Reviewer's report on "How much do perceptions of corruption really tell us?" by Claudio Weber Abramo

The paper deals with an interesting and challenging subject. Since Mauro's seminal work in 1995, researchers are looking for measures to analyse the incidence of corruption quantitatively. Several subjective indices based on ratings of 'country experts', businessmen's or general public's opinion emerged as preferable choice and these data are used in plenty of studies. The first merit of this paper is to challenge this tacit consensus. The author uses data from the Global Corruption Barometer 2004 from up to 60 countries to compare the subjective judgement of institutional quality and personal experience of bribery. The results show that subjective indices might be bad approximations of experienced corruption. Albeit objective and subjective measures are significantly correlated over all countries this interrelation completely disappears if subgroups according to GDP per capita are formed.

The paper is well motivated and easily accessible. However, some editing seems to be necessary.

However, there are some remarks which might help to improve the paper.

- Definitions of main variables are in the Annex. This makes it difficult to understand especially the Tables 1 and 2. I would suggest moving a short explanation of the definition of variables in the first section. For the same reason the content of the Table Data (pp. 56ff) is not very clear.

- Annex II is not very accessible for non-statisticians. Please add some explanations at the beginning for which purpose this annex serves and perhaps one publicly available source where the interested reader can find the basics for this procedure.

- The current version of the submitted article is quite long relative to its central message. To give the paper a clearer focus I would suggest cutting on some institutional variables like media, NGOs, and religions. Their relationship with experienced corruption is not very elaborated in the paper and paper's central message will remain unchanged. Most research starts from corruption as an illegal exchange of actors including one public official. Therefore, a focus on public organisations like customs, education, judiciary etc. might be a preferable choice.

- In relation to variables' definition an analysis of sensitivity would be helpful. Do results support the same conclusion if categories to construct dummies are changed, e.g. only using respondents from the highest category or using answers of all respondents?

- The author mentions the data from the International Crime Victim Survey (ICVS). It would be an additional achievement to compare his experience data with these ICVS data. The same holds for objective measures of corruption like number of criminal investigations and convictions (e.g., surveys of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime on crime trends and the operations of the criminal justice systems).