

Challenges and associated solutions in Collective Action to fight corruption

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Young Professionals

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Theme: *Let us unite to fight against corruption practitioners.*

Abstract

This paper illustrates the root cause of corruption while suggesting a set of tools intended to win anti-corruption fight. Economic development and eradication of poverty, strong pay to public servants, independent detective/security and judiciary agents are among the important issues that the paper discusses. Crucially, community mobilization, strong penalty to corruption practitioners and free media are fundamental principles in building an environment free from corruption.

People are always set to look at corruption as something that other people do, forgetting that we are that very "other people" to other people. So the ball goes round and round until it comes around again.



The symbol of togetherness above can be turned into a corruption symbol and that is what we have to fight against

Indeed there is even a false believe in Somalia that bribery and corruption are things of the Western world or other religions and culture except our own. More so, the youth of our nation look down upon those people who try to raise the anti-corruption issue as trouble makers instead of supporting them to achieve the noble end. Viewed from an independent angle, the acts that lead to corruption are simple but not easy to deal with. Mostly, corruption involves getting the right things at the wrong time or getting the wrong things at the right time. Again, this depends on which side one is looking from. During my brief observational research, I came across people in reputable positions who believe that corruption is just a way of life. Suggested measures in the paper are laughed at when put to most people but it is my belief that it will happen one day. Finally, as a lady few people in my society give women ideas a hearing, but there is hope.

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I. Introduction

Anti-corruption is a global movement against all corruption in all sectors of societies. Although most countries differ in their anti-corruption action approach, their effort depends on the level of corruption that exists in their countries and how political leaders view it. Even though the fight against corruption is extensive around the world, it is still a growing problem that is becoming a burden to economic growth and dangerous to the lives of many communities trying to make a good living in their countries.

Corruption is a wrongdoing by those entrusted with positions of power, especially government officials and private service personnel who misuse funds and other resources for their personal use thus causing economic decline. This will always have a negative impact on the administration and proper economic development of any given country be it a poor Somalia or a great economic power like the USA. What the whole world has witnessed in the past year as the USA economy plummeted to very low levels pulling the rest of the world with it clearly came down to corrupt practices at top levels. Were it not for its transparent democracy, the world would never have known what swept the US giant companies to the ground as if hit by a destructive hurricane or tsunami. Of course, it is almost impossible to expect the rest of the world to be as open as the US in the way they tackled that corruption disease led by their vibrant new leader at White House, President Barrack Hussein Obama. However, there is positive hope.

The level of corruption varies. It can be minor in which public servants take bribes from community members or it can be huge in which high level officials and politicians take from government coffers or donors huge sums that in turn halts the development of any society. Private companies too get involved in a huge way since whenever we hear of a high level corruption, it almost certainly involves a government tender given to a private firm. Actually, the two (private and public sector) corrupt parties complement one another all the time. A private firm is importing goods worth millions into a country's ports and the very first people to ask for a bribe are the port agents. What the public will see is the corrupt public servant but always never think about the private firm which readily gives the bribe. The simple saying that it takes two to tangle will always remain true and correct. You ask for a bribe from a person who is readily willing to give. Anti-corruption is a tough fight indeed but one that can be won.

According to Transparency International's corruption index of 2007, Somalia is one of the most corrupt countries not just in Africa but the whole world. Similarly in 2008, UNHCR reviewed the current situation in Somalia and stated that every aspect of human life was impacted by severe corruption in

the country and can be the center of world corruption, if the concerned parties do not take appropriate steps to correct the situation.

Corruption delays the psychological and physical development of a nation. It holds up the government services, and the communities never meet their needs. There are certain factors that force most of government officials to embrace corruption which indirectly has negative influence on the development of a nation. These factors include: poverty, low income and lack of accountability. As a result where poverty and other above mentioned factors are high, the level of corruption will be higher.

Even though no country is immune to corruption and it is not possible to enumerate all aspects of this malady, this paper is an attempt to present some ideas that can be a solution to world wide corruption. These ideas include: **a)** acceptable compensation to public employees **b)** Economic development, **c)** better public fund management and accountability **d)** Strong penalty to corruption practitioners. **e)** Awareness to the community and business personnel **f)** independent audit system and **g)** free mass media. To have a world free of corruption, societies need to develop a system of governance that does not give loop holes to corrupt practices.

