

## *Original Paper*

# Exploring the Drivers of Corrupt Practices and Non-Adherence to Ethical Values in Public-Sector Management: Focusing on Public Policy and Programme Implementation

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### ***Abstract***

*This study explores the drivers of corrupt practices and non-adherence to ethical values in public management operations by focusing on public policy and programmes implementation within the Ghanaian context. Evidence based on an in-depth semi-structured interview (32) and focus-group discussions (2) found several drivers of corrupt practices and non-adherence to ethical values; which suggests an intertwined and cyclical relationships among the drivers. We find institutions, administration systems and political as fundamental drivers whilst socio-culture and economic as secondary drivers. However, political leadership is fundamental whilst management leadership from contracting firms are secondary drivers.*

### **1. Introduction**

Extant literature indicates that corrupt practices have gradually become a key political and socio-economic problem which hinders growth and development worldwide (Quah, 2001; Jancsics & Jávör, 2012; D'Agostino et al., 2013; Rose-Ackerman, 2016; Azim & Kluvers, 2017). Corruption, which is defined as the abuse of public office for private gains, includes a variety of malfeasances that violate professional ethics in public service (Tian & Lo, 2009). Consequently, the malfeasances has attracted the attention of many practitioners and academics alike; hence, extant literature has been devoted to the discussion of the relationships between corruption and many variables such as cost increment (Pashev, 2011), economic development (Riesman, 2000; Huang, 2016), social effects (Saha & Gounder, 2013), inequality (Azim & Kluvers, 2017), firm management quality (Athanasouli & Goujard, 2015), innovation (Paunov, 2016), returns on investment (ROI) (Boycko et al., 1996),

privatization (Miguel & Cuadrado-Ballesteros, 2019), Gross Domestic Product (GDP) (Pellegrini & Gerlagh, 2004), democracy (Jetter et al., 2015), political discontent, instability and violence (Aisen & Veiga, 2013), rule-violating intentions (Sundstrom, 2016), ethical leadership and public trust (Thaler & Helmig, 2016), public-sector performance and integrity (Ko, 2015), leadership style and ethical behaviour (Lasthuizen et al., 2011), among many others.

However, the literature indicates that little is researched about the relationship between corruption and public-sector policy and programmes implementation in developing countries in the African region—despite the pervasiveness of the malfeasances in the public sector. Further, the very few studies that have looked at the relationships between corruption and projects or programmes have done so in relation to the effects of corruption on projects/programme performance (Aladwani, 2016; Locatelli et al., 2017; Damoah et al., 2018). To the best of our knowledge, only Aladwani (2016) and Damoah et al. (2018) have focused exclusively on the public sector in developing countries; and even did so only in relation to projects and excluded policy. Further, these studies did not look at the drivers of corruption; thus, they looked at how corruption impacts on public sector projects performance. This current research seeks to bridge this research gap by exploring the drivers of corrupt practices in public-sector policy and programmes implementation.

On the other hand, literature indicates that there is a direct link between corruption and ethical values (Donaldson, 1989; Gyimah-Boadi, 2002; Tian & Lo, 2009). However, studies that have looked at corruption and ethical values in public sector policy and programme management have mainly done so in isolation. This study therefore takes an integrated position.

The Ghanaian context is important for this study for a number of reasons. First, existing literature indicates that there is a clear link between religion and ethics; and corruption. Given that Ghana is an extremely religious country with 96% of the populace regarded as religious, and the number one in the global religiosity index (WIN-Gallup International, 2012), we propose that being extremely religious will have significant impact on people's attitude towards ethical values and corrupt practices during public-sector operations. This also represents many developing countries as the index shows that the most religious countries are predominantly in developing countries and African region, hence, findings will have international implications.

Second, the Ghanaian context typifies an African country with the possibility to develop through public-sector policy and programmes implementation; as a result of the discovery and exploitation of oil in commercial quantities (Ahadzie et al., 2009; World Bank, 2012); and therefore, corruption and non-adherence to ethical values in the public-sector policy and programmes implementation will have dire consequences on socio-economic development and sustainability. The exploitation of oil in commercial quantity made the country one of the fastest growing economies in the world, averaging real GDP growth rate of 7.3% between 2010 and 2017 (Ghana Statistical Service, 2018) and number one in world ranking of economic growth in 2011 (Economy Watch, 2011).

Third, the Ghanaian context is important because corruption within the country, particularly, the public-sector operations is pervasive, and this has attracted many public debates through lectures, political campaigns and academic studies over the years (Gyimah-Boadi, 2002; Mensah, 2003; Azeem, 2009; Short, 2010; Bawumia, 2014, 2015; Addo, 2015; Damoah et al., 2018). Others have cited corruption as the fundamental reasons for public-sector policy, programmes and projects failure in the country (Short, 2010; Damoah et al., 2018). However, little is known about the drivers of these cited corruptions. Therefore, the study will add to existing discussions and growing debate on the phenomena within the country and other developing countries with similar corruption problems.

Empirical findings using in-depth semi-structured interview and focused-group discussions, several drivers of corruption and non-adherence to ethical values were identified and classified into socio-culture, economic, institutions, administration systems and politics. These drivers are intertwined and have cyclical relationship. In particular, the findings indicate that institutions, administration systems and politics as fundamental drivers for corrupt practices and non-adherence to ethical values while socio-culture and economic drivers as secondary. Further, political leadership is considered to be a root driver to most of the drivers.

This paper makes several contributions to existing literature and practice. First, this study provides for the first-time first-hand empirical evidence on the key drivers of corrupt practices and non-adherence to ethical values on the implementation of public sector policies and programmes from an African perspective. Second, prior studies have only looked at the relationship between corruption and projects/programmes implementation, which is at the management phase of public-sector policy and programme implementation processes (Aladwani, 2016; Locatelli et al., 2017; Damoah et al., 2018). Therefore, by looking at it from policy and programme perspective, both pre-management and management phases are integrated into the discussions. Third, while previous studies have focused mainly on the negative impact of corruption on public sectors projects (Aladwani, 2016; Damoah et al., 2018); this current study explored the drivers of these malfeasances—this sets the foundation for further studies to be conducted on the drivers of corruption and ethical values in public-sector policy and programmes implementation. Fourth, by exploring the drivers of corrupt practices and non-adherence to ethical values in public-sector policy and programmes implementation, we deepen our understanding of drivers of corruption and ethical values within the public sector operations. Lastly, by developing a conceptual framework with empirical evidence, we provide a framework that consolidates the relationships between corruption, ethical values and public-sector policy and programme implementation.

