

Global Capitalism and Predatory Practices of Transnational Corporations in Developing Countries

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of the paper was to contribute to the debate on how the operations of transnational corporations (TNCs) negatively impact on their host nations. The paper critiques the popular claims enshrined in the public sector reforms which are promoted by supranational aid agencies that TNCs contribute significantly to the economic development, especially of developing countries. Specifically, the paper set out to probe the predatory practices of TNCs in developing countries.

Design/methodology/approach – Drawing from the theory of global capitalism, and having adopted a qualitative approach, the study probed the predatory practices of TNCs in developing countries of Qatar (Arab State) and Uganda (sub-Saharan African nation).

Findings – The study revealed a number of predatory practices carried out by TNCs in the process of accumulating global capital in the selected developing countries. In particular, the study revealed that the TNCs exploited the weak regulatory frameworks and with the help of the “new” transnational state actors, to optimise the global capital accumulation using predatory practices, including subjecting workers to horrific conditions, servitude and desperation, all in the interest of maximizing capital. In addition, especially with the case of Uganda, Umeme (U) Ltd optimized their capital accumulation through extortion and collusion with nation-state actors to fleece the Ugandan people.

Practical implications – This paper demonstrates how transnational corporations, in the pursuit of global capitalism in developing countries with weak regulatory frameworks, openly carry out predatory practices, with full protection from the “new” transnational state actors.

Originality/value – The paper adds to the debate on the predatory practices of TNCs, under the guise of foreign direct investments (FDI), which contradict the intentions of accelerated economic development for poor and developing countries.

Keywords: *Transnational corporations; Globalisation; Global Capitalism, Predatory Practices, Developing Countries.*

Paper type: Research paper

1.0 Introduction

Globalisation is the process of integrating national economies into one global economy (Robinson, 2012; Sklair, 2002; Korten, 1996; Grusky, 2001), and this takes on various dimensions, including trade, capital forms, information and people. Transnational corporations, thereafter referred to as TNCs, are the epicenter of the globalisation process (Alnesafi, Kasumba and Aldhuaina, 2015; Westaway, 2012; Robinson, 2012). These corporations usually are armed with significant amount of power resources, which they use for the advantages (Westaway, 2012; Sklair, 2002; Tabb, 2002). TNCs exploit the public sector reforms, which many countries, especially the developing ones, are coerced to accept, and are usually fronted by supranational institutions, such as the World Bank, IMF and others (Westaway, 2012; Alnesafi, Kasumba and Aldhuaina, 2015; Grusky, 2001). The public sector reforms have provided that production and delivery of public services be removed from the state actors to the private sector with the promise of enhancing efficiency (Robinson, 2012; World Investment Report, 2007).

There are arguments hinting that the TNCs have had positive impact on countries where they operate, especially developing countries (Makinde, 2013; Robinson, 2012; World Investment Report, 2007). In fact, there are claims that the TNCs are the key drivers of development, especially in the developing world (Robinson, 2012). Furthermore, it is alleged that TNCs have vast financial resources that they can inject in developing countries to foster development (Robinson, 2012; Sklair, 2002).

For instance, the Secretary General of the United Nations, Ban Ki Moon, in the preface to the World Investment Report, 2007, hinted about transnational corporations that:

“

Transnational corporations can bring in the finance and management skills in these economies needed to transform their resources into products that can be used locally or exported.” (p.iii).

With the adoption of neo-liberal policies, especially where private investments are critical for enhancing development, TNCs play a pivotal point in raising the needed private resources, which the indigenous companies would find absolutely impossible to raise (Alnesafi, Kasumba and Aldhuaina, 2015; Robinson, 2012). For instance, Alnesafi, Kasumba and Aldhuaina (2015) revealed that the privatization of the electricity sector in Uganda could

only be possible through TNCs. No indigenous company had the experience, technology and financial resources needed to acquire operation concessions for electricity in Uganda.

However, there is also evidence that points to the negative effects of TNCs, especially in developing countries (Stiglitz, 2006; UNCTD, 2010; Westaway, 2012; Deen, 2015; Guttal, 2007). For instance, Westaway (2012) argues that TNCs possess incredible amount of power resources and influence which they deploy in denying human rights to citizens in countries in which they operate; and avoid accountabilities for their actions (Robinson, 2012; Tabb, 2002).

In addition, TNCs usually undermine state sovereignty, especially in developing countries (Robinson, 2012; Otusanya, *et al.* 2012). For instance, Robinson (2012) argued that TNCs can easily influence national policies to their favour to the disadvantage of the local citizens (see also, Broad and Cavanagh, 2014). Similarly, Otusanya, *et al.* (2012) posited that TNCs were implicated in corrupt practices in Nigeria, depriving the Nigerian citizens vital resources for the alleviation of poverty and for economic development (see also Bakre, 2008).

A number of authors have documented evidence of negative impact of TNCs, such as human rights abuses (Action Aid, 2011; Bowers, 2015; Awodiran, 2014; Gravelle, 2015); environmental degradation (Thakur, 2010; Raworth, 2004 Bowers, 2015; Jones, 2015; Andebo, 2014); corrupt tendencies (Otusanya, *et al.* 2012). For instance, Otusanya, *et al.*, (2012) revealed that, with the help of political elites, TNCs were able to attained lucrative government contract using bribes in Nigeria. Similarly, Bakre (2008) observed that TNCs in Nigeria were involved in tax avoidance, bribery and other trans-organised financial crimes.

The purpose of this paper is to contribute further to the debate on the TNCs and their predatory practices, especially in developing countries. Specifically, this paper set out to probe the predatory practices engaged in by selected TNCs in developing countries.

