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# Corruption A 'Unantidoted' Evil Crime Against Humanity: The Case Of South Africa During Covid-19

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## Abstract

Corruption in the public sector has become the most debated issue and it continues to make headlines worldwide in both developing and developed countries. This global phenomenon is frequently debated in different forums. Corruption has become a pandemic in all areas of the globe. World Bank Group acknowledges that in many societies corrupt behaviour is deeply rooted in the historic origins, social norms and political culture, therefore it is not unusual to find a strong inter-linkages between power, politics and money. This has a negative impact on the general society as a whole. People especially the poor get hurt when resources are wasted. Though corruption has an impact on everybody it continues to have a disproportionate impact on the poor and most vulnerable, increasing the cost of, and reducing access to basic services, as resources would have been wasted through corrupt activities. Studies show that corruption hits the poor the hardest. Corruption distorts resource allocation and government performance. The cause of corruption development varies from country to country. In South Africa and elsewhere the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak led to the implementation of emergency procurement measures, which opened an even wider loophole for corrupt activities. According to Corruption Watch, emergency procurement measures created a fine opportunity for greedy officials to deep their hands in COVID-19 cookie jar (2020). This article draws corruption cases from South Africa during COVID-19, unearth the underlying reason for that, analyse the impact and lastly provide solutions.

**Keywords**: Corruption, Crime, Humanity, COVID-19.

## Introduction

According G20 report (2020), COVID-19 pandemic presents unprecedented challenges to the global community which has seen governments around the globe dedicating enormous resources to respond to the ongoing health crisis and address economic, however, the response mechanisms put in place has been confronted with rapid increased opportunities for corruption. Perceptions of pervasive corruption in South Africa have dominated public discourse for the better part of the past decade. In its many forms, corruption undermines the effectiveness of the state, worsens the quality of public services, and ultimately erodes public trust (Fukuyama, 2014). The ongoing outbreak of COVID-19 is affecting developed and developing countries simultaneously. The COVID-19 pandemic gives rise to very significant risks of corruption. Massive resources mobilized to respond to the health and economic crises create opportunities for corruption, while many corruption prevention and enforcement mechanisms are suspended due to the emergency. This corruption

risk is a rule of law problem in itself. It also compromises the pandemic response, undermining much-needed trust in public institutions, squandering supplies and resources, and impeding their flow to those in need (World Justice Projects, online). The pandemic has exposed how difficult it is to govern efficiently and transparently in times of crisis; as a result many governments have lost the moral high ground when they demand those things of international aid recipients as a condition of help (Mezoui, 2021).

The coronavirus pandemic intensified corruption in South Africa in 2020, exposing many loopholes in the country's health sector, an anti-graft monitor said on March 25th. Corruption Watch said it had received 4,780 reports of graft in 2020 the second-highest tally since it was founded in 2012. Although the pandemic discouraged people from making in-person reports, an average of 11 cases were received each day on-line, the Johannesburg-based organisation said. Maladministration, procurement corruption and fraud topped the list, with the "lucrative" health sector hardest hit (Africa Research Bulletin, 2021 online).

**Defining Corruption**
There is no single and clear definition of corruption. This is because corruption exists in different forms involving different participants. The best-known form is obviously bribes paid by private individuals or companies to public officials. However, when corruption is already institutionalized in a country, it might appear as well within the civil service (Enste & Heldman, 2017). It is often defined in terms of individual actions that abuse entrusted power for private gain. An office bearer for his own personal benefit also defines corruption as the use of public office for private gain, or in other words, use of official position, rank or status. Following from this definition, examples of corrupt behaviour would include: (a) bribery, (b) extortion, (c) fraud, (d) embezzlement, (e) nepotism, (f) cronyism, (g) appropriation of public assets and property for private use, and (h) influence peddling (Myint, 2000).

**Theories of Corruption**
**The principal-agent** approach has for decades been the predominant theoretical framework for understanding and tackling corruption (Marquette and Peiffer, 2015). Its origins are found in the theory of the firm, where a principal delegates a task to an agent; the goals of the agent may differ from those of the principal, causing a conflict of interest. Moreover, the agent directly involved in the task has more access to information, producing an asymmetry. The corruption cases that marred the COVID-19 pandemic was another spectacle that linked in most cases the political office bearers (the Principal) of various departments and their administration (the Agent) counterparts. it is on this basis that the constructs of this theory resonate well with the propositions of this paper.