The next section reviews relevant prior literature relating to corruption, ethical values in business and public sector-sector operations management in general and Ghana in particular; and development of theoretical framework for the study. Section three presents the methodology of the study by describing the philosophical foundation of the study, and research approach. Sections four and five present the

results and discussions; and conclusions, contributions and suggestions for future studies of the study respectively.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Public-Sector Policy and Programme Implementation

Public policy is the relatively stable set of purposive governmental actions that address matters of concern to some part of society (Anderson, 2000). Project is defined as “an endeavour in which human, material and financial resources are organized in a novel way, to undertake a unique scope of work, of given specification, within constraints of cost and time, so as to achieve beneficial change defined by quantitative and qualitative objectives” (Turner, 1993, p. 35). On the other hand, a programme is described as when two or more projects are managed and controlled under a department within an organisation or managed and controlled by the entire organisation (Turner, 1993). By principle and practices, programmes and projects require different levels of competence in the management processes due to the scope and nature, but they exhibit a lot of similarities and attributes; hence, in this study, the two words shall be used interchangeably to mean the same.

Governments’ policies are often translated into programmes and projects (Goodman & Love, 1980; Bitler & Karoly, 2015; Freedman & McGavock, 2015; Haveman et al., 2015). These policies, programmes and projects play pivotal roles in a country’ growth and development; hence, they are inevitable in any nation’s growth and development plans (Eichengreen, 1996; Alic, 2008). Accordingly, their implementations are very critical to a nation’s development as their performances can determine the political fate of governments (Damoah, 2015; Damoah & Akwei, 2017) and a country’s quest for development (Alzahrani & Emsley, 2013; Amoatey et al., 2015). Despite the applications of various sophisticated and modern technologies, frameworks, models and good practices, performance of these policies and programmes in developing countries and emerging economies have been mixed (Kumar & Best, 2006; Aziz, 2013; Fallahnejad, 2013; Marzouk & El-Rasas, 2013); and Ghana is no exception (Amponsah, 2010; Damoah et al., 2015; Damoah & Akwei, 2017).

### 2.2 Previous Research on Corrupt Practices, Ethical Values and Public-Sector Management

Extensive studies have been conducted into the study of corruption; however, they have mainly been focused on the effects of corruption; with particular emphasis on the socio-economic effects. For example, in relation to economic, Treisman (2000) used the popular Transparency International Corruption Perception Index data to examine the relationship between corruption and national development; and found a positive relationship. In similar study that used cross-country data, Saha and Gounder (2013) identified corruption as the fundamental factor that hinders economic development. However, countries with low-levels of income tend to be more corrupt than their counterparts with high-levels of income and as such corruption has significant negative impact on countries that have low-levels of income such as those in developing countries. Hessami (2014) also found that corrupt practices can lead to increment in governments’ expenditure, hence, affecting economic growth and

development. Farooq et al. (2013) investigated the effects of corruption and developing countries' growth; and found that corruption impedes economic growth and development. In Africa corruption is pervasive (Luiz & Stewart, 2014; Pillay et al., 2017); and they affect public sector performance (Damoah et al., 2018). For instance, Luiz and Stewart (2014) investigated corruption and South African multinational enterprises (MNEs); and found that corrupt practices are pervasive, and this hinders economic development. Regarding the social effects, Saha and Gounder (2013) found a positive relationship between corruption and citizens' social development. Dobson and Ramlogan-Dobson (2012) also found that corruption often results in inequality among a country's populace.

Regarding public-sector management and operations, empirical studies suggest that corrupt practices are pervasive. For instance, empirical study conducted in Hungary by Jancsics and Jávör (2012) that involved 45 interviews with different organizational actors who were participating in corrupt transactions or at least had first-hand experiences of corruption found that corrupt practices are made by government officials by deliberately creating networks among several players to siphon money. The networks are multilevel structured within and among participating organizations and each level of structure plays different roles in facilitating corruption.

On the other hand, available research agrees that cultural differences (which include ethical values) are critical for public policy and programme implementation as they dictate the inclusiveness of the execution process. For example, Stajkovic and Luthans (1997) and Christensen and Lægheid (2011) elucidate that misconceptions and errors in project planning and execution can become very substantial among foreign investors and international actors if their cultural differences are not considered during projects implementation processes. They argue that, in order to cure the cultural differences, there must be good and well-informed ethical values which are followed by all—they should not be ambiguous. Further, societal laws are based on the procedures and code of conduct made by the legal system of society or government (Thaler & Helmig, 2016); nonetheless, all ethical expectations cannot be covered by formal laws (Năstase, 2013; Thaler & Helmig, 2016). This implies that a robust ethically compliance within the business environment will ensure a lawful society and ultimately eliminate corruption (Donaldson, 1989).

In this study, we argue that public sector operations ethics must be a fundamental part of the operational environment in developing countries such as Ghana. This is premised on the argument that corruption within the public-sector policy and programmes implementation environment could generally undermine the morality within the Ghanaian society. Nevertheless, literature suggests that in developing countries such as those in African countries, majority of businesses and governments violate ethical values. These comes in the various forms and types such as: "bribery, sexual harassment, patent of copyright infringement, lying and deceit about product performance and safety, deliberate use of harmful substances, intentional environmental pollution, discrimination, dangerous working condition, violations of promises" (Carroll & Gannon, 1997). The key question is; what factors drive this violation of ethical values that influence corruption?

### *2.3 Corruption in Ghana*

Corruption, particularly in the government sector has become the most discussed topic in Ghana in recent years (Bawumia, 2014, 2015; and Addo, 2015). Even though it is difficult to find a criminal code that defines corruption (Azeem, 2009), corrupt practices such as bribery of local or foreign government officials and private companies, “facilitation of payments”, fraud, embezzlement, theft, collusion, and rent-seeking exist in the country and its pervasive (Gyimah-Boadi, 2002).

