

Corruption as a complex system

Complex systems have a history (Cilliers). Such systems evolve through time and their past are co-responsible for their present behaviour.

Corruption is as old as the evolution of humans. In Namibia we have our own history of corruption.

Neither colonialism nor Apartheid or the liberation struggle prepared Namibians for good governance. We are conversant with the harsh realities of Apartheid (Coetzee).

Violent and historic illegitimate government systems over a number of decades contributed partially to the current affinity to abuse power and our culture of entitlement. Abuse of power and greed is in stark contrast to the aims and objectives of liberation struggles.

Can corruption by the colonial masters such as the British Empire and the National Party of South Africa be perceived as a response to the Armbrund challenge? Poor whites were provided with land and work opportunities in mines and railway services.

Apartheid was an overreaction to fast-track the development of the Afrikaners that were humiliated by the British during the Anglo-Boer War of 1899-1902. The humiliation of the Germans after the First World War similarly contributed to the rise of nationalism in Germany and Hitler's exploitation thereof as an overreaction.

Locally, overreaction is being illustrated by the magnitude of corruption triggered by the descendants of some of the liberation struggle heroes that are in control at different levels of society, namely politically and economically. What can be deduced from the history: humiliation of cultural and ethnic groups is that they overreact when the opportunity arises - it is a natural human response. In the bigger perspective it is understandable and expected.

However, such overreaction is no excuse for continuing the relentless enrichment of predatory elites, especially if the majority of the population that have contributed towards liberation are suffering the most from the impact of corruption.

How can we normalise our dysfunctional society to peace and prosperity? What will change the corrupt minds of predatory elites in control of the levers of power?

SYSTEMS VS PEOPLE

Each element in a complex system is ignorant of the behaviour of the system as a whole



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(McCilliers). We need to look away from individual elements, towards the whole system, its structure, e.g. relationships between those in power that manipulate systems for their exclusive advantage.

A corrupt system can be manipulated to create further opportunities for corruption. Those in power tend to take advantage of opportunities when checks and balances are not in place. That is human nature.

We can close down and limit opportunities for corruption. If not corruption, will be strengthened.

The target of anti-corruption strategies should not be people, but systems - limiting opportunities and implementing checks and balances. Corruption will always take place, but we can reduce the magnitude, the brutality of what can be called primitive corruption.

The penalties for corruption should be higher for professional people like lawyers, accountants and auditors compared to less

educated people.

Those in power are ignorant of the behaviour of the system as a whole. This implies that those in positions to exploit loopholes in a system, will do so if such loopholes are not "plugged".

References

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