**Collective-action theory** – For decades, economic literature referred to principal-agent model to explain corruption (Groenendijk, 1997). Collective-action theory recently emerged as an alternative explanation to why systematic corruption exist though there are laws against it (UNODC, 2019). Systematic corruption is regarded by Persson, Rothstein and Teorell (2013) as a collective problem because people

rationalize their own behavior based on the perception of what other will do in the same situation. To a greater extent, the corruption that ransacked the economy has demonstrated the extent of a well-orchestrated arrangement between the role players both within and outside government. Moreover, this theory indirectly connect to the Principal Agent Theory since from the role players or actors of corruption, one can identify the Principal and the Agent with ease.

**I**

**nstitutional theory** – while corruption can occur at individual level, it can also occur at institutional level or can also be institutional in nature in cases where institutions are structured in a way that makes them deviate from their original purpose. An example of this if the private financing of political campaigns (Ceva & Ferrati, 2017:3).

**Game theory** – another theory that explains the prevalence of public sector corruption is the game theory. In this theory, an individual fears a disadvantage if s/he refuses to engage in corrupt practices while others do not refuse to do so in the same situation (Kuhn, 2019). The two cases below are an indication that official in the public sector have engaged in these corrupt activities because they did not want to disadvantage themselves by refusing to engage in these activities. To South African public officials and politicians corruption is a game that people believe it must be played to enrich themselves. Again, looking at the sums of money that are involved in the corruption activities in both cases it is clear that these officials and politicians in grand corruption which involves huge sums of money. According to Lynda, Dent and Ophelie Quraishi (2014), corruption that involves higher ranking government officials and elected officials who exploit opportunities that are presented through government work is referred to as grand corruption. Another definition by Transparency Organisation indicates that grand corruption is the abuse of high-level power that benefits the few at the expense of the many. The United Nations Handbook on Practical Anti-Corruption Measures for Prosecutors and Investigators (2004) says: "Grand corruption" is an expression used to describe corruption that pervades the highest levels of government, engendering major abuses of power.

With the two cases below it is clear that those corrupt activities were performed by higher ranking government officials and elected politicians. For example, when the health minister works with other public officials and unscrupulous companies to systematically divert resources from the country's entire hospital system into their own pockets – that is grand corruption. In this scenario, high level influence over the award of government contracts for the construction of new hospitals or new medical equipment may result in their being allocated to unqualified companies owned by the minister's cronies. These companies may be allowed to inflate prices and channel some of the illicit gain back to corrupt ministry officials.

Case 1

In South Africa, where corruption has always been rife, the spread of COVID-19 has turned into a looting spree. According to media reports, almost R450 billion of money earmarked for the country's COVID-19 response has been stolen. In some instances, companies with links to high-ranking government officials and senior members

of the ruling African National Congress (ANC), were awarded multi-million rand contracts to provide services like personal protective equipment and other medical supplies. Now, President Cyril Ramaphosa has written a letter to the ANC, asking the organisation he leads to fight corruption within its ranks. "I am sure that you are aware that across the nation there is a sense of anger and disillusionment at reports of corruption in our response to the coronavirus pandemic," Ramaphosa said in the letter. This anger, Ramaphosa added, is understandable and justified. One of the most high profile cases of COVID-19 corruption involves Ramaphosa's spokesperson, Khusela Diko. The Sunday Independent revealed in July that a company owned by Madzikane II Thandisizwe Diko — Diko's husband — was awarded contracts worth R125 million by the Gauteng Department of Health. According to Sunday Independent, Diko, the spokesperson, is also close friends with Loyiso Lugayeni-Masuku, the wife of the Gauteng member of the executive council (MEC) for health, Bandile Masuku. "In recent weeks, we have heard stories of tenders for personal protective equipment that have been given to individuals associated with ANC leaders and of public servants flouting the law in issuing tenders," Ramaphosa said.

