

Corruption: Socio-Political Perspective in Pakistan

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Abstract

In this paper, the issue of 'Corruption' in Sindh has been discussed in a socio-political perspective. The paper starts in an introductory mode and then goes on to explain the prevalence of corruption in Sindh, stating that corruption in Sindh has been increasing at a rate of 5%. Then the paper goes on to discuss the various methods of corruption involving bribery, fraud, embezzlement, fraud, nepotism and abuse of discretion. After that, the reasons which give rise to the phenomenon of corruption in Sindh have been pointed out. The major causes entail: poverty, low salaries, culture, lack of accountability and regulation, red tapism, lack of transparency and poor governance. The main consequences of corruption involve lawlessness, lack of development and growth, resentment in society, disrespect of law and injustice in society. Following that, a set of recommendations has been proposed to counter the issue of corruption. The recommendations comprise of: strengthening of institutions, formation of special courts, increase in salaries and incentives, good governance, and change in attitudes and culture.

Keywords: *Sindh, Corruption, bribery, fraud, Socio-political perspective*

Introduction

Corruption is considered as digression from principles when discussed in theological, moral or philosophical context. Corruption can be conducted at different scales, in different sectors and through a variety of methods. It can be generally defined as dishonest or fraudulent behaviour by those in positions of power. Political Corruption is regarded as the employment of power by state's officials in order to make unlawful personal benefits. If an illegitimate act is carried out by a government official and if the act is openly associated with the official's administrative duties and is performed in the veil of law, then such an act would come under the umbrella of political corruption (UNODC, 2005).

Corruption that takes place in social arena such as health and education sectors comes in the realms of social corruption. When political corruption is coupled with social corruption, then corruption is holistically viewed in a socio political perspective.

In Pakistan, corruption is a familiar occurrence at nearly every administrative and government level. Pakistan has been continuously obtaining extremely poor rankings in the Corruption Perceptions Index of Transparency International's. In the year 2012, Pakistan attained a ranking of 139, which made it the 34th most corrupt country in the world. As per the latest rankings, Pakistan shared its rank with countries such as Nigeria, Nepal, Azerbaijan and Kenya (Sethi, 2012).

Transparency International reports that since 2008, Pakistan has suffered tremendously due to corruption, losing an astonishingly high amount of up to Rs 8.5 trillion. Tax evasion, bad governance and corruption at nearly all levels have been the major causes of this rising menace. An official from Transparency International says that if Pakistan carries out good governance and eliminates corruption, then it might not require even a single dollar of assistance from the outside. The country has been facing corruption in different sectors such as judiciary, sports, taxation, public utilities, law enforcement, health and education.

In the recent years, print as well as electronic media has been playing a positive role in raising the issues pertaining to corruption (UN, 2011).

Prevalence in Sindh

Similar to the situation present in most parts of the country, corruption has been a growing phenomenon in the province of Sindh as well. According to the Transparency International Report, in the year 2009, Sindh became the second most corrupt province of Pakistan after Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (then NWFP). Corruption in Sindh was growing at 5% (Transparency International survey against corruption in four provinces of Pakistan, 2009).

A report published by World Bank has revealed that mounting corruption in Sindh has become a major impediment for growth and development in the province. This report states that in the view of the policymakers, poor governance and augmenting corruption are perceived as the top two developmental challenges being encountered by Sindh. Considering the opinion of Sindh entrepreneurs, corruption has been the top most factors that have negatively affected the investment scenario in the province. It is also pointed out in the article that the Sindh provincial government has itself acknowledged the existence of corruption over the years at various junctures. There seems to be extensive pervasiveness of nonconformity in different socio-political departments with reference to defined criteria and procedural mechanisms especially in matters of hiring, selection of site and procurement (Sindh Government Corruption, a Serious Impediment: WB, 2004).

With the passage of time, corruption has become endemic in Sindh at socio-political levels. Various sectors including health and education have been at the forefront of corruption in recent times. Rule of law has not been given due regard and its enforcement remains a matter of least concern. Political backing has been the customary norm in this regard. Professionalism and autonomy of the private and public sectors have been damaged to extremely high levels. Though media and civil society have been raising their concerns, but in general, they do not have the authority and power to drag the major perpetrators to court. Manipulation and misuse of public funds, bribery among political and social officials, violation of rules with regard to procurement; has negatively affected the lives of millions living in Sindh, which in effect, has hampered the development and growth of the province. Corruption in this way, has led to accumulation of wealth, disregard of rule of law, inequality, injustice, lack of provision of basic services, and eradication of foreign investment. Corruption needs to be recognized as a major problem in the province and should be tackled as an issue of priority. However, the efforts of media and civil society need to be complemented with the will and determination of the common people in order to bring an end to this endemic disease (Abro, 2013).

