

❖ Column Corruption – A social disease • Part 128

Canvassing the beacons of light in the land of the corrupt

In terms of Transparency International's ratings, the overall trend since 1998-2016 is stable.

The judiciary seems to be one of the beacons of relative independence from the legislative and executive branches. However, with the recent combining of the High Court and the Supreme Court, the executive encroached on the independence of the judiciary.

The Anti-Corruption Commission and the Election Office are not independent. They should report to a board consisting of civil society members (with at least as possible political connections or associations with any political party) and the media, not to skewed Parliament with a two third majority of the ruling party. Constitutional amendments without adequate public consultation do not encourage transparency and open debate.

The central government is very much in control and dominates the administrative and financial systems. The public sector is incapacitated, bloated and characterised by weak institutions and weak leaders as illustrated with the waste of public resources, e.g. the mismanagement of TransNamib, Air Namibia, Regional Councils and municipalities.

WILL AND SPIRIT

Central government neither has the capacity nor the inclination to monitor the performance of the ever increasing number of Public Enterprises (PEs) of which the number current is 98 after the recent creation of the Business and Intellectual Property Authority (BIPA) who is involved in a questionable land deal. The esprit de corps (common spirit) of public sector employees seems of such a nature that a transformation is required to motivate them and to improve their performance. Corruption is rife and blatantly manifested as illustrated in ignorance, arrogance and running second businesses during office hours (moonlighting).

Public Private Partnerships (PPPs) and Black Economic Empowerment are used as loopholes to evade accountability and to enrich a small number of privileged politically connected people, e.g. the Government Institutions Pension Fund's (GIPF) missing N\$ 660 million and the Small and Medium Enterprise Bank's missing N\$220 million and the state of the resorts of Namibia Wildlife Resorts (NWR), including camping sites such as Jakalsputz.

Local industries are protected, e.g. milk (including Namibia Diaries), as well as the technology and banking sectors which were exposed by the Institute of Public Policy Research (IPPR) in a



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study as some of the banks with the highest service fees in the world. They are protected without any time-limits or targets, creating an atmosphere of very limited competition and very limited

incentives to increase efficiency and reduce waste of resources (a manifestation of corruption).

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

Public oversight mechanisms exist, but they are uncoordinated and rarely effective. Central government does not encourage public engagement with civil society institutions in order to stimulate open debate about national issues.

What has been positive was the current President's initial efforts to focus on poverty and housing. If these issues are alleviated, corruption can reduce, because housing, poverty and corruption are interrelated, intertwined and interdependent issues that cannot be addressed separately. The corrupt landscape should be changed to reduce corruption, making corruption impossible to occur, similar to the approach in addressing the crime problem in New York during the 1980's.

A beacon of light is the media that are allowed to play a critical role in exposing corruption and making people aware of its manifestations. The number of media institutions increased since Independence and within this context, the media's role in exposing corruption also increased. The Media Institute of Southern Africa (MISA's) regional office is in Namibia and this illustrates the freedom of the Namibian media in the region. Namibia has been rated during 2016/17 as the African country with the most media freedom.

The media focus on corruption incidents, but does not adequately practise investigative journalism. The media focuses mainly on bread and butter cases such as covering incidents and not adequately provide an insightful and overall perspective about corruption related issues of national concern. Where investigative journalism is practiced, it is on ad hoc basis.

Investigative journalism costs much more money than merely reporting incidents. From a financial perspective, media houses are too small to focus adequately on investigative journalism. Let us focus this year on reporting corruption to make Namibia the land of Light and the Brave. Let us live up to our name.

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