

## Similar to cancer and HIV

In previous articles, the focus was to create an understanding of the unpredictability of corruption as a systemic concept – i.e. one that requires a holistic perspective to contain and manage. The metaphors of cancer and HIV/AIDS can be applied to crystallise an understanding of the destructive effects of corruption on another holistic system, a country and its people.

**Important:** The purpose is not to offend any person with these illnesses, nor to generalise or stereotype. The sole purpose is to explain corruption as a concept and its impact in terms of metaphors that are relatively well understood by the public.

The Eritrean Ministry of Information used the metaphor of cancer to explain the impact of corruption, describing the phenomenon as "a dangerous cancer that will destroy a healthy culture, pollute the moral and accepted values of the society, undermine the rule of law, decimate the social and economic rights of the majority and retard the production capacity of the people and government. It is the greatest threat to national security" (Klitgaard). Such a cancer is also destructive of development initiatives.

### LIFESTYLE AND MORALS

The similarities between cancer and corruption may also be tellingly illustrated by means of the HIV/AIDS metaphor.

The main contributors to cancer have their roots in socio-economic factors or lifestyle (e.g. colon cancer) and genetics (e.g. bone cancer). HIV/AIDS, however, has an economic, ethical and moral dimension that cancer does not have. HIV/AIDS tends to have a higher prevalence rate and impact at the lower end of the socio-economic continuum than on the affluent or rich. For example, some women from poor households



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without formal occupational skills take to prostitution as a means to survive, increasing their risk of contracting HIV/AIDS.

Poor people are highly vulnerable to the impact of corruption; for example, the poor in Somalia who survive on food donations cannot afford delays in distribution because of corrupt officials that can make a difference between life and death.

Corruption drains the limited resources of a country just as cancer and HIV/AIDS drain the energy and vigour of patients. Because of this draining of energy and vigour, corruption, cancer and HIV/AIDS can be conceptualised as societal pathologies. Pathology is a biological term that refers to a condition of illness – a deviation from what is regarded as normal for vigour. A societal pathology in the context of corruption refers to a shortage in terms of desire or ability (in terms of development) of rulers and managers to remove a persistent development obstruction (Spies). Money that could have been used for socio-economic development has to be applied to fight corruption similar to a family having to spend scarce resources on treatment of these diseases.

### - References

- Klitgaard, R. (2008).** *A Holistic Approach to the Fight Against Corruption.*
- Russell, R. (2009).** *Big Men Little People: Encounters in Africa.* London: Maxwell.
- Spies, P.B. (2003).** *Tompassings van Swakse Sinterster Teorie by Armoedewerping in Suid-Afrika.*

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