Transparency International Report over the years place Ghana among the most corrupt countries in the World (Note). Consistent with the definition offered by the World Bank (World Bank, 2017), corruption is defined in the study as the abuse of public office for private gain. Nevertheless, Tax Justice Network (TJN) (2016) has criticised the definition for leaving the impression that it is only people who occupy public office who are capable of abusing their office or power TJN suggests the inclusion of practices such as market rigging, insider trading, tax dodging, non-disclosure of conflicts of interest, and illicit party funding. Even though the TI study’s findings give a picture of the state of corruption in the country, if TJN’s criticism and definition are taken into consideration, the state of the phenomenon could even be worse in the country. To this end, this study adopts the definition offered by TJN (2016) as it is more comprehensive and fits well into this study.

The Ghanaian government has made significant attempts over the years to curb and/or reduce corruption by enacting laws, setting up independent bodies and agencies to address the phenomenon (Amponsah, 2010; Short, 2010; Damoah et al., 2018). Notable among them in recent years include the Ghana Public Procurement Act, the Anti-Money Laundering Act, the Financial Administration Act and its Regulations, the Assets Declaration Act, Ghana Integrity Initiative (GII), the Whistleblower Act, the Public Officers Liability Act, the Serious Fraud Office (SFO) and the Commission on Human Rights and Administrative Justice (CHRAJ). Despite the numerous conscious efforts to curb the canker, evidence suggests that these efforts have only helped expose the problem (Short, 2010; Damoah et al., 2018), but the phenomenon is on the increase (Bawumia, 2014, 2015; Addo, 2016; TI, 2017). On the basis of the pervasiveness of corrupt practices and non-adherence to ethical values in the country, we propose that there could be fundamental drivers of these acts.

### *2.4 Drivers and Causes of Corrupt Practices and Non-Adherence to Ethical Values: Empirical Evidence*

Even though corruption studies in general have centred on perceptions (including their causes) (Saha & Gounder, 2013; Gong et al., 2015), many reasons have been cited for their causes and drivers of corruption. They range from economic conditions (Saha & Gounder, 2013), decline in moral values (Mensah, 2003), lack of transparency and accountability (Luna, 2015), institutional voids (Luiz & Stewart, 2014), among others. However, the existing literature suggests that most of the drivers are context-specific even though some seem to appear in most contexts. Therefore, we argue that the factors that drive corruption and non-adherence to ethical values within the Ghanaian context may

differ—depending on the local prevailing conditions and therefore, the next sub-section reviews the local contextual factors that may drive these malfeasances.

#### 2.4.1 The Ghana Contextual Factors that may Drive Corrupt Practices and Non-Adherence to Ethical Values in Public-Sector Management

The drivers of corrupt practices and non-adherence to ethical values in the public sector operations may be explained with several factors. First, economic factors; Ghana is a developing country with gross domestic product (GDP) of US \$32.1 billion and growth rate of 4.1 percent with inflation rate of 17.2% (Focus Economics, 2016). The country relies on primary products such as cocoa, gold, oil and gas, timber, bauxite, and diamonds as the main exports; hence, the country relies on these for growth. In 2012, the country attained Lower middle-income status with per capital income of US\$1,410 (World Bank, 2012). This could be linked to the exploration of oil on commercial quantity in 2010. Further, efforts have been made over the years through the millennium development goals to reduce poverty levels, which has helped reduced poverty from 51% in 1996 to 29% in 2015 (Toure, 2015). However, these achievements do not reflect on the lives of the ordinary citizens and as such a lot of people are classed as poor; with poverty profile of 30% and 55% of people living on less than \$1 and \$2 a day respectively (Toure, 2015; World Factbook, 2018). Moreover, income levels of the average Ghanaian are low (Ghana Statistical Service, 2018). Due to the poverty levels with high level of unemployment, there is a high dependency ratio (Ghana Statistical Service, 2018). We argue that due to these economic situations in the country, it may drive those in higher authorities and contractors undertaking public-sector policy and programmes to be corrupt and unethical in order to satisfy their needs and their families' needs.

Second, the Ghanaian public administration and institutional systems; the Ghanaian public institutions are weak (Amoako & Lyon, 2014; Asunka, 2015) and the administration system is full of bottlenecks and bureaucracies (Kallick, 2008; Amoako & Lyon, 2014), hence, the inherent weakness affect the public-sector operations (Asunka, 2015; Luna, 2015; Damoah & Akwei, 2017; Damoah & Kumi, 2018); and business operations in general (Amoako & Lyon, 2014). We proposed that due to the weaknesses in the institutions, and the administration systems; they may drive public officials and contractors undertaking policy and programmes implementation to indulge in corrupt practices without regards to ethical values.

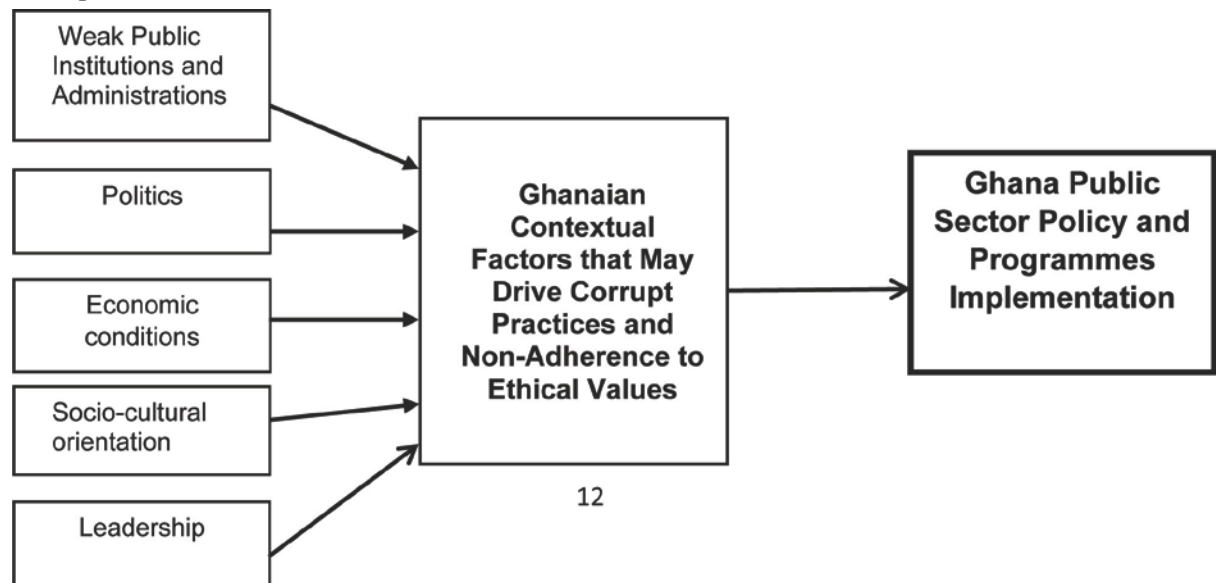
Third, socio-cultural factors; the socio-cultural orientation could partly be traced to and explained by Hofstede (1980, 1983a, 1983b) six cultural dimensions—power distance, individualism, masculinity, uncertainty avoidance, long-term orientation, and indulgence. Even though the Ghanaian cultural attributes have been espoused in The Hofstede Centre (2018) and the GLOBE (Hoppe, 2007), only few are applicable in the context of public sector operations. For instance, the Ghanaian society is characterised by the practices of master-servant relationship; where the rich and those in high authorities are esteemed (Amponsah, 2010; World Factbook, 2018). As a result, being rich and the occupation of high authority is the desire of most Ghanaians (Amponsah, 2010). The desire to be rich at