2.0 Theoretical Constructs and Prior Studies

2.1 Global Capitalism

In the post modernity era, powerful nations created several global governance structures, such the United Nations, World Bank, IMF to occupy various spaces with the primary agenda to promote and protect global capitalism under the guise of enhancing socio-

economic and political development, especially of poorer countries (Sklair, 2002; Williams and Ghanadan, 2006). Robinson (2007, 2012) advocates for the theory of global capitalism as a plausible construct to internalize the actions of TNCs in the global circuits of production and accumulation. Global capitalism is construed to involve three major tenets: “transnational production, transnational capitalists and a transnational state” (see, Robinson, 2003, 2004). Within the global economy, the key agent is the transnational capital which is rooted in the TNCs, supranational agencies, such as IMF and World Bank; transnational state and elite “cadres” (Robinson, 2007, 2012; Korten, 1996; Grusky, 2001).

The TNCs are key actors in the global capitalist social structure and they influence the political and social agendas of both their home and host governments (Detomasi, 2006; Stiglitz, 2006; Otusanya, *et al.* 2012; Bakre, 2006). For instance, Albin-Lackey (2013) cites that in 2011 Exxon Mobil generated revenues which were far beyond the economies of some developed countries, such as Norway. Similarly, Bakre (2006) argued that TNCs have become powerful agents in the global capitalism at the expense political, socio-economic and environment considerations of the masses in the developing countries. The exploitative mechanisms of global capitalism are usually at the expense of the local masses (Bakre, 2006; Stiglitz, 2006; Andebo, 2014; Brown, 2014; Action Aid, 2011; Bowers, 2015; Awodiran, 2014; Gravelle, 2015).

Global capitalism represents a paradigm shift from national economies, in which individual countries managed and owned production processes under state capitalist systems to an integration of “national circuits” into new global circuits of production and accumulation (Robinson, 2007; 2012). Thus, global capitalism creates a new breed of global capitalists whose interests are far beyond territorial borders in the pursuit of global circuits of production and accumulation, usually assisted and protected by supranational institutions, such as the World Bank, IMF, United Nations (Bakre, 2006; Robinson, 2012). Within the global systems, there emerges a new transnational state, whose mandate is not to organise production and accumulation within the confines of state capitalism, but rather reconfigured to facilitate the globalisation processes, through creation of enabling environment to favour the global capitalists in the name of TNCs (see Alnesafi, Kasumba and Aldhuaina, 2015; Brown, 2014; Deen, 2015; Guttal, 2007, Robinson, 2012; Korten, 1996; Grusky, 2001).

Robinson (2007) argues that: “transnational state is a loose network comprised of supranational political and economic institutions together with nation-state apparatuses that have been penetrated and transformed by transnational forces” (see also, Korten, 1996). It is further stated that the emergent transnational nation-states have no significant role in the global system (Bakre, 2006; Stiglitz, 2006) but rather have a facilitating and a receiving role, and mainly act in favour of the global circuits of accumulation and not in the interests of their citizens (Robinson 2012; Broad and Cavanagh, 2014). For instance, many nation-states are coerced to implement policies formulated by supranational institutions to promote interests of the global capitalist (see, Deen, 2015; Grusky, 2001; Anderson, 2014). In addition, within the transnational state there exists the transnational state elites or “cadres”, whose mandate in the globalisation system is to facilitate the spread of “capitalist globalisation” (Robinson, 2012; Korten, 1996).

Globalisation gave rise to various supranational institutions, whose roles within the global system, are mainly to act as “go-between” the transnational states and TNCs in promotion and sustenance of global capitalism (Robinson, 2012; Sklair, 2002; Grusky, 2001). In addition, to acts as agent of TNCs, the same supranational institutions have direct capitalist interests in the transnational states, under the guise of “supporting” economic development and reduction of capital (see, Guttal, 2007; Jones, 2014; Anderson, 2014; Alnesafi, Kasumba and Aldhuaina, 2015; Korten, 1996).

In the globalisation process, supranational agencies, such as the World Bank, IMF, Danida, DfID, even United Nations, play significant and enabling roles in supporting the predatory practices of TNCs (Grusky, 2001; Alnesafi, Kasumba and Aldhuaina, 2015; Brown, 2014; Deen, 2015; Guttal, 2007). Whereas it is claimed that the supranational agencies are established to maintain new world order, in terms of economic, development, security and others, what pertains in the globalisation processes indicate that these institutions do not “*walk the talk*” (see Anderson, 2014; Grusky, 2001; Brown, 2014; Deen, 2015; Guttal, 2007; Alnesafi, Kasumba and Aldhuaina, 2015; Jones, 2014; Smith, 2015; Grusky, 2001). Instead, most of their activities are deemed to be geared towards satisfying the interests of TNCs, who in some cases, provide funding to the former (Deen, 2015; Guttal, 2007).

TNCs are among the biggest economic institutions in the world owning or controlling about 25% of the global productive assets (Greer and Kavaljit, 2000). Due the vast amount of financial resources at their disposal, they command significant corporate power within the global capitalist system of production, exchange and accumulation (Robinson, 2012). With support and protection from supranational institutions, TNCs dominate the global policy making processes, usually to their global capitalist interests, including directing their actions and activities to the disfavour of the hosting nation-state (Raworth, 2004; Yard, 2014).