Source: Global Citizen. https://www.globalcitizen.org/en/content/covid-19-corruption-crack-down-in-south-africa (Accessed 25 October 2021)
Case 2

**A former South African Health Minister has been implicated in a corruption scandal involving the awarding of a Covid-19 communication contract.**

A probe by the country's Special Investigating Unit (SIU) found Dr Zweli Mkhize guilty of "a distinct lack of oversight" over the contract worth around $10m (£7.4m). Money from the deal was used to buy Dr Mkhize's son a car, and he was also given around $20,000. Dr Mkhize has denied any wrongdoing. The National Department of Health paid the company Digital Vibes for Covid-19 communications work - but the contract was authorised outside normal government regulations, according to the SIU report. The report found that the real directors of Digital Vibes were two close associates of Dr Mkhize, even though it was officially run by a woman who in reality worked in a fuel station. She has denied being used as a front for the company. It emerged a few months ago that some money from that contract was also used to pay for repairs at Dr Mkhize's private property. When questioned by SIU investigators he said he only became aware of the payment through media reports - claiming that an employee on his property had arranged for the repairs and subsequent payment by an associate. The SIU report cast doubt on that explanation. The former health minister resigned in August amid the scandal - but denied any wrongdoing - or prior knowledge that he and his family had somehow benefited from the contract. While the report has found there is enough evidence for criminal action against some senior officials in the health department - on Dr Mkhize it found there were only grounds for "executive action" by the President Cyril Ramaphosa. Dr Mkhize has gone from a hero praised by many for his handling of South Africa's Covid-19 response to a man tainted by corruption allegations. It was under his watch that what has now

been found to have been an irregular and unnecessary contract was awarded, costing South African taxpayers millions. For Dr Mkhize's critics it is difficult to believe that someone who has served in the governing party for decades in various senior positions and knows its regulations would have missed this controversial spending. Not least because the cabinet to handle communications work around the Covid-19 pandemic had already tasked another government department - a decision he was aware of. It has raised questions about Dr Mkhize's motives when approving the payments. The Digital Vibes scandal is one of a number of investigations related to the misuse of funds under the guise of Covid-relief, something that has enraged many South Africans. The former health minister may have resigned from his post but remains a member of parliament. President Ramaphosa has staked his reputation on fighting corruption and South Africans are now waiting to see what action, if any, will be taken in the wake of this damning report.

Source: https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-58734557

**Impact of COVID-19 corruption in South Africa**
Unfortunately, corruption often thrives during the time of crisis and South Africa was not immune to that during COVID-19. The pandemic has served as a catalyst for corruption, which has also contributed to debilitating health systems. Documented corrupt practices during Covid-19 include grand corruption schemes involving high-level politicians, petty corruption at the point of service delivery, and corruption in procurement and contracting processes. Covid-19 related corruption in service delivery has had a dire effect on groups who are most reliant on health and other public services (https://www.u4.no/topics/covid-19-and-corruption/basics).
Corruption and international perceptions of corruption in South Africa has been damaging to the country's reputation and has created obstacles to local and foreign direct investment, flows to the stock market, global competitiveness, economic growth and has ultimately distorted the development and upliftment of our people. Public money is for government services and projects. Taxes collected, bonds issued, income from government investments and other means of financing government expenditure are meant for social grants, education, hospitals, roads, the supply of power and water and to ensure the personal security of our citizens. Corruption and bad management practices eat into the nation's wealth, channelling money away from such projects and the very people most dependent on government for support (https://www.corruptionwatch.org.za/learn-about-corruption/what-is-corruption/we-are-all-affected/).
Furthermore, Corruption Perception Index (2020), indicate that corruption is one of the key barriers to achieving the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and the corruption that has been witnessed since the outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic is making those goals even more difficult to attain. Countless studies around the world show how corruption can interrupt investment, restrict trade, reduce economic growth and distort the facts and figures associated with government expenditure. But the most alarming studies are the ones directly linking corruption

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in certain countries to increasing levels of poverty and income inequality. Because corruption creates fiscal distortions and redirects money allocated to income grants, eligibility for housing or pensions and weakens service delivery, it is usually the poor who suffer most. Income inequality has increased in most countries experiencing high levels of corruption (https://www.corruptionwatch.org.za/learn-about-corruption/what-is-corruption/we-are-all-affected/). Even in the best of times, government corruption and mismanagement are harmful they can cost lives and financial resources. In today's pandemic, they fuel a spiralling tragedy. Together, they will prolong the crisis by undermining government efficiency, significantly increasing the loss of life, wasting untold resources, and reducing society's already fragile trust in government each of which has significant long-term consequences that will linger far longer than the virus itself (Hanstad, 2021).