all cost has resulted in the decline of moral values and disrespect for constitutional institutions and authority is rather upheld; and this affects people's drive to engage in corrupt practices and unethical behaviour (Gyimah-Boadi, 2002; Mensah et al., 2003). The implementation of public-sector policy and programmes is perceived by many Ghanaians as an avenue to 'cut' part of the national cake and they do so through corruption (Damoah et al., 2018). Further, there is a very strong family bond, which serves as the primary source of identity, loyalty and responsibility, as such, the country is regarded as feminine (The Hofsetede Centre, 2018). This dimension may have significant influence on the award of public-sector policy and programme contracts—thus, contracts maybe awarded on the basis of family ties and bond without regards to ethical values. We, therefore, propose that this can drive non-adherence to ethical values and corrupt practices since in a family set-up, these practices may not be regarded as corruption but rather helping one another.

Fourth, political factors; extensive political science and public-sector management theories, models, and frameworks show a positive relationship between partisanship politics and the public-sector management (Foirina, 2002; Persson & Tabellini, 1997; Besley, 2007). Moreover, empirical studies indicate that there is an inverse relationship between partisanship politics and political accountability of public officials operating within the public sector (Anderson, 2000; Hellwig & Samuels, 2008; Kayser & Wlezien, 2011; Bob-Milliar, 2012; Asunka, 2015; Luna, 2015). In addition, the Ghanaian constitution allows the president to appoint majority of the public institutional and administrative heads (Republic of Ghana Constitution, 1992). Due to the partisanship nature of the public institutions and administration systems; and the appointment of public sector officials; we propose that this will drive corrupt practices and unethical behaviour in public sector operations.

Lastly, leadership factors; literature indicates that project leadership plays an important role in the projects performance as they are supposed to create an enabling and collaborative environment to achieve the project goals (Ollus et al., 2011). Existing literature in Africa also shows that projects leaders sometimes indulge in corrupt practices (Gyimah-Boadi, 2002; Damoah et al., 2018). We, therefore, propose without the collaboration of projects leaders, it will be difficult for corruption and non-adherence to ethical values to occur.



**Conceptual Framework**

**Figure 1. Corruption, Non-adherence to Ethical Values and Public Sector Policy and Programmes Implementation Conceptual Framework**

**3. Methodology**

The philosophical underpinning of this research is based on the interpretivism research philosophy and the social constructionism paradigm. The philosophical assumption was adopted due to the absence of extensive study on the subject under investigation within the local context. We also deemed this philosophical assumption as the most appropriate due to the researchers' pursuance of practical knowledge of the phenomena under investigation; which is embedded in the African context which involves the various key stakeholders of the Ghanaian public sector policy and programme implementation; hence, stakeholders' interactions and their meanings of their society could be revealed (Crotty, 1998; Bryman, 2012). The social constructionism research paradigm will help the investigators to produce new understandings of the drivers of corrupt practices and unethical values in Ghanaian public sector policy and programme management. The participants, therefore, will provide information based on their experiences and interactions with the society they attempt to interpret (Crotty, 1998; Silverman, 2013). We needed data from the audience that will generate illuminative and rich information sources from participant's insight from the phenomenon under investigation (Patton, 2002).

The empirical data was collected using four stakeholders associated with public sector policy and programmes implementation processes, which consisted of semi-structured interviews project/programme management practitioners (12), contractors (5), clients (public officials and administrators) (5), the general public (10) and two (2) focus-group discussions in sequential order respectively. The interview was conducted using face-to-face, skype, facetime and phone while the discussion was conducted using social media platforms (WhatsApp)—consisting of two different platforms; one consisting of Ghanaians living in the diaspora (80) and the other consisting of

Ghanaians living in Ghana (23). Not all members on the social media platforms actively participated; only 15 and 9 actively participated and for the purpose of this study, they are classified as public.

The selection of project management practitioners, clients, contractors was made using purposive and snowballing while the public were selected using simple random techniques. The first two selection criteria were based on knowledge of the phenomenon under investigation (Teddlie & Yu, 2007; Saunders et al., 2012) and recommendations by earlier participants, respectively. However, recommendations were only followed up after the researchers have made a research about their background; in order for them to fit into the first criterion (Bryman, 2012; Saunders et al., 2012). To ensure that individuals identified and recommended meet the purposive criterion, we made sure that only individuals working for active and well-known companies; and public institutions were considered for participation. On the other hand, the general public were targeted not because of their technical know-how about the implementation of policy and programmes, but because they are the main beneficiaries of public policies and programmes (Ahsan & Gunawan, 2010); and therefore, they may follow the implementation processes closely.

The data collection started with pilot interviews by selecting one participant from the targeted audience groups. The main reason for the pilot interview aimed to improve validity of the interviews by ensuring that the question guides are of high quality to capture the needed data (Foddy, 1994). The number of participants was determined following the recommendation of Guest et al. (2006), Silverman (2013) on data saturation—the point where no new information emerges.

The interviews and discussions lasted between thirty and sixty minutes; and three weeks, respectively. Due to the sensitive nature of the data, and the positions of some participants, some social media platform members opted to send their views to one of the researchers' private email. All interviews and discussions were conducted in English; the official language of Ghana.

