

Combating Corruption: Role of States, Civil Society & International Organizations

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1. Introduction

This essay is an attempt to study corruption as a serious governance challenge which is found present in one way or another in almost all societies regardless of the variations in their social, economic or political status. It aims to conceptualize some relevant responses or measures to combat corruption with regard to the role of states, civic society and concerned international organizations.

This essay will begin with discussion around the meaning of corruption, which in fact appears confusing in a way, as there is no unanimity among scholars about defining corruption. Secondly, this essay will review contemporary approaches as proposed by different scholars that attempt to help understand corruption from different perspectives and offer solutions to this governance challenge. The role of states, civic society and international organizations in regard to curbing corrupt practices in a society will be described, followed by an analysis of their strengths and limitations. This essay tries to establish an argument that, curbing corruption successfully, demands collective, collaborated and coordinated actions from all concerned actors including states, civil society and international organizations, however the success of combat against corruption depends upon the understanding, recognition and addressing of the particular inherent features or attributes of a society being dealt with.

No Unanimity in Defining Corruption

Corruption is a universal phenomenon. It is present in all countries, but in varied forms and degrees. However, we can find no single definition of corruption that is unanimously agreed upon by scholars.

Generally, corruption is described as the wrong use of a public authority for private gain (Lambsdorf 2007). Corruption is found in specifically four main forms, "bribery, embezzlement, fraud and extortion" (Andvig, Fjeldstad, Amundsen & Søreide 2000, p.14). Corruption is also classified by dividing it as petty corruption and grand scale corruption (Rohwerr 2009).

Although it is true that corruption is prevalent in almost all areas of society (Panday 2005), the sectors which are most severely impacted by and involved in corruption are the bureaucracy, political leadership and business sectors (Subedi 2005).

Overview of Approaches to Combating Corruption

As corruption has been a hot topic in the contemporary society, we can find a huge load of literature examining corruption from various perspectives and offering measures

of solutions to fight against it in varied ways. However, it is quite interesting to observe that corruption is such a subject which does not have a specific 'theory' as it is called, which can be employed in looking upon this issue and explaining it. Still, corruption is identified by different researchers in varied ways. The scholars' opinions vary a lot in determining which particular form of corruption is more dangerous to the governance system, and they also vary in proposing various approaches that need to be adopted in order for reducing corruption, if not eradicating it completely, in a particular society. As DeGraaf (2007) suggests, there is significant variations in literature of corruption about which specified anti - corruption approaches can create most desired impacts in specific circumstances.

The existing scholarship of corruption more or less agrees on the point that, successful anti - corruption approaches to be prescribed for a particular society, relies heavily on what the reasons are behind the emergence of corruption, in specific circumstances (DeGraaf 2007). That is why; the combat against corruption begins by identifying the inherent reasons behind corruption and applying preventive measures against the causes, which will definitely be varied for different societies. The lesson that should be learnt from all successful combat against corruption, therefore, is that there is no any particular individual solution as the panacea for controlling corruption (DeSousa 2009). Rather, adoption and application of a combination of different measures in a sustainable manner for significant amount of labor and time, can be able to pave way for success in the battle against corruption. The solutions, moreover, need to be context - specific considering the inherent causes behind corrupt practices in the society being dealt with.

Role of Different Actors in Combating Corruption

The history of combat against corruption is not very old. Heimann & Pieth (2017) analyzes the recent last two decades, when corruption emerged as one of the most talked about global issues, dividing it into five different stages. The first phase was when Transparency International was the sole actor raising the issue of corruption and combating against it. The second phase was marked by the combined efforts from many other concerned international institutions such as the United Nations Office on Drugs & Crime (UNODC) and the Organization for Economic Cooperation & Development (OECD) which have conducted many international conventions against corruption year by year. Then, the third phase appeared as crucial one, with the attempts by states to combat corruption by beginning to internalize the international conventions with their adoption in national statutes. The fourth phase is marked by the adoption of "compliance programs" by corporations or

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institutions. The current or fifth phase is crucial as it is characterized by appearance of "popular mass movements" against corrupted governance systems all over the world (Heimann & Pieth 2017).

