

Minimize Corruption: What Roles Can Various Actors of the Fijian Society Play?

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Abstract: *Corruption is regarded as the abuse of public office for private gain and the abuse of public power for the private benefit. Corruption is a very broad term covering a larger scope of worldwide and it has engulfed our everyday life as it is seen in everywhere we happen to be. As a result, been a responsible citizen of the country, it is duty for all various stakeholders and actors to undertake ways and actions to minimize corruption in Fiji. While governments implements strategies to combat corruption from all works of life, one must embrace the fact that it is not the sole responsibility of the government but various stakeholders of the society to lend a hand and assist the government meet the challenge of corruption. This paper highlights ways and strategies that can be undertaken by various actors of the society namely individuals, family, educational institution, religious bodies, business firms and mass media to help curb corruption. Questionnaires were given to focus groups made up of at least six individuals who were to discuss the topics and come up with responses.*

Keywords: Corruption, Fiji, Society

1. Introduction

Corruption in simple makes reference to the extent to which a person in authority uses public power for a personal benefit. According to Transparency International, corruption is the abuse of entrusted power for private gain. It can be classified as grand, petty and political, depending on the amounts of money lost and the sector where it occurs. The Fiji Independent Commission against Corruption (FICAC) is an oversight institution for corruption established on 4th April 2007 and had its roles confirmed in the 2013 constitution of Fiji. In the ten years of its existence, FICAC has revealed that general dishonesty and abuse of office is extensive across the private sector in Fiji and it is causing a loss to our economy. Unauthorized modification of data and bribery continued to top the list of forms of corruption committed in Fiji in 2016 (Cava, 2017). Since its inception in 2007, the commission has prosecuted 336 individuals for corruption related offences in the Court of Law. According to the 2005 Corruption Perception Index reported by Transparency International Fiji was ranked as the 55 least corrupt countries out of 175 countries (Fiji Corruption Rank, 2017).

While the government has recognized the need for such anti corruption agency, it is yet to enact the anti corruption laws for the country. With the Prevention of Bribery Promulgation 2007 identifies new offences in respect of bribery and 2010 Crimes Decree relates the offences of white-collar, other forms of corruption remains unattended in a legal framework. Therefore, it remains the duties of the society and its actors to play important roles in adopting strategies that can instill better morals for its citizens.

2. Roles of Individuals

Ethics define the right conduct of an individual. As an individual, the desire to practice ethical conduct should come from within one's self. One can only voice out and report the practices of corruption if he/ she is not corrupt. One of the participants aged 32 stated that it is the sole responsibility of an individual to see that he receives a receipt for any payment made to a government department. He further elaborates that when one makes a payment, he should in his conscious demand for receipts and check that correct receipt has been issued. In addition, another participant mentioned the individuals should let their community members know that they are interested in the topic of corruption through active participation in the development of any projects in the community. The importance of education was highlighted by majority respondents as education is the key tool for arousing awareness about the negative impacts of corruption.

Another participant opined that it is a common practice that individuals declare their income status incorrectly in order to evade tax. It is very important to declare correct income to the tax authority in order to reveal a clear picture of the income and expenditure of an individual. The need to report any forms of corruption to the anti corruption agencies was also highlighted by the participants.

3. Role of Family

Family is the most basic foundation that establishes a nation. The nation is made up of a larger stratum of people who share common descent, history, culture or language. The structure of the family at the bottom tends to be an explicit reflection of the government at the top level. A family is where moral standard and values are taught and through good morals and values we are able to reach higher ladder of success. One of the participants expressed

that parents should know that their actions are being copied by their children so they need to act smart and show expectable behavior. She further elaborated with an example that if a family is stopped by the police officers for over speeding and the driver bribes the public official to avoid getting charged for over speeding. In such cases children will see and learn the behavior of the parents, thus practicing good ethics may influence children to hate corruption and not to engage in corrupt activities. Parents should encourage children to attain higher education so that they are well versed on the topic of corruption.

In addition to this, a participant elaborated that parents should supervise and monitor their children activities and ensure that they do not engage themselves in bad peer groups. Another participant mentioned that the family as a whole should talk about sensitive issues such as corruption, rape, crime, teenage pregnancy during their family tea times or family get together as it will benefit children in the long run

4. Role of Educational Institutions

Knowledge and education is the important element to shape an individual's behavior and mindset therefore schools are said to be the place of worship as it provides us with knowledge and knowledge is light. A respondent explained that teachers should deliver proper and useful education to children so that they do not engage themselves in unwanted activities such as corruption, crime, rape, stealing and glue sniffing.

In addition to this, a respondent who is a student at a tertiary institution highlighted the importance of Governance and Ethics course at his University. He elaborated that he has learnt about various types of corruption and is able to identify the unethical practices even before he joins the working field.

Furthermore, another respondent elaborated that academics should always be fair in their judgments and should not get involved in corruption. Another respondent expressed similar views that educational institutions should organize anti corruption week and encourage students to participate in activities such as making posters, poems, role plays and other activities that promote awareness amongst students.