The interview data was transcribed at the end of the day of the interview. Regarding the social media discussions, at the end of each week, the messages were exported to one of the researchers' email. The data was analysed using thematic and content analysis techniques with the help of word documents and NVivo10 software. The data was uploaded to the software and were reduced by selecting, focusing and condensing of the information and was then coded using the theoretical framework in Figure 1 as the main guiding themes. In agreement with Braun and Clarke (2006), we followed through the data by using line by line coding based on the content. Cross-case analysis was then undertaken to code sentences that explains the main themes (Braun and Clarke 2006; Bryman, 2012). This was followed by axial coding to identify and explain the relationship between the various variables under investigation. The themes and sub-themes that emerged from the data were compared with those in the theoretical framework to identify (if any) any new themes and/or explanations. Therefore, the data was visited and re-visited several times to verify and confirm the themes identified (Miles & Huberman, 1994). They were then refined, re-defined and organised into more coherent framework that explains the drivers of corrupt practices and non-adherence to ethical values in the implementation of Ghanaian public sector

policy and programmes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Consequently, the relationship between the variables in the framework changed (see Figure 2) (Remenyi et al., 1998; Saunders et al., 2012).

#### 4. Results and Discussions

##### 4.1 Drivers of Corrupt Practices and Non-adherence to Ethical Values in Public Policy and Programmes Implementation

Several factors were revealed by participants as the drivers of corrupt practices and non-adherence to ethical values in public sector policy and programmes implementation management in Ghana; and are analysed and discussed below.

###### a) *Institutional Drivers*

Participants revealed several institutional factors that drive corrupt practices and non-adherence to ethical values in public policy and programmes management. Among them is the judiciary, legislature, executive and public service institutions such as the procurement authority, ministries, departments and agencies. Among these, the most cited reason was the judicial system and security personnel. Among all the participants, thirty (P1-P12, C1-C5, GO1-GO2&GO4, GP1-GP10) of them mentioned the judicial as the main reason why people engage in corrupt practices and disregard for ethical values. In the words of GP9:

*Human beings are inherently weak and immoral; and in Ghana and Africa, the rules do not work. They [people who engage in corruption and non-adherence to ethical values] know that they can bribe the police. In most cases, the police will not even arrest him or her ... because they are political appointees. So, I will say weak institutions, controlled by politicians and their political party is the main reason why people are driven into these practices.*

Others said that “These public officials and contractors who are the main culprits [of corruption and non-adherence to ethical values] know that the public institutions that are supposed to check them are also corrupt and weak; and therefore, they can have their way when caught.” (P1). “In Ghana, you can easily bribe a security officer, this is an open-security” (P12). P10 added that if the public officials know that the security officers and other institutions who are supposed to check them are corrupt, then that will drive them also to be corrupt.

*If everybody within the public institutions is corrupt and has no moral values in doing so, it also motivates them to also do the same; so during the Ghanaian government policy and programmes implementation processes, it's all about who can be smart and grab more. People are normally arrested and prosecuted only when its politically motivated... even with that [prosecution], it is only done when the government in power loses [general] elections.*

Tracing the root driver of corruption to the judicial system, GP9 for instance said:

*As I said earlier, human beings are inherently weak morally and are prone to indulging in these malpractices [corrupt practices and non-adherence to ethical values]; therefore, the only way to make them corrupt-free is to ensure that the judicial system is efficient ... but in Africa, the law can only deal*

*with the ordinary people. The public officials and the civil servants know that the law does not “bite” and that drive them to engage in corruption. The officials know that they will be freed by the court, so why won’t they steal from the public purse? In other jurisdictions such as UK, US and China, you think the people there are better than us, no; it’s the institutions that they are afraid of, that is why there is less corruption there.*

On the other hand, there were other opposing views. These were mainly between the general public; and the contractors and project management practitioners. The contractors and project management practitioners were of the view that, left with the institutions alone, they would have upheld ethical values, hence, less corrupt practices; however, they argue that there are often “bigger hands above” (P3) who are mainly politicians who influence them to engage in such malfeasances. On the contrary, the general public argued that even though they believe that the politicians are the main reasons why the public institutions are weak, which drives people to be corrupt; they disagree that, it’s the politicians that cause that. They argue that, Ghanaians are inherently corrupt and therefore, it’s the individuals who want to gain other benefits and as such, deliberately weaken the institutions, so that they can siphon money during policy and programmes implementation.

*My brother, the motivation is not only forming the politicians as some of our people often try to portray, it is the human beings in Ghana that are inherently greedy, selfish and wicked ...that is what drives them to do these acts [corruption]. Tell me, will the politicians force them to collect bribes before signing [policy or programme] documents? (FGA1).*

Weak public institutions have been cited by prior studies in the country (Ghana) (Kallick, 2008; Bob-Milliar, 2012; Amoako & Lyon, 2014; Asunka, 2015; Luna, 2015), however, they were mainly discussed in relation to economic development (Kallick, 2008); small and medium size enterprises operations (Amoako & Lyon, 2014), and political accountability (Bob-Milliar, 2012; Asunka, 2015; Luna, 2015); hence, this finding adds a different dimension to these existing literature by linking how weak institutions foster corruption and unethical behaviour in public policy and programmes implementation. It is also in agreement with earlier studies which showed that public institutional designs or structures impacts on corruption activities among civil servants (Rubin & Whitford, 2008).

Others mentioned the lack of checks and balances among the public institutions as a major driver of corruption and non-adherence to ethical values. Critical ones mentioned is the three arms of government. Respondents argue that these institutions are weak and that they drive people to be corrupt. They trace this to the Ghanaian constitutional provisions which entrust the president with enormous powers to appoint institutional heads and appoint majority of his/her ministers from parliament.

*There are no checks and balances among the various institutions, especially the three arms of government. In Ghana, the executives are more or less, in practice controls the legislature and the judiciary; and therefore, when they [the executive] is implementing any policy or programme, the legislative arm of government who are mandated to monitor the implementation processes are not able to do so ... because, majority of them [parliamentarians] belong to the same party as the executive*

*[arm]. My friend, do you think in Ghana and Africa in general, a parliamentarian from the same party as the president can question the president and the ministers on corrupt related issues; you will be sacked the next day or be voted against in [general] elections. This drives many people to be corrupt and they do it with impunity [not considering ethical values]. (GP10).*

This finding agrees with the work of Beerli and Navot (2013) which found that corruption is structural – which is within the governance structure in democratic regimes—especially where there is decentralization, representation and responsiveness. Similarly, this finding echoes the empirical studies of Jancsics and Jávora (2012) that found multi-level structural networks that facilitate corruption among organisations participating in corruption. This also confirms earlier studies such as Rubin and Whitford (2008) that found that the type of institutional design within the public service can influence corruption. Ghana is a democratic country that practices decentralisation and representation, hence, the findings echoes the type of institutional structures that may foster corruption. The implication is that, in practice, checks and balances that are supposed to be held in order to reduce corruption are not working effectively as expected.

