

Social death

As more systems are subverted by corruption, like with HIV/AIDS, the impact of the disease becomes more severe, and institutions and people eventually “die”, like patients whose whole immune system has been fatally compromised.

Indicators of social death are illegitimate institutions (not representing the will of the people) with very limited trust and social capital (e.g. caring in families, and between races and ethnic groups), where individuals operate in self-serving cliques that protect their corrupt members from exposure and prosecution.

Trust and social capital are proxies for measuring corruption because corruption cannot be measured directly since corrupt members protect each other, hide and destroy evidence. The more trust between people, the less corruption.

Social capital is togetherness, the ability of people to care for each other (Spies) and to care for the vulnerable such as people with cancer, HIV/AIDS and the poor.

HIV/AIDS is also associated with human trafficking, a form of organised crime and these “diseases” have some symptoms in common, like a high prevalence of drug abuse, women and child trafficking, and prostitution. HIV/AIDS and organised crime are both social pathologies that represent deeper underlying problems in a society or country. In states penetrated by these diseases and countries with a high HIV/AIDS prevalence such as South Africa and Namibia, people can become tolerant of corruption and HIV/AIDS. An indicator of such tolerance and resistance to “treatment” is that people justify their HIV/AIDS status and corrupt behaviour based on a culture where “everybody does it” to make dysfunctional systems with bureaucracy and unnecessary delays (that can be pre-



JOHAN COETZEE

vented) more efficient.

GREASING THE WHEELS

People “grease the wheels” or bribe because it is cheaper and much easier to get anything done.

Corruption is not only a moral issue anymore, but become a socio-economic issue. When such a culture prevails, members lose hope of a better and shared future, because the corrupted culture is so entrenched (systemic) and so unjust, that members cannot see how change is possible.

In such countries, people, especially the poor that cannot afford to pay bribes, can lose hope of a better future, because they are locked into corrupt systems that drain their energy, vigour and limited resources. The more entrenched corruption is, the more people have to spend on gaining access to public services.

In such countries, even the private sector is not immune. A truck delayed at a border post, and every delay in applying for a business licence is an add on cost to the price that the poor and vulnerable have to pay and for private companies to make profit (the reason for their existence).

Life becomes a struggle for survival, it is about life and death for affected people, especially the most vulnerable, like the abject poor, businesses and countries.

• References

Spies, P.H. (2003). *Toepassings van Sosiale Sisteem Teorie by Armoedeverligting in Suid-Afrika.* jcoetzee@polytechnic.edu.na