II. Impact of corruption

Corruption affects the domestic environment in many ways as follows:

- **Fiscal policy:** these mainly include lost revenues from tax, customs tariffs and licensing fees. Most revenue from developing countries is lost through unofficial and personal purposes. For example, 90% of Puntland revenue comes from import tax and export of livestock. However, less than 40% of this income goes to the state while the rest is lost through corrupt channels.
- **Reduction in production investment and growth:** the costs of corruption are high in countries like Somalia, Bolivia and Sri Lanka. The country's infrastructure has remained poor, and hence such countries do not have the ability to attract foreign investors. This creates an atmosphere of corrupt investors to sneak in and do their evil acts.
- **Costs to both the public and the poor:** provision of services based on bribes has extensive impact both on the public and the private sector. Although the level of impact differs between poor and rich, the diversion of resources from its intended purpose distorts the formulation of public policy which largely influences private business.

- **Loss of confidence in public institutions:** once public services can be bought and public leaders break the trust or confidence that community has on them, institutions lose credibility. This in turn weakens law and order, security and the legitimacy of the state.

Similarly, the international environment is heavily affected by corruption leading to such acts as: piracy, money laundering, banking fraud across borders, smuggling and both drug as well as human trafficking.

III. Challenges facing collective action to fight corruption

This paper is written from the context of an African country (particularly Somalia) and will in this section discuss the challenges faced in reversing the corruption trend while at the same time trying to embrace the remedial actions highlighted in the next section.

- Culture of the people: it is quite difficult to eradicate corruption in countries with strong tribal system and poor economic situations. Nepotism is practiced by politicians, enticement and bribing, usually, tend to obstruct any endeavors against corruption. Somalia is a typical example suffering the prevalence of a very strong tribal system, poor economy (scarce resources) and absence of employment opportunities keeps the country with a chronic and widespread corruption. Clans fight for handling meager public funds and politicians corrupt the system for their personal gains. There is strong competition among individuals from different tribes for public positions, and to get a public position one has to pay kickback and his/her clan members have to support him/her to find that position for corruption means.
- Serious fight against corrupt; generally, depend on the level of education of the society at large. The more illiterate is the bulk of the people, the higher the level of corruption in any given country. Generally, the great illiterate majority tend to suppress the small number of literates fighting against corruption. This is a common problem of Africa and the third world in general.
- Infrastructure: the existence of limited sources is another challenge why corruption can not be eliminated in Africa, no anti-corruption institutes extending anti-corruption strategies. Further more, there is no tough law and order; hence the feeble law supports corruption to take place and strengthen in places where corruption is visible.
- Economy of the country: meager economy exists in most part of Africa and Asia, people are busy for obtaining their basic life, state revenue are controlled and are under the hands of specific ruling individuals,

the economic scarcity push individuals to accept bribes for their economic stability, also people have to pay bribes for attaining opportunities, and averting job cuts.

IV. Remedial Actions against corruption

a) Competitive compensation to public employees.

Most public employees do not get competitive compensation. Generally, their compensation does not meet their needs and hence they become financially insecure. Due to this financial insecurity, they resort to illegal means of survival and in particular accepting small bribes in order to meet their personal needs. However, for this to discontinue, the public servants and officials should find rational pay so as to handle their personal consumption needs. This will result into them not getting tempted to accept bribes in most cases.

Most countries in Africa and some parts of Asia are economically deprived, meaning that their economic developments are below the poverty line. To make it worse most of these countries do not have mass internal income sources and external investors. In addition to that, public servants do not acquire enough pay. For example in my country Somalia, a country with extensive famine and a raging civil war, there is no freedom of media but with strong political competition. There is open evidence of gender discrimination and humanitarian crisis. Public servants are not paid for months and when paid, it is always in piecemeal installments. Inevitably, they resort to petty and grand corruption both for the highly and the lowly ranked not taking into account any consequences the wrong doing would have on themselves and others.

In addition to that, humanitarian organizations play a crucial role for the growing level of corruption in Somalia, and other countries with humanitarian crisis. UN aid organizations in Mogadishu recently accused the Transitional Federal Somali Government officials backed by America and Britain of demanding bribe for their routine services in Somalia. However, it is difficult to eliminate corruption in countries whose governments are made of corrupt individuals, unless the concerned parties interact with the government and internal movements.

b) Economic Development and Eradication of poverty.

High levels of corruption have very harmful affect in economic and social development of a nation. Corruption deforms the business world. It also lowers efficiency and benefits from the public services by increasing the cost of services, which hardens people's ability to meet their basic needs like food, shelter, medicine and security. Worst of all this hurts the poor most

and yet in most cases, it is the not-so-poor who get involved in the grand corruption.