2.2 Global Capitalism and Predatory Practices of TNCs

TNCs are indispensable actors in the global capitalist structures (Albin-Lackey, 2013; Robinson, 2003, 2004). There is doubt about their roles in providing capital, technology and technical skills in the global system (see, World Investment Report, 2007; Robinson, 2012). Notwithstanding, the capitalist interests and activities of TNCs usually harm the citizens in the host countries (see, Gethin, 2011; Lendman, 2010; Raworth, 2004; Yard, 2014). These may include, but not limited to exploitation of workers, environmental damage, tax avoidance and evasion (for instance, see Sikka, 2015); influencing legislations and regulations to favour TNCs' capitalist interests (see, Thakur, 2010; Raworth, 2004; Bowers, 2015; Jones, 2015; Andebo, 2014; Eden and Lenway, 2001; Stiglitz, 2006; UNCTD, 2010; Westaway, 2012; Tabb, 2002; Broad and Cavanagh, 2014), whose literature is reviewed in the following sub sections:

2.2.1 Exploitation of workers

There is overwhelming evidence in the literature about TNCs, in their pursuit of global capitalism, they exploit workers in their host countries (see, Human Rights Committee (2015). For instance, Human Rights Committee (2015) provided evidence of cheap labour working in the Hon Soll factories in Honduras in which employees were earning a base wage rate of \$ 0.65 per hour for each of the \$75 NFL and NBA jersey they stitched for TNCs, such as Nike, Rebook. Similarly, the Guardian of Saturday 30th April, 2011 revealed that Apple factories were accused of exploiting Chinese workers, by paying them poorly, subject them to excessive hours of work, making them suffer humiliation, in the process of producing iPads and iPhones. An investigation carried out by two Chinese NGOs revealed that many workers, mainly migrant workers, making iPads and iPhones were exploited and were living on "peanuts" as their salaries, yet in the first quarter of 2011 Apple Inc. posted a

net profit of \$6 billion (£3.6 billion) (Guardian, 2011). Similarly, Lendman (2010) submitted that because of TNCs are unaccountable, a dehumanized global workforce is ruthlessly exploited, denied their civil liberties, a living wage and the right to work in dignity in healthy safe environments (see also, Raworth, 2004; Yard, 2014; Tabb, 2002; Puerto and Lalata, 2003).

In the process of cutting down costs to maximize returns and amass global profits, TNCs force employees to work under deplorable conditions (see, Tabb, 2002). For instance, Tabb (2002) revealed that in China, employees worked for 15 hours shift daily to produce Huffy bicycles, which was detrimental to their health. He further reported a case of 16-year old girls who applied toxic glue to Stride Rite shoes using bare hands and a toothbrush, thus putting their health to risk, yet they were being paid low wages (Tabb, 2002). In Philippines, it was revealed that employees were given amphetamines drugs so that they could work for 48- and 72- hour shift in Anvil Assembles, makers of baby clothes to boost their production in order to meet their supply obligations at a minimal cost (Puerto and Lalata, 2003).

2.2.2 Environmental Damage

Liu (n.d.) argues that the Chinese government has brought to book 33 multinational corporations for violating environment laws and regulations. These companies mainly hailed from the West, included among others, American Standard, Panasonic, Pepsi, Nestle. These companies were involved in discharging industrial waste without due regard to the environmental requirements and were undertaking construction without proper environment impact assessments. Nollkaemper (2006) argues that TNCs exert great amount of stress on the environment in terms of depletion of ozone layer, fish stocks in water, deforestation, moving industrial waste across geographical jurisdictions.

Although there exist various guidelines to regulate the actions of TNCs, such as The Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, that make it imperative for TNCs to respect human rights, these are trampled on by environmental damages, carried out unabated by TNCs (see also, Morimoto, 2005). For instance, Morimoto (2005) argues that TNCs operate their business in host countries, especially developing countries, following very low environmental standards. For instance in Nigeria, Shell-Nigeria was accused, prosecuted and paid colossal sum of money in damages to an American court for

contaminating water for the Ogoni people in Nigeria where Shell irresponsibly conducted its oil exploration and extraction processes (Quarto, 2000;).

2.2.3 Corporate tax avoidance and evasion

Using predatory tax planning mechanisms and transfer pricing systems, TNCs have been implicated in tax avoidance and evasion (Sikka, 2015; Needham, 2003; Tax Justice Network, Gravelle, 2015; Awodiran, 2014; BBC Business, 2013; Bowers, 2015; Jones, 2015; Andebo, 2014). For instance, Needham (2003) argued that TNCs have the ability and power to decide which countries to operate in with favourable tax regimes. He further adds that with growing business conducted over the internet, a transaction could be initiated in one country and completed electronically in another with seemingly low or no tax implications. Sikka (2015) reported a case of TNCs (*Starbuck and Fiat's*) unscrupulous way of avoiding taxes by illicit state aid.

Tax Justice Network acknowledges that TNCs employ specialized accountants who can easily find strategies and loopholes in the tax laws, especially in developing countries, to avoid taxes in their host countries, which predatory practices is detrimental for the poor. Tax Justice Network further alludes to the fact that many TNCs hold trillions of dollars profits offshore (see also, Deen, 2015; Grusky, 2001; Anderson, 2014). Although, there are some international treaties to deal with taxation of TNCs, Tax Justice Network argues that these treaties favour rich countries rather than the poor. For instance, TNCs manipulate transfer prices to shift profits from high-tax jurisdictions to relatively low-tax spaces (see also Awodiran, 2014; Gravelle, 2015).

The use of transfer pricing mechanism to avoid taxes has received much concern from the public (Awodiran, 2014). For instance, Awodiran (2014) argues that TNCs minimize the tax liabilities by taking advantage of different tax rates of different jurisdiction, especially by shifting profits from high-tax to low-tax jurisdictions in their tax avoidance plans. Meanwhile, BBC Business (2013) reported that the European Commission (EC) sought to fight the tax evasion within the Commission by exchanging information about financial income earned by TNCs in their countries by non-residents. However, this move was mainly to affect the rich-countries, leaving the TNCs operating in developing countries free to carry our predatory practices unabated (Deen, 2015; Grusky, 2001; Anderson, 2014).