Methods of Corruption in Sindh

There are a variety of methods of corruption which are employed in Pakistan as well as in Sindh. Some of the most prominent ones have been discussed below:

Bribery – Bribery refers to the inappropriate use of favours and giveaways in exchange for private benefits. The term ‘kickbacks’ is often used as a synonym for bribery. The types of favours that are given in bribery involve gifts, land tracts, money, company shares, employment, etc. The private benefit received can vary from special treatment to overlooking of a criminal act. Bribery can lead to a vicious cycle of corruption as in several cases; bribery is done to carry out further corruption, thereby leading to systemic corruption.

Embezzlement, Fraud and Theft

Embezzlement, also referred to as theft entails misappropriation of money, assets and public funds. On the other hand, Fraud involves cheating and deception so as to influence the possessor of assets or funds to hand them over to an illegal party. Examples can be misuse of public health and education budgets or stealing of foreign aid.

Blackmail and Extortion

Blackmail and Extortion are two other methods of corruption that revolve around the use of threats and intimidation. Threats can be of varying nature such as threat to cause harm to a person or threat to expose the secrets of a person. An example of such type of corruption can be powerful individuals threatening to cause harm to the hospital authorities if they are not given immediate attention ahead of other patients in the queue.

Abuse of Discretion

Discretion abuse involves the wrong use of one's authority and power. For instance, abuse of discretion is evident in a case where a custom officer makes use of his power to permit drugs through the port or an official in the education department purposely overlooks a fake degree.

Nepotism, Favouritism and Clientele

Nepotism and Favouritism involve providing preferential treatment to one's close ones such as relatives or friends. For instance, when an official in education department hires an unqualified close relative as a teacher in a government school, then it would be an example of nepotism and favouritism (UNODC, 2005).

ANALYSIS

Causes

Corruption is considered as one of the most serious issues facing the province of Sindh. Over the years, Sindh has suffered from the jolts of corruption in a number of ways. The growth and penetration of this menace can be attributed to a variety of factors which are discussed below:

Low Salaries

One of the fundamental causes of corruption in Sindh is low salaries. Socio-political sectors such as education, health and welfare have almost always had low salaries. The officials working in these departments have usually worked in return of below average compensation. It is human nature that people desire to improve their standard of living, fulfil the needs of their families, and afford the luxuries of life. In this way, when people working in political and social sectors do not receive satisfactory official compensation, then they look towards other means to attain financial stability. Consequently, corruption becomes one of the easier ways to accomplish needs and desires. Thus, low salaries turn out to be one of the most basic reasons of corruption (Annual Report, 2009).

Absence of Regulation and Accountability

Corruption has been able to thrive in Sindh, largely due to deficiency of accountability and regulation. Sindh government receives funds through federal government, taxes as well as other administrative mechanisms. This money is supposed to be spent on the welfare of the people particularly with regard to facilities of health, education, welfare, etc. However, when there are no checks and balances, then often this money tends to go into the pockets of the bureaucrats and government officials. This is primarily due to lack of accountability. Though anti-corruption units do exist in Sindh, but their role more or less remains quite insignificant as big fishes often tend to use their political influence to evade court cases and accountability tribunals. There is no fear of getting caught or reprimanded. This in turn leads to tax evasion, which is itself another cause of corruption. However, in this context, when general public sees that government is not spending the revenue on people, then public loses trust in government and avoids paying taxes. This again creates a vicious circle as people do not pay taxes, government suffers revenue losses due to tax evasion and corruption by public officials, and then government is not left with much to spend on social welfare and development of people.

Lack of Transparency and Red-Tapism

Ever since Pakistan came into existence, transparency has been a missing ingredient in the country's affairs. Especially in Sindh, information is often controlled by a few powerful individuals who manipulate it to achieve their own hideous motives. As a result, transactions and deals including bribery that take place under the table never emerge onto the arena despite efforts by the media. Even when they do leak out, somehow, these powerful individuals are so influential that they easily cover up their crimes and effortlessly evade any kind of punishment. The custom of red-tapism only adds to the problem as excessive paperwork and filing provides opportunities to those in charge to make money for themselves through unfair means. In this manner, absence of transparency coupled with red-tapism complicates issues and further intricate the problem of corruption.