Halima Ali, a business woman explaining what she gets from the Government in return of the tax she pays.

During my research I met Halima Ali a business woman and she said, "I pay the tax on time, while I don't receive my return on time or not at all." She explained how she has to pay extra money for security of her business while the government does not give consideration to basic issues like security, education and health. She also added that she has to take care of the bills of criminals in jail while at the same time the tax money is used for personal purposes by the tax man, while the tax payer struggles to meet basic needs.

Corruption is an obstacle to economic growth, widening disparity in the poverty levels and hence hurting the majority poor people. Although the world differs in economic development, the less developed countries where corruption is abundant and becoming morally supported like Somalia, the economies are under the worst strain. In this case the poor and vulnerable ones are those to get hurt and suffer most because in such countries, justice is a matter of negotiating a price. This makes money as the only factor which could set one free from the jail. In effect only the rich ones can have positive interactions with the police and with the law keepers. From the beginning, the rich will be in a winning position even if they are guilty, while the poor have to suffer.

In this case, internal and external economic sources are needed to run the economy. This would lead to job creation, employees to earn sufficient salary and hence help people to get better life while avoid corruption.

Nevertheless, much effort is needed for the eradication and reduction of the level of corruption in less developed countries. Important starting point would be, improving the quality of some basic public services like the

administration of justice, health and education. This would help further reduce the share of hidden economy and the related corruption.

c) Better Public Fund Management and accountability

The fight against poverty and corruption can be improved under an environment with good governance, transparency and well managed public funds.

Lack of good management and accountability by the government officials and private business personnel are the motives that lessen a nation's development both psychological and material.

Public fund mismanagement is done by the public servants, particularly those with access to the government's income sources like the ports, the police and tax departments. In this case, strong scrutiny and inspections are needed by the professionals, business community, media and civil society to have a watch on the government. This would in the long run give different parts of the community a chance to have the enthusiasm and desire to fight against corruption and corrupt officials.

Public fund management exists in each country, but in order to really have some impact on fighting corruption, better public fund management, transparency auditing and stricter control.

Research about good governance done by Puntland Development Research Centre (PDRC), a Local NGO based in Garowe Puntland Somalia, enlightened in May 2004 that 95% of Puntland Regional revenue comes from import duties and export tax of livestock to the Arab Gulf countries.



Ali, a Ports Authority officer calculating daily Tax income

However, the research established that 90% of the state revenue is unfairly and illegally distributed to the senior public officials while the rest of the community has to do with the paltry 10%. All these happen while the community has to pay for the attaining of their basic public services like education, medical care, electricity, security and water.

In order to establish accountability and transparency in government, both internal and external pressure are needed, allowing state revenue to promote economic and social development of that country and reduce poverty levels. This can only be done with the collaboration of the different parts of the society including government officials.

Although this idea cannot be applied in the same way to countries with different corruption level, the practice of good governance principles benefit each country. Similarly, it is important to build strong positive relationship with the government and its citizens, increase the loyalty of business organizations, incorporate international investors as well as local communities to the government, and enhance the practice of loaning with transparent intent.

d) Strong penalty to corrupt individuals.

Corruption problem affects all societies, wealthy and poor; so in order to avoid and overcome this practice there must be easy access to law and order. This is necessary for the sustainability of resource management in a good manner.

If the law is definitely meting big punishment against corruption practitioners and the power of accomplishment or taking the accurate step is available, then this is a touchable step towards the elimination of corruption. Otherwise the remaining good people will be the next to practice, until corruption will be part and parcel of the normal activities done by the different people of any nation. This is a case of one rotten fruit soiling the others in basket and hence setting off the whole basket to rot.

In my country Somalia, corruption is absolutely visible, and there is credible evidence that every leader in high position had some kind of a financial scam. The negligence of corruption practices resulted into the practice becoming normal, although the situation in Somalia is different from other parts of the world, since lawlessness rules the land. Clearly, corruption practitioners in our society do not face trial and judgement at the courts of law.

Another important issue of penalty to the corruption practitioners is excluding them from the employment and not allowing them to participate in national activities including social festivals. This is a way of shaming those found in the act and hence detracting anyone else with similar intend.

e) Awareness to the community

The communities may create favorable conditions for corruption environment. For example in some countries including Somalia, corruption is quite visible and the community attitude or stigma towards such practices are very low even considering it as part of daily life and legal business. However the community should have some kind of disgust towards corruption actions done by either public or private sectors.