2.2.4 TNCs Influencing Local Legislations in their Favour

Rondinelli (2003) posits that TNCs have the ability to overcome any constraint of any country's legal system and regulations to the disadvantage of the host countries, especially in the LDCs. TNCs advocate for free trade, liberalization, privatization in the promotion of their selfish interests in the enhancement of globalisation and capitalism. TNCs have incredible amount of power resources at their disposal (Robinson, 2012; Otusanya, *et al*, 2012; Eden and Lenway, 2001; Stiglitz, 2006; UNCTD, 2010; Westaway, 2012; Tabb, 2002) which are deployed to influence policy formulation processes of host countries, especially the LDCs in which they operate (Tabb, 2002; Stiglitz, 2006).

Campaigns and Actions against TNCs and FTAs (2015) state that TNCs possess the ability to shape both national and international policies and legislative and regulatory processes in their interests in collaboration with nation-state actors. Regulatory frameworks for TNCs are "designed, interpreted and implemented" to favour the TNCs (Broad and Cavanagh, 2014). They further argue that "Multinationals are treated as if they were social actors whereas they merely represent their shareholders whose interests are returns to investments rather than serving the social good" (Campaigns and Actions against TNCs and FTAs, 2015; Yard, 2014).

3.0 Methodology

An extensive qualitative case study and literature review was carried out to generate deeper understanding of the global capitalist interests and actions of TNCs which constitute predatory practices to the communities of the host transnational states.

The case study was carried basing on the activities of one transnational corporation in Qatar (Carillion plc) and one in Uganda (Umeme (U) Ltd. These two countries have been engaged in implementing wide ranges on public sector reforms, including privatisation policies, prescribed by various supranational agencies with intention of rehabilitation and reconstruction of the fragile economies, with direct foreign investments; and through development loans, some of which were channelled to the developing countries through TNCs (Guttal, 2007; Jones, 2014; Grusky, 2001).

Table 1: Selected TNCs for the Study

TNC	Country	Sector
1. Carillion plc	Qatar	Construction
2. Umeme (U) Ltd	Uganda	Electricity

The Arab State of Qatar was selected for the study of predatory practices of TNCs because of the use of migrant workers from very poor countries of the Global South in the sectors (*Construction*) which are construed by the indigenous people as not worthy their efforts. This is due to the hazards associated with construction work and the long working hours needed to ensure that work is accomplished in time ahead of the World Cup Finals in 2022, and intended to provide pomp from the small wealthy oil-rich Arab state of Qatar.

In addition, and in comparison, one sub Saharan African country of Uganda was selected. In the case of Uganda, the study dwelt on the Umeme (U) Ltd, the sole distributor of electricity in Uganda, with connections with various supranational institutions, and was awarded an operating concessions for 20 years from 2005 (Alnesafi, Kasumba and Aldhuaina, 2015). The concessions were prepared under the technical assistance provided by the World Bank.

A number of reports, publications, petitions and court rulings, in connection with the activities of TNCs and other concerned and affected parties were reviewed to create an understanding of the predatory practices perpetrated by the selected TNCs in their host countries (Gethin, 2011; Lendman, 2010; Raworth, 2004; Yard, 2014; Grusky, 2001). These reports and publications will include newspaper clippings, official reports from supranational agencies, NGOs, pressure groups; anti-corruption groups; Hansards, Acts of Parliament, Special reports of Parliament, Court proceedings and rulings, especially in connection with litigations against the actions of TNCs and others.

The study contributed to a deeper understanding into the interests of TNCs in the broad global circuits of production, exchange and capital accumulation; and how the protected TNCs through both external and internal economic structures used their privileged positions of no or self-regulation to perpetuate predatory practices in the study countries.

Background to the Case Studies

This section provides some background information to the two TNCs that formed the case studies for the predatory practices of TNCs in developing countries.

4.1 Carillion plc-Qatar

Carillion plc is one of the UK's leading integrated support services, with extensive construction capabilities (www.carillionplc.com). Carillion claims to employ over 40,000 people worldwide in their global circuits of accumulation, including in the UK, Canada and the Middle East and North Africa (MENA). Most of these workers are migrant workers, especially for their construction business in the Middle East, including Qatar.

In Qatar, Carillion plc is partaking in one of the most lucrative global capital accumulation involving designing and construction of mega sporting infrastructure of the modern times. Given the massive construction activities, in preparation for the World Cup 2022, and the small labour force from the indigenous population, many TNCs, including Carillion plc, resorted to the use of migrant workers to facilitate timely completion of the construction projects. These migrant workers originate from some of the poorest countries of South Asia and Africa. The supply of migrant labour has been critical for the development of Middle East, especially in Qatar after the discovery of the “*black gold*”.

4.2 Umeme (U) Ltd

Umeme (U) Ltd is a consortium of Globeleq (now known as *Actis Infrastructure*), a commercial arm of Commonwealth Development Corporation (CDC) of the UK's Department for International Development (DfID), and Eskom Enterprises, that acquired a 20-year operating lease manage the electricity distribution network in Uganda in 2005. Umeme (U) Ltd, as a TNC, owned and financed by a supranational aid agency (DfID) took over the management of distributing electricity in Uganda from a state-run enterprise known as Uganda Electricity Distribution Company Ltd (UEDCL).