According to G20 Report (2020), corruption directly interferes and hampers specific remedial actions that aim to address and ease one or more effects of the crisis. This may involve matters such as the embezzlement of the immediate economic and financial aid that is received as well as the abuse of emergency procurement processes for private benefit in areas that include crucial health sector resources such as medicines and medical equipment. This becomes even worse where pandemic is involved considering that is the time where government need to utilize its resources efficiently and effectively to ensure the distressed sectors of the society receive the much needed relief.

**Legislative Framework addressing corruption**

The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996, mandates compliance with international law and requires the country to comply with its international obligations. South Africa has ratified several international conventions and treaties and participates in forums that require the country to implement measures to prevent and combat corrupt activities. These include: The United Nations Convention against Corruption8 (UNCAC), which promotes the prevention and criminalisation of corruption. UNCAC also highlights the need for international cooperation in the fight against corruption and the return of assets associated with corrupt activities. The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development Convention (OECD) on Combating Bribery of Foreign Public Officials in International Business Transactions9; The African Union's Convention on Preventing and Combating Corruption.10; The SADC Protocol Against Corruption11; The Financial Action Task Force (FATF); The Group of 20 (G20) Anti-Corruption Working Group, where South Africa participates and regularly provides its accountability report. South Africa's commitment to eradicate all corrupt practices is further supported by, amongst others, The Public Service Anti-Corruption Strategy (PSACS), 2002; and The Local Government Anti-Corruption Strategy (LGACS) 2016, Prevention and Combating of Corruption Act 12 of 2004, Prevention of Organised Crime Act, 1998; Protected Disclosures Act, 2000, Financial Intelligence Centre Act, 2001;Protection of Constitutional Democracy Against Terrorist and Related Activities Act, 2004; and Competition Act, 1998.

Despite having the above anti-corruption legislative framework, South Africa still faces a number of corruption cases every year. Corruption activities have escalated

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amidst COVID-19 crisis, and this state of affairs start making a silent question on whether the government is doing enough with regard to introducing robust programmes that will be focusing on addressing the re-awakening of ethical cods within humanity. This is based on the mere fact that the extent of corruption that has been at play since COVID-19 pandemic engulfed the nation has proven that law enforcement measures alone are not enough to address corruption in South Africa.

**Measures introduced by the South African government to deal with COVID-19 corruption**

According to Corruption Watch (2020), the Executive Director of Corruption Watch (David Lewis) cautioned that while the South African government has been widely praised, and deservedly so, for the urgent, honest and science-based response to the virus, it must be candidly recognised that the extension of increased powers to the law enforcement community, procurement officials and elected representatives is open to abuse. In echoing the same sentiment, the Deccan Chronicle (2021) indicated that while South Africa is seen as the best-prepared of any country in sub-Saharan Africa for COVID-19, but years of rampant corruption have weakened institutions, including the health system. In dealing with the reality of the assertions there are various measures that were introduced by government to fight against rampant corruption that evaded the ethos humanity. Firstly, in July 2020, the President of the Republic of South Africa announced the establishment of the collaborative and coordinating centre which central to its establishment was to strengthen the collective efforts among law enforcement agencies in order to prevent, detect, investigate and prosecute COVID-related corruption. The centre comprised of nine state institutions which is the Financial Intelligence Centre, the Independent Police Investigative Directorate, National Prosecuting Authority, the Hawks, Crime Intelligence and the South African Police Services, Detective Service, South African Revenue Services, the Special Investigation Unit and State Security Agency.

Secondly, the President of the Republic signed a proclamation authorising the Special Investigating Unit charging it the responsibility to investigate any unlawful or improper conduct in the procurement of any goods, works and services during or related to the national state of disaster in any state institution. According to the South African Government News Agency (2020), the proclamation comes amid a flurry of allegations about fraudulent Unemployment Insurance Fund (UIF) claims, overpricing of goods and services, violation of emergency procurement regulations, collusion between officials and service providers, abuse of food parcel distribution and the creation of fake non-profit organisations to access relief funding.

Thirdly, the Auditor General South Africa also introduced measures to safeguard funds committed to safeguard the fight against the pandemic. To see end, the institution conducted special audits to government institutions with specific attention to COVID-19. BusinessTech (2020) the Auditor-General's office led by Mr Kimi Makwethu undertook real-time audit wherein 16 of the key COVID-19 programmes introduced by government were audited. According to the Auditor General report (2020), the Covid-19 audit is performed by multidisciplinary teams, made up of fraud, information technology and sector-specific experts, who support the financial auditors to dig deeper and

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provide relevant insights on auditees' risks and operations. It is focusing on auditing payments, procurement and delivery as they occur and are reporting any findings to the accounting officer or authority to enable them to deal with any shortcomings immediately and tighten the controls to prevent a recurrence.