A good example of this happened recently within Puntland political leadership, when the current government accused its former Minister of Finance to have illegally acquired finance dealings as well as some private properties taken from individuals of society using the power of the government. Although the case is still under investigation, the government itself showed some kind of transparency and people felt relieved seeing such a formerly powerful entity exposed and brought to shame.

However, many societies do not pay any attention towards the corrupt individuals. We can even say that some nations have culturally adapted the practice of corruption and other kinds of fraudulent deals.

In order for the different parts of the community and business personnel to be aware of the consequences of corrupt practices and to strengthen the natural abhorrence, the simple quick and positive step to this disaster practice is to create community mobilization mainly in the public gathering areas as well as national ceremonies.

Free and independent media is the fundamental and basic forum for playing crucial role in public awareness. This can also be the best course to express periodic corruptions done by government officials, servants and business community. It can also be the best method in which to awaken the community and to make them account and look insight with the government activities.

Another issue for corruption elimination is to conduct anticorruption workshops, anticorruption celebration days and national anticorruption rally, where different parties in each nation on the globe participate. On such occasions people would be informed of their rights and that paying bribes for obtaining of public service is illegal action for both the giver and taker. It would be appropriate to use slogans and flags that symbolize corruption

practitioner as evil in the society, while those who abhor corruption would be depicted as angels of the society.

Extensive and continuous training for public servants and officials are crucial for the improvement of positive ethics. At the same time, the strengthening of financial regulations and the provision of periodic reports minimizes the sum of corruption cases to take place. This gives corruption minded people no room to practice their abhorring trait of proverbially harvesting where you did not sow.

f) Independent detective personnel

Since corruption practitioners are those responsible for the management and implementation of state affairs as well as the running of natural resources of the country, it becomes difficult to monitor them. Security and judiciary agency in most countries are under the hands of the government, and the authority of these agents remains in tandem with those taking care of state property. In most cases some of the leaders of these organizations have good relationship with the government and are corrupted, so it becomes difficult for them to be punished.

However, independent judiciary and security agents are crucial for the minimization of corrupt actions carried out by the public and private servants. If these organizations do not come under the control of the government or any other organization the consequences are negative really. They should have the capability and ability to give full insight within the government external and internal activities. They should also examine public servants as well as external donors and business community dealing with the government. With such access, these organizations are able to take proper legal action towards the corrupt bodies.

The other anti-corruption strategies mentioned above would not work if these organizations are not performing legally without the hesitation of the current legal arm supported by the executive branch of the government.

V. Limitations and problems in methodology of the essay

The desire to write something that is deemed good has always driven people to achieve great heights in life. During the paper research, it was evident that most people were unwilling to participate in discussions concerning corruption. This makes progress in research quite difficult.

The tendency by community members is to assume that people who look for corruption stories are simply disgruntled employees. It is difficult and far more complicated when one is a woman like myself and trying to advocate

for such noble cases. Funding is a big problem and independent press or reporting is very limited especially here in Somalia.

To make things worse, communication has become very difficult with people being suspicious of one another due to the numerous incidents of piracy and kidnappings. The education system does not give much leeway in carrying out research of such sensitive nature and so I find all these limitations a hindrance to proper research on any given day.

All these limitations are overcome through encouragement from my fellow students, parents, friends and people of the same school of thought against corrupt practices.

VI. Conclusion

Countries in the world are not on the same levels in their corruption, demand for scrutiny, inspection and application of their auditing systems for regulation. Like any system however, we must adopt the good practices from a role model while carefully learning the traits of bad ones in order to systematically make good adoption and defense mechanisms.

To reduce corruption, it is essential to develop societies in all aspects including the areas of social, economic and political environment. It is also necessary to improve public confidence and loyalty to the state. In addition to all that, agreements between the donors, private business and governments need to be transparent to the public.

It all starts with the individual in that if you spot a wrong and feel that there is action you can take without risking lives, then go ahead and take the positive action. One does not need to walk to the front desk of a police station to report a corruption case. Instead, you can openly discuss a process in open at a forum and see the reaction of the audience. Once while attending a workshop for community policing, I urged the local police commandant to reduce the amount of money drivers paid at road blocks. The whole workshop burst out laughing and the commandant acknowledged that there was no official fee at road blocks. It led to a crackdown on those corrupt officials especially on the two main road blocks to the South and East of the capital. The will to stop corruption is there and it starts with me. Join me and we end this disease called corruption. Yes we can.

Let's unite to fight against corruption practitioners

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