5.0 Predatory Practices of Selected TNCs in the Case Study Countries

This paper set out to probe the predatory practices engaged in by selected TNCs in developing countries; and to explore how the local citizens and other non-state actors responded to the predatory practices of TNCs by in the selected countries. The study revealed that different TNCs perpetrated different predatory practices in their host countries,

depending upon the socio-economic and political contexts. What seemed to emerge from the study is that there were similarities in the predatory practices of the selected TNCs and these mainly focused on amassing capital at the expense of other factors of production.

5.1 Carillion- Qatar plc

A number of investigations into how migrant workers are treated as Qatar prepares to host the FIFA World Cup Finals in 2022. These include, among others, the Human Rights Watch (2014); the Amnesty International (2015); the BBC News Night (2014). International Labour Organisation (2014). For instance, the BBC News Night (2014), specifically set out to investigate the plight of migrant workers at Carillion plc in Qatar. They uncovered numerous predatory practices that were subjected to the migrant workers at Carillion plc in Qatar, which are classified into **six** categories as illustrated below:

Predatory recruitment practices

Like many Arab states, Qatar operates the same “kafala” system of sponsorship with migrant workers. Migrant workers are fleeced by the recruitment agents, who traverse the Poor South, especially the South Asia and Africa, promising vulnerable workers “heaven” in the Middle East, including Qatar; and extorting from them colossal sums of money, as recruitment fees. However, when they reach Qatar, the promises turn out to be servitude. For instance, Amnesty International (2015) revealed that migrant workers frequently pay substantial fees to recruitment agencies in order to secure work in Qatar. These recruitment agencies make false promises about the pay and the nature of jobs to be done. This induces many vulnerable migrant workers from poorer nations to be lured to pay their way into destitution.

Similarly, the BBC News Night (2014) disclosed that migrant workers for the South Asia at Carillion were paid different rates than they were promised. Quoting an interview with on South Asia migrant worker, Imran, a 32-year old Bangladesh (at that time), regretted why he had paid out his way to Qatar. He had been promised 1,500 Qatari Riyals (equivalent of £263) per month. He had to pay for his food, phone and medical care, let alone the deductions made for visa fees payable to the employers. He was left with only 650 Qatari Riyals (*BBC News Night, 2014, 8th December*). Imran, like many other migrant workers in Qatar, pay their way to Qatar, especially in the construction industry, hoping to generate

money to support their families back home. However, their hopes are shattered when what was expected to be windfall turns out to lead them into servitude. For instance, Imran revealed that he had to give half of the remaining 650 Qatari Riyals (QR) to the recruiting agency in Dhaka, his home country. The balance could not support his elderly parents, wife and a child (*BBC News Night, 2014, 8th December*).

With the above ordeal, Imran would have returned to his mother nation, however, his passport was confiscated by his employer (Carillion and its associates) under the “kafala” system of sponsorship, which by that time, provided that employers seize the passports of migrant workers so as they could not go back to their countries, should they find the terms of employment are not as they expected. In the interview with BBC News Night, 8th December, 2014, Imran said:

“I don’t want to stay here but I can’t leave. The company has my passport”.

This is evidence of predatory practices of TNC, Carillion, to commit the migrant workers into serfdom because their labour is critical in the global capital accumulation, regardless of the conditions in which labour is provided, but in the interest of maximizing wealth.

Poor working and living conditions

Although migrant workers at Carillion were working at complex mega-sporting infrastructure in Qatar, they lacked basic equipment for their safety. The company was not providing appropriate safety gears to protect the workers from occupational hazards. In an interview with one of the migrant worker at Carillion (one Sanjay), the BBC News Night (2014) revealed that the company did not provide them with construction glasses and gloves, a situation which put their hands and fingers to high risks of injuries. For instance, Sanjay responded that:

“I am working for Carillion. When I’m on the construction site, I don’t get safety glasses or gloves.my finger was nearly chopped off... I never got compensation for it nor were my medical bills paid. I paid for the treatment myself.” (*BBC News Night, 2014, 8th December*).

In a related development, the on Wednesday, 10th December, 2014, Press TV also mentioned about how Carillion (a major British construction) had been linked to substandard

working conditions of its migrant workers in the Persian Gulf State of Qatar. (*Press TV, 10th December, 2014*). The media house quoted a London-based political commentator, one Professor Janathan Rosenhead commenting that:

“I think it is a very sad and despicable story that we have a major corporation in Britain [Carillion plc, emphasis added] making millions (if not billions) of pounds, employing people who are at a very edge of destitution, on almost starvation verges and kept as almost forced-labour in Qatar and taking very little interest in how they make their money” (*Press TV, 10th December, 2014*).

Further, BBC News Night (2014) disclosed that workers at Carillion had to endure very long hours of work for the outdoor construction activities in the scorching sun of the desert country. For instance, the one Imran interviewed by BBC News Night, argued that:

“We wake [up] at 4 in the morning, get to work about 6 [a.m] and work until 5 [p.m] in the evening.” (*BBC News Night, 2014, 8th December*).

This was also verified by Amnesty International (2015) also revealed that the conditions of on-site construction workers were harsh and dangerous, and putting the lives of the workers to high risks, including deaths. For instance, it has been reported in 2014 that since 2012 over 1,000 migrant workers had died at Qatar’s mega-sporting infrastructure being constructed and more were expected to die as a result risky working conditions at Carillion construction sites, by the time FIFA World Cup finals get under way (*Press TV, 10th December, 2014*). Mainly, these migrant workers were dying of cardiac arrest resulting from strenuous work done over excessively long periods in out-door scorching sun of above 40 degrees Celsius. (ILO, 2005).