Fourthly, an audit firm was appointed by the Department of Employment and Labour to investigate all the UIF related claims and that all COVID-19 Temporary Employment Relief Scheme were subjected to a review process. South African Government News Agency (2020) reported that the office of the Public Protector, one of the Chapter Nine institutions in South Africa also conducted investigations in response to the public outcry with regard to the inflated prices in the procurement of Personal Protective Equipment.

Lastly, National Treasury introduced several control measures through the issuing of Instructions aimed at curbing against the abuse of procurement function when procuring Personal Protective Equipment and other related goods and services (National Treasury, 2020). This was to prevent the spiking of prices, thus ensuring that institutions procure goods, services and works within the fundamental principles of section 217 of the Constitution which is the cornerstone of public procurement.

**Areas that proved to be veritable grounds for COVID-19 corruption**
According Corruption Watch (2020), reports indicate instances of manipulation by ward councillors with an aim of favouring their own constituencies, thereby sowing serious divisions within communities. In supporting this assertion, Heywood (2020) indicate that during the hard lockdown reports emerged wherein food parcels were stolen or used by African National Congress ward councillors as a currency for political patronage. The manner in which these programmes are implemented, including the Solidarity Fund, and in which distribution of food and resources is handled, seems to point to growing evidence of corruption and mismanagement.

Procurement of PPEs has proved to be another veritable ground for rampant corruption during the COVID-19 pandemic. Upon the Declaration of a National State of Disaster on 15 March 2020 by the President of the Republic, National Treasury relaxed procurement regulations which exempted procuring institutions to follow the normal procurement processes (National Treasury, 2020). However, Daily Maverick (2020) expressed that instead of easing the procurement process, these became an orgy of corruption.

Sanitization or decontamination of schools was another area that proved lucrative for the unscrupulous people who took advantage of the panic mode caused by COVID-19 for their clandestine business endeavours at the expense of the majority of the devastated citizens. Corruption Perception Index (2020) reported that the emergency response to the COVID-19 pandemic revealed enormous cracks in health systems and democratic institutions, underscoring that those in power or who hold government purse strings often serve their own interests instead of those most vulnerable.

The employee relief programmes within the Department of Employment and Labour was amongst the areas that provide to be fertile ground for COVID-19 corruption. The Auditor General report (2020) found that UIF Ters payments were being illegally made to grant recipients, students who were NSFAS beneficiaries, public servants,

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UIF employees, inmates, dead people and minors. The Auditor General report (2020) also highlighted some concerns with regard to the processes and control within the South African Social Agency's outdated, limited databases and inadequate verification controls resulted in people who were not in distress receiving the social relief of distress grant, while those who were in distress were sometimes unfairly rejected. The discussion above shows how corruption was executed in a cancerous manner in the society. It also shows that where corruption exists, saving lives of the people becomes secondary.

## Proposed strategies for combating corruption

Although COVID-19 pandemic has exposed the weaknesses of many organisations around the globe, it has also given an opportunity for many organisations to introspect and look at the mitigating strategies. This section discusses the proposed strategies for combatting corruption.

### Digital government transitions

E-governance is also increasingly promoted as a tool for improving transparency in public service delivery and reducing corruption. There is a broad consensus that e-governance can help address corruption by automating and streamlining government processes, restricting officials' discretion and the need for citizens to negotiate with gatekeepers to access key services. It can also be instrumental in monitoring public officials and enhancing the effectiveness of internal and managerial control over corrupt behaviours (Chene, 2016). The response to coronavirus crisis is providing a unique opportunity to reinvent government, rebuild trust and accelerate the global fight against corruption, propelled by the smarter use of new technologies and data analytics. Digital transformation is central to recovery plans, which will require agile government and cutting red-tape, but also corruption-proofing reactivation programmes (OECD, 2021). E-procurement is also gaining momentum as a means of preventing and reducing opportunities for corruption in the different stages of the public procurement process. This is expected to improve market access and competition, promote integrity, reduce information costs, facilitate easier access to information, and increase transparency and accountability. According to the Auditor General's Report (2020), the information technology systems used in government were not agile enough to respond to the changes required. The use of online systems as an anti-corruption measure to respond to COVID-19 could have assisted South Africa in preventing corruption as it eliminates human interaction. These included using Information and Communications Technology to help ensure the continuity of the criminal justice sector and to engage in robust monitoring of public procurement processes.