Culture

Corruption's growth in Sindh is also attributable to the culture that prevails in Pakistan, in general, and in Sindh, in specific. Corruption has deeply penetrated into the society and has assumed the shape of systemic process, which is reinforced every now and then through desperation, routine and convention. One of the astonishing realities brought about by this undesired phenomenon is the level of indifference that exists at the strategic and policymaking level with regard to corruption. For instance, policymakers often presume and expect that a clerk, custom officer or policeman will make a decent income through corruption (bribery), so the state purposely keeps the salary of these public servants low. Bribery at all levels has become a norm in Sindh, not only among state officials and public servants, but it has crept in to the lives of general people as well. Whether it is to get away with a vouchers, develop a fake license or a degree; fraud, bribery and corruption have unfortunately become a part and parcel of people living in Sindh, in general. Seeking extra money through fraud, deceit, blackmail and abuse of discretion has become an indispensable phenomenon in the province. The temptation to gain more and more at the expense of others has been one of the many reasons for this social evil. In this way, the culture of Sindh,

particularly at socio-political level has become prone to corruption (Sayeed, 2013).

Poverty

Poverty is a major economic problem that is deep rooted in third world countries. Similarly, Pakistan being a third world country also suffers from the phenomenon of growing poverty. The existing level of poverty in Sindh contributes immensely to corruption. It is a widely accepted belief that corruption and poverty work together simultaneously, leading towards a threatening vicious circle in which poverty gives birth to corruption and vice versa. Due to poverty, those people who are close to the subsistence level suffer the most. With substandard salaries, these people are not able to meet the needs of their children and families. In addition, these people are often coerced to pay bribes to get their work done, the completion of which is not possible through fair means. As a result of these bribes, the disposable income of such people gets further diminished, which negatively affects the management of their household affairs. Further, inflation has been on the rise in Sindh and Pakistan over the years and with soaring prices of food and other basic commodities, people often fall into the trap of corrupt practices such as extortion, blackmail, bribery to make their ends meet (Khalid, 2009).

Poor Governance

Governance entails execution of political, administrative and economic authority to run the affairs of a country in all spheres. Consequently, good governance implies skilful management and control of country's resources and dealings in a way that is transparent, accountable, just, fair and people oriented. Provision of law and order, alongside social and economic development, form the core of good governance. Regrettably, for the most part, Pakistan and Sindh have been the victims of poor governance. This has provided fuel for corruption in addition to poverty, violence and terrorism. Governance in Sindh, most of the times, has lacked vision, purpose, determination and leadership. Those, at the helm of affairs, have often allowed things to aggravate and deteriorate instead of trying to bring them under control. The elected representatives of Sindh in both the federal assembly as well as the provincial assembly have not been laidback when it comes to raising their voices over the problems of the province. However, when it comes to actually taking steps to solve the problems of the masses in relation to good governance, they have lacked the will and competence. Poor governance in the province has worsened the situation in all regards including unemployment, lawlessness, terrorism and corruption. The lack of political will and determination has set new records of corruption in Sindh. In this way, poor governance on the part of the authorities has been a dominant factor in the rise of corruption, one of the most disgusting social evils (Governance and Corruption).

Effects

The effects of corruption on Sindh and its people have been disparaging to say the least. This social evil of corruption in social and political spheres has caused harm to the province in almost all aspects.

Unequal Distribution of Income

One of the primary effects of corruption has been unequal distribution among the people of Sindh. Corruption has led to accumulation of wealth in a few powerful hands while the masses have been at the receiving end of corruption. The gap between rich and poor has only widened due to this phenomenon resulting in increasing poverty and unequal income distribution in the society. Thus, the social impact of corruption has resulted in the rich getting richer and poor getting poorer and thereby increased differences among people (Khan, Khan, Ahmed, & Mehmood, 2012).

Resentment in Society

Corruption creates great amounts of resentment in the society. People possessing strong morals decline to participate in corrupt practices, thereby refusing to accept or pay favors; tend to get infuriated upon seeing the prevalence and growth of corruption in society. It causes extensive bitterness among such people when they witness the rise and prosperity of those who indulge in corruption. When less deserving people get ahead of meritorious people on the basis of fraud, deceit and bribery, it creates an environment of anger, hatred and antipathy in the society.

Disrespect of Law

The practice of corruption completely distorts rule of law and this has been the case in Sindh for quite some time now. Respect for law has diminished in the province at a rapid rate largely due to the open practice of corruption. People have lost faith in the credibility of the state institutions and their ability to provide justice and act fairly. This is not a good sign for a country which is already suffering from a crippled economy, terrorism, internal and external pressures. In this manner, the future of democracy seems to be at stake because people's expectations from it have not been met in any way whatsoever, which is quite evident from the pervasiveness of corruption.