As far as the role of different actors in fighting against corruption is concerned, for quite a long time, most specifically in the decades of the 1990s and the 2000s, the most effective measures to control corruption were considered to be the foundation and operation of anti - corruption agencies by the government. DeSousa (2010) emphasizes on the most important role played by strong anti - graft agencies backed by support from cooperative government agencies, powerful networking, skilled, knowledgeable and efficient manpower, and specified statutory authorities to carry out operations against corruption. Such anti - corruption agencies, however, need to be oriented to research and innovation to improve their performance. Sustainability of such institutions must also be considered. In contrast, lack of organizational autonomy and independence, absence of supportive organizational ambience and reduced scope of organizational development, can prove detrimental and lead to institutional failure impacting the organizational goal of reduction of corruption (DeSousa 2010).

Feldman & Eichenthal (2014) also argue in favor of strong, functionally autonomous and efficient oversight institutions that can make sure good governance is established and maintained in the country. Holmes (2015) also emphasizes on founding a powerful anti - corruption institution by the government which he believes, will definitely bring about a desired impact upon the control of corrupt practices. Interestingly, Holmes (2015) also opines that one of the radical approaches to curbing corruption could be to "declare an amnesty" by the government with a certain date from which to take harsh action against corruption cases in the country.

For an instance, Jones (2017), drawing lessons for policy makers from the experience of Botswana in combating corruption, find that the most important actor responsible for contributing to the success of the government of Botswana in reducing corruption is in fact the Directorate of Corruption and Economic Crime (DCEC), the anti - corruption institution that played a crucial role with both awareness programs and strong enforcement of legislation in its operations.

In contrast, there are scholars who opine that it is not much beneficial in trusting on the founding and functions of anti - corruption agencies as the only solution to combat corruption. However, it is agreed upon by most researchers that strong, powerful and efficient anti - corruption institutions are a basic and integral component of response to corrupt practices in any given society (DeSousa 2010).

Moyo (2014), employing political economy theory, analyzes the role played by states and the civil society in fighting against corruption. Examining the role of states in formulating and implementing integrity policies and the important role of the civic society as a pressure group for effective anti - corruption policies, Moyo (2014) argues that

one of the most primary prerequisites for successful combat against corruption is "political leadership and commitment".

In the same line, Abdulai (2009) making a comparative examination of corruption reduction efforts of Singapore, Ghana, and Hong Kong, argues that anti - corruption efforts in a country can never succeed if there is no genuine commitment in top level political leadership. Only the presence of continuous political commitment and will against corruption can lead to reduction of corruption in a country (Abdulai 2009).

Guan (1998) examining the challenges faced by Singapore in controlling corruption states that combating corruption is a continual process which requires unconditional support from top level state authorities along with supportive attitude as well as conduct at all levels. The attitudes, perceptions, values and conduct of all including "political leadership.... . public service.... and society as a whole" (Guan 1998, p.139). Gherai, Tara & Matica (2016), similarly, suggest that constitutionally independent and functionally capable audit institutions can contribute a lot in controlling corruption. Mbaio & Komboni (2008), in the same line, recommend "legislative reform aimed at strengthening" the anti - corruption institutions to make sure that the accountability of such institutions must be to the Legislature, and not to the Executive so that they can function freely, fairly and with credibility.

Montinola & Jackman (2002) examine why it is that corruption in system of governance is somewhere more prevalent and somewhere less, in varied societies employing "public choice explanations" that indicate the reasons behind corruption are the absence of choices in political or financial sectors in particular states. Their argument is that corruption is affected by status of competition at political level but not in a linear method. Interestingly corruption is found to be typically reduced in authoritarian countries which have recently begun the democratization process to some extent. With the advancement of the country towards democratic system of governance, corruption is found increasing. However, once a certain threshold is crossed, the practice of democratic form of governance begins restricting corruption to a great extent.

Similarly, some researches stress on the strength of civil society with increased civic engagement in combating corruption. For instance, Vogl (2012) suggests that consciousness and adoption of successful efforts and outcomes of corruption reduction programs in different countries in the world can provide useful insights in other parts of the world to advance their actions. In this way, even though no society is completely exempt from corrupt practices of one form or another, combating against corruption can lead to better achievements in lowering its prevalence with combined efforts and by learning and adopting best practices from one another.