**b) Administration Drivers**

Most of the respondents (P1-P12, C1-C4, GP1-GP3, GP5&GP7-GP9; FGA1, FGA3-7) opined that the public administration system also drives people involved in the public policy and programmes management; however, surprisingly none of the clients mentioned this. As evidenced in other studies (Amoako & Lyon, 2014; Damoah & Akwei, 2017); respondents were of the view that, there are too many bureaucratic procedures to follow; and this drives people to engage in corrupt practices without reference to ethical considerations. In the words of C4 for instance:

*My brother, it is not easy in this country if you are a contractor working on government project or policy; the problem is, there are too many bureaucracies in the [public administrative] system. Before you are paid even small money, you would have to go and see soo many people ... in most cases you have to go to Accra [the capital city] for someone to approve or sign a document for you, and when you go, they will be tossing you around, so if you don't have the "balls", you will end up paying something [bribe] in order to speed up the process.*

When probed further, C4 asserted that, he has not been involved in such an act before, but his colleagues have complained to him on several occasions; and argues that their company does not yield to such pressures because theirs a big company with a lot of resources.

*Our company don't kow-tow to these demands because we are big with a lot of resources, so if there is delays, even though it affects us in a way, it's not too much significant because we have other things [contracts] doing; and we have the money and resources to carry out the job. Its disturbing situation for every contractor but what can we do? (C4).*

The implication of this finding is that companies with a lot of resources are less prone to corrupt practices and unethical behaviour than their unwealthy counterparts. Here, resource dependency theory (RDT) is evidenced. RDT states that organisational performances are determined by the ability to own

resources (Pfeffer & Salackcik 1978; Hillman et al., 2009). Linking this to RDT implies that, if an organisation has adequate resources for survival, they are less prone to external environmental factors such as corruption demands from public officials.

**c) Socio-Cultural Drivers**

Under the socio-cultural, there were contrasting views. While some perceive that socio-cultural practices drive corruption and unethical behaviour, others perceive otherwise. For instance, GP1, GP4 and C1, C4 opined that there is a social and cultural element to what drives corruption and unethical behaviour. They hold this view by saying that Ghanaians' lifestyle and desire to get rich quicker has increased over time and that people generally do not care about how they get riches. In the words of GP4:

*These days, young people want to be rich overnight and do not care about how they get the money ..., even if they have to rob, they will [rob] and I do not blame them; because the Ghanaian culture is that, you are reverend and respected in society, especially in the family level if you have money. In the past, people cared about how you got rich and if you become rich all of a sudden, they will attribute it to "Sika Duro" [money ritual], especially if a closed relative dies around the time of you being rich; as a result nobody would want to get close to you or wants your money but now, they don't care. They may talk about it but so far as you can share the money in the society, nobody cares.*

This finding contradicts the work of Tian and Lo (2009) which found that in order to curb corruption, formal criminal measures are not enough, and that public opinion plays crucial role. Thus, in the Ghanaian socio-cultural orientation, money matters more than public opinion about bad moral and ethical values. Others (P7, P9; FGB12-FGB14, GO2&GO4) link corruption to religion and they opined that religion in Ghana makes people think of instant money [riches and wealth]. "Most Ghanaians are very religious, they want everything instantly, they love money and envy those that have more than them" (FGB14). "There is no honesty in Ghana, we all want to get rich without being honest and it seems everybody, including all of us are doing it despite claiming to be religious" (FGB13). Others also mentioned that people are generally greedy and are insensitive to the suffering of the ordinary people (FGB10&FGA1).

On the other hand, GP9 perceive that "there is no cultural link between corruption and ethics ... we don't follow our culture anymore". However, GP9 linked these malpractices to tribal politics in the prosecution of corrupt officials. Among others, GP9 said that people are driven to corruption and non-adherence to ethical values because they know that they will not be prosecuted if they belong to specific tribes. "If I belong to a particular tribe and the man in charge is from my tribe, obviously I know I will not be prosecuted and even if I am prosecuted, I know I will be set free" (GP9).

This confirms prior assertions of Gyimah-Boadi (2002) and Mensah et al. (2003) who argue that the motivation of corruption in Ghana could be traced to decline in moral values. However, their assertions are reports and therefore, this current study adds empirical evidence to the growing discussions. The implication is that, opinion leaders in the country should be able to conscientize the people on the need

to hold morale integrity as opposed to riches and wealth; otherwise the morale fibre of the society will continue to deteriorate, hence, increased in corrupt practices.

**d) Political Drivers**

Apart from the clients, all the other respondents mentioned that partisanship politics is a key driver of corrupt practices and unethical behaviour in the execution of public policy and programmes. Some even traced the root driver of corruption and non-adherence to ethical values to politics, particularly, partisanship politics (C1-C4, GP9; P1-P4&P12). GP9 for instance argued that:

*“people are driven to indulge in corruption because they know they will not be prosecuted because they belong to the ruling government and if they are prosecuted, it will be aborted in some way, because they don’t want to jail their own. They are [political] party faithfuls. You know the boys storming the court to sack a judge and later were fined only Gh1, 000 cedis each? This is not corrupt related ... but this one was more glaring with evidence but they were set free, so what of corruption which are usually not clear to get evidence. Even this one, they [political parties] will not benefit, they didn’t prosecute, so what of corruption where they [the political party] will benefit. Even if they are jailed, the jail sentence is not deterrent enough, so why won’t they steal [corrupt]”.*

Another dimension to the politics is the awarding of contracts on partisanship basis; which often result in connivance between the awarding public officials [who are mainly appointed on political patronage] and the contracting performing organisation. They argue that getting government contracts without political affiliation is extremely difficult and therefore, there is always the temptation for contractors to “pay back” to their political affiliates who awarded them the contract. This was unanimous response from the respondents. However, the project management practitioners and the general public in particular argue that in most cases, the contractors connive with the public officials because before they are awarded the contract, certain percentage of the project sum might have gone to unofficial third parties who act as agents and/or middlemen and therefore, if they do not connive with public officials, they will incur losses.