This is worrying, especially for migrant workers, who leave their dears one to temporarily relocate to rich-countries of the Middle East hoping to make “ends meet” but instead are returned to their home countries in “wooded boxes”.

In a statement responding to the damning revelations made by the BBC News Night of 8th December, 2014, Carillion observed that:

“Carillion is deeply concerned and surprised by the claims made by News Night concerning workers employed by our subcontractors in Qatar, which were reported in the programme broadcast on 8th December. We are

conducting an immediate review of these claims to establish the position and take appropriate action". (*BBC News Night, 2014, 8th December*).

The statement further added that:

"We make it clear to all of our subcontractors that they must comply with Carillion Health & Safety Standards on our sites, in the same as those applied in the UK... In addition, we also require our subcontractors to comply with the requirements set within Qatar Labour Law in respect of payment of wages, living conditions and employment rights." (*BBC News Night, 2014, 8th December*).

Poor Enforcement of Laws Protecting Migrants

In Qatar, most of the labour used on construction sites comes from migrant workers. Although, Carillion claimed that its workers were subjected to the same standards as it is the case with the UK and that Qatari Labour Laws were respected, there was a weak or no monitoring mechanisms in place to check on the excesses of the TNCs in the process of accumulating global capital. For instance, the Human Rights Watch Report entitled: "*Building a Better World Cup: Protecting Migrant Workers in Qatar Ahead of FIFA 2022, of June 12th 2012*", it was revealed that Qatari labour system has a weak monitoring mechanism, which made the workers, especially migrant workers, highly vulnerable to violation of human rights. For example, it was noted that there were only 150 labour inspectors deployed to monitor over 1.2 million migrant workers (*Human Rights Watch Report, 2012*). The Report further provided that language barriers constrained the monitoring exercise as the majority of migrant workers could not speak Arabic (*Human Rights Watch Report, 2012*).

Further, the Report disclosed that the monitoring done by the Qatari Ministry of Law is carried out using records tenable from the companies, giving no opportunity to seek firsthand information from the aggrieved migrant works. Notwithstanding, Human Rights Watch tried to interview some migrant workers, but they feared losing their jobs, and subsequently deportation, if they revealed the truth about human rights abuses carried out by TNCs (*Human Rights Watch Report, 2012*). Besides, those who sought assistance from the Complaints Department of the Qatari Ministry of Labour, said they had lost their jobs and some had stopped receiving their salaries. This is an indication that the nation-state actors

of Qatar focus more attention on the interests of TNCs at the expense of protecting labour, especially migrant workers.

The current Labour Law of Qatar that was passed in 2004 has provisions to protect workers' rights, such as maximum working hours per week, paid annual leave, end-of-service bonuses, providing for workers' health and safety and others including, banning midday work during the hot summer periods (Qatar, 2014). In addition, in 1972, the government of Qatar ratified the Conventions of ILO protecting workers against forced labour, discrimination in employment and others (ILO). However, due to poor enforcement processes, the workers, especially migrant workers, are still exploited by TNCs who seek to maximize their returns by suppressing labour.

Restricted Rights to Workers' Welfare

The rights to freedom of association and collective bargaining are fundamental in ensuring that employees' welfare is attended to and honoured. In instances where individual employees are unable to "fight" for their cause, it is usually their trade unions which are called up to negotiate and prevail over erratic employers. However, for the case of Qatar, especially in regard to migrant workers, it is prohibited for migrant workers in Qatar to join trade unions (International Labour Organisation, 2014; BBC News Night (2014).

Notwithstanding, the freedom of association, collective bargaining the industrial relations are not provided for in Qatar. Any grievances employers are supposed to Labour Department, which is expected to settle it amicably, and where settlement is not reached, it is the same department to apply to Court for redress and not employees (Qatar, 1963, accessed from ILO, on 27th November, 2015). For instance, Act No.2 of 1963 established an optional system to file a case before the Qatari Labour Court. The Act provided that workers and employers may submit their dispute concerning the application of any of the provisions of the Labour Code to the Labour Department to undertake the necessary procedures to settle the dispute in an amicable manner. In case of failure, the Department shall submit the case before the Labour Court (Qatar, 1963, accessed from ILO, on 27th November, 2015).

5.2 Umeme (U) Ltd

From the time Umeme (U) Ltd acquired the operating licence to manage the distribution of electricity in Uganda, the TNC has been embroiled in a lot of controversies from the initial preparation of the contract, which was highly influenced by the World Bank and skewed in favour of Umeme, to the implementation phase, which has been marred with several predatory practices as illuminated below:

Exaggeration of Power Losses

According to the 20-year concession agreement made between Uganda government and Umeme (U) Ltd, the latter was to be compensated in forms of rebates of Shs. 10 million (approx. \$300,000) for every 1% loss of electricity arising from old distribution network which the company inherited from the formerly state-run UEDCL (*Electricity Regulatory Authority (2011)*). Umeme (U) had claimed that the electricity distribution network they took over from UEDCL was very poor that there are technical losses of electricity from where they buy it from (Uganda Electricity Transmission Company Ltd, a state monopoly) to their old distribution network. In order to mitigate this loss, the Concession Agreement, which was prepared mainly to suit the capitalist interests of Umeme, provided rebates (*Electricity Regulatory Authority, 2011*). However, evidence revealed that the losses were always inflated by Umeme to the disadvantage of Ugandans.