### Enforcing accountability

Accountability is a key requirement of good governance. Not only governmental institutions but also the private sector and civil society organizations must be accountable to the public and to their institutional stakeholders. Who is accountable to whom varies depending on whether decisions or actions taken are internal or external to an organization or institution (UNESCAP, online). In general, an organization

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or an institution is accountable to those who will be affected by its decisions or actions. Accountability cannot be enforced without transparency and the rule of law. According to the Corruption Watch (2021), While our current circumstances may call for these enhanced powers, this demands increased transparency, vigilance and accountability, particularly against the backdrop of the extremely high levels of corruption that have characterised South African public life for so long.

The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa of 1996 provides for various mechanisms of fostering public accountability. It is worth noting that some existing accountability mechanism sought to be evaluated so as to recommend effective and efficient approaches and enhance their functionalities (Munzhedzi, 2016). Chapter 9 of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa advocates for the establishment of state institutions to support constitutional democracy. The following institutions and their guiding principles were established in that regard, (a) The Public Protector. (b) The South African Human Rights Commission. (c) The Commission for the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Cultural, Religious and Linguistic Communities. (d) The Commission for Gender Equality. (e) The Auditor-General. (f) The Electoral Commission.

The following are the guiding principles with regard to the establishment of the above institutions (a) These institutions are independent, and subject only to the Constitution and the law, and they must be impartial and must exercise their powers and perform their functions without fear, favour or prejudice. (b) Other organs of state, through legislative and other measures, must assist and protect these institutions to ensure the independence, impartiality, dignity and effectiveness of these institutions. (c) No person or organ of state may interfere with the functioning of these institutions. (d) These institutions are accountable to the National Assembly, and must report on their activities and the performance of their functions to the Assembly at least once a year. The corruption that the country has witnessed amid CIVID-19 questions the impact of the role and responsibility of some of these institutions. Perhaps this is an opportune time for the National Assembly to consider giving these institutions more teeth to bite, the same way it was done to the Auditor General.

The use of technological tools to ensure and guarantee transparency, accountability and monitoring in various domains, especially within reporting mechanisms (whistle-blowing) and public procurement processes would have prevented or reduced the level of corruption activities that occurred during COVID-19 pandemic crisis in South Africa.

*Transparent government*
Transparency is a manifestation of good governance in a democratic government. Provision of accurate, clear, and relevant information is highly necessary for achieving an open government and gaining public trust. Today's society tends to have more transparent government, especially with many corruption cases and abuse of authority found in both central and regional lines (Ngatikoh, Kumorotomo and Retnandari, 2019). Transparency is the principle of allowing those affected by administrative decisions to know about the resulting facts and figures (e.g., the city budget) and about the process that resulted in those decisions. Transparent governance means

that government officials act openly, with citizens' knowledge of the decisions the officials are making. Availability of information on government policies and actions, a clear sense of organizational responsibility, and an assurance that governments are efficiently administered and free of systemic corruption are important components of transparent governance (https://icma.org/transparent-governance-anti-corruption). Transparency is a fundamental element of abolishing corruption.

Transparent governance is important to local governments and the communities they serve because corruption threatens good governance, leads to the misallocation of resources, harms public and private sector development, and distorts public policy. Controlling corruption is only possible when government, citizens, and the private sector cooperate to ensure transparency (https://icma.org/transparent-governance-anti-corruption). South Africa could have taken action to increase transparency in the allocation and distribution of economic response and relief funds and in procurement processes, such as by making relevant information publicly available and using internal control bodies during the COVID-19 crisis. According to the Gurdian (2020), Kristalina Georgieva, the IMF's managing director, said any funds mobilised must be accounted for properly and made a profound statement that member states must spend what you can but keep the receipts. This was a clear warning to countries that there was a risk that a chunk of the $8tn already committed would vanish as a result of corruption and warned that "We don't want accountability and transparency to take a back seat."

