

Views of Competition

Corruption of the economic system and the style of the education system make it difficult in Sub-Saharan African culture for much to happen in terms of legitimate competition in business and development. I've known people and known of people who have launched an ambitious business only to have it taxed or bribed out of existence. As I have said many times, and I think is of utmost importance, is that people understand that every form of corruption carries a cost that weighs on everyone. A business man friend of mine told me how businesses had to fill out a form stating the inventory they had in stock, and were taxed on it. Even when a person filled the form, often the tax person would change the amount and if you argued, they would threaten to put them out of business. Most retailers would have their shop that they sold from, and then rent a separate store to keep most of their inventory.

- ❖ Societies resistant to development have negative views of competition, often under the pretense of fostering equality.
- ❖ Societies favorable to development view competition as necessary and good for the creation of wealth and excellence; it's what drives capitalism and democracy.

The following story demonstrates the challenges and frustration that many people face when trying to start a business and to attempt to improve their personal economic situation.

I once met a young man named Issac who was employed as a parking meter attendant by the largest town in our region. I'd parked that day across the road from a shop I wanted to go to but didn't have any coins for the parking meter. Isaac happened to be nearby, so I asked if he could make change for me. He said he didn't have any, but at my request, told me that I could put the money in the meter when I got back from the shop. Upon returning just a few minutes later, I found that my tire had been chained because the meter was expired! Looking up the road, I saw the guy who was doing the chaining, a different person than Isaac, who was a few cars up the road chaining someone else. I tried to explain to this guy what had happened, but the trust thing was obviously an issue. Fortunately, Isaac was on his way back down the road in our direction, and when he arrived, he told the tire chaining guy the same story I'd told, and the chain was removed.

I thanked them both for doing their jobs and commented that this country is blessed to have people who are serious about their work. Isaac then told me his story about how he has a degree in business management, but here he's working as a parking meter attendant. He said he came from a family with little means but had recently graduated from university with a degree in business. After graduating, he learned that the government was sponsoring a program that was supposed to help stimulate the economy by helping people start businesses. He hoped to receive some assistance from that initiative to start a cooperative for people who would be raising agricultural chickens for meat. He went to the office to enquire about the process and picked up his application for the grant. After completing his application and putting together the required business plan on how he would start the business and how it would profitably function, he was surprised when the person who was in charge told him that he would only accept his application if Isaac gave him 400,000 francs (about \$670.00). Isaac told him that he wouldn't be there trying to get assistance if he even had that much money! Several different possibilities could be going on in a situation like the one Isaac experienced. Either there were people receiving money who really weren't entitled to it under the program and were paying bribes for the privilege of getting some, or the person being paid to administer the development program was only interested in the "development" of his own pocket. In either case, the government initiative was being subverted at the administrative level, presenting a clear example of how corruption can prevent economic development.



I sometimes think that the education style of memorizing information, rather than learning theory and critical thinking, is also a factor that hinders economic growth because it also limits creativity. I observed a limited variety in the vast majority of the workplaces that comprise the nation's economy: its street sellers, small market vendors of assorted goods, produce, transportation (taxis and motorcycles), tailors, building products, and small businesses like manufacturers of furniture or metal products such as security gates. The traditional methods of teaching the basic skills needed for life are learned by watching and replicating with minimal if any theory being taught. That inhibits creativity. There's a "way" that things are done and have always been done, and that's primarily how information is transferred.

Some individuals, though, are born with the gift of cognitive thinking, but they represent a small segment of the general population. I would say this is generally true throughout the world,

not just in Africa. The general population is limited in its ability to come up with new ideas or expand on those they already know without the teaching of theoretical and scientific principles about how and why things work. I want to be clear that this has nothing to do with how intelligent an individual might be but, instead, with the particular types of intelligence they may be gifted with and the further development of those intelligences through appropriate education. More on that later in “Whom to Target as Disciple Makers.”

1 Corinthians 9:24: Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one receives the prize? So run that you may obtain it.

Colossians 3:23: Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men,...

Module | opposing Cultural Values— *Views of Competition* [Pages 41 – 43]

Theme: *How competition, creativity, and corruption shape economic development and discipleship.*

Grounding Scripture

1 Corinthians 9:24 – *“Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one receives the prize? So run that you may obtain it.”*

Colossians 3:23 – *“Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men...”*

Puzzle Piece

Insight: Healthy competition fosters excellence, innovation, and economic growth. But when corruption distorts opportunity, competition becomes a source of injustice and despair. In cultures where bribery and favoritism dominate, gifted individuals are sidelined, and creativity is stifled.

Challenge: Without integrity and opportunity, competition becomes exploitation. Discipleship must address both personal character and systemic barriers.

Bridge Thought | Connection

- Biblical competition is not about defeating others—it’s about wholehearted effort, stewardship, and honoring God through excellence.
- When believers model integrity and creativity, they redeem broken systems and inspire others to pursue their calling.

Toolbox | Practical Tools

Corruption Audit: Identify where bribery or favoritism undermines opportunity.

Creativity Catalyst: Encourage critical thinking and innovation in discipleship and education.

Excellence Culture: Celebrate effort, integrity, and results— not just status or connections.

Reflection Prompts

1. How does your culture view competition—healthy or harmful?
2. What barriers prevent gifted individuals from thriving?
3. How can discipleship promote creativity and integrity?

Action Steps

- Teach biblical excellence as a form of worship.
- Challenge corrupt systems with truth and transparency.
- support initiatives that foster innovation and fair opportunity.