Lack of Growth and Development

One of the most disastrous consequences of corruption for Sindh has been with regard to growth and development of the province. For decades, corruption has been one of the topmost factors that have prevented Sindh from developing. In fact, the growth of Sindh has been stunted as a result of corruption. The funds that are allocated for development projects have been subject to massive corruption, which has brought development schemes and projects to a standstill. For instance, Karachi, which is the capital of Sindh and the financial hub of Pakistan, suffers from poor public transport system and over the years, corruption has not allowed any development in this regard and at the end of the day, it is the common man of Karachi that bears the pain. Likewise, cities and villages of interior Sindh have also been deprived of development and growth due to mismanagement and misappropriation of funds. Consequently, Sindh, which has a lot of natural resources including coal tracts, has, up till now, failed by a considerable margin and it has mainly been due to the greed and indifference of state officials who have exhibited no sympathy or care for the province and its people (Siddiqui, 2012).

Lawlessness

Another distressing outcome of corruption has been the rising level of lawlessness in the province. This can fundamentally be attributed to the penetration of corruption within the institution of police. This institution holds a lot of responsibility in the state as it is directly in charge of maintaining law and order in society through law enforcement. However, corruption in police, has, to a large degree, diminished the faith of the people in this institution. According to a report by Global Integrity, recruitments in police largely take place on the basis of political factors. In this manner, police in Sindh is often on the forefront of conflicts of interest as a result of personal linkages and loyalties. Numerous cases have been reported from interior Sindh which state that feudal lords are the chief decision makers when it comes to the placement of police officers in their respective areas. This is because they tend to make use of police to achieve their own goals and objectives. Corruption, on the part of the police does not only affect poor common people but it also hurts the economy of the province. There have been official and unofficial complaints, time and again by businesses and commercial groups that they become the victims of extortion by police, such as counterfeit fines and claims. In general, a corrupt police officer is one who makes use of his position for making personal and unethical organizational gains. Being specific, police corruption in Sindh involves activities of violence, brutality, extortion, fraud, bribery, favouritism, racism and deceit. Such activities are not only prevalent at lower level of this institution but also at the upper levels. Consequently, the politicization of police has served as a breeding ground for corruption, which in turn has damaged the province and its citizens through lawlessness (Khalid, 2009).

Injustice

Injustice in the society is another terrible consequence of this social evil. When corruption engulfs a country's judiciary, then the outcome results in injustice at all levels. Unfortunately, corruption in judiciary is witnessed not only at the federal level but also at the provincial and local levels. A survey by Transparency International Pakistan in 2006 reported that more than 95% of the population who dealt with judiciary in one way or the other encountered corruption and almost 44 % of them reported that they had to pay a bribe to one of the court officials. Global Integrity reports that often judiciary has shared connections with the executive, thereby contributing to a culture of political corruption. Further, the procedure for selecting judges in Pakistan including Sindh has lacked transparency and often has been influenced by political powers. As a result of this fraud within the realms of judiciary, several judicial decisions lack credibility and consequently, this leads to a damaging wave of injustice in the society. Poor and deprived are often the victims of this injustice because they do not possess the wealth to pay bribes to court officials to get their work done. However, at the same time, the business community of Sindh has also not had the best of the times with the local and provincial judiciary. The business community has often lacked belief in the ability and capacity of judiciary as they are a testimony to the fact that dispute and conflict settlements involve heavy bribes. For instance, on average, judiciary takes around 880 days to come up with a decision on a commercial dispute and the resultant cost turns out to be 24% of the total claim (Khalid, 2009).

Recommendations

It is a widely accepted notion that corruption has become entrenched in the society of Sindh. It is a deep rooted complex phenomenon that has hampered the progress of Sindh in numerous ways. Finding its immediate cure seems to be an uphill task at present. Yet, there are measures which can be taken at all levels to eradicate this menace from Sindh. Some of the steps which can be taken to cleanse Sindh from the disease of corruption have been discussed below:

Strengthening of Institutions

The primary measure which needs to be taken to get rid of corruption is the strengthening of the institutions. Currently, the institutions of police, judiciary, accountability, investigation, etc seem to be quite ineffective in their approach and performance largely due to the penetration of corruption in these institutions. These institutions hold immense importance in a society because of the functions they perform. As it was discussed in the previous section of the paper, the institution of police suffers dramatically from the evil of corruption and its consequences have been far reaching for the people of Sindh. There seems to be no rule of law in the province and lawlessness has become one of the norms in Sindh. Feudal Lords are free to manipulate the police for their own hideous motives while in urban areas such as Karachi, police is involved in extortion and blackmailing. Then judiciary, which itself is a victim of corruption is playing to the hands of the few powerful and influential people in the province. Investigation and accountability seem to be at an all time low. In the light of these issues, the first step that is the need of the hour is making these institutions strong. For this purpose, accountability of these institutions becomes an imperative. A rigorous process of accountability should be initiated from top to bottom of these organizations. Those found guilty of corruption should not only be dismissed from their jobs but also be punished through special courts. Punishment can involve imprisonment as well as seizure of property. It should be ensured that those found guilty are not allowed to get into these institutions in the future in any manner whatsoever. Once these institutions are strengthened, which would definitely take time; it would be a tremendous breakthrough with regard to eliminating corruption (Javaid, 2010).

Special Courts of Justice

In order to bring an end to the problem of corruption, special courts of justice need to be established in Sindh with the purpose of cleansing the province from corruption in an effective and speedy manner. The courts should include those judges who have a proven record of credibility, honesty, integrity and performance. These courts should be given the power to hear all the cases related to corruption and announce their verdict on these cases as quickly as possible so that instant results are witnessed. There exist numerous corruption cases which still await a verdict from the judiciary. All these cases should also be presented in these special courts. Once these cases begin to solve and results start coming, then it would begin an era of justice in the society in which the culprits will have no chances of escaping punishment. It would not serve as a sign of fear to those indulged in corruption, but would also restore faith and credibility in the society of Sindh with respect to the state and judiciary. In this manner, special courts of justice can play a pivotal role in ending corruption in Sindh.

Increase in Salary and Incentives

The measures discussed above need to be complemented simultaneously with positive policy changes involving increment in salary and incentives for bureaucrats, public officers, government officials and civil servants. As discussed earlier in the paper, poverty and low salaries often turn out to be a crucial factor in tempting officials to indulge in corrupt and unfair means so that they could fulfill the needs and desires of their families. Especially, those who live at the subsistence level are often forced to enter into the world of corruption in order to make both ends meet, which is indeed deplorable. To avoid such circumstance, it is imperative that policymakers plan an increase in the compensation that public officials receive. Such a measure can be quite useful in bringing an end to corruption as with enhanced salaries, public officials will be able to meet their needs in a better manner and their motive to indulge in corruption might drastically reduce. Similarly, new incentives should be introduced which offer rewards to those civil servants who practice their profession in a clean and disciplined manner (Annual Report, 2009).

A change in culture and attitude

One of the causes of corruption highlighted earlier in the paper was the culture prevalent in Sindh. Culture emanates from attitudes and behavior of people. Unfortunately, the attitude prevalent today is *“They want – I give”, “I want – I get”*. This type of attitude and mindset has also penetrated deeply into the general public as well. If the practices of avoiding vouchers by paying bribe, making fake degrees, blackmailing, etc need to be uprooted, then the general public needs to play its active role by ensuring that it does not indulge in such unfair means. Such a measure can help in eradicating corruption from bottom to top (Khattak, 2012).

Good Governance

One of the prerequisites to end corruption is good governance on the part of the state. Lack of good governance; in the form of misappropriation of development funds, destruction of merit, recruitment of employees in public offices on the basis of nepotism; has had a disastrous effect on the growth and progress of Sindh. In fact, it has served as a breeding ground for corruption. Consequently, good governance in all regards is a necessity in order to root out corruption from Sindh. For this purpose, government needs to take a proactive role while civil society and media need to continue to raise their voices on issues of corruption (Javaid, 2010).

Conclusion

Corruption in socio-political arena has been a dominant social evil in Sindh which has negatively affected the growth and progress of this province. It has proved to be a major impediment in the way of development in Sindh. According to Transparency International, corruption has been increasing in Sindh at a rate of 5%. The practice of corruption has hampered the lives of millions living in Sindh. There are various ways through which corruption is practiced in Sindh. These methods include bribery, embezzlement, theft, fraud, deceit, extortion, blackmailing, and abuse of discretion, nepotism and favoritism. There have

been various causes which have contributed to the rise of corruption in Sindh. These causes entail: low salaries, poor governance, poverty, lack of transparency, red tapism, culture, and lack of accountability and regulation. Corruption has had disastrous effects on the province of Sindh, some of which include: disrespect of law, lawlessness, unequal distribution of income, resentment in society, lack of growth and development, and injustice in society. In order to combat the problem of corruption, some of the measures that can be adopted are: strengthening of institutions such as police and judiciary, change in culture and attitudes, good governance, formation of special courts, increase in salaries and incentives.

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