In the first place, the first Managing Director of Umeme (U) Ltd in 2005 was Mr. Mare, who was previously the Managing Director of UEDCL, which granted operating licence to Umeme Ltd. Mr Mare was an employee of Eskom Enterprises of South Africa, a company that co-owned Umeme (U) Ltd. All the ground work about the privatisation of Uganda Electricity Board (before it was unbundled into three separate companies)¹, including setting up of UEDCL, was done with full knowledge of Mr. Mare. Indeed, the determination of the extant losses emanating from an old distribution grid, was done by Mare, who latter was to become the Managing Director of the resultant company after the privatisation process. For instance, it was revealed that in March 2005, when Umeme (U) Ltd took over the distribution operating licence in Uganda, the allowable technical losses were fixed at 33%, and were

¹ These included the Uganda Electricity Distribution Company Ltd (UEDCL); Uganda Electricity Generation Company Ltd (UEGCL) and the state-run Uganda Electricity Transmission Company (UETCL).

expected to be reducing by 0.83% per annum to reach 28% in the seventh year (*Electricity Regulatory Authority² Report, 2011*).

However, through manipulations, the technical losses were increased by Umeme (U) Ltd using nation-state actors to give an advantage to the global capitalist interests of the former. For instance, it was revealed the former State Minister for mineral development, Kamanda Bataringaya has admitted that he approved the Umeme (U) Ltd losses threshold at 38%, over and above the 33% recommended by his boss at the time, Daudi Migereko (the full minister at the time). This was indicated in a letter dated November 28, 2006, Mr Bataringaya wrote to the then Minister of Finance Ezra Suruma on behalf of Migereko, expressing no objection at the amendments accepting the threshold to be put at 38% (*Uganda Radio Network, 22nd March 2012*).

The above hike in the technical losses meant that the Ugandans were made to compensate Umeme colossal sums of money, which otherwise would have been available for provision of basic social services. It was further observed that for every percentage loss over and above 28%, government has been compensating Umeme 5 million US Dollars per year (*Uganda Radio Network, 22nd March 2012*). The Legislative Assembly of Uganda (*Parliament*) was particularly concerned how the State Minister could just approve a change in technical losses without proper analysis. In defence, the State Minister claimed that he only appended his signature after receiving a document from the Permanent Secretary (*Uganda Radio Network, 22nd March 2012*).

Inflated Investments in Power Distribution Network

According to the concessional agreement between Umeme and Uganda government, the former was expected to make core investments in the power distribution network to improve on service delivery. In particular, Umeme was supposed to investment \$10 million in 2007; \$20 million in 2008; \$40 million in 2009; and \$65 million in 2010 (*Electricity Regulatory Authority, 2011*). However, the extent of the investments made by Umeme was unclear and in some cases controversial. According to the Electricity Regulatory Authority (2011), Umeme was entitled to a refund of 20% return on investment. However, Saleh Report

² The role of Electricity Regulatory Authority (ERA) is to regulate the electricity sector in Uganda, including granting operating licences; approving electricity tariffs.

(2009)³ revealed that the government of Uganda was misled in 2006 in thinking that Umeme had made an investment of US\$ 10 million, yet the actual verified investment was US \$ 4.9 million and the balance of US\$ 5.1 million had not yet been verified by the regulator, the Electricity Regulatory Authority (*Saleh Report, 2009*). It was discovered by the Saleh Committee that by the end of 2008, a total of US\$ 10,144,093 of disallowed investments were still earning a return on investment in tariff and Ugandan were being cheated in form of hiked cost of electricity.⁴

Inflating investments by Umeme was one of the predatory practices through which the TNC managed to extort public resources of Ugandans. By exaggerating the investments, the company was able to fleece the Ugandan government of the 20% return on investment (*Saleh Report, 2009*).

The New Vision newspaper of 22nd November 2011 also reported that Umeme had inflated its investments in the electricity distribution network by \$ 23.4million (over Shs 75 billion). This revelation was made by the Managing Director of the Uganda Electricity Distribution Company Ltd (UEDCL), Mr. Joseph Katera. Mr. Katera had appeared before the MPs on the Adhoc Committee of Energy and revealed that: “Umeme submitted assets worth \$117 million, of which \$ 23 million worth of assets were “disqualified”. He explained further that, “some of the equipment Umeme had classified as investment were found to be those of routine maintenance work.” (*The New Vision, 22nd November, 2011*). Meanwhile, the UEDCL manager for technical services, Franklin Kizito commented that Umeme had failed to invest in core assets required to improve the distribution system, which investment was one of the terms in their Concession Agreement with the Government of Uganda (*The New Vision, 22nd November, 2011*).

Faulty Power Meters and Irregular Billing

Another predatory practice in which Umeme is alleged to have extorted colossal sums of money from unsuspecting Ugandan has been through the use of faulty meters (Electricity

³ The Government of Uganda set up a Committee on the Interim Review of Electricity Tariff, headed by General Salim Saleh, a brother to the President of Uganda. The Committee produced a Report in 2009, which was coded “Saleh Report”

⁴ The return of investment payable to Umeme is factored in the tariff charged to electricity consumers (*Saleh Report, 2009*)

Regulatory Authority, 2009). Whereas, Uganda's regulatory body in charge of maintaining standards, the Uganda National Bureau of Standard, is in existence, the meters that Umeme imported into the country were not tested. Besides, the national electricity regulator (ERA) did not address the issue of faulty meters. In their undated publication, *"Increasing tariffs, faulty meters and resigned customers: What role for Uganda Electricity Regulatory (ERA), the Africa Institute for Energy Governance (AFIEGO) questioned the role of the Uganda Electricity Regulator (ERA), which kept a blind eye when the Licencee (Umeme (U) Ltd) was accumulating capital through predatory practices, such as using faulty meters that were not tested by the Uganda National Bureau of Standards.*

AFIEGO (undated) noted that:

"While the roles of other players, such as ERA are provided for by law, the people have for long seem Umeme manage the power distribution as if we do not have a regulator". Power consumers continue to suffer with faulty meters, late bills and irregular disconnections...Unfortunately there is no legal framework that can be relied on to hold Umeme accountable."