These findings agree with prior studies that revealed that corruption is deeply rooted in governance, and politics (Beeri & Navot, 2013). On the other hand, the finding contradicts other studies that identified democracy as an antidote to corruption (Thomas et al., 2000; Treisman, 2007). The implication is that, it is not democracy per say that fights against corruption but rather the form of democratic practices that will determine its ability to combat corruption.

**e) Economic Drivers**

With regards to economic drivers, the responses were mixed. While some (FGB10, FGB15, P4&GP5) believe low-levels of income and poverty drive people into the malpractices, others (P11&GP9) are of the view that, this is not the case. For instance, FGB9 said that “I believe corruption is because most of the basic needs of the people have not been met, [therefore] there is a sense of insecurity for the future.” Others such as GO3, P1-P4 and P8 were of the view that there is high rate of dependency ratio in the

country and therefore, the few privileged working in the society have no option than to engage in corruption.

My brother, some of these [corruption] are driven by family pressure ... assuming you are the only person in the family who is working, you become the breadwinner, everybody is expecting you to carter for them and yourself... they expect big things from you, so what do you do? I am not saying it is an excuse, but we are human beings, sometimes you are forced to act certain way that you know it's bad or unethical but what can you do? (P2).

In Ghana, unlike developed countries like UK and Germany, government doesn't give you any money if you are not working, so you must depend on your family for survival; and all the burden will go to the one who is working. You know in Ghana we practice extended family system where you carter for everybody; these days its changing a bit from extended family to nuclear family but you will still ned to help. (GO30).

This finding is echoed in the work of Toure (2015) and World Factbook (2018) which found that despite the reduction in poverty rate, a lot of people are still living below the poverty line –hence, the drive to get rich and help their families through corruption.

Surprisingly, the contrary view held by others such as P11 is that “the drive to engage in corruption has got nothing to do with low-income and poverty in the country but rather, it is the rules that do not bite”. P11 cited that in some advanced countries, income levels are lower than those in Ghana and yet the people do not engage in corruption and unethical behaviour; therefore, traces the behaviour to non-application of the laws in the country.

Others also agreed to some extent by arguing that economic situation may drive corruption and unethical behaviour but that is not the fundamental driver. GP9 for example is of the view that:

In my view, economic situation such as low pay may drive corruption and ethical issues but that is not fundamental reason(s), it's all about the working of the rules ... the rules don't work, so they can do whatever they like. Even if you are paid Gh10 [cedis] and the rules are unappealing, you still wouldn't do it. Even in developed economies, it's not all [people] who get good pay and yet because of the rules, they don't do it [corruption].

Even though the former view is not surprising as extant literature have demonstrated positive relationship between low-income levels and high levels of corruption (Riesman, 2000; Saha & Gounder, 2013), but the later view is a bit surprising. The implication is that low-levels of income do not necessarily drive corruption and non-adherence to ethical values but other factors such as the weak application of rules and regulations. This adds a different dimension to the ongoing debate on the relationship between income levels, corruption and ethics.

#### *f) Leadership Drivers*

Surprisingly, only few people (P8, P10, FGA5; FGA6&FGA8) perceive that leadership alone drives corruption and unethical behaviour. FGA6 for instance, argue that if the project leader is corrupt, it



drives others also to be corrupt; however, FGA6 links this leadership to political leadership rather than leadership from the performing organisation.

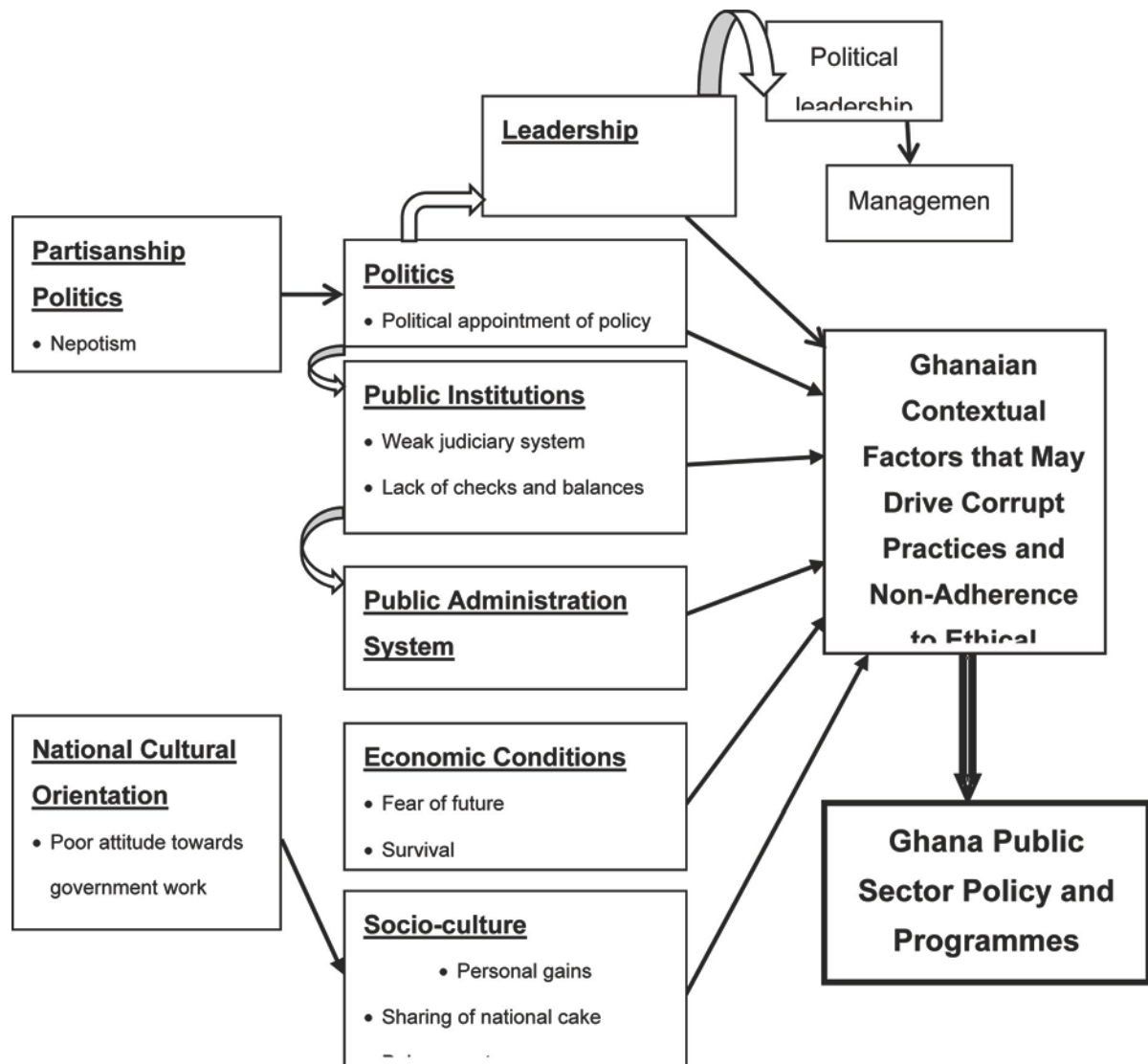
I can say that leadership can also drive corruption in policy and programme implementation ... assuming that the contractor knows that the government official leading the project is corrupt, what do you think he will also do? (FGA8).

