

Outdated perceptions about corporate and organised crime

It may be comforting to think that organised crime is the apex of all criminal activity.

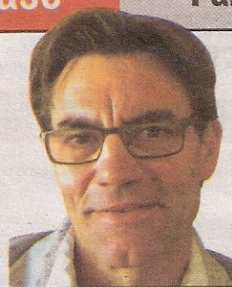
Their dealings, while certainly dangerous and harmful to society, are far removed from the seemingly "gentlemen's games" of sophisticated malpractices of corporate activity. Perceptions about organised crime as evil, as opposed to captains of industry as "saints", partly due to their donations of vast sums of money to sport, community and green projects, has become dangerously outdated.

The reality is that legalised parts of organised crime has worked their way into operating models of more acceptable and respectable institutions such as banks, the legal profession and pharmaceuticals. In addition, politicians, business persons and public servants have beaten the wise guys of organised crime at their own game. They have gradually shifted the rules, media attention and legitimised criminal behaviour in a far more dangerous and sinister manner than that which is known to the public.

In general, society perceives ordinary criminals as vicious. However, the underworld of corporate criminals that benefit from organised crime does have a different status. The activities of the underworld are legalised and made respectable by the corporate world, from whom it draws its income (Woodiwiss) e.g. drugs used by the upper class of Wall Street and by them, they are protected, e.g. by hiring lawyers to defend them and to "wash" their drug money in the stock market.

As corporate ownership became more concentrated, e.g. Multi-National Companies (MNCs) and sophisticated in branding (e.g. effective mass media advertisements) and concealing the negative impact of bribing government officials with sweeteners and monopolising markets, corporate dominance over the rest of society became institutionalised as the new world of global economics for improving societies. The issue is not if MNCs and corporates contribute to the improvement of society. The question is, at what cost for society?

The impact of tobacco companies with their effective advertisements in cinemas during the 1970's until the 1990s' contributed to millions of deaths. Other examples include concealing the side



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effects of medical drugs and chemotherapy instead of also exposing patients to alternative healing methods that could enable them to make informed decisions; the respiratory effects of ongoing exposure to asbestos products, underground mining and pesticides; and the effect of excessive sugar and salt in food that contributed to obesity.

Sophisticated denial

The ongoing effective liquor advertisements on television are parallel to the ban on tobacco advertisements in our very recent history. Corporates and society are in denial about the impact of liquor advertisements; we see it as completely different from the impact of tobacco. It is time that we see the impact of some corporates for what it really is, causing more deaths than organised crime.

To provide an indication of misleading corporate language, in the pharmaceutical and medical sectors, the words "corruption" and "fraud" are generally not professionally acceptable, instead, they prefer to talk about waste, inefficiencies and uninformed stakeholders.

In a holistic perspective, corruption is a systemic problem that includes waste, inefficiency and negligence, and should be contextualised as the breaking down of the wholeness of a system, contributing to malfunctioning, e.g. inefficiency. By being overly sophisticated and diplomatic, some corporates do not call a spade a spade and in doing so do not define and address the problem for what it really is. Solutions for the right problem are only possible if we define the problem appropriately.

"If I were given one hour to save the planet, I would spend 59 minutes defining the problem and one minute resolving it," Albert Einstein said.

References

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- Robinson, J. (2000). *The Merger. The Conglomeration of International Organised Crime.*
- Woodiwiss, M. (2005). *Gangster Capitalism. The United States and the Global Rise of Organised Crime.*