The AFIEGO publication, further states that:

"The prepaid metering was introduced to solve problems like estimated billing...The meters were also presumed harder to manipulate. Unfortunately, like the postpaid meters, the "Yaka" [prepaid] meters are being given to consumers without being tested and certified by Uganda Bureau of Standards to ensure that they are not faulty. Perhaps, it is this reason that "yaka" (prepaid meters) have not translated into good services and lower cost for the consumers. Instead, people are complaining of inflated bills and high and varied costs of paying the bills".

It could have been a deliberate intention for the distribution company not to subject their metering devices so as to inflate power bills for their capital accumulation interests. For instance, The East African newspaper of 29th September 2009 run a story entitled: *"Untested meters spark fear over high bills"*. It was reported that over 90,000 electricity consumers in Uganda were likely to end up paying higher bills than the electricity they use due to some of the meters imported by Umeme had been found faulty and they were not tested and verified by Uganda National Bureau of Standards. It was further revealed that a ping pong game emerged between Umeme and Uganda National Bureau of Standards about the meters that the former had imported into the country. Whereas Umeme claimed

that they tested and verified the meters, Uganda National Bureau of Standards argued that Umeme did not have the mandate to test their own meters (*The East African*, 29th September, 2009).

In the same vein, according to the study conducted by the Electricity Regulatory Authority (ERA) in 2009, it was revealed that 30% of the meters installed by Umeme in various parts of Uganda were faulty. Similarly, the Saleh Committee (2009) revealed the same that some of the meters that were procured by Umeme in 2009 were substandard and were rejected by the testing engineers, but company went ahead to install them. It was reported that the meters were calibrated to trip at higher speeds than the industrial benchmark, hence taking higher energy readings than the amount consumed (Saleh Report, 2009).

Notwithstanding, all the above predatory practices of Umeme Ltd and the various investigation reports about it, and although all of them recommended for the termination of the Concession Agreement with the TNCs, nothing was implemented. Umeme is still pursuing their global capitalist interests unabated, with a powerful had of the transnational state of Uganda.

6.0 Discussion and Conclusion

The purpose of this paper is to contribute further to the debate on the TNCs and their predatory practices, especially in developing countries. The study was undertaken based on case studies of two Arab states, mainly focusing on the predatory practices against migrant workers by TNCs and one sub-Saharan country, laying emphasis on how TNCs exploited various citizens of the host countries.

The findings of the study revealed that due to weak or lack of effective legal and regulatory mechanisms in Qatar, the transnational state actors of this country abetted the predatory practices of TNCs. For instance, the “kafala” system of sponsorship for migrant workers helped significantly to favour the global capitalist interests of TNCs. This is because, even if the migrant workers found themselves to have been fleeced by recruitment agencies about the nature of jobs and remuneration details, they could not change jobs because of the terms and conditions of the “kafala” sponsorship system that tied migrant workers to their initial employers within a period of two years (Human Rights Watch, 2014; Jannic-Cherbonnel, 2015). This predatory practice made migrant workers to have their wages

being taken up to pay for their stay in Qatar, leaving them with “peanuts”, a situation that led to the destitution and the highly desperate one would end up taking their own lives (Motaparthy, 2015; National Labor Committee, 2010).

Whereas, a number of supranational agencies, such as the International Labour Organisation, the European Parliament, and non-government organisations, such as the Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International; and others raised serious concerns about the plight of migrant workers in Qatar, no serious reforms were made (National Labor Committee, 2010; Gethin, 2014). Putting too much pressure to the errant governments of the Middle East states, of which Qatar was one of the small but oil-rich state with the highest per capita income in the world, would jeopardise the opportunities for TNC that are associated with their sponsors to partake in the lucrative global circuits of accumulation (Robinson, 2010).

For the case of Uganda, this study has further revealed that various predatory practices were carried by Umeme (U) Ltd on the people of Uganda. Umeme (U) Ltd, which is owned by the UK government through its Commonwealth Development Corporation (CDC), used its monopoly position as the sole distributor of electricity in Uganda to amass capital by bending the law and regulations to their benefit (Awodiran, 2014; Gravelle, 2015). For instance, Umeme (U) Ltd overstated technical losses and investments to optimize refunds from the national treasury of Uganda (Anderson, 2014; Grusky, 2001). According to the Concession Agreement with the government of Uganda, the latter was supposed to refund the former with the technical losses arising during their distribution business and a 20% of return on investments in core assets to improve the distribution (*Electricity Regulatory Authority, 2011*). However, in the pursuit of global capital, Umeme (U) Ltd, with the help of some nation-state actors managed to defraud Ugandans of their financial resources through predatory practices of false claiming on losses and investments. In a related development, this study has also revealed how Umeme (U) Ltd extorted financial resources from Ugandan by using faulty meters, which recorded higher readings that the amount of power consumed by the unsuspecting customers, riding on the lack of or poorly regulated space to extort capital from vulnerable people (Bakre, 2006).

In conclusion, this study has added to the debate that, contrary to the popular argument that TNCs are critical for the economic development of nations, especially developing countries, through the direct financial investments (DFIs), evidence has revealed that the predatory practices carried out by TNCs deprive the host nations of resources that would enhance socio-economic development, and in other cases commit vulnerable poor workers into servitude and destitution.

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