*Political will*

The lack of political will is often invoked as a reason for failure of anti-corruption reforms and a major obstacle to economic performances and the achievement of development goals. Without political will, anti-corruption laws will remain empty shells and anti-corruption authorities will feel abandoned," Charalambides said (COPENHAGEN, 2020). "Political will is therefore the Alfa and the Omega of any effective anti-corruption strategy." Political leadership and a commitment to fight corruption at the highest levels is a pre-requisite for initiating and sustaining reforms over time, until results are achieved. Power holders are supposed to act for the common good and against their self-interest. As they make the laws and allocate the powers, manpower and funds that enable them to be effectively enforced, they are the principal actors who can change a country's culture of corruption (Martínez and Kukutschka, 2014).

The will of those that are in senior positions and politicians to act with integrity could play a major role in preventing corruption during the hard times of COVID-19. This include their commitment to serving the society that is in need. Political will by those in power also assist in ensuring that anti-corruption measures are enforces in the country. The Citizen (2021), reported that Advocate Wim Trengove, representing the ANC, argued that the party's refined step-aside resolution was taken by the party's 2017 Nasrec conference in the context of declaring war on corruption in the ANC. This becomes a classic example with regard to the expression of political will to fight corruption taking into account that it is spearheaded by the ruling political party in South Africa, the African National Congress.

## Strengthening the justice system

SADC criminal justice systems are generally weak in responding to organised crime, particularly in financial crimes and money-laundering. Most countries lack the legislation and prosecutorial capacity to tackle transnational crimes, including terrorism. Regional cooperation among prosecuting agencies is equally limited. Justice systems and legislative frameworks often fail to comply with international standards in access to justice and protection of human rights (UNODC, online). Therefore, there is a need to strengthen the justice system in the country to ensure that those involved in corrupt activities get prosecuted. Given the magnitude of existing corruption, law enforcement efforts need to incorporate the full complements of South Africa's criminal, civil and administrative legal framework to ensure accountability. While criminal prosecutions remain an important aim, they are lengthy, resource-intensive and costly. Criminal prosecutions in a constitutional democracy are naturally a lengthy process because the prosecution must prove the accused's guilt beyond reasonable doubt. To meet this standard of proof, the state needs to ensure that criminal matters are investigated thoroughly, failing which the accused walk scot-free (Deccan Chronicle, 2020).

## Building capacity to operate with integrity

Raising awareness, building knowledge and skills, and cultivating commitment to integrity are essential public integrity elements. Raising awareness about integrity standards, practices and challenges helps public officials recognise integrity issues when they arise. Likewise, well-designed training and guidance equip public officials with the knowledge and skills to manage integrity issues appropriately, and seek out expert advice when needed. In turn, raising awareness and building capacity contributes to cultivating commitment among public officials, motivating behaviour to carry out their public duties in the public interest (OECD 2020).

## Anti corruption agencies

Anti-Corruption Agencies (ACAs) have, over the past 2 decades, received a great deal of attention and criticism because of the high visibility of their work and their seemingly limited impact compared to the resources devoted to them. Although they are a new institutional response to corruption (as suggested by de Sousa, 2010), ACAs are often misunderstood and insufficiently analyzed (World Bank Group, 2021). These agencies play a pivotal role in enforcement, prevention and investigating corruption. An effective anti-corruption agency is a huge strength in the fight against corruption when they are independent of government and empowered to investigate allegations, they are have the potential to even hold the most powerful people in society to account (Transparency International, online).

## Conclusion

Corruption escalated during the COVID-19 era in South Africa and globally. This pandemic opened a gap for corrupt people to loot from government. Large sums of money have been lost to grand corruption involving high-ranking government

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officials and elected politicians. This led to resources diverted away from government plans to enriching the few greedy senior officials and politicians. This has affected the millions of ordinary citizens and also health workers in the country. Services that were supposed to be delivered to the poor could not be delivered because funds were exhausted. Health workers' lives were at risk because of lack of proper personal protective equipment as a result quite a number of them lost their lives. There is legislative framework guiding fighting against corruption in the country that if implemented well can assist in reducing the level of corruption in the country. There are strategies that can assist in dealing with corruption in the country. The extent of the corruption that hit this country has proved that law enforcement agencies alone are not enough to curb the challenge, as such there is a need for government to consider investing more on programmes that can focus on the reforms and the re-awakening of the moral fiber of humanity.

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