Another respondent identified that there is a need for educational institutions to have moral value classes conducted every week so that right conduct and good values are instilled in students.

5. Role of Religious Institutions

Religion provides us with right norms and values which guides an individual how they should live. Religion can be used as an important equipment to fight against corruption as people of different religion attend their respective worship places such as temples, churches, mosque

therefore the religious ministers should take out few minutes to address people on social issues such as corruption which increases day by day in the country.

The respondents had mixed opinions on this topic as some think that religion should take the responsibility of shaping one's morality, while others believe that religion should not be blamed for increase in corruption as not everyone is born with good values. However, two respondents mentioned that there is a need to have a youth wing in all religious institutions and stated that this group should work on creating awareness on issues related to everyday life that is not covered in the religious scriptures.

6. Roles of Business Firms

A business organization whether small or big, corruption is part and partial of their everyday running of the business. Addressing private sector corruption is as important as public sector corruption because it makes significant contribution to the national economies; therefore ethical conduct of corporate and business employees is important for public interest in general.

Majority respondents agreed that there should be scope for business organization to create and enforce norms and strategies in controlling corruption as to keep the environment clean from corruption. An organization should follow proper procedures first in order to expect ethics from its employees. One respondent stated that 'in order to operate any business, businesses needs to be registered and have a legal license to operate.'

Moreover, few respondents articulated that organization should provide extensive training to staff involved in procurement procedures to ensure the proper implementation of the procurement process and also a clear merit based recruitment guidelines to be set in order to prevent discrimination based on one's race, age, gender, ethnicity and background.

Having a whistle blower policy was highlighted by respondents as it will encourage employees to report the unethical practices in the business firms. The presence of this policy itself will create awareness amongst the employees to refrain from unethical practices. Presenting the correct financial statement to the tax authority was also mentioned under this topic.

7. Role of Mass Media

The media is a critical tool that can contribute towards a corruption free society. The effectiveness of media depends on factors such as media freedom, freedom of information legislations and extent to which the citizens are given right to express views on the part of the governments initiatives. However, this topic seeks to find out what roles the media can play on its own to minimize corruption from the society.

Respondents agreed that Fiji lacks investigative journalism. Investigative journalism refers to a form of journalism where journalists go to any extent to deeply investigate a topic which interests them such as political corruption and other unethical acts. It was also revealed that media companies should organize talk back shows on serious issues related to corruption. This will create awareness amongst the general public.

Another respondent suggested pop-up advertisements on you tube to be a good way to allow information on corruption to be filtered to the society. He also expressed that media can organize workshops and other activities in relation to create awareness on petty forms corruptions that exist around them. It was also noted that television programmes that includes criminal investigation to be aired so that people know about consequences of engaging in such acts.

8. Recommendations

The government is mainly responsible of cleaning dirt of corruption, when corruption flourishes in the country; it reflects the weak structure of the economy. The government itself needs to be corrupt free so they can work towards cleaning the nation from government. Some of the recommendations include the following on the [part of the government:

- Zero tolerance policy and a anti corruption act should be implemented so as to foster harsher penalties for those who are found to be involved in corrupt practices. The policy should also highlight the provisions of recovering the lost funds.
- Public Accounts Committee should be independent so that any mismanagement of funds could be easily located. It should include members from different actors of the society with no conflict of interest with any Government Ministers. It should be given right to investigate on the usage of funds at any point of time.
- Another independent oversight institution should be established which will be responsible for receiving and

assessing the complaints made by the general public. Instead of posting pictures on corruption on social media, the general public can post pictures on the institutions website. This institution will compliment the work of the Fiji Independent Commission against Corruption and further enhance transparency.

- Technology advancement such as tracking systems should be introduced in the security forces. Caller or mobile number tracking systems should be implemented to tap call records.

9. Conclusion

Corruption is a problem that cannot be solved overnight but it's a long term process where strict law implementation can help solve corruption. Effective law enforcement is vital so that people are been punished on their unwanted activities and the cycle of corruption is broken. It is the responsibility of each and every individual to voice out against corruption and help in reducing corruption. In order to have a developed and healthy economy, all people's job is to come together and fight against corruption.

Thus this paper, from the general public's view highlights the actions that other actors of the society can play to assist and support the government in their race to control corruption in the country. In addition, further research would be able to give more details on whether or not the several actors of the society puts any emphasis on minimizing corruption and what strategies have already been implemented.

Reference

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Appendix 1
Questionnaire

Gender: _____
Age: _____
Occupation: _____

1. What roles have the government played in order to control corruption in the country?

2. What other strategies should be implemented by the government to control corruption in the country?

3. What roles can the following actors of the society play in order to minimize corruption in the country?

Individual:

Family:

Educational

Institution:

Religious

Organizations:

Business

Firms:

Mass

Media:

Thank you for your time and contribution towards this research.

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