In the same way, other scholars stress upon the combined and coordinated capability of powerful anti - corruption laws and national, regional and international conventions along

with increased transparency and interconnectivity that has been radically developed by the achievements in information and communication technologies (ICT) and aware and committed civic society in the combat against corruption internationally that can pave way for definite success in the collective efforts.

Mungiu - Pippidi (2015), too, relies on the most significant role to be played by civic society to combat against corruption. The emergence and adoption of democratic practices right after fall of authoritarian regime, for example, may be characterized by growth in corrupt practices in newly found governance system, however the efforts by powerful and aware civic society and its continued impact on the state governance systems, will ultimately contribute to reduction in corrupt practices (Mungiu - Pippidi 2015).

Vogl (2012) further stresses that the goal of developing "transparency and accountability", which are most important tools of corruption reduction, relies heavily on the status of civic engagement aimed at achieving the desired outcome. Existence of aware and strong civic society having exposure to national and international levels and admittance to committed leaders with political will can be the most effective weapons for controlling corruption.

Some researchers opine that "strong democratic institutions with checks and balances in place" can contribute most effectively in corruption control in all concerned sectors. The establishment of truly independent judicial bodies, free press, adoption of the rights to information and active civil society are the basic prerequisites that lead to success in controlling corruption in the state (Heimann & Pieth 2017). On the contrary, if a state is characterized by the absence of strong institutions and decline in transparency, answerability, and accountability, it will have a hard time combating corruption.

Such states with weak democratic institutions need higher pressures, interference and attempts by concerned international philanthropic and financial institutions such as World Bank, Transparency International, International Monetary Fund (IMF), and Asian Development Bank (ADB) in the combat against corruption globally. Higher assistance and interventions with support is required to such states by international institutions that can enhance their capability to curb corruption successfully (Heimann & Pieth 2017).

Some scholars stress on the contribution of harsh anti - corruption statutory provisions which are mandatory by law and irrevocable by ethics. Nicholas (2000) emphasizes on the existence and application of harsh anti - corruption statutory provisions that are crucial for unitary or combined attempts by states for corruption reduction.

Rothe (2010) examines the role that international economic organizations can play in fighting against corruption in their member states. The study lights on the role that international economic institutions can play in regard to status of corruption in different member states. However, it is fascinating to observe that some aspects or policies of such organizations are in fact supportive to increase rather than inhibit corruption in specific circumstances.

Moreover, some research has suggested that corruption is increased by lower payoffs to public position holders including political leadership and civil servants. Therefore, higher level of government payoff can contribute to reduce corruption in public sectors. Likewise, the rise in economic capability of the country can also be favourable for decline in corrupt practices as the state capacity to social security enhances (Montinola & Jackman 2002). Similarly, Quah (2001), analysing anti - corruption strategies adopted by Singapore, one of the most successful corruption - control model, stresses on high payoff to public officials including political leaders and high ranking civil servants. Committed political leadership, comprehensive anti - corruption legislation, autonomous and incorruptible anti - corruption institutions along with high salaries and fringe benefits to public position holders can reduce corruption by minimizing both the chances and motivations for corruption (Quah 2001).

Maor (2004) opines that the states are generally not committed and positively determined to control corruption. Therefore, the establishment of anti - graft agencies is mostly due to rise in pressures from civil society and media. In numerous instances, if high level state authorities become the target by the ombudsman institutions, these agencies are made to be unsuccessful in their efforts by creating obstacles and raising questions over their integrity or legitimacy issues that often leads to incomplete or inefficient reporting or investigations in particular cases.

There has been some research on the relationship of corruption to different state policies. The studies have analyzed the interconnectedness between "neo - liberal economic policies and political corruption". Similarly, Gerring & Thaker (2005) opine that the enactment of liberal market economic policy and decline in regulatory role of the state can ultimately cause reduction in corruption at political levels. However, it is still not able to demonstrate regular inter - dependence between the presence of state in market and effects it causes on the level of corruption. The study has primarily highlighted the financial policies as accepted and practiced by state and overall effects on status of political corruption.