On the contrary GP9 said that:

There is no direct link between leadership and corruption or ethical issues, but you can link it to why the rules don't work; they are supposed to ensure that the rules and regulations work but in most cases they don't ... because they will also benefit [from the corrupt activities].

Thus, the leaders are supposed to enforce the rules and regulations governing policy and programmes implementation and if they fail to do so, then it drives people to engage in corrupt activities. Further, they opined that more often, it is the political leaders who influence or drive the performing organisations' policy and programme executors' leaders to engage in corruption—hence, echoing the findings of Luna (2015) which found that politicians can siphon government money through contracts and are formalised by technocrats through connivance.

Prior studies have cited leadership as a factor affecting project performance (Hwang & Ng, 2013; Damoah & Kumi, 2018). Further, this finding confirms the study of corruption and accession of Bulgaria into the EU by Pashev (2011), which found that there has been a move of corruption from the middle (experts) to a high level of the corruption hierarchy to the more structured and powerful networks of political and business influence. Impliedly, the political leaders who are supposed to be championing the curbing of corruption are rather facilitating it.



**Figure 2. A Model Summarising the Findings on Corruption, Non-adherence to Ethical Values and Public Sector Policy and Programmes Implementation Conceptual Framework**

## 5. Conclusions

This study explored the drivers of corrupt practices and non-adherence to ethical values in public management operations by focusing on public policy and programmes implementation within the Ghanaian context. Using in-depth semi-structured interviews and focus-group discussions, several drivers of corrupt practices and non-adherence to ethical values were identified and discussed. These factors relate to public institutions, public administrations systems, politics, socio-culture, economic and leadership. However, some of the drivers are intertwined and are cyclical in nature. While some are regarded as the fundamental drivers, others are secondary.

Regarding institutional drivers, factors such as weak institutional structures, the control of situations by politicians coupled with the lack of checks and balances among the arms of government drives people

executing public policy and programmes to engage in corruption and non-adherence to ethical values. Unlike other developed democracies such as USA—where there are checks and balances. The system of checks and balances is weak in Ghana. Further, these drivers are perceived to be fundamental drivers where checks and balances are strictly enforced (Knott & Miller, 2006), there are other drivers such as administration systems and economic situations.

Closely related to the public institutional drivers is the administration system in the country, which is full of bureaucratic and administrative bottlenecks—which drives people to use corrupt means to get around the systems. The use of hardcopies and the centralisation of paperwork in the capital city mean that there are a lot of delays; resulting in contractors being compelled to use other corrupt and unethical means to get their paperwork done. However, the root cause of this problem is the weak institutional systems, controlled by the executive arm of government.

Politically, people are driven to disregard the ethical values, hence, indulging in corruption due to their political affiliation to political parties in power—knowing that their political affiliation can influence the decision to be prosecuted and jailed. Further, due to the weak institutional systems, especially the judicial system as a result of lack of checks and balances, perpetrators are emboldened to engage in corrupt activities, knowing that they will be freed or receive lenient punishment. Even though prior studies (Thomas et al., 2000; Treisman, 2007) have found that democratic institutions are able to serve as anti-corruption measures, this is not the case in the Ghanaian public sector operations context, as public officials are able to use these institutions to engage in corrupt activities.

With regards to socio-cultural drivers, the findings are mixed. While some perceive that there is a direct link between socio-cultural; and corrupt practices and non-adherence to ethical values, others perceive there are no links. However, those who perceive the former, view culture as a secondary driver, as they perceive that Ghana no longer uphold unto their cultural belief systems. It was also revealed that even though everybody in the country is religious—which implies that they are supposed to uphold moral integrity; this is not the case due to the penchant to get rich quick. On the other hand, those who hold the latter view is of the perception that religious preaching and teaching of late talks about getting rich quick and therefore people try to achieve this by being corrupt, hence, contradicting prior studies (Tian & Lo, 2009) that public opinion helps in curbing corruption since they are enshrined in morality and ethics.

Economically, low-income levels and high rate of dependency ratio drive people to engage in corrupt activities and non-adherence to ethical values during policy and programmes implementation. However, this is considered as a secondary driver as it is considered that, if there are strong institutions and administrative systems, then irrespective of economic condition, there will not be an avenue to engage in such malfeasances.

Leadership came in two-folds—political and technocrat; while political leadership is considered as a fundamental driver, technocrat leadership is considered as secondary. Thus, partisanship politics play key role in the appointment of policy and programme leaders from the central government but from the

performing organisation perspective, they rely on the political appointees for the project implementation, hence, political leaders are able to influence the performing organisations' leadership to corrupt activities and non-adherence to ethical values through connivance.

The findings show an intertwined and cyclical nature of corruption and non-adherence to ethical values in public-sector policy and programmes implementation. The cyclical and intertwined nature of these drivers makes it difficult to trace these malpractices to specific driver(s). Further, there is networks of individuals, institutions and organisations that consciously drive the practices (Jancsics & Jávora, 2012). Even though the study has revealed a number of factors under each of the drivers category, this could be regarded as an exploratory and therefore there is the need to conduct further studies using quantitative data such as questionnaire survey to determine the most important drivers. This will help policy makers and implementers to know which of these drivers' areas to focus most during policy and programmes implementation.

### Conflict of Interest

There is nothing on conflict of interest. This has not featured in responses.

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