Convention on Prevention and Combatting Corruption (AUCPCC) two decades ago, impunity of public actors, a weakened civic space and the lack of public access to justice and information continue to be critical issues that threaten the rule of law in the region. Anti-corruption efforts are therefore necessary and pertinent at all levels and with multiple stakeholders within the justice network, from court-class lawyers and family systems to prosecutors and magistrates.

Cautious optimism amid anti-corruption efforts

Cote d'Ivoire (40) has improved steadily over the past decade, with a thirteen-point increase since 2013. After years of armed conflicts in the early 2000s and a political standoff following the 2010 presidential elections, President Alassane Ouattara's administration implemented several successful reforms. These include passing a law on prevention and repression, establishing a national anti-corruption authority, requiring senior officials to declare assets upon assuming duty, creating

[economic and financial crimes sections](#) in the court system, implementing toll-free [corruption reporting lines](#) and issuing a decree on combatting money laundering.

While these legal and institutional measures are steps in the right direction, they should be enforced across all relevant sectors in Cote d'Ivoire. Additional measures, such as making asset declarations public, passing a law on whistleblower protection with robust enforcement mechanisms and introducing a beneficial ownership register accessible to the public, would complement these efforts.

Seychelles (71) and **Angola** (33) continue to register marked progress in their fight against corruption. Over the past decade, Seychelles' CPI score increased by 19 points, while Angola has improved by 14 points since 2019. Both countries share common anti-corruption measures, such as the consistent effort to recover stolen assets and openly hold alleged perpetrators to account through the national justice systems. Angola finalised an anti-corruption strategy spanning 2018-2022. These efforts, together with other judicial reforms, have led to the [recovery of US\\$ 3.3 billion in assets](#) by the sovereign wealth fund. The investigation and prosecution of high-ranking officials has also culminated in the recovery of approximately US\$7 billion in total financial and tangible assets.

Cabo Verde (64) recently passed a law to create an online platform for judicial operators to reduce delays and pending proceedings.

Liberia (25) has declined sixteen points since 2012. The country's CPI score contrasts with positive reforms introduced by the administration of former President George Weah in the latter part of his tenure in 2022-2023. These efforts included the amendment of the [Liberia Anti-Corruption Commission \(LACC\) Act](#), which gives the Commission direct and immediate power to prosecute and seize public officials' assets, the passing of a whistleblower protection law and the amendment of the National Code of Conduct, among others. However, the impact of these reforms is yet to be fully realised, as impunity for corruption remains high. This is evidenced in cases where multiple officials, sanctioned by the US government for significant public sector corruption, have neither been

Country to Watch: South Africa

South Africa (41) will mark 30 years in 2024 since the end of Apartheid and the ushering in of a new democratic era. Despite this significant milestone and the hope that corruption would end with the establishment of a just governmental system, South Africa's CPI score has declined over the past five years.

As the country approaches the 2024 General Elections, the executive continues to lead ongoing anti-corruption efforts that seek to draw in stakeholders from across society, including by setting up the National Anti-Corruption Advisory Council. This presents an opportunity to launch anti-corruption campaigns geared towards political parties and their manifestos, and to mobilise the public and civil society to hold the country's leaders to account.

It is crucial to leverage this moment to build upon the recommendations of the [Zondo Commission](#) to ensure that systems and legislation are strengthened while opportunities for corruption are reduced.