Klitgaard (1998), on the other hand, suggests the probable impediment in the journey of combating corruption. As corruption is a sensitive and serious agenda of the society, it is difficult to ensure the sustained commitment and will of corruption fighters including political leadership. In many instances, the proactive and committed combatants against corruption turn hostile when it is time to apply it in practical life. Therefore, the actions targeted at corruption control can sometimes lead to some shocking revelations in the corrupt system. Strong anti - corruption laws, convenient governance systems, capable and motivated civil servants are the crucial elements to combat corruption. This, however, may not always be sufficient. Klitgaard (1998) advocates for establishing a "national anti - corruption coordination" institution equipped with citizens' oversight, categorizing most significant sectors or issues to be dealt with primarily to build up convincing ambience, capability enhancement of major public institutions, and rapid prosecution of commonly - known corrupt public position

holders can hit hard upon the level of corruption in an effective manner. In short, reform in governance system is crucial to successful corruption reduction efforts.

No "Blanket - Approach" Solution Can Work

Corruption control is of utmost significance to a country because it restricts the economic growth and social welfare of the countrymen. Being familiar with the inherent reasons behind the emergence and pervasiveness of corruption is a primary step to walk forward in the fight against corrupt practices. De Graaf (2007) argues that knowing well the causes responsible for occurrence of corruption enables the concerned actors to choose better and more effective policy and institutional weapons to use in fight against corruption.

Therefore, the study of corruption must be contextual as well as circumstance - specific. Right recognition of the inherent causalities behind corruption is the secret to combating against it successfully. The selection of the appropriate approaches against corruption heavily impacts the direction the offered solutions will lead towards. Further, different "causal chains" lead to various "discourses on corruption prevention and corruption control" (DeGraaf 2007).

The fight against corruption is a perpetual journey without any specific date of end. But the rising consciousness against corrupt practices at the level of citizens and growing demands for transparent, answerable and accountable governance systems is driving us towards success in the days ahead. The revolutionary advancement in the field of information and communication technologies, known as the digital revolution, has endangered the traditional concept of "secrecy", which is the mother of corruption. The recent social media revolution is also favourable to corruption control combat (Heimann & Pieth 2017).

2. Conclusion

The decline in integrity and pervasiveness of corrupt practices in a specific country can be the outcome of various factors ranging from weak political will among leadership, incapable and passive anti - corruption agencies, poor status civic engagement and oversight, and lower salaries and fringe benefits to public servants, to lack of significant international interventions from international community including international financial institutions to the corrupt government to obtain considerable success in corruption reduction. Recognizing the inherent reasons behind pervasive corrupt practices rightly will lead towards selecting and applying proper approaches to combat against corruption successfully.

The right set of approaches to be applied to control corruption, thus should be based upon the recognition of the circumstances behind the emergence and operation of corrupt conducts in a particular society. The best practices adopted successfully in some countries can be replicated in other states too but while doing so, specific attention should be given to the special attributes, characters and features of the country to deal with. Similarly, anti - corruption approaches need to have based less on any theoretical perspective, rather more on what could be the best measures in specific circumstances (DeGraaf 2007). However,

learning lessons from best successful models of combating corruption in particular examples can be beneficial in examining the positive and negative aspects of the existing anti - corruption weapons and strategies currently being applied in a country, and to take decisions on selecting the best approaches of moving forward in the combat against corruption.

To conclude, strong political will among leadership against corrupt practices, policy of zero tolerance of corruption by the governments, strong legal arrangements and serious implementation, strong, capable and autonomous anti - corruption agencies, proactive and brave civic society, and continuous pressures and interventions from international institutions, can prove to be most powerful weapons against corrupt practices which lead to success in declining the level of corruption drastically in all sectors of the society. In doing so, the role of none of the key actors, such as the state, civil society or international organizations, can be undermined. It is only through well - connected, well - planned and well - coordinated efforts by all concerned actors that the fight against corruption